

MAN'S MELANCHOLY SYMPHONY OF SELF

(Conclusion)

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"When a society dispenses with God, with the Absolute, and rejects all the binding moral imperatives, the only binding power that remains is sheer physical force alone."¹



THE FIRST MOVEMENT of man's melancholy symphony of self, introduced by maestro Luther, provoked an appreciative audience of Christian rebels to a spontaneous outburst of applause. The dissonant theme of selfishness introduced by the new symphonic arrangement held the listeners spellbound. The sweet incense of self-adulation penetrated even to the outermost ring of the patrons assembled in the world-size amphitheatre. The sharp note of human license dinned in every ear. The simple yet seductive melody became for its enchanted auditors the inspiration for a whole way of life, a way which would stretch out even to the doors of eternity. By an outright revolt from the Catholic Church, in short, by a substitution of human authority for divine, that provoking dilemma of human existence was at last to have a solution: the satisfaction of man's pleasure and the pleasure of God, at one and the same time, would now be possible of fulfillment. In the future, man's will would not be so heavily taxed in effecting a reconciliation with God's Will. Hereafter, in this grandiose conception of a new life first things would be last and the last first. The scholarly research of Dr. Sorokin testifies to at least one practical exemplification of this new working agreement between the creature and the Creator. "Moneymaking," writes the doctor, "was declared the sign of God's grace; it was elevated to the rank of primary duty: 'We must exhort all Christians to gain all they can and to save all they can; that is, in effect to grow rich,' preached John Wesley. Says Benjamin Franklin: 'Honesty is useful because it assures credit: so are

¹ Sorokin, *Crisis of Our Age*, p. 163.

punctuality, industry, frugality, and that is the reason they are virtues . . . Remember that time is money. Remember that money is of a prolific generating nature.'"² And these are the ethical norms of that one, limited sphere of human endeavor catalogued as economics. Sorokin's conclusion then should come as no surprise: "Hence the parallel growth of Protestantism, paganism, capitalism, utilitarianism and sensate ethics during the subsequent centuries."

The irreligious devotees were well prepared to endorse the publication of the second movement of man's melancholy symphony. Once the custodian of God's word and His authority had been repudiated an expectant audience was quickly introduced to the succeeding symphonic arrangement. It could have one, only one, unmistakable message: the rejection of Christ the Star, the Fountain-head of Truth, the legitimate Ambassador of the Almighty. "When men break with Peter, then the fellowship of faith perishes and along with it belief in Jesus Christ. When there is no rock, there is no Church, there is no Christ." The confusing babel of man's doleful outcries against God's Spouse and against His Son continues, with the one dominant note—consummate selfishness—rising to a fiendish shrillness.

Human society, no longer resting on the rock foundation of Faith, and Hope, and Love, reflected the fickleness of its miserable heritage. The Protestant Reformation was, in every sense of the word, a revolt, not only against the authority of God's teaching Church, but against society itself. "In the name of a blind emotional hope without reasonable foundation . . ." Luther refused to "accommodate himself to God." Rather, the Creator must work according to the passionate dictates of the creature. The evident result of such a tenet is anarchy. President Hutchins has skillfully analyzed the evil potentialities of this moral cancer. "If everything is a matter of opinion, and if everybody is entitled to his own opinion, force becomes the only way of settling differences of opinions. And of course, if success is the test, right is on the side of the heavier battalions."³ Luther himself, in his own lifetime, heard the call to arms of these "heavier battalions." Unbridled, his principle threatened the society of his day with complete collapse. Luther recognized its power for evil and sought some means to curb it. "He had two

² Sorokin, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.

³ R. M. Hutchins, *Education For Citizenship*, p. 62.

alternatives—the Roman Catholic Church or the State. He chose the latter.”⁴

Now the City of Man is held together either by love or force. Luther, turning to the State, prepares the way for force as the common bond of union among peoples; Christianity always exercises love. By substituting the State for the Church, which meant the eventual exclusion of Christ Himself, the first reformer razes the foundation pillars for all society: justice and charity. For these two supernatural virtues, when practiced by men, bring peace; and a God-like peace, the distinctive mark of every Christian society, is the source of all social unity. But when men have lost sight of their Guiding Star and have become conscious only of themselves, they are compelled to plot their course in accord with the directions of creatures as mistaken as themselves. When man can rise no higher than man, human society lacks the requirements for a unified Christian peace. If the individual is the sole judge of what is right and what is wrong, if God, provided that His very existence be acknowledged, is subjected to the dictates of His creature, if man's moral code is fashioned to subserve the beguiling pursuit of wealth and pleasure, what is there to regulate the conduct of one man towards his fellow-men? Nothing but his own conniving self-interest; selfishness geared to mass production intensity! What is there to prevent him from shutting his eyes to the wants of his neighbor, from brushing aside, as he would a speck of dirt on his coat, the inalienable rights of all men to life and happiness? “Nothing but physical force,” answers Sorokin! “How far will he go in his insatiable quest for sensory happiness? He will go as far as brute force, opposed by that of others, permits.”⁵ Once Martin Luther, therefore, chose the State in preference to the Roman Catholic Church, society was condemned to the vagaries of creature substitutes for peace and to sham imitations for the imperishable, supernatural columns of justice and charity. Might became right; right became a puppet; peace became a fiction and force ruled supreme.

Men, made to the image and likeness of their God, began now to seek their own reflection in something of their own creation, namely, the State. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries share the dubious distinction of introducing the third and final movement of man's dismal ecstasy of self—the denial of God

⁴ Clement Della Penta, O.P., *Hope And Society*, p. 164.

⁵ Sorokin, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

Himself. As the half-way mark of a bloody epoch approaches, brute force is found ensconced on the throne designed specially for the queen of the virtues, charity. God has been replaced by a demigogic State which seeks to dominate the whole man and to exact from him the worship he once rendered to his Divine Master.

Though lacking the public tribute of her subjects, and exiled from the souls of men, there yet remains one faithful champion of charity, the gracious queen. Christianity as taught and lived by Christ's earthly Spouse, the Catholic Church, is that solitary champion. As Christopher Dawson, one of the queen's most articulate spokesmen, cogently declares: "Christianity is bound to protest against any social system which claims the whole of man and sets itself up as the final end of human action, for it asserts that man's essential nature transcends all political and economic forms. Civilization is a road by which man travels, not a house for him to dwell in. His true city is elsewhere."⁶ While the modern State never considers the whole man, Christianity has never forgotten that remarkable complexity of matter and spirit which constitutes a human person. It is the inner man, the spiritual, dynamic soul of man which forces him to look beyond the perishable "now" to the eternal. It is because he has an immortal soul that man must have an ideal. Precisely because "his true city is elsewhere" man is offered by Christianity a spiritual ideal: sonship with God, heirship to an eternal Kingdom.

The godless ideologies of state glorification, on the other hand, would build for man a permanent city right here on earth. Nazism would enshrine as its supreme ideal the Race and would endow its worshippers with the rights and obligations becoming to the sons of the German racial myths rather than to the sons of God. The State would be mother, father, high-priest and savior for the "free" thinking liberated subjects of the Fascisti. "Japanism," spurning the glory of the Risen Christ, bows in pagan adoration before the "rising sun" of Nippon. The hammer and the sickle, imbedded in a flag of bloody red, proclaims defiantly the cause of the proletariat, the Class brotherhood of Communism, "a piece of pie" still very high in the sky of the future.

The modern gods, the handiwork of the creature's vain adu-

⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Religion And The Modern State*, Intro., p. xv.

lation of self, appreciate the need for an ideal. In imitation of Christianity, the Race, the State, and the Class are forced to serve that necessity. All pay lip-service to justice of some sort or other; but charity, that indispensable "rock" for all society, receives the respect of none. The anarchical ferment raging within the human social sphere today stands as an eloquent condemnation of man's godless symphony of self. The battlefields of the world are booming forth slaves of tribute to the reign of might. Force, arrayed in all the hideousness of its wartime apparel of bombs and guns, of death and famine, day by day continues to stalk the continents of the world devouring its trusting subjects.

With World War II the curtain of finality is drawing to a close the death struggle of an old order, that way of life once heralded as new and inspiring. Whether or not the godless theme inaugurated by Luther, and malevolently developed by succeeding Revolvers, continues to pipe the tune to which society must dance depends on the final outcome of world events in the very near future. As men and nations stand on the threshold of a "new"—a Christian—order, it is imperative that they know what was gangrenously wrong—and, too, what was genuinely right—with the old. The "outlook and principles" of the new way of life must be redirected to those fundamentals of all human society, justice and charity; that is, if peace is to replace force and right is to conquer might.

The individual members, too, of the new way of life must strive to merit once again the rich inheritance of their Christian Birthright. They must rediscover their Christ-like ideal, their Guiding Star, never forgetting that their "essential nature transcends all political and economic forms." Once the true dignity of the individual person is universally respected, once it is generally appreciated that man is not a body, not a soul, but an amazing combination of the material and the spiritual, then, and only then, will a God-conscious, Christian order of society be effected. Then, and only then, will first things come first. Men's moral code will not only exact from them the effort but show to them the way to an ideal loftier and more precious than human possessions and human pleasures and human selfishness. With eyes fixed on an eternal goal they will look at their neighbors and will no longer be deterred by any "physiological libido" from perceiving the skillful craftsmanship of Divine Love. Like the early Christians, they will once again embrace with ease the

rigorous discipline of charity, their new-found queen. How these Christians of the latter twentieth century love one another!

What is wrong with the world, said G.K.C., is that we do not ask what is right with it. In order not merely to unmask the wrong but likewise the reasons for it, not only to seek the righteousness of created things but to consecrate them to their proper end, "the Church," writes Christopher Dawson in his timely exhortation, "must once more take up her prophetic office and bear witness to the Word even if it means the judgment of the nations and an open war with the powers of the world. What we must look for is not an alliance with the temporal power as in the old Christianity, but a re-ordering of all the elements of human life and civilization by the power of the Spirit."⁷

The selfish, symphonic rhapsodies of men and nations must remain unfinished. Love must be the thematic accompaniment of the joyous, homeward return of the earthly wayfarers to their God, to their Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to His Spouse, the Catholic Church.

⁷ Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations*, p. 155.