

MEN AND NATIONS

FRANCIS CONWAY AND DAVID MORIARTY



FATHER, wishing to test his son's knowledge of geography, took a map of the world from the newspapers and cut it into small pieces. Then he told the boy to put them together as quickly as he could. Not long after, the lad came to his father and told him that the task was completed; he had put the world together. The parent was delighted, yet mystified, at the boy's speed and asked him how he had finished it so quickly. The youngster replied: "Oh, it was very easy. There was a picture of a man on the other side, so I put the man together and the world automatically put itself together."

There is a profound moral lesson in this anecdote. It contains the answer to a problem which is trying the souls of all serious-minded people in the world today, from the great statesman to the ordinary citizen. Now that the armed hostilities of this second World War are over, the nations of the world have gathered to talk over and plan for a permanent peace. But things are not going as smoothly as all of us wish. Planning world peace is not a simple matter of bookkeeping. There seems to be a difficulty on the part of certain nations to recognize even the most fundamental demands of justice, and more and more people are growing discouraged and are losing hope of ever reaching that world order for which so many men have fought and died. Peace in the world—the goal of the nations—seems very far off.

The answer to the problem of peace is, theoretically, absurdly simple. Perhaps, that is why the directors and citizens of nations have overlooked it for so long. One of the difficulties of enormously important little things is precisely the fact that they can be trodden under foot in favor of cumbersome and mysterious, though practically useless, plans and gadgets. It is the old story of our straining gnats and swallowing camels. Complicated plans which require unwieldy administrative machinery seem to capture our fancy. In the interest of "science" we set aside the homely notions about getting things done that have been the basis of human action since time began.

THE POWER OF EXAMPLE

The great error into which the world has fallen is that men have failed to see that peace among nations is inseparable from peace with-

in men. The nation is in great part the reflection of the view of life of its citizens. Their daily lives and actions set the moral tone of the nation. The moral level of men is at once a cause and an effect of the general moral level of the Nation. If they are good, that nation is good; and if they are leading evil lives, then that nation is on the way to decadence. But the great danger arises when men do not see this, when they hold aloof from the actions of their country as if it were none of their concern, and with a certain smugness repeat the cry which Cain raised before the throne of God: "What business is it of mine? Am I my brother's keeper." And when individuals justify themselves in their sin: "it's our life, and we're not hurting anyone else," then the peace of the world is truly in peril. For God in His Providence has so ordered the whole of creation that men may be brought to Heaven by means of one another. The failure or defection of one man may spell the spiritual ruin of many, and the good example of another may prove to be a shining beacon to countless souls and result in their eternal salvation. History has shown the truth of this on innumerable occasions, and the latest example has scarcely had time to be written. The nations seek peace, and humanly speaking, it is hardly possible that they will find peace, until they realize exactly what peace is.

INVENTORY

Assuredly, it is not very wise to belabor a dead horse because he will no longer draw the cart; still less is it charitable to disinter the corpses of the evildoers and point accusing fingers at their bones. Yet because we stand at a crucial point in history, it is necessary to stop and examine our culture and our history, in order to see where we have come from and to seek to determine whether or not we are on the right road, and if not, at what point we have strayed. The time for superficial judgments has passed, and now at last, willy nilly, we are face to face with fundamentals.

"Today humanity lies prostrate and breathless by the wayside. While in its folly it was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, from the city of prayer to that of pleasure, from the region of ideals to that of lucre, it fell among thieves whose names are pride, unbelief, ambition, violence, disloyalty, and hatred. These have despoiled it of its riches, of the supreme moral values which render a man worthy and laudably proud; faith in God, brotherly love, mutual trust; they have taken away with violence a precious treasure, peace."¹

¹ Allocation of Pope Pius XII to the Knights of Malta, Jan. 15, 1939.

REFORMATION

Thus Pope Pius XII sums up the calamitous period in which we live. And in order to see the profundity, the truth, and clarity of his judgment, we need only to look upon the events of our day in the light of the history of the past few hundred years. Although history is not amenable to the rigid rule of cause and effect, as is the case in the physical sciences, still the movements which arise are brought about and fostered both by the will of men and the inner vitality of the principles of these movements. Yet because of man's evident bent towards evil it is with difficulty that good movements are begun and encouraged, and evil ones repressed. Ideas, more often the bad than the good, have a way of working themselves out in political and social order. Every theory is eventually carried out to its logical conclusion. As a consequence, we of the twentieth century are reaping the sorry crop sowed by the men of the Reformation.

Today the State or Nation has been largely absolved from morality, and expedience has been canonized as its legitimate activity. The true norms of moral judgment have been rejected with the rejection of Christian principles of life, international and individual, taught by the Catholic Church. Whether conceived of as absolutist or democratic, the modern State has been given a mystical life above and apart from the lives of its citizens.

Machiavellianism, or deification of the ruler, has had its adherents almost since time began; but State worship, as we know it today, evolved ultimately in the bosom of the Protestant Revolt, either in the form of the State Church of Henry VIII and Martin Luther, or the Church State of John Calvin. Both of these forms, although intended by their authors to lift the papal yoke from the backs of men, became, under these same reformers, immeasurably worse than the evil they proposed to remove.

There is a constant ratio between the value set on human dignity and the place given to the State in the thought of men. When a false value is placed on the one the true worth of the other is diminished. It is to the eternal credit of the Catholic Church that She, during the time of Her ascendancy in Europe, stabilized the two. Man, according to the Church, was a citizen of two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. Each had its own sphere of operation. Provided each remained in its sphere, there could be no cause for conflict between the two. But the new faith of the Reformers destroyed this balance. Both Luther and Calvin denied man's free will; Luther by a faith based on an excess of despair, Calvin by a faith resting on an excess of presumption. For Luther, man is absolutely

incapable of doing anything good, so much so that every one of his actions is a mortal sin. He is saved solely by faith in God. Calvin likewise rested his doctrine upon the foundation of justification by faith alone, but was more logical in his conclusions than his passionate German confrere. According to Calvin, if we are absolutely sure that we are justified by faith, this certitude cannot be lost; it is inalienable and extends even to our eternal salvation. He raised the State to the condition of a church, with the ruler a lay pope, the object of which was to enable the "saved" to live without molestation from the "damned."

INDUSTRIALIZATION

In England the industrialists eagerly accepted the new teaching and it played a major part in the development of the principles of Protestantism and in their application to social and industrial life. The greed which the Catholic Church had succeeded in keeping under control broke loose with the spread of the influence of Calvinist principles and doctrines, and the new religio-economic theories were soon put into operation. They suited the practical English character quite well, whereas on the continent, they remained for a long time speculative questions. Calvinism gradually became the religion, now secularized, of *laissez-faire*, of big business and the economic man. Success, for Calvinism, was the sign of divine good pleasure; wealth and prestige, the marks of predestination. Poverty and misery were the beginnings of damnation on earth. The poor were the cast-offs of God, and nothing could be done to raise their condition. So the rich grew richer, and the poor grew poorer under this most comforting (to the predestined) religion.

As Calvinism began in religion and ended in becoming the inspiration of big business, Lutheranism began in religion and ended in laying the foundation of modern totalitarianism. It was a spiritual son of Luther, George Hegel, who sounded the clarion of Statism. "We must worship the State as the manifestation of the divine on earth."

MARXISM

His theories were eagerly seized upon by the apostle of Revolution, Karl Marx. Marx transmitted them to posterity in the form of the Brown Socialism of Germany and the Red Socialism of Russia, which in our days have engulfed the world in blood. Marxism was able to grow because of the increasing unrest caused by the practical consequences of the philosophy of *laissez-faire*. When the laboring masses began to rebel against the injustice and inhumanity of a self-seeking bourgeoisie, the proletarian social philosophy was given its

impetus. And the only power on earth which could control it and guide its energy into constructive channels, the Catholic Church, was engaged in a defensive war all over Europe. The Church was forced to direct its attention principally to holding the lines of Catholic belief against either open persecution or against the subtler, more trying, tendencies of some Catholic states to provincialize and nationalize its universal character.

In the desperate struggle for their daily bread, men began to consider their salvation more and more in terms of dollars and cents. The voice of the City of God passed unheeded, and of all the voices in the City of Man that of the marketplace prevailed. The working classes took the doctrines of their employers, refashioned them, and in view of their own demands set forth conditions by which they believed their ideals would be realized.

But the acquisition of wealth is a siren goal. It destroys in soul and body all who pursue it, and they in their turn break the backs of all who stand in their way. The hardships which were inflicted upon the workers by this uncontrolled lust for wealth and power were enormous. The State became the barrier of the wealthy against the legitimate demands of the workers. And since that time, the employers or capitalists, compelled by force of circumstances to retreat from the position of absolute power which they exercise over the workers by means of the State, have nevertheless maintained the principles on which their predecessors operated.

PROGRESS OR REGRESS?

Many speak of the wonderful progress of mankind in the last few hundred years. No one denies the accumulation of time- and labor-saving devices nor the scientific advances which are beneficial to human life. But we continually overlook the fact that so much of the so-called progress has in reality been retrogression, because it has been without and often against God. It is the unconscious realization, as it were, of this fact that has blighted the happiness which men should have received from the material conveniences with which they are surrounded.

The roots of the revolt of which we have been speaking have penetrated deeply into the depths of the souls of men, and have entwined themselves about their noblest ideals and emotions. Thus it seems that men must learn the hard way that their stubborn and blinded opinions are not the ways of God. They have unquestioningly accepted the achievements of Science while the word of God has been condemned as a superstition which is beneath man's dignity. Yet what

greater superstition, what more outlandish blasphemy could be hurled in God's face than the audacity of man to set his perverted judgment against the Providence of God? It is no wonder that there is treachery among nations and strife and contention among individuals, not to speak of the awful tension within the heart of every man.

Man was made for God and not for any materialistic kingdom. Yet because of the mockery of God which has been presented to them in the place of God by modern society, there are many who do not want to seek Him. In feverish agitation they will seek consolation where it cannot be found. They consult psychoanalysts more restless and confused than themselves, who advise them to bury themselves in amusements and distractions which leave them in still more deplorable spiritual hunger. For the vision of man as a child of God, they will substitute the "realism" of stage and screen, portraying human life at a mere animal level. When such a state of affairs becomes the accepted life of the nation, then the moral life of the individuals has reached a low ebb. When there is chaos and confusion in the lives of the citizens, then there will be chaos and confusion in the nation and in its policies. Peace will be promised by those who do not know what the word means and who have not been able to experience the tranquillity it brings. A sound proposal of peace is hopeless unless it is based on some other foundation than man, for no wholesome culture can be built on the shifting sands of human emotions.

But God is not easily thwarted. "Deep calleth unto deep." Man is His creature, and the eternal restlessness in the depth of man's soul is its revulsion to the attempts to satisfy it with anything less than God. A return to Christ, God Incarnate, and to the teachings of Christ is imperative for the salvation of individuals and for the security of the nations. When honor and honesty have been restored between neighbors, when wealth and power are no longer preferred to the service of God, when lust is no longer publicly glamorized, when the true Christian virtues are given their rightful place in the lives of all who call themselves followers of Christ, then there will be peace, for the order established by God and based on His Son, breeds no dissensions.