

Liturgy and Politics

by Brian Wicker

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The problem of politics is essentially the problem of reconciling personal relationships to public or impersonal human relationships. For we all feel a tension between the two. We begin life almost wholly within a context of personal relationships – with parents or parental substitutes who present themselves to us as individuals. It is only gradually that we discover a wider world or relationships with people who are not members of the family – that is to say, people not *familiar* to us. Slowly, as childhood proceeds our original personal relationships are surrounded by a rarefied and less knowable but ever-expanding ‘atmosphere’ of *unfamiliar* humanity. This ‘atmosphere’ of impersonal humanity can only be partially explored, and has for the most part to be taken for granted. Of course, no sharp dividing line can be drawn between those whom we know in a real, personal way and the surrounding mass of humanity which we can know only in a notional, impersonal way, but just as the familiar air of Birmingham or Bermuda gradually thins out as we go upwards, until we come to a point where we quite obviously need some artificial means for continuing to breathe there at all, so we gradually come to a point, in the exploration of our human surroundings, where we need to set up some artificial, institutional framework if we are to carry on living in that rarefied atmosphere. That is to say we need to set up a political order and to develop a political consciousness.

Now because we begin with personal relationships, these become the paradigms of our social life, the norms by which we evaluate and judge all social interaction. A social relationship which falls short of the personal is almost automatically felt to be, to that extent, a less than fully human relationship, despite the fact that entering into impersonal relationships with the circumambient atmosphere of humanity is as inescapable and natural a process as growing up itself. It is in this feeling of the relative inadequacy of impersonal relationships to offer us fully human experiences that the tension arises between our understanding of other people in the personal relationship, the *familiar* setting, and our comparative inability to understand them in the unfamiliar, impersonal setting. So, knowing that the wider social atmosphere is something we have to breathe in order to stay alive, even when we are too young to recognise the fact; and at the same time feeling that it is an atmosphere that will

never be as rich in life – giving nourishment as the closer personal atmosphere, we begin to harbour a kind of guilt. We tend to feel that we *ought* to be able to enter into the same kind of relationship to humanity at large, that we are able to experience in the familiar world. And because we cannot, we are faced with a problem. How to reconcile the fact of the impersonal social atmosphere which is as necessary to life as food and drink, with the experience of something by comparison with which it seems almost unnecessary, or even hostile? This problem of reconciliation is the essential problem of politics. For politics is about the artificial structure – the social institutions – which we need in order to breathe in the rarefied atmosphere of impersonal social life.

Very often we look for some way of dealing with the political problem in purely personal terms; that is to say, we try to project the structure (or rather the apparent absence of structure) of personal relationships into the outer atmosphere of politics – where it cannot function because it was not designed to do so. There are various more or less subtle ways of doing this. Here I shall discuss only three. These seem to me to be the most characteristic and the most relevant to my present theme.

Liberalism and the Personal

First of all there is the way of *liberalism*. Liberalism simply accepts the diagnosis that I have indicated, admits the existence of the disease so to speak, and then avoids its implications by systematically choosing, at all the crucial points, to follow the way of personal relationships and to ignore, or even defy, the impersonal atmosphere of wider humanity. Having allowed that there has to be a choice between the two, the consistent liberal always prefers the familiar world of personal relationship to that of politics. Perhaps the most humane and attractive statement of this position which has been made in recent years is that of E. M. Forster in his essay on *What I Believe*.¹ In that essay he made the famous remark that ‘if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country’. This humanely unpatriotic affirmation is simply the logical conclusion of a consistent (if inadequate) approach to politics. According to Forster, what is of basic value is the personal relationship, and the trust which it demands. This is something that cannot be wholly eroded away either by psychology (for, whatever the theoretical findings of that science, we still have to act on the assumption that the personality is solid, that the self is an entity, ignoring all contrary evidence) or by totalitarian organization (for the dictator may order people to merge, and incite them to mass-antics, but ‘they are obliged to be born separately, and to die separately, and owing to these unavoidable termini, will always be running off the totalitarian rails’).

¹Cf. *Two Cheers for Democracy* Part 2.

Personal relationships, then, must never be sacrificed for an impersonal good. But, as Forster admits, in an essay on *The Challenge of Our Time*,² there are certain other basic human needs – the biological needs of food, shelter and the rest – which equally cannot be sacrificed. And the provision of these must be organised, in the modern world, by some kind of political action. For without this, not only personal relationships, but persons themselves, will simply die out. His solution to this dilemma is interesting. It rests upon a distinction between the needs of the body and the needs of the spirit. The bodily needs of man can be legitimately organised politically, because they do not touch the essential, spiritual nature of the personal relationship. ‘We want planning for the body and not for the spirit’, he says. Thus, the liberal answer involves a dualism which is, I think, ultimately unsatisfactory. (And indeed, Forster’s own novels prove that such a distinction is insufficient; for the personal relationships so sensitively dramatised there are by no means merely spiritual, nor can the bodily element in them be separated out without damage to the relationship itself). Inevitably therefore, Forster raises the problem of dualism – ‘where does the body stop and the spirit start?’ – but does not answer it. He merely evades it. ‘Suppose you are planning the world distribution of food? You can’t do that without planning the world population . . . You are meddling with the realms of the spirit, of personal relationship, although you may not have intended to do so. And you are brought back again to that inescapable arbiter, your own temperament. When there is a collision of principles would you favour the individual at the expense of the community, as I would? Or would you prefer economic justice for all at the expense of personal freedom?’. What is significant here is that a determinism of the individual by some force called his own temperament is invoked as a way of evading the responsibility of choice that, on liberal principles, has to be made. Because your own temperament is your inescapable arbiter, the essential spirit of ‘you’ is somehow saved from the responsibility of deliberately denying economic justice to all. The invocation of temperament is made, one feels, because Forster rightly senses that to have to make such a decision oneself is somehow intolerable. Seeing no other way out of the problem, he invokes ‘temperament’ as the justification for his own liberal choice while failing to say what should be done by the person whose temperament leads him in an opposite, say totalitarian, direction. This seems to be a classic case of existentialist self-deception or ‘bad faith’.

Leninists and Fabians

The liberal way of dealing with the political problem thus entails a radical dualism of body and spirit, and finally a direct conflict between individual and society. But this is not the only answer which

²*Ibid*, Part 1.

involves an unsatisfactory dualism. The traditional concepts of socialism suffer from an equally intractable difficulty. The roads to socialism may take a number of routes, but hitherto most of them have fallen into two main categories: the parliamentary or Fabian and the insurrectionary or Leninist. Perry Anderson, present editor of the *New Left Review*, has distinguished them as follows: 'For Lenin, the road to socialism was short but sheer: it required the armed insurrection of the proletariat against the established state, its capture and destruction. Out of this conflagration the working class would fashion a new State, the dictatorship of the proletariat. For Webb, on the other hand, the road to socialism was long, flat and unwinding: its terminus was always over the horizon. The working class could only create a new social order by slow, imperceptible stages. It must respect the constitutional framework into which it had been admitted. There was only one way to change society in these conditions: to win an election, a majority in Parliament, and then, gradually and peaceably, begin to legislate towards the distant pole-star of socialism'.³ But in either case intolerable choices were involved. In the first, the sacrifice of the individuals' liberty for the sake of an imposed, and allegedly necessary party unity and orthodoxy of doctrine. Leninist, or insurrectionary socialism is simply the opposite of the liberal position. Conflict between the needs of the individual and the requirements of the community are admitted, and a deliberate, consistent choice is made in favour of the community at the expense of the individual. This is now so generally admitted that the point scarcely needs labouring here. But the parliamentary road to socialism is dogged by a less openly acknowledged but an equally serious conflict. This is the struggle between the socialist demand for a wholesale change in the total pattern of social relations – class relations, industrial relations, cultural relations, financial relations – and the Fabian insistence upon the need to work through an established institutional procedure which is itself governed by the very relations which it is the aim of socialism to transform. In England, the attempts to win a parliamentary majority for socialist ideas and, then, to pursue them in a context of power derived from an anti-socialist world has consistently meant the distortion of socialism into hybrid forms of a pseudo-socialist or neo-capitalist kind. The current form of this distortion is the present government's cult of capitalist modernisation, the attempt to transform politics into technology, with the consequent attempt to win over the uncommitted new technological white-collar voters by presenting them with an image of an up-to-date, streamlined, efficiency-orientated society, in which all genuine political struggles are forgotten in the search for universal economic prosperity. But it must not be supposed that, in the present order of things, there is very much room to manoeuvre here. Given the need to maintain a viable Labour

³*Towards Socialism* (Fontana Library 1965) pp. 224–5.

administration in Parliament, and the need to woo a politically unstable minority of floating voters in the country, there is little alternative but to dress up socialist ideas in an alien, politically neutral garb. But given also the actual political struggle that is going on elsewhere – in the international field, especially – this distortion of socialism into the cult of modernisation must inevitably deteriorate from a merely tactical expedient to a positive ideology. It has to be followed out into practice. There is at present no other alternative. Socialism is thus strictly impossible as long as it is envisaged in the old Fabian terms as a slow evolution from above through the progressive amelioration of proletarian conditions and the establishment of a Welfare State.

Thus both the traditional ways of conceiving the road to socialism involve intolerable choices. Insurrectionary socialism entails the expendability of personal relations in the interests of the anonymous community. Parliamentary socialism involves the expendability of genuinely socialist objectives and their replacement by abstract notions, such as efficiency, economic growth, and technological progress, all of which are rigidly impersonal and, in themselves, life-denying.

It might be thought that my third way of dealing with the political problem would be the conservative way. But I do not wish here to consider contemporary conservatism in any detail because I do not think it has anything interesting to say. It is, to my mind, simply a congeries of incompatible slogans, useful for practical polemics but of little theoretical significance. Conservatism adopts for its own purposes the liberal stress on the individual over against the anonymous community, but without the sense of humanity or of the agony of choices which genuine liberalism always implies. It adopts pseudo-socialist ideas of Welfare, but effectively blocks the further advance towards the obliteration of obsolete social and economic distinctions. In fact, conservatism, in modern Britain, is simply the articulation of the herd instinct of those who stand to lose by any form of radical change. It is not a significant approach to the political problem. No, the third way of dealing with the political problem that I want to discuss is the Christian way, and especially the Catholic way, as hitherto envisaged.

The Traditional Christian Approach

The tradition of Christian thinking about social problems has been predominantly liberal in its stress on the primacy of personal relations. Thus it has taken for granted, as definitive, the concept of the family as the norm for all social intercourse. It has therefore consistently failed to grapple with the political problem – which, as I have said is precisely the problem of impersonal unfamiliar relationship. It has, inevitably, emphasized the values characteristic of an immature stage of human existence, for it is only at this stage that

personal relations can be plausibly regarded as the whole, or almost the whole, of social life. The values of obedience, of docility, of self-help, of mutual, voluntary, personal care for other individuals and fear of the outside, unfamiliar world, have been the characteristic values of the Christian view, and especially of the Catholic view. They are the values of people who find their interests and satisfactions in a family setting and do not need, or wish, to look outside it. The universal Church itself has been thought of as an extended family. And the parish – the one social experienced offered by the Church to the majority of its members – has succeeded only when it could be organised and known as a family-based society with its own spiritual ‘father’ – the parish priest – at its head.

There is, of course, an immense amount to be valued in this traditional ideal, and there will no doubt always be a certain validity in it. But here I wish to draw attention to some of its weaknesses. The first of these I have already mentioned: namely that it is characteristic of an immature, or childish perspective. It deals with the political problem by mostly ignoring it. But this is more than a limitation, for it entails a certain built-in hypocrisy. For not only does Christianity claim to offer life to adults, as well as to children: it also claims to be a universal, world-wide religion available to all. The very Catholicity of Christianity, the universality of its message, implies an embracing of all human relationships. Thus, precisely in so far as the Church succeeds in converting the world, the family-analogy *must* break down. There cannot be personal relationships between all Christians. The vast majority of my fellow believers must always remain, to me, part of the anonymous atmosphere of unexplored humanity which surrounds me but which I cannot know. To pretend that the Church is an extended family is therefore hypocritical and dangerous. For not only is it a false analogy: it blocks the development of a more adequate one.

This built-in hypocrisy is possibly the most damaging feature of contemporary Catholicism, and it leads to a disabling dualism as unsatisfactory in its own way as the dualisms already examined. One consequence of the false analogy is that it allows to go on, unchecked, a totally inhuman assimilation of all those aspects of the Church’s life which cannot plausibly be felt as familiar and personal, into juridical and positivistic categories. The excessive dominance of bureaucracy and canon law over the life of the Church is actually the inevitable consequence of trying to see everything in personal terms. For whatever cannot be assimilated into personal terms, has to be relegated to the sub-personal realm of legal regulation. Only in this way can everything that is felt to be essential to Christianity be kept in the personal, family context. So a Christian view of *political* relations becomes a contradiction in terms, and as a result is rendered impossible in practice.

Secondly, on the individual level, the prevalent attitude expresses

itself in the attempt to distinguish completely between a person and the ecclesiastical office he holds. Thus as a person, the bishop must be fatherly, kind, sympathetic, as chummy as he can. But precisely as a bishop his task is to rule, to exact obedience, to proclaim the doctrine, to speak in exalted generalities, to wear a distinctively authoritative costume and to adopt a particularly dignified mode of deportment. At its limit, this attempt to distinguish person and office results in the modern effort by the mass-media to present the Pope, in his personal life, as 'one of us – an ordinary man at work, at recreation, travelling or chatting or praying – while precisely as Pope, he has to be presented as an object of adulation, borne on his chair by his devotees and bowed down before as if he were a kind of divinity. This schizophrenic display is an inevitable result of the attempt to keep Christianity wholly at the level of personal relations while simultaneously claiming for it a universal appeal and a world-wide loyalty. It is impossible to divide the personality into private and public roles in this way without damage to the integrity of the community which seems to require it, and even of the individual himself.

The Current Catholic Debate

Happily, as a result of the Vatican Council or perhaps as a result of the widespread disgust with Christian hypocrisy which (among other things) led to the Council, this attempt to see the Church purely in terms of personal relations is being replaced by something more solid and theological. A Christian view of impersonal human relations – that is, of politics – is beginning to be discussed among Catholics. But we are far from having arrived at a satisfactory formulation yet. An interesting argument that is part of the attempt at a formulation is to be found in recent numbers of *New Blackfriars*,⁴ between Mr Michael Dummett and Mr Terry Eagleton. I should like to spend the rest of my time trying to see whether there is room for both their views in a Christian formulation of the political problem.

Mr Dummett's fundamental thesis is that the Church's past and, indeed present, corruption is at bottom the result of a retreat from the concept of practical charity. 'While many inside the Church are living, or trying to live, Christian lives as individuals, the Church *as a body* has not been leading a Christian life at all. In our time we have come to realise more forcefully that the Mass is the supreme act *of a community*, and an expression of charity between the members of that community. But this realisation is hollow when what is symbolised in this corporate act simply does not exist in reality. Neither the parish, nor the Church as a whole, is a community at all . . . we do not know one another, we do not care for one another,

⁴Cf. NEW BLACKFRIARS: August 1965 – *How Corrupt is the Church?* by Michael Dummett; October 1965 – Terry Eagleton on *The Language of Renewal*; November 1965 – *Church and World* – Mr Dummett Replies.

and we have nothing in common with one another save our acceptance of certain religious tenets'. The solution which Mr Dummett suggests is a renewal of genuine local community. That is to say, a return to the reality of the local Church as an extended family of personal relationships in which genuine caring for one another can be practised.

Mr Eagleton's counter-thesis is that such a renewal in terms of the restoration of a society of personal relationships is based upon acceptance of the very conditions which it is the real task of the Church to transform (that is to say, the bad social conditions which bring about the need for, say, the corporal works of mercy). Thus he says that 'social structures already exist for dealing with . . . hardship (extremely inadequate, of course) and the real centre of Christian commitment, surely, is engagement in the work of creating and sustaining these common structures – the Church in the world – rather than the creation of a substitute Welfare State in the parish'.

Mr Dummett's main answer to this point is that to ask for the total transformation of society, instead of trying to transform it piecemeal, in the places where one can personally do some good, is in fact to postpone all amelioration indefinitely. 'The effect of radicalism of Mr Eagleton's kind is only too likely to be highly conservative', he says. But, more positively, a parish which did conform to the demands of personal caring would not only harness the energies of people who at present do nothing at all; it would also serve as an example and challenge to the surrounding society, and so contribute to its total transformation. Now, behind this view lie two presuppositions. The first is that the realisation of the ideals of mutual love, of sharing with and helping one another, is necessarily unattainable by society as a whole; and secondly that, in any case, the Church must always stand over against the world to some extent, as a challenge to its purely temporal values.

It is noticeable that in this answer the primacy of personal relationships, as the norm of all social life, is taken for granted. Mr Dummett sees it as a limiting *weakness* of 'society as a whole' that it cannot attain to the ideal of a purely personal, family-based social existence. (Mr Dummett hints that this is a weakness especially characteristic of unconverted societies.) But surely it is just here that the mistake is made. It is not a weakness or a limitation of society as a whole that it cannot become a kind of extended family. It is simply its nature to be impersonal, to be based on unfamiliarity rather than on familiarity, on political and other dealings rather than on personal relationships. The Christianisation of society does not consist in somehow bringing these dealings into the orbit of personal relationships, and so taking them out of their own proper sphere; but rather in bringing the power of God into their very impersonality and making of their very anonymity something ecclesial and so open to the life of the Holy Spirit.

But if that is the weakness in Mr Dummett's position a corresponding difficulty needs to be pointed out on the other side. This is that if Christianity has traditionally (and wrongly) pretended that all worthwhile relationships could be transformed into personal relationships (given only that necessary softening or 'change of heart' which charity seems to imply) socialism has traditionally tended to speak as if it were tolerable to ride rough-shod over the sensitivities of personal relationships in its haste to transform the impersonal world. For example, by spawning a monstrous abstract jargon from which it has not succeeded in freeing itself, socialism, like neo-scholastic theology, has tended, as Orwell rightly insisted, to alienate those whose concern is with the maintenance of the quality of personal relationships. Liberalism on the other hand, has appealed to Christians partly because it has been able to speak in a civilised tone of voice, as E. M. Forster, for example, has amply demonstrated. (It is characteristic of Forster's liberalism that a reviewer should describe it as the work 'of a truly civilised mind'. This is not a locution which would be likely to occur to any reviewer of, say, the average article in *New Left Review*, or (dare I say it?) in *Slant*. It is perhaps worth taking seriously the reasons why this is so.)

The problem of politics, then, is how to order in a way adequate to human needs, those impersonal anonymous human relationships which form most of the social atmosphere we breathe. Socialism, if it is to mean anything, must mean primarily that. It will not, that is to say, be an attempted personalisation of this atmosphere. It will be a socialisation of the impersonal, not a personalisation of society. But what does this mean? One answer that must, I think, be rejected is the idea that it means that somehow 'love' will come to dominate all of our social existence. For love is essentially a personal relationship, based upon personal knowledge. (In this it is to be distinguished from charity in the theological sense.) A society based upon love would be intolerable, as Orwell and Forster both saw. It would mean either a society based upon the pressure of public opinion to conform to certain accepted concepts of what love demands, or a society living at such a pitch of private intensity that it would soon become hopelessly neurotic. But it is in any case, an impossibility, and we have to start from that fact. We have to accept that the realm of impersonal human relationships is around us on all sides, and that this is where we must begin.

The agnostic socialist is here at a disadvantage. For he has no model for the kind of relationship that he is trying to achieve, except perhaps in so far as he is prepared to accept those societies which *call* themselves socialist as his models. And no intelligent socialist can do that unconditionally. He is forced, then, inevitably, to imagine that of which he has no direct experience. The Christian, however, does have something more to go on than this. I do not mean by this that for him the Church considered sociologically is a model society:

for as I have insisted, the Church in that sense is part of what needs to be Christianised along with the rest of our impersonal world. I mean Christ himself, present to us in his own body. And to say that takes us to the heart of the concept of the liturgy.

The Liturgy: Personal and Impersonal

The liturgy, especially the eucharistic liturgy, makes Christ present to us, not as individuals in the first place, but as a community. This community, to which he becomes present, becomes by virtue of that presence, his own body. But it is a one-sided concept of the liturgy to think of this community simply in terms of an extended family gathered together in a single place. It is an essential element in the concept of the real presence that Christ is present in many places at once. This means that the liturgical community has simultaneously a personal aspect and an impersonal aspect, all within its one human vision. In so far as the liturgy can only be celebrated in a particular place, by a particular group of people, it has a personal aspect, uniting them into a family with its own bonds of personal relationship. And if the local liturgical assembly does not achieve that kind of personal relationship among its members, then there is something radically wrong with it – as I think both Mr Dummett and Mr Eagleton would probably agree. But the liturgy also makes Christ present in a somewhat different way to the whole Christian community. Every liturgy is a celebration by the whole church, somehow concentrated and focussed in this one place. The liturgy is also concerned, therefore, with the creation of community in the impersonal sense. It must Christianise the relationships which hold between all God's people, whether they have any personal knowledge of each other or not. For Christ is both a person and an institution, and his presence has both a family aspect and a political aspect.

Mr Dummett is right to insist that the liturgical assembly, as a community of personal relationships, must always stand over against the world, as an example, a goal and a reproach. The local liturgical group, as an extended family, does have as its primary task, the creation within secular society of a better form of social life than the secular world can provide. It is not the task of the local assembly in this sense to transform, totally, the whole pattern of social relationships in a complete society. But as a segment of an impersonal universal society, which is brought to a focus in this or that particular place, the liturgical assembly does have just such a function; and in discharging that function it must be more than just an example and a reproach: it must be an agent of the transformation of its society with which, potentially, it is identical.

Because the liturgical assembly is local and particular, but at the same time universal and Catholic, these two aspects of personal family-community and an impersonal society must be present, locally, at every liturgical gathering. And this is evident in fact.

For, in every typical liturgical gathering today there is first of all a group of people whom I personally know and care for, and perhaps live or work with, but there is also, beyond them a wider impersonal mass of people with whom I have, and can have, no personal familiar dealings. And the liturgy would be the poorer if it were confined either to those people whom I personally knew, or on the other hand to those whom I did not know. But beyond this and more profoundly, we have to understand that those who are not present at all in the flesh – the lapsed, the separated Christians and the unbelievers who are in good conscience – are yet somehow present ‘in the spirit’, and joined to us. And to that body of people there can be no limit, other than the limits of the human race itself, living and dead.

This theme of the double character of the liturgy could be explored in a number of directions. One way would be to consider that Christ is both personally present, in the eucharistic offerings themselves, and impersonally present in his word and its utterance by us. Another would be to reflect that he is, in a sense, both present – because he is alive in us by faith and sacramentally—and absent (and so impersonal for us) because he is with the Father in heaven. Or, finally, we might consider that he is both personally present to us in the visible body of his minister, the celebrant, and impersonally present in all of us all who mystically form his body. These double aspects are made real to us by the mixture of personal action (especially the interpretation of the gospel to us by the priest and our own response as individuals to it) and impersonal action, manifested in the stylised gestures and the pre-ordered words, characteristic of liturgical activity. But the point that is most important for my theme is the eschatological perspective of the liturgy, as showing forth in the present moment the very lineaments of the future glory.

The liturgical assembly is the sacrament, here and now, of the community of the blessed in heaven. It is the nearest approach we can make to that ultimate state of humanity. Now heaven is, among other things, the locus of a total and final reconciliation between individual and society, between personal and impersonal relationships. It is the totally transformed society, in which all our needs are satisfied. But this does not mean that it involves the abolition of everything we have experienced. On the contrary, it is the consummation of all that is valid in experience. We are redeemed in our own bodies, and with the traces of our own actions upon us. In so far as our social relationships have shaped us and made us what we are, they will inevitably be represented in the heavenly consummation. And in so far as we are shaped by personal relationships and by the impersonal world of unknown humanity, both these elements will be present somehow in eternity. Heaven, one might say, will be the true political order, arising – it must be insisted, by the power of God – from the approximations to such order that we inaugurate on earth. There is a real sense in which how heaven will

ultimately be, depends on what we do now: and if heaven is the place of true impersonal relationships as well as of true personal ones, then our political actions now, as well as our personal actions now, will, in their own fashion, and under God's Providence, go towards the making of the final reconciliation.

But what matters more for the present is that the liturgy offers us some guidelines to the political problem itself. For it assures us in its eschatological dimension – by faith, but nevertheless with certainty – that there is no absolute gulf fixed between the fundamental interests of the individual and the basic needs of society. In that sense, Christianity provides an alternative to the liberal dilemma. The agonising choice which the liberal faces is, in fact, based upon a false analysis of the situation. We do not *have* to choose between individual liberty and social justice: if it looks as though we do, then this merely shows that we have not thought the problem out to the end. And it therefore tells us that we must do the best we can for both sides in the dilemma and rest content, for the time being, in the knowledge that we have not deliberately betrayed either. Trusting God is better even than trusting one's friend, because trusting one's friend may entail betraying others, whereas trusting God means relying on a power which can actually ensure that no betrayal at all occurs. (This does not, of course, solve the problem of precisely what, in our trust of God, we must do in the concrete situation. That decision must always remain in our own hands. But this is true whatever our beliefs or hopes may be.)

We can go further than this, however, and assert that the liturgy is concerned with both the creation of a better society in its own small part of the world *and* with the total transformation of society. It is tempting already, so soon after the renewal has begun, to think of the new liturgical concepts in a static way, and to oppose them to the old, mediaeval ideas on that basis. Thus we 'progressives' may contrast a modern participating community with an old-fashioned passive one, and a community of understanding with a community of ignorance, a vernacular liturgy with a 'dead' liturgy and so on. But surely the most important feature of the renewal is the contrast between an obsolete static liturgy, devoted to the private sanctification of individuals, and a dynamic liturgy devoted to undertaking a role in the unfolding of history. The eschatological perspective of contemporary theology, and especially of the liturgy, entails necessarily that the liturgical assembly should see itself as an agent of historical change. This change is just what we mean by the conversion of the world. And because, as I have insisted, the liturgy has both a personal, family aspect and an impersonal, political aspect, we have to see this role in two ways. Locally, and familiarly, as the transformation of the family of the parish, or whatever other small scale social unit evolves from it, into a genuine community of personal caring for people known to us: and globally,

as the transformation of the whole system of impersonal social relationships which surrounds us and shapes our particular destinies. Neither is by itself enough. For there is no local transformation which does not imply a global transformation. And there is no global transformation except that which is actualised in a particular acts taking place at particular moments and undertaken by particular individuals.

Yet even at this point we have to respect what is valid in liberalism. Some words of Lionel Trilling's about Forster are to the point here: 'He has learnt not to be what most of us are – eschatological. Most of us, consciously or unconsciously, are discontented with the nature rather than with the use of the human faculty; deep in our assumption lies the hope and the belief that humanity will end its career by developing virtues which will be admirable exactly because we cannot now conceive them. The past has been a weary failure, the present cannot matter, for it is but a step forward to the final judgement; we look to the future when the best of the works of man will seem but the futile and slightly disgusting twitchings of primeval creatures: thus, in the name of a superior and contemptuous posterity, we express our self-hatred – and our desire for power'.⁵

All this shows that a balanced theology of the church in action in the liturgy must entail some kind of political commitment. There is no evading the political problem for a Christian. But does this mean that we can deduce from it any particular political attitude? To answer this question fully is impossible in the space left to me here. It is worth saying, however, that I think one of the most hopeful signs of the renewal of the Church in this country at the present time is that the outline of a coherent argument about this question is beginning to emerge. It will be clear from what I have said already, roughly where my own sympathies lie. It seems to me that the liberal solution – if it can be called that – even in its most consistent and humane form, is radically inadequate, for the reasons I have suggested. I have also suggested that, in my own view, there is now no longer any genuine or distinctive conservative position. The intellectual nullity of contemporary conservatism seems to me practically complete. As an active force in our society, representing a distinct social and economic interest, and as a mass movement able to achieve power, conservatism is still a force to be reckoned with – probably in fact the most powerful force there is. But as representing a coherent political ideal, or a distinctive political position, it is non-existent. Conservatism has been swallowed up by the neo-capitalism it has, in effect if not in intention, brought into being. It has become the victim of its own illusions.

There remains, therefore, only some version of the socialist answer. As I have said, this cannot however be identified with either partial, Leninist insurrectionary socialism, or the creeping, partial,

⁵Lionel Trilling, *E. M. Forster*, p. 21.

socialism of the Fabians. What is required is a properly humane, but at the same time *total* socialism. This phrase may sound sinister. But it is not. What I have in mind is this: that the inhumane, insensitive, callousness of some traditional versions of socialism is due precisely to their being insufficiently total in their vision. It is just because, for example, the right-wing conservative/socialism of the Gaitskell era was preoccupied with only one small aspect of the socialist struggle – namely the struggle to win an electoral and parliamentary majority – that it inevitably became inhuman and philistine. Being obsessed with an abstraction, it failed to take into account the concrete problems of personal relationships and individual needs. Similarly, the socialism of official communist theory has become inhuman for the same kind of reason; the direct, unswerving pursuit of another abstraction, proletarian dictatorship. What is needed therefore is a socialism which sees parliamentary power as only one part of a whole system of relationships – industrial, cultural, familial, economic, religious, educational – all of which have to be infused by the same political purpose. Only when all these aspects of life have been brought into the political arena, and seen for what they are – namely the single interwoven context of all our living, the very air we breathe as social beings – can socialism take account of their subtleties of tone, style and idiom and so become relevant as a personal as well as a political ideal. The entry of politics into these areas is not a threat to personal relations, but on the contrary the saving of personal relationships from being trampled underfoot by an oppressive political force which masquerades as a liberating personalist individualism. If we cannot escape the human problem of politics, I do not think we can escape the socialist solution of it.

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