

the poor who have suffered from the evil poverty there is a feeling that to talk to them about the good poverty is either to insult them or to crush their revolutionary instincts. How difficult it would be to show them that to follow the course of this good poverty would be to work a revolution more complete than any Russian one.

How can we do it? Perhaps introduce them to the writings of Eric Gill. All that has been written here is an imperfect exposition of one section of his thought and those who know Gill's writings would echo the view that it would be better to send people to them rather than impose such an exposition on them.

He was misunderstood and suspected by those who did not see the world as he saw it and they glossed over such views as his on poverty. They did not understand it because money ruled in their hearts and they did not want a revolution.

R. P. WALSH,

Editor of *The Catholic Worker*.

(All the passages quoted in this article are from the writings of Eric Gill.)

THE PURITAN DENIAL

THE technical achievements and elaboration since the sixteenth century do not comprise the whole of modern capitalism. Capitalism has been much more than that; it has been an outlook on life with its own peculiar orientation and values. To endeavour to understand capitalism as a socio-economic form, therefore, it will be of help to look at the type of character which played a fundamental rôle in the capitalistic development. There is a vast literature on the relation between capitalism and Calvinism, especially in its Puritan form. The general question does not concern us here. What we shall consider is the Puritan character as it appeared in the middle seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this way it will be possible for us to discern more clearly the temper from which the modern technical innovations sprung or by which they were exploited. The spirit that lies behind these new methods in many ways involves an asceticism as rigid and as austere as the older medieval one: but the goal is different, the *ascesis* is intramundane, while the reward is no longer invisible but very near and very tangible.

When one examines the Puritan mentality at this period, that character with its intense energies and limited horizon, it reveals those features that have made possible the organisation of industry and wealth which has caught millions of human beings in its

meshes during the course of the modern era; meshes more unbreakable than steel because they were spun of the fibre of emotionless hearts and held together by the unyielding rigidity of relentless human wills; meshes cast by men conscious of a purpose to be achieved and self-righteous in the pursuit of that purpose.

The machine-like nature of Calvin's personal God, disposing with incalculable precision immutable decrees, begot in the minds of the worshippers an attitude and nourished the virtues that inevitably sprang from the worship of such a Being. The Christian life was now orderly and unitary in a manner altogether different from that taught in the Catholic doctrine which allowed for the accumulation of merits and always granted that repentance could repair the fault of sin. But the Puritan is not going to be judged by the merits of his life; rather his whole life must bear witness to his predestination, Perseverance, the outcome of a tremendous concentration of the will, and an austerity that rejects the world, the lust of the flesh and the pleasures of life are the dominant traits of the new Christian. No one, not even the richest, should be unemployed, but each should follow a calling. Talents and time were to be used to the utmost. 'You may labour', wrote Baxter, 'in the manner as tendeth most to your success and lawful gain, for you are bound to use all your talents. . . . If the Lord show you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way, if you refuse this and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling and you refuse to be God's steward.'¹ The frugal thrift of the religious man was added to the necessity and rationalisation of work. But frugality and thrift are two fundamental presuppositions for the successful capitalist.

Economic affairs were thrice holy now: they were the fulfilling of God's will in one's calling; they furnished the means of living a life devoted to a virtuous toil that glorified God; the monotony of business provided an *ascesis* for the Christian. 'Thus precisely at a time when the expansion of bureaucratic methods in business and government, and the expansion of large-scale manufacture were making the whole routine of practical activity an ever deadlier grind, Protestantism developed a special facility for getting pleasure out of that grind. This was Protestantism's special contribution to the development of capitalism and mechanism; not to initiate them, but to make them more tolerable and to pour into them all the energies of the moral life. Drudgery served the Protestant as valuable mortification of the flesh; valuable in a worldly as well as in a spiritual sense, for unlike the hair-shirts and the self-whippings

¹ Richard Baxter. *Christian Directory* (ed. London 1678), vol. I, p. 378b.

of the medieval saint, his unflinching concentration on dull work brought tangible profits.² Moreover, fortified in the justice of his calling, the Puritan could also drive others as he drove himself. The self-imposed and dreary routine that demanded more energy than creativeness, more determination than joyous enthusiasm, justice more than forgiving charity, was also imposed on those for whom the Puritan was in any way responsible: these too had to show the marks of predestination.

This side of the Puritan doctrine, with a biting double edge, drove home the amassing of wealth in business and justified the existence of poverty in the world at large. Arthur Young typifies the outlook on the latter point. 'If you talk of the interests of trades and manufactures, everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor or they will never be industrious; I do not mean that the poor in England are to be kept like the poor in France but the state of the country considered, they must be (like all mankind) in poverty or they will not work.'³ He goes on to say elsewhere that churches should be built in the poorer sections of the English cities—and incidentally provides a justification for Marx's assertion that religion was the opium of the people, if ever there was a justification—because genuine Christianity is inconsistent with revolt, or with discontent in the midst of plenty. 'The true Christian will never be a leveller.'⁴

The Puritan businessman narrowed life; his religion satisfied labour but forbade the joy of creativeness. He continually poured his energies into his calling and disciplined himself for its better fulfilment; but he bartered life for the sake of a function and reduced culture to its economic presuppositions. He consumed himself in the service of an impersonal task and in his individualism rejected the social co-operativeness of work, culture and life. Pictures, colouring and music, except in the form of the grim portrait or dirgeful hymn, disappeared from his surroundings. But the fundamental defect in the whole character orientation was its extraversion. Extraversion was the prime factor in the secularisation of the calling, in the formation of the ideal of impersonal service of a soulless business, and in the narrowing of the interests of life.

It is essential to human life that every now and again a man withdraw within himself to commune with God and to enter into his own soul, to put aside for the time the business of the world and the things that tend to absorb the spiritual soul in its material surroundings. Since the soul of man becomes, in a certain way,

² Lewis Mumford. *The Condition of Man* (London 1944, p. 199).

³ Arthur Young. *Eastern Tour* (London 1771, vol. IV, p. 361).

⁴ Young. *An Enquiry into the State of the Public Mind among the Lower Classes*

all that it knows and is concerned with, it must not remain all the time centred on the external and the material, or it will forget itself and be drawn down to the level of its preoccupations. The Puritan laboured in the works of God but almost never in silent prayer contemplated with intellect and will the God of works.⁵ He tinkled the cymbal and sounded the brass but forgot the primacy of love. Contemplation, above all contemplation that is the effusion of love, is an integral part of life. It alone can raise man above the spiritless grind of the machine or the brute vitality of the animal. Contemplation was especially necessary where the routine of business absorbed so much of a man's day. But contemplation was rejected by the Puritan as barren. 'To neglect this (i.e. bodily employment and mental labour) and say "I will pray and meditate" is as if your servant should refuse your greatest work and tie himself to some lesser, easier part.'⁶ Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravians and leader of the Pietistic German Puritanism, wrote: 'Man works not only to live but lives that he may work, and if a man has no work, he either suffers or dies'.⁷

Calvinism, it has been well said, believed that faith could move mountains, and worked at the same time with axe and spade. The evolution was not difficult to the stage where the axe and spade in the hands of the determined individualist were conceived as sufficient for the task. In a religion that measured grace according to material success, a success which was inevitably seen in the long run as the reward of effort and thrift, men could not but become imbued with a certain idea of their own self-sufficiency. But this immediately excludes that spirit of poverty which should pertain to the essence of a creature's outlook on life. The humble contemplation that would see in all of man's finite poverty, in men's every need, a need for God, was made impossible in the Puritan outlook. Fundamentally, the purpose of prayer is to praise God; prayer does this and at the same time opens the heart of man to receive God. In a certain sense there is no need for men to beg God's favour because he ever wishes to grant his gifts. But lest men should refuse these gifts when they are granted, they

⁵ It is true that not all Pietistic sects rejected mental prayer completely. The Quakers, for example, had periods of silent prayer at their meetings, prayer that was connected with their belief in the quasi-private revelation of the 'inner light'. But on the whole the fact is, as Borne and Henry put it, 'All delight, all leisure, and all enjoyment, even, perhaps the joy to be found in prayer, were suspect in the eyes of these austere moralists [i.e. the Calvinists in general]. Contemplation was adjudged by them to be a haughty survival of paganism'. (Borne and Henry, *Philosophy of Work*, London, 1936, p. 61.)

⁶ Baxter, *op. cit.* Vol. 1. p. iiiia

⁷ Zinzendorf: cited in J. H. Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind.* (Cambridge, Mass. 1840. p. 161).

must always bear within themselves that consciousness of their poverty which finds expression in the contemplative prayer of the ever imperfect finite being before the Infinite Creator. But the spirit of poverty was missing in the Puritan and contemplation found no place in his life.

By a stress on a half-truth, Puritanism condemned its adherents to a half-life: the concept of the Economic Man was the logical outcome of such a doctrine. In the real fullness of life, work must be balanced by leisure, economic activity by the cultivation of beauty in its several forms; action must have as its correlative contemplation; extraversion must find complement in intraversion; the God of works must not be forgotten in the works of God; and the human must find a continual reintegration into the divine in the manner that the Incarnation made possible.

JAMES O'CONNELL, S.M.A.

THE MYSTERY OF GOSPEL POVERTY

THE morning of April 16th, 1209, witnessed in the square of St George in Assisi (now called the Piazza Santa Chiara) an incident most rare and strange in the history of men. Warned and expectant of good things, a great crowd of beggars and outcasts had assembled, and to them presently came two men bearing between them a deep, heavily-weighted sack filled to the top with money. With that large indiscriminateness that often accompanies Catholic charity they began to hand out right and left the contents of the sack. The method of distribution would have horrified a modern humanitarian. There was no personal interviewing or questioning, no assessment of alms-qualification, no means test. A careless and bountiful profusion characterised this very medieval gesture; and when the last coin had been given away and the last beggar satisfied, it was probably the literal truth that the only completely destitute persons in that crowded square were the two prodigal benefactors.

The sack had contained in money the total worldly possessions of Bernard a Quintavalle, a very rich merchant of Assisi. Some little time before, he had gone one day with Francis to a small nearby church to pray and to seek God's will in his regard and, opening the book of the Gospels which lay upon the altar, they had immediately come upon the words: 'If thou wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.' And Bernard, with the help of Francis, already a beggar, forthwith obeyed this direction with literal exactness.