

## THE INCARNATION AND THE HUMAN ORDER

If there is one temptation more strong than any other in this time of falling bombs and unbelievable cruelties it is to despair of man. As in the time of Tacitus we have entered upon 'a time rich in disasters, gloomy with wars, rent with seditions and savage in its very hour of peace.' Purges within the states, wars between the states, cities flaming to heaven, women and children buried beneath the ruins, death raining from the sky, a new and brutal generation of scientific killers riding down fleeing refugees in their tanks or spraying machine-gun bullets on defenceless streets, on children at play—the list is endless. And this is human society. These are men. What can we hope from such corruption? Even if we survive the war, what can be built upon a generation whose nerves have been shattered by constant bombing and whose characters are maimed by the orgy of killing in which they have grown up? Even where bodies are intact, what can be hoped from these twisted souls? It is an obvious reaction to abandon all interest in the future of human society, to concentrate on the otherness of the spirit, the transcendence of God, the nothingness of creation, to adopt an apocalyptic attitude towards the present struggle. If two thousand years of Christian effort in the world have brought the world to this pass, why keep up the pretence that the human order can be redeemed? We are pilgrims and strangers. Our duty is to hurry through the unpleasant landscape of our earthly journey with all possible speed, our eyes fixed on the last milestone and the inn of death.

This despair, this renunciation of the human order is as old as man's thought. The great systems of the East saw man tied to the 'melancholy wheel' of created things

and taught the wise man to find peace in nothingness by breaking all ties of soul and body with the human order. Existence was suffering, blessedness the cessation of existence—the return of nothing to Nothing. The Greeks, too, had the sense of creation as an everlasting cycle in which man wearily relived a thousand lives. In Platonic thought the archetypes of the ideal world were only distortedly present in the material world, since matter was an impure medium.

The power of this condemnation of creation, of material things, of this distinction between the pure world of spirit and the corrupt world of nature has persisted long after the coming of Christianity. Manicheans, Bogomils, Catharists in the ages of faith, Lutherans, Jansenists after the disruption of European unity, and in our own day the neo-Lutheran school of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner have, although in diverse manners and with important differences of emphasis, insisted upon the cleavage between Divine and human, Creator and creation, Spirit and matter, the kingdom of God and human society. There is thus a weight of tradition behind our contemporary temptation to despair, also an impetus of reaction. For the last four hundred years, the Western world has grown increasingly secularist and materialist, a movement culminating in the rationalised materialism of a Marx and the sub-rational materialism of Blood and Soil. Human nature, divorced from grace, has 'had its chance' and this is where we are landed. Could there be a better argument for the radical corruption of created things?

Nevertheless the Catholic Church has fought the false dichotomy from her foundation. Long before the first heresies had arisen, St. Peter learnt at Joppa to 'call nothing unclean.' Creation could not be held wholly corrupt without insult to the Creator Who had looked on His handiwork and found it good. Human nature, though wounded, could not be wholly corrupt for, as St. Paul insisted, God was accessible even to reason alone. Man, even

without Revelation, was not deprived of Divine Light; in Greek thought he had reached the intuition of God by reason and—*teste David cum Sibylla*—in Virgil had felt the longing for redemption. And if without Revelation all creation and within it man's human nature were to be held good since, like grace itself, they were gifts of God, how much more good, how infinitely greater became the destiny and dignity of our human nature, when in the Incarnation we were called to 'become companions of the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ, even as He vouchsafed to share with us our human nature.'

The Incarnation is the great revolution in the concept of man. Without it man might, as did the greater prophets and thinkers of ancient times, dimly realise his dignity and mission. But the temptation to despise the 'weak and needy elements' was never wholly banished. Plato, for all that his thought was in a sense 'incarnational'—he admitted the partial realization of the archetypes in created things—could not prevent the old dichotomy. But in the Incarnation it is human nature, matter, energy, the very stuff of life that is accepted, shared, thoroughly lived by God Himself. Every human activity is sanctified. The family, the affections are sanctified in thirty years at Nazareth, rest and refreshment are sanctified at the well of Samaria, friendship at Bethany, healing, the relief of suffering in a hundred miracles, eating and drinking in the house of Simon the Leper or in the fish broiled by God Incarnate beside the Sea of Galilee. 'Call thou no thing unclean.'

And behind this obvious justification of the validity and sanctity of the human order which the simplest meditation can draw from the Incarnation, there is a profounder, more philosophical significance in the mystery of the Word made flesh. In the beginning was the Word, *Logos*, the Archetype, the 'form' of the philosophers, the rational principle in created things, the rule of their natures, the law of their inner development. And this *Logos* does not

remain in the shadowy world of ideal types; it is plunged in matter, and is incarnate. Despite all the perversities and negations of the Fall, the principle of creation and the principle of man is law, the laws discoverable in matter by the methods of science, the law of reason and conscience implanted in the heart of man. The Incarnation is not only the guarantee of the dignity and sanctity of common things, it is also a manifestation of their inner nature. Christ walking, talking, eating, sleeping, feeding the multitude with bread, curing the dumb man with dust, leaving his Body and Blood under the accidents of Bread and Wine is the sanctification of matter; the Logos, the Word made flesh, is the manifestation of Natural Law, of the rationality of the universe.

But if this is the significance of the Incarnation, how are we to explain the hideous mockery of a human order that we see to-day in the new totalitarian despotisms? The international anarchy? The bestial cruelty? The ravages of war? Since the whole mystery of evil cannot be our concern in this paper, here it is only possible to give a negative answer. These evils do *not* spring from a radical cleavage between grace and nature, between the divine and the human order. Indeed, it is possible to see in an attempt to create such a cleavage one of the causes of the *mysterium iniquitatis* in Russia and Germany. In Russia the Orthodox Church, in its emphasis on the Resurrection, on the Kingdom of God already manifest, tended to abandon the work of grace in nature and the validity of the human order established through the Incarnation; the human order was neglected, the secular sphere left to the civil authorities and a curious division generated within the Church between the intense mysticism and other worldliness of a Father Zosima and the purely political aspect of the Holy Synod. The self-exclusion of the Church is at least a contributory cause to the total exclusion imposed by Bolshevism.

In Germany, the case is perhaps not so obvious, but the

Lutheran tradition is at least in part responsible for that apotheosis of the Prussian state, which has culminated in the pagan idolatry of the Third Reich. In Luther we have the denial of the two elements which the Catholic Church has made manifest in the Incarnation, on the one hand the goodness of created things, on the other the rule of law in the universe. For Luther, the world was a 'Kingdom of wrath and punishment' and in this kingdom there was 'nothing but punishment and resistance, judgment and condemnation.' At the same time, he attributed a divine authority to the State but believed that this authority was irrational, mysterious and amenable to no law. His God was a violent God. 'It is God not man who hangs and breaks on the wheel, beheads and scourges. It is God who wages war.' And the State's divine authority, as a natural consequence, partook of this violence. For the Catholic concept of natural law, Luther substituted something perilously akin to a rule of naked force, something, at least, which could easily degenerate into a mere cult of power. And this, in the historical shape of the Prussian state, then of the Bismarckian era of Imperial Germany, has ended in the vile despotism of the Third Reich.

Thus, in the history of both Russia and Germany, there has been a tendency to banish the Incarnation. And can we maintain that the experiment has done anything but prove with a horrible vividness the fact that without the recognition of the Incarnation, either through Revelation or through reason, the human order not only is not supernaturalised but actually falls below the level of humanity? In the finished product the second generation of the new despotism 'stands in all its naked monstrosity, the Robot: the man who has lost all connection with mankind and lives by plan, product of a breeding stud, cog in a machine for industry and war, spiritually fed with 'strength through joy' or physical culture, emotionally satisfied by car rides or parachute leaps . . . ready to do everything that an unknown centre shall command—man from whom

conscience, mind and soul have been extracted as by an operation. In the first generation this was done with an ideological pretext: in the second the pretext has ceased to exist and the question arises in all seriousness whether these beings are still to be called men. Physically, to all appearances, they are still men, spiritually no more. But who knows in how few generations physical degeneration may overtake them.\*

In the Western tradition, however, there has been no fatal cleavage between the two orders. The spiritual roots of our free community lie deep in the Christian and human tradition of our Common Law, in the desire of the Puritan reformers 'to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land,' in the steadfast belief of generations of Christians that on the one hand a good human order could be built, that 'Thy kingdom come' meant quite simply what it said, and that, at the same time, Christian revelation and the Natural Law were the materials out of which the edifice should be built up. There is a religious dynamism behind the growth of the Western World and the justification of the free community, of the democracies of the West, has been essentially the belief grounded in the Incarnation that day-to-day life was shared in the supernatural, and that its inner laws were ethical.

The Western states have not been true to this original inspiration. We are suffering to-day under the great apostasy of the nineteenth century, an apostasy which was, in its ultimate form, the denial of the Logos. For by conceding to economics an autonomous sphere, by withdrawing one of the most important of man's activities from the laws of reason and conscience and setting up in their place laws drawn by analogy from partially substantiated sciences of biology and sociology—survival of the fittest, evolution by competitive struggle and the rest—the men of the nineteenth century weakened the essential inspiration be-

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\* Sebastian Haffner. *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde*, p. 106.

hind their community, the building of 'the Kingdom' on a basis of ethics, of natural law.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the ugliness, injustice and suffering caused by that betrayal of the Logos which was *laissez faire* capitalism, there remains within our community the desire, still furiously alive, 'to build Jerusalem.' And a new opportunity has arisen for its building on solid foundations in that the revolts against nineteenth century abuses, typified by Left-wing materialism and Right-wing irrationalism, have ended in an image of an inhuman Janus-headed National-Bolshevism sufficiently hideous to send both materialists and irrationalists in search of new principles. It is a tragedy if at this moment, following in the footsteps of a Barth or a Brunner, Christians renounce their responsibility, refuse the Incarnation, accept despair. If the age of the Spirit ended in the appalling upheavals of the Reformation, may it not be the age of matter which is now in its death agony? The Ages of Faith explored the nature of God and the supernatural sometimes to the neglect of man, and a human order without God took its revenge. But in the new totalitarian orders where the very image of man is defaced, the possibilities of man without God are clearly exhausted—in the exhaustion of man himself. Only the law of the Incarnation, of man and the human order 'marvellously created and ennobled' and sharing in the Divine Life can fulfil the promise of the Word made flesh.

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