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IS THERE A RELIGIOUS BASIS FOR SOCIETY?

By

SIDNEY SPENCER, B.A.

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By the same Author

THE MEANING AND VALUE OF RELIGION

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individual lives in society, and religion, if it is to be vital, must express itself in terms of our social relationships. There is no true antithesis between " spiritual redemption" and " social change." The Kingdom of God for Jesus was something to come in the world, as well as something present here and now in the soul. Its coming meant the supersession of the existing order. Christianity naturally finds expression in a Communism based on love.

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Religion needs a social expression: does society need a religious basis? At one time it was assumed that the appeal to personal gain was sufficient to secure the common good. In the light of experience that assumption has broken down. It is increasingly evident to-day that the common good requires a radical reconstruction of society. In Russia such a reconstruction has been carried out on the basis of a materialist philosophy, for which the only test of right and wrong is class-interest, and which is therefore led to justify methods of Terrorism. On such a basis it is impossible to create a free society. In Fascist countries we have a deification of the national State which is a serious menace to the future of civilisation. The only possible basis of a truly humane and civilised society is the sense of the unity and sanctity of life which belongs everywhere to the higher religion, and which is implicit in the evolution of modern consciousness.

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER I

Society and the Church: the Present Challenge

"Christianity must be Christian, or perish" (J. Middleton Murry)

Civilisation is faced to-day with a grave crisis. How far does religion help us to overcome it? The Church as a whole gives us no definite lead. It condemns new developments like "National Socialism" and Russian Communism, but it accepts the main features of the present social and international order. Yet that order is directly opposed to the spiritual values of Jesus. It rests on the pursuit of monetary gain and of national power; and these things are a direct and constant challenge to the Christian ethic. The present position cannot be maintained indefinitely. "Christianity must be Christian, or perish."

It is a commonplace to-day that we live at a time of crisis. To any one aware at all of the nature of the forces which are at work in the modern world it is clear enough that the years which lie before us will be of the gravest moment to the future of civilisation. In a certain aspect the crisis is obvious to all. The nations are engaged at the present time in a feverish expansion of armaments, the natural outcome of which is a war which, by common consent, will mean the suicide of Western civilisation. It cannot, of course, rightly be said that war is "inevitable." It may for the time being be averted. But it cannot be finally overcome short of immense changes in the whole order of the world. The crisis that confronts us is not merely an international crisis; it is a social and a spiritual crisis. The forces which have brought it about are forces inherent in the life of the world as a whole—in our economic

and social life as well as in our international relationships, in the traditions that govern us and the ideals that we pursue in every sphere.

In this situation, what is the task of the Church? Have religious men and women any distinctive message for the world? Have they any guidance to offer which will help in any way to give direction to our efforts? Does religion carry with it any particular attitude towards the problems which press so heavily upon us? Does it involve any particular social outlook?

Towards such questions as these the Churches as a whole are unable to give a definite reply. There is indeed an essential ambiguity about their attitude. On the one hand, the largest claims are often made with regard to the power of religion to solve our problems. The alternative, it is said, is "Christ or Chaos." But unfortunately the official spokesmen of the Church in its different branches are not by any means clear as to what the way of Christ actually involves. All are agreed, no doubt, that it means the ultimate cessation of war and the establishment of peace. But as to what the establishment of peace implies, either as an immediate practical policy or as a governing ideal for the life of the world, the most divergent views are held. There are those who tell us that Christianity endorses the use of military force nationally or by the League of Nations as a whole, to restrain an aggressor state. The Archbishop of Canterbury declared not long ago that "the sword" is "the instrument of God for the protection of the people." There are others who feel that such language, from both a practical and an ethical point of view, is an utter mockery in relation to existing conditions. Most Christians, again, do not recognise that there is anything incompatible with religious principles in an imperial system whereby the territory of the more backward peoples

is the private property of some of the more developed and stronger nations. On the other hand, there is an increasing number who believe that the very principle of the possession of the territory of one people by another is contrary to the Christian ideal and directly opposed to the cause of peace.

There is a similar uncertainty with regard to internal issues. In the Archbishop's broadcast address initiating his " Recall to Religion " at the end of 1936 he referred to two political systems, which he branded as anti-Christian. In Russia, he said, " a vast community is being poisoned by an aggressive atheism and by a doctrine of class-warfare which is anti-Christian." Elsewhere—in Fascist countries —" the idols of race and State are usurping the supremacy of Christ." So far as our own country is concerned, there is no suggestion of any similar criticism. The enemy which has to be fought here at home is, on the one hand, the contagion of "false doctrine" from abroad, on the other hand, the drift away from organised religion, arising out of the growth of material civilisation and physical science. The Archbishop brought us " a summons to re-found our life, personal and national, on the standards of conduct which Jesus Christ has set." The assumption clearly is that our life, whether personal or collective, has been founded on those standards. The forces against which we have to contend, it is implied, are not those which have traditionally prevailed : they are forces alien to the essential substance of Western civilisation. The Archbishop's attitude is very largely typical of the attitude of the Church. We have to stand against Fascism and Communism, most religious people would say, because their whole tendency is consciously or unconsciously irreligious. Our own civilisation, on the other hand, is supposedly Christian in its essential basis. Is that really

the case? Have we actually had at any time in our history a genuinely Christian society?

What is our test of "Christianity"? We have had, certainly, a society sanctioned in its main features by the Church. But that is scarcely a sufficient proof that our society has been ethically "Christian." There are few people who would be prepared to deny that the Church itself has again and again departed widely from the way of Jesus. Christian leaders have in all sincerity supported policies and institutions which cannot by any possibility be reconciled with the Law of Love, which is the central principle of Jesus. They have supported slavery, persecution, torture, aggressive war, the merciless exploitation of the labour of women and children. Christianity and the Church are two widely different things. The test of Christianity is in the spiritual values which are the heart and essence of the religion of Jesus. Can it be said from that point of view that our civilisation has been truly Christian?

Take our industrial system. The main appeal of that system is to the desire for personal gain. J. M. Keynes has said that its essential characteristic is its "dependence upon an intense appeal to the money-making and money-loving instincts of individuals as the main motive-force of the economic machine" (*The End of Laissez-Faire*, p. 50). He says also that the present system is "absolutely irreligious, without internal union, without much public spirit, often, though not always, a mere congeries of possessors and pursuers" (*A Short View of Russia*, p. 25). He adds that "the universal problem of our age is concerned with the love of money, with the habitual appeal to the money-motive in nine-tenths of the activities of life," and that existing forms of religion "have lost their moral significance just because

they do not touch in the least degree on these essential matters."

It is strange how complacent religious people have been to the development of the money-making incentive. Personal gain has even been presented as an actual religious duty. "If God show you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way (said Richard Baxter in the seventeenth century), if you choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and you refuse to be God's steward." Similarly John Wesley said in the following century, "We must exhort all Christians to gain all they can and to save all they can: that is, in effect, to grow rich." Wesley felt that the process of enrichment had its dangers, since "as riches increase, so will pride, anger and love of the world." No great regard, however, was paid to that, and in any case Wesley felt that the accumulation of wealth was a Christian duty. Wesley and Baxter were in the Puritan tradition. The Puritans looked upon business typically as a divine calling. They believed that it was in fact their duty to seek after gain for the honour and service of God. Work was for them a means of religious discipline. Its produce was not a thing to be consumed in enjoyment, but rather a thing to be saved, a means of accumulation. Religion therefore encouraged the spirit of accumulation, out of which the modern system has emerged. Yet such religion had in reality little in common with the spirit of Jesus. The religion of the Puritans was in general hard and narrow and individualistic. It had nothing of the large humanity of Jesus, of his freedom of spirit, of his universal love. It is clear from the gospels that Jesus regarded the accumulation of wealth in an entirely different way. He looked upon it, not as a worthy object of human endeavour, but as a hindrance to the higher life. "How hardly

shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God."

A modern Jewish writer—C. G. Montefiore—has pointed out that the attitude of Jesus differs markedly from that of the Rabbis generally. "The Rabbis looked at wealth and poverty from a more realistic and common-sense point of view than Jesus. They were less paradoxical, or (if you will) less idealistic than he" (*Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*, p. 274). In other words, the Rabbis were far less challenging and revolutionary than Jesus. They were far nearer—strangely enough—to the attitude of most modern Christians. They were antagonistic to the abuses of wealth: Jesus was opposed to the principle of accumulation. It is sometimes said that what really weighed with Jesus, what determined his attitude towards social and economic life, was his belief in the speedy approach of the Kingdom of God, so that it can be dismissed as inessential. It has been urged that the ethic of Jesus as a whole was simply an "interim ethic"—a way of life devised for the short time that remained till the "end of the age." Actually—whether or not Jesus himself believed that the Kingdom of God would come miraculously on the clouds in a brief space of time—we can be quite sure of this, that his ethical outlook was not shaped by any such mistaken view. It rests on something far deeper than that. It rests on a profound insight, on a living discernment of spiritual truth. And his teaching about wealth was no exception. Jesus did not tell the rich young man to sell his possessions because he believed that we should cut ourselves off from the life of the world. There is nothing in his authentic teaching to justify the piety of the monastic cell, which regards material life as in principle an evil thing. As Guignebert has said, the figure of Jesus as it is depicted in the synoptic gospels gives us "an im-

pression of proportion and good sense" (*Jésus*, p. 211). There was nothing in him of that contempt of the world manifested in the Christian saint who would not even smell a rose for fear of sin. His attitude to Nature was very different from that. He saw the splendour of the lilies of the field: "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Even when he protested against an exaggerated concern for material things, he affirmed the value of material life. "The life is more than the food, and the body than the raiment." Jesus did not extol poverty, as St. Francis extolled it, as an end in itself. His opposition to personal enrichment is based, not on any hostility to the material life, but on a sure psychological and spiritual insight, which the experience of the world since his time has amply confirmed. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." In other words, the pursuit of property as the end of life falsifies the purpose for which we were created. It turns us aside from that giving of the self in the love and service of God and man for which we were born. Gerald Heard is simply expressing in modern terms the insight of Jesus when he remarks (in *The Third Morality*) that "possessiveness is the characteristic symptom of individualism"—the characteristic symptom of that concentration on the interests of the separate self which is so great an obstacle in the way of liberation and enlightenment.

From the standpoint of Christian ethics the industrial system stands condemned, not simply because of its results (in poverty and unemployment and in the fomenting of international conflict), but because of its essential nature. It stands condemned because it is based, not on the law of fellowship and service, but on the getting of individual riches—because (in the words of a report issued some years ago by the Federal Council of Protestant Churches in America) it rests on "an attitude which tends

to make private profit the goal of industry, to measure all things by their money values, to subordinate human interests to property interests, to make ruthless competition or equally ruthless monopoly the way to success, and to deny the right of those who have failed to any part of the rewards of the successful."

Private wealth is the ruling fact in the economic life of the modern world. But private wealth does not stand alone. Associated with that is the pursuit of national power. Politically the modern world consists of a number of sovereign states, each of which is substantially a law to itself. In the determination of national policy the state is governed by self-interest. We do not ask, for example, in connection with tariffs, what effect our action is going to have on the life of any community outside our own Empire. It would be altogether " Utopian " to expect any modern state in determining its economic policy to consider the interests of " foreigners." Yet from the standpoint of the Kingdom of God there are no " foreigners " : every man throughout the earth is a " neighbour " whom we are to love and serve. In the matter of our imperial possessions, again, we acknowledge no responsibility to the world as a whole. We will not brook the interference of any one outside the bounds of the Empire. The national state is a law to itself ; and the great object of its policy is the maintenance or extension of its own power. (The League of Nations has made no substantial difference in this respect.) In the quest of that purpose it is thrown inevitably into rivalry with other states ; and in the course of that rivalry it considers itself justified in appealing to the arbitrament of arms. When the nations renounced war as a matter of " national policy " in the Kellogg Pact, they were careful to claim the right of " self-defence," as to the meaning of which they are themselves the judges.

That is our tradition. It is the dominance of the twin forces of private property and national power (which are in fact closely intertwined) which underlies the present order of the world. But that dominance is a constant challenge to the Christian ethic. So far as the Christian ethic fails to meet the challenge, so far as it reconciles itself to the existing order, it stultifies itself; it betrays its own distinctive vision. Christianity is pledged by what is deepest in itself to stand for a conception of life utterly opposed to the struggle for wealth and power which dominates, and desolates, the life of the world. It is pledged to a new principle of self-giving and brotherhood. That principle has never yet been made the basis of social and international life. In that fundamental sense it is true (as has been emphasized repeatedly in recent years) that "Christianity has not been tried." The Law of Love has not been tried as the ruling principle of the life of an organised community. Neither has the Church demanded that it should. Historically the Church has indeed turned aside from the ideals of Jesus. "For eighteen centuries (says Tolstoy) the Church has hidden the light of Christianity beneath its forms and ceremonials; and by this same light it is put to shame." Tolstoy's words are a moral challenge. They are also a historical truth. Whatever may be the ground for the development (and it had its own causes—its own ultimate necessity), it is in any case a simple matter of historical fact that the Church has to a great extent ignored and denied what is most original and most essential in the ethics of Jesus. It has failed to take seriously his principle of "Non-violence" and his repudiation of the pursuit of wealth. It has given its sanction to the growth of a civilisation founded on the very principles of gain and force which he condemned. "The world (in Tolstoy's words) organises an existence in absolute opposition to the

doctrine of Jesus, and the Church endeavours to demonstrate that men who live contrary to that doctrine really live in accordance with it."

It is not possible to maintain this position indefinitely. Men are aware increasingly of the real nature of the practice of the "Christian" world. They are aware increasingly also of the real meaning of the principles of Jesus. They may, or they may not, feel that those principles are practical. But this, at least, is more and more driven in upon our consciousness, that there is no room for a Church which can deny in fact the things for which its Master gave his life. There is no room for a Christian Church which is not ready to commit itself in deed and in truth to the way of Christ. "Christianity must be Christian, or perish."

CHAPTER II

RELIGION : INDIVIDUAL OR SOCIAL ?

" Religion and politics are the same thing " (WILLIAM BLAKE)

The churches in general have not yet come to recognise that religion demands a specific social expression. It is still sometimes said that Christianity is purely " inward " and " individual." Certainly religion cannot be a mere social force and nothing else ; it must go down to the roots of the individual life. But the individual lives in society, and religion, if it is to be vital, must express itself in terms of our social relationships. There is no true antithesis between " spiritual redemption " and " social change." The Kingdom of God for Jesus was something to come in the world, as well as something present here and now in the soul. Its coming meant the supersession of the existing order. Christianity naturally finds expression in a Communism based on love.

The weakness and ineffectiveness of conventional Christianity in face of the challenge of the modern world are due in part to this, that the churches have not yet come definitely to recognise that religion demands a specific social expression. It is true that the purpose of religion is to-day very often defined in terms of the " Kingdom of God " rather than in terms of a purely individual " salvation " with no bearing on the problems of society. But the " Kingdom of God " is for most of those who speak of it a vague dream rather than a clear and compelling vision. It is a vague dream of brotherhood with no definitely practical significance in relation to established institutions and existing conditions of life. And there are some who reject the whole movement of thought which finds expression in such terms. There are some who repudiate the whole tendency to identify religion in any

degree with social effort and social aspiration, and to look to the coming of the Kingdom of God as a new order of life to be realised, partially, on earth. Religion, they maintain, is purely individual, and not in any wise social, in its character.

What may, perhaps, be described as a classical expression of this reaction against the " social gospel " was given by Prof. Whitehead in his book, *Religion in the Making*. " Religion (he says) is what the individual does with his own solitariness. . . . Religion *is* solitariness " (pp. 6, 7). It may be that Prof. Whitehead was here deliberately over-stressing an aspect of religion which the sociological interpretation so prominent in the work of certain modern students—like Durkheim—has ignored. In his very suggestive discussion of Christianity in *Adventures of Ideas* he gives considerable attention to its ethical and social aspect. In any case, the statement I have quoted is sorely incomplete. It is true enough that in one sense solitariness is necessary to religion in its more developed phases. At the primitive level that was scarcely so, since before the growth of conscious individuality religion was an affair of the group, in which the individual was merged. In its higher ranges religion certainly involved solitariness : we must be capable of retreating within ourselves, if we are to lay hold upon its deeper meaning. It is doubtless true, as Whitehead contends, that " if we are never solitary, we are never religious," in the sense that if we never withdraw within ourselves, to face for ourselves " the mystery of God " and to surrender ourselves in secret to the Spirit, we have not in any way entered upon the life of religion. Religion when it is full-grown is profoundly spiritual in its character ; and such a religion can only be apprehended by each man for himself in the depths of his own individual being.

So far as Whitehead is concerned to emphasize the inwardness of religion, he is right. Religion is not a merely social force, as some would have it. It involves contemplation, the finding of an inner refuge, the lifting up of the individual soul to God. But to narrow down religion, to make it a merely inward or individual thing, to limit its scope to some small part of life, is to falsify its meaning. The test of the reality and significance of our religion is not "what we do with our solitariness"—taken by itself—but what we do with our life as a whole. John Newton, in the eighteenth century, was moved to religious ecstasy on board a slave-ship—entirely untouched by the sufferings of the slaves huddled below. In one sense he was, no doubt, genuinely religious at this time, since his feelings were sincere enough. But his religion was an exceedingly limited and imperfect thing. It did not touch his heart, in any effective sense, with the love of his neighbour. To limit the scope of religion to inner experience is to distort the significance of that very experience. To suggest that religion is merely a matter of contemplation and aspiration and prayer is to forget that these things find their true fulfilment, not in a mere private ecstasy or thrill of emotion, but in a life quickened and renewed and transformed by the sense of God. Carlyle spoke the final word on this question a century ago. "The prayer which accompanied itself in special chapels at stated hours, and went not with a man, rising up from all his work and action, at all moments sanctifying the same, what was it ever good for?"

In modern religion, as I have said, we hear much of the "Kingdom of God." But it is sometimes said that the Kingdom of God is in reality purely an inward state of soul, to be realised for each man by himself, and that the "gospel of the Kingdom" carries with it no vision of a reconstructed society. One of the best known exponents

of that point of view in this country is Dr. Inge. He finds the clue to the message of Jesus in the words, "The Kingdom of God is within you." The message of Jesus (he says) "was one of spiritual redemption, not social reform." (*More Lay Thoughts of a Dean*, p. 13.) He has reacted strongly against both the evolutionary and the social emphasis which has been characteristic of so much of modern thought. He would have us turn our thoughts away from a goal to be realised in time, as the end of our aspiration, and fix our gaze on the vision of the Realm of the Spirit, which is "eternal"—beyond time and change—and in which all our ideals of Beauty and Truth and Good abide in their fulness of reality. In his book, *God and the Astronomers*, Dr. Inge quotes as almost his last word the saying of an American who, after listening to a lecture on the stars, remarked, "Then it does not matter, very much, after all, whether the Republicans or the Democrats win the election." He is inclined to suggest that it does not matter very much whether or not the cause of progress wins the day on this planet. Up to a point Dr. Inge's reaction is natural enough. Exaggerated claims have undoubtedly been made, crude conceptions have been advanced, by the champions of progress and social idealism. It has been suggested that the whole development of life finds its meaning and its justification purely and simply as a preparation for an ideal community to be established in the future. It has been held that the Kingdom of God is a final stage of life, a static Utopia, which can last for ever, "world without end." Dr. Inge has rightly reminded us that we have no good ground for believing in the permanent existence of life on this planet. It is evident, moreover, that no form of life can enjoy finality—no complete perfection is possible in the life of finite beings.

Personally I believe that Dr. Inge is right in his vision of

an Eternal Order. I believe that he is right so far as he maintains that the end of life is the expression of the Spirit, and that wherever men rise to the creation of Beauty, the discovery of Truth, the realisation of Good, that end is in some measure attained—the life of the Spirit is truly, though partially, expressed. But it does not follow in the slightest degree that we can afford to neglect the task of creating a better society. The realisation of the Spirit in time and space involves a constant endeavour to bring the whole life of man, both in its personal and in its social aspect, into a fuller harmony with the divine.

For Jesus himself, it is evident, the Kingdom of God was not merely a spiritual state. The Kingdom as he conceived it was something to come—" Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth." And, whatever his beliefs about the nature of its advent, it is clear that he strove to instil into the hearts of men the Law of Love, which should be its ruling power; and he saw that that Law was in conflict with the forces prevailing in the world. Jesus " saw from the beginning (says Prof. John Macmurray) that the way to the Kingdom of Heaven lay through the destruction of the existing order " (*Creative Society*, p. 70). It was his attitude towards that order which brought about his death. That fact is not commonly recognised, because the significance of the arrest and condemnation of Jesus is obscured in the gospels by his supposed Messianic claims. Actually it is clear that, whatever his attitude towards the Messiahship, the real ground of his offending lay elsewhere. Both Mark and Luke suggest that it was his action in driving out the merchants and money-changers from the Temple courts which roused the enmity of the priests, who, together with the Roman authorities, were responsible for his death. (See Mark XI, 15–18, Luke XIX, 45–47.) That is not in reality surprising. For the action of Jesus was a challenge to

the authority of the priests and a blow to their vested interests—since their revenues depended in part upon the use of the Temple courts for the very purpose which Jesus condemned. It was a plain indication of his hostility to the existing ecclesiastical and social order. In face of his challenge the priestly aristocracy feared for its power and privilege. It felt—and rightly felt—that that power and privilege were undermined by his principles. (It is well to remember, incidentally, that the "Cleansing of the Temple" was not an act of violence, as is sometimes supposed. It was by the force of his moral passion, and not by any violent measures, that Jesus drove out the money-changers. If he had appealed to violence, he would easily have been overwhelmed.) The Kingdom for which Jesus looked was not merely a Kingdom in the soul: it was a Kingdom to come in the world. And he endeavoured to prepare the way for its coming, both in the hearts of men and in their life. Unquestionably Dr. Inge is right when he says that the message of Jesus was one of "spiritual redemption": it was one that went down to the very roots of life, and called for a whole-hearted giving of the self to the service of God. But he is wrong in suggesting an antithesis between "spiritual redemption" and "social reform." The message of Jesus involved for each man who accepted it a new orientation of life; and for that very reason it carried with it the widest implications for the whole order of the world. Precisely because it is profoundly spiritual in its appeal, it is also of necessity social, political, economic in its application.

Religious people have often been curiously blind in the matter of the social order. It is indeed one of the strangest and most tragic facts of the modern world that religion and the life of the spirit are so widely divorced from the enthusiasm for social ideals. We are governed by a

tradition of individualism. Our conventional religious ethic carries with it no vision of human relationships as an organic whole and no distinctive ideal for society. In the early nineteenth century men were expelled from the Methodist societies for their sympathy with the principles of the French Revolution: they were not expelled for their support of ruthless competition and the merciless exploitation of the weak and helpless. Our common ethical outlook views men as separate individuals existing side by side and entering into relationships of a more or less external and accidental character, rather than as fellow-members of the body of mankind existing only by the fact of our common membership. Yet it is the very essence of personality that it exists in a system of relationships. It exists, and can only exist, in a society of one kind or another, and so in an "order of life" into which as individuals we are born, and in the midst of which our life develops and our personality grows up. Some one said to me once in discussion that he could see only individuals—he could see no "social order." The obvious comment is that he must have been singularly short-sighted. The "order" is certainly there, whether or not we see it; and any kind of ethical principle which fails to recognise the fact is bound to be ineffective. The Law of Love, if it is to be a vital power, must be a principle which we seek to embody in the whole structure of society.

Dr. Inge declares in an essay on *Wealth and the Gospel* (from which I have already quoted) that the gospel "always works outwards from the individual to society," never from society to the individual; and he infers that we cannot appeal to the gospel to sanction such a principle as the collective ownership of property (*More Lay Thoughts of a Dean*, p. 15). This reasoning involves a curious confusion. For if the gospel "works outwards from the individual to

society," the implication surely is that its principles will in course of time establish themselves in the social order, so that we shall have a Christian society—an order of life based genuinely upon the Law of Love. In time to come, then, as individuals are born into that order, its ideals —assuming that they are sustained by a living devotion— will be handed on as a creative influence. Society and the individual act and react upon one another. There must be an influence working from society to the individual as well as from the individual to society. The question is, what shall be its nature?

If religion is indifferent to the forms which society assumes, then it is compatible with chattel-slavery and feudalism as well as with our present order; and since, if it does not affect the internal structure of society, it can scarcely be held to influence its external relationships, it is compatible with the most blatant Imperialism and the most nakedly aggressive war. (Italian aggression in Abyssinia was openly approved by the Pope.) War has been defended by Christian teachers from the fourth century onwards, and slavery has been defended until comparatively recent times. I am not aware that any one is bold enough to uphold the private ownership of human persons to-day; but to condemn slavery on religious grounds is to admit that society must have an ethical basis. It is to reject as false the whole antithesis between spiritual redemption and social change. Dr. Inge has himself, surprisingly, exposed with admirable clarity and force the weakness of our traditional outlook. In a broadcast talk on "The Causes of War" (published in 1935) he said, "From the time of Machiavelli to our own day there has been a shocking assumption that Christian ethics apply only to the individual. The State is a law to itself; the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to do with

politics. Here is a lie which should be nailed to the counter."

In the light both of fundamental principle and of historical experience the conception of religion as a purely individual thing, and not also a social force, can only appear a singular aberration. The religious experience naturally carries with it the sense of a community of souls in which we have our place. It naturally brings to men the sense of an inner mystic bond uniting them with their fellow-worshippers in a common whole; so that, while in one sense solitariness is necessary to religion in its more developed phases, in another sense it is the essence of religion that it saves us from it. Religion—however sadly it has failed in the expression of its principles—has always brought with it the twofold command that we should love what we see or feel as "God" with all our heart and mind and strength, and—as the necessary outcome of that—that we should love the man whom we see as our "neighbour" as ourselves. The Power men hail as divine is always a Power which by its presence unites them with some company of their fellows—which saves them from their isolated selves, and makes them one as members of a common brotherhood. In the early phases of religious growth the circle of brotherhood is naturally limited. The great step forward in the spiritual evolution of mankind is that which is taken when men rise out of the tribal, national, racial limitations which have clouded their souls, into the vision of a Unity which is all-embracing. But the vision of such a Unity naturally brings with it the sense of universal fellowship and the desire to express that fellowship in a life inspired and controlled by the vision.

When Christianity was born into the world, the members of the Church were possessed at first by a spirit of love which was radically incompatible with the established order of

the world. It is true that up to a certain point Christians accepted existing social institutions—though they refused to participate in war or in the administration of the Roman Empire. They looked to the supernatural advent of the Kingdom of God, in which existing divisions and inequalities would be done away. Believing in supernatural intervention, they failed to recognise the necessity of political and social changes brought about by the conscious will and effort of men. Yet in Christianity there was present at the beginning a social trend of considerable significance. We are told in the Acts of the Apostles that when the Church was first established in Jerusalem, its members "were of one heart and soul," and "had all things common"; those who possessed lands or houses sold them, "and distribution was made to each, according as any one had need." Modern critics have pointed out that that is an over-statement of the case. The Communism even of the primitive Church at Jerusalem was never quite so general as the Acts of the Apostles suggests. The significant fact, however, is the tendency which the episode represents. It has been generally brushed aside as a thing of no enduring moment—an outcome of early enthusiasm which soon split on the rocks of hard reality. That is a short-sighted view, which does no real justice to the facts. Actually the Communistic trend in Christianity was not confined to one particular episode. It appears to have been widely recognised in the Christian churches that "while it was perfectly lawful for the Christian man to hold property, to give all that one had to the common funds of the society was the more perfect way" (Carlyle, *Political Theory in the West*, I. 133). The renunciation of privilege and exclusive ownership, the sharing of wealth among the Christian brotherhood, was widely felt to be the true expression of the law of Christ.

There is, of course, a considerable difference between the limited distributive Communism of a religious group and the organisation of the life of the whole community on the basis of common ownership. But the difference is one of application, and not of fundamental principle. The Christian Church did not desire to be a minority group; it desired to gather all mankind into its field. The ideal which its members pursued was in principle a universal thing. The Church desired to see all mankind made one in heart and soul; and from that inner unity the outer unity of a classless society would naturally follow.

A striking feature of the history of the Christian Church is the way in which over and over again groups of men have arisen—persecuted and harried by the Church officially—which have re-asserted the principle of common property. It was the same with property as with war. Officially the churches of Christendom have departed very far from the primitive ideal. Yet time and again that ideal has been re-born into the world. How indeed could it be otherwise? The Law of Love, so far as it enters deeply into men's souls, seeks to express itself in the whole range of their common life. It seeks to express itself above all in the utter repudiation of the barbaric violence of war, and in the vision of a constructive, world-wide Communism, in which the whole order of the world will be made new.

CHAPTER III

DOES SOCIETY NEED RELIGION ?

" Civilisation needs a religion as a matter of life or death "
(BERNARD SHAW)

Religion needs a social expression : does society need a religious basis ? At one time it was assumed that the appeal to personal gain was sufficient to secure the common good. In the light of experience that assumption has broken down. It is increasingly evident to-day that the common good requires a radical reconstruction of society. In Russia such a reconstruction has been carried out on the basis of a materialist philosophy, for which the only test of right and wrong is class-interest, and which is therefore led to justify methods of Terrorism. On such a basis it is impossible to create a free society. In Fascist countries we have a deification of the national State which is a serious menace to the future of civilisation. The only possible basis of a truly humane and civilised society is the sense of the unity and sanctity of life which belongs everywhere to the higher religion, and which is implicit in the evolution of modern consciousness.

Some years ago a business man who was also a fervent evangelical remarked, " I never let my religion interfere with my business." It was a profoundly significant utterance, all the more so because the speaker did not feel in the least that he was saying anything surprising, and still less anything irreligious. Yet it is essential to the very life of religion that it shall seek to guide and inspire our life in every aspect. A religion which stands apart from economic or political life, in the assumption that such things lie outside its own distinctive sphere, is poisoned at its root by an essential unreality. But if religion is bound by the law of its own being to bring its principles to bear, not merely on men's private and personal, but on

their political and economic relationships—if (in other words) religion needs a social expression—is it also true that society needs a religious basis? "During the last two centuries (says Prof. Tawney) Europe has seen the development of a society . . . in which the very conception of religion as the inspiration and standard of social life has been forgotton." From the side of religion it is evident that we need to re-discover that conception. Do we also need to re-discover it from the standpoint of society? Does society need a religious foundation?

I quoted in an earlier chapter J. M. Keynes' assertion that modern capitalism is "absolutely irreligious." In saying that, what he had in mind was not, of course, that capitalism directly involves an irreligious—that is, a materialist—theory of the universe, but that it involves an irreligious—that is, a materialist—ethic: it appeals to the money-making incentive. In other words, it rests upon individual self-interest as the controlling force in economic life. Its standard of success is profit, which benefits the recipient from an economic standpoint, but does not necessarily benefit the community. It was at one time assumed almost universally that the play of self-interest was sufficient to secure the general good. It was assumed, in other words, that there was no necessity for religious motives in economic life. Each man in seeking his own gain, it was said, by that very fact was led, even in spite of himself, to contribute to the welfare of society. Edmund Burke went so far as to say that if an employer is "excessively avaricious," it is all the better for his employees. "The more he desires to increase his gains, the more interested he is in the good conditions of those upon whose labour his gains must principally depend." Similar claims have been made in more recent years. Sir Ernest Benn has argued in his *Confessions of a Capitalist* that

profit is dependent at every turn upon the rendering of service, so that from the point of view of the common good the question of motive is entirely irrelevant. "However much a man may want to make money, he is under the profit-system altogether powerless to get hold of a sixpenny piece until he is willing to render some acceptable service to others at the price they will willingly pay for it." If this view is justified, society can get along very well without religion so far as economic life is concerned. We have simply to pursue our own personal advantage, to follow the pressure of our own individual self-interest, and all will be well; the social good will be achieved. On the economic plane, at least, religion is then a luxury that can be dispensed with. If religion matters at all, it is in some other context.

To-day there are few intelligent people who are prepared to maintain the individualist principle in the extreme expression which was given to it by the advocates of "Laissez-faire." "Laissez-faire" has broken down. Unchecked profit-making in the early nineteenth century led to conditions so appalling in the new industrial towns that the State was compelled—very tardily—to intervene. The same thing has happened in recent years with the rise of modern industry in the East. The growth of Trade Unions and the increasing intervention of the State for the benefit of workers and consumers are an obvious refutation of the individualist contention. Sir Ernest Benn is flying clean in the face of both historical and contemporary experience when he contends that the principle of individual self-interest is a sufficient basis for economic life. The welfare of society demands another principle.

The individualism of the early nineteenth century has been modified by the development of collective bargaining and the State regulation of industrial conditions. But

profit-making still remains the basis of business enterprise. The main object of commercial and industrial undertakings is to secure as large a return as possible on invested capital. To that extent the system excludes religion: it rests upon a principle entirely incompatible with the Law of Love. But it is increasingly evident that the system must be radically changed. Capitalism has only been made tolerable at all from the standpoint of social welfare so far as its working has been checked and controlled by forces alien to its essential nature. Trade Unions and the State have stepped in to limit the field of exploitation. As against the rights of capital they have asserted in increasing measure the rights and claims of human personality—the right inherent in each member of the community to a certain standard of leisure, of culture, of material livelihood. Britain led the way in this direction, though it now lags behind. In recent years France, America and the Scandinavian countries have embarked upon large experiments in social control.

The modified capitalism of to-day is based upon mutually inconsistent principles. Everywhere the interests of property stand in the way of the development of social welfare. The provision for the whole community of an adequate standard of health, nutrition, housing, education, is crippled by the lack of funds arising from the fact that what is described as the "national wealth" is in the hands for the most part, not of the nation as a whole, but of a section only. And it is the interests of the owning section which normally determine the limits of social policy. The existing order rests upon a far-reaching division in society: it involves a wide cleavage between wage-earners and owners of capital—the cleavage recognised by Disraeli when he spoke of the two "nations" of rich and poor, and described by Karl Marx as the "class-war." As long as that division

remains, there can be no fundamental social harmony and no enduring stability in the social order. The existing order is essentially unstable. It gives rise to strikes and lock-outs, to financial crises, to recurring cycles of boom and slump; it foments international rivalry, which in its turn produces the imminent danger of war. The position to-day is increasingly intolerable. Science has placed in our hands powers which make possible a full and free and spacious life for all mankind. Yet we waste our energies, we dissipate our resources, in mutual conflict. The life of man is divided against itself by the strife of nations, of classes, of business groups. And in the process the very existence of civilisation is imperilled.

Society plainly needs another basis. Where is it to be found? And what is its connection with religion? There are to-day, along with capitalist society as we know it, two rival systems in the field. There is Fascism or National Socialism, which in spite of certain minor differences stand for the same essential principles, and which may be conveniently described by the same term; and there is Russian Communism, which is propagated by the various Communist Parties, united in and controlled by the Third International. These rival systems are sometimes described by sympathetic observers as "religious." And there is this much of truth in the description, that they both embody a cause and a principle which demand the complete subordination of the individual self. Fascism and Communism, however far removed from one another, stand equally for an ideal which has succeeded in winning the enthusiastic and whole-hearted adherence of great numbers of men. The Fascist or the Communist who is sincere is ready to give his life for his cause. In the communities which they control the dominant motive-force is, in theory, the interest of the group. In the case

of a Fascist community the supreme object of devotion is the national State. It is true that capital remains for the most part in private hands, so that monetary gain is still in practice to a great extent the incentive. Fascism indeed is sometimes regarded as in its essence a defensive reaction on the part of propertied interests against the fear of fundamental change. That view contains an element of truth, since both in Italy and in Germany the party received considerable financial support from Big Business interests. But that support was given rather from fear and hatred of the Communists and Socialists whom the Fascists and Nazis attacked than from any love of Fascism or Nazism in itself. In both countries the movement bore in early days a markedly Socialistic character. The programme of the Nazis, for instance, included the nationalisation of Trusts. Italian Fascism also began with radical social aims. In neither country, moreover, have the achievements of the movement been purely reactionary. In both countries it has greatly increased the powers of the State in industrial affairs. It has carried through a large programme of public works for the reduction of unemployment. In Italy it has re-organised the banking system on a semi-public basis.

The real centre and inspiration of the Fascist movement lies in its exaltation of the national State. In both Germany and Italy it gained its power to a great extent from the appeal which it made to the national spirit. It stands pre-eminently for the "national idea." It acknowledges no authority of any kind beyond the State, to which its own interests can be subordinate. It recognises no rights on the part of individuals within the State which can in any way conflict with its demands. It cannot tolerate the existence of Trade Unions which have any measure of independence—it replaces them by workers' organisations

(so-called) which are a part of its own machinery. Nor can it allow of political parties which are an organ of independent opinion. A Fascist State has room only for one party—the party of Fascism. By the nature of the case it is intolerant of any trend of thought hostile to itself. In Germany it has its representative in every block of flats to watch over every single household and to spy out for any suspicion of political heresy. For Fascism (as G. D. H. Cole has said) " the national State is the ultimate being, with an absolute claim upon the loyalty of every one of its members." It stands for a group-solidarity, which carries with it a group-mentality. It brings into being a particular type of man, who has no essential individuality of his own, who not only acts with his fellow-countrymen as the State demands, and subordinates private interests unquestioningly to those of the group, but who thinks and feels with his fellow-countrymen, and sets aside any claim to a judgment or a conscience or an emotion which shall in any way separate him from the group, or mark him off as a heretic. " I command you now," said a Nazi leader to his followers in the early days of the Revolution, " to be intolerant towards every one with different views from yourself. There must henceforth be one political faith." Fascist mentality is the mass-mentality which is essentially submissive to national authority and essentially intolerant of any vestige of individual independence.

It is evident in the light of what has been said that while Fascism shares something of the religious spirit through its subordination of the individual self to the wider " good " of the nation as a whole, its ideals are completely contrary to those of a truly spiritual religion. A spiritual religion stands for service and self-giving—but not for a service and a self-giving to which men may be compelled by the threat of Terror. A spiritual religion stands for the sacred-

ness of human personality as the temple of the Spirit, for the supremacy for each man, therefore, of his own vision of truth and right, for the unity of all souls in the life of God, for a love which breaks down the barriers of race and nationality, and goes out freely to all. But if the principles of Fascism are contrary to those of a spiritual faith, they are equally contrary to the needs of contemporary civilisation. The Fascist State knows no law higher than its own interests: whatever is done for the State is held to be justified. And so the greatest of wrongs and cruelties can be committed with an easy mind. The individual can be sacrificed without shrinking on the altar of the State; and for the glory of the nation the life of other communities can be ruthlessly destroyed. "Collective egoism," which has in fact been the law of international life, is exalted into a supreme and unquestionable principle.

The future of civilisation is dark indeed if it is to be dominated by the Totalitarian State as it has been established by Hitler and Mussolini. But the Communist State of Russia is equally "Totalitarian." In much that I have said of Germany and Italy I might equally have been referring to Russia. The Soviet Republic likewise is governed by a dictatorship which allows of no rival party, which permits no expression of minority opinion save within the framework of the party policy, which is equally intolerant of heresy and equally ruthless in suppressing it, which seeks to promote the same mass-mentality, which brings the same enthusiasm for a common idea, the same devotion to a common purpose—accompanied by the same subordination of individual judgment and individual conscience. It is true that the principle underlying the Russian system is radically different from the national idea, which is the basis of the Fascist outlook. The principle behind the Russian system is not the su-

premacy of the State in itself. The State is supreme for the Communists only as the organ of the working class—only as the instrument of solidarity and power for the "proletariat." What is ultimate to the Communist is not the national State, but the interests of the working class—or what are regarded as such by the Communist Party. The clash between Fascism and Communism is the clash between the ruthless pursuit of national power and the equally ruthless pursuit of class emancipation.

From the religious standpoint the Communist objective is far more sympathetic than the Fascist. The Communist stands for common property and the fellowship of the workers of every land, for the bringing to an end of national antagonisms and the creation of a world-wide community. But the method of violence and dictatorship which the Communist regards as necessary is in any case incompatible with the Law of Love and the sanctity of life. And it is incompatible with the attainment of a truly humane and civilised society. By the boldness of its economic reconstruction Russia has set the world a great example; but by the methods of violence and Terrorism which it has pursued, and by the results to which those methods have led, in the increasing militarisation of the country, and in the trials and executions of political and military leaders which have startled the world, it has given us a signal warning. Whatever may be the truth about those trials—whether the confessions of the accused are mainly and substantially true or mainly and substantially false (as to which it is impossible yet to form a definite opinion)—in either event they cast a sinister light upon the nature of the régime. If the confessions are false, the State authorities are convicted of the greatest barbarity. If, on the other hand, they are true, the position is equally disquieting. The Soviet Press is accustomed to denounce

the accused as " vipers " and " mad dogs," deserving only to be shot. It suggests that the whole trouble lies in their treachery—in their co-operation with hostile foreign Powers. That is, in any case, a superficial view. For here are men who have risked their lives in earlier years for the Revolutionary cause, who have given their energies to working for the new order, but who are now convicted of seeking to undermine the State which they have themselves helped to build up. Is it not clear that, if they were indeed led into such a course, it was for lack of any lawful means for the expression of an opinion opposed to the prevailing policy of the dictatorship? Whatever the detailed facts behind them, the trials and executions are an overwhelming condemnation of the political régime out of which they arise.

The most significant fact about the Soviet system is the divergence between the ideals at which it aims and the methods which it employs. It is well to recognise, however, that the methods, though strikingly discordant with the ideals of Communism, are a perfectly logical outcome of its official philosophy. " Dialectical Materialism," which is the avowed basis of Russian Communism, rules out any recognition of an ethical principle which is intrinsically valid. " Everything is good," says Julius Hecker in his exposition of Communist philosophy, " which promotes the interests of the workers of the world; everything is bad which obstructs them " (*Moscow Dialogues*, p. 217). On that basis it is obviously possible to justify the employment of any method, however unscrupulous or inhumane, which may be held to assist the workers in their struggle, or to assist the Soviet State as the organ of the workers. In his crucially important book, *The State and Revolution*, Lenin quotes with approval Engels' assertion that " the conquering party is inevitably forced to maintain its supremacy by

means of that fear which its arms inspire." But fear is no fitting motive for the creation of a free society. A materialist philosophy is no sufficient basis. It is only a religious interpretation of life, in the light of which spiritual values are supreme, which can provide the foundation of a radically new order. As Berdyaev points out, Marxism fails to meet our needs because it does not break sufficiently with the outlook of the present order. It " bears the fatal impress of the materialist spirit of capitalism " (*Christianity and the Crisis*, p. 98).

What is necessary as the basis of society is a spiritual principle which can find expression in its institutions, in the light of which its laws and policies can be tested, through the increasing realisation of which a higher order can be brought about. It is the failure of the modern world to find such a principle which underlies the prevailing anarchy. Yet such a principle is in reality implicit in the evolution of modern consciousness. In spite of the set-backs of recent years, in spite of the barbarities perpetrated under the dictatorships, one of the main facts about the modern world is the growth of a larger humanity. In spite of all the atrocities of modern times, we have progressed beyond the ethics of the Hebrews of old, who could massacre a whole population in the name of God; we have progressed beyond the morality of the Greeks, who constantly inflicted torture on those who were accused of crime; we have advanced beyond the level of our own " God-fearing " ancestors, who grew rich out of Negro slavery, and heaped up their profits through the exploitation of the labour of women and children working sixteen hours a day in cotton-mills and coal-mines. What is the significance of this development of humanity? Why is it that we feel that cruelty and inhumanity are so grossly and monstrously wrong—wrong in themselves, and apart from any question

of social expediency, of the interest of States or classes? (Even those who stand for an ethic based purely upon class or State interest appeal, inconsistently, to the sense of humanity in their condemnation of the wrongs committed by their enemies.) It is not simply that some of us happen to be built that way, because it is something more than a personal peculiarity—it is a movement in the common consciousness. It is because inhumanity is a violation of something that men recognise, however dimly, as fundamental—a violation of some law which rests (as their feeling implies) on the inmost nature of their being. In all of us there is born a fundamental love of life and a deep-lying urge to its free expression. Through manifold difficulties and distresses men cling to life. In face of age-long oppressions and tyrannies they strive for the liberation of its inner potentialities. Life itself, they feel, is something supremely sacred—not only life as they know it in themselves, but as they see it in their fellows also. "Fellow-feeling," solidarity, is the essence of all morality that is not merely formal and external. It is the ethical expression of the mystic sense of unity which is a basic aspect of religion. For long ages this fellow-feeling is narrowly restricted in its range: the evils against which men rebel for themselves they inflict without compunction on those whom they regard as alien—those who are separated from them by the barriers of race or class or creed. But in course of time the eyes of some are opened: they come to see the value and sacredness of life in all humanity. When the sanctity of life is violated in any single soul, when any life is wronged, so far as this larger vision is awakened in men's hearts, they suffer; the wrong that is done to others they feel as done to themselves. The sacred thing, they come to recognise, is life itself in all human beings—to a lesser degree, in all things that live (the ethic

of "reverence for life," as Schweitzer has pointed out, cannot be limited in its scope to mankind, though it is in human relations that it finds its primary application). This discovery of the sacredness of human personality was implicit in the attitude of the Hebrew prophets in denouncing the inhumanities perpetrated by neighbouring states. It is a discovery implicit everywhere in the higher religious consciousness. The mystics apprehend God typically as the Universal Self; and in that apprehension they are drawn into the sense of a profound inner unity with all. The man who follows the path of union with the Spirit "rejoices in the welfare of all born beings" (in the words of the Bhagavad-Gita); "his self has become the self of all beings;" he "beholds his self abiding in all beings and all beings in his self." Religion has been defined indeed as "a sense of oneness with all living things, from which must flow a universal love." It is said of Ramakrishna, an Indian saint and reformer of the last century, that a blow given to a man in the street by an enemy left an actual physical mark on his own flesh. "His nephew saw his back red and inflamed at the sight of a man who was scored with the whip" (Rolland, *Prophets of the New India*, p. 142). In Ramakrishna there was embodied in a peculiarly intense form the consciousness of spiritual solidarity which belongs, in principle, everywhere to the higher religion, and which has been growing up increasingly—though often entirely dissociated from any form of conscious religious faith—in the modern world. It is in this spiritual solidarity, in this "reverence for life," in this sense of the sanctity of life in all human beings, that we have the one possible basis of an enduring society. It is in the resolute application of this principle that we have the means whereby the new society and the new civilisation can alone be built.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION AND THE NEW ORDER : THE RE-MAKING OF MAN

" When man comes to love God,
Who is himself, and all mankind, and every living creature, and every plant and tree, and the whole earth, and the universe,
There shall be no more priests.
And man shall no longer be an image of God ;
He shall be God."

(FRANK TOWNSHEND in *Earth*)

" *By re-making the self we re-make (and can only re-make) the world* "

(GERALD HEARD)

The only hope for the future lies in the growth of a new religious consciousness. It is said that religion belongs to the primitive level of experience, and is to-day necessarily an obstacle. Religion has unquestionably been an opiate, though it has never been merely that. It makes essentially for self-giving to that which is greater. It is conservative because it is immature. There are those in all religions who have risen beyond the external sanctity and the dualism which are the basis of superstition and the mark of immaturity. In the mystic consciousness (where the individual is one with the Universal Self) we have the essential fact in the higher religion ; we have also the guide to the way of life and growth for the world. The basic fact in history is the evolution of human consciousness. In that process individualism has its place as a necessary phase. But it must to-day be transcended. What is essentially necessary as the basis of a new order is the re-making of the self through the growth of a religious consciousness whereby we see our oneness with all that live. We have to work for a twofold revolution, spiritual and social. In doing that we must follow the way of love, which is the way of " non-violence."

The only possible basis for a society which is to be a true " fellowship " is a spiritual one—the recognition of the sanctity of life in each one of its members, and the unity of their life with the life of mankind as a whole. So far,

therefore, as religion is identified with a spiritual conception of life, it is in religion, and only in religion, that we shall find the ultimate solution of our social problems. The supreme necessity, apart from which civilisation itself must assuredly perish, is the emergence of a new religious consciousness.

But is that in any way possible? And if it comes about, will it achieve the results for which we are looking? It is sometimes said that religion is essentially a conservative influence, looking to the past rather than to the future, and calculated to-day to stand in the way of the building up of a new society. "It is possible (said Bertrand Russell a few years ago in the *Rationalist Annual*) that mankind is on the threshold of a golden age; but if so, it will be necessary first to slay the dragon that guards the door; and this dragon is religion." I do not know whether Bertrand Russell would express himself precisely in those terms to-day. In any case, he would doubtless maintain his essential position—that religion is by its very nature superstitious and so obstructive. "I regard religion," he once said, "as belonging to the infancy of human reason, and to a stage of development which we are now outgrowing." That is the view of Russian Communism. Religion, Communists declare, is a product of ignorance and fear; it serves to give men pleasant and consoling dreams, and so to distract their attention from the real tasks that await them, from the actual needs and possibilities of their life. In an essay on "Socialism and Religion" Lenin contends that religion is a form of "spiritual oppression." "It teaches those who toil in poverty all their lives to be resigned and patient in this world, and consoles them with the hope of reward in heaven. . . . Religion is a kind of spiritual intoxicant, in which the slaves of capital drown their humanity, and blunt their

desire for a decent human existence " (*Lenin on Religion*, pp. 11-12).

It is important to recognise the truth which this criticism contains. No one can deny that what Lenin—following Marx—regards as the condemnation of religion has been its recommendation in the eyes of many others. No one can deny, in other words, that religion has in its traditional forms been bound up to a great extent with the support of the status quo. It has often been said with a good deal of satisfaction that the Methodist movement in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saved this country from revolution. So far as that is true, it can only have been by the effect which Methodism had in turning men's minds away from the material conditions which so urgently demanded change, and fixing their hopes and aspirations upon a better life in the world to come. In 1819 Parliament voted a million pounds for the building of churches as an avowed means of allaying " social unrest " ; and the measure was only too plainly typical of the attitude of conventional religion. Religion has unquestionably often been an opiate. The most notorious instance of that in recent times is the case of the Greek Catholic Church in Russia, which under the old régime was an actual part of the State organisation, and which therefore gave a direct sanction to the social iniquities of the Tsardom. Such a religion is obviously not the type of religion that we need as the basis of a new society. Neither is the Roman Catholicism which can give its blessing to Italian imperialism and Spanish reaction, or the Anglicanism which can sanction the property-system prevailing in this country. What is necessary is not the mere revival of religion in its traditional forms—that can only be a hindrance to the progress of the world. What is necessary is the re-discovery of religion as a living and creative power.

There is an important measure of truth in the Marxist criticism. But it does not really go down to the roots of the matter. Certainly in its beginnings religion was not a form of "spiritual oppression." It was a spontaneous outgrowth of the human spirit. There are neither kings nor priests nor owners of property among the Black Men of Australia. Yet the Black Men of Australia are intensely religious—or rather they were intensely religious, until their life was blighted by contact with Western civilisation. And the Black Men of Australia are typical in this respect of early man. For early man religion was very far from being a mere superstition. It was an effective instrument of solidarity. Its beliefs and ceremonies were, of course, based upon ideas of a "magical" sort which we can no longer hold. The rites of the primitive Australians, for example, were designed to promote the growth of certain species of animals and plants. We can scarcely suppose that they actually had any such effect. But they had an effect of a different order; they had another significance. They served to express and to stimulate men's sense of living wonder in face of Nature—their sense of something supremely mysterious and supremely sacred in the life about them, with which they themselves were strangely and deeply one. Early religion as we study it in the life of the primitive hunting tribes of Australia and America was marked above all by the sense of solidarity in the life of the clan, inspired and sustained by the sense of unity with the deeper forces of the world. For them, certainly, religion was not an opiate; it did not turn them aside from the tasks of life. "The end and result of primitive religion (says Prof. Marett) is the consecration of life, the stimulation of the will to live and to do." To the savage religion "stands for the whole of his concrete life so far as it is penetrated by a spirit of earnest endeavour." It brought

men a new energy, a new enthusiasm, a new devotion to the work of life, because it made them one—one with their fellows in the social group, through their oneness with a greater power.

Through the ages religion has assumed many different forms; it has exerted many varying effects in life. Its original tendency has been distorted and obscured; but it has never been wholly lost. Society has passed through many different phases. Man has come in the course of ages to oppress and exploit and tyrannise over his brother-man. And correspondingly the nature of religion has been changed. Traditional Christianity, for instance, has centred mainly in the thought of personal salvation after death. For this reason Nietzsche described Christianity as "selfishness magnified to infinity." But in saying that he did it very much less than justice. Salvation has never been purely a matter of personal safety and personal reward. It has always had other and finer aspects. The essential religious impulse is the impulse to give ourselves to that which is greater—to find ourselves in communion with a larger life. And that impulse has never been entirely lacking. Always religion has brought to men a certain power, a certain strength, a certain kindling of the flame of life, because it has lifted them in some degree out of themselves; it has made them partakers of a greater fellowship; it has united them with forces beyond themselves.

Does religion, then, "belong essentially to the infancy of human reason and to a stage of development which we are now outgrowing"? In a little book on *Religion in the U.S.S.R.*, Yaroslavsky—expounding the official standpoint—speaks of the coming of the time when men will have established their collective mastery over Nature and over their own social life—when they will have learnt to

abolish the havoc of drought and storm and flood, when they will have won a final victory over war and economic chaos, when world-wide peace and unity will prevail. "Then and only then (he says) will the last vestiges of religion be destroyed" (p. 56). Surely a strange conclusion! "The last vestiges of religion will be destroyed," when man has won his way to unity and power. But how, in truth, can we win our way to unity and power; how, when unity and power have been won, can they be sustained, save through the religious spirit of devotion and loyalty and faith? If we were indeed to destroy "the last vestiges of religion"—if we were to put out of man's life, not merely the conscious acceptance of a religious faith, but the essential spirit and attitude which underlies it (and the two things cannot in the last resort be separated from one another)—we should leave him a mere isolated individual, with no sense of the common life, with no solidarity to bind him to his fellows, with no vision of a Purpose in the universe to give meaning and value to his existence, with no "reverence for life," with no fire of faith and love to quicken and inspire his soul. "Man cannot exist but by brotherhood" (said Blake); and brotherhood is of the essence of religion.

But the Russian leaders tell us that religion everywhere involves superstition. It brings with it, that is to say, all manner of beliefs in gods and spirits which distort the facts both of Nature and of human life—which stand in the way of rational understanding and therefore of the effort to win control. The critics fail again in insight. They fail to distinguish between the form and the spirit. They fail to take into account the fact of religious growth. Religion is not a thing given once for all in some final dogmatic shape. It is a thing that lives and grows and changes its form with enlarging knowledge and increasing understand-

ing. Religious thought is not stereotyped from the beginning in some unalterable creed. It changes and develops with the deepening insight of humanity. "What makes religion such a conservative force (says John Macmurray) is not that in its real nature it is conservative, but that as yet it is immature." We see everywhere the signs of this immaturity. An obvious instance is the conflict which breaks out from time to time between the representatives of great religions, like Hinduism and Islam. Such clashes have their origin in the differing conceptions of sanctity for which these religions popularly stand. To the one this or that observance is peculiarly sacred; to the other it is indifferent. The indifference of the one and the reverence of the other for some building or some ritual or some object becomes a cause of mutual offence. That is, clearly enough, an attitude rooted in immaturity. The Hindu and the Muslim are brought into conflict because of their limited vision. Just as children think always in terms of concrete things, so men at a certain stage tend constantly to localise the divine, to embody what is sacred in the shape of "holy" places and objects and books and institutions and creeds. Religion has been a cause of narrowness and intolerance because of this external sanctity in which at a certain stage of growth it has naturally found expression. But this stage is not final. In all the higher religions of the world there are those who have passed beyond it—those who have learnt to "put away childish things," to put away the external authority of priest and church and sacred book, to put away the image of a God without, before which men prostrate themselves, and to find God as a Life and Light within, dwelling in the depth of their own souls, dwelling at the inner heart of all the universe.

Traditional forms of religion have been dominated to a

great extent by the dualism which sets God apart from the universe—which looks upon Him as a Power who steps in at particular points in Nature and in the life of man, to reveal Himself. It is true, as Russian critics suggest, that that belief is out of harmony with the essential tendency of modern thought. It is out of harmony with the whole effort of man from the beginning to control Nature and his own common destiny; it is out of harmony with the vision of a coherent and rational universe which underlies the whole endeavour after understanding. But, equally, it is discordant with the profounder insight of seers and mystics. The essential fact of "mysticism," wherever it is found, is the extension of human consciousness beyond the limits of the separate personality. In the moment of vision the mystic feels and knows himself to be one with a Life and Spirit which is greater than himself. His consciousness is, so to say, merged in the consciousness of the universe. "When a man knows his true self (says an Indian seer) something else arises from the depths of his being, and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal" (quoted by Paul Brunton in *A Search in Secret India*, p. 159). So far as the mystic is true to his own insight, the God he worships is no mere external personality, no mere individual over against himself, but the Universal Soul, in whom he is one with all things.

This fact of the mystic consciousness is the essential fact in the higher religion. The culmination of the age-long process of religious development is in the life and consciousness of the man who knows that in the depths of his own being he is one with the World-Spirit, and for whom that vision of oneness with the Spirit becomes a living realisation of fellowship with all mankind. It is in such men that religion attains its full maturity. And it is they

who point the way of life and growth to the world. We are as yet only at the dawn of human attainment. In the words of John Macmurray, " we are only at the beginning of the stupendous work of human personality." We are dominated as yet by the narrow self, which throws us into conflict with our fellows—which seeks its own good in rivalry with theirs. And the essential task which lies before us in the creation of a higher order is the re-making of the self—the transformation of personality.

It is the weakness of Marxian Socialism that it seeks to evade that necessity. It presents the process of social revolution as the automatic expression of the working of economic forces—as the outcome, in particular, of the " class-war." Marx saw, rightly enough, that there is a deep-seated cleavage in modern society, resulting from the private ownership of socially important property. He saw that a true social harmony can only be reached, not through any superficial reconciliation of conflicting interests, but through a fundamental change in the structure of society—through the establishment of a " classless society " resting on the communal ownership of property. So far the teaching of Marx is in entire accordance with the implications of the religion of Jesus, which demands a thorough-going reconstruction of the social fabric. But Marx insisted that reconstruction can only come through the intensification of class-conflict—leading of necessity (as Lenin and the Communists maintain) to an actual outbreak of armed violence. Marx himself declared that in democratic countries the transformation might come about peacefully. But in any case he regarded the struggle of the working-class against the owners of capital as the lever of social revolution. Whether violence was called for or not was purely a matter of circumstance and expediency. The Marxist (says Wells in *Men like Gods*) has

"attempted to build social unity on hate, and rejected every other driving-force for the bitterness of a class-war."

The Marxian analysis ignores the spiritual factor. It assumes that human beings react automatically—though not always immediately—to the pressure of their social interests; and it stakes its faith in the coming revolution in society on that assumption. Experience has shown the practical weakness of this hypothesis. Fascism owes its power to the strength of a nationalist psychology which cannot be reduced to the mere expression of class interests. But, apart altogether from that, the Marxian view is essentially superficial. Its fundamental dogma is "Economic Determinism"—according to which everything in life depends in the last resort on the way in which the production of goods is organised. "The method prevailing in any society of producing the material livelihood determines the social, political and spiritual life of men in general." How far is that actually the case? Economic conditions undoubtedly exercise a considerable influence on the forms which the spiritual life assumes. The art and religion of a hunting tribe will differ widely from the art and religion of an agricultural community. But there can be no art or religion at all, there can be no science or philosophy, there can be no political or social organisation, unless there is an impulse springing out of the nature of man to create and sustain these things. There is in the very nature of man a capacity for Beauty and Truth and Good; there is a capacity for God; and it is out of these capacities that the spiritual life of man has grown. Economic conditions, it is true, have a peculiar importance. We cannot live at all in this world, and therefore we cannot develop any kind of culture or religion, unless our material needs are satisfied to some extent. We have to get our livelihood before we can cultivate art or science. But the way in

which we go about it, the way in which the production of goods is organised in any given society, depends not simply on our tools, our technical knowledge or equipment, but also on our prevailing social and spiritual attitude. The economic system is never the outcome purely and simply of material conditions. In the Middle Ages a prominent part was played in the economic life of the towns by the principle of the "Just Price." Prices were regulated to some extent, not simply by the law of supply and demand, but in accordance with the general idea of what was "just." But that principle did not mechanically follow from the method of handicraft which prevailed in industry. It was the outcome of the moral tradition which was upheld at the time by Catholic Christianity. To-day the economic system under which we live is the result, not merely of the establishment of machine industry, but of the spiritual attitude which men have come to adopt. It is the result of the tradition which exalts private self-interest, which divorces economics from religion, which allows money-making to be the great motive-force in industrial and commercial life, and so undermines the spiritual health of the whole community. And we cannot effectively change the economic system unless we can at the same time change the moral outlook which controls it.

Economic forces have unquestionably played an enormous part in determining the forms of life. But always there is the inter-play of the material and spiritual factors; always there is the action and reaction of the inner spirit and the outer conditions. There is taking place in human life not merely a process of economic evolution; there is taking place a spiritual evolution, which, in truth, is fundamental. Behind the rise of private property and the class-struggle which it produced there lay the growth of the moral and spiritual individualism, the sense of

personal separateness, which closed men's eyes to the unity of life. Possessiveness (as Gerald Heard has said in *The Third Morality*) is " the characteristic symptom of individualism." And if possessiveness is to be transcended, if " the acquisitive society " is to give place to a constructive Communism, the spiritual attitude of men must be changed. It is only by the re-making of the self that the world can be re-made.

There are those who contend that such re-making is impossible, and that the struggle for individual gain is the outcome of the essential make-up of human nature. But human nature is not a fixed and unvarying quantity. Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century spoke of primitive man as engaged in a constant war of each against all. Every man, he taught, was the enemy of every other. But we know to-day that the life of savage peoples is to a great extent a life of solidarity. The sense of separate individuality does not appear to belong to the primitive level. In the earlier phases of life the unit was the group rather than the individual. Explorers have sometimes been struck by the strange way in which the members of a tribe, assembled in council, would arrive (as it seemed) spontaneously at a common decision. They would somehow think and feel together. We know also how they would hold themselves and their enemies collectively responsible for an act of violence. If a man took the life of a member of another clan, it did not matter in the least whether the original offender was punished, so long as vengeance was performed on some member of the clan. The responsibility was not individual, but collective. Almost everywhere, again, so far as they practise agriculture, undeveloped peoples look on the land as in some sense common property.

Individualism is not essential to human nature. It represents a phase in the spiritual evolution of the race.

With all the evils which it brings, that phase has its own necessity. Man rises, from the solidarity of the primitive group, through the individualism which exalts the separate self, to the attainment of a true individuality grounded in the sense of oneness with the Universal Life. To-day we see the rise of a " mass-mentality " which has no respect for personal freedom. " The individual, his feelings and his conscience (says the revolutionary leader—*The Nameless* —in Toller's play, " Masses and Man ") what do they count ? . . . Only masses count." The tendency so expressed marks in effect a regression to the primitive level. When the revolutionary leader declares that only the masses count, so that no matter what wrongs may be committed in their name, the individual must stifle his protests and repress his conscience, he is demanding in reality that we shall renounce our individuality—that we shall give up the claim to personal vision as the supremely sacred thing.

That is not the way of progress. We need to-day—we sorely need—a new unity in the life of the world. We need to overcome the tragic conflict which divides our life against itself. But the way to a true and vital unity is not by any enforced uniformity of thought and feeling ; it is not by a renunciation of the individuality which we have begun to win. The way forward is by the growth of a religious consciousness, which affirms at once the unity of life and the sanctity of the individual soul—which rejects not only the existing evils of an irreligious society based upon the pursuit of gain and power, which rejects also the spirit and the method of violence by whomsoever that method may be exercised. It is vain to seek by the threat of force to re-make the world or to build an international society. Whether in social or in international life violence to-day can only bring disaster.

" There is only one revolution for us now (says Middleton Murry) : the revolution of Jesus"—the re-making of human life without and within, the re-making of man himself by the liberation of the forces of the spirit, by the creative power of love, militant, yet " non-violent," which if we dare to follow its light shall yet renew and transform the life of the world.

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