

## The Christian in the Service of the Welfare State.

**U**NDER whatever government a Christian may live, he must be in that world though not of it. He should be deeply integrated in the life of the community but must never be blindly conformed to it. By his faith in Jesus Christ he will always bring a creative tension to the contemporary situation. But he should never evade that situation.

This is particularly important in times of social change. The Christian must move with the times. Any nostalgia for an early simpler age must be restrained. So today as we pass into a Welfare state, we must adjust our ministry to our age. Yet we should exercise a spiritual discrimination. Everything new is not necessarily good and everything old is not necessarily bad. We must be in the Welfare state though not of it. It does not command our first loyalty. Our citizenship is in heaven and this may in many instances be compatible with our earthly citizenship. But this has not to be casually assumed. The adjustment of our unchanging commission to an ever changing situation calls for enlightened judgment.

Let us note how well this was achieved in the third century. Tertullian says: "We are neither Brahmins nor Indian fakirs, nor do we live remote in the woods. We despise none of God's gifts but use them with discretion and understanding. Moreover in living in this world we make use of your forum, your meat market, your baths, shops and workshops, inns and weekly markets and whatever belongs to your economic life. We go with you by sea, we are soldiers or farmers, we exchange goods with you. But we do not join in your festivals to the gods, we do not wear wreaths upon our heads, we do not go to plays and we buy no incense from you. It is true that your temple dues are continually becoming smaller: we prefer to give to the poor in the streets rather than to the treasuries of the gods. Other dues, however, are conscientiously met by Christians."<sup>1</sup>

We have travelled far since those days and we have now to think of the Christian's service in the Welfare state. We may approach this subject by a consideration of some of its terms. We speak of a Welfare state. But whose welfare, we may ask. Is it that of the state as such? Does it involve a conception of the state in which man is but a mere means to a political end? We

<sup>1</sup> *The Bible and Social Justice.* Dr. Hugh Martin.

are aware of conceptions of the state in which man has no inherent dignity and value. He is merely adjectival to the state. The welfare of the state is then the prime and sole concern of everyone in it. On the other hand there is the view that worth resides in the individual alone as such. He is seen in abstraction from the state and invested with rights and privileges in that isolation. It is then supposed that it is the welfare of such an individual which should be the prime concern of the state.

That one view cancels out the other is a small matter. What is of deeper significance is that the kind of state and the kind of individual thus described are abstractions. Ultimately there is no state in abstraction from the individuals in it and therefore no welfare apart from the welfare of the members which comprise it. In like manner the individual in sheer isolation is an abstraction. The Greeks called such an unsocial person "idios". The Bible says it is not good for man to be alone. The individual for whose welfare the state should be concerned is a social as well as a private being.

Further, we may ask what do we mean by welfare? If we think of the state, do we measure welfare by material prosperity, political prestige or military strength? If we think of the welfare of the individual much then depends on what we think of man. He has been variously described as a sexual being, an economic being and a political being. From the Christian angle these treat a part as the whole. Man is all these and more. He is essentially a child of God. He has thus a direct relationship with God which establishes his rights as an individual, but he is also a brother to all other men which involves great social obligations. In the light of these principles we will examine the Christian in the service of the Welfare state.

I. *The Christian has an obligation to maintain and augment an order which in principle is good.* The Christian will have a high regard for law and order as such. He should be ready to give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. God makes the solitary to dwell in families and the Bible which opens with an individual in a garden ends with a multitude which no man can number in a city. It is significant that although the New Testament reveals a tension between the existing political executive and the Church, nevertheless it does not question the right of the state to govern and even speaks of such government in general as being from God. The Christian recognises that in a social vacuum or chaos the full development of the individual personality could never be realised. That requires an ordered state with its balance of rights and responsibilities. Moreover the Christian's obligation to serve his fellows would be gravely embarrassed in a state of anarchy. Thus

both his rights and his responsibilities require an organised state of society for their realisation. So the Christian man, while recognising the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of an individual, realises that in their reciprocal influence they involve a loyalty to the state in which that dignity is honoured and those rights protected. It is significant that the last article but one in the Declaration of Human Rights states: "In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society." The rights of one man are inevitably limited by the rights of another and these can be adjusted to the mutual advantage of both only in an ordered society.

It is this limitation which every totalitarian government so gravely abuses. Does an artist, a scholar or a minister of religion out of fidelity to his vision, his conviction or religious loyalty respectively take a course which diverges from the strict regimentation of the state, then he is dubbed a deviationist, he must be "conditioned" for confession and then sentenced—all on the charge of acting contrary to law and order; that is, law and order as the totalitarian government conceives. Against this the distinctive freedoms of democracy shine in vivid contrast.

Yet this is not a plea for a blind patriotism. For the Christian in his service to the Welfare state will always feel that patriotism is not enough. He belongs to a world-wide fellowship: all men are his brothers and he is concerned for their welfare. Consequently a Christian could not subscribe to a narrow and spiky nationalism. And the state that regarded the welfare of its own citizens alone would receive only a limited loyalty from the Christian. Thus the totalitarian governments have shown a partiality for a Church that would be national according to their interpretation of that term and they have always shown a suspicion and hostility towards the ecumenical character of the Church, for in that sense the Church transcends the merely national. Yet ultimately in a world so closely integrated as ours is a number of sovereign and selfish nationalisms would be bound to lead to impoverishment and conflict. Think for example of the Colombo Plan with its immense relief for the millions of Asiatics in distress. On humanitarian grounds alone this plan is excellent and must be supported even though its immediate effects might involve a lowering in our standard of living. I say its immediate effects. For let us suppose that the fortunate nations adopted a selfish policy and allowed the Far East to sink into misery, destitution and revolution, then it would quickly fall into the Soviet grasp and

our security and standard of life would be imperilled. But to all these considerations the Christian brings the conviction that all men are his brothers. Thus he should take an intelligent interest in foreign affairs and judge them in the light of the universal brotherhood of all men in Christ.

The Welfare state in its development gradually takes responsibility for many services once rendered by the Church, the home and the individual. It is well to remember that for many centuries the Church was the only Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health. The Church out of compassion initiated great ministries which in process of time it could not sustain much less develop. The Church helped the poverty-stricken, protected the unfortunate and succoured the aged. But her material resources became entirely insufficient for an adequate ministry to such people and the state assumed responsibility. This transference still continues in the state's service for youth, in National Insurance and in a host of other ministries.

At first blush the Christian may feel that the state will more and more increase and the Church decrease, and that in time the Church may be left only as the guardian of devotional exercises—a state of affairs not very remote from what we find in the totalitarian countries. This, however, is not inevitable here. It must be borne in mind that there is a difference in principle between a democratic Welfare state and a totalitarian one. In the former the individuals are responsible for the action of the state and such as are Christians should feel a strong obligation to maintain and strengthen the genuine social services. The poor and the sick, the unfortunate and the aged we have with us always and the change from private to collective service for such should not lessen our ardour for the good work done. It may be more appealing and spectacular for one person to give to another who is thirsty a cup of cold water than it is to serve on a water board or pay your water rates and so collectively ensure a good supply of water to a whole community. But we are primarily concerned not with the spectacular but with the best means of service. At any rate we cannot leave human need today to be met by the fortuitous acts of individual charity and the Christian who acts conscientiously in some great co-operative social service can do so with the assurance that to him, no less than to an individual donor of an earlier age, Jesus will say, "Inasmuch as ye did unto one of the least of these ye did it unto me." Thus in a Welfare state alone can some human needs be met and in the service of such a state a Christian may labour as for Christ.

II. *The Christian in the service of the Welfare state should safeguard the rights and obligations of the individual citizens.* The human being for whose welfare the state is concerned has a deep

and complex nature. He has initiative, originality and responsibility that he must not and cannot transfer to the state. Somewhere there is a line of demarcation between those responsibilities which a state can carry for the individual and those which by their nature are inalienable from the individual. Moreover, care has to be exercised that those social services which bring such salutary help to the weak and unfortunate do not by their universal and indiscriminate action soften and demoralise those who should be left to shoulder their own burdens. We still recognise and praise the toughness and stern resolution of men who

Breasted the blows of circumstance  
And grappled with their evil star.

Had the state done that breasting and grappling, these men would not have been what they were. Yet we have still to admit that by such services the state has often brought the weaker brother to a better life and a higher service than he could have reached on his own initiative and resources. Gray stands in the graveyard of Stoke Poges suspecting that within the sod rested

Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

But says he, "Their lot forbad" for

Chill penury repressed their noble rage  
And froze the genial current of their souls.

There was no free education, no chance of a place in a university. We can be profoundly thankful to a Welfare state for removing to some extent so grave and unmerited a disability.

There is, however, a limit to this. Just as a wise parent knows that with the developing child a time comes when the best service to the child is to suspend some service and let the child stand upon its own feet, so the state must recognise that there is a limit to what it can do for the welfare of the individual. In recent years we have seen this "writ large" and ridiculously in the totalitarian countries. In the Nuremberg trials one common plea of the criminals was to place all blame for their action on Herr Hitler. Let us admit that in this there was some guilty evasion of responsibility, a mere "passing of the buck." But did not Herr Hitler declare that he was the state, did he not demand total obedience, did he not execute conscientious objectors and was not all law made subject unto him, so on that ground all responsibility centred in him? When such totalitarianism has reached its summit, you have only one free and responsible man, the dictator.

This is very remote from us. But we must be careful that we do not thrust upon the state a responsibility which not only are we able to bear but which is really necessary to our manhood and

womanhood. Let us see this in the light of an ancient theoretical totalitarianism. Plato in his ideal republic, amid many commendable features had some very grave defects. He would take the children of the best classes away from their parents and place them in a state creche. He believed that the state could take over the entire responsibility for such children. All this is not so remote as it may sound. We have heard of youth clubs commended because they could hold young people six nights in a week. If you should have asked, when will the home hold them, you might have been told that it is not fit to hold them. Now youth clubs have rendered a magnificent service, but they are not substitutes for the home nor can they relieve us of the obligation to try to make the home what it should be. After all, old and platitudinous though it may sound, "There's no place like home."

Anna Rosenberg, the wife of the Governor of Danzig during part of the Hitlerite regime, tells of a critical conflict in the home where she found all her Christian convictions rising against decrees of the Nazi state. In her book *No Retreat* she tells how one of her daughters came home from school one day bereft of her usual brightness and vivacity. Something had gone wrong and the girl resolutely refused to divulge what it was. At long last the secret was revealed. The poor girl brought up in the best Christian traditions had seen a school chum brought to the front of the class and commended by the teacher for being a mother of a state baby. The soul of Anna Rosenberg rose in revolt. The state had overstepped its legitimate limits. At the risk of life itself she would defy such a state and, with her family, she ultimately fled the country. Who would not be grateful that in this our own country we have a system of education with its provision for worship and religious instruction and with alternative options for those who desire them? At the same time we need a restoration of parental responsibility and even authority which would do much to lessen the incidence of juvenile delinquency. For whatever law and education and other state agencies may do, Christian parents will still hold their children as a gift from God and will still feel the obligation to train them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Here is a service the Welfare state can neither give itself nor compel from others. Here indeed is an extra mile to the mile of service the state may demand and of what inestimable value to the state it is. Burns, thinking of the simple pieties of his Scottish home, said :

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs  
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad.

We have been contending for the full exercise of Christian initiative, originality and responsibility. The value and necessity

of the Welfare state's grant and service are indisputable but we must not make them a substitute for our own judgment and action nor must their generous measures blind us to their danger when they exceed their proper limits. It may be well to mention here the judgment of Mr. Christopher Dawson who said: "It may be more difficult to resist a totalitarian state which relies on free milk and birth control than one which relies on castor oil and concentration camps." We think of the cry, once often heard, "Let the state pay." But there are limits to that. At any rate what we are increasingly discovering is that there is no abstract state with illimitable funds but a concrete state that really does not pay at all but only keeps the books and what it gives it charges up to you and me through the Inland Revenue and in other ways. More important still is it for the Christian men and women not to accept negotiating machinery as a substitute for their own powers of promoting understanding, goodwill and conciliation. The Christian man should join an appropriate union or group but while he should be in it he should not be of it to the extent of being a mere duplicate of the party mind. He should never say: "My party right or wrong." Justice and public service should have for him a priority over party or personal advantage.

III. *The highest contribution the Christian man can bring to the Welfare state is his Christian Ideal for the State.* The state is not an end in itself nor a law to itself. It is subject unto God. Its authority is derived, and not native to it. The Bible says not only that the individual Christian should be transformed into the likeness of Christ but that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus the Christian, in finding an ideal for his personal life, finds also an ideal for the state to which he belongs. He has a dual citizenship. He is a citizen of an earthly order and, as Paul says, he belongs to a colony of heaven. Neither, somehow, can he allow the earthly state and the heavenly to be detached as incompatibles or irreconcilables. He believes the former, the earthly state, is the raw material for the latter and that he has a share in the responsibility for the transformation. It is interesting to note how in this land the two conceptions are interwoven in Christian thought. For decades has the tune "Ewing" been used for the hymn, *Jerusalem the Golden*, but it is now also used for the hymn, *Oh beautiful my country*. The heavenly ideal and the earthly actuality are closely intertwined. Cecil Spring Rice wrote a hymn, sometimes called the school-boys' national anthem, and declared in it,

I vow to thee my country all earthly things above  
Entire and whole and perfect—the service of my love—

but he continued,

And there's another country I've heard of long ago . . .  
 Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know.

The two worlds were interwoven in the one hymn. Now Plato kept such worlds apart. His ideal republic, he said, could never be got out of heaven: it belonged exclusively to the realm of pure ideas. Not so said John, the seer of Patmos. "I saw the new Jerusalem," said he, "descending from God out of heaven." That is the authentic Christian note.

Above all did not Christ pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth"? Thus the Christian pilgrims of today, like those in ancient times, stand amid the actualities of their country looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. This is probably the greatest service the Christian can bring to a Welfare state. Let us exemplify this. Is he a doctor under the National Service Act? Well, the requirements of the state may be a matter of nicely calculated more or less, but as a Christian he has also an obligation as indefinite as the old "Seventy times seven." He is a representative of his Master, an assistant to the great Physician, and brings with him by his spiritual sympathy and informed prayer something of the "healing of Christ's seamless dress." That is something which the state cannot demand or repay. It is a quality of service beyond computation or repayment. Or take a Christian lady teacher under the Ministry of Education. She has certain stipulated duties for which she is paid. These may include religious instruction and worship. But beyond these she not only teaches Christianity but lives it: not only conducts worship but lives nearly as she prays. That is an extra mile of immeasurable worth. A Christian man in the service of National Insurance will not merely pay Granny the correct amount of her pension but will help her to fill in her forms and, if time permits, will perhaps ask after the grandchildren. And where shall we draw the line to the range of service in a Welfare state which may be augmented and transformed by the grace of a Christian life? Studdert-Kennedy saw this operating in the realm of labour. He wrote,

When on the sweat of labour and its sorrow,  
 Toiling in twilight flickering and dim,  
 Flames out the sunshine of the great tomorrow,  
 When all the world looks up because of him . . .

Then will he come with meekness for his glory,  
 God in a workman's jacket as before,  
 Living again the eternal gospel story,  
 Sweeping the shavings from his workshop floor.

Above all, the human individual is so unique, complex and mysterious a being that his need at many points escapes entirely



the regimented services and standardised allowances of a state. Because of that there is a deep need for personal service that is made effective only by close acquaintanceship, sympathetic insight and sacrificial love. There are many welfare services excellent within their limits but irrelevant and impotent in the deeper regions of life and there a modern bewildered Macbeth being offered state physic might cry,

Throw physic to the dogs.  
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?

The Christian man however will not look upon these limits with disdain or with an air of superiority but will see a glorious opportunity of supplementing what is within them. It is significant that when Jesus referred to the service the state could claim He did not deride it but indicated how one could augment it. It was a time of the press-gang; of forced marches and service and, thinking of these, Jesus said, "If a man press thee to go a mile, go twain."

In like manner a fear has been expressed that in time the Welfare state will be so perfected as to eliminate the possibility of sacrifice which has so big a place in Christian ethics. Our forefathers sang the old evangelical hymn,

Must I be carried to the skies  
On flowery beds of ease?

and anticipated a firm reply in the negative. Some, however, now think differently. They think a Welfare state may supply "The flowery beds of ease." Those forefathers asked, "Are there no foes for me to face?" "Must I not stem the flood?"; but it is now feared that the state may fight the foes and stem the flood. But the present writer does not believe the state can ever reach such omniscience. When the state has reached the legitimate maximum service in organising the production and distribution of nature's bounty to man, man who has eternity in his heart will still need the mediator and priest whether official or lay between man and God, a truth so beautifully portrayed in Neville Shute's recent novel, *The Bend of the Road*.

We see then a certain quantity of service the state can demand and pay for and a certain quality which by nature must be without money and without price. No demand can elicit it and payment could only defile it. Now we should not make light of such Christian supplements to the mere requirements of duty. A modern calculating Judas might ask what these graces could fetch in money. Yet we all know that life can be wonderfully enriched by them. T. H. Green in his *Prolegomena to Ethics* has the following impressive passage on essential goodness, "If the supreme value for man is what we take it to be—man himself in

his perfection—then it is idle to contrast the more observably practical type of goodness with the more self-questioning or consciously God-seeking type. The value of each is intrinsic and identical." Thus, while not minimising the need for practical helpfulness, we recognise that the best service some are rendering to the state is not in what they do or in what they give but in what they are.

Some good Christian people of strong social instincts look upon the grave social evils that so mar the Welfare state and, seeing their might and magnitude, exclaim, "What can an individual do before these?" A sense of futility and fatalism possesses them. What can they, as individuals, do? Well, even as individuals they can do something. But the question itself is not an adequate one. They ought also to ask what they may do collectively with all other Christians through the agency of the Christian Church.

The local church should maintain co-operative contact with the Town Council and be familiar with its work. Special interest should be taken in local Education Authorities and the hospitals. Industry is a sphere where the application of Christian principles is of great urgency and the Church should offer chaplaincy services and hold study classes for those engaged in industry. The leisure-time interests of the community merit consideration. What is shown at the cinema should be considered and praise as well as criticism be offered when merited respectively. The Church should exercise its rights at the Brewster Sessions and seek to awaken and inform the public conscience at the time of local and general elections. The subject of Christian citizenship should have a prominent place on its programmes.

In recent years the various communions have joined together for united action for social progress. A central Churches Committee representative of the Anglican and the Free Churches, of the Roman Catholics and the Jews joins with the leaders of the National Council of Social Service to consider how jointly they may further some of the great reforms of our day. The Social Responsibility Department of the British Council of Churches which comprises representatives of the Anglican and the Free Churches is concerned with such questions as Housing, Juvenile Delinquency, the problem of the colour-student and worker from our Colonies, the ethics of strike and lock-out action. The Council has also published excellent literature on these subjects. Its work should be more widely known and supported. Many towns have their own Council of the Christian Churches affiliated to the British Council of Churches. The Free Church Federal Council also offers the means for a wide range of corporate social action. By being associated with the work of these committees and councils

the individual Christian can render to the Welfare state an invaluable service that would otherwise be out of reach. This work on so wide and well-organised a scale is relatively new and we cannot but deplore the complacency and inertia of the Church in general in past years to the great social evils of its day. It had, however, its bright exceptions in such men as Maurice and Kingsley and others. But as the social conscience of the Church is quickened, informed and wisely directed, as it may be by the organisations mentioned above, the Church may make an incalculable contribution to the Welfare state.

The Church, however, will rightly insist that the ultimate requirement for social advance is not mere organisation, finance and man-power, but a change of heart, a return to God and a life lived under the discipline of Jesus Christ. The Church is not an instrument of the state nor are her ministries a means to a secular end. Yet the spiritual good carries the social good with it and when a man seeks first the kingdom of God, he finds that all material necessities have been added unto him.

T. G. DUNNING.

*The Doctrines of the Christian Faith*, by Sydney Cave.  
(Independent Press, 12s. 6d.)

This is the third impression of a book which was originally issued (by another publisher, from whom the Independent Press have purchased the copyright) more than twenty years ago. One has but to read these pages to understand why there is a continuing demand for the book, for Principal Cave here sets forth concisely and comprehensively the chief doctrines of the Christian Faith with such skill and so lucidly that he who takes up this volume will find it hard to put it down until he has read through to the end. Wise and scholarly, this is a book which merits warm commendation to all who want in one useful volume the main Christian doctrines, historically traced and clearly presented.

GRAHAM W. HUGHES.