

# The Liberal and Post-Liberal Estimate of Man.

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COUNT LEO TOLSTOI wrote an interesting spiritual autobiography which he entitled "Christ's Christianity." In it he declared that most of his life had been based on belief in the doctrine of general perfectibility. "This belief," he says, "may be summed up in the word 'progress.' Everything develops, and I myself develop as well; and why this is so will one day be apparent." This facile philosophy failed to provide Tolstoi with an explanation of decay and death: "There was a time when I was myself developing, when my muscles and memory were strengthening, my power of thinking and understanding on the increase. I, feeling this, very naturally thought that the law of my own growth was the law of the universe and explained the meaning of my own life. But there came another time when I had ceased to grow, and I felt that I was not developing but drying up; my muscles grew weaker, my teeth began to fall out, and I saw that this law of growth, not only explained nothing, but that such a law did not and could not exist; that I had taken for a general law what only affected myself at a given age." A period of despair descended upon Tolstoi when he realised that his optimistic philosophy was a psychological rationalisation of his personal experience. This disillusionment carried him forth from academic speculation into the common ways of men. From the peasantry he sought to learn the meaning of life. For the Count, and his circle, life was hollow and pointless; for the poor, the labouring, and the humble, life had meaning. Why was this? It was, he observed, because the common, unlearned people had that childlike faith which sustained them in happiness and peace. They did not reason; they believed; and through their belief they found comfort and joy.

In his spiritual autobiography, Tolstoi could be said to personify Western Civilization itself. The Renaissance brought rejuvenation to Christendom. Both intellectually and geographically civilization began to expand, and an optimistic philosophy of development and progress was inevitable. This optimism received an enormous fresh impetus through the growth of mechanical and scientific knowledge which followed on the Renaissance. Anthropology was dyed the appropriate optimistic colour and was indistinguishable from the gay background of belief in Cosmic Progress. Then, alas, the Renaissance began to grow old. Geographical expansion reached its maximum; the teeth, which had bitten so deeply into the iced cake provided by infatuated philosophers, began to fall out. Humanity had taken for a general law that which had only affected it at a given age. Humanity had made the mistake which Tolstoi made, and a large part of Humanity fell into Tolstoi's gloomy despair. Today, the followers of Marx and Nietzsche are brutally trying to knock the poor old creature into obedient activity, while Barth and Brunner sit at the bedside in a

role strongly reminiscent of Job's comforters. Furthermore the orthodox theologians find it hard to refrain from an irritating "I told you so" attitude.

With this summary of the general history of liberalism in mind, we may venture to pass on to the discussion of anthropology. We shall find, as Tolstoi found, that to understand the nature of man we must go to life itself. God is always acting upon Man through the media of His Word and Spirit, and Man is ever reacting in a positive or in a negative manner. We can only discover the truth about human nature by observation, and we shall limit our observation to those occasions when Man is aware of God's search for him.

The great principle of liberal anthropology is the oneness of the human and Divine nature. Finite spirit is, in its essence, one with the Absolute Spirit. This great assumption is the fountain-head of the spate of over-confident humanism which has flowed out into the desert of Reality, and there it has vanished, burnt up by the hot sun of human sin and passion. All the superstructure which has hitherto been built upon the foundation of liberal anthropology has been shaken into ruins by the successive convulsions which have affected the foundation; nevertheless men are even now building again upon the old foundation in the hope that there will be no more earthquakes. How much better it would be if the sociologists transferred their constructive work to the rock of hard fact; but to do this they would have to obtain permission to build from the Lord of Truth and Fact, and this they will not do.

Reference has been made to God's media of Revelation, the Word and the Spirit. "The spirit of man is so akin to God that it is one with God, not merely united to Him." So say the humanists. Hence the revelatory Spirit of God is identical with the higher operations of the human spirit. What, then, is the liberal conception of the Word of God? Do you mean the Word of God made flesh? Why, His is the Personality which makes most patent and explicit those higher operations of the God-Man Spirit which every human soul possesses in a measure. He is superior in degree, though not in quality, to His fellows. On the other hand, do you mean the Word of God written? Surely it is obvious that this is the record of those higher operations of the human spirit. It is the record, first of all, of Him Who is the great Exponent of innate human potentiality, but other saints and heroes also add their contribution to the whole.

Such a generous estimate of human nature as liberalism permits still has to face the glaring examples which History affords of human depravity; Nero and Hitler have got to be explained somehow. Therefore they and their satellites are victims of some psychological aberration which is due to faulty genetics and an unsympathetic education. Progress of knowledge will enable us to reduce the number of such unfortunates. I must allow that today all this is wearing very thin with the world at large. Omnivorous liberals who can digest Hitler are few and far between. The resistance of liberalism to fact is disintegrating. The bomb which has blasted it is not so much the recent existence of Hitler, as the fact that millions have bowed down to him and have made him their god. Faulty genetics and unsympathetic education seem so widespread, that it might be simpler

to accept the anti-liberal view that man is a fallen being, wholly estranged from God. It would certainly afford a good working hypothesis.

Here come Barth and Brunner shaking their wise old heads and giving Humanity the same comfort which Job received. It has all happened because of sin. Along come the orthodox and the fundamentalists to add their quota of woe. God is "Wholly Other". What, therefore, can be expected from Society apart from God? All these terrible things could not have happened if Humanity had not been very wicked and very proud. Just a fragment of society, the few chosen, God will retain, but the rest are beyond redemption. Humanity, the poor old sick creature, murmurs in response, "The Master you profess to serve loved me and died for me." Post-liberalism has tended to make too much of diagnosis and too little of the marvellous curative power which resides in the Gospel of God's love. The Good Samaritan not only exposed the wounds to light of day. He poured in oil and wine, and the wounded man began to revive and to take courage. It is not to the wounds, nor to the stricken posture of Humanity, smitten to the ground by sin, that we should look in forming our estimate of Man, but rather to the way in which he responds to the pouring in of God's oil and wine. In other words, we must study the nature of religious experience.

Emile Cammaerts, in his book "The Flower of Grass", does an extraordinary amount of nail-hitting. He hits the anthropological nail right on the head with the hammer of mature faith. Having, in former days, drunk deeply at the various fountains of philosophy without slaking his intellectual and spiritual thirst, he can appreciate to the full the Living Water from Above. The fountain of belief in individual liberty, in the innate goodness of man, in the value of autonomous freedom of expression, ultimately failed to satisfy him. He saw that its rejection of authority could only result in chaos and licence. The fountain of totalitarianism he suspected from the first. Its waters were tainted. The outcome of thorough-going collectivism he knew to be an inevitable over-emphasis of secular authority, with the subsequent debasement of human personality. Only one Fountain provided Living Waters. Here he found the right combination of freedom with authority. Christianity demands personal freedom for men in this world, but it also demands complete submission to an Authority beyond this world. Thus it harmonizes freedom of the will with moral self-surrender, because God is the Fountain both of freedom and authority, and in His Perfection all the faculties of man find fulfilment.

George Herbert, in speaking of God's creation of man, pictures words of mercy on the lips of God :

Let him be rich and weary, that at least,  
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May toss him to My breast.

Man's innate goodness is an optimistic fiction ; man's weariness is an acknowledged fact. So weary is he that he will fall down before a false god, if he cannot find the True ; but he will never find rest until he finds the God Who is Love. As St. Augustine cries of his soul :

"It is ruinous; do Thou repair it." The soul of man is ruined and devastated, and yet it cries out to be restored, and the process of restoration gradually declares the nobleness and dignity which are the rightful lineaments of God's chief handiwork.

Rudolf Otto's definition of the numinous experience as "creature-feeling", in contradistinction from "the feeling of dependence", is significant. Schleiermacher's "dependence" is really a category of self-valuation in the sense of self-depreciation. It is an inference from Creation and is, therefore, in the realm of humanism, whereas "Creature-consciousness" has an immediate and primary reference to an Object outside of Creation, the *Mysterium Tremendum*. We are in the realm of the Mystical experience. It is the mysticism which Deissmann would call "re-acting mysticism". The pagan mysticism is active; it tries to lay hold of the Absolute; it seeks, and endeavours to know. Christian mysticism is reactive; the soul realizes that it is sought and that it is known. It is this marvellous responsive capacity of man which forbids us to accept the Barthian anthropology. The depth of spiritual experience possible to man is illustrated by the saints. Barth regards the "analogia entis" as the invention of Antichrist, but Von Hügel would find in Christianity the revelation of human personality and depth. Christianity for him is "deep and dim and tender, slow and far-reaching, immensely costly, infinitely strong." It contains a "discovery and exemplification of the mysterious depth and range and complexity of human personality and freedom, of conscience and of sin." And one feels that the massiveness of Von Hügel's estimate of man is proper, though one realizes, with Barth, that until Christ comes into the life, it is all a mighty ruin plunged in darkness.

Christian religious experience is experience "en Christo". Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the post-regenerational fusion of our human nature with the Divine. The man or woman born into the family of God becomes a member of the New Humanity, and shares in the Spirit of the Second Adam. It is only by contemplating, and by being conjoined to the Second Adam that we can rightly understand the potentialities of the First Adam. The Christological discussion is intimately related to the anthropological. The great liberal and humanistic assumption is that in Christ the innate goodness of man has its supreme manifestation. Christ is man at his highest and his best, the Flower of Humanity, the supreme exhibition of man's essential affinity to God. All this simply will not do. It is not true to the Bible, it is not true to observation, it is not true to personal experience. The saints are not lesser Christs any more than their martyrdoms are "lesser Calvaries". Perhaps, in a mysterious corporate sense, the Church is the extension of the Incarnation, and her sufferings the fulfilment of Christ's Passion, but individual saints are the first to own their inferiority to the Lord, and it is only "in Him" that they dare to seek for mercy. There is no personal attainment, or innate sanctity, or parallelism to the supreme Exemplar, which has ever permitted them to claim a similarity of function with Him, and no one would believe them if they did. If, therefore the saints fall short of the glory of God, the philanthropist and the "decent fellow" are not likely to be very convincing as claimants to the

Divine status. Both Revelation and common sense forbid us to think of Christ in any other way than as "sui generis", and anthropology can never become Christology, even though Schleiermacher and Hegel tried hard to merge the two.

In spite of all this, we are not at liberty to pontificate about man being utterly evil. To talk of the "analogia entis" as the invention of Antichrist (as Barth does) is to talk extravagantly. If man were utterly evil, how could God become perfect Man? He could become like man, but He could not become truly human unless the Divine Image, which involves the "analogia entis," did exist. There is in the theology of Emil Brunner a marked tendency to avoid a Christology which lays an equal emphasis upon the human nature of Christ. There is a docetic element in his doctrine.

God and Man are one Christ, and if the Incarnation is the clearest declaration of man's inability to reach God unaided, yet it is also a Divine evaluation of man's nature which should lead him to dignity and self-respect. God did become Man. It was an act of condescension which fills us with wonder, but we do not feel that God degraded Himself in becoming Man, and there is no hint in the Bible that He did. There was Divine condescension, but not Divine degradation, and no greater demonstration of man's worth could be found than this simple statement. It is a decisive refutation of all inferior estimates of Man, whether theological or social. Man's pride is rebuked in that it cost God so much to save him; Man's dignity is preserved in that God could become human and yet remain Divine. As Dr. Maurice Relton avers: "The Divine Logos was capable of being the Ego, not only of His Divine but also of His human nature; because His Personality in virtue of its Divinity already embraced all that is most distinctive of a truly human personality."

In the light of all this, what are we to make of the fresh anthropological evidence so gratuitously given by Germany and Japan? Their atrocities beggar description. The general reaction is to declare that the perpetrators are not human beings. If they are not human beings, what are they? "Beasts! Swine! Dogs!" Are they? Would animals behave towards their own species as the Germans and the Japs have behaved? Surely it is an insult to the bestial world to use such expletives. "Devils! Demons!" Perhaps we are getting nearer the truth. Demon-possession seems to be more than an archaic oriental fiction. But they are not only devils and demons. The devils make use of the existing human capacities, but those human capacities are the attributes of men, moreover of men who have voluntarily prostituted their faculties to the service of the flesh and the devil. It is tempting to place these human monsters in an infra-human category, but somehow or other we must find a place for them in the anthropological scheme.

When we do this we part company with two schools of Christian thought. We part company, first, with those who consider Christianity to be an extension, amplification, and consummation, of the fundamental moral law which is written in men's hearts. Religious moralism is too superficial to find a place for such abysmal wickedness and it must, therefore, be rejected. Alternatively, we can have no use for Christian pietism. There is a detachment from the

world which surrenders it to non-Christian domination in the belief that such separatism is superior. To do any such thing is to take a shallow view of evil, for evil is dynamic, aggressive, omnivorous, cruel, and it must be fought and fought and fought. Give evil an inch and you have lost a mile ; give evil autonomy and Christian hegemony is no more. Not so long ago, it was the fashion to be cynical about the concept of a Christian comity of nations. Religious people were inclined to regard Christianization as dressed-up heathenism and Christendom as a gigantic fraud. This attitude is wrong, for we can now see that a nation which abandons Christianity, or else has never professed it, is heathen to an extent which bewilders those nations in which the Christian profession survives. The dissemination of Christian Law, and the conception of God as supreme Arbiter, may not be in themselves adequate for salvation in the next world, but they are indispensable for salvation in this, and, after all, this world does count for something. Ask the poor twisted inmates of Axis torture chambers whether or not there is a difference between Christian and non-Christian civilisation, or whether Christians ought to take an interest in politics.

International Law, cultural development, these abstractions are impotent to affect human nature unless behind and above them there is a supernatural Source and Fount of Law and Culture—unless there is a known God to Whom all nations are terribly responsible. It is to such a God, revealed in Christ, that the Christians look. He is a God Whose Gospel can take that twisted trampled ruin which men call conscience, and in the fire of the Spirit can straighten and restore it. He is a God Whom to worship afar off is to rise superior and transformed. It is when the gleam of God's light falls upon the prostrate form of Man, that we discern a touch of reflected beauty, and this glimpse makes us eager to expose Humanity more and more to the Light of Heaven.

What, then, do we find man to be? Thomas Carlyle in "Sartor Resartus" quotes a view of man which describes him as "a forked straddling animal with bandy legs", to which description Carlyle adds the comment "yet also a Spirit, and unutterable 'Mystery of Mysteries'." Can we go further than this rather agnostic position? I think we can. Man is a created being capable of maximum voluntary response to the soteriological operations of God. Our review of the evidence permits us to reach this conclusion ; and it is a conclusion which might be more simply expressed : "Man is a created being capable of loving God." He is no more than this ; he is no less.