

communion which makes us the *ἱεράτευμα* as well as the living sacrifice to God.

4. There is a juridical language—made sin, made curse : God as just and justifier : the relation of Christ's work to the moral law and to God as the holy and righteous : accepting God's full reaction in judgment and love upon a world which Christ voluntarily entered, with which *under the law* He identified Himself. This is Paul at his deepest ; but may it not be also our Lord's understanding of Isaiah liii, the heart of His experience at Calvary ?

Atonement and Contemporary Thought

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WE begin by quoting from two contemporary theologians their considered opinion of modern man's attitude to his sins, and consequently of his need for any doctrine of atonement at all. Reinhold Niebuhr, in his Gifford Lectures published in 1939, says, "Our introductory analysis of modern views of human nature has established the complacent conscience of modern man as the one unifying force amidst a wide variety of anthropological conceptions". A little later on he says, "The typical modern is naturally not inclined to take dubious religious myths seriously, since he finds no relation between the *ethos* which informs them and his own sense of security and complacency. The sense of guilt expressed in them is to him a mere vestigial remnant of primitive fears of higher powers, from which he is happily emancipated. The sense of sin is, in the phrase of a particular vapid modern social scientist 'a psychopathic aspect of adolescent mentality'". (*The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1, p. 100.) Our second quotation is from Prof. D. M. Baillie's *God was in Christ* (1948). "There is a modern inability to understand the sense of sin and especially the meaning and the need of divine forgiveness. 'Why,' many a seriously minded man will ask, consciously or unconsciously, 'should I brood over my sins and the need of having them forgiven? No one can "atone" for my misdeeds except myself, and I can do it only by leaving them behind, making any possible reparation to any whom I may have wronged, and then forgetting the past and going blithely on to better things. Therefore I will not trouble about my sins and their forgiveness'."

This latter attitude would seem to be the solution offered in the *Cocktail Party*, Mr. T. S. Eliot's recent play. A young woman falls in love with a married man, and although the affair does not go very far, she is left with a sense of guilt which causes her unhappiness. She consults a psychotherapist who, after listening to her story and her desire for forgiveness, suggests two courses. The first is the one that would be taken by the majority in her position. By becoming a conscientious wife and mother she can do enough good to balance the evil. The second way is possible only to the few. It consists in joining an Order and becoming a missionary. She will thus be

separated from the world she has known, from her friends and even from her countrymen. She will be called upon to make great sacrifices, even, as it transpires, of life itself. Whatever Mr. Eliot may really believe about the Atonement, it would certainly seem from this play that we must work out our own salvation and that atonement is possible as a result of our own self-sacrifice.

Whence comes the complacent attitude of modern man to his sins? It is due, we would suggest, to an entire absence in modern thought of any conception of a transcendent God standing over and above Man as Creator and Judge. Sin is, after all, a theological term. It denotes the breaking of the relationship between God and Man. If man has ceased to believe in God, or in God as revealed in Christ, he must perforce have a different conception of sin from that which gives rise to Christian doctrines of atonement. The current view of the universe is that it is self-contained; modern thought is dominated by what Prof. Paul Tillich calls the "principle of immanence". This term he uses to refer to any view (*a*) which finds meaning, value and reality exclusively within natural and human processes, and (*b*) which therefore rejects the belief that these processes (and their meaning and value) depend upon a transcendent ground. As such, the phrase covers pantheistic views like Bruno's and Spinoza's; but it also includes modern naturalism. Tillich goes on to point out that where this principle of immanence has gained ascendancy it has reduced existence to a sum of finite life-centres and their inter-relatedness. There is thus no spiritual centre which can serve to integrate life or the world. Modern society, for lack of such a centre of being, value, meaning and purpose either falls back upon some theory of automatic checks and balances, such as the balance of power in politics or the balance of supply and demand in economics; or else it elevates one finite centre of being to a position of transcendence, making the others subservient to it, as in the case of totalitarian systems where state or class is made into such an absolute centre of power.

When such partial and finite centres of life are so elevated they take the place of God, and atonement then means that the individual has to be made one with them. There are thus, in the modern situation, false doctrines of atonement corresponding to the various substitutes for the ultimate good. We shall consider three such; nature, the community, and the "better self".

I

Those who consider that the source of man's insecurity and consequent uneasiness is his divorce from nature, advocate that he should cease to have pretensions concerning his difference from other creatures and accept the fact that he is but a self-conscious animal. A great majority of the modern prophets are naturalists of one kind or another. This is due, in the main, to the tremendous advance of the natural sciences during the last century. The biological sciences, and especially comparative anatomy, have sought to shew that life is only a question of adaptation to environment and that man is nothing more than a successful biological adaptation to *his* environment. Whatever the physicists may be discovering about freedom in the

atom, the biologists, on the whole, remain convinced determinists and think of the human organism in terms of a highly complicated machine. A recent development will illustrate this point. The neurologists, working on the human brain, give us a picture of an infinite number of cells reacting automatically to stimuli which come from the sensory nerves. The cells, in time, form patterns which seem to suggest habit formations. Memory is explained as a "storage" operation which, when interrupted by shock, is upset, with consequent loss of memory. This knowledge of the brain which has become available largely as a result of shell-shock and brain injuries during the recent wars, has given the engineers the clue to automatic calculating machines which are being constructed on the analogy of the brain. The engineers, in their turn, give further hints to the neurologists and so it goes on.

The point I wish to make here is that the assumption behind all this work is that human nature is amoral and that man cannot be held accountable for his behaviour. If man is in fact an animal motivated, not by freewill, but by instinctive reactions, bound hand and foot by heredity and environment, what happens to a sense of sin? Criminal behaviour, which is to be condemned not on grounds of morality but of expediency, will be cured not by repentance and forgiveness, but by medicine, surgery and psychiatry. This is already beginning. In a recent court case in London the prisoner, who was a man of some education, was accused of repeated petty thieving over a period of years. A brain surgeon who was interested in the case said that he would cure him by a leucotomy operation and, on condition that the man was prepared to undergo the operation, the magistrate placed him on probation. It is perhaps worth noting in this connexion that a very large number of mental patients are now being treated by mechanical and physical means. All this tends to confirm the naturalists in their belief that what has been thought in the past to be due to sin, i.e., to selfish or wilful behaviour under the control of the individual, is due to the complications of modern life with its unnatural way of living. In other words, it is due to maladjustment of the organism to its environment. Change the environment and bring it nearer to nature and all will be well. It is characteristic of this school that it has little use for discipline of any kind. Discipline or restraint sets up repressions and complexes. To be free from these, one must follow one's feelings. This leads, inevitably, to the loosening of all traditional moral ties, especially between the sexes, and has led in no small measure to the easy conscience of modern man in regard to illicit sexual unions. Another manifestation of naturalism is the new attitude to children and their education. They are to be brought up with as few restraints as possible, shielded for as long as possible from the harshness of the outside world. In its extreme form, naturalism would advocate a return to agricultural and pastoral life, for it attributes most of our ills, social and individual, to the growth of industrial civilization. There are hundreds of communities working out these ideas in Europe and America and it was, of course, the policy of Mr. Gandhi.

Opposed in some ways to the naturalist is the rationalist. He explains human sin, not as a consequence of man's having broken the

harmony of nature, but to man's having failed to impose upon nature a sufficient measure of order. The solution offered by rationalism for the lack of security in modern life and the anxieties to which it gives rise, is more planning. In other words, man, the rational centre of the universe, must impose order upon the world. The rationalist would equate sin with ignorance and the salvation which he offers is education. Bertrand Russell may be taken as a typical exponent of this attitude, but it is, of course, extremely common. The amazing growth and importance attached to research is a symptom of the faith in human knowledge which is such an obvious feature of our times. Belief in education is accompanied by a naive belief that if men knew a better way of life they would of necessity follow it. The rationalist thinks that sin is due to ignorance on the one hand and to lack of social order on the other. He believes, therefore, in social engineering. Plans and blue-prints must be made, including those of human behaviour. When we know the facts we shall be able, by the developing social sciences and social services, to put men right. It will be seen that, although the naturalists and the rationalists differ from one another in some important respects, they both refuse to make man responsible for the mess he is in. They are both optimistic about human nature and really believe that man, either by simplifying his life or by planning it, can put it right.

Optimism about human nature is almost universal, but not quite. Hobbes had a somewhat low opinion of his fellowmen but thought that their egoism could be kept in check by the powerful state. Nietzsche was generally pessimistic about human nature but believed in the emergence of the super-man. Freud has uncovered in his dungeons of the unconscious a very unflattering picture of humanity, but man is not held responsible for this cess-pool ; its source can be traced to mythical happenings which go back to the cradle of humanity ; man is the victim and not the origin of rebellion against the pristine harmony of nature. Freud offers certain palliatives ; he has no cure. He is symbolic of the despair which follows the shattering of modern man's illusions about himself.

II

We turn now to the second solution offered by the contemporary world to the anxieties and insecurities of men. Marxism attributes these evils to the emergence of individualism and the failure of the individual to adjust himself to the community of which he is a part. Marxism is rationalistic in that it claims to be scientific in its analysis of history and of social dynamics. But in its attitude to the working class and in its hope of the perfect society, it shews itself to be compounded of a large measure of romanticism. It produces a moral alibi for the individual by projecting his failings on to the environment. His particular shortcomings can be explained in terms of the social system in which he lives. When the ordering of society has been righted and the classless society has emerged as a result of the working out of the dialectic process, all the outward reasons for human greed and ambition will have disappeared and men will live in peace and harmony one with another. When this happy condition of affairs

has arrived, the state, which exists in order to maintain by force a social system which is inherently unjust, will no longer be necessary and will wither away. Thus Marxism, like naturalism, believes in a fundamental harmony; but, whereas for the naturalists, it is something to be "returned to" for the Marxist it is yet to be attained; it is the goal of history.

It is obvious from current Marxist literature and from the practice in Communist countries that Marxism knows nothing of sin in the Christian sense of the word because it has no belief in a God who stands above man as judge. Even capitalists are not to be blamed for what they do, for, being capitalists, they must act in a particular way in accordance with the economic interests of their class. The real problem for the Marxist is the deviationist and the traitor to the Party. So completely certain are the Marxists that they have the truth on their side and so assured are they that they know what is best for humanity, that anyone who opposes their will (unless he is a capitalist and can therefore be "explained" in economic categories) is anathema. Only two things can be done for such an one. Either he must be liquidated or he must publicly confess and be absolved. There is, in short, no place for the individual as such. Apart from the community, he has no right to exist and the terms for community membership are complete conformity of doctrine and behaviour.

The following extract from Mr. Leonard Constantine's article on "Communism in China—A New Pattern of Life" (*Manchester Guardian*, Nov. 16th, 1950) gives some idea of the thoroughness with which confession is demanded: "The group meeting, in Chinese literally *Investigation-discussion*, is a means by which faults are corrected and deviation checked. Daily they review their own and their comrades' conduct; accusations of incorrect behaviour or thinking are encouraged; then all is measured by the yard-stick of Marxist-Leninism. Students seriously bring to the group their love affairs and the group decides whether, in each particular case, marriage would be compatible with serving the cause". A little further on, he writes: "One technique much used as a means of discipline and to correct faults is that of public confession. Any trouble in school, factory or government office is fully ventilated in the newspapers; people write frank criticisms of the actions of the headmaster, manager or official concerned, and when the matter has been aired for a suitable length of time a grovelling apology is published from the offending person".

We have here a violent reaction from the over-individualism of the West. The loneliness and insecurity which the individual feels in the modern world is one of Communism's greatest attractions. Paradoxically enough, where Communism is still a minority movement struggling for power, the individual finds a new sense of significance and purpose in working for a cause which comes to him with the force of a gospel. Driven into opposition by society, his sense of commitment to the fellow-members of his party is deepened. When the day of power comes, he finds that it does not in fact fulfil his hopes. Disillusionment follows and he is likely to be one of the first victims of the Communist government. This may be partially explained by the

fact that the struggle for power produces people with a strong sense of individuality which makes it difficult for them to sink themselves into the mass. Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that it is the "old guard" who are amongst the first to be liquidated when the day on which they have set all their hopes finally dawns. This is because Communism cannot forgive, it can only correct. Because it has no doctrine of sin it is bound to attribute deviation among its members to error. Confession of error and a willingness to accept unquestionably the interpretation of events as laid down by the party is the way to restitution. Very often the accused is anxious to undergo imprisonment or some other form of punishment in order to demonstrate the genuineness of his penitence. It is perhaps easier for Christians than for liberal-humanists to understand this, for it has its parallel only in religious experience. For the Communist, the People's Court dispenses absolute justice and he therefore feels towards it something of the awe which the religious man reserves for God alone.

III

The third solution offered for the uneasiness and bewilderment of modern man which we shall consider is that he should be his "true" self. This is the view of the liberal-humanists who, in spite of all that has happened during the past twenty years, still believe that man's trouble is curable from within his own resources. A recent book which states this position with real conviction is *Man for Himself* by Erich Fromm. The author is known for his previous book *The Fear of Freedom*: he is a refugee from Hitler's Germany now living in America and is a practising psycho-analyst. According to Fromm, man will remain dissatisfied, anxious and restless so long as he relies for salvation upon powers outside of himself. "There is only one solution to his problem; to face the truth, to acknowledge his fundamental aloneness and solitude in a universe indifferent to his fate, to recognize that there is no power transcending him which can solve his problems for him. Man must accept the responsibility for himself and the fact that only by using his own powers can he give meaning to his life." The way to happiness is the full realization of those faculties which are peculiarly human—reason, love and productive work. To develop these to the full is to live productively, that is, to choose life and not death. Fromm thinks that one of the main handicaps to this kind of living is what he calls the authoritarian conscience. This develops in any individual who accepts orders from some external authority such as parent, state or church. He is told that if he disobeys the commands of these authorities he is doing something wrong. This sets up a feeling of guilt which inhibits action and productivity. Once this happens, we are in a vicious circle. Less productivity, more guilt; more guilt, still less productivity. In the end, in extreme cases, mental disorder follows. Needless to say, this does not mean that the individual can live without discipline, but it must carry the reason with it. What is condemned is the "do this because you are told" or "do this because the Church teaches it" attitude, which, because it treats the other person as less than human, produces people who are, in fact, less human than they might be.

The alternative to the authoritarian conscience is the humanistic conscience. "Humanistic conscience is not the internalized voice of an authority whom we are eager to please and afraid of displeasing; it is our own voice, present in every human being and independent of external sanctions and rewards." It is the voice of our true selves which summons us back to ourselves, to live productively, to develop fully and harmoniously—that is, to become what we potentially are. Guilty feelings are due, therefore, to our having let ourselves down. We are conscious of failure and frustration. But the solution is in our own hands. By quiet meditation, so that we may hear ourselves speaking, we can strengthen our conscience so that it is able to overcome the forces of disintegration at work in us. Fromm admits that the environment is largely responsible for the failure of man to reach his true stature and he has a good deal to say about the effect of modern commercialism upon character which is most valuable. He is typical of many high-minded men of our generation. Appalled, as they are, by the inhumanity which they have witnessed, either in totalitarian countries or in the ruthlessness of capitalism, they long for deliverance. They do not see in Christianity as presented by the Churches any solution to their problem, for they fail to observe any marked difference between Christians and others in the field of human behaviour. They pin their faith therefore to character training, and, believing as they do, that human nature is potentially good, they are hopeful enough to think that a new kind of education will produce a new kind of man.

IV

We have dealt so far with contemporary *thought*, i.e., with formulated systems of philosophy current in the modern world which form the mental climate in which we live. We suggest that they are not likely to listen very readily to any doctrine of Atonement which is remotely Christian. But it may well be objected that the average man is not a philosopher and is therefore unlikely to understand any solutions offered to him. Have we any clue at all to the popular attitude to the great themes of forgiveness and atonement? Ordinary people are not very articulate when it comes to the deeper things, but it is possible to arrive at some indication of the underlying suppositions of their lives by examining their proverbs and slogans. Professor Brunner in *The Church's Witness to God's Design*, has collected together a large number of these axioms of the modern man some of which bear directly on our subject:

- General : I cannot help being what I am.
 Laws of nature determine everything.
- Britain : Man needs education—not redemption.
 A sense of sin cramps your style.
 It's only human nature after all.
 At all costs keep an open mind.
 There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so.
 Just the art of being kind is all that this world needs.
- America : Human nature is fundamentally sound, but needs guidance
 and correction to achieve its fulfilment.

Sin is just another name for ignorance or correctible imperfection or biological lag.

God is really a projection of man's ideals.

Jesus was a good man. What we need are a lot more people like Him. Now, take Lincoln. . . .

Germany : How can I be guilty of the misery of humanity? Find the guilty and punish *them*! But I want a little peace.

Certain people bear the responsibility for our destiny ; it's obvious that they have no conscience at all and they do it badly. But I can't alter that.

France : God will forgive, that's what He's there for (Voltaire).
What have *I* done to deserve this?

It cannot be said that these axioms reflect any widespread desire for forgiveness or any consciousness of sin. To people who accept them the doctrine of the Atonement would seem to be completely irrelevant.

And yet it is clear that behind the jaunty complacency of modern man, there is a cynicism which borders upon nihilism and despair. The frantic efforts of groups and individuals to place all the blame for the present state of the world upon others is a certain sign of a guilty conscience. Apart from forgiveness, a guilty conscience has to be eased by some form of self-justification, hence the age-long device of the scape-goat. All the evil in the world is attributed to Communism, or to capitalism, or to imperialism, or to Stalin, or Truman, or the British Government. Having designated the source of evil, the next step is to destroy it ; and since it is unmitigated evil—depersonalized as it were—it is legitimate to use the most ruthless weapons of destruction which the ingenuity of men can invent. But the very use of these methods increases the sense of guilt and makes the possibility of reconciliation more remote and so we arrive at the diabolical conception of unconditional surrender ; diabolical because it presumes to equate overwhelming force with absolute righteousness and refuses to acknowledge the injustices and imperfections which exist in any human cause, however good ; and the element of justice in any cause, however bad.

May we then sum up as follows. Modern man is only too conscious of the mess that he is in ; he cannot escape from the evidence of it even if he would. Nevertheless, he does not hold himself responsible for it. He finds the root of the trouble either in civilization itself, or in the particular social or economic system in which he lives, or in his own ignorance of himself. His nagging discontent is objectified into hatred of some particular group of people to whose machinations he attributes his misfortunes. These people become for him the very embodiment of evil and their destruction provides a legitimate and praiseworthy outlet for his frustrations and discontents. But the appalling misery caused by his own destructiveness increases modern man's feeling of guilt and so he gets deeper into the mire. Never did man need forgiveness more than he does now ; never did he realize less than he does now that the forgiveness which he needs can only come from the God who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all.