

## NOT BY POWER, NOR BY MIGHT

**The Early Christian Communes.**

The early Christians were Communists, "Not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own." By means of this voluntary co-operation, little knots of brethren all over the world, sharing all things, struggled to realise the law of brotherhood. So long as the numbers in fellowship were small, the churches met with a measure of success, and it is said they were never in want.

It is a melancholy fact, however, that ideals, like persons, are deranged by an environment of social injustice. Before there can be a reign of Benevolence, there must be a reign of Justice.

The ideal of the kingdom of heaven upon earth was no exception to this rule of deterioration. It was in turn obscured, distorted, inverted and finally shattered into fragments, just as a healthy captive, confined in a dungeon, is adversely affected and finally loses his reason.

Free men and women are regulated by the Great Social Law of Equity. The Golden Rule, based upon the social instinct, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is a patriotism unattainable by the slave or slave-owner until his point of view is changed and he is able in imagination to transfer himself into the New World while yet living within the Old.

It is difficult for a man who has had to sell his daughter into slavery, to save the family from starvation, to understand that he should love his neighbour as himself. It is barely reasonable to expect the bitter-minded helot of the soil, condemned like a beast of burden to a hopeless life of hard toil, to "resist not evil." On the other hand, a change of heart in the suspicious despot surrounded by

secret danger, attended by chicanery and flattery, encouraged in brutish self-indulgence, is even less likely.

The intrusion of those who had not first sought the Higher Truth, and who wished either to find scope for ambition or merely wished to live upon their neighbours, content with low material advantage only, was fatal to the success of the communes. These had not been "born again," and they were not impelled to uphold the Higher Standard of all.

The early Christians had to learn by bitter experience that while numbers increased rapidly, freedom did not increase, but finally disappeared altogether.

#### **Power and Might enter the Churches.**

Critical investigation during recent times has disclosed the fact that, just as the teachings of the Old Prophets were made of none effect through the subsequent veiling over by false doctrines, so also have the teachings of the New Prophets been largely deprived of their value by the superimposed fraudulent doctrines now taught and put forward as Christianity.

To such an extent has this process been carried that professing Christians may criticise, ~~analyse~~, condemn and reject the Sermon on the Mount, without incurring any censure, but they may not examine or cast doubts upon what we shall presently see is palpable forgery. There is furthermore not a single doctrine or dogma in this spurious Christianity based on the teachings of Jesus.

One of the first to obscure and distort the genuine teachings of the New Prophets was Paul, upon whose philosophy was built an apocryphal theology, now known as the "Christology of Paul."

This so-called spiritual Christianity cannot be harmonised by any theological casuistry with the "ethics of Jesus." Paul's sensual conception of a kingdom of heaven not on earth, but located somewhere in the sky, where the saints were "to eat and drink at the table of the Lord, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel," is comparable only with the happy hunting-grounds of the Red Indians.

"This, then, is the first turning of the road where Christianity has gone wrong and misdirected those who followed

its lead. It taught that the world was ruled by a moody, capricious tyrant, who is amenable to flattery and bribes, whose will may be subordinated to our own, and on whose changing moods it depended what kind of fruit a tree shall bring forth." (Ignatius Singer.<sup>1</sup>)

Power and Might thus entered the Church to maintain and defend a faith which has no basis in reason: "If anyone preach unto you any other gospel than the one which we have preached unto you," said Paul, "THOUGH IT BE AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN, let him be accursed."

### The Christians become Insular.

The Christians now began to exhibit the same characteristics as the "Peculiar People," the Jews, with whom they were often confounded by the nations of the Roman world. In fear of being accused of impiety, they would not take part in the most innocent diversions of the ancients, such as the humane licence of the Saturnalia, commemorating the primitive equality of mankind.

They incurred, and, it must be confessed, sometimes encouraged, the resentment of their Pagan neighbours for gracelessness. The gloomy early Fathers were convinced that the end of the world was at hand and that they alone would be saved from hell's fires.

While the disciples of Pagan philosophy asserted the rights of intellectual freedom, the Christians exercised strictly the jurisdiction of their laws and magistrates over the minds of the faithful. The ecclesiastical government was supposedly based upon the heavenly model, which bore a remarkable resemblance to that of Imperial Rome. The despotic ideal progressed and increased as the inevitable anarchy developed.

Acts of oppression only added new force to the elastic vigour of the mind, and an age of religious controversy was inaugurated in which heresies and schisms appeared that the bishops and presbyters were helpless to suppress. Ill-temper caused trivialities to assume exaggerated importance in the minds of the disputants, who separated into sects. The fettered congregations were frequently robbed

<sup>1</sup> See *Theocracy of Jesus*, published by C. W. Daniel, London; also *The Rival Philosophies of Jesus and Paul*, by the same writer. Published by Allen & Unwin, London.

by dishonest pastors, like Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, a spiritual despot, who, on a charge of heresy, was removed on appeal to the temporal tyrant of Rome.

But the Christian sects exhausted the tolerance even of the polytheistic heathen, and their reputation was not enhanced by the treacherous acts of the Jews in Egypt, Cyprus and Cyrene. Ugly rumours were spread against the Christians, who were often unjustly accused of impiety and of practising secret illegalities. Persecution descended upon the Church, and the sectaries were for the moment drawn together. In the belief that the end of the world was imminent, the crown of martyrdom, combined with the certainty of eternal reward, became a priceless possession greatly sought after by deranged fanatics.

#### **The Cœnobites and Anachorets.**

Nature makes no allowance for errors committed in ignorance, any more than for deliberate wrongdoing. If it were otherwise, we should never learn, and rational thought would be impossible.

The saying of Jesus, like all His genuine sayings, that a millstone might as well be hung round the neck of anyone who would offend a little child, and the offender cast into the sea, carries a deep biological meaning. The first duty of the species is the care of the young. This duty includes the care not only of our own children, but also the children of our neighbour. All experience goes to show that attempts made on a large or small scale to benefit our own children by hurting our neighbour's end in disaster for all.

We dare not neglect the young, either before or after birth. Disobedience of this primary duty, which is based upon the social instinct, results in extinction, the death of the race. A race of anchorites, therefore, such as Paul conceived to be the perfection of saintliness, is contrary to the teachings of the Founder of Christianity, as it is to the laws of Nature.

Paul's initiation of the monastic habit brought terrible calamities upon those who practised the new form of captivity, as well as upon their co-religionists.

In the belief that mankind was composed of criminals and that God was a tyrant only to be propitiated by life-

long penance and torture, hermits, monks and nuns rushed into every extreme of madness. Their mental atmosphere became peopled with dæmons, dragons and personified temptations, bearing the names of the gods of antiquity.

Actuated by these hallucinations, they withdrew themselves from the society of their fellows and invented strange devices of physical and mental torture for the mortification of the flesh. They hated themselves intensely, and extended this hatred to all mankind, finding a savage pleasure in the morbid admiration bestowed by superstitious spectators upon their antics. Many became religious maniacs and raving lunatics, objects of disgust to all right-minded men and women.

Athanasius, the great metaphysical obscurantist of the fourth century, introduced into Rome the knowledge and practice of the monastic life, and the fashion of associating pleasure with guilt grew everywhere into a vile culture.

The actions of a monk, his speech, and even his thoughts, were controlled by inflexible rule or by a severe and cruel superior. But the desire for freedom is beyond the control even of those who try to will themselves to submission. It betrays itself in involuntary offences, and these were punished by disgrace or close confinement or by fasts, sometimes supplemented by flogging.

Disciplinary measures, which were increasingly necessary as oppression increased, became more diabolical to meet the inevitable anarchical tendencies. By the time of Charlemagne, the abbots indulged themselves in the mutilation of their monks, occasionally putting out their eyes, or, in extreme cases, walling them up in subterranean sepulchres.

It was natural that, having applied with apparent success forceful inventions to make themselves good and holy, the orthodox should desire to employ these same engines of ingenuity for the regeneration of the heretics and schismatics who strayed from or rebelled against the authority of the orthodox Church. Opportunity for the gratification of this laudable desire was provided when Christianity became the reigning religion of the Roman Empire. It is scarcely necessary to remind ourselves that, just as the Pagans when orthodox persecuted the Christians, so also when the Protestants established themselves in Rome they perpetuated

the same methods of power and might against those who differed from them.

This is the characteristic performance of all egoisms.

### **Power and Might replace the Light of the World.**

The constrained Church was easily and frequently split into contending sects by the irritating difficulties which presented themselves as the Christian mythology evolved itself.

The ingenious attention of the metaphysicians and ready scribes of the first and second centuries after Christ was given to the provision of counter-attractions in the new Christology which would appeal to the respectable worshippers of the favourite heathen deities of the Gentiles, and to the creation of a supernatural origin for the poor Carpenter of Nazareth that would not offend the snobbery of the powerful.

Concessions made to suit differing local conditions caused denominations of Christians to spring up, each advocating some more or less subtle difference in doctrine. Consequently, by the fourth century, ingenuity had to be directed to the diplomatic linking up of Christian interests, and towards attempts made to consolidate these various sects into one Church.

This proved to be a task faced with insurmountable difficulties. There were the Rogations, who intensified the general insularity of the Christians into a peculiar belief in predestination and the limitation of the saints, who were to be saved from the final destruction by fire at the last day. These were awkward to negotiate. Not less fatalistic were the strict Donatist sect, possessing the inflexibility of the Jews. Of them Gibbon says: "The invincible spirit of the sect sometimes preyed upon its own vitals, and the bosom of their schismatical Church was torn by intestine divisions." It was, therefore, not easy even to attract the attention of the Donatists, preoccupied as they were with their own afflictions, which, indeed, they tended to cure themselves by wholesale suicides.

The Novations, the Ebionites, the Sabellians, the Manichæans and their kindred sects all contributed to stimulate the pathetic lament of the venerable Bishop

Gregory Nazianzen, that the kingdom of heaven was converted by discord into the image of chaos, of a nocturnal tempest and of hell itself.

Diplomatic compromise, even at the hands of so learned and courageous a theologian as Athanasius, had its limitations. The Catholics and Arians found it impossible to reconcile the Homoousion and the Homoiousion, the microscopic difference of which was almost invisible to the nicest theological eye.

Christianity, divorced from the eternal principles laid down by its Founder, was irretrievably corrupted and disrupted in the surrounding medium of growing social injustice. The earlier Christians were conscientious objectors to military service, but as bitterness and hatred grew between the competing sectaries, objections to the taking of human life insensibly vanished. The Pagan historian Ammianus stated as his opinion that the enmity of the Christians towards each other surpassed the fury of savage beasts against man. Alienated from their natural rights on earth, the dispossessed contended for the private ownership of heaven, and Theology was placed before Humanity.

Irritations which appeared the least connected with the subject of dispute were sufficient to kindle the flame of civil discord. The Arian and Catholic factions fought each other with a bitterness rarely exceeded in the history of so-called religious wars. But, as Gibbon shrewdly remarks, "The writer who should impute these tumults solely to a religious principle would betray a very imperfect knowledge of human nature."

#### **The Tomb of Ritual.**

In a desire, more or less conscious, to coalesce the scattered fragments of the Church into one catholic whole, groping for a basis of enduring peace, worship was extended far beyond the Triad or Trinity. The Virgin was substituted for Venus, and a new Olympia was filled with the saints as minor gods. As in ancient Egypt, the lofty ideal of One God was ground into powder. Divinity was supposed to cling even to the relics of the saints, real and imitation, and these were worshipped by the infatuated people.

Churches, cities and provinces had their patron saints, and after the subversion of the Roman Empire in the West,

when the Bishops of Rome extended their domination over the laity as well as the clergy of the Latin Church, the patron saints fulfilled a function in the coalition for a central tyranny similar to that of the gods of Egypt, of Chaldæa, and of Pagan Rome.

Inversion had been carried to such an extreme that the most superstitious savage entering the Church would not have missed for long his cherished tribal fetish or totem. The Church had fallen into superstition to a greater extent than the Paganism it was fondly believed to have overcome.

### **The Demoralised Laity.**

Rome continually presented the aspect of war and discord : the churches and palaces were fortified and assaulted by the factions and families. Citizens carried arms, and in the twelfth century St. Bernard, who attempted many reforms, thus described the degenerated people: "Who is ignorant of the vanity and ignorance of the Romans?—a nation nursed in sedition, cruel, intractable, and scorning to obey, unless they are too feeble to resist. When they promise to serve, they aspire to reign ; if they swear allegiance, they watch the opportunity of revolt ; yet they vent their discontent in loud clamours if your doors or your councils are shut against them. Dexterous in mischief, they have never learnt the science of doing good. Odious to earth and heaven, impious to God, seditious among themselves, jealous of their neighbours, inhuman to strangers, they love no one, by no one are they beloved ; and while they wish to inspire fear, they live in base and continual apprehension. They will not submit ; they know not how to govern ; faithless to their superiors, intolerable to their equals, ungrateful to their benefactors, and alike impudent in their demands and their refusals. Lofty in promise, poor in execution, adulation and calumny, perfidy and treason, are the familiar arts of their policy."

It is unthinkable that these were inherited characteristics ; that the Romans in the short space of a few centuries, by progression in evolution, had transformed themselves into effeminate and hysterical degenerates ; nevertheless, appearances at first sight might lead to such a conclusion. Yet, think ; would not the struggles of the English men, women



and children shut up in the Black Hole of Calcutta have seemed just as reprehensible to a spectator who could not see the dungeon walls which surrounded them? Are we not more reasonable to infer that these were symptoms of captivity in an environment rendered hostile by the growth of social injustice, the cause of which was hidden almost completely from the mental purview of the citizens themselves?

The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire was not caused by the influence of Paganism or Christianity, nor by the incursions of Goths, Huns, Normans and Turks. The barbarians only plundered a helpless people imprisoned by the consequences of their ignorant non-observance of the Law of Equality in social custom.

### **The Church Militant.**

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries pestilences swept over Europe. The Black Death and Sweating Sickness carried off nearly half the population of Western Europe. The pressure in the overcrowded insanitary cities was relieved, and the country districts, already sparsely populated, were deserted. The supply of labourers was lessened more quickly than the landowning classes could restrict scope for opportunities by throwing land out of use. In spite of legislation instituted by the ruling profiteers to prevent wages rising, the labourers who survived were able to obtain a more equitable proportion of the total wealth produced. The conditions of life for the masses of the people therefore greatly improved, partly owing to the better distribution of wealth, but also owing more especially to the concomitant increased production under impulsion of better rewarded individual effort.

The easing of the effects of economic injustice was soon reflected in the better credence of the people. New advances were made in scientific knowledge, which led to great discoveries. One of these was the discovery of America, which was to eventuate in another spurt of temporary easement in the nineteenth century. With greater scientific enlightenment came also the desire for greater civil and religious liberty.

Reformers arose, who protested against the black superstition of the Church of Rome and tried to remedy abuses. But the armies of the Church defended by violence what

had been acquired by fraud. All pretence of benevolence was soon brushed aside, and the malevolence of proscriptions, wars, massacres, and the devilries of the Holy Office were revealed in their hideous reality.

Vigorous attempts were made to suppress the Protestants, whose appearance filled with hatred and dread the minds of those who wished to profit by the continued ignorance of the people. Catholic princes openly leagued with the Holy See in the common aim, and many rulers assisted in secret, while making a pretence of being sympathetic to the reformers.

In the effort to support the fabric of superstition which had been erected, hundreds of thousands of unfortunate people were executed in the Netherlands and elsewhere or were killed in battle.

**“The New Presbyter was the Old Priest writ large.”**

But the real bondage was not that of physical and moral violence, which since the time of the early Fathers had developed gradually to meet and restrain the struggling factions of the centuries. Violence is not destroyed by counter-violence, and the Church cannot be redeemed by vengeful slaughter. The real bondage of superstition can only be removed, has only been removed to the partial extent it has, by the greater diffusion of scientific enlightenment among Catholics and Protestants alike.

Until Christians learn that peace cannot be obtained by war, security by menacing their neighbours, goodwill by hatred and happiness by bringing affliction upon others, then murder, robbery, persecution and misery must continue among them.

Behold a Catholic and a Protestant armed to the teeth, each trying to subjugate the other, so as to be able to secure peace and happiness for himself. Neither of them is bad or wicked, human nature is not at fault: it is ignorance only which makes them act in this way.

In place of enlightened guidance, each of them has received a sword, blessed by his blind spiritual leader. It is that they rely upon.

Bravely, inspired as they believe with a high purpose, each thrusts the cold steel into the other's body, in the

hope of thus securing peace and goodwill for himself. And lest the combatants might foresee before it was too late the folly of mutually destroying each other, the priest or pastor, as the case might be, has cheaply promised eternal peace and glory hereafter to his protégé and the everlasting torments of hell to his opponent! Here we have an epitome of the quarrels between the sects of the Church.

Historians are reluctantly compelled to admit that Christians, in the course of their intestine dissensions, have inflicted far greater severities upon each other than they have experienced from the zeal of infidels.

### **The Bankrupt Church.**

The philosophy of Jesus, which was the enduring keystone of Christianity, has been discarded and termed "idealistic nonsense" by so-called Christians. It has been dropped out of its important position, and the fraudulent substitute has not stood the test of time.

Freedom-loving men and women view the fallen ruins with regret, but they have no use for a Church in which justice in the clouds after death only may be preached, and where, instead of a currency based upon the Golden Rule, one of counterfeit charity may be tendered and accepted only.

It is not that there are no real Christians to be found in the Churches, but that anyone in search would not economise time by looking for them there before anywhere else. Disimulation has overtaken assimilation.

The Christology of Paul is known to be a forgery, definitely, because of its failure in the test. The Church may seek to cover her nakedness by drawing about her the bedraggled rags of insane superstition, but she cannot for shame be other than dumb and helpless. How can she advance peace on earth and goodwill towards men while in "irons" for moral bankruptcy?

### **The Hope of True Religion.**

But, while deploring the decrepitude of the Church and the futility of attempting to put new wine in old bottles, it is necessary in justice to remember the economic environment which has been instrumental in bringing about her

discomfiture. Truth still lives, and may be found in an environment in which the shadow is not pursued for the substance.

After a reign of Justice there will be a reign of Benevolence. Then will be revealed to mankind the Kingdom of Heaven upon Earth. The Spiritual Evolution of Man is only possible in Freedom.