

THE CATHOLIC
REVIEW

JAN-
MAR

1915

Dawson's first
published piece.
1916

THE CATHOLIC TRADITION AND THE MODERN STATE.

THE changes that have come over Europe in the last century are too great to be ignored by anyone, but their very greatness and nearness to us prevent their being really understood. They have been admired blindly and enthusiastically as the dawn of a humanitarian millennium or they have been condemned by the traditionalists for undermining authority and order. By both parties, however, the fundamental characteristic of the new age has been misconceived. It is not liberty, but power which is the true note of our modern civilisation. Man has gained infinitely in his control over Nature, but he has lost the control over his own individual life. This may seem a paradox in face of the claims of an age which prides itself above everything on its democracy and liberalism, but the latter really mean only the substitution of a new ideal of social obligation for the old principles of authority and divine right. The executive has perhaps lost much of the arbitrary power that it possessed under the old *régime*, but there is no lightening of the pressure exercised by society as a whole on the individual.

The present war must make clear to everybody the enormous increase of power in the modern State—power not only in the matter of material resources, but also in the complete subordination of the individual to the society.

Under the old *régime* however much people suffered

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from their rulers they kept a power over their own lives which is unknown to-day. The peasant who was tired of being robbed could take service as a hired soldier, the soldier who was dissatisfied with his life could become a religious like St. John of God or St. Ignatius, the noble who was in trouble in his own country could betake himself to the service of another prince; for the nations of Europe were then only provinces of a single great fatherland, Christendom. In the modern State, on the contrary, every man has his allotted place, and when society needs it he must give his life in its service. An official touches the handle of a great machine, and from every corner of an empire millions of men move automatically, with an utter suppression of their own individualities, to the fulfilment of one gigantic task—a task that will bring wounds and death to millions, suffering and privation to all. That is the spectacle we see to-day, in Germany above all, and more imperfectly in the other belligerent countries, and it shows us the real meaning of the changes in Europe as nothing else could do; for it is the direct result both moral and material of the last 100 years of European national organisation and progress. While men were talking of democracy and liberty, there has grown up a vast secular power like nothing that has existed since the Roman Empire. That power is the modern State. It has an influence over men's souls that formerly only religion possessed, and its claims are almost unlimited. Is it possible to think that this power is a legitimate development of the old Christian polity, or is it, as some say, unchristian in principle and a consequence of the apostasy of the modern world? Are Catholics to look on it as a possible friend and ally, or as a persecutor and an enemy?

Let us attempt to answer these questions by tracing back the new order of things to its origins and trying to discover what has been the Christian society of the past.

When the Catholic Church first came into contact with the society of the ancient world, there ensued a great struggle

Possibilities
in
Christendom

Now:
The Machine

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between the religion and the society, which lasted from 300 to 400 years. At first the Church had to live a hidden and "recollected" life. Persecution was not strong enough to crush her, rather by isolating her it preserved her from the great danger of being assimilated by the apparently all-powerful organism of the Roman Empire. Finally the Church was victorious and Christianity become the religion of the State. There follows a period in which all social institutions are recast according to the new faith and rule of life, and on the ruins of the old world a new Christian civilisation is built up. This was the civilisation of the Middle Ages, which has been so variously appraised. Its admirers have so fully realised its embodiment of Christian ideals that they have been apt to hold it up as the one Christian civilisation to which all others must approximate. Its critics have attacked indiscriminately its ideals and its failures to realise them. Some Catholics, like Newman, will attack it on the latter ground, but more often it has been blamed because the critic has a conception of Christianity at variance with the Catholic conception of life that the Middle Ages strove to embody, in however faulty and temporary a shape. To value the Middle Ages justly one must realise that theirs was an immature and youthful civilisation which never reached a complete development, for the modern world belongs to a different tradition and has progressed by a series of revolts against the mediæval tradition. The Middle Ages give us, as it were, a rough sketch of what Christian society might be, but it did not live long enough to realise it.

THE NEW ORDER.

Social change may proceed from two causes :—(1.) Religious. From a change in the social ideal and conception of life. (2.) Economic. From a change in the conditions of life. A primitive people may change radically by becoming Christian; it may also change by becoming an agricultural community instead of a tribe of hunters.

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Now, the changes on which modern society is founded are of both kinds. First, there were the economic and political changes of the 15th and 16th centuries that had been preparing for hundreds of years. The rise of strong national monarchies was the centre and summing up of these. Secondly, there was the discovery of the New World. Thirdly, the recovery of the learning and art of the ancient world and the advance of the science of Nature.

The result was an age of expansion and self-consciousness. Man felt himself to be of age, and gloried in the hitherto unrealised possibilities of his powers and knowledge. He grew impatient of restraint, irreverent towards authority, wishing to prove and to see all things. Hence the temper of Humanism, man entering into his kingdom and turning his eyes away from faith and the supernatural. Hence a reaction from the *secular* mediæval tradition, each nation and race standing on its own ground and vindicating its independence against the rest of Christendom.

If the Church had been in a conquering mood, as she was a thousand years before, all this new expansion of knowledge and power could have been brought into the service of the Christian spirit, and instead of a break with the mediæval tradition there would have been an harmonious, if swift, development, and Christian civilisation would have attained its majority. But, on the contrary, she was then in a weakened condition after an age of schism and under the invasion of the secular spirit. It was the old story—two much lump and too little leaven. And so the revolt from the old tradition became a revolt from the Church. Mediæval civilisation was the result of the marriage of the culture of the Lower Empire to the northern barbarians; when Western Europe in her expansion outgrew that culture, the Northern nations threw off not only the mediæval tradition, but also the Christianity that had come to them with it, and as it was not possible that they should react to their original Paganism they fashioned a new Christianity—a transition

15th + 16th
Centuries:

total
Humanism

Reform — a new Christ.

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religion—founded on private judgment and a new legalism. The Church was no longer an independent organism, but became an aspect of the State, and Christianity was thoroughly socialised and moralised.

In Latin Europe, of course, no such new edition of Christianity was possible, and there the reaction was in the direction of Paganism and Naturalism *sans phrase*. In the 16th century the Christian made a renewed and sustained effort to reconquer the ground that had been lost and to continue the Christian social condition in the altered state of Europe. The Church indeed was reformed and society was re-christianised to a considerable extent. In two of the great national States at least the new order was infused with the Christian spirit, and perhaps the Middle Ages themselves cannot show such remarkable instances of Christian societies as 17th century Quebec and Paraguay; but the work never went beyond social life, the counter-Reformation was unable to conquer either thought or art. It could, it is true, use the art and literature of the time in the service of Catholicism as 17th century Rome shows, but it could not inspire them with its own spirit as it had done in the past. In thought and in science Humanism progressed, though society was still Catholic, and hence the dark and repressive aspects of the Catholicism of that age which are in such contrast to the temper of the mediæval Church. The tremendous strain of dominating society spiritually without intellectual or æsthetic help could not but be exhausting, and it is not altogether fanciful to trace the decline of Spain and Italy at least in part to the effects of this superhuman effort.

After the death of Louis XIV. the counter-Reformation finally collapsed. The destruction of the Society of Jesus made it patent to all. It is in the 18th century that the modern world began. In the first place it is the age of Frederick the Great and Joseph II. The great State becomes all-powerful. It will brook no limits to its authority in religion or in any other matter. It will recognise no end

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but its own advantage.* Consequently the last remains of the Christian commonwealth of mediæval Europe disappear. The supreme violation of natural justice and right between nations is perpetrated by the partition of Poland. Further, in all Catholic countries the rights of the Church are overthrown. As an age of confiscation it rivals or surpasses the 19th century. Everywhere there is a subordination of the Church to the State, a denial of the rights of the Holy See. Gallicanism and Febronianism are everywhere triumphant.

The eighteenth century witnesses a new outburst of Humanism of a definitely anti-Christian kind. The free thought of the Encyclopædists becomes the dominant intellectual force in Europe. The prevalent ideal is to pull down everything and to re-erect an edifice of a new society based on principles of obvious utility. The weapon of ridicule is used against Faith with tremendous effect.

Also there is a new movement of sentimental naturalism, of which Rousseau is the prophet, which at least gives naturalism a hold on the affections and rouses enthusiasm. Finally there comes the Revolution which is inspired by these ideas. It sweeps away all the débris of the old order, its traditions good and bad, and builds up a new society founded on democracy and freedom of thought. In the wars of the Revolution France becomes the crusader of this new order, and in the course of the nineteenth century the same movement, united with the spirit of nationality, makes a triumphant reappearance in country after country on the Continent. This movement still survives as Continental Liberalism. It is of course a mistake to think that this movement was primarily a popular

* Compare the spirit of the true counter-Reformation monarchy as shown, e.g., in the political testament of Charles II. of Spain, "to govern rather by motives of religion than by considerations of State and Policy, preferring the service of God and the Faith to their own advantages." "In order to preserve, maintain, and defend the Catholic Religion his glorious predecessors have employed and even pledged their royal patrimony, preferring the honour and glory of God and of His holy Law to their temporal interests." He recommends his successor "to be very jealous for the Faith and perfectly obedient to the Holy Apostolic See; to live and act always as a Catholic prince." The Bourbons, both in France and Spain, hold an intermediate position which corresponds to the Gallican party in the Church.

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one. Its main strength was always in the bourgeoisie. The extraordinary resistance that the lazzaroni of Naples made to the French army in 1799 shows what a strong hold the old order still had on the populace. Even in France Brittany, La Vendée, and large districts in the centre resisted the Revolution, and wherever there was a strong and independent Catholic peasantry the Revolution was met by force of arms.

When the rulers of the *ancien régime* understood the danger of the new ideas, they also rallied to an interested defence of the tradition that they had done their best to destroy in the eighteenth century. But it was not Talleyrand and Metternich, but the Basques and the Tyrolese who were the real enemies of the new spirit. Owing to the way in which modern history is written few people are aware of the obstinate resistance of the mediæval tradition in various parts of Europe and America, a reaction which has had its heroes (*e.g.*, Garcia Moreno, La Rochejacquelin, Andreas Hofer) no less than the Revolutionary movement. Even on the threshold of the twentieth century the political testament of Don Carlos embodied the mediæval tradition in its most uncompromising form, and this still commands the allegiance of a considerable Spanish party. It is possible that the fight between the Revolution and the partially revived mediæval tradition might not have been altogether unequal if the combatants had been left to themselves. In fact, however, the Revolution received an ally more powerful than itself which had been growing to maturity in Protestant Europe.

The development of the new order in England had been continuous from the sixteenth century, and consequently the revolutions that were inevitable to its progress were not cataclysmic as was the great Revolution in France. The new non-feudal land-owning class, which had attained such power at the Reformation, set itself to conquer political supremacy during the seventeenth century. By 1688 it had succeeded in finally vanquishing the old tradition and the claims of authority by divine right in Church and State, and

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had set up an oligarchic republic under monarchical forms. Thenceforward the energies of the ruling class and the new classes that followed it were devoted not to the destructive work of the contemporary "liberal" movement in France, but in accordance with the national temperament to the practical work of developing the resources of the country in wealth and material prosperity. The freedom that they had vindicated against the Crown was not, as is popularly taught, the freedom of the individual against arbitrary power, for the poor man was better protected under the old order; it was, on the contrary, the *security of the de facto social powers in the nation from interference by a de jure authority*. The dominant interest should not be restricted in its free development by anything but the constraint of a more powerful interest, so that the dominant social forces became ends in themselves and society was freed from the constraint of a distinctive *a priori* policy.

This system had its obvious disadvantages; the poor were at the mercy of the ruling classes, so that the Revolution was the death-knell of the English yeomanry; but in a time of expansion and of new opportunity in industry and trade, it gave a tremendous material advantage to England. English commerce set out to conquer the world, agriculture was placed on a capitalist basis; above all, industry was revolutionised and the age of Iron began. In eighteenth-century England modern capitalism and industrialism were born. Naturally the Whig oligarchy were not able to maintain their rule through all these changes, for as the new interests became strong they also vindicated their claim to free development. First, the American colonies refused to be governed in the interests of the mother country, and with similar traditions to the English started their gigantic development.

Later, the capitalists and industrial magnates claimed a share in the English polity, and after a struggle lasting through a great part of the nineteenth century definitely defeated the agricultural interest. But as the peasants had

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been sacrificed to the landlords, so were the artisans to the manufacturers, who claimed the right to exercise their economic strength to the full. Consequently industrial development went on with the same reckless waste of human material that had marked Roman capitalism in the Iron Age of the Republic, and the mill towns and mining villages in England became a byword through Europe for squalor and misery.

Amidst this growing materialism of social life English Protestantism had made gallant efforts to retain or revive some form of Christianity, but as they could make no effort to convert society and to inspire it with their own spirit all their efforts were doomed to failure. Wesley himself in later life confessed the impossibility of keeping his converts from the spirit of the world. The Methodist he describes, whose regularity of life and probity were helps to money making, was a common character in the England of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. Consequently Protestantism tended more and more to make men conscientious members of the existing society—good citizens—and the supernatural character of religion gradually disappeared.

English Liberalism, which itself owed a great deal to Protestantism, became in the nineteenth century the characteristic mode of thought of industrial England. It was marked by an entire faith in the indefinite progress of material prosperity by industry and trade, and in the complete satisfactoriness of this progress as the aim of human society and the last end of man.

In the nineteenth century, and especially since 1870, all the currents that we have been describing have begun to flow into one another, and to form the majestic river of modern civilisation. To the German Empire belongs the credit of reconciling the Great State with the Industrialism and Capitalism which had been accompanied in England by an almost anarchic individualism, but the German Empire retains something of the old *régime* in its royal and aristocratic hierarchy. The results of the German system are, however,

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being adopted by all the modern great States, even by England and the United States, for the unrestricted individualism of the early nineteenth century could not have continued to develop without bringing with it the break-up of society itself.

— In the same way the intellectual and democratic Liberalism of France, the heir of the spirit of Revolution, has been amalgamated, both on the Continent and in England and the United States, with capitalism and the idea of the great State; and the spirit of Humanism and faith in the possibilities of science have given to the whole complex a culture and almost a religion of its own.

The amalgamation is, however, by no means complete. There remains an opposition between the capitalistic plutocracy and the revolutionary democracy, and also the opposition between Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism. The Socialism which was produced in Germany in the last century made an effort to overcome these inconsistencies; it based itself uncompromisingly on the secularist spirit and on the idea of the great State as the one all-sufficient end of man—a society all-powerful and all-embracing. But Socialism was weakened by the Utopian character of its aims and hopes; it under-estimated the hold of the plutocracy on that system of representative government which had been the great creation of the nineteenth century revolutions, and in its endeavour to capture the legislative machinery it was itself caught in the wheels and rendered harmless. Nevertheless it has had a most powerful influence on the mind of the age, and though the Socialist party itself may be a Samson grinding the corn of the Philistines, the march of events can hardly fail to fulfil its essential idea, whether by the destruction of the plutocracy and the rise of a real democracy which can organise capital and industry for itself, or, as seems most probable in England at present, by the plutocracy converting itself into a bureaucracy and thus making itself a necessary part of the Great State.

individualism
destruct. of
society

humanism
as
religion?

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With regard to the other question of the opposition between Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism we seem, as I write, to be assisting at the dying struggles of the Balance of Power, and it is difficult not to believe that sooner or later the world-civilisation of our age will develop an international organisation capable of being its political embodiment.

Whatever development the future may bring, the character of our civilisation is clear enough even in the present. We are face to face with a society, substantially the same in every State, compared to which the Roman Empire was a bagatelle. In its centralisation, its wealth, its hold over its members, its economic and financial organisation, it is unlike anything the world has ever seen. No wonder that the man who looks only at the exterior believes that our age is incomparable and that its wisdom is the only wisdom for man. No wonder that the will and spirit of this society have become a god whom no man dares to question. What society can dare to defy this world and hope to live? Yet we must believe that the Church will conquer, if we cannot believe that the spirit of this civilisation is the Spirit of Christ and of His Church. It is true that this society does not possess a false religion or false views of the supernatural, as did the ancient world. But it has a negative and even hostile attitude to the supernatural. It will accept and honour a religion which consists in enjoining social duty on men, but it will have nothing of a theory of life which subordinates this world and its prosperity to the next. The present order is an end in itself; what helps the present order is good, what hinders it is bad. That is the substance of the social creed. Consequently the worship of success and of money, which last acquires an almost sacramental importance. Nor is this by any means confined to gross and common minds. It is a creed that can be idealised, and moreover the world will gladly use real virtue and self-sacrifice so long as its great ends are not impeded.

If we are inclined to pessimism the outlook must seem

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dark indeed, for it would seem that if Catholics remain faithful to the spirit of the Church, they will dwindle to a small and persecuted minority. If they retain numbers and worldly power, they will become weakened and subdued by the dominant spirit of society. But we know that God is never nearer His Church than when she seems to men to be most forsaken, and therefore we can go forward in faith, doing what is humanly possible and leaving the rest to the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, unless a miraculous conversion of the spirit of the age takes place, we must expect the Church for a considerable period to occupy somewhat the same position as it did in the Pagan Roman Empire; we must resign ourselves to the prospect of a new age of the catacombs, a period of hidden and perhaps persecuted activity, in which the Church will work once more to convert the world and which we may hope will end, as in the ancient world, with her victory and triumph. Whatever the outward results may be, we cannot doubt that the divine leaven will work. However strong a society may be, the needs of the individual soul exist, and all Nature, much less a great material civilisation, is incapable of satisfying them. We cannot hope that the successful, the powerful, and the wise will turn to the Church, for they are just those who find satisfaction for their souls in the kingdom of this world; but, as from the first, the Kingdom of God will be preached to the poor and the unsatisfied, those for whom the world has no use and those that it uses callously as its slaves. And the more complete is the material triumph of this civilisation the less there will be to hope for, and the greater void will there be in men's souls.

C. DAWSON.