RELIGION AND THE TOTALITARIAN STATE

By CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

One of the most striking features of modern society is the increasing claims of the State on the individual. The sphere of action of the State has grown steadily larger until it now threatens to embrace the whole of human life and to leave nothing whatsoever outside its competence.

As I have written elsewhere, the modern state is daily extending its control over a wider area of social life and is taking over functions that were formerly regarded as the province of independent social units such as the family and the church, or as a sphere for the voluntary activities of private individuals. It is not merely that the state is becoming more centralized, but that society and culture are becoming politicized. In the old days the statesman was responsible for the preservation of internal order and the defence of the state against its enemies. To-day he is called upon to deal more and more with questions of a purely sociological character and he may even be expected to transform the whole structure of society and refashion the cultural

1 Sociology as a Science in Science To-day.
traditions of the people. The abolition of war, the destruction of poverty, the control of the birth-rate, the elimination of the unit—these are questions which the statesmen of the past would no more have dared to meddle with than the course of the seasons or the movements of the stars; yet they are all vital political issues to-day and some of them figure in the agenda of our political parties.

The most important step in this advance was undoubtedly the introduction of universal compulsory education for that put into the hands of the State the power and responsibility of forming the minds of the youth of the nation. But even before this the State on the Continent had made another advance that was almost as important, namely the institution of universal military service. The absence of this in the British Empire and America is one of the main dividing lines between the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and that of the rest of the world. It is a division which cuts across the division between East and West and between Fascist and Communist: for conscription is found equally in Russia and Italy, in Germany and Japan, in Turkey and Holland. And it is a distinction that rests at least to some extent on religious causes. For there can be no doubt that the attitude of the Free Churches, or some of them, would have made it very difficult for any British government to introduce permanent conscription in the nineteenth century, even if circumstances had demanded it.

Thirdly, we have the extension of economic control by the state, which is now perhaps the most important factor of all. It is due in part to Socialism, in part to the inherent needs of a highly organized industrial society, and in part to the humanitarian movement for social reform, which in this country, at least, is responsible for a great deal of modern social legislation.

It is interesting to note the diverse elements and personalities that have contributed to this result. In England we have the influence of an Evangelical individualist like Shaftesbury, alongside of the trade union movement, both currents finally merging in the Parliamentary social reform of the early twentieth century. In Germany we have the influence of the Social Democratic Party as well as the anti-socialist social legislation of Bismarck; and finally in Russia there is the anti-Christian communism of the Soviets and in Italy the anti-communist and anti-liberal corporatism of the Fascists.

I think it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the movement towards state control in every department of life is a universal one and is not to be confused with the political tenets of a party, whether Communist or Fascist. (The essential principle of the Totalitarian State was, in fact, asserted by Liberalism before Fascism was ever heard of.) What is happening to-day is that the movement towards state-control and state-organization has reached a point at which it comes into conflict with the older forms of parliamentary democracy. The vast increase in the numbers of the electorate, the multiplication of political parties and the fundamental character of the points at issue all tend to produce a state of political deadlock which in turn leads parties to look to extra-parliamentary action in order to gain their ends. In practice this may mean general strikes, dictatorships, revolutions and every kind of violence. Nevertheless it rests fundamentally in a perfectly healthy and reasonable desire to put the state and the government of the state above party, and to ensure that the power which has so immense an influence for good or evil on the lives of every citizen shall not be at the mercy of a political clique or the servant of class interests. It is moreover difficult to deny that the old political ideal of individual liberty corresponded to the old ideals of economic individualism and laissez faire, and that the supersession of the latter by state economic control and a planned economy involves some limitation of individual liberty in the political sphere and some increase in the authority of the government.

Now in fact we do find in every state, and not least in our own, such a limitation of freedom and increase of state author-
ity taking place owing to the extension of bureaucratic government. In the Totalitarian State, however, we find in addition to this a new principle of political authority. This is not simply dictatorship. Indeed the pure type of dictatorship is to be found rather in the Spain of Primo de Rivera than in either Russia or Germany. The new type of political authority is the dictatorship of a man but of a party. But it is something very different from the political parties that we know in democratic countries. It is organized in an hierarchical fashion. That is to say, it is based on authority, discipline and subordination. It demands complete obedience and unlimited devotion from its members, who may have to undergo a period of probation before their admission and who may be degraded in rank, or expelled from the party altogether, if they show any signs of disloyalty or inefficiency. In short it resembles a religious or military order rather than a political party of the old type, and it tends to foster the same strong esprit de corps as they do.

There is no doubt that this type of political organization has shown its effectiveness both in the Communist and Fascist States. It is in fact the one element in the Totalitarian State that is an undisputed success.\(^1\) It combines the aristocratic principle of government by a privileged elite with a democratic width in the basis of selection. But at the same time it can be a most formidable instrument of tyranny, for the very strength of its corporate spirit is apt to generate intolerance and fanaticism. Yet on the other hand it may be argued that a Totalitarian State without this element would be

\(^1\) Since this was written events in Germany have shown the existence of a serious conflict between the principle of State authority and that of Party Dictatorship. The Reichswehr is not like the Red Army, the passive instrument of the dominant party, it is a quasi-independent power which recognizes the Nazi Party only in so far as the party recognizes the paramount authority of the State. Thus there is a certain dualism in the present régime in Germany, which has been resolved, in so far as it has been resolved by the subordination of the Party to the State rather than vice versa.
And at the same time, the economic individualism of the Liberal economists was condemned as being inconsistent with Christian morals by religious leaders such as Leo XIII and Bishop von Ketteler of Mainz.

In England Liberalism on the whole had not this religious character. Nevertheless it was far from meeting with the unrestricted approval of religious men. The Oxford Movement, for instance, was definitely opposed to political liberalism, while F. D. Maurice, the leading social thinker in the Church of England, was as outspoken in his condemnation of democracy as in his opposition to economic individualism. In these respects he was the disciple of Coleridge and Carlyle, and though the latter cannot perhaps be regarded as a Christian thinker he certainly exercised a very strong influence on religious thought in nineteenth century England.

I think we may conclude that there is no essential connection between Christianity on the one hand and the parliamentary democracy and economic liberalism of the nineteenth century on the other. Undoubtedly a fusion between the two did take place in the later nineteenth century in England, the age of Gladstonian liberalism, but this was a local and temporary phenomenon which has little bearing on the fundamental character of the forces involved.

Consequently there is no fundamental reason why the passing of parliamentary democracy and economic individualism should be opposed to Christian principles or sentiment. It is at least theoretically possible that the limitation of political and economic freedom by the extension of social control should be actually favourable to the cause of spiritual freedom. In practice, however, we have got to consider the spiritual tendency of the new political forces, before we can decide whether their influence is favourable or hostile to Christianity.

2. Here we must distinguish between the various forms of the Totalitarian State. It is obvious that the Totalitarian State is not a uniform phenomenon. There is obviously not only a difference but an opposition between the Fascist and Communist types. While within Fascism there is a considerable difference in the character and principles of the Fascist regime in its Italian and German forms.

Now in the case of Communism, there is an obvious and apparently irreducible opposition between Communism and Christianity. The Soviet state has gone further to eliminate religion from society than any state that has ever existed. And no doubt it is the spectacle of this vast system of organized secularism that has alarmed Christian opinion more than anything else. We feel that the modern Totalitarian State has a power of control over the lives and thoughts of its members which no ancient state ever possessed and consequently we are doubtful of the power of Christianity to face this new power as it faced its persecutors in the past.

Nevertheless Communism is not simply a form of political organization; it is an economy, a philosophy and a creed. And its hostility to Christianity is due not to its political form, but to the philosophy that lies behind it. Communism, in fact, challenges Christianity on its own ground by offering mankind a rival way of salvation. In the words of a Communist poster: 'Jesus promised the people Paradise after death, but Lenin offers them Paradise on earth'. Consequently the opposition of Communism to Christianity rests not on the Totalitarian character of the Communist state, but on the religious exclusivism of the Communist philosophy, and though these phenomena are not unrelated they are by no means identical. After all, Marx himself was no believer in the Totalitarian State. He believed that Communism involved the 'withering away' of the state and the complete supersession of all forms of political authority. Yet his state-less society, if it could be realized, would be even more anti-religious than the most secularized type of Totalitarian State. It would be, so to speak, the Church of the Godless Triumphant, whereas the Communist state under the Proletarian Dictatorship is only the Godless Church Militant.
THE TOTALITARIAN STATE

The criterion

Hence if we wish to study the Totalitarian State in its essential character, we shall do better to look to Fascism rather than to Communism, for it is Fascism which stands on its own principles and is not merely as with the Communists a vehicle of philosophy and a temporary instrument for carrying out an economic revolution.

Now the Fascist State is not consciously or intentionally hostile to religion. In Italy and Austria it has given a much fuller recognition to the place of religion in national life than the liberal regimes it has replaced. In Italy the agreement between Fascism and Catholicism which resulted in Mussolini's stipulation that the state and of Concordato has always been based on a concept of a Catholic State alone, which is not the case in Germany. The danger is rather that it has a religion of its own which is not that of the Orthodox Church. This religion has not the dogmatic character of the Orthodox creed, it is a fluid and incoherent thing which expresses itself in several different forms. There is the neo-paganism of the movement, a respect for the traditions of the German nation, and there is the Pan-German element, there is the Aryanism, which is characteristic of the race and of the Christian ethics.

At the same time it would be a mistake to suppose that the moral and ethical teachings of the state would be the servant of the national word or the moral and social propaganda. Now it is for us to condemn such a development because we as Englishmen have no political sympathy with

National Socialism is generally regarded in Germany as hostile to Christianity. The coming of the new regime means the abandonment of the religious neutrality of the liberal state, and this cannot but meet with the approval of those who still accept the traditional Lutheran ideal of the relations of Church and State. German Protestants, or at least Lutherans, cannot but sympathize with the objections to this ideal. For in the first place, such a union could only easily come about if the national and consequently the religious question were fundamental rather than an afterthought. In the second place, the relation of the State to the National Church would be fundamentally different from that which existed in earlier centuries. In the past, the Church and State were bound together, because the people were members of both societies, and even when the prince asserted his supremacy in ecclesiastical matters, he did so as a member of the Church which accepted its moral and theological teachings. But the state of things no longer exists in the world today. In Protestant Germany, above all, only a small part of the population consists of practising Christians and there is no reason to suppose that the rest of the nation, if the National Church is to be a national church and give it a privileged position, it will not be because of fear and awe, but because they think that such a church would be a valuable support and education. In other words, the national Church will be the servant of the national state and the organ of its moral and social propaganda.
the Nazi propaganda or with the German type of Totalitarian State. But what would our attitude be towards a similar development which had a different political movement and a different set of ideas behind it? We may not have a Totalitarian State in this country of the same kind that we find in Germany or in Italy. Nevertheless, as I have already pointed out, the same forces that make for governmental control and social uniformity are at work here also and in the U.S.A., and it seems to me highly probable that these forces will result in the formation of a type of Totalitarian State which bears the same relation to Anglo-Saxon political and social traditions, as the Nazi State bears to the traditions of Prussia and Central Europe. Such a state might be nominally Socialist, but it would not be the Socialism of the Third International; it might be Nationalist, but it would not be the militant racial nationalism of the Nazis. Its ideals would probably be humanitarian, democratic and pacific. Nevertheless, it will make the same universal claims as the Totalitarian State in Russia and Germany and it will be equally unwilling to tolerate any division of spiritual allegiance.

What attitude will such a state adopt towards Christianity and the Christian Churches? I do not believe that it will be anti-Christian in the Russian sense, or that it will be inspired by any conscious hostility to religion. On the other hand, it will have very little in common with the old liberal state which claimed to be no more than a policeman and left men free to guide their lives by whatever religious or moral standard they chose to adopt. The new state will be universal and omnipotent. It will mould the mind and guide the life of its citizens from the cradle to the grave. It will not tolerate any interference with its educational functions by any sectarian organization, even though the latter is based on religious convictions. And this is the more serious, since the introduction of psychology into education has made the schoolmaster a spiritual guide as well as a trainer of the mind. In fact it seems as though the school of the future must increasingly usurp the functions that the Church exercised in the past, and that the teaching profession will take the place of the clergy as the spiritual power of the future.

Nor will the state confine its educational activities to the training of the young. It will more and more tend to control public opinion in general by its organs of instruction and propaganda in this country. We have already secured the nationalization and public control of Broadcasting, and I believe the time is not far distant when similar methods will be applied to the control of the Press, and the Cinema. It is obvious that a Totalitarian State, whether of the Fascist or the democratic type, cannot afford to leave so great a power of influencing public opinion in private hands, and the fact that the control of the popular Press and of the film industry is often in unworthy hands gives the state a legitimate excuse to intervene. The whole tendency of modern civilization is, in fact, to concentrate the control of opinion in a few hands. For example, Hollywood to-day forms the taste and influences the thought of millions all over the world. As our civilization becomes more completely mechanized, it becomes easier to control, and the organs of control become more centralized. It is true that these things are not usually regarded as having much relevance to the religious issue. But we may ask ourselves—do people go to the cinema or to church? Does not the cinema take the place that was formerly occupied by church and chapel? Has not Hollywood got a distinct ethic of its own which influences the minds of its audiences? Is this ethic in any sense Christian?

Now the centralized control which will be characteristic of the new state will doubtless stand on a higher moral level than that of Hollywood, but there is no reason to suppose that it will be Christian in any real sense. Its moral standards will no doubt be higher than the commercialized morality of the press and cinema, but they will be essentially secular standards and consequently more akin to the latter than to the traditional Christian ethics of the Church. But whether these standards are high or low, whether they represent the bourgeois idealism of the Rotarians, or the racial idealism of
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religious answer to a religious need. Consequently it often arises from some quarter which the publicists and the leaders of public opinion entirely ignore.

The ancient world in the first century B.C. was in dire need of a religious solution, and the wise men of the age provided one in the religious revival of the Augustan age. But since their solution arose directly from the political situation, it provided merely a political remedy. The true solution came from an entirely unsuspected quarter—from an unknown sect and a despised people. But it arose directly out of the religious situation; it was not an answer to the political needs of the Roman world, but the fulfilment of the hope of Israel. The same principle holds good in every age. Nothing could have been more discouraging than the religious situation in England in the early part of the eighteenth century. It was threatened by the rationalism of the Deists, by the secularism of the Whig state and by popular materialism and the brutalization of the masses. The wise men attempted to find their solution in a rational Christianity purged of enthusiasm which would be indispensable to the state as a bulwark of law and order and morality. Then there arose a prophet in Israel, John Wesley, and the whole situation was altered. The solution of Hoadley and Warburton did not ever gain the respect of those whom it was intended to conciliate, while the solution of Wesley transformed the whole spiritual climate of eighteenth century England. Of course this was not simply the result of Wesley's personal genius. It meant that English religion possessed spiritual resources which the intellectual and ecclesiastical leaders of the age had not discovered and Wesley was the man who released these reserves of spiritual energy.

The essential duty of the Church towards the State and the world is to bear witness to the truth that is in her. If the light is hidden, we cannot blame the world outside for ignoring it. It is of course possible that men may know Christianity and still reject it, but in the great majority of cases the men who follow the new secularist ideals of life and regard

Christianity as discredited are men who have never known it as a living reality, but have been acquainted with it only at second-hand or in distorted forms. Here sectarianism has much to answer for. We can see, for example, from Edmund Gosse's story of his early life how a really sincere and pious Christian can make religion hateful to those he knows best owing to the narrow and unlovely forms with which he identifies it.

Nevertheless sectarianism is by no means solely responsible for the failure of religion in the modern world. An even more widely spread cause is the indifference and apathy which spring from a mechanical and lifeless acceptance of religion as a matter of course. When the practice of religion becomes a matter of social conformity, it is powerless to change the world. Indeed the men who are religious because society expects them to be, will be irreligious for the same reason in a secular society. It is impossible to deny that there has been an immense amount of this social conformity in English religion and the drastic secularization of state and culture will not have been an unmixed evil if it produces in reaction a thorough desecularization of the church and of religion.

It is very noticeable that this process of secularization is most violent in the countries such as Russia where the Church has been most closely associated with the state and where social conformity played the largest part in religion. Of course there are fundamental differences between the type of social conformity that was typical of Russian religion and that which is characteristic of England. The former was conspicuously non-ethical, whereas the latter usually takes the form of an identification of Christianity with social ethics. Nevertheless each of these types is equally compromised by the new situation; neither of them can survive in the atmosphere of the new state. The ethical idealism which was characteristic of nineteenth century culture is passing away with the culture that gave it birth. As Karl Barth has written: 'All that was called Liberty, Justice, Spirit, only a year ago
and for a hundred years farther back, where has it all gone? Now these are all temporal, material, earthly goods. All flesh is as grass. . . . It is harder for us to realize this here in England than for Christians in Germany, just as it was easier for the Russians to realize it than for the Germans. The sun sets later in the West, but it must set at last. The state is steadily annexing all that territory that was formerly the domain of individual freedom; it has already taken more than anyone would have conceived possible a century ago. It has taken economics, it has taken science, it has taken ethics. But there is one thing it can never take, because to quote Karl Barth once more, 'Theology and the Church are the natural frontiers of everything—even of the Totalitarian State.' Only it is necessary that Christians should themselves recognize this frontier: that they should remember that it is not the business of the Church to do the same thing as the State—to build a Kingdom like the other kingdoms of men, only better; nor to create a reign of earthly peace and justice. The Church exists to be the light of the world, and if it fulfills its function, the world is transformed in spite of all the obstacles that human powers place in the way. A secularist culture can only exist, so to speak, in the dark. It is a prison in which the human spirit confines itself when it is shut out of the wider world of reality. But as soon as the light comes, all the elaborate mechanism that has been constructed for living in the dark becomes useless. The recovery of spiritual vision gives man back his spiritual freedom. And hence the freedom of the Church is in the faith of the Church and the freedom of man is in the knowledge of God.

W. B. YEATS AS A REALIST

By STEPHEN SPENDER

W. B. Yeats is an isolated figure in modern writing whose achievements at first seem only to be explained by his extreme individuality. His individuality is emphasized by the romantic line of his development, which is reminiscent of Goethe. He began as the writer of romantic, twilight poetry. Late in life he is now writing his best poetry, inspired partly by contemporary political events, and the lives of his friends. His awareness, his passionate rhythms breaking away completely from the limp early work, remind one of the opening stanzas of Goethe's West-Ostlicher-Divan, written also in a time of European revolution:

Nord und West und Süd zersplittern,
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern:
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten
Patriarchenluft zu kosten!
Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen
Soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen.

The command to escape, excepting into the pride of his own individualism, is not there in Yeats, but like Goethe, he went on writing a romantic poetry until he was drawn into public life. The effect of his public life on his writing was revolutionary.

Yeats's development which at first seems unique is the result of three main influences: the influence of changes in social life during his life and that of his friends; the influence of his interest in magic; the influence of symbolist theories of poetry.

Although he sought very consciously at one time to root his poetry in the popular ballad poetry of Ireland, the chief