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LIBERALISM IN CRISIS

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MAY I say three prefatory sentences about the purpose of this paper? When the invitation to discuss this topic came to me, I should have liked to think that it owed something to my public doubts about Liberalism and my private attachment to liberalism, but I suspected that it owed more to the discussion which followed a paper of two years ago, a discussion in which I touched upon the differences between Liberalism in the English-speaking, and Liberalism in the Latin, world. As this paper is only one of two tonight, I thought that it might be useful if I were to emphasize those aspects of the topic which have received relatively little attention here. I hope, however, that it will appear that "difference" is not "irrelevance"—that because Liberalism with us is not the same thing as Liberalism elsewhere, it does not follow that the collapse of Liberalism elsewhere is *irrelevant* to the crisis of Liberalism among ourselves.

A paper on Liberalism in crisis may begin with a definition of liberalism and a statement of the sense in which liberalism, so defined, is in crisis. In its original English home, liberalism had many sources, chiefly—as I argued before the Historical Association two years ago—aristocratic constitutionalism and religious independency; but in our contemporary world, liberalism is not exclusively English and can hardly be identified with any one of its sources. A genetic approach to it might suggest that it is derived from the idea and institution of property; and we are all familiar with the school which sees it as having been merely the political expression of economic *laissez-faire*, and of the interests of the capitalist *bourgeoisie*. I do not wish to discuss this view at the moment except to notice that it seems to enjoy a greater vogue in North America than in England.¹ Even when we have finished pushing back the beginnings of the industrial revolution to the Renaissance, and the beginnings of the Renaissance to the twelfth century, the fact remains that both our parliaments and our civil rights, in the English-speaking world, are older than anything which can usefully be called modern industrialism or economic *laissez-faire*.

In any case, I suggest that, in the liberal view, the idea of property is itself a deduction from the more fundamental idea of the individual; the idea that "the end of man . . . is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole" and that for this there are two requisites, "freedom, and variety of situations."² This, I take it, has been the classic core of liberalism, and, lest collectivists should scent a defence of *laissez-faire*, I would add that most liberals today would agree with T. H. Green that this does not mean that individuals are free "to do as we like irrespectively of what it is that we like," and that the law

¹For example, in Dr. Becker's *Modern Democracy* (New York, 1941). The more typically English view that "the union of Liberalism with *laissez-faire* was a coincidence in time rather than a congruity in spirit," will be found in Dr. E. Barker's *Reflections on Government* (Oxford, 1942), 186-94.

²J. S. Mill, *On Liberty* (1859).

should "put rather more than less restriction on those liberties of the individual which are a social nuisance."³

I shall use liberalism, then, to cover broadly that attitude of mind which holds "that a society must not be so unified as to abolish vital and valuable differences, nor so extravagantly diversified as to make an intelligently co-ordinated and civilized social life impossible, and that the imposition of a universal plan of life on a society is at once stupid and immoral."⁴

The obvious antithesis of liberalism, so defined, is totalitarianism, and the genesis of totalitarianism has been described as follows⁵:—mediaeval society was made up of a number of interlocking but autonomous "orders"—religious, political, cultural, and economic—with the spiritual order enjoying a primacy, in theory at least, in that the spiritual purpose of life was held to be paramount, and the spiritual order, therefore, to transcend and subsume all others. For the last six centuries, this unity has been steadily dissolving. With the Renaissance, secular culture escaped from the control of one historic organization, the Church, and created an independent order of humanist knowledge; and with the commercial revolution, economic activities escaped from the control of the other historic organization, the State, and created what, roughly, we call the capitalist order. These two independent orders—the freedom of secular enquiry and the techniques of modern capitalism—have largely determined the character of our modern civilization and have enormously increased its resources; but they have also acted as disintegrating forces, and the attempt to re-impose unity on society (by giving to the political order the same sort of primacy which, in the mediaeval period, was enjoyed by the spiritual order) is the thing which we call totalitarianism.⁶

I

If we have defined liberalism and totalitarianism correctly, then two things follow: first, that liberalism is something other than democracy, and

³*Works of T. H. Green* (London, 1908), III, 372. "Freedom . . . of doing what one will with one's own is valuable only as a means to . . . the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to a common good. No one has a right to do what he will with his own in such a way as to contravene this end. It is only through the guarantee which society gives him that he has property at all. . . . This is the true and the only justification of the rights of property."

⁴M. Oakeshott, *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge, 1939), xix.

⁵Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (New York, 1939), chap. I.

⁶This has been the more obvious in the sphere of economics because the attempt to bring the economic order under the control of the community has meant an attempt to extend political control to all aspects of social life; but a similar process has been at work in the field of culture. When the Humanists threw off the control of the Church, they did not reject the mediaeval idea of the freedom of the spiritual power. They simply applied that idea to the freedom of scholarship as directed to the investigation of the natural order . . . i.e., to the world of art and science—and they asked of the devotees of that freedom, a discipline at least as arduous as that of the devotees of the Church. With the growth of popular education at one end of the scale, and of scientific specialization at the other, the unity of the intellectual order has disappeared, to be replaced by the power of the State in popular education, the power of the press, and the world of the intelligentsia. The totalitarian régimes have tried to reimpose unity by the simple—and to us, distasteful—device of denying any autonomy to the intellectual order, and making all men's mental activities subserve the one purpose of a social consolidation imposed from above. Cf. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (London, 1932), chap. XII.

totalitarianism something other than dictatorship; secondly, that if totalitarianism is an attempt to cure certain evils which are said to have sprung from liberalism, then a study of totalitarianism should point us to those weaknesses of liberalism which make the totalitarian remedy seem either necessary or plausible.

It is important to distinguish the issue of liberalism versus totalitarianism from that of democracy versus dictatorship, because I take it that we, in the English-speaking world, are concerned with the question: "Can it happen here?"; and I suggest that if the contemporary régimes which most obviously embody the threat to liberalism are to be treated on the political level, merely as dictatorships, then a study of them has little relevance for us.

Each of the contemporary dictatorships is explicable in terms of national experience, and that experience is not ours. The Bolshevik dictatorship was set up in a Russia in which every great ruler had been a Bolshevik, in the sense that, from time to time, some megalomaniac autocrat had taken the upper layer of Russian society and pushed it violently towards the West in the recurrent attempt to redress Russia's backwardness. The National Socialist dictatorship was set up in a Germany with an authoritarian tradition, a Germany accustomed to identify the State with the Army, and a Germany in which the idea of the "Volksgemeinschaft"—of a Community far transcending the mere juridical form of the State—has a long history. In the same way, we need not take too tragically, I think, the collapse of a particular set of liberal institutions—parliamentary institutions—in countries in which after all (and as has been said by someone—for here I am a picker-up of a half-remembered trifle) those institutions were never much more than copies of an English model in a dubious French translation.⁷

If, on the other hand, the great anti-liberal régimes are regarded as totalitarian communities, facing the same elements of social disintegration as those which confront us, and attempting to re-introduce, through the political window, the transcendent unity which, at the end of the Middle Ages, was expelled through the spiritual door, then it is another matter—a matter in which talk of either democracy or dictatorship is beside the point. The forces which are making for totalitarianism are common to all modern societies which are highly industrialized, and a democracy may be as totalitarian as any other form of polity. It was under the guise of democracy, indeed, in the French Revolution, that totalitarianism first made its appearance. The great safeguard of our liberal freedoms in the English-speaking world has been the pluralistic character of our society.⁸

⁷Just as Mr. Gladstone did not always understand that all those who admired his eloquence did not necessarily agree with him, so Liberals were prone to think that they had captured Europe when they had only dazzled it. They forgot that there are peoples who appear to find their best energies under authority, and others among whom the franchise is an addition to things for sale. Dr. Becker (*Modern Democracy*, 14-15) and Dr. Barker (*Reflections on Government*, part I, chap. II) have both recently restated the material and spiritual assumptions which underly the successful working of liberal democracy. They are large assumptions, and, had we remembered them, we should not, perhaps, have been too surprised that they have not been easily—and everywhere—fulfilled.

⁸"All simple forms of government," said Canning, "are bad." The spirit of England was "a spirit of corporation. Cities, parishes, townships, gilds, professions, trades and callings . . . and the pervading principle of the whole is that of vicinage or neighbourhood."

Replace this pluralism by a collective order, and the results, though democratic, may be no less totalitarian—though, we should hope, less police-ridden—than Bolshevism or Nazism.

I may be dispensed, perhaps, from rehearsing the confusion which arises from our English-speaking habit of identifying liberalism with democracy, because I have dealt with it elsewhere;⁹ but I should like to emphasize the point that because this confusion leads us to mistake the nature of the great anti-liberal régimes, it leads us also to mistake the points in which those régimes differ from ourselves, and so to mistake the peculiar sources of our own strength.

When eighteenth-century liberals spoke of British freedom, they meant *civil* liberties—freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of speech, freedom of worship and association—the liberties which are essential to the Liberal State. They did not mean *political* liberty, the franchise, the democratic state. But because, in our English-speaking world, there was as yet no incompatibility between liberalism and democracy, liberals were able to rear their nineteenth-century structure of political democracy upon the already assured basis of their older civil liberties, and to assume—as did Mill, and as does Dr. Lindsay¹⁰—that the first is an essential extension, and even a guarantee, of the second. Today, we are confronted by popular dictators who get into power by using all the apparatus of political democracy—mass plebiscites and popularly elected assemblies—and then use the power so obtained, to destroy the essential guarantees of *civil* liberty;¹¹ and confronted by this phenomenon, liberals have found the flanks of their defences turned, and their weapons pointing in the wrong direction.¹²

Secondly, to identify liberalism with democracy is to make an assumption which has been largely true of the English-speaking world, but which has been so radically false for other countries that, again, we are likely to lose ourselves in an international smoke screen and to minimize differences which—I shall argue—are important.

Liberalism, in the English-speaking world, developed out of the defence of individual liberties and class franchises *against* the State; whereas Continental democracy began as the *assertion* of the State, unified according to Rousseau's doctrine of the General Will, *against* class privilege.¹³ Democracy entered Western History with the Jacobins who—save in the one matter of the Leader-Principle—anticipated nearly every feature of our contemporary dictatorships, and from the Jacobins onwards, continental democracy has always betrayed a marked totalitarian strain.¹⁴

⁹"Dictatorship and democracy" (*Queen's Quarterly*, XLVIII, no. 2, 1940). It is interesting to notice how Liberals and Marxists were both led to accept a view of the German and Fascist régimes as mere conspiracies; the first, by their inability to believe that a popular régime can be illiberal; the second, by their denial that a popular régime can be nationalist.

¹⁰A. D. Lindsay, *Essentials of Democracy* (London, 1930).

¹¹Sir Alfred Zimmern, *Modern Political Doctrines* (London, 1939), xv-xvii.

¹²Cf. Oakeshott, *Social and Political Doctrines*, 4.

¹³Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 41. See also H. Rauschnig, *The Redemption of Democracy* (New York, 1941), 49-51.

¹⁴It is significant that Dr. Barker who (*Reflections on Government*, 3-5) "protests *ab initio* against this disjunction of the cause of liberalism from that of democracy," notices that it is mainly continental authorities who make the distinction. He himself realizes (139) that the modern dictators in "the origins from which they start and the

Lastly, under this head, I would recall the distinction which was made by Peter Drucker:¹⁵ the distinction between countries in which liberalism has had little *independent* appeal but has only been accepted because it helped to deliver some specific "good," and countries in which it has been accepted for so long that it has become part of the instinctive habit of mind of a people, quite apart from its actual and present content. Drucker points out that the great experience of both Germany and Italy in the nineteenth century—the cause for which sacrifices were endured, and the cause, therefore, about which German and Italian sentiment could gather—was primarily that of national unification, and only secondarily that of liberalism. Liberal reforms were means to the Nationalist end, and liberal assumptions had little *independent* emotional appeal apart from that end. They had to depend, as it were, on their actual substance and promise, and when these last became invalid, they collapsed.¹⁶

One suggests, therefore, that, for our purpose, the real division is not between democracies and dictatorships, but between those countries in which a Community-State has (for reasons which are, in each case, explicable by national experience), made a deliberate break with the liberal tradition, and those countries in which a Community-State is developing gradually and in which the survival of the liberal idea still favours religious and intellectual liberty. The difference is slight in theory, but, fortunately, considerable in practice. For I hold that it is precisely on such margins of difference that men and women live. Germany and Italy may both—by the careless—be called Fascist, but I suspect that it makes a decisive difference to actual persons living in the two countries whether the Fascism be of the German, or the Italian variety. England and Canada are both called democracies, but, to actual Canadians and Englishmen, it makes a profound difference that in Canada democracy rests on the proposition that A is as good as B, while in England it rests on the mutual willingness of A and B to leave each other alone.¹⁷ Totalitarianism, like every other creed, will become a different thing as it is filtered through the different experience and temper of different nations.

methods by which they arrive, can . . . be acclaimed as in some sense democratic," and he really reduces the question to one of terminology when he says (36) that "democracy which rests merely on the will of number, rests merely on force. If we keep the name and the idea of democracy we must find some other basis. . . . From this point of view it is not the people, as a people, that matter. It is not the majority, as a majority, that matters. It is each human being as such." I can only say that I should call this liberalism, not democracy.

¹⁵Peter Drucker, *The End of Economic Man* (New York, 1939), chap. v.

¹⁶Compare Germany and Italy, in this respect, with England, where the national unity had been so hammered out by the sixteenth century that we have been able to take it for granted ever since; with the result that our emotions have been free to gather about the later struggle for our civil liberties—about our freedoms and not about our unity. Drucker's point will seem even more cogent if we remember that the struggle for our civil liberties not only came *after* the national unity had been assured, but also came *before* the stresses which arose from the industrial revolution, so that English liberals were not called upon (as were liberals in Russia and in Spain), at one and the same time, to carry through the transition from absolutism to constitutionalism, and also to meet the demand for economic democracy. There is our own case in Canada, where social reform has to reckon with the fact that civil liberty is established, but national unity is not.

¹⁷Cf. L. B. Namier, *Conflicts* (London, 1942), 186-96.

II

Assuming then, that our concern is with totalitarianism and not merely with dictatorship; that talk of democracy is irrelevant because democracy can itself be totalitarian; and that totalitarianism has different backgrounds in different countries; we still find three explanations of the decline of Liberalism which—because they do not confine themselves to one country but are international in character—would imply that “it could happen here.”

There are, first, those who equate liberalism with capitalism, and who say that these two rose together and are now falling together.¹⁸ Liberalism, they argue, left two legacies; on the economic side, free-trade capitalism; on the political side, universal suffrage. In the nineteenth century, these two forces could work in harmony, because it was an age of expansion, which meant that the Many were able to use their votes to extract social benefits from the Capitalist State without subjecting it to unbearable strain. Capitalism multiplied wealth, and the masses used the political power conferred on them by the vote, to milk the system of a share of that wealth. The political consequence of Liberalism, universal suffrage, was thus used to redress the balance which had been tilted against the small man by the economic consequence of Liberalism, free-trade capitalism. In short, the vote paid its way. Today, in countries in which there is less and less wealth to be shared, there are obvious limits to the benefits which can be extracted from the Liberal-Capitalist State without destroying both its liberal and its capitalistic character, and for the resultant drift towards state control, the Liberals have no remedy.

Secondly, and complementary to this view that Liberalism *should* give way to socialism, there is the Fascist argument that Liberalism *cannot do other* than develop, first into democracy, and then into socialism. Alfredo Rocco,¹⁹ for example, argues that, having once declared that the goal of society is the welfare and happiness of individuals, Liberals *must* be led on, first, by logic, to admit all individuals to a share in government (democracy), and then, by the pressure of modern industrial conditions, to undertake to organize economic society (socialism). Liberalism begins by limiting the privileges of minorities, but it goes on inevitably to admit the positive rights of majorities. Once give the vote to men who have no property, and you give them the right to share in the benefits distributed by the State. This may be necessary in the interests of social justice, but it ends by destroying Liberalism; for as the State is increasingly called on to distribute largesse to the voters, it can do so only by interfering, to an increasing degree, with the ownership or control of wealth, which means that as the demands of the propertyless increase, so the nature of the steps which even the non-socialist State must take, become increasingly socialistic.

The third explanation of the decline of Liberalism is Christian.²⁰ Christopher Dawson, for example, traces the decline as follows:²¹ Europe's first experience with mass-democracy in the French Revolution was so

¹⁸Cf. L. Dennis, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (New York, 1940).

¹⁹Minister of Justice in the Government of Italy. Speech of August 30, 1925, printed in *International Conciliation*, no. 223 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York).

²⁰E.g. Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion* (London, 1937), and *Religion and the Modern State* (London, 1938).

²¹Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, chap. III.

shocking that the post-Revolutionary period began with a double reaction. Genuine Liberals, men such as Royer-Collard, de Tocqueville, Benjamin Constant, recoiled from Jacobin totalitarianism and did all that they could to limit the power of the community as against the individual. For example, while they were hostile to the Church as an embodiment of authority, they valued it as a "separatist" power. They valued it, that is to say, for the same reasons for which the Jacobins had attacked it; because it represented—as a genuine religious body must always represent—a claim to maintain a way of life independent of the State, and because it was, in their view, therefore, a refuge for the individual conscience against totalitarianism. At the same time, the Romantics (for example Coleridge—now, in my opinion, too much neglected) were in reaction not only against the totalitarianism of the revolution but also against the rationalism which was supposed to have produced it, and were looking back towards the mediaeval idea of the State as the servant of the spiritual order. The Romantic movement, however, ran foul of the rationalism of the Utilitarians and of their middle-class supporters, before whom there was opening the prosperity which was promised by *laissez-faire*; and out of the two movements, Liberal and Romantic, there grew the nineteenth-century compromise: individual freedom in economics and religion, stiffened by a quasi-moral faith in progress.

This compromise, Dawson argues, carried the seed of its own destruction. Liberalism succeeded in treating the State merely as the servant of the community, but the Romantics failed to make it the servant of the spiritual power. In practice, it was left free to become the servant of particular material interests, and the fact that, in our time, dissatisfaction with the operation of those interests has compelled the State to interfere in the economic field, makes it more important that the independence of the remaining autonomous orders, the religious and the intellectual, should be safeguarded. Both religion and culture, however, have paid for their freedom from State interference by becoming increasingly divorced from social reality, and Dawson finds them now too devitalized to offer a citadel for the defence of the individual. When the Liberal said that religion was a private matter, he meant that it was important, since, to him, the things of private life were higher than those of the State. When the modern Democrat says the same thing, he means that religion is supremely unimportant.

It is argued, further, that the fact that totalitarianism is an attempt to reimpose unity on society by putting an end to that independence which has been enjoyed by both the economic order and the intellectual order for the last four hundred years, leads us straight to the two points in which *modern* Liberalism has been vulnerable: its identification with the idea of a pre-established economic harmony—what has been called "the plausible ethics of productivity"—, and its association with an optimistic "perfectibilism."

The rational basis of liberalism was Descartes' claim that "there is nothing so far removed from our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it, provided only that we refrain from accepting the false for the true, and always preserve in our thinking that order which is necessary for the deduction of one truth from another": and I suppose that, with due emphasis upon the "provided only," some such faith in the power of human

reason sustains all of us in this room. With the eighteenth century, however, rationalism slipped into "perfectibilism," into the belief that Man is naturally good and that his history, therefore, should, and can—if only certain wicked minorities, who are somehow held to be exempt from this natural goodness, can be stopped from perverting it—be one of inevitable and automatic progress towards perfection.²² It slipped, that is, into a creed which, inasmuch as it flies in the face of both history and religion, was plainly *irrational*.

The socialists, of course, have been in revolt against Liberal economics for over a century, but they kept the Liberal perfectibilism and added it to their own doctrine of the class war. As early as the 1830's they were identifying "the people" (held, by definition, to be naturally good) with "the plebs," with the "masses" as against "the classes";²³ and whatever may have been the doctrine of socialist thinkers, this has been the emotional driving force of popular socialism ever since. "Thou hast put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the humble and meek."

This cult of perfectibilism, it is argued, has led to totalitarianism in two ways: first, the disillusioned are always likely to despair too much, and the sharp reminder, in our time, of the presence of evil in the world,²⁴ has thrown our perfectibilist civilization off its balance as it would not have discountenanced a civilization which had remembered that ages of verifiable advance may carry in themselves the seed of ugly lapses, so that there is nothing inevitable and automatic about progress.²⁵ Men who had been taught that reason supplied a basis for belief in automatic progress, are inclined, now that progress is arrested, to deny Reason; and what should be a healthy retreat from perfectibilism has become a flight from Reason itself. That, in turn, means a decline in respect for the individual, "for it is not in the community . . . that reason is enthroned, but in single minds."²⁶

Secondly, it is argued that to separate liberalism from Christianity was to divorce it from its roots. The "credo" of liberalism, the essential dignity and worth of the individual, is not a fact of experience but a dogma of religion. Christianity teaches that men are equal in the sight of God, but we cannot deduce the equality of men from the course of their history. Christianity claims liberty for men, conceived as being made, however imperfectly, in the image of their Maker, but if Man be considered merely as Man, the use which he makes of his liberty is such that, on any secular grounds, there must always be a strong short-term case for taking it away from him; and one reason why I think it worth while to discuss our topic tonight is that 70 per cent of the young men whom I meet accept that case.

²²Cf. I. Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (New York, 1924).

²³Lowes Dickenson, *Revolution and Reaction in Modern France* (London, 1892), chap. IV.

²⁴Now that its "prevalence and obtrusiveness" have been recognized by Dr. C. E. M. Joad, Evil may perhaps be said "to have arrived?" See his palinode, *God and Evil* (London, 1943).

²⁵Cf. Lord David Cecil, "True and False Values" (*Fortnightly*, London, March, 1940).

²⁶W. James, "The Decline of Liberalism" (*Nineteenth Century and After*, CXXX, no. 778, 1941).

III

These three theories are all advanced as being international in scope. It remains to ask whether they have any value when applied on our British "margin of difference"; and it seems to me that in this matter "Know thyself" must also be among the commandments. What has been done in Russia or in Germany is nothing to the point. Our problem is "how to transform the mechanized, dehumanized mass population of an industrialized State into a true community with a common ethos and a common faith."²⁷ Russia has not faced this problem. She has, so far, been mechanizing herself, and doing so in a way which has been as prodigal of her human resources as we in North America were prodigal of our natural resources. She is not yet facing the further problem "of how an already mechanized society is to be physically revitalized and morally reinvigorated." The National Socialists have had to face that problem, but inasmuch as the methods which they have used have been those of mass propaganda (where they have not been those of force) they are, from the liberal point of view, using Satan to cast out sin. We have to find a solution which is consonant with our own character.

The point is important because there is a tendency—too many *émigrés* from the continent have done us a disservice by strengthening that tendency—to import into our affairs the exclusiveness of continental "Right" and "Left" (forgetting that we have never known a Right which was exclusively royalist or clerical, nor a Left exclusively anti-Christian or proletarian), and to discuss our problem in terms of the abstractions of international democracy (forgetting that our British freedoms have their own distinctive roots).²⁸

If we resist this tendency, we can count stout assets.²⁹ Our parliamentary system was not borrowed, but has grown in answer to seven hundred years of changing national needs. It is, by nature, non-totalitarian, both of its elements, both crown and parliament, being limited in character. Our parties have never been the organs of unbending orthodoxies, bent on mutual proscription;³⁰ and if they have represented the shifting social and economic elements in our societies, they have only done so to a very incomplete degree. Our tradition has been to leave whole fields of the national life outside the range of State activity and even where the State has begun, of late, to encroach upon those fields, "the State" has meant the Civil Service, whose training until very recently (though this, perhaps, is less true of Canada than of England) has been humanist rather than political. Lastly, our "left" still trails some reminiscences of the Christian tradition; can still speak of human dignity and liberty, as against order, security, and management.

If we keep these assets in mind, it may still seem that the Fascist determinism, which sees Liberalism as unable to help itself, holds good for

²⁷Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 80.

²⁸Cf. the analysis of the peculiar danger inherent in the ambiguous semi-Marxist, semi-democratic position of a portion of the Left in English-speaking countries, in Barker, *Reflections on Government*, part II, chap. VI.

²⁹Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 13-14, 38-40.

³⁰It is three hundred years since the iron phrases clanged about the head of Strafford—"the great apostate," "fallen archangel," "stone dead hath no fellow"—and even in our seventeenth century, there was one to say "Yet are our opponents Englishmen; I would not have them whipped into their senses."

us in so far as it embodies the probability that in the sense in which Liberalism was applied in mid-nineteenth century England—as a matter of widening the franchise, extending the area of the “political people,” and opening up to the many what had been reserved for the few—in this sense, Liberalism is probably condemned, as Metternich foresaw, to act as a forerunner, blazing the road for more radical movements which, when their hour has come, dismiss it with a brutal “ôte- toi que je m’y mette.”³¹

Similarly, the socialist theory of the decline of liberalism would seem to embody the truth that unemployment is a test case, with us as elsewhere; and that if our Liberal theory of the nineteenth century is to be valid for more than an *élite*, it requires reasonable equality of opportunity for its basis. Whether that should be taken as a reason for supplying the basis, or as a reason for destroying the Liberalism, seems to be a matter in which our “margin of difference” must count.

For granting the Fascist-Socialist argument that Liberalism is fated to pass into democracy, need it, with us, pass into illiberal democracy? Those who see liberalism as being bound up with capitalism, and as being, therefore, about to disappear, say that man’s social system is determined by his methods of production. If that is so, a society devoted to the production of plenty seems likely to be hierarchic, because large-scale production is a hierarchic matter. Under the capitalist system, that hierarchy has been made tolerable, partly by such freedom of vocational choice as existed, and partly, by the fact that economic and political power were not in the same hands. Put the means of production in the hands of the political power, and that safeguard goes. Would it not seem, then, that the more things are collectivized—i.e., the more Liberalism disappears in the economic sphere—the more vital become our liberties at common law? The more functions are controlled by government, the graver the need for *habeas corpus*, since without that antiseptic, collectivism seems likely to slip into tyranny; and it is surely not unimportant that our civil liberties—what Coke called “somewhat fundamental”—are older with us, and nearer to our daily lives, than any political democracy?

So far as we are concerned, the real danger in the transition from Liberalism to democracy seems to lie in the fact that democracy has not yet developed its own ethic. Without ever formulating the fact into a theory, the enfranchised classes in our nineteenth century did tacitly act upon the assumption that the Liberal State was theirs, that they were its beneficiaries, and that they were under an obligation, therefore, to make it work; and the vast amount of free and unpaid public activity which was so characteristic of our Victorian period was, in effect, a lubricating oil for the machinery of a Liberal State which, otherwise, would have borne too strong a stamp of what Southey called the “cool calculating inhumanity of laissez-faire.” In this respect, it may seem that we are running a race against time, and that it is a question whether the forces which are so abstractedly analysed by Fascists and Socialist will smother our liberalism before our democracy

³¹Liberal prophesy, in this matter, was not happy: John Russell finding a mystic finality in the proposed franchise of 1866; Durham imagining that the Mother Country could part with everything else but retain control of lands and external relations; Morley declaring that if it could be said that his Indian reforms would lead to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, “he would have nothing at all to do with it.”

has realized—as the middle class realized before it—that the beneficiaries of a régime cannot be absolved from responsibility for its good governance. At present, the two classes most characteristic of industrial society, the “workers” and the “salaried technicians,” still think of government as the concern of “Them” and not of “Us.”

IV

It is partly because Christianity insists that material organization is no substitute for moral order—which is one way of expressing this truth that no constitutional machinery will work unless there is a sufficiently wide-spread conviction that it is important that it *should* work—that I think that the Christian criticism of Liberalism is the most fundamental of the three upon which I have touched. It does appear to be sound as history. The disappearance of the unity which society once derived from a belief in its spiritual purpose—a belief not intellectually apprehended by everyone of course, but assumed in the diffused consciousness of men—did produce a period of what may be called anarchy in the cultural and economic activities of the community. That anarchy was richly productive, but it had less desirable features which were masked for a time by the myth of a pre-established economic harmony and by the myth of human perfectibility, and now that both those myths are exploded, men have taken refuge in another secular religion, the cult of the totalitarian state.

It seems to me, secondly, that the Christian criticism goes to the root of the decline of Liberalism when it attacks perfectibilism.³² Burckhardt prophesied that men who had ceased to believe in “Principles” would soon be found believing in “Leaders,” and so long as perfectibilists ignore the presence of evil in the world, the sequence of over-optimism—disillusionment—despair, seems likely to repeat itself, and likely—whenever it does repeat itself—to be dangerous to liberalism. Once the presence of evil is admitted, we can get on with our liberal task of reducing it to amounts which are spiritually and socially assimilable.

For those who grow restive at the contemporary mention of religion, I should make three caveats. There is no question, of course, of subordinating the State to the Church. Dr. Feiling reminds us that searching the Scriptures half-ruined us in the seventeenth century, and that it is difficult to argue that the New Testament enjoins any particular polity. But he reminds us also that the old alliance of Church and State had its kernel in the State’s recognition of the moralities which were taught by religion; that, there is “a real connection between elemental conscience and external political arrangement; and that, in the last resort, there are moral principles in politics which “sooner or later put forth their tested power.”³³

³²We tend to forget how dominant the perfectibilist myth has been. To every problem in the world there is some superficial solution which, in the last analysis, rests on that myth. Hence, in foreign affairs, the assumption that wars are merely “the fruits of the mistakes of kings and their ministers,” and that “once let the people rule, and they will only will such wars as are just;” hence, in home affairs, the side-tracking of real reform by a teaching which idealizes the have-nots; by the dream of a right-minded proletariat which is assumed, *en masse*, to be superior to those whom it would replace, not only in governmental capacity but also in disinterested devotion.

³³K. Feiling, *What is Conservatism?* (London, 1930).

There can be no question, secondly, of using Christianity as a kind of tonic for a sick society. That would be heresy. It would also be self-defeating, since it would merely "heighten the amount of moral tension without increasing the sources of spiritual vitality."³⁴ Church and State have each their own formal principle, without which they would cease to be themselves, and one cannot ask "sincere men to adopt . . . a religious faith on the grounds of its fruits in earthly politics."³⁵

Thirdly, it must be said that this is not a proposal to exorcise economic problems by waving spiritual banners. To quote Feiling again, "it is impossible to generalize about spiritual values below a certain level of subsistence."³⁶ Fortunately, we are not compelled to choose between alternatives. The Christian says that reformers pay too much attention to economics and too little to original sin. The socialist could reply (or he could, if he were not a perfectibilist) that original sin "makes some men erect their urgent needs into absolute values and other men believe that their . . . control over others is in the order of nature." He could reply that if men pay too much attention to economics, it is because the present economic order is false to its essential purpose, and that the economics of our democracy "are really a form of moral government" in the guise of an economic mechanism. Christian critics of modern Liberalism, therefore, are not looking to some fantastic "extension of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount to the publicly organized spheres of life";³⁷ but if we believe with Burke, that "never did nature say one thing and wisdom another," if we believe as rationalists that nature works by law and that her law, in the long run, is reasonably ascertainable, then we may believe that it is the business of religion "to discern the regulating principle of the natural and social life of man . . . and to declare where the Natural Law is violated and can be restored in the historical order." Unless it be stiffened by such a religion, it is difficult to be very hopeful about liberalism—considered as a doctrine of the sanctity of the human person. For if only this world be considered, Man appears too often—when the winds arise—as seeking safety in the colour of the Herd.

³⁴Dawson, *Beyond Politics*, 21.

³⁵James, "The Decline of Liberalism."

³⁶The Church of which Elizabeth Tudor was Supreme Governor asserted that "They that are snared and entangled in the utter lack of things needful for the body cannot set their minds upon Thee as they ought to do. . ." (quoted in H. G. Wood, *Christianity and Civilization*, Cambridge, 1942).

³⁷V. A. Demant, "The Importance of Christopher Dawson" (*Nineteenth Century and After*, CXXIX, 1941, 66).