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CONCERNING MAN AND HIS REMAKING*

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I.

WHAT is Man? This is the question of the hour, as it is the question of the ages. The whole subject of man exercises in our time a strange fascination. What is still more interesting, the question, as now formulated and discussed, has something very much more than the antique academic flavor and the old romantic sound. For the plain truth is, as Dr. Carrel has pointed out in his "Man the Unknown," that Man is colossally ignorant of himself. And certainly reasons have multiplied why he should take stock of himself and his future.

The new interest in man and human nature is essentially practical in character. It arises to a very large extent out of a feeling that man has failed. He has been a disappointment; the Lord of Creation has suddenly taken on many of the features of the beasts of the field. We are living at a moment in history when man can no longer be taken for granted.

Among those specially interested in man from this practical viewpoint are the psychologists and the politicians. The new psychology, so-called, has unveiled dismal and sinister depths in human nature. Man can no longer flee from reality into the romantic refuge of his own heart; for the

human heart has become a house of horrors in whose murky recesses man cannot erect for his solace either a shrine or a citadel. Rather, must he again set out on pilgrimage and flee from himself as from the City of Destruction. Outwardly man is unseated; inwardly he is divided; in the abyss of his being he is uprooted. In the meantime, the psycho-analyst has begun to supplant the Christian minister—shame that it should be so!—in the supreme task of the cure of souls.

The politician has quite another interest in man. His aim is not to cure man, but to subdue him. Men like Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin and others of the dictator ilk have an uncanny insight into human nature. They are among the world's greatest psychologists. Aware of the anarchy and the chaos looming up in their respective countries, they laid themselves out to explore the weaknesses of the human soul in order to be able to dominate man and make him, individually and collectively, the servant of their whims and political caprices.

This leads us to a very important consideration. One of the chief differences between the intellectual climate of some preceding generations and our own lies in this: For centuries the most representative minds were engaged in the task of dominating nature, exploring its hidden resources, ascertaining its laws, harnessing those laws to the desires of men; in

* The first address of a series at the Autumn Alumni Conference of which the second and third dealt with the themes "God and God-Centered Living" and "Jesus Christ the Redeemer of Men."

our time they are engaged in the task of dominating man. Those new political systems which tend increasingly to go around the world are mobilizing their insight and their energy to dominate man and to remake him after their likeness. With much reason has that distinguished Russian philosopher, Berdyaev, spoken of the "Fate of Man," because man has suddenly passed from being the Lord of Creation, whose rights were undisputed, to being a mere serf, bereft of individual rights.

We see this particularly in the new education now prevailing in Communist and Fascist states. The education of the totalitarian state takes man and puts him in a cultural straight-jacket. The great battleground of today has thus become the soul of the child. The omnipotent state, claiming the attributes of deity, conscripts human personality, body, soul, and spirit. The official doctrines on blood and race, on life and duty, on God and the State are handed down to schools and universities. A man's soul is no longer his own, nor does it belong to God; it belongs to a state, presided over by a superman, which moulds it after the likeness of a political pattern. The anthropological question, therefore, is the most relevant question in the life of our time. Man himself is, after all, the real problem of contemporary civilization. "We have blamed our misfortunes on the bankers," said a recent writer, "on Wall Street, on the Republicans, on the Democrats, on the delinquency of foreign debtors, on the rich, on technology and overproduction—in fact, upon everything and everyone except ourselves, our own qualities and the selfishness which has governed individuals of low as well as of high state."

Now that people have become serious and concerned about man the Bible begins to take on fresh significance. Said one thinker recently, "While it is true that modern science has destroyed utterly many of our old conceptions about na-

ture, the keenest and truest insights are confirming the Biblical view of man, and they show that the greatest textbook ever written on human personality, on those elements that constitute character, and how true personality can be formed is the Bible." The old Book thus assumes a neo-modern character. In dealing with the problem of man in the atmosphere and background of Biblical thought, I do not propose to elaborate a full Biblical view of man, nor to say what I do say in technical theological language. I am as much interested in getting under the skin of theology as I am in getting under the skin of man.

II.

The first impression that comes to us as we read the Bible reflectively is an overwhelming awareness of the *meanness* of Man. I use the word "meanness" both in its original physical meaning and in its derived moral meaning. Man's meanness is, of course, bound up with his mortality. Let us hush our spirits a moment and listen to how the Bible describes the meanness of mortals in the background of the Everlasting. Their life is brief as the motion of a weaver's shuttle, unreal as a dream, fleeting as a shadow, frail as the grass. The rhythm of Biblical thought on the meanness of mortal man moves between two magnitudes: the littleness of time and the greatness of eternity. Empires and individuals pass away and are forgotten. In the palaces of Babylon, the glory of Kingdoms, wild beasts of the desert shall lie (Isaiah 13:19, 21). Perpetual silence shall enter the halls of imperial revelry. In true Biblical vein Wordsworth presages the day when a visitor from afar will stand on London Bridge and gaze at the ruins of St. Paul. Equally Biblical is the strain of Carlyle's "Stanza":

"What is man? a foolish baby,
Vainly strives and fights and frets;
Demanding all, deserving nothing;
One small grave is what he gets."

All the glory of man is as the flower of the field, whether it be the beauty of a human face or the splendor of a kingdom. Emperor and beggar occupy much the same amount of earth at last. The very existence of some dynasties has become known to history only by tablets casually discovered in the soil.

There is also in man a moral meanness. He is "mean" in the full connotation of the American term. Man is bad; he is a sinner. The depths of his meanness are being unveiled in a ghastly way in individual and social life in these times. What a contemporary ring there is about these old Biblical judgments on mankind! "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, . . . And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, . . ." (Genesis 6:5-6). And this other, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it" (Isaiah 1:6).

Jesus had no illusions about man. He "knew what was in man," we are told. What a tremendous arraignment of sinful human nature, and how true to present day fact, is Paul's prologue to his letter to the Romans.

How wretched does modern man appear when we think of those abysmal chasms in the life of today which are haunted by the demons of fear and hate, separating individuals and nations from one another! How many fair children of the Christian spirit,—religious freedom and reverence for personality, for example,—we thought would remain inviolate forever. And think of the fact that more people in this country are suffering from nervous and mental ailments, involving the terrible reality of divided selves, than are suffering from physical ills. This indicates the extent to which humanity is in pain. Consider what a single nervous disorder or mental breakdown means in the creation of misery.

But if human meanness is real, equally

real is the majesty of man. Man, as God's creature, made in His image, is a majestic being intellectually and morally. No one has portrayed so strikingly the majesty of man as a thinking being as has Pascal. More and more is Pascal, that marvelous Frenchman, coming into his own, and the more we study him in evangelical circles the better. "Man is but a reed," says Pascal, "the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this. All our dignity consists, then, in thought."

There is no need, therefore, to suffer from "astronomical intimidation." The man who weighs the stars in the scales of his calculation and measures their mighty bulk and plots out their rhythmic motions is infinitely greater than the universe, which is the object of his thought.

And what shall we say of man's moral grandeur, even of the "natural man," as we know him? His capacity to be loyal to a cause, even at the expense of suffering, sets him in the frame-work of the morally great. I think of that Chinese girl who was brought before a military tribunal some years ago and condemned to death. She listened calmly to her sentence and then with serene eye she scanned her judges one after another. "Gentlemen, I am dying for a cause," said she, "What are you living for?"

There are millions of young people today who are living and dying for a cause. There is coming back into the vocabulary of our time and of our country, that tremendous word "commitment." Men are realizing that it is impossible for human beings to live upon freedom that is purely negative. True freedom is freedom in and

for something. It is not simply a cutting loose from trammels. The passion for the new freedom embarrasses many educators and religious leaders. Young people begin to demand authority. They look around for a personality that will serve them as a leader and for a great cause to hurl their lives into.

You may dispute the rightness of the Fascist ideal or of the Communist ideal but there is something you cannot dispute: namely, that there is moral grandeur in both and that the devotees of these new faiths fling themselves with glorious abandon upon the trail and into the arms of their leaders. If this measureless loyalty is not being reproduced in Christian ranks today Christianity is on a lower level morally than either National Socialism or Communism.

Of course, everything depends upon the cause to which people commit themselves. You can throw yourself with utter abandon into the arms of the devil, and that is what youth is going to do if the Christian Church does not make more appeal to them than it is doing today. My point is simply this. A capacity for loyalty involving self-sacrifice is native to human nature. Whether God or the devil is the object of loyalty, the moral grandeur of human nature stands out just the same. That is the terrible truth. Obviously, the Christian task consists in securing that man become morally great in loyalty to God himself and not in loyalty to God's rivals; for man is truly man only when he lives in God and for God, when God is both the source and the goal of his life. But ere this can happen and in order that it may happen, man must be remade.

III.

It is certainly a striking thing that the two new religions of our time set out, both of them, to change man in the most radical way. Nietzsche insistently maintained that man was a being who must be surpassed, and Marx that the real prob-

lem was not to think the world but to change it. Still more insistent was Jesus Christ that man must be reborn. "Ye must be born again." In the closing section of the New Testament speaks the exalted Christ saying, "Behold I make all things new."

What does it mean for a human being to be remade? What is the nature and extent of change that takes place within him? Leaving to a subsequent address a discussion of the means whereby this great change is brought about, we may say that the remaking of man in a Christian sense involves two things: a change of mind and a change of heart. Man needs to have new thoughts and new affections, insights that are true and attitudes that correspond to the reality he apprehends. The first great need of man is to *have right thoughts about God and life.*

You remember that classic encounter between the Lord and Peter? Peter had just received from Jesus' lips the greatest of all commendations. The disciple had said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And his Lord had replied, "Thou art Peter; on this rock shall I build my church." A little later when Jesus began to bring before Peter and the rest that His approaching death on the cross was linked up with His destiny and was part of His work as the Redeemer of men, such a conception did not fit into Peter's all too human thoughts. "Nonsense, nonsense, Lord," he said in effect, "That simply cannot be." Jesus turned around sharply and, as it is rendered in the King James Version, said "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou savorest not the things that be of God but those that be of men." (Matt. 16:23.) Moffatt's translation gets closest to the heart of the Greek, "Your outlook is not God's, but man's." As if to say, "You are all too human, Peter, in your thinking." Or, as Weymouth puts it, "You are thinking like a man and not like God."

What that means is simply this. One of the essential elements of true life is to have God's thoughts, to think like God, to see things from His perspective, through His eyes, in terms of His revelation, to possess a world view and a sense of values that conform with the mind of God as that mind has been revealed in Jesus Christ. And so we come to consider the remaking of man's mind.

Let me suggest that man in his outlook upon life has been guilty and continues to be guilty of two outstanding intellectual sins. First, he has got a totally erroneous view as to what constitutes life, and, second, he has an equally erroneous view as to his own status in the universe. In the first place man has always believed and continues to believe that life consists in possessing things. The primary and most damning sin of the mind consists in believing that the essence of life consists in having something or other, bread, money, health, a personality, culture, religion. Now it is true, of course, that a certain number of things are necessary for man if he is to live a normal human life. The trouble is that we have an inborn tendency to live *for* those things which we ought only to live *by*. To live for bread or health or wealth or culture is sin. What shall it profit a man should he gain all of these as his possession and lose his own soul? We only begin to live when we accept the challenge of God to live on a spiritual plane, by Him and for Him. Only then are we able to fulfill our destiny as men. "Man shall not live by bread alone," that is to say by anything that is necessary for the sustaining of a mere natural existence. He shall live only by the word of God that meets him and forces him to a decision as to whether he shall live for the enjoyment of things or for the glory of God and in order that God may become visible through him.

A difficulty may seem to arise when we dispute the fact that to acquire a person-

ality or cultivate a religion is the true end of life. Yet a person may fulfill the whole triangle of conditions necessary to have a full orb'd personality and be the most icy and sterile of individuals, a beautifully chiselled pagan stepping out of the Grecian Parthenon. Personality attains its fulfillment not when it is made an end in itself, or is graspingly retained, but when it is surrendered with joyous abandon to God, when a man says "*no*" to himself and "*yes*" to God—"If any man will come after me," said Jesus, "Let him *deny* himself." Not this or that bad habit of the self is to be denied, not simply a man's bad self but his whole self. A Christian personality must be ready to die if it is to become what God wants it to be.

Many people have a religion, but religion may in no sense have them. Their religion is their most prized possession. They have its parts neatly classified and labeled and some of them dexterously ossified. Sometimes they keep their religion in their libraries, sometimes in their pockets, sometimes in their churches. They are always smug and complacent about it. But true religion never made anybody smug or complacent. It creates and maintains a high tension in life. The peace of God which passeth all understanding is a paradoxical peace. Whoever is smug and complacent about his religion needs to engage in very serious self-examination, for religious knowledge or religious experience if they are pursued as ends in themselves tend to take the place of God Himself and become idols of the mind or of the heart. Truly to know God is to be known of God, that is, to be mastered by Him, to see all things in His light and to do all things in obedience to His will.

The second sin of man's mind is to conceive of himself as the center of the universe, to succumb to the temptation which Jesus escaped, namely, to achieve universal sway by worshipping the world spirit, and thus becoming a demonic pow-

er over against the sovereign God. Man's aspiration to be God has been the key to the whole Renaissance period which is now drawing to an end. "Man the measure of all things," has been the slogan. Yesterday it was man as an individual, now it is collective man that aspires to the rank of deity. But amid the measureless aspirings of man, whether as an individual or a collectivity, and above the din of his Promethean efforts to take God's place, sounds the ancient prophetic word, "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." (Isaiah 2:22.) Homocentricity is the root of all our woes. God is God. He must reign. "Gangway for the Lord!" The new man, the only true man, accepts the Lordship of God and only such a man has a future.

IV.

We turn in conclusion to the second phase of man's remaking. Man needs not only a change of mind that he may know the true nature of his life and of his place as a creature in God's world; he needs also a change of heart. What about man's heart, the seat of his affections? Ability to think clearly and to have great ideals is no guarantee of spiritual achievement. It is one of the illusions of Liberalism, so-called, that has become rooted in the life of our civilization, that all that needs to be done is to show the way and man will take it. An intolerable tension has thus been set up in the lives of many splendid people in our time. A few years ago several leaders in a great Christian organization in the State of New Jersey committed suicide because they could not keep up their idealistic pace.

A new realism is shattering many of the illusions of the old idealism. The heart of man must be changed. New attitudes can only grow out of new affections. Jonathan Edwards wrote a book on the "*Religious Affections*." It is a discussion of true religion.

"True religion," says he, "consists in great part in holy affections." The holy love of God and man must be born in human hearts. We must rediscover Jonathan Edwards. His thoughts will help us to preserve an equilibrium which has been disturbed in these last days. No clarity in our thinking, no amount of dogmatism or of orthodoxy, can take the place of holy affections in our hearts. Where these affections do not exist as a potent redemptive and creative force, true Christianity does not exist. We have got to insist upon that.

The true and ultimate perfection of Christianity consists in the warm, practical expression of religious affection, in love to God and love to man. A man is remade, therefore, when God illuminates his mind so that he thinks of life and death, of things present and things to come, in the light of God, and when, in addition that, God becomes the supreme object of his affections. When he thinks of life in the light of God, when God's self becomes the object of his love, when in God and for the sake of God and for what God has done, he loves his fellow men with the compassion and sympathy of Jesus Christ, he is God's man, the type of man that God gave His Son and Holy Spirit to redeem for His coming kingdom of love.

Listen once more to Pascal: "What a chimera then is man! What a novelty! What a master, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, imbecile, worm of the earth; depository of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error; the pride and refuse of the universe!

"Know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself. Humble yourself, weak reason; be silent, foolish nature; learn that man infinitely transcends man, and learn from your Master your true condition, of which you are ignorant. Hear God."