

Charity, Pure and Political

ALL men are human, in varying degrees, and in that obvious fact lies the urgency for the Welfare State. The tap-root of every enthusiasm for "social betterment" is the impulse to aid a vagrant or to endow a hospital. Were it not for this instinct of sympathy, the concepts of justice and rights would never have been born and men would never have concerned themselves about a Good Society. Yes, reformers are merely human.

The Greeks, to be sure, had a word for it. The word is Charity, and it is the right word, despite the unflattering connotations it has gathered in its long life. Its original meaning was love, not unlike the feeling of a man for a woman or of parents for children; usage extended its orbit, and ultimately it was applied to the act of giving and to the thing given. If we keep in mind its original value, the value of love, we have no difficulty in spotting the substitutes that go by the name of Charity, including the uncharitable schemes that thrive on it. Not the least of these perversions is the doctrine of obligatory social relations, with its corollary of compulsory compassion.

In recent years this notion of compulsory compassion has got so strong a hold on the public mind that the mere questioning of it brings upon the questioner a tirade of abuse. One who rejects any political plan for ameliorating the condition of the unfortunate, as unsound in principle or deleterious in practice, is likely to be put down as being less than human, utterly uncharitable. Opposition to socialized medicine, for instance, is described as selfishness to the point of brutality, while deprecation of schemes which, under the pseudonym of "security," amount to siphoning wealth from one pocket into another, is laid to gross cupidity. The vituperation passes for argument and carries weight simply because of the hold Charity has on all humans; to label an opponent as lacking in this elemental quality is enough to disqualify his argument and disallow his evidence.

It is an old custom. Even in prehistoric times the priesthood learned that compassion could be capitalized and put to profit. The idea of propitiating the unpredictable gods arose from common fear and mutual sympathy, and found expression under the prompting of the priesthood in sacrificial offerings; the yield gave rise to understandable temptation. The business was put on a sound basis by the introduction of a system of tithes, which was the precursor of the fiscal system underlying the modern Welfare State. The analogy will bear close scrutiny.

The keynote of that ethical philosophy which is Christianity is Charity. The life of Jesus is the exemplification of human love and his parables contain the finest expression of it known to man. His promise of universal brotherhood touched a human chord that had long remained dormant under pagan practices, and Caesar had no chance against Jesus. In the early years it was love alone that held his followers, and it was love alone that sustained them in their trials. Since love seeks expression in giving, of oneself as well as of one's goods, the offerings of help for those in need were spontaneous. Solicitation was hardly necessary and generosity was not watered down with the vanity of sacrifice; anonymity was the rule. There was no tithing, for that would be, as Tertullian, a Christian writer of the second century, said, "as though we put men to ransom their religion."

There was, of course, ample opportunity for this essential Christianity to come to the surface. The prevailing slave economy provided it. Not only were there plenty of destitute to be taken care of, but those who were condemned to the mines or cast into dungeons for professing the outlawed faith could not be abandoned. The religious, to whom fell the job of receiving and distributing, set their standard of living in the tradition of Jesus and his disciples. Christianity made its way among the Romans as the religion of Charity.

Pagan persecution of the Christians ceased with the "conversion" of Constantine. The need for alms was further lessened by the large grants he made to the clergy, and by the contributions of the wealthy who, following the style set by the emperor, adopted the recognized ritual. Nevertheless, the clergy, among whom were many who hardly measured up to the early Fathers, harped with vigor on the necessity of alms-giving, implementing the Christian doctrine of fraternity with imprecations on the sin of covetousness. A coercive clause was gradually insinuated into the Sermon on the Mount and, miracle of miracles, the maintenance of the clergy improved with the bounty of the worshippers. The glory of ecclesiastical titles and the splendor of religious ceremonies cast a shadow on the pristine beauty of Christian Charity.

The organization of human kindness into a political instrument took a long time. It was not until 764 A.D. that a civil law was proclaimed (by Pepin, king of France) to the effect that one-tenth of a person's income should be appropriated for the support of the ministry. (That is to say, the principle of our Sixteenth Amendment was invoked for what passed as the "social good.") But, even as early as the fourth century, Sylvester, bishop of Rome, decreed that the revenues of the church be divided into four parts: 1. for the bishop's support; 2. for the lower clergy; 3. for repairs of places of worship; 4. for the poor, afflicted and travelers. Thus, the division of the spoils of Charity were regulated, even though regularity of intake by way of compulsory tithes was a long time in coming. This inadequacy, however, was overcome by a vibrant note in the solicitation of "voluntary" contributions: those who withheld, and even the ground they trod upon, were declared accursed, and their souls were assuredly destined for perdition unless they repented liberally for their sacrilege. Compassion was thus put upon a compulsory basis—which is the thought-pattern of our modern Welfare State.

Collectivized Love

ONE cannot exploit what does not already exist. It is the fact that Charity is inherent in the nature of man that commends it to cunning cupidity or arouses the arrogance of intellectual conceit; it is this fact that serves the self-seeking politician and the impudent fabricator of social orders. Each of us wants what the political humanitarian proposes to give—general prosperity, health for all and unbounded happiness; and because we want it we are easy subjects for his legerdemain. The promise he holds forth is sufficient guarantee for the soundness of his proposals. Reason is under the necessity of penetrating an emotional cloud.

Though the political humanitarian builds on the rock of human love he begins by denying the primacy of the human who loves. That is always so. Every scheme to "improve conditions," every plan to fit society into a preconceived pattern of perfection starts with the elimination of the individual in favor of a superseding whole.

The group becomes the unit of life, endowed with an existence that approaches immortality, while the component parts are relegated to transitory means. It is this collectivity that wills, desires, loves; it is this collectivity that has a conscience and a destiny. The ego of the individual disappears in this mass.

But, how else can the planner plan? From Plato to Karl Marx, from the Poor Law of early England to the current National Health Act, the necessity of denying the individual and of creating a transcendent collectivity is apparent. All the "evils" found in the social order seminate in the wickedness of the individuals who compose it, and nothing can be done in the way of an improvement program until these individuals are discounted. If the would-be improver admits that society is nothing but an abstraction, not a reality, and that its character, its faults and its virtues, is always a reflection of the individuals who compose it, then he is confronted with the problem of bettering the whole by bettering the parts. That is a job for divinity

alone. Hence, he is compelled to declare the individual the product of society rather than the maker of it, and to assume that this human protoplasm can be shaped by any mold into which it is fitted. With a little imagination and a lot of conceit the perfect mold is put on the drawing board, the execution of the program is then merely a matter of force. That is the reasoning behind all compulsory compassion schemes.

The logical sequence of the denial of the individual is the denial of his right to property. How can ownership be vested in something that has no independent existence? The advocates of slavery were on solid ground when they de-personalized the slave on the premise that he was without the power of ownership; he was in fact more like any living (and non-owning) thing in the barn. So, when the planner maintains that the collective body transcends or absorbs the individual he inferentially invalidates all private titles to things. Charity (in its original meaning) then becomes an incongruity, for one cannot give what one cannot own; when property is fully collectivized it follows that any material expression of human sympathy becomes a black market operation.

When one is convinced one is never lacking in logic. The political humanitarian supports his denial of private property by one of two theses: first, that the property in the hands of the individual was come by dishonestly, that it was stolen, and the inequity in the social order is a consequence of this theft; or, secondly, that those who acquire property by skill, industry and thrift are merely custodians of what by right of universal brotherhood under a common Father is common property. The first is the position of the Socialists and those who, disclaiming the association, nevertheless are addicted to the same line of thought; the second is a doctrine frequently adopted by organized religion. In either case, the unequivocal right of the individual to himself, and therefore to the enjoyment of his production, is denied.

The Socialists are more forthright about it. They assert that any act of Charity, as between individuals, is in itself an immorality. (Though how they can speak of morals when they deny the primacy of the individual is a contradiction they do not deign to dissolve.) The helping hand is extended, they maintain, not from any compassionate inclination, but to soften resentment toward that social injustice which put property into private hands. Philanthropy, as they put it, is the purchase price of privilege. There would be no need of it if all that is produced were commonly owned and equitably distributed. Moreover, they go on to say, collective ownership is moral ownership simply because all production is collective; society produces everything, the individual nothing. Thus they support on economic grounds their *a priori* doctrine of a transcendent mass, conveniently overlooking the obvious fact that the total output of a group is in direct proportion to the number of specialists engaged. Omit one specialist from the production line and the output at the end of it is proportionately decreased. An economy based on specialization and exchange creates the appearance of social production, but reason shows there is no such thing; everything that is produced is produced by individuals. However, reason must be denied when it does damage to the passion for collectivity.

Christian doctrine, as regards Charity, cannot go along with that argument, simply because the first tenet of the religion is the dignity of the individual. The demotion of the person to an attribute of the mass would make of him an automaton, quite without will or responsibility, would release him of personal allegiance to his God. But, with little regard for logic, the doctrine attacks the individual's absolute right to property by positing a common claim to it through the common kinship in

God. Though the doctrine admits that the individual acquires property by virtue of personal accomplishment, his title in it is qualified by the needs of his fellow-man;

and his ownership is reduced to trusteeship. Compassion thus assumes the character of a duty rather than an expression of personality. This duty-concept blithely slithers into the justification for compulsory compassion, and the Socialist and Christian doctrines, as regards property rights, become strange bedfellows.

Compassion for the "Average"

THE Welfare State, however, is a practical institution, with a definite job on hand, and takes to theory only when expediency dictates. That job is to channel property from private pockets to a cen-

tral pool, so as to make it available for political beneficence. The channeling is effected always—whether in the name of Fascism, Communism, Socialism or just plain democracy—by the instrument of taxation. In that respect all political ideologies are alike. Experience has proven taxation to be the perfect instrument for the purpose; custom, dating back to the sacred institution of tithing, obscures its objective; legal verbiage clothes it with a disarming rationality; its painfulness can be anesthetized with indirection and gradualness; its victims can be seduced into support by a sagacious distribution of the proceeds. Without taxation, without this instrument of confiscation, there could not be a State—"welfare" or whatever pose it affects.

We are not here concerned with the economic fact that taxation tends to destroy that upon which it feeds—that production reacts inversely to the degree of confiscation. Our interest is rather in the ethical rationale of the confiscation. For the Welfare State rests its case on its capacity to serve as *pater familias* to society as a whole. Its claim to being the perfect agency of Charity is under consideration, for if that claim is substantiated any evaluation of its methods becomes academic.

First, of course, the element of personal interest is eliminated from its operation. The well-being of the mass requires a formula in which the need of the individual can play no part, and personal compassion can only be an interference. The ministrations of the Welfare State must therefore

be directed toward an "average" person, something that is created by the device of splitting sums down the middle. Neither the sums nor the quotient have life, but the assumption is that if the well-being of this mathematical being is assured, all the humans who contributed their individual figures to it will be provided for.

The servicing of this "average" is done by way of a rationing ticket. In the computation of this device it is impossible to include individual desires or aspirations, since these are factors of the future, unknown variables, while the "average" is necessarily derived from the past. Out of its knowledge of past performance the Welfare State creates a pattern of existence which, according to its lights, approaches perfection. But, perfect or not, it is certainly static. It cannot allow for hopes, flights of the imagination or the vagaries of uncontrolled appetite.

Since the objective of all charitable purposes must be the welfare of the person, let us consider what must be the effect of this static formula on the individuals who are thus provided for out of their own substance. They will be free from want, and the fear of it, even as they will be rid of the necessity of making choices; they will not even be bothered by choice after they have become inured to the perfect regimen. The risks of existence will be reduced to the minimum. No one will be annoyed by lack of occupation nor by the urging of an insatiable desire. The excitement of hope or ambition will not disturb the equanimity of their days, nor will anxiety cause restless nights. All will be serene when the component parts of society approximate the perfect "average"—a result assured by the necessities of existence.

The advocates of the Welfare State can call upon the animal world for a supporting analogy. Given a meal and a mate, the birds and the beasts seem to find no fault with whatever environment befalls them; they suffer only from the vicissitudes of climate and the predatory inclinations of their kind. Since the Welfare State will do away with all human predation, and will most certainly provide

against inclemencies, the human being under its ministrations ought to enjoy the perfect contentment of the domesticated animal. And that would ensue, to be sure, if the human being were like unto all other animals. There's the rub.

The very fact that there are proponents of a Welfare State is proof of the unworkableness of their plan. For they are themselves rebels, the unadjusted, the seekers for something that cannot be included in the "average." Were their plan in operation they would be the first to find its "security" irritating, the first to pit their personalities against it. Why? That is the unanswerable question, the mystery of the human being which we try to explain by merely naming it: the soul. When the plan of the *pater familias* is confronted by this indeterminable, something must give way; the soul must be crushed or the plan abandoned. Since by virtue of the confiscation of economic power the plan enjoys political power, the immediate result of this conflict is the attempt to crush the soul, to suppress by force any effort of personality to express itself. Hence, the paraphernalia of the Welfare State must include a powerful police and such emetics as the prison and the purge. But what about its pretensions to being the perfect instrument of Charity? To which the Welfare State replies that in suppressing the individual it serves society, the super-personal being, the "average" without a soul.

The Price of Welfare

YET, that is a complete perversion of the content of Charity. The essence of human help is to enable the recipient, temporarily incapacitated, to reassume responsibility for himself; his capacity for self-reliance is taken for granted, simply because he is a human being. On the other hand, the Welfare State predicates its whole program on the denial of the dignity of the individual. It does so, first, by confiscating his property, without which the individual must become a supplicant, and, secondly, by demanding subservience as a condition for its dispensations.

Charity is hardly an over-the-barrel transaction. Compassion that is conditional upon recompense is a trade, quite correct in itself, but hardly up to the name of love. Now, when the State allocates its confiscated property it explicitly or implicitly demands a price: when it subsidizes education it buys the right to supervise the curriculum and censor the text books; when it supports commodity prices it reserves the right to determine production; and so on. The "welfare" dispensed by the State is a *quid pro quo* proposition, pure and simple, and must not be confused with Charity. There is no resemblance.

Yet the strings which the State attaches to its "welfare" are unavoidable. The State has nothing of its own to give—since it is a non-producer—and is, theoretically at least, under the necessity of rendering an account of its stewardship to the rightful owners of the property. It cannot, even if it wished to do so, practice anonymity, which is Charity at its best. Jesus, whose authority is invoked by those advocates of the Welfare State who call themselves Christian Socialists, enjoined that "thine alms be secret." He thus enunciated the principle that the recipient of anonymous assistance avoids the self-abnegation of beggary, while the magnanimity of the giver is not tarnished by even the anticipation of gratitude. Secrecy, however, is impossible in the unemployment insurance office or in the consultation room of the politicalized doctor. Trumpets and drums must herald the operations of the Welfare State, and the inurement of society to such fanfare induces an attitude of mendicancy. The public avowal of one's distress by way of an application blank does irreparable harm to one's self-respect.

A mendicant society is the inevitable end-product of the Welfare State. It cannot be otherwise, for the confiscation of property necessary to the role of *pater familias* makes unashamed supplication a condition of existence. The sense of self-respect gives way to the will to live and

the habit of beggary is acquired. The habit is made easy by the aura of legality, so that the farmer who makes application to the authorities for a seed-loan, the industrialist who files for a refund in taxes, the veteran who demands a gratuity, the expectant mother who submits to the glare of socialized medicine does not recognize in so doing any diminution of personal dignity; beggary becomes a "right." But, the fact is that the worth the individual puts on himself is lessened by the legalized tincup he habitually holds out. The lost value shows itself up in that moral decadence that has characterized the moribund civilizations of the past.

Concurrent with the degradation of the human spirit that ensues from politicalized Charity comes the grandeur of titles and the advantages of political preferment. The power vested in the managing hierarchy by virtue of its control of the economy inevitably spawns an arrogant and well-fed aristocracy. The consequence is so obvious, even in the early stages of the

Welfare State, that one is inclined to suspect its proponents of more realism than idealism. Whether this is so or not, the fact of the matter is that the prime beneficiaries of the Welfare State are its operatives, their friends and their families. In the nature of things this must be so, for does not "Charity begin at home"? Those who expect a different result are under the delusion that the State is an entity distinct from the persons who compose it, that this entity thinks, wills and acts in a super-personal way. How that delusion persists in the face of all the evidence to the contrary is one of the enigmas of the human mind. The State is people, with all the frailties inherent in the human race, and their control of the nation's purse-strings can do nothing else than intensify the temptations to which we are all subject. They are not corrupt, they are human.

In the long run, the greatest harm done when the State presumes to monopolize human sympathy is that the supply tends to dry up; society is impoverished. For,

as humans become wards, the natural relationship between them is superseded by dependence on the controlling guardianship. Neither conscience nor public opinion press upon the strong or successful any obligation toward the weak or unfortunate. The doctor's first responsibility is toward the hiring State, not the sick, and his sense of duty is satisfied when the formal documents have been properly filled out; a "social security" number shrivels up the helping hand. Thus, humanity dies when the State declares itself its custodian.

Charity is love and love is a personal experience; it is non-transferable; it can be neither compelled nor regulated. By this premise the logic of the Welfare State is made specious and its promise proven false.
