

EQUALITY AND BROTHERHOOD

Let us consider briefly one of the most revolutionary social consequences of the Gospel message, the one which most clearly separates pre-Christian from Christian times.

14. As we shall show in the third volume of this work in which we shall treat of the social thought of the early Fathers of the Church, the custom of exposing infants, especially girl-babies, was a plague upon all classes and races. In one papyrus we read of a certain Hilarion who on the seventeenth of June in the year 1 B. C. writes to his wife Alis: "If thou bear offspring, if it be a male child let it be, but if female, expose it" (*P. Oxy.*, IV, n. 744).

Christ rewon freedom for man by liberating his soul from the slavery of sin, from dependence upon the pagan Fate, and from worldly fears and anxieties; by teaching him that his soul is dependent upon God, not upon idols or other men, and that it must fear God alone. Such freedom is a highly active leaven in the transformation of society, which freedom, however, in the all-embracing sphere of charity is purged of any exclusivist tendencies. This liberty of the sons of God is not anarchical, for sonship in God does not mean an atomism but a family. And it means true equality.

Equality is another principle which most decisively breaks down the old order to construct the new. The multiple strata of ancient society were born of inequality: conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, subjects of the law and objects of the law, Greeks and barbarians, citizens and foreigners, *honestiores* and *humiliores*, etc. In the society outlined in the Gospel there are no longer Jews or Samaritans, slaves or masters, classes or races; there are only souls, all equal because of their origin, because they are all children of God. In fact "whoever will be first among you, shall be the servant of all," that is, a slave (Mk. 10:44). He who exalts himself will be humbled. It is the Pharisees who make a counterfeit of the law of God and strive to excel, claim the first places, and wish to be greeted first. But God scatters the proud and exalts the humble, as he assured the humble Mary. Every attempt to dominate is a violation of humility, which is the guarantee of equality. But this is not a barren, suspicious equality whereby each one is on the watch to prevent his neighbor from rising above a uniform level. It is the equality that obtains in a family, in the household of God, in which each regards his fellow with love and respect, feels himself rather the inferior of his brother, and rejoices if he is more successful.

The new society has proved to be more attached to this equality than to liberty itself, and Christianity has brought it

straight back to its very origin, to the universal brotherhood of man. The new law organizes men in a family and makes them brothers, not only in the fact of their creation by the same Father but also by nature of the love they share and their inheritance of the sin of their first parent. And that brotherhood is protected even at the very root of man's thoughts. Consequently, from the very beginning Christians began to call each other brothers. This relationship is redeemed and remade organically richer and more intimate by the blood of the Redeemer.

The spirit of criticism acts as a corrosive upon the ties of brotherhood, for it easily degenerates into hypercritical and malicious judgments and provokes discord and enmity. "Judge not," commands the Lord, "that you may not be judged." This is demanded by charity and equality without which there can be no brotherhood; it is a practical application of the commandment to love others as ourselves. "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged. . . ." And what is this "judging" but a phenomenon of pride which causes a strange distorted vision, so that while one sees the mote in his brother's eye he pays no attention to the beam that mars the sight in his own eye? (Matt. 7:1 ff.) For we do not judge deeds so much as intentions, and in so doing we heap upon our brothers burdens of guilt that have been fashioned principally by our own envy and ill-will. The works of others are to be judged instead by one authorized to do so, first on earth, and then in heaven. But thoughts and persons can be judged accurately only by one who has the power to fathom human hearts. Thus interpreted the maxim of Jesus cannot be considered merely a handy expedient (I don't judge you, and you don't judge me) which might easily become an actual and base connivance; it is rather required by charity in order to safeguard peace. It is in this sense only that we can accept the saying: — Each one for himself and God for us all.

And since there is a correlative — God will judge us with the measure with which we judge our brother — it is our duty to pass judgment in the spirit of charity, to infuse a spirit of love into justice by being indulgent toward the one at fault. Given all the circumstances, what would we have done in our brother's place? And are we ourselves pure? That is how charity cuts into justice.

Thus the world's moral attitude is inverted. Instead of being indulgent with themselves and severe with others, men must show compassion for others in order to merit a bit of it themselves, who have so much need of it. Their attitude and behavior will never be cowardly but straightforward and sympathetic always. This is quite different from the attitude, albeit so high-minded, of the Stoic philosopher, who does not judge others either, not because he is humble and charitable but rather because he is intolerant and scornful; because he does not wish to disturb his own impassive calm and because he mistrusts a judgment that is impotent before the universal fatalism whereby everything a man does is the result of a whole deterministic chain of causes by which he is inescapably bound. It is but a short step from this impassiveness to outright pitilessness.

And because it searches into the most intimate motives of human conduct, the Gospel does not limit itself to condemning murder, the most serious crime in which hatred for one's brother can culminate; it condemns equally the very first step in the growth of hatreds which find vent in murder, when it also consigns to Gehenna the man who is angry and says "thou fool." From insult to aggression, from anger to blood — it is a straight road. He who hates his brother in his heart has already killed him. That is why Christ goes back to the very first impulse of hatred and forbids the insult: *Raca*.¹⁵

15. To understand the severity of this prohibition of Jesus we must remember the ease with which the Jews indulged in revilement, accustomed as they were to underline their remarks with sanguinary insults for which there was no penalty.