

# Agencies of Power in Modern Culture

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Every period of human history has its own characteristics. Every era of social development reaches its own climax, makes its own contribution to the ongoing of cultural endeavor. Perhaps the most significant events and developments of the entire recorded human history are in the process of unfolding before our very eyes. Breath-taking discoveries in the field of science, industrialization and automation (an American phenomenon known in Europe under the name of automatization), new social theories and movements, political alliances in an effort to create a balance of power, combine to create tense situations and threatening actions.

Modern world is undergoing a change. It is in the process of transition, shaping its own future unknown destiny. The old, time-honored social structures are crumbling under relentless pressure of social reform and under the frightening appearance and growth of various revolutionary movements. Italian Fascism, German National Socialism, Communism, various national and international movements seem to march before us in rapid succession. Some of these have already disintegrated into oblivion, while others are still lingering, challenging us by their new and, to our ears, strange social dogmas to redefine our traditional scale of values and to re-evaluate our long-established and until recently rather commonly observed social and moral sanctions.

The traditional "Status Quo" thinking does not seem to fit into the picture. This is definitely an age of conflict all down the line. It is an undeclared fight to a bitter end in the field of economics. The two sworn enemies are communism and capitalism. Neither one of these will ever rest at ease, unless the other is dead. This writer is convinced that the most significant and spectacular developments of the next quarter of a century will occur in the realm of economics, largely because of this economic dilemma.

Such is the case in the political situation of the world. Here we are confronted with a titanic struggle of global proportions. It is a fight to a finish. It is either democracy or dictatorship. The two cannot be combined. They cannot supplement each other, they cannot collaborate and, as of now, we cannot even be sure that they can co-exist. The choice is before us. It is either human rights

or state rights, freedom or compulsion, liberty or forced labor camps. The choice should not prove to be difficult, but it should be immediate, swift and final. Hesitation or procrastination in this important matter may prove to be disastrous or even fatal. Democracy is in danger.

The same is true in the area of religion, not for the first time, of course, but the danger is not less serious. The combined forces of materialism, secularism, scepticism, agnosticism, modernism, atheism and many other "isms" are deliberately conducting a determined attack not only upon everything overtly religious, but even upon everything suggesting religion. The high and holy things are disregarded, temples are desecrated, faith denied and God dethroned. Can Christian theism weather this new onslaught of materialistic atheism? Or is it really new? "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," but . . . there seems to be more blood. And yet . . . "If God be with us, who can be against us?" Fighting God any time, anywhere, for any reason is a lost cause. We believe that, and yet we must not become careless. We must "fight the good fight of faith." Through Him we are more than conquerors!

And conquerors we must be! For ours is a dynamic age of strange complexes in an ever-accelerating tempo of social change. Inactivity is a thing of the past. We must keep up with the times. The handwriting is on the wall. Here we are confronted with another dilemma: individualism vs. collectivism; group control and the power of the organization seem to impose their will upon the individual and to restrict his freedom of action. So, man becomes expendable for the sake of society. It is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between the good and the bad. We are developing a secularized approach to life. Scientific progress, undue emphasis on "things" in preference to thoughts, gadgets in preference to goodness, prove to be effective allies in the onslaught of materialism on modern society. In every realm of social contact and in every case where social action is in order, one has to choose between freedom and regimentation. In the scale of this ideological contest one has to choose between reaction and radicalism, or to find a temporary resting place anywhere between the two.

What is the road before us? Shall we rely primarily upon the atomic bomb to resolve our atomic-age difficulties? Shall we build a better civilization by blasting ourselves out of existence? Or shall we develop another civilization by starting it from the ground up

in some undetected jungle, which, as if by a miracle, could have escaped atomic destruction? That would not violate the jungle rule or a way of life. However, this admittedly is a backward step and, as such, is against our best judgment. Civilization is defined as an "advancement in social culture; progress in arts, sciences and statecraft." It denotes "an advanced state of material and social well-being." Culture and civilization go hand in hand. Advancement in culture is an advancement in civilization. According to Webster, culture "emphasizes the intellectual aspect of civilization, delicacy of taste and nicety of breeding." It can be developed by education, discipline and training. All this is a strange talk from the viewpoint of atomic diplomacy on both sides of the "iron curtain."

We must approach perplexing problems of our day, not only from the position of strength, but on the basis of right. Might has not always been right. Hitler proved it. So did many other adventurers. Brutal force does not solve problems, it creates them. There is a might, however, which is right; that might is "right." What is the natural channel for the expression of the cultural aspirations of humanity throughout the world? Militarism? Subversion? Regimentation? Suppression? Exploitation? Infiltration? Annihilation? These would hardly serve the cause of progress whether it be in the arts, sciences or statecraft.

Loading of any culture with social dynamite would mean social disintegration. On the other hand, proper recognition of social dynamics will foster progress and add benefits to society on every stage of its development, and in every aspect of the entire scope of its cultural possibilities. We have already touched, at least in a measure, on the intellectual aspects of culture, such as science, invention, philosophy, literature, drama. Without aesthetics, there could be no true culture; so art, music and architecture must be included too. Still more important, moral values should be defined, and the higher values or the ultimate values recognized. No culture is at its best without giving due recognition to spiritual values, both on the psychological and the philosophical levels. The search for religious experience and the philosophic inquiry into the ultimate reality of the universe must be guided in the direction of the God of the Christian theism. The ultimate reality is spiritual in its nature, Christian in its content and personal in its essence. It is God self-disclosed in the Christian revelation. It is the God of the Bible.

This is as it should be, but what do we actually find in the

modern society of today? In place of unity we find dissension. There are many contrasts in modern culture. Conflicting ideological movements find themselves side by side within the cultural framework of many nations. Ideas have a definite relation to action. Ideas have "legs," and produce action. They make an impact upon society. Systems of thought resolve themselves into corresponding structures of society. They bear fruit—good, bad and indifferent. They crystallize themselves into definite historical situations, readily available for our consideration. Humanism and the Renaissance resulted in intellectual liberation and in the re-birth of culture; advancement of modern science influenced industrial revolution and economic liberation; pietist movements and Protestant reformation stimulated spiritual revival; materialism and Marxism succeeded in producing spiritual degeneration, economic dogmatism and political chaos.

Yes, ideas have legs, but sometimes they have no heads. There is much in this world that is so unreasonable, impractical, unsound and, at times, insane. We are so much concerned with materials and methods that we find ourselves in doubt concerning that which is even more important, the point of emphasis. We begin to major on minors. We erect our own idols and feverishly begin to worship them. We may idolize our civilization, promote "culture," inspire revolution, engage in politics, support militarism, capitalize on capitalism or propagate communism. There are plenty of followers to support all of these. The empire-builders of today are burning midnight oil in search of political and economic balance of power. But with every added effort in this direction they find themselves more hopelessly entangled in the unresolved contradictions of our time. Shall it be free or controlled thought? Nationalism or internationalism? Radicalism or reaction? Communism or democracy? We will do this and we will do that, but what about God? Have we asked God about it? Does He have anything to say to our modern age? Do we ever think of it? Of Him?

But that is beside the point! Is it? In our search for agencies of power in modern culture we must not overlook any, but because of the limitations of time and space we will have to confine ourselves only to those agencies which so manifestly exert such an undeniable influence upon the affairs of the world today. We shall mention only three of them: communism, democracy and Christianity.

Communism is a historical fact. Great changes in Russia were necessary, but, according to A. I. Denikin,<sup>1</sup> "Nobody could foresee that the people, rising like a tidal wave, would so rapidly and so easily sweep away all the foundations of their existence." The revolution came, then the counter-revolution of Bolshevism, then . . . . you know the rest!

The political objective of communism is dictatorship of the proletariat. Was there any political "necessity" for the Bolshevik revolution and could the Russian revolution assume any other form? Yes, it could and did. It assumed the form of a democratic government under Kerensky's regime, prior to the Bolshevik uprising. Bolshevism removed every trace of democracy in Russia and subordinated the individual to the party. Political freedom vanished, individual initiative was lost in the rubbish of superimposed party machinery, and communist dictatorship was firmly established. Tyranny was enthroned.

It affected economics as well as politics. Private property has ceased to exist as a social institution. Motives of profit and of interest have professedly disappeared. A new "capitalist" class was created, with the communist "directors" riding around in big automobiles while the population of the country faced shortages of the barest necessities of life. That this is "progress," I am sure, we will agree. One five-year plan followed another, until at the end of the fifth one, this year, they have less bread now than they had twenty-five years ago. The "plans" plainly fell through. No wonder!

Their educational system is designed to promote building of Socialism. Communist indoctrination becomes a "must" under such planning. Complete regimentation of education follows, and with it a complete distortion of everything that is not communist. Soviet education is a perfect channel for political, economic, social, educational and anti-religious propaganda.

According to the Bolshevik laws, marriage is a mere agreement between a man and a woman to live together. Unless children are involved, the Soviet does not object to the separation of these two, if they have decided that life together has become impossible. Marriage should be officiated by the authorities of the Soviet civic tribunal. Such registration is recognized as "unquestionable testimony of the existence of the marriage."

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<sup>1</sup> *The Russian Turmoil*, p. 13.

Women are invested with such obligations as cannot be found in any other country. For instance, in the *Izvestia* (official press organ of the Soviet government, issue of October 8, 1927) there can be found the following statement: "What can the working and peasant women do for the strengthening of the defensive power of the U.S.S.R.? Every laboring woman must learn the elements of science . . . aviation and chemistry." In other words, every woman must become a "pistol-packing mama." A fighting woman is not a distinctly new phenomenon, but in this case, she promises to be even more deadly. She discarded her fingernails as an offensive defensive weapon in favor of chemical warfare and aerial block-busters.

Religion is recognized to be a real obstacle in the way of communism. According to J. Freloff<sup>2</sup> things have gotten completely out of control: "By the will of the allah, jehovah or other gods, women are distracted from taking part in the Soviet work, by the help of the prayer-meetings, which are directed by clergymen, sectarians and rabbis purposely on the same day and hour with Soviet conferences." As we can see from this quotation, in place of the name of "God" they are hoping to substitute the concept of "communism." Hardly possible!

Parents are encouraged to send children to the nurseries, rather than to keep them at home, in the hope of detaching them from parental love and developing love and fidelity to socialism and socialistic principles. Divorce is a simple matter, and even though, presently, measures are being taken against undue irregularities, there were instances when men took to themselves a wife in the spring in order to divorce her in the fall, after the hard work in the field was over.

The situation is not any better with the Soviet morality. As everything else in the Soviet Union, it is presented to us in a typical communist garb. From the *Moscow Daily News*,<sup>3</sup> we get the idea that public opinion is the only source of moral sanction. "We are rejecting religion, but we are not without a very strong public opinion . . . any form of conduct accepted by us is our morality, and to this morality we give all of our powers, by it we live."

Many more pages could be written on this distressing subject

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<sup>2</sup> *Religia, Semia i Deti*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Issue of January, 1936.

of communism, but we can already see from the material used above that while communism may be properly termed as an effective tool of oppression, it can hardly be considered as an agency of power for the promotion of a constructive program of human relationships. Rejecting cultural values of the past, they undertook to build a modern state without solid foundation. Recent developments in Russia after the death of Josef Stalin point in the direction of a change in the group of the Moscow government. Rumbings and dissatisfactions, purges and executions, dismissals and exiles, shortages and defections—all are pointing to a complete re-evaluation of the whole communist enterprise by the chief sponsors of it. This is good news. The “solid front” so-called of the communist party-line is beginning to fall apart with various sections of it pointing in different directions; Stalin, Malenkoff, Khrushcheff, Bulganin . . . who is next? On all points, communism will have to be discounted. It can never be relied upon as a safe guide in the affairs of this world or followed as a sane philosophy of life, as long as it is what it is, a tyranny, a despotism.

The strongest contemporary opponent of the communism is democracy. This is a truly constructive force in our complex society. Democracy has its own glorious history, culminating the dreams and the hopes of the centuries in the form of an American government. Democracy made this country what it is—the leading nation in the world. By opposing oppression and regimentation on the one hand, and by holding forth to the oppressed nations of our day the promise of freedom of plenty and of peace on the other, it keeps alive the hope of the tomorrows. The democratic countries of the world must be aware of the peculiar position they occupy in this world as custodians of the human rights. The proceedings of the United Nations Assembly amply demonstrate it.

There is a reason for this. On the whole, democracy “practices what it preaches.” As a political agent it safeguards liberty for all; as an economic agent it sustains free and competitive enterprise; as a social power it may be considered as one of the most progressive forms of government in the world; as a moral power it recognizes the dignity of the law and the worth of an individual, serving as an inspiring precedent for other nations; as a custodian of the cultural treasures of the past it recognizes religion, a true interpreter of truth, beauty and virtue. High idealism of religion and lofty philosophy of social relationships in a democratic community of na-

tions combine to produce a powerful force in support of progress of culture and modern civilization.

Democracy is far from being an illusion; it works, it remains as an abiding factor for the benefit of all. We can think of so many who have come and are already gone and soon will be forgotten: Hirohito of Japan and his unaccomplished "divine mission" in the Orient; Mussolini of Italy and his "evaporized *mara nostrum*"; Francisco Franco of Spain and his unrealized dreams of a Fascist co-prosperity sphere; Adolf Hitler of Germany and his deflated Aryan "superiority"; Josef Stalin and with his successors in Russia and their deformed "democracy." All of these have either already, or soon will, become an unpleasant memory, but we believe and trust that democracy, in spite of all the difficulties that confront it, will go on serving humanity. It must go on!

The best that humanity can offer is insufficient in itself. In the vastness of our universe man feels his own smallness. At times the tasks are too heavy, the burdens are too crushing and the road is dark. At such times man comes to an end of himself. Then . . . a miracle happens! He looks within and then he looks up in faith. In that very moment the Light breaks through, the clouds lift themselves and upon the horizon of his soul, as a rising sun, appears a new realization of the new meaning of life, of truth and beauty . . . he sees GOD! The vastness of the universe and the smallness of himself brings him to the realization of the greatness of God. He finds God, he finds his place in the world, he finds himself. More than that, he finds peace. He is transformed.

Christianity is such an agency of transformation. It is the true liberator of life. The greatest historical fact of life is CHRIST. The greatest power on earth is His. He stands above everything else, towering above all in goodness, in wisdom, and in spiritual splendor. He is the hope of the world and the only solution to all the perplexing questions. He is the answer—He and His church.

The church is also a historical fact. True Christianity is represented in this world by a truly regenerated church, the body of Christ. It is "the light of the world and the salt of the earth." Christianity is the way to God through faith. Faith in the enduring moral values and in the everlasting God becomes basic to true culture. Christianity advocates and promotes it. It supports every worthy cause and seeks to remedy every ill. In government it seeks honesty, in economics it is for fair distribution of the necessities of life; it

inspires social reform, practices Christian charity. It is a moral stabilizer of life. In the Christian philosophy of life we find satisfying truth. It is an infallible guide for our daily walk, a restorer of peace and a refiner of souls. To be true to himself, to humanity and to Almighty God one must make a provision for his soul, for the true culture is the culture of the soul. For this, the grace of God is sufficient.

We believe in the supremacy of the spiritual. The greatest agency of power for good is God. The God of our fathers is our God. God loved the world. Christ gave Himself for the redemption of mankind. The choice is before the nations of the world. Man must choose between the temporal and the eternal. Man must live by bread, but he cannot live by bread alone. To material prosperity must be added spiritual riches. In the midst of the desperation of our life we must find inspiration for our soul. Materialism pales into insignificance in the presence of the facts of faith. Atheism fails, while faith bears fruit. Spiritual values are supreme.

The greatest agency of power in modern culture is Christianity. "Go ye into all the world and teach all nations . . ." Make Christ known in the world. Proclaim His message. Propagate His truth. Let Him rule and reign in all of the relationships of life. He is both supreme and indispensable. ". . . choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Jos. 24:15.) To let Him be known in the world is our task. No culture or civilization can be complete without Him.