

POWER FOR PEACE

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RECENTLY one graduating student of physics at an American Christian college, which has a sumptuous campus chapel appearing more like a cathedral, told me jubilantly that he had been accepted in a well known arsenal as a research scientist. As many others like him in our time, he was to apply his knowledge of the physical laws of the universe in what is euphemistically described as—for the peace and security of the nation. Later we had a scientific meeting on the grounds of this same vast arsenal. It was revealing to observe the ceremony of pinning a number not a name on every visitor passing through the gateway—a significant and symbolic procedure of dehumanization that is symptomatic of our age. Yes, beyond this gateway, in this respectable laboratory of scientific robots, there is an inviting lure of security and prosperity offering an air-conditioned paradise in a privileged society. It was indeed surprising that this young physicist, educated at a Christian college, not for one moment thought of the consequences of his work and research. He did not think of the price at which he sold his individual life with only thwarted freedom under the watchful eye of an invisible employer, the state. This, then, is one of many incidents and aspects that marks our momentous age of transition in which we first must pray, then think and act fast.

Crossroads of history

Our age and all world events most insistently call upon the devotees of peace and goodwill because it is an age marked by a portentous accumulation of power in an alarmingly reduced frame of space and time. The physicist, mostly unaware or comfortably indifferent to the social problems of his fellowmen, is taken out of the pigeon-hole of his ivory tower and exposed to the chill of drifting winds of an inexorably changing order that on the global scale are whipping our planet purporting the gargantuan nuclear power unleashed by man. Our civilization is on the most eventful promethean crossroad, that has no precedent since the dawn of history. It categorically demands nothing short of complete and unconditional conversion from any compromise with evil to unflinching goodness. Man has tapped the cosmic source of power at the nuclear center of physical creation, yet he has not tamed his animal appetites, passions and habits of his Neanderthal kinsman. Nothing is more appropriate in the keynote of this Christian peace gathering in the heart of Europe and in the vicinity of the Iron Curtain than the voice of the disciples when they called in distress, and that we repeat as a prayer: “Lord, stay with us for it is drawing late!”

Evidently our civilization in general and our society in particular displays much confidence in the practical results of physical power. A

most fantastic armament goes on in opposing camps with scientific intellects being pooled in docile servitude to their respective non-human states. And this despite the unparalleled toll of one hundred million human victims in two world wars of this present scientific and technological century! Effective fuel, record-breaking thrust, jet propulsion, are slogans of our daily life and it is an assumption that whoever will be first to reach the Moon will dominate the world. Triumphant victories of physical science in the 19th century shaped the foundation of materialistic philosophy that not only is the official school of thought behind the Iron Curtain but which likewise represents the dominant Weltanschauung of the Western brand of our common Graeco-Roman rather than Judeo-Christian heritage in this our peninsula of Eurasiatic continent known as Europe. In other words, materialism dominates mankind everywhere, with only a different verbiage. And it is this materialism that is the humus in which the war mentality is brewing.

There is no question that science and scientism besides many useful services has shattered our simple faith and modest way of life that was the source of incomparable strength of the early disciples of the Master of Galilee. Simple needs that are more conducive to the quietude of the soul are now replaced by an insatiable desire for an endless chain of material commodities and the world markets of commerce where human flesh is cheap are the fateful barometers of international relations. Under these circumstances, salesmen of cleverly invented necessities, armed with enticing weapons of electronic communication and artful psychological technics and verbiage—parallel with brainwashing in the political world—a valuable college course, are in the much cherished positions of high priests of our society—a dignity enjoyed in our chronic wars only by generals. In this way, mass mentality, conformism, are inevitable end-products of mass entertainment, mass production, etc., and the thing most feared is to live one's own individual life.

The mass mentality

These are naturally the most favourable conditions for war—mass mentality and enormous physical power concentrated under the control of one or a few individuals. I can never forget the effect of mass brainwashing in one middle-west college, also of nominally Christian tradition. At that time practically overnight Japanese became yellow devils. One kindly appearing professor, perhaps just to please the artificially agitated populace of a small college town, said at one public occasion: "We do not need to hate these Japs, we just kill them like grasshoppers." Yet, in face of the tragedy of the present century, let us not forget that during the 19th century our forerunners looked hopefully towards our age and this hope was nourished by a growing science that was to save mankind from the incredible affliction—war.

Camille Flammarion, the noted French astronomer, whom I like to call my first teacher of astronomy, voices the philosopher's astonishment at the end of the first chapter of his "Popular Astronomy" which received the prize of the French Academy of Science in 1881: "Strange social organization! This human race is divided into tribes subject to

their chieftains, and from time to time we see these tribes, afflicted with furious folly, arrayed against each other, obeying the signal of a handful of sanguinary evil-doers who, in addition live at their expense, and the infamous hydra of war mows down its human victims who fall like ripe ears of corn on the blood-stained battlefield. Forty millions of men are killed regularly every century in order to maintain the microscopical division of boundaries of a little globule into several anthills." It is significant that this revealing passage, indicating the sentiment of France in the previous century, has disappeared in the recent new edition of the same work, edited by the director of Paris Observatory. Are we afraid to reveal the ghastly account of wars to the present generation? Or is it because we have far superceded forty millions of human victims of war per century? No one can see the tragic vanity of wars as well as an astronomer in his role of cosmic observer of our otherwise fascinating little world in a wonderful universe.

Power—physical and spiritual

Indeed, the physical power of destruction through nuclear sources is overwhelming. It is shocking to think that one pound of any matter in its nuclear structure contains, if released, an energy equivalent to the sudden explosion of eight million tons of TNT. Yet the same amount of energy would keep a one hundred watt bulb burning for thirteen million years. This very fact urges us ever more to ponder over the wisdom taught by the seers and prophets of mankind who since the dawn of spiritual awakening in their meekness and unfailing confidence pointed to the light of forgiveness, renunciation, and love and they themselves led the way in their saintly example. In the language of Henri Bergson, they are a very solitary upsurge, but they stand out, radiating in the darkness, and the divine mystery of their appearance passes all understanding. Our age of nuclear energy is calling for their guidance. As early as 1920 Mahatma Gandhi stated: "The rishis, the great seers of mankind, were greater geniuses than Newton, greater warriors than Wellington, because knowing the use of the weapon, they did not resort to the use of force but taught the war-weary world that its salvation rests in non-violence and love." As in a prayer my thoughts ever linger over the words Gandhi wrote in his last letter to me: "I am the same as when you saw me except that my faith burns if possible brighter than before." This convinces me that in a more scrutinizing investigation of the trends in man's history we are bound to find that it is the saint, not the general, who ultimately shapes man's highest destiny. A short range view of history will, no doubt, note triumphant marches of victorious armies. Yet, these die out and the meek voice that was once hushed on Calvary will ring throughout the Universe.

Consequently, the dilemma that we are facing in the midst of the 20th century is that of an unprecedented lopsidedness or rather obsolescence of man in his own world of technology. His mind lags far behind the dimensions of his means of communication. With his doctrines of nationalism and tribalism he is still deeply steeped in the age of

mythology. Indeed, tribalism is the ultimate causal background of World War II. Yet modern man has power, great physical power at his disposition but he does not know what to do with it and in his materialistic outlook and progressive paganization of that little christianity that he may have acquired, he faces an acute crisis of purposelessness. It is for that reason that the philosopher and sociologist, Pitirin Sorokin, proposes that much greater service will be done for humanity if instead of the present feverish race in the publishing of abstruse scientific papers, the same effort is exerted for the elevation of man's spiritual life. It all indicates that we seek power for peace. Indeed this was suggested as the theme of our deliberation. Yet I would make a little amendment and would rather say renunciation of power for peace. Once during one of our evening prayers someone gave Gandhiji the question: "Bapuji, he said, "what would be your first act if at this moment you had the power to shape the destiny of mankind?" After a brief period of silence in a firm voice Gandhi answered: "I would pray for the courage instantly to renounce that power."

This is truly the guiding light of our peace conference. In the midst of strife for political prestige, none of us is a plenipotentiary of any government and that is good, that is very good. We are a small minority in the world, a minority that is being chastised and purified, and in this minority we see the world of hope as the early Christians when they sought refuge in the humid obscurity of catacombs and had no wealth, power or title to their names. While in the secular world, in a world of power and endless political conferences, there is no answer, in the world of the spirit there are no problems as the secular world knows them. Our family of seekers of peace must be aware that above all peace is a state of mind. "If I knew that a nuclear bomb is to fall at a certain spot," states the seer of our age, "I would walk to that spot to console the people in their last moment of physical life." This kind of peace does not need power in the ordinary sense for it is the power.

Here is something of a portentous nature that the devotees of peace can look for. Although our terrestrial vanities may be immediately concerned as to who will be first to reach the Moon, it is incomparably more important to be concerned as to what our earthly mind will carry along into the wasteland of the lunar reaches—will man carry the illusions and delusions of a caveman or will he be his brother's keeper? Thus, even without the material conquest of space it is within man's power to reveal a boundless paradise in this small corner of the universe we live in; beyond all competitive aspirations and technological glory, it is still attainable only by following the example of the One, Who affirmed that: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

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