

# The Problem of Europe and America

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THE present and ominous dislocation among the powers reveals a mutual depth of misunderstanding and political ineptitude, but more significantly, that we are caught up within tides of irrationalities that seem to be bent upon the total destruction of civilization. Torrents of national stubbornness seem to defy the constraining influence of the reservoir of good will and hope with which humanity tries to face the post-war world. While the present tension between Russia and America does rise out of an historic antagonism between Capitalism and Marxism, nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean either catastrophe or the impossibility of reconciliation. David Zaslavsky, Russian foreign affairs commentator, rightly emphasizes this fact, in a *New York Times* quotation, when he says "the old bourgeois democracy and the new Soviet democracy proved they could work together against a common enemy. Who believe that, given good will, they cannot work together in peacetime?" The resolution of the problems of Capitalism and Marxism are dependent upon the solution of a deeper and more basic problem, namely, that of the difference rising out of the vulnerability of the European generally and the Russian specifically and the relative invulnerability of the American. The differences arising out of these two conditioning factors have created the misunderstandings and suspicions which have magnified and complicated the joint political-economic problems confronting these two nations.

It is significant that almost every controversy between the Anglo-American bloc and the Soviet Union revolves around the meaning of freedom. Russia's lethargy in fulfilling treaty requirements in regard to both Iran and Manchuria arises out of her feeling that, as Mr. Vishinsky put it in an earlier controversy, freedom and political irresponsibility follow strangely parallel lines for the Western powers. The fact that Russia seems sometimes almost paranoiac in her fear of encirclement should not detract from the realization that, with or without the atomic bomb, Russia is the most vulnerable and, since she is the land bridge between East and West, must be constantly looking in two directions.

There is an amazing lack of imagination on our part in not being able to sense the problems of vulnerability. Relative invulnerability has given us a queer rigidity in regard to history. Standards are carefully defined; they are clothed in law, they become axioms. The European man, on the other hand, must be much more flexible in his ability to make compromises. The historical pressures of living diversities prohibit the mind from following those exact patterns which are so central to our thinking.

Our rigidity has been indicated not only by our failures to accommodate policy to new and unexpected developments but also by our predilection for pronouncements and formulae. We speak as though an exact definition would solve a critical problem. The European man recognizes that all definitions are subordinate to fluctuating situations and that a formula is dead that cannot respond to pressure. Obviously while this makes for a tendency which meets the pressures from below, it also leads to opportunism and a cynical attitude toward the spoken or written word. We, on the other hand, act a little bit lost if the formula doesn't work and in a daze write another formula as though this would change the situation. The Atlantic Charter became for us a kind of a *creed*, deviation from which would be dishonorable and confusing. The European man found the charter to be a suitable and timely definition of an essential mood but one which did not have eternal significance. The inflexibility of our minds has been irritating to the Europeans, and what appears to be the shifting loyalties of the Europeans have seemed dishonest and lacking in judgment to us. Historically our perspective of "innocence" has been a temptation to cynical European statesmen, and the "opportunism" of Europeans has caused us to withdraw to safer and cleaner realms.

Perspective is affected by the degree of involvement in the crucial issues of history. Fundamentally there is a difference between a nation which, because of its invulnerability, can claim that it has neither sought war nor been responsible for wars, and European nations which, because of the pressures of vulnerability, can never quite escape the judgments of history. America being "guiltless" will achieve therefore an objectivity and directness of judgment which European nations cannot match since they must be circuitous and devious in avoiding the areas of their manifest guilt. Yet both the "guilty" and the "innocent" will have an uneasy relation to history and because of this uneasiness will be forced to construct myths which will clothe them with the responsibilities of eternal verifications. Thus America will find peace in the myth that she has always been drawn into wars for which she is not responsible while Europeans will find relief in the idea of *lebensraum*, encirclement or in the general security myths. It is interesting that recognition of the shrinking character of the world has drawn us into a similar security consciousness in our conception of the Pacific as an American lake.

But involved or not we still persist in assuming an Olympian detachment and objectivity. Therefore

we are extraordinarily naive in regard to the relativity of moral standards in the political area. We believe that good is good and that evil is not the same at all. Too much concern for the gray tones becomes an excuse for indecision. This explains somewhat the pre-occupation of our liberal world with categorical conceptions, i.e., Fascism. The continued use of this term after the destruction of the centers of historic Fascism suggests an oversimplification of history. In part this accounts for the failure of liberalism generally to understand the very complicated relation of the German people to Fascism and also why it is not possible for the Germans to acknowledge guilt in the manner which we expect. In a very real sense the court at Nuremburg is not the last judgment and it is not right to expect men, even guilty men, to negate themselves before us as though we were God and therefore without guilt. If the Russians also seem to have a fondness for categorical definitions it is for entirely different motives, partly because it is a standard trick with which to embarrass opposition and to cloak objectives and partly because the mythology of Communism must set the whole world up on an either-or basis. The European man, even those who have suffered greatly, knows that circumstances have a great deal more to do with the manner in which an individual accepts or rejects historical evil, than we in America would be prepared to admit. In this sense the European is much more profound because he views evil from an historical rather than from a personal point of view.

Americans expect that history will conform to what is right. So does the European but he isn't permitted to be quite so sure of his standards. Americans interpret war guilt formally and mechanically. The army, for instance, decides that anyone who was a Nazi prior to 1934 is to be separated from all responsibility in the future of Germany. Once our standard is defined it is expected that reality will conform to it. Actually there were numbers of confused nationalists who became disillusioned with the excesses of Nazism and who ceased, not without some sacrifice, to be active in the party. At the same time many of the most vicious members were those who were too young to join until after 1933. The Russians understand this problem better and have been more realistic in their refusal to set up such exact standards. Knowing that good and evil cannot be so absolutely separated, they make overtures to all except war criminals, because it is impossible to maintain these distinctions into eternity. Finally what does one do with former Nazis? The Russians use them and we exclude them—which means, as Werner Richter in his book *Re-Educating Germany* suggests, that we keep alive focal infections and potential centers of resistance to any genuinely honest political movement within Germany. It is of course right that, in the immediate future, all Germans who are suspects should not be given adminis-

trative power, but it is possible to utilize technical skills under the careful supervision of non-fascists. Those who are criminals must either be destroyed or educated. They cannot be ignored. To freeze them out of responsibility is to create a new and dangerously confused class of frustrated and bitter rebels who, for economic reasons if no other, will attempt to destroy responsible order so that they can again regain power.

European man finds that the freedom of history is constantly being imperilled by some dark fate. If European statesmen seem to be unduly cynical in regard to treaties it is because they are convinced by the pressures of vulnerability that peace is only a relative condition and that the more violent forces of history can be held in check for only a limited period. Therefore it is the responsibility of the statesman, no matter what his statements on peace, to safeguard the interests of the state so that peace will not weaken the possibilities of defense. Americans, on the other hand, have more latitude, 3,000 miles of it, so they aren't quite so convinced that history is potentially catastrophic. They believe that war can be avoided just because it is necessary to believe that man is in control of history and that proper action can always beget proper ends. There is certainly more profundity in the European view which recognizes that there are subterranean depths in the soul of collective man which resists all expressions of rational and moral will. History is sometimes under the control of daemonic powers and, in this sense, Europe being what it was, Fascism was an historical inevitability. This is difficult for us to understand because we believe that there are no forces which cannot be broken on the rock of our good will. Partly of course our point of view is the result of our historical adolescence. Boy scout morality expressed in political creeds and formulae do not solve the problems of history. It can be hoped that experience will give us the maturity and flexibility with which we will be able to respond more intelligently to the pressures of history.

Around the problem of vulnerability, two mutually exclusive philosophies of history have arisen. The cynicism and opportunism of the European mentality as well as the false objectivity, moralism and self-righteousness of America is prohibitive of any community on an international basis and of any lasting resolution of the present tensions. Neither can find a basis for responsibility because responsibility must be defined from beyond history if it is to be more than the projection of national interest. Cynicism is the result of the divorcement of the level of history from the level of eternity. Moralism is the result of the identification of the level of history with the level of the eternal. In either case the level of history becomes bereft of meaning. The European mentality can justify any action as a result of vulnerability with the claim that space and

time prohibits responsibility and objectivity. If Europe seems to us sometimes to be too indifferent to the claims of the eternal—we should remember that we have come dangerously close to idolatry in our political judgments. In this connection it is interesting to note that those among us, both political and clerical, who are most provoked by the supposed lack of loyalty to such a formula as the Atlantic Charter actually have much less interest in the binding power of such a document as the Ten Commandments. Thus do we substitute historical relativities for eternal ultimates. This is especially true of those who must believe that democracy is the ultimate order and the only order in which God can properly operate.

In both Europe and America the transcendence of national interest is impossible because cynicism and moralism have destroyed the dynamic tension between man and God. In both Europe and America the Church has become ineffectual. In both cases it has capitulated to a more intellectually powerful secularism. The dualism of orthodoxy and pietism has clothed the naked power of nations with demonic qualities. The tendency to identify the two levels by American liberalism has sacrificed the power of the eternal to redeem history. In the face of catastrophic evil both are powerless—the pious man can only cluck his tongue at evil and the liberal can only hope for a better day.

The American man and the European man are failures because, not being able to relate themselves to the eternal, they can never bridge the gap between themselves and achieve mutuality. Both conceptions of history have failed and will continue to fail until the Church rediscovers and re-establishes a center to history. Only the Church can discover and proclaim that center which is strong enough to discipline the anarchies of history and therefore establish community. The Church can do this only insofar as it dares to affirm a theological understanding of existence—for only theology possesses that dialectical understanding by which time can be related to eternity, man to God.

There is one element of hope for European man. Among German ministers, the *judgment* and *crisis* of history has opened some new doors. For the first time the German clergy has been awakened to the necessity of breaking the dualism, the eternal separation between God's order and the temporal order. There is a very strong feeling among the younger clergy that the Word must express itself very specifically in regard to the political possibilities and responsibilities before the German people. This is a radical departure for a Church which has been notoriously passive in its orthodoxy and piety. The manner in which the German clergy is able to debate with vigor the controversy between Barth and Brunner indicates theological health and hope. Whether a theological faith, arising out of this situa-

tion, will have the strength to undermine European cynicism and to affirm the possibilities of history in a dialectical relation to the level of eternity, is not yet known. But we can be thankful that men are again serious about theology and that perhaps Christian thought will break out of the secular bonds which have for so long made the Church into either a tool of the State or into an impotent refuge for the frustrated.

Obviously the European Church has an advantage over the American Church. In Europe it is much more difficult to avoid the sense of judgment which arises out of devastation and the destruction of a culture. America alone has come out of the war with more power, and this may encourage self-sufficiency. Fortunately the American Church is not without humility in regard to this power. But humility is not enough unless it causes us to re-examine the theological bases of faith and life. In America, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, faith has had to depend upon a synthesis with secularism in order to maintain itself. Chaplains especially will not forget their uneasiness about the vagueness and the incoherence of the Protestant faith. In contrast to a strongly defined Army ideology, the Christian faith seemed wan and apologetic. Partly one had the feeling that the best minds of the day had not been attracted to Christian thinking, and partly one had the feeling that the timidity of the Church was due to an inner uncertainty as to its mission and authority. It is not strange therefore that we accepted the role of tolerated but queer country cousins.

The reflective Christian in America cannot help but be embarrassed by the weakness of his own theology. If the European theologian is a little bit smug in his evaluation of American theology—that too is not surprising. In the history of American Christianity *what* theological contributions have we made which have been strong enough to make an impression on the World Church? In some sense we have an amazingly small amount of self respect in that we are willing to be a symbol to the World Church of financial generosity without intellectual depth. Perhaps it would be better if we did not defend ourselves on that score.

But the problem of history still remains with us. Our secularism is about to contribute its share to the smashing of our world. Until our Church recovers its seriousness in a persuasive and forthright theology, we cannot hope to do much more than to make our pronouncements, our formulae, and we shall find that the stubborn and unyielding irrationalities of our day will not heed us. Only in a theology which is serious and which profoundly understands the tension between God and man, can the Church gain that strength which will make it the effective agent of that God who, in judgment and in mercy, is the sovereign Lord of history.