

SELF, WORLD AND GOD

Since the beginning every human being has had the same challenge; how to be related to himself, and to the world—people, events, ideas, and things --and to God—the creator, the source, reality, perfection. There have always been these three separate entities: self, world, and God. And the history of all individuals and civilisations is the history of their relationship.

In reality the three have always been one. There is only life, consciousness, being. Eternal and mysterious, unsoundable and holy, it is the essence of *our being and contains the universe within itself*. To live consciously in this union with creator and all creation is blessedness, wisdom, redemption. It is felt in the heart as love and acts in the world as virtue and order.

But in this totality man has made himself separate through thought, and entered into subjective relationship with everything else. From this position *he projects the images of a material world and a God outside of himself*. These images are not only private and individual, but also collective: all the great religions and their symbols *represent* God and the forces of goodness, moral codes approximate love and virtue, social institutions try to establish from the outside the order which can only really come from within. *Providence still penetrates down to man: in his life, religion, and experience he may still find a link with truth and sanity, a path, a way back to the source*. But he has essentially separated himself from the divine and is related to his creator mainly through symbols, and through intermediaries such as priests, gurus, prophets.

This is the *collective human condition*: materialism, confusion, and selfishness, variously called primal ignorance, the great illusion, *kali yuga*. How extraordinary it is that man, being from the start perfection and living within the spirit, should think himself and the world to be separate from God and try through countless ages to bring the three together again!

Acting for the *separate ego, or for collective extensions of its identity and interests—family, social, national, racial, and religious groups—man has created so much disorder and suffering that the world itself has become suffering, life has become darkness! Man has created hell on earth, and this is more true today than ever before*. The conditions which make a spiritual approach to the *problems of life more urgent than ever have largely devalued spirituality and the great religions*. Moral principles have ceased to be a deciding factor in the collective conduct of human affairs. As the Delphic oracle told the messenger of the emperor: *Apollo has lost his hat*.

Once the sacred—man's tenuous life-line to truth—has lost its power and authority, *anything and everything becomes equally valid*. Good and evil lose their distinction; men neither love nor even fear divine justice and live not by allegiance to any truth or higher purpose, but according to a 'lifestyle' defined by fashion for pleasure and greed. In all things matter has priority over spirit.

Individuals and governments are adrift without direction, without values or meaning.

Whether consciously or not, people everywhere feel the profound crisis of our time and recognise that it is somehow everybody's individual crisis, because everybody has to live in the world and everybody contributes to its condition. We have only to look around us to see the extent of confusion. Our socio-economic system is based on the profit motive, which has ruled the distribution of wealth since history began, and demands constant production, expansion, waste in order to survive. This now directly threatens our ecological survival because it pollutes the planet and squanders natural resources. So if we are to survive at all we must totally change the material pattern and psychological motivation by which we have been living since history began! Nations are divided within themselves and from each other: peace recedes as governments arm to ensure it; crime and violence increase as legislation multiplies to control it; the real health of the population deteriorates in direct proportion to the development of technological medicine, the rise of its costs, and the growth of the huge government bureaucracy of public health; the civic freedom of individuals evaporates as governments step in to protect it; the inner freedom of heart and mind disappear as man seeks it in selfish gratification; the word love increasingly comes to mean selfish sensual satisfaction; problems in the world become more complicated as politicians and specialists of all kinds undertake to analyze and solve them; their confidence and their promises sound more and more hollow until they hardly even believe themselves any more; wisdom diminishes as organised education spreads; simple human joy and innocent happiness disappear under the heavy load of goods and appliances which technology and the industrial welfare state ceaselessly provide; the sages and heroes who inspired the youth of antiquity as models of human virtue and excellence are replaced in our time by actors and rock musicians; real culture and refinement which are the essence of civilisation are replaced by the complete model of living constantly thrust upon young and old by television and the press. Conditions already exist for the enslavement of men's hearts and minds, not by any visible outer tyrant but by a pervasive spirit of darkness, not through coercion and violence but by a screen in the living-room, which controls thought, reassures, offers man a total participation in life vicariously and as a spectator, removing from him all will, initiative, responsibility—and real consciousness. Progress has brought us here: collective madness reigns in the world.

Our youth are profoundly uprooted, disappointed in the world of their elders, alienated from the past and from society. Feeling that they have been betrayed and cheated of something precious and sacred—life itself—they squander their beautiful potential in cynicism or impotent protest. Their grievances are assimilated and exploited by the society which caused them and reduced to fashionable mannerisms and slogans, or else channelled and focussed by political groups planning a society even more stifling and materialistic.

Many escape their confusion and despair in the obliteration of chemical or ideological drugs. We have lost nearly a generation, the lovely flowers of our youth. What Robert Burns wrote after some unfortunate battle in long forgotten Scotland is apt today:

"The flowers of the forest that fought, aye, the foremost,
the flowers of the forest are weeded away,
The pride of our land are cold in the clay."

What to do, where to turn? Having made the world what it is, man then has the problem of how to deal with it, how to be related to it! Throughout history there have always been two distinct and apparently opposite answers: to reform the world, or flee from it. Nearly all political and social reformers have tried to do the former, many religious teachers the latter. Each implies the other, they are similar; both perpetuate and strengthen the problem—one by meddling in it and compounding it, the other by shunning it; both are concerned with a result more than with its cause. Men in all times have alternated between these opposites and tried to combine them in varying degrees to satisfy both God and Caesar. Kings and sometimes priesthoods as well have served this world whilst paying homage to the next. One's treasure was either in heaven or on earth, so one had to be more real than the other.

Real spirituality, the greater wisdom, does not separate the world and heaven; it does not retreat to secluded places on earth or secluded private heavens; both divide life. The world can only be reformed from within outwards, from above downwards. Just as a person naturally expresses and produces outwardly around himself what he *is* in all his acts and attitudes and communications, so also society manifests outwardly in world conditions the collective consciousness of its members.

The solution to the world condition is a state of being, not a program of outer action, an inner change of human consciousness—understanding and purpose—not the manipulation of outer results.

It is a return to the unity of life, and comes about when the individual ego subsides. The totality already *is* when division ceases; it does not have to be brought about. Each human being can end the division within himself at any time: changing himself he changes the world. This will bring the individual, the world, and God together again. This will unite mankind, and man within himself. This will usher in a new world.

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