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ENDANGERED MAN*

Introduction

The primary aim of this thesis is to identify the threat or threats confronting man.

In the second place it is necessary to define more closely what is meant by man in this context. Of course, in the sense of humanity, there is only one "man". However, for the purpose of the present task, it will decidedly have to be defined more accurately in terms of space and time. Consequently the analysis is mainly concerned with humanity in the second half of the twentieth century. Even with this limitation, it remains necessary to gradually add additional and relevant qualifications. Naturally this focus cannot be maintained in terms of watertight isolation. After all, it can be expected that the threats will not represent non-historical powers or phenomena without any past. Consequently, the threats peculiar to earlier eras cannot be placed beyond the scope of this discussion.

Primeval threat and the primeval hostile aggressor

The point of departure for this lecture is the thesis that threatened man is not only modern twentieth century man. Threatened man is a universal, phenomenon of all times. The threat became a reality the moment man fell prey to Satan's deception, couched as a promise that man would become as God. Powerless man would be empowered to do the impossible, viz. that which only the Almighty can. For that very reason he was subjected to the curse called over him and over creation. Following this, "the

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flaming sword which turned every way” at the entrance to the tree of life becomes the time-enveloping and world-encompassing threat, in the same sense as the sweat by which he gains his bread soaks the unruly earth. Even then man does not realise that God is not the One who threatens as Satan represented Him. Thus man dies spiritually in coveted equality to God.

One noticeable characteristic of man after his fall from Grace becomes revealed in the phenomenon that the one who is threatened becomes the continual hostile aggressor of nature, his fellow man and himself. In his disappointment and envy Cain takes refuge in homicide and recklessness. But even under the cloak of unapproachable indifference there is the hidden fear that: “Each one that finds me, shall slay me”. Throughout this history God unequivocally indicates the aggressor. It is not God who threatens. He even sets a protective mark on Cain. Sin which “lieth at the door” is the one who threatens: Satan stands behind sin. And man placed himself at the mercy of Satan.

Yet the elevation of mankind to the status of violent avenger is unmistakably present throughout history: With Lamech, sword in his right hand, and his challenging song of revenge. With the Pharisees and the Jews and their callous: “Let Him be crucified”, up to the present era of revolutionary violence. It is only when the arch-deceiver and aggressor “the old serpent – who is the devil, Satan” – after he, according to Revelation 20:7-9 has been loosed out of his prison to deceive the nations – has been cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10) and his followers have received their part in it (Revelation 21:8) that the threat will come to a final end.

As far as the question of threatened man and the aggressor and threats is concerned, the lecture may herewith be considered as concluded. Apart from pointing out that the nature of the threat is contained in man’s estrangement from God, in his iniquity and the execution of the only punishment, viz. death, the essentials concerning the matter have been stated.

Forms which the threat may take

God placed mankind within a historical milieu. His creation did not jerk to a standstill with the Fall and did not remain in a state of static immutability. There was still a masterplan of the Creator which had to and would be fulfilled. At the same time Satan's zealous originality and the artful disguise of his attempts did not fail to materialize. With various tactical and strategic coups he has continued to manoeuvre energetically. Although the threat — to alienate people from God and his service and through iniquity to surrender them to death — has remained essentially the same, the forms in which it manifests itself have changed and varied kaleidoscopically. Concerning this aspect I wish to refer to a few examples and tendencies without laying claim to completeness or in-depth analyses.

As far as man, victim of the threat, is concerned, one must take care not to approach or regard him from too Europe centric a viewpoint. Because Western Europe, with its offshoots or civilization satellites has become the centre of the sciences and philosophy, Christendom and technology in the past twenty centuries, there is a strong tendency to focus analysis in this connection on European man only, implying that he is the representative of all mankind.

This action would have been justified if we were to stop at the essential threat of sin and eternal death. But such a generalization is no longer valid when looking for the variety of shapes in which the threats have found expression in current times. Especially in the global community of the second half of the twentieth century the reality of the Second and Third Worlds should also be taken into account. They no longer stand outside the circle of knowledge of the West. All suffer from the same disease, but not all display the same symptoms in the same way or at the same time.

Earlier on I drew attention to the peculiar dialectic of the being and conduct of threatened man. Being threatened, he flings himself on the aggressor. Van Riessen draws attention to the same phenomenon when he outlines the aggressor as one in the

grip of his own power, and who goes down as result of it. This has been referred to in examples in the period after the Fall, the conduct of Cain and Lamech, the builders of the tower of Babel, Nebuchadnezzar and the Pharisees, Pontius Pilate and the Roman Caesars, and so on to the present day. It is a conflict of man against the powers around him. More, even: it is man's freedom versus his own power. In this man is served by ever-changing weapons and techniques. He creates idols after his own image and implores their help. It fluctuates between embracing these idols and proclaiming that God is dead. Fortune-telling and witchcraft, but also reason and ideology, are increasingly being called upon. Propaganda, with the lie as its most important component, is as important in the conflict as are nuclear or hydrogen bombs. This is conceivable and typical of impotent and godless man. Being created, he must have a god. Even though it may be less dramatic than the brandished sword of Lamech, or the plans of Babel's architects, the creation of idols after man's image through the ages is more universal and even more time-encompassing and influential than manufacturing weapons and building bulwarks. After all, gods serve better as insurance policies. The God may be declared dead, but idols created by humans thrive and flourish.

Yet, everything revolves around the same nucleus: the intuitively felt but as yet keenly denied threat against impotent man who lives under the delusion that he has elevated himself to the level of the Almighty. He declares the powers to be gods and designs sophisticated cults around them. He appeases them by adopting an obliging humility and buys their favours with sacrifices.

A form strongly related to the creation of idols is the tendency to render absolute the partial and the relative, the dependent and the limited. Aspects of life, creations of man's hands and spirit, if not objects from nature, become the deified sources of power, providence and wisdom.

The long list of idols from history has been supplemented, not necessarily replaced -- with the absolutisation of science and technique, art, eugenics, communication. The answers to the fundamental questions of life are expected of

them; power and the meaning of life emanating from them are expected; they are thought able to supply salvation, redemption and life. After all, the word of man's hand will, under the guidance of his reason or vital energy, effect deliverance.

Dialectic

Unfortunately, schisms are caused by the multiplicity of gods. Science, as well as art, claims for itself self-sufficiency; so does reason as well as sensuality, technology, as well as eugenics. Science makes its own laws, art proclaims its own. By the multitude of gods and laws man is torn and ground into an insecure being which is nowhere totally safe.

Time and time again this process leads to the basic dialectics of man and his uncontrollable creation. His implement is taken as a god, and his god becomes a destructive monster.

When Van Riessen asserts that secularization leads to atheism, he is still bordering on the previous subject. It still concerns the core of the threat, which lies here on the religious level. The process of secularization has indeed some merit. It has led to stripping institutions of their historical, man-made cults. What was left revealed their pathetic reduction to man and world, here and now, bread and games. It also, however, freed state, education, and industry from the false grip of religion, even from the false grip of Christendom and ecclesiastical absolutisation. In this way it even prompted the Third World to throw open its animistic and Islamic flanks, and smoothed, humanly speaking, the way of Christianization.

This does not mean that the opposite should not be noted. It is, moreover, noticeable that secularization is transformed into secularism, and that the latter only sees its task as a liberator from Christianity and acts accordingly. In the place of the displaced religion another is quickly substituted, seven times worse than the previous one: socialism in the Latin-American sector; Africa socialism and Black Theology in Africa. A victory for secularism over socialistic ideology as a practical and state religion in Russia and China could not yet be recorded. The destroyer of

religion turns into the creator of another religion.

Another aspect of this maze of infatuation and entanglement is the levelling off of man's vital dimensions. He has lost the divine. Instead of looking upwards, he merely looks inwards. By rejecting a divine God in heaven the mundane remains the only reality. Without the eternal, he only has to contend with the temporal. All insight and views are horizontalized. This attitude seeps into theology. This is clear from Bonhoeffer's premise that the law of love is not manifested unto God, but unto the neighbour. What wide influence this has not had in the W.C.C. and beyond that! Relativism goes hand in hand with these, and consequently all gods have to be acknowledged – each with sovereignty in his own sphere. They exist without a higher and unifying bond. Small wonder then that altruism is freed from the command to love and is being arbitrarily played with in ecclesiastical as well as in sexual relations.

From reason to sensuality

In the process of changing gods, and in the search for the best possible protection, the sovereignty of reason in the 18th and 19th centuries was replaced in the second half of the 20th century by the elevation of the irrational and the sensual to the highest position in this Pantheon. Its manifestations are manifold. In the economic sphere it manifests itself in materialism which controls both capitalism and socialism of all colours. The socialists are essentially similar to capitalists in their passionate quest for wealth-mark, not by achievement, but motivated by need, and by the earnings of others. Love for the neighbour is proclaimed, but at the same time repudiated.

A probably even more striking phenomenon of this condition is the imbalance in modern civilization and the life of so-called civilised man. While with his reason he aspires to the highest levels of technological achievement, he is mired down spiritually and physically in pornography, shameless sexuality (even to the point of denying sexual differences), permissiveness on all levels, and in various forms of drug addiction.

This results in the development of a secondary primitivity following the model of Rousseau, but far exceeding the apostle of the creed of the noble savage in manner and amplitude. In many respects it has already become a cult, as is evident from the hippy cults and associated cultural patterns, communes, the accompanying music, dances, recreation, art, and way of life. Proclaiming the contra-culture brings this to undeniable expression. Back to idyllic nature where there is no work, but food and drink, no matrimony, but all the privileges attached to it, no responsibilities, but a claim to human rights. There is no longer the vocation to create culture, but instead a disregard of culture; no longer order, but a return to chaos.

No wonder this can be seen as existence to the point of annihilation. The apostles of existentialism want to formulate the dialectic of this kind of life to preserve the highest freedom and autonomy of dignified man as freedom and autonomy to the point of annihilation and nihilism. Indeed, what else is there to a life without sense, and what else are the fruits of a senseless revolution?

It may not be inappropriate to tie the reaction of irrational powers and those of the emotion to the rise of pentecostal and spiritualistically charismatic movements now current in church and religion. The lack of balance in life may be the cause of this. No function in life or prime characteristic of man can be ignored without vengeance being taken. Neglected feelings react strongly even when religion is externalized and rationalised at the expense of love. A last typical aspect should be mentioned here to illustrate the imbalance between the rational and the affective. Technologically, from agriculture to surgery, from the manufacture of biological weapons to the investigation of space, it may appear that man is on his way to complete control of the cosmos. In sharp contrast, however, is his lack of self-control. Man can manipulate his neighbour – for this activity he is eager and even fully equipped. But his liberty as a human being does not allow him to practice self-control.

Fear

Sometimes it seems as if pride and the unrestricted urge for freedom is motivated by fear. In spite of its power there is fear of matrimony, of the public, of tradition, of order, of riches as well as of poverty, of isolation as well as of community. Modern society, even that in the Third World which up to now has been rather backward with its so-called primitive or primary groupings, has become progressively one in which bonds of relationship have been substituted by secondary ties. In Tönnies' terminology, (mechanised) society increases at the expense of the (organic) community. The world population becomes progressively urbanised. A characteristic of urban life is that it causes the primary communal bonds such as matrimony, family, ancestry, and neighbourhood based on tradition to make way for friendships, acquaintances, societies, and interest-groups. This is accompanied by bigger horizontal and vertical mobility which quantitatively leads to more contact, but with less depth, durability and cohesion.

Bigger and looser groupings against the background of mass habitation, the larger extent of more intensive interdependence in labour, production processes, recreation, transport, education, etc. lead to more complex forms of organisation. Supposedly freer man is unaware of the fact that he is consumed by, used in, and controlled by this invisible organisational machine. He must be at a certain place at a specific time because others will be there, and his absence will slow down and damage the machine. He is an ignorant and unwilling part of the rat race of which the aim, nature, tempo, and sense is determined collectively, i.e. impersonally. The "god" progressively becomes the errand boy. In this Babel of organization there are millions of Kafkas who do not know why, whence, or when.

The contribution of science

Science has made an important contribution to this tragic process of the addiction of man in and through his own impotence.

The roots of this are to be found in the elevation of culture to religion and to a cult; from a dominion by service motive to a dominion by redemption motive. Science as a creation of culture with strong and determinable religious roots can not but reflect the spirit and belief of its creator/pursuer.

The general tendency of human/cultural/social sciences becomes easier to understand when the fact is taken into account that the most important of these (Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology) had their origins in the previous century. Their spiritual background and soil are the post-reformatory schools of thought. But even the older Sciences — Education, Political Science and History — did not escape later influences.

This is no place to discuss each of the sciences and their histories. A few general comparative remarks are sufficient. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries constitute the era of the supreme “neutral” science — science “liberated” from the metaphysical and the religious. It is a known fact that here we are confronted by a semblance of liberation. The only religious bonds shaken off are those of the Christian religion, and the world view originating from it. In many respects secularization ought to be welcomed, especially since the Christian sciences seem to have become stuck to contemplative speculations and unverified opinions, instead of fathoming both reality — also the discovery of sinful reality — and of truth as the norm of evaluation.

This did not really free the so-called neutral sciences. Firstly, religion still governs sciences *a priori*. But the partial premise still burdens human sciences with partiality. The fundamental defect is equally well known, i.e. the rendering absolute of a given and ever-changing aspect of life, which, in any case, can be relayed to the crucial problem of man trying to play God, with the result that he elevates now this, then that facet of his life to be the guiding principle, turning into an absolute that particular aspect, and expecting salvation from it. His lamentable efforts to manufacture absolute transcendent components from the immanent fail every time, and every collapse in these efforts drags man down into misery with it.

In this connection humanism and evolutionism, rationalism

and positivism, relativism and horizontalism, phenomenology and socialism, both neutral and “committed” sciences, are all from the same stable.

All have in common that *man* is the premise and aim of the pursuit of science. Now his reason takes the lead (rationalism), then again his irrational components of existence (existentialism). His mode of knowledge is limited to empiricism, to counting, to measuring and to weighing “facts” (the qualifiable) – his gaze turned to and fixed on the horizontal and the relationalistic. The latest contribution has been made by structuralism. The object of this doctrine is to work towards a time when man can be computerized together with the sum total of his culture. The remarkable aspect of this is that the partial, the component, is overreached by absolutism: reason only, experience, exclusively, nothing but the empirical, structure only. In all cases only one religious foundation is disclaimed, namely the Christian.

Lately the Christian approach has showed one conquest. As opposed to the stereotyped or unconcerned practice of “neutral” science the idea is gaining ground that the sciences should be involved. This is a step towards greater honesty in human sciences which since Comte have refused to be normatively engaged or founded, but which in practice have always been. Nonetheless, the traditional trap has not been avoided. The only popular committed fashion allowed proclaimed at the moment is that of socialism!

Two other weak links in the armour of human sciences should be pointed out. Firstly, they are fundamentally as well as practically limited as creators of culture and as aids for those who practice them, as well as for mankind in general. These characteristics limit the practice of human sciences to nothing but dissection and analysis in the components and processes of the phenomena concerned. But again a halt is made at the demands of the principle of norm and value.

Because of the limited premises of man, two fundamental truths are denied and side-stepped: God, and sin, reality and truth, including the reality of the lie. Naturally God is also excluded in the application of the norm and the judgement of con-

clusions. The perceptible and perceived phenomena are labelled as “normal”. Reality is interpreted as truth, and the phenomenon is elevated as the norm. What is, is right.

Laws and responsibilities

The second problem, to a great extent resulting from the endeavour to find research methods equal in “objectivity” to the “exact” natural sciences, is the search for laws in human sciences. To find “laws” in the sciences is in itself not wrong. However, against the religious background of these sciences two dangers are imminent. The first has partially been referred to in the previous paragraph. Laws are seen in things as they are: They are not tested by any higher norm.

There is a strong tendency to reach a kind of supra-organic law, almost equal to laws of nature. Social, psychological and economic laws are proclaimed as proved by research. They are loosened and abstracted from *human* behaviour as regards certain spheres, aspects and functions of life. The result is twofold: spiritual life is severed from moral norms, and it serves to shake off human responsibilities. For that matter, immoral behaviour is made subordinate to the immanent “laws”.

The results of the particular schools of science can hardly be estimated separately. While they have a common root, their influences can be seen as jointly and mutually reinforcing. Even the “neutral” sciences recognise the existence of values and morals and moral codes in society. However, these are recognised only as mere facts. They are regarded as without common authority. Relativism claims the same right of existence and recognition for all. The stressed individual human rights make them atomistic, volatile, and causes them to be experienced as permissiveness. Humanism and horizontalism are in accord with this.

Autonomy

Accompanying this there is the independence, the autonomy of different facets of world view. Art only acknowledges the laws

of art; politics only political law and expediency; psychology only psychological laws. Part of the lack of unity in life resulting from all this is the absence of balance in civilization – civilization taken to be the sum total of cultural activities. The exciting achievements of man in his dominion over nature and manifested for instance in his space flights stands in stark contrast to his failure to control himself. The result is the emergence of a secondary primitivity as is evident from tendencies in the plastic arts, music and song; in the modern cult of Baal and Astarte; in the back to nature movement in the shape of nudism, trial marriages, etc. etc. Once again the voice of Jean Jacques Rousseau is heard in reaction to man's restraining achievement as regards his governance of nature: concrete places, urban jungles, Babylonian cities which grow in size and number.

New horizons restrict his view of the past and the future. Modern man tends to become a-historical as regards both past and future. He tries to escape all and sundry; he feels threatened by the past because of its traditional ties and its failures; the future frightens him because he can only see it as a shadow of the present.

His history contains only the temporary. It is without genesis and without eschatology. The motto is: life, here and now. "Not this God and Jesus stuff, not all these promises for the future; we want to live in this city today" – as I once heard a preacher declaim in a previously well-known Methodist church in San Francisco. The past is without an anchor, the present without meaning, the future without vocation. A life of reflection has to make way for a life of intoxication.

The vocation of the Christian

Seen in this light, the Christian's answer is becoming clear, although the formulation of the answer may be difficult, especially as this has to be done from an inner depravity and a sinful milieu.

The answer for the Christian lies firstly in the recognition of God and the authority of his word and law in every sphere of

life. Life must be God-diverted, not man-centred. The catechism supplies the answer to the question: knowledge of sin, redemption and gratefulness. Knowledge of sin unequivocally pinpoints the threat. Knowledge of redemption, consolation in living and dying, indicates equally strongly a defence against the threat.

There is but a short distance between this fundamental confession and the answer of the practitioner of a Christian-based science. What he confesses as a true believer, should also be expressed in his science. Here the humanorial sciences offer a more than ample opportunity. But much of this even now bears the hallmark of unbelief, so that the instruction becomes a loud accusation. The practitioner of the human sciences must, like all scientists, fully penetrate to the full knowledge of every phenomenon in his field of research.

The mere proclamation of principles does not supply the answer. The scientist must also know the empirical, the realities. But it does not stop here. The scientist has indeed received mercy in that he knows a deeper and wider reality. When a Christian has studied all the forms in which the nation or matrimony exist ethnologically or sociologically as well as all the tendencies appertaining thereto, he will be in a position to assess them. This will be more than a discovery of variety, or of laws of growth and change, because he will have to point out to what extent these structures and functions, processes and regularities deviate from and are opposed to the creational norms for them as laid down by God. His empirical findings will be reflected in what they *ought* to be. Once again the words to Cain will be heard: "Sin lieth in wait at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire and thou shalt rule over him".

Therefore the human sciences must penetrate to the fundamental differentiation of reality (which also includes sin), and truth which exposes and rejects the lie and unrighteousness.

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