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CORPORATISM, COMMONWEAL,
AND THE JUST SOCIETY

INTENT AND CONCEPT

Since we are going to be discussing corporatism and commonweal in various contexts we should say something about these two concepts. Corporatism is a basic principle of fascism. It seeks to curtail individualism, not in the context of commonweal – the common good – but in the sense of a top-down control and order in society. It seeks to organise society into a hierarchy of corporate [not to be confused with capitalist corporations] structures that require conformity, severely limiting or even curtailing altogether, individualistic liberties and actions. This structured hierarchy corporatises behavioural norms according to a given ideology. Every aspect of society can be corporatised in order to produce a culture conforming to a given ideology. Education, religion, morality and every external form of behaviour must be regulated in order to impose this ideological concept in a matrix interpretation of the "norm." This corporate structure is imposed and enforced by an arbitrary system of law. Such a system falls under a general ideology known as "fascism." It can be a secular civil construct or a heavily moralistic religious arbitrary "theocratic" construct.

There are other understandings and levels of corporatism, but we are using the ideological concept outlined above which is the general form used to create a fascist society usually with a deformed and corrupted variation of crony capitalism which curtails individualism and individual creativity of a new form

which might interfere with the centrally controlled structure of social order and economic structures.

While Canada was originally shaped with the "Red Tory" idea of commonweal as opposed to a radical, self-centred individualism, commonweal is understood as "the common good expressed within a political system of democracy and individual liberties." In this system, capitalism is regulated only to the degree that is necessary for stability, justice and fairness. Civil society is also regulated as little as possible while ensuring such things as equal healthcare for everyone and a regulated social safety net that provides for the commonweal, the common good, for the whole of society without impinging upon civil liberties but ensuring the greatest scope of civil liberties that are permitted in a peaceful and cohesive society. This presupposes freedom in such realms as religion and reasonable concepts of morality, a variety of political parties within a cohesive and democratic nationhood. The operational ideology in such a society is "democracy and the greatest scope of civil liberties as can be afforded in a united and orderly culture." In Canada, this is well expressed in The Canadian Charter, We will be mainly interested in discussing the idolatry of corporatising religion and morality, the idolatry and blasphemy of an ideological, arbitrary authoritarian "theocracy."

Within these concepts there are variations, of course, but these are the concept within which we are writing. Having established this framework, let us continue.

PROLOGUE

*I*s not this the manner of fast that I have commanded: to loose the bonds of *repression, to lift the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free, and that you should break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you shall bring the poor that are cast out to your own home? Is it not that when you see*

the naked, you shall clothe him; and that you do not hide from your own weaknesses? 1hen shall your light break forth as the dawn, and your spirit will quickly spring forth: and your righteousness shall go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your recompense. (Isaiah 58:6-8}

Then the King will say to those on his right hand, Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me.
   Then shall the righteous answer, Lord, when did we see You hungry, and fed You, or thirsty, and gave You drink?
      When did we see You a stranger and take You in or naked, and clothed You? Or when did we see You sick or in prison, and visit You? And the King will answer them, I tell you in truth, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me. (Matthew 25:34- 40).

No society which is governed by ideologies can possibly be a "just society." The original meaning of "justice" (Lat. *justitia*; Gk. *dikaionsine)* is "to balance, to set aright, rightness," etc. Justice indicates a recompense to those who have been wronged, even if they have been wronged by legal means, not simply "punishment." justice did not have a juridical connotation until late middle Latin. It did not and does not mean simply "to punish." Nor does it mean to uphold a given ideology and attempt to force it on the community by means of state power. In terms of a "just society," we must refer to the concepts of social justice, the commonweal, the common good. By "commonweal," we do not mean corporatism. As an example, in Socrates' *Apology*, he tells a story that illustrates the tension between corporatism and commonweal. Zeus, Socrates relates, decided to help mankind create a human society. He sent Hermes to distribute the necessary technical and managerial skills to certain people. The result was a society based on self-interest and expertise. Such a society was centrifugal and fragmented. As philosopher John Ralston-Saul observes,[1] Zeus had created a society based on the corporatist model. The economic and social structures were based on professional self-interest. People were defined and their value established by what they did. In more contemporary terms, this would be the corporatism of consumer capitalism, also based on self-interest and self-centredness: defining people by what and how much they consume.

Zeus, realisiung the error, decides to remedy it by having Hermes distribute social reverence (aidos) and right-mindedness (diki) to every person

Social reverence signifies a sense of "community," a shared awareness, a shared knowledge of self-constraint and belonging. Right-mindedness relates to a sense of social justice, integrity, freedom, and social order: a shared sense of responsibility. An example of this would be the Canada Health Care Act. Under our health care system, Canadians share the burden for one another, and this is perhaps our highest moral accomplishment as a nation. Those who are ill are not corporatised as "consumers of medical services," but rather are seen as equal human beings with equal access to the basic human right of adequate health care. This was also the case in the Byzantine Empire.

This is what we refer to as "commonweal." It defines people simply as "fellow human beings," as members of a community that we call "humanity."

Corporatism in a consumer capitalist economic system reorganizes society with the reduction of the

individual to his or her status as a consumer. To consume is patriotic; to consume in excess is to raise the level of one's social status. This present economic world order presents us with intense moral and ethical contradictions, arguing that greed, self-gratification, and excess consumption are simply aspects of human nature. This argument, taken from the doctrines of Social Darwinism, is certainly questionable. As author Linda McQuaig observes in her essay, "Lost in the Global Shopping Mall"1: Perhaps we are in danger of becoming such a culture, but it is important to remember that culture itself is a learned set of rules. The concept of the "common good" is one that has fallen out of favour in recent years. Over the past two decades, it has become increasingly common to dismiss the notion that we all share an interest in the broader community, that society is more than simply a collection of individuals all pursuing their own individual material self-interest. The rapaciousness of certain business leaders has been much in the spotlight recently. Even conservative pundits appear shaken by the astounding greed and dishonesty at the heart of ... corporate culture. Still, some shrug it off as simple human nature, saying that we are inherently a competitive, acquisitive species, naturally inclined to push our own self-interest as far as we possibly can. But is this the whole picture? Is our society really nothing more than a loose collection of shoppers, graspers and self-absorbed swindlers?

As Paolo Virno has suggested:

At the base of contemporary cynicism is the fact that men and women learn by experiencing rules rather than facts ... Learning the rules, however, also means recognising their unfoundedness and conventionality. We are no longer inserted into a single, predefined 'game' in which we participate with true conviction.

We now face several different 'games,' each devoid of all obviousness and seriousness. Only the site of an immediate self-affirmation an affirmation that is much more brutal and arrogant, much more cynical, the more we employ, with no illusions but with perfect momentary adherence, those very rules whose conventionality and mutability we have perceived.[2]

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At this point, we may also refer to the corporatisation of morality and, to some extent, of Christianity. Here, we have one of the primary reasons why Christianity itself has lost much, even most, of its influence in Western nations. It is no longer seen as having any true moral authority. The concept of commonweal - the common good - is foundational to an authentic sense of morality and to the idea of a just society. A clear and profound doctrine of commonweal is affirmed by Jesus Christ with his two great moral imperatives, ("love your neighbour as yourself" and "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"). Christ makes the love of neighbour (together with unconditional love of God) the very foundation and essence of the Law and the Prophets. The fulfilment of such a moral imperative certainly requires a direct encounter and interaction with culture and society. Unfortunately, this is an encounter that has been either abandoned, corporatised or reduced to outbursts of legalistic, juridical moralism by many Christian bodies. This is often coupled with the utopian fantasy of the mythological "godly nation." This leads to a deconstruction of Christianity by blending it with the unfounded socio-cultural constructs of this utopian fantasy. This, in turn, undermines the concept of a just society by reinterpreting the concept in juridical terms of rules, of externally correct behaviour. This approach corporatises human beings into categories that often prevent the effective encounter with human catastrophes and social injustices. When people are corporatised as "godly" or "ungodly," (as the "properity gospel" does) or "good" or "bad" in a moralistic way, punishment too often becomes the primary or, worse, the only definition of

"justice." In such a circumstance, there is little chance of healing social problems. Interaction with society under these concepts often consists primarily in scolding politicians and demanding that the law enforce on all citizens the sort of behaviour considered to be correct according to a given ideology, whether or not it ultimately has an overall positive effect on that society. We must avoid the inner contradictions of moralism and address the whole scope of true morality. Contrary to an ideological approach, the Christian community must engage society and culture in a creative and interactive way. This would entail a deep sense of social justice, not juridical justice. The healing of social injustices can prevent as much crime, and sometimes more effectively, than juridical concepts of justice.

Justice, Morality and Moralism

True morality consists far more in how well we care for one another than in what sort of behaviour we demand of others, and so it must certainly be tied to valid concepts of social justice.

Some years ago, when a large body of us had gathered in Ottawa to protest the civil sanctions against Iraq which caused about 500 children to die each day, I approached a group of pro-life protesters in Ottawa. I asked them to join our protest because of the death of all these children. The members of the group were essentially very right-wing Christians, and they were quite rude and openly hostile to our protest. They refused, in an openly condemnatory manner, our invitation to express a sincere pro-life position by joining us in protesting the deaths of these thousands of "already born" children in Iraq. How can Christians consider it to be an authentic expression of morality or "prolife-ism" to oppose the killing of unborn children while ignoring the killing of children who are already born? Is it truly moral to protect the lives of unborn children while ignoring or trivializing the fact that they will have to grow up in a world where, because of our own excess and ideologies, they will not have sufficient food, tens of thousands will die agonised deaths from starvation and many of the necessary natural resources will have been squandered, and climate change will have made their lives precarious and uncertain?

It is neither just nor moral to deny global warming for the sake of a religious ideology or the outrageous profits of multinational corporations. It is genuinely evil to deny it in order to protect corporate profits or cultish "end times" fetishes. Is it actually moral to demand that governments enforce the sort of correct personal behaviour that our own ideologies demand while turning consumer capitalism into a religious doctrine that cannot be subjected to critique and criticism?

One fatal flaw in the preaching of Christianity that has had negative effects in North America is the failure to distinguish between morality and moralism. From an authentic Christian point of view, true morality has to do not only with salvation but with every aspect of our inter-human relations; it is not simply a system of "correct behaviour" according to the often arbitrary corporatising concepts of one or another religious ideology.

True morality is not a system of law that, if obeyed, makes one a moral person. Nor does holiness consist in ultra-correct behaviour; rather it consists in perfect unselfish love. It is necessary to have laws relating to ethics and civil conduct for the sake of society, but such laws have little to do with the change of a person's heart and an inner transformation into the image of Christ's love. Morality is not a form of bondage but a path of liberation. True morality cannot be expressed in a society that does not base itself on concepts of social justice and commonweal, the care for all the members of that society equally, no matter what the circumstances of their lives and whether or not they conform to your religion's ideology or sometimes arbitrary interpretation of one's particular

holy book.

When we speak of "the law of God," we are not speaking of an ordinary, worldly notion of "law." God's law is not given to repress us but to protect us and guide our inner transformation, not to corporatise us and force us to act under compulsion, rejecting the action of our free will. As Orthodox Christians, we cannot accept the notion that the "law of Moses" overrides the moral imperatives of Christ.

NOTES:

1. *Queen's Quarterly,* 19 June 2002

2. *"The Ambivalence of Disenchantment"* in **Thought Out of Bounds**, University of Minnesota, (Minneapolis, London. Vol.7, p.13).