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The Church and Revolution

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It is the great revolutions of modern history, first in England, then in France, Russia and China, which have created the world in which we live. It is these revolutions which have procuded the modern society of freedom and equality, democracy and the modern technical economy. The revolutions in the East gave rise to the Communist organisation of society and the system of the totalitarian state. The repercussions of these revolutions at the present time are causing political, social and economic upheavals in Asia, Africa and South America. The range and intensity of this contemporary revolution are world-wide and total. It is spreading all over the world and transforming it, and no end is yet in sight. We are all living in a transitional society, and can only see the vague outlines of the society of the future gradually becoming perceptible.

X One would have thought that these tremendous upheavals, which have been going on for over 350 years, would have stirred Christian thinking to the depths, and stimulated it to ever-new enquiry into the reasons for these great revolutions, and their effects. It is an extraordinary fact that this did not happen. Of course, the Churches have discussed the revolution, and its spirit, especially since the French revolution. But these discussions were predominantly negative in character. There was no change, until 1848, and then only a partial one, when liberal theologians, pastors and church-members supported democratic reforms in Germany. Admittedly, since the 16th centruy many theological reasons had been put forward supporting the right of subjects to rebel against tyrannical rulers; in some cases they had even advocated the assassination of tyrants. But this theological thinking had not even begun to think about the revolutionary movement itself which was far broader in scope. It dealt only with the infringements of duty and the derelictions of the authorities who had hitherto been the legal rulers, and asked whether it was permissible to depose a ruler of this kind, and whether it was a moral and Christian duty to oppose him.

The mainly negative character of the Christian discussion about revolution springs from the powerful and dominant tradition of a conservative Christian mentality; in the 19ty and 20th centuries this mentality even wanted to turn the clock back. It regarded the traditional political and social order (especially the authority of the princes and kings) as sacred and unchallengeable, because it was divinely appointed.

St. Paul's words about the political authorities of the Roman Empire of his time being a divine "disposition" (diatagé) were interpreted in this conservative sense. The privileged classes of the clergy and the nobility were regarded as having been placed in that state by God. The social hierarchy has considered as sacred and everyone had to remain in that state in which it had pleased God to place him. This practically excluded all dynamism, mobility or social progress.

Judged from this aspect, revolution is bound to look like something reprehensible, or even criminal, as a revolt not only against men but against God and against the world-order established by Him once and for all time. The conservative-Christian rejection of revolution is therefore a religious condemnation of it, not merely a moral or political one. But first of all we must examine the character and concept of revolution more closely, before passing on to criticise this Christian conservatism.

I.

The concept of revolution

There is such a bewildering number of definitions that we can only select a few here, which are, or were, of importance for our subject, and for the tradition of Christian thinking.

1. The first of these concepts is that of political revolution in the narrower sense, involving merely a change of rulers; the persons in authority are replaced by others. This change of rulers does not change the existing political and social system, which remains as before. It is not attacked either in practice or ideologically. In this limited sense, therefore, political revolution takes place within a framework which remains unaffected.
2. Social revolution goes further. Social classes which have hitherto been oppressed, unfree and under the authority of others obtain the upper hand, more or less by the use of force. They overthrow the authority of the ruling classes, and take their place. Social revolutions of this kind include political revolution. Examples are the social and political upheavals in the Middle Ages, the struggles between the patricians and the guilds, the transition from the monarchy to the republic, all of which were limited in extent. But in addition to the actual seizure of power from the upper class, the first ideological attacks upon them are apparent: the oppressed, the socially unprivileged, demand freedom and equal rights; they too want "a place in the sun", they want all to have a share in the power and the same standards of living as the people who hitherto enjoyed privileges and a pleasant life at the cost of those without power or money, who had to work for them. The peasants who revolted at the time of the Reformation based their social demands directly upon the Christian Gospel, insisting on the freedom and equality of all the children of God;

they insisted that in future these principles must determine the social order, which should be modelled on the pattern of the human fellowship in Paradise . As the old rhyme says:

"When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?"

The same themes came up again in a stronger form a century later among the "Spiritualists" and revolutionary sects at the time of the revolution in England. They in turn became the spiritual fathers of the American revolution. In these cases the Christian thinking about revolution was not conservative; it was progressive, even pro-revolutionary. In its view, the Christian Church founded by God's covenant with man, the people of God in which all members are free and equal, is the original pattern upon which the secular-political and social order should be modelled, as opposed to the traditional society of privilege with its hierarchy. The spiritual "democracy" of God's Kingdom on earth - already effective in the form of the Christian community - must give rise to earthly, political democracy, and constantly renew it, providing it with a truth of its own and instilling life into it. Faith in the presence and the immanence of God's Kingdom in the world, through the Christian community, therefore gives rise to Christian revolutionary thinking, whose repercussions have created the society which exists today in England and America - admittedly through many stages of secularisation.

Two opposing forms of Christian thinking, one conservative, the other revolutionary, are meetin today in the ecumenical movement. Which of them will prevail ? Are there theological reasons which should compel us to give one of them the preference? We must revert to these questions later on.

3. The third type of revolution is total revolution, in which the whole social system is overthrown. This upheaval affects every class in society and every sphere of life, including culture, intellectual life and religion. It is this type of revolution which is setting out today to conquer the whole world, supported by the forces of our technological civilisation. This revolution is total, not only in extent, but also in its intensity, because it is based on a new human attitude to the world; and this new human attitude is revolutionary because it has the power completely to transform the world as we know it. It is the creator of a second, artificial world. 1)

The technological civilisation changes man's attitude to Nature; his attitude to his fellow-men, to society; to his work; and finally man is transformed himself through technology, science, scientific social organisation, and through the application of psychological and sociological insights. Man transforms himself into the kind of man who is needed by the social system of today and tomorrow; he adapts himself to the system.

1) Cf. Helmut Schelsky, "Der Mensch in der wissenschaftlich-technischen Zivilisation" (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Geisteswissenschaften H. 96), Köln-Opladen, 1961.

But this means that he, who is the creator and shaper of the new, technological, scientific, rational world makes himself unfree, becomes the slave of his own creation, because the very continuation of his own existence depends on the system which he himself has created with its machinery, apparatus, technology, scientific methods and social organisations. So man the creator becomes his own creature and has to obey the laws of the secondary world which he has created. This reveals man's creative power in our scientific, technological civilisation; but it also reveals the menace to man himself. He has released powers of destruction which seem to be completely uncontrollable. 2)

This concept of total revolution stands out among a whole series of other concepts, which also indicate forms of change in society and State. Firstly, revolution is not evolution, by which we mean a gradual, organic development stage by stage. Admittedly, revolution may be the transition to evolution, as in the case of the revolutions in England and America; but a clear distinction must be drawn between the two concepts. Evolution presupposes a given social system, which it does not overthrow but develops during the course of a long period of time, in so far as it is able.

Secondly, a distinction must be drawn between revolution and reform (or a plan for reform). Reform accepts the existing social system, but tries to improve the different institutions in it; these improvements are based on criticisms of society made by different political and social movements within it, and derived partly from the social-ethical thinking of Christians and of the Churches.

Thirdly, at the opposite pole stands reaction. This tries to eliminate revolution and its effects, and to represent it ideologically as invalid, illegitimate and morally reprehensible. As Hannah Arendt has rightly pointed out, reaction owes its existence to the French Revolution. 3). By nature it is polemical (we would aid, negative and unfruitful, incapable of assuming fresh forms) and the whole concept of reaction is of a "derived nature". 4)

Conservatism should be distinguished from reaction in spite of all the similarities between them during the course of history. Conservatism is entirely dependent upon the fact of revolution; it is an attempt to maintain or to restore the pre-revolutionary order of society. It lives on a pre-scientific myth about Nature, which may also have a Christian tinge (the Creation). National-Socialism made use of this myth in secularised form (the idea of the "Volk"-community, the unity of "Führer" and "Volk", blood and soil). The anti-revolutionary, conservative romanticism of Europe has often reverted to this myth and given it historical expression.

2) Cf. H.D. Wendland, "Die Macht schöpferischer Zerstörung, über den Menschen im technischen Zeitalter", Zeitwende/Neue Furche, 1966, Volume 6, page 382 - 390.

3) Hannah Arendt, "Über die Revolution", München, 1965, p. 364.

4) " " " " " " " "

It was closely connected especially with the Protestant theology of the 19th century and with the social and political attitude of that theology. In his book "The socialist Decision" (1933) Paul Tillich submitted this conservative "origin-mythos" to radical criticism, which is still valid today; already in the 1920's he pointed out the connection between the Christian nationalism of that time and the conservative "origin-mythos". 5)

In so far as conservative thinking is based on the conservation of what is old and traditional (which it equates with what is valid and true- "das alte Wahre - fass es an", as Goethe said), it is to a large extent polemical. Yet it draws its strength not merely from the antithesis (like reaction) but from historical traditions which it is fatal to ignore (the importance of geography and history) and from a realistic view of man. Conservatism is radically opposed to all forms of optimistic Utopias.

It is not only anti-revolutionary romanticism which is conservative in its thinking. Sören Kierkegaard, with his sharp eye, regards revolution as the moral decline of mankind. And in the IInd Volume of his Memoirs "Vergänglichliches und Unvergänglichliches", Fedor Stepun describes the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia as a "mixture of crime and disease".

To those who think on these lines, revolution is downfall, disruption, decadence, the decline of organic fellowship in nation and state, the decay of ethics and religion, the end of all true culture and a contempt for history. Everything good, noble and great is irrevocably lost through revolution. These laments are still heard in the pessimistic criticisms of culture written during the 1920's.

There is only one truth in these laments, that all great historical changes really do destroy many values which can never be restored nor regained. They belong irrevocably to the past. But according to the Christian view, this change and loss is part of the nature of history which is the history of mortal men, institutions and empires.

Revolution defines itself quite differently. According to its own self-understanding, through revolution the free, creative man works out his own future and that of mankind, by liberating it from the ballast of traditions and the number of laws and rights which have accumulated during the long course of history. He opens the way to the future, builds up a better society (if not the perfect one) and a right form of state in which freedom, equality, justice and humanity have their due place. Revolution's own understanding of itself is closely related both to the political-social Utopia (perfection as the ultimate goal of history) and to radical, revolutionary Natural Law. The former speaks of the new future

5) P. Tillich: "Christentum and soziale Gestaltung", collected works, Vol. II, Stuttgart, 1962, p. 209, 219 ff.
Concerning conservative parties see von der Gablentz: "Einführung in die politische Wissenschaft", Köln-Opladen, 1965, p. 147 ff.
Cf. the Article by A. Bergsträsser: "Konservatismus", RGG. Vol. VI, 3rd ed. Tübingen, 1962, Sp. 1782 ff.

of mankind that is opened up by revolution; the latter stresses the fact that revolution springs from the creative rational nature of man, which is the norm for all historical orders and which deprives them of their absolute validity and domination over men. Human reason thinks out the ultimate, true form of justice, state and society. At the end of the revolutionary process stands the empire of freedom, the empire in which human beings can develop all their capacities to the full; the empire of rational culture and of justice, achieved through active revolution. By and large this is the secular-eschatological self-understanding of revolution. It is most clearly apparent where it is understood as absolute revolution, as in Karl Marx. The victory of the proletariat puts an end to the previous history of mankind, and opens the door to the reign of freedom, which at the same time offers the inexhaustible satisfaction of all human needs. This is the real beginning of human history, because the conflict between human nature and human existence has ended, which has hitherto caused so much suffering. And the men and women who belong to the empire of freedom are absolute, creative and free, they are the creators of the really human world in which everything has been completely eliminated which estranges man from himself, from his fellow-men, from work and its products, and lastly from Nature (6).

II.

Two concepts of Revolution which are diametrically opposed.

Karl Marx developed the concept of absolute Revolution. He went further; he created (especially in his early writings) that concept of Revolution which has had the strongest influence upon history and which has produced the new Communist elements in society. Revolution raises the old story of the class-struggle and brings about the uniform, classless society. The dictatorship of the victorious proletariat is the instrument used by history to carry this out. The destructive dualism between the two surviving classes - the proletariat and the capitalists - is terminated and eliminated. We have already described the main features of the new society in which man is free, creative and liberated from all estrangement, deformation and humiliation. The absolute Revolution also sets up man himself as an absolute, who creates himself and society. In the form of the collectivity, the proletariat, this man is (so to speak) his own Messiah.

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- (6) Out of the tremendous amount of literature on the theme of Revolution, mention may be made here of two outstanding works: Karl Brinkmann: "Soziologische Theorie der Revolution", 1948, and Hannah Arendt: "Über die Revolution" 1963 (On Revolution). The wealth of ideas in these books cannot be dealt with in this brief essay. There are no theological books on the subject at all, apart from the essays of Paul Tillich and Arthur Rich mentioned in Section IV. A good introduction is given by E. Fahlbusch in his article on Revolution in the EKL. Vol.III, Göttingen, 1959, Sp.639 ff.

This concept, according to which this (proletarian) revolution is the meaning and goal of the whole of history, has developed an amazingly strong missionary force, and is exercising its influence everywhere where poverty exists or oppression (e.g. feudalism); it acts as a ferment producing unrest and upheaval, especially in Asia and Africa. This means, however, that we are passing through a total world-wide revolution which affects every continent and is overthrowing all the old cultures and social orders with irresistible force. The revolutionary momentum of this movement can no longer be stopped; at the most it can only be slowed down a little. As far as the dynamic advance of technology and science is concerned, things are no different in the East than they are in the West, in spite of the differences in the political and social structures (e.g. totalitarian state here, democracy there).

Directly opposed to this is the view of Revolution taken by Friedrich Julius Stahl (- 1861), leader of the Conservatives in Prussia, as developed in his "Philosophie des Rechts" (3rd edition) Heidelberg, 1854/56). Stahl fully adopted the slogan of Gottfried Menken, the revivalist-preacher of Bremen: "All revolutions are contrary to the Kingdom of God". Since Menken and Stahl this has been the slogan of conservative-Christian thinking, but Stahl was the first to provide it with a theological and legal-philosophical basis. He constructs his doctrine of justice and of the state on the basis of "the Christian view of life" which he derives from the authority of God Himself, understood as a "personality".

Revolution is against God and His order. It is man's rebellion against God. Man wants to supersede God Himself. Revolution is therefore a demonstration of human sin. However, this basic attitude does not prevent Stahl from seeing the facts sharply and clearly; so he clearly recognised the absolute and permanent character of the contemporary revolution. Nor can Stahl be reproached for taking due purely negative view of Revolution. He rather endeavours to take due account of the just demands of his time for a certain amount of freedom for citizens and a certain flexibility in the constitutions. He remains the passionate advocate of the legitimacy of royalty, (especially in Prussia), but in contrast to absolutism he tries to incorporate in his view some recognition of the right of citizens to freedom (admittedly in a form which appears very modest to us today). Admittedly this was a modernised form of the old freedoms of the "Stände" (classes) rather than real democratic thinking.

Stahl's concept had a great influence on his time, on German Conservatism during the 1920's and on Protestant theology, right up to the time of Walter Künneth's book "Politik zwischen Dämon und Gott" (1954). The anti-revolutionary spirit was so strong that it has prevented Christian thinking from a frank, unprejudiced study of the phenomenon of Revolution and its ideas, right up to the present day. The worst consequence was that the big Churches in Germany as a whole absolutely refused to accept either democracy or socialism.

Whereas Christian thinking about social ethics contained great possibilities for transforming these movements and integrating revolutionary ideas within itself. But the Church and theology supported the social and political powers-that-be - the monarchy, the bourgeoisie and the employers. Today, however, the totalitarian character of the world-wide revolution compels us to study these movements. We can no longer avoid doing so, and are constantly being urged to do so by Christians in Asia and Africa who are experiencing the social upheavals in their countries in their own lives and in their own Churches. This raises many entirely new problems for ecumenical social ethics. (7)

Stahl's victory in the political and social thinking of the German Church must not remain permanent. We must therefore ask ourselves whether we can recognise and accept any factor of truth in Karl Marx' concept of revolution.

The National-Socialist revolution was an ideological one; in this it corresponds to the Marxist concept of revolution, although otherwise it was entirely different from Marxism. The Nazi revolution was a total one, i.e. it revolutionised every sphere of life. This was the cause of its conflict with the Church. In the Church-struggle the Church was forced to recognise that the issue at stake was not merely the freedom to preach the Christian faith and to attend worship; it was government and society itself, freedom and justice in state and society. The limitations of German Protestant theology very soon became apparent, because it had not worked out a social ethic which could be applied to modern problems and situations, so that it was completely helpless when faced by the Nazi revolution. At first it completely misinterpreted National-Socialism, namely as a conservative movement for national renewal, which wanted to set up a state with real authority instead of the anarchy of party-government. Its traditional thinking about "authority" made it impossible for the Church to understand the revolutionary nature of National-Socialism. This conservative concept of "authority" still had a strong influence in the resistance-movement of the "Confessing Church". For this resistance did not follow the ideas of democracy, but the idea of an authoritarian state which had been purified by justice and freedom. The Confessing Church did not work out a Christian concept of revolution either, although that would have been a good answer to National-Socialism and a useful approach for criticising its ideology and its actions. It became increasingly clear that the problems of modern society would not longer be tackled from the standpoint of the traditional doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. For the crucial issue now was not to leave the economy, society and civilisation any longer under the jurisdiction of the state, but to ensure that the Church (and its social ethic) shared responsibility for those spheres of life and for humanising them.

(7) See H.D. Wendland: "Die weltweite Gesellschaft und die Okumene der Kirche " in W. Marxsen (editor) "Einheit der Kirche?" Witten, 1964, p. 74 ff.
and especially W. Schweitzer: "Christen im raschen sozialen Umbruch heute" (appendix to the Oekumenische Rundschau 2, Stuttgart, 1966).

III.

Tendencies toward total revolution in the world today

We have already referred to the total character of the revolutionary processes today. It is the revolution brought about by technology and science, by rationalism and the rapid spread of industrialisation. This revolution is seizing hold of every continent, upsetting all traditions and institutions, and eating its way into the oldest cultures. It is putting all the religions of the world to a test of unprecedented severity and compelling them to re-think their ethics and social ethic in the light of the new human and social situation. The struggle between the mythological language of the religions and the spirit of rationalism has entered a new stage, which may be decisive.

In the case of Asia and Africa, the Christian Church and its mission is one of the important causes of this revolution. For it was the Church which introduced the civilisation of Europe and America into those continents through its educational institutions, and which did much to form a new intellectual élite there. Here Christianity has had a positively revolutionary effect on the existing cultures and social systems. Only from time to time this process is held up and stabilised, for instance in the form of the "tribal churches" in Africa which correspond to some extent to the regional and national Churches in Europe, in the principle of linking Church and society. Today, however, these tribal churches are breaking up and being superseded by new forms of Christian community (cf. the essay mentioned in Note 7).

The most important elements in this "global" revolution are perhaps the following (it is only possible to mention a few of them here).

The first is the crisis in the clan and its partial dissolution under the influence of the western principle of individualism, involving the free choice of a marriage-partner based on affection; this means a complete metamorphosis of the legal and social forms of marriage. The small family of modern times based on partnership is on the increase, especially in the African cities. The position of women is becoming freer and more independent, they are gradually being liberated from the domination of men, and can no longer be treated like goods and chattels.

The second element is the revolution in agriculture owing to the introduction of machinery and technical-scientific methods, such as the use of chemical fertilisers. This involves a change in man's attitude to the soil and to plants, seeds and harvest; his attitude is now a rational one. The revolution in agriculture has also produced entirely new social structures, which are transforming village life and the old tribal systems.

The third element is the large number of new forms of state which are endeavouring to adopt western political ideas and constitutions. As a result they are torn between dictatorship and democracy. It is quite obvious that in places where there is absolutely no basis for democracy either in culture or in education (not even the capacity to read, write or count), it is artificial to transfer the constitutional forms of democracy, and impossible for them to work.

The fourth element is the ideological influences that come from the West, and which are very strong. This is particularly apparent in the outbursts of nationalism in Asia and Africa. Although the European idea of the nation and of national freedom is based on entirely different historical and social conditions, nationalism has had revolutionary effects in transforming society, and (so far, at any rate) has been the strongest ferment in the new state-systems. Without the integrating force of the concept of the nation, it would be impossible to break down the tribal barriers and to overcome the great social and cultural differences within the new states. (This is also the view of many Christians who are politically active in those continents). Without the idea of the nation it would also be impossible to train an élite capable of assuming political responsibility.

The fifth element (which is the basic problem) is the question of the whole new order of society and the position of men and women within that society. The necessity of giving the state a great deal of initiative and scope in setting up the new economic system causes the appearance of the idea of national socialism in various forms, and attempts to set up a more or less socialistic economic and social system. It remains to be seen how many of these experiments will prove valuable permanently.

These experiments are often connected with the secular-religious idea of a collective solution, or a "social" redemption, in which Christian, Marxist and ancient pagan elements are all mixed up in an extraordinary syncretism. The number of prophets, saviours and sects is simply inconceivable. Many of them do not last long and have very few adherents.

The old world-religions - Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism - are compelled in this world-situation to rethink their own ethics and social ethics, to adapt them or (in the case of Buddhism) to think them out for the first time. In doing so the non-Christian religions borrow considerably from Christianity. For it seems as if the ideas of freedom, humanity, justice, social and political peace, a decent human society and social equality are indispensable for building up the new states and social units. All these ideas were coined in the West. Attempts must therefore be made to link them up with their own ancient religious-ethical traditions, and to apply the authority of the old traditions to the new forms of thought and behaviour with as little disruption as possible.

This whole situation shows the total nature of the revolution which is sweeping over the whole world today and transforming it; not even the religions are immune from it. New forms of state, society and culture will arise from it. Its most important tendency is the trend to form a uniform civilisation and a uniform society all over the world.

Both in the developing countries and outside them, many Christians and many Church are dismayed, baffled and indecisive in face of the revolutionary changes taking place there. This is shown in Karl Heinz Pfeffer's instructive book "Welt im Umbruch" (Gütersloh, 1966). This attitude of anxious uncertainty is connected with the lack of any modern social ethic and of a Christian understanding of revolution, both in the positive and in the critical sense. The traditional background of church thinking (whether "Obrigkeitsstaat", democracy, economic liberalism, or conservative "community"-ideology, etc.) excludes a social ethic which is realistic and relevant, and is an obstacle to understanding the world-wide social revolution of our time.

In face of this highly dangerous negative or helpless attitude, which makes it impossible to take appropriate action, the following demands must be made to the Churches:

1. A comprehensive critical understanding of the world-wide revolution of our time, its tendencies and forces, must be worked out, in cooperation between Christian ethics and all the other competent sciences;
2. In this connection a theological theory of revolution is especially important (the present study indicates its approach);
3. Thorough criticism of all the liberal, socialist, conservative and reactionary theories and ideologies about society and revolution will help to prepare the ground for tackling the tasks mentioned above.
4. Over and above theological-socioethical theory, the Churches must be guided by an open-minded policy of solidarity with the world which (with special concern for the plight of man) tackles the problems of the new order and the world-wide order of society. These problems are being raised everywhere today wherever the revolutionary process is going on. First and foremost what is needed is Christian courage, which faces the future and its tasks freely and frankly.
5. In order for the Church to act in this way, it is essential for it to clarify the pattern and to see what form it should assume in future, i.e. the pattern of the responsible society which judges all situations and orders by the socio-ethical norms of freedom, justice, partnership (Mitmenschlichkeit) and peace.

This applies also to Christians in the countries of rapid social change. Only a very small minority are frankly facing the situation and taking ethical action in social and political affairs; while a large majority are helpless, unfree and indecisive, and need to change their mentality completely if they are to obey the Commandment to love their neighbour today.

IV.

The revolutionary element in the Christian message

We must now examine the revolutionary element in the Christian message itself, and its influence on human history. From the theological aspect, this is the crucial question. If human history today has become revolutionary in character, the question then arises: what is the connection between the revolutionary element in the Christian message and revolution in history? Are they antagonistic to one another? Do they run in two entirely different dimensions - one spiritual, the other secular? (In this case our problem might be solved on the lines of the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms). Or is it possible to combine the two? Let us examine these questions more closely.

Paul Tillich is the first, and almost the only, important theologian who has recognised the problem and devoted his attention to it. (8) He begins his study (quite rightly) with the eschatological expectation of the Early Church, which lived in expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God all over the world. This Kingdom has already become present in history through Jesus Christ and in the form of his Church. It is changing and transforming this human world already here and now and leading it towards the New Creation at the End of Time. The Kingdom of God not only affects the individual and the inner life, ethics and religion of men; it affects the whole world of men, understood as a totum in time and space, without any exception. There is nothing material nor external which is not affected by this fact of the Kingdom of God. The universalism of the rule of God embraces His whole creation, liberating it from sin and death and leading it towards its consummation. For the issue is God's rule over the world.

The Kingdom of God presents a challenge to the present constitution and form of this world, in so far as it is not in accordance with the holy, life-giving will of God, but is dominated by sin and death. But the purpose of God's challenge to the world is not to set up an entirely new political régime and a perfect social order which would eliminate poverty, injustice and oppression; it is rather to penetrate the whole world with the divine justice and love which are united in God and His rule. The will of God is directed towards the human person and the human heart, urging men to repent and to be transformed into sons and heirs of God and His Kingdom. But this action affects the whole of human life, including politics and society and history, so that there is no duality between body and spirit, inward and outward, man and the world. Ethical and social trends are therefore immanent in the coming of the Kingdom of God. At the same time they are the result and expression of that Kingdom.

These ethical and social trends express themselves through the Church of Christ in history, which not only believes and hopes in its existence in the world, but also acts by giving service in the love of Christ, and recognises all men as its neighbours.

(8) Especially in his analyses of Marxism, published in Vol. II of his collected works: "Christentum und soziale Gestaltung", Stuttgart, 1962, (new edition).

The Church regards its mission to the world, therefore, not merely as a mission (although this remains fundamental) but also as responsibility for man - especially for those in poverty and distress. As the epiphany of God's grace and glory, His Kingdom is always something far more than moral action, or than an ethical community created by moral action; it transcends and breaks through all ethical norms, ideas and social factors. Nevertheless the force and effect of social ethics is immanent in this Kingdom; in accordance with its nature, it takes up the struggle with all forms of injustice, misery and oppression among mankind. It strives to restore man in his truth and humanity, in face of all the innumerable travesties and perversions of human nature which actually exist.

In this way, therefore, the rule of God indirectly has social and political repercussions, not by stirring up rebellion, not by the use of political and military force, but solely through the "quiet", unarmed, loving action and service of Christian groups scattered all over the world, and yet united in Christ.

The aim of these remarks is to draw the line against Christian utopianism and chiliasm, which believes in restoring Christ's Kingdom in this world through Christian action. But it is not the Christian Church which builds up Christ's Kingdom of life and grace-although it undoubtedly makes use of Christ's followers and endows them with the full authority of the Holy Spirit for their action. In this world and in its history Christ's Kingdom continues to struggle with sin, the flesh and death; it is therefore not completed. Only at the End of history will God consummate His Kingdom, through Christ. However, the challenging presence of God's Kingdom within history gives the latter its aim and end, constantly gives it fresh impetus and disturbs its course. Under the influence of eschatology, the world is constantly changing, although the victory of Christ is still concealed. It is therefore an eschatological ethos which confronts the situation in the world, challenging it with the power of love, which transforms itself creatively to meet the different times and situations.

Through its prophecy of the End, and through its radical challenge, this ethos destroys all myths of the origin which worship and invoke the powers of the past - origin, life, blood and procreation. It also does away with the isolated belief in the creation which equates "this" world with God's creation and falls a prey to the illusion that the pure life-giving forces of Paradise are available and can be allowed to flow unchecked. It is Christ alone who unlocks the gates of Paradise and shows the way to eternal life.

So the Kingdom of God is the imperfect Kingdom struggling in history with the weapons of love and of the Holy Spirit. It suffers innumerable defeats through the unbelief and sin of men, through the meagre faith and the cowardice of Christians; but it remains invincible, because it lives through Christ's presence in the world, which no power of this world can remove. It is therefore the fundamental Christian paradox of death and resurrection, of victory through defeat, of triumph in apparent failure, which also decides the character of the eschatological ethic.

The innumerable prophets who have prophesied the end of Christianity have all proved to be false prophets. Even if millions of people believe what they say, they will always be false prophets.

Arthur Rich also follows the basic ideas of the eschatological, world-transforming ethos in his way. On the one hand he does not accept the concept of "absolute" revolution nor the way in which it sets up man as the measure of all things. On the other hand, however, he understands being-a-Christian as revolutionary living for the sake of love and justice, and in order to preserve the humanity of man. Maintenance of the status quo, laissez-faire, compromising with circumstances, are denials of the critical-revolutionary nature of Christian life. "Consequently the eschatology of the Christian faith releases a revolutionary humanity (Menschlichkeit)." (9) .

This revolutionary, Christian existence does not aim at a "social order of a Final character". The love of the Christian faith is no anti-revolutionary; it strives for concrete improvement within the relative and the historical; it therefore transposes the love of Christ (Agape) into humanity. So A. Rich comes to a revolutionary Christian humanism which is not utopian and not absolute. He deliberately and rightly goes further than the theological ethic which had hitherto existed, which had not adequately recognised the problem of revolution because it was not derived from the Coming Kingdom of God and from His righteousness, which places commitments upon men. (10)

It is now for us to follow the way indicated by P. Tillich and A. Rich. Let us therefore now examine the social-theological approach of revolutionary Christian humanism.

First of all this approach (as already briefly explained) must be understood eschatologically. This means : the Kingdom of God comes into the world with the commandment of justice and with the gift of love - the love which serves and which transforms through service. For the sake of man and his future in history, the active Christian community strives for freedom, justice and humanity, although these values cannot attain perfection in their institutional form. But a single drop of humanity and justice is worth infinitely more than the heartless laissez-faire of inhumanity and injustice. All human institutions are transformable; they are not fixed, immutable quantities. The Kingdom of God's righteousness is already at work here and now in the action of the Church, improving the institutions of society and constantly confronting them with the norm of God's justice and love.

(9) Arthur Rich: "Glaube in politischer Entscheidung", Zürich, 1962, page 96.

(10) Arthur Rich: "Glaube in politischer Entscheidung", Zürich, 1962, page 97.

This task is the office of "secular Christians", i.e. of all those Christians who are carrying out their functions and professions in society, in the state, in economic and cultural life. They therefore have a vocation entrusted to them by God in the service of the societas semper reformanda: to reform and improve the institutions of society. It is not for Christians to ask whether their action is very successful or not, nor whether its effect is long or short. They must carry out the vocation with which God has entrusted them of service to man and to society, in each historical situation. They must seek out suffering and distress and remove them, especially those forms which are deeply concealed. As the servants (Diakone) of the world, they are the pioneers of all social reform.

Secondly, this social-theological approach must be understood anthropologically. In his being-in-the-world man (in spite of his sin) is the creature of God, and has been appointed by God Himself as His cooperator, and endowed with creative faculties. This is the source of man's infinite power over the world. Man is the administrator who organises and reforms the state, the economy, society. It is through his intelligence that man is able to do this, to observe his environment, to analyse it and to change it; but man's intelligence cannot liberate him from sin and death (as Luther pointed out). In matters affecting "the world", however, man's intelligence has full authority and is entitled to take action. This anthropological concept of our social-ethical approach must, of course, immediately be extended and also limited: owing to their eschatological and spiritual existence, the Christian (and the Christian Church) has the vocation and task to love the world and to give it service. This vocation is linked up with man's creative task as the "cooperator dei", although it has a different origin because it is derived from the Kingdom of Christ. It is the union between these two vocations which produces the fertility of Christian action, and its unique power in history.

Thirdly, the social-ethical approach must be understood and evaluated from the aspect of the ethos of action. By this I mean the duty of Christians (and especially of Christian service-groups) to cooperate in state and society, particularly to reform social institutions. Christians are not solely responsible, but they do share responsibility. State and society are not the creations of the Christian faith (they are rather independent, and have their own justification); but Christians share responsibility for social and political institutions and forms.

It should also be stressed here that the attitude of Christians to their environment should be both positive and initial. For they are in solidarity with all the people who exercise the same political, social or economic functions as themselves. However, this solidarity is at the same time critical, because Christians are bound to protest against all forms of injustice and inhumanity. This critical solidarity expresses itself in the readiness of Christians to consider any opportunities for change which point the way to the future. Readiness to envisage the future of society is part of the contribution which Christians must make in society. This attitude of readiness is derived from the faith that God Himself holds the door open for human history to go forward to the future, and that this presents many new opportunities for organising and shaping society.

Christians therefore have freedom to plan both in small matters and in large ones, because if their action were split up into individual efforts it would lose its effectiveness. It is the general plan which determines what separate steps are taken.

Fourthly, and lastly, the extremely important question of the pattern for Christian action in serving the state and society must be examined. We mean a historical pattern which can actually be attained - not an unreal Utopia - a pattern for which the actual situation really offers a genuine basis both in the opportunities latent within it and in its crises and inadequacies. Ever since the WCC Assemblies at Amsterdam (in 1948) and Evanston (in 1954) the ecumenical movement has tried to provide a pattern of this kind with the slogan "the responsible society". (11) This pattern indicates a decent, humane society with democratic institutions, whose norms are freedom, justice, humanity and peace. This presupposes that the men and women living in that society are free persons with a sense of responsibility towards God and towards their fellow-men, who are called to cooperate freely and responsibly in state and society. An élite of persons and nations must lay the foundation of this "responsible society" of the future, which is already beginning to appear today. This élite, in its turn, must create the bases for democratic states and societies, in places where they do not yet exist (or have only just begun to appear), such as Asia, Africa and South America.

With the ethic of a revolutionary, Christian humanism of this kind we are at the same time fulfilling the heritage of the revolutionary Christian groups of the English Revolution and of Puritanism. For those groups regarded God's sacred covenant with men in the form of the Christian Church as the prototype and basis for the social covenant between men. The freedom of God's children in the Church (based on eschatological and spiritual reasons) must find expression in the political and social freedom and equality of the members of state and society. Free Christians must be free citizens. This connection sets in motion the political and social action of the Church, the aim of which is the democratic society of freedom and equality for all men.

Admittedly, some restrictions must be drawn here. The Kingdom of God does not become identical with society as a result of Christian action; secular freedom must be preserved, and the state and society must retain their own independent form. Christians are therefore not carrying out a "Christian revolution"; they are working with secular, human methods of justice and politics to reform society for the sake of man. Christians therefore remain within the limits imposed on them in this world. They do not set up any "Christian" orders, systems, states and societies; for their task is to humanise the secular orders, (13)

(11) Cf. the explanation and extension of this concept in H.D. Wendland: "Der Begriff der verantwortlichen Gesellschaft in seiner Bedeutung für die Sozialethik der Oekumene". Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik, 1965, Volume I, page 1 ff.

(12) On these aims cf. the instructive essay by P. Brunner: "Unsere Verantwortung für die Menschlichkeit der Gesellschaft und für das Recht". Pro Ecclesia, Vol. II (?), Berlin 1966, p.180 ff. We fully agree with the basic ideas in this essay.

and the slightest real progress that can be attained there is more important than the most perfect Christian Utopia, because it guarantees real help to definite people or social groups. However, although secular order may appear to be Christian, this is only a deceptive veneer. The word "Christian" can be applied only to the action of Christians who are constantly transposing love into secular humanity. The problem of the relationship between Christian, revolutionary action and the politico-social, revolutionary action of men in history has still to be faced.

After what has been said above it is clear that this question of the relationship can no longer be answered negatively. A responsible relationship (which is both positive and critical) with the dynamic-revolutionary society of today is possible only if Christians are given an opportunity to understand both in theory and in practice all the chances of transforming society. But here some critical remarks must be made. Christians must not be guided by the ideology of the absolute revolution, nor by the Utopia of the perfect society. It means also that they cannot advocate revolutionising the whole situation by force; they have to take the course of reform. If Christians exclude the use of power, especially military power, from their world-transforming action, this does not mean that they believe in the possibility of a society or a state which is entirely devoid of power and has no system of authority. Christians are not striving for a Utopia of this kind. Humanity and order in society cannot be maintained without the use of power. But that power must be controlled, must be subject to definite norms, and must be used to promote the general aim of "humanising" society, improving justice, and establishing social and international peace. The exercise of power and the conduct of those entrusted with power must be governed by the norms of humanity, freedom and justice. If this is done, the use of force will become superfluous, and simultaneously the "prophylactic" transformation of society will eliminate those social and political causes which might have necessitated the use of force.

Here the question immediately arises: does not this mean abandoning the revolutionary ethic, about which we have talked so much? The answer to this question must stress the fact, that a strong relationship must be maintained between the separate reforms to be realised and our ultimate aim. For this is the only way to guarantee the meaning and the fruitfulness of the separate reforms and to keep the general-transformation in mind. The action of Christians will then avoid being split up and fragmentary. It is only in separate measures that the general plan can become real and visible; on the other hand, those separate measures derive their power and their truth only from the general plan as a whole. Separate measures and part-reforms must therefore always be subordinated to the general aim, and measured by that norm. This will ensure that Christian revolutionary humanism does not degenerate into a purely opportunist "reformism" with separate measures. It will remain revolutionary provided that it keeps in mind the new order of society as a whole. But in contrast to the ideology of the absolute revolution, this order of society is "new" only in the relative, historical sense; it does not emerge from history, nor does it profess to set an end to history. The general-order is new, however, in the sense of a new epoch within history, new motives and a new kind of interplay between the political forces and the social groups. The

absolute newness of the Utopia which claims to be the embodiment of the absolute revolution is an illusion. It therefore does not deserve the honourable name of "revolution". Genuine revolution is always related to real history (instead of escaping from it), and introduces into history a new epoch with a new kind of social order.

A clear distinction must therefore be drawn between Christian revolutionary humanism and the following:

1. "Reformism" with its disjointed efforts, which have no central aim;
2. total revolution which tends to regard man as the measure of all things;
3. a conservative mentality expressed in a pseudo-Christian equation of the world with God's creation (Paradise);
4. the whole negative reactionary attitude of extreme opposition to the idea of total revolution.

The truth of the Christian humanism described above lies in the following:

1. in its historicity, i.e. in its actual impact on its historical context;
2. in its concentration on those aims of contemporary society which can be implemented;
3. in the ethos of responsible actions based on love and justice;
4. in deriving this ethos from the eschatological expectation of God's coming Kingdom, which is already present in history;
5. in the love which transforms itself daily into practical measures of help and reform for the benefit of man.

Then the problem of "Church and revolution" raised at the beginning may be solved as follows.

The Church's mission in and to the world leads first to revolutionary, social-ethical action in the sense described above. Thus the Church itself becomes the source of constant revolutionary changes in state and society. Rooted as it is in the eschatological-revolutionary power of the Christian message, the Church's attitude to the historical revolution is both positive and critical. On the one hand the Church accepts that revolution; on the other hand it transcends it by rejecting all forms of Utopian ideology. Unlike radical Natural Law, because the Church is not able to dispose of God's creation, but must see it in the light of historicity, it perceives the opportunities for relevant action within contemporary social institutions.

We have thus indicated the kind of social-theological approach which enables the Church of Christ not only to stand firm in face of the total revolution of our time, and thus to act as a brake on the whole

revolutionary process, but also to meet the challenge of that revolution both positively and critically, or even to supersede it by means of revolutionary Christian action to create a new social order on the pattern of the responsible society.

Lastly, the crucial theological question must be raised: what is the attitude of this social-theological approach to the Gospel as the message of the New Testament?

Firstly, it is evident that our position has nothing to do with a fundamentalistic approach to the New Testament, with its legalistic implications.

Secondly, it is clear that we cannot transpose the eschatological message of the coming of God's Kingdom (in Jesus Christ and in his Church) into the social-moral Utopia of the Christian society. We have to maintain the distinction between the Kingdom of God and this world, and to bear in mind the conflict between that Kingdom and sin and death.

Thirdly, what has been said above shows that we reject the attitude of eschatological passivity, i.e. the idea of the Church's waiting passively and making no attempt to change the world. In our view, this kind of waiting is a misinterpretation of the eschatological hope.

Fourthly, from the coming of God's Kingdom, and from the spiritual character of Christ's Church, we deduce the right to use Christian freedom in the world, i.e. to undertake free Christian action upon the world - action which relates itself to the social structures and their essential transformation through love.

This also means, however, that within the spiritual continuity of the Church we must also take account of the discontinuity of the times. As Christians we must act in today's world with its technological civilisation and its dynamic industrialism, a world entirely different from that of late antiquity and of the Apostles. If we acted differently, that would mean that Christians were condemning themselves to unfreedom and preventing themselves from acting in accordance with the needs of the situation and of men today. This would be a complete contradiction of their eschatological-spiritual freedom; it would completely obstruct any application of Christian ethics to the present day. That cannot be the meaning of faith, love and hope. We cannot fulfil our obedience to God's act of salvation in Christ either by merely reciting the New Testament message or by imitating the ethics of the New Testament. We have to preserve faith, hope and love in the freedom of the Holy Spirit today in our contemporary society, trusting in the presence of Christ in and with the world. It is the freedom of faith and love which is the source of our freedom to serve contemporary man, and to shape our society today.