

# The Catholic Lawyer

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Volume 7  
Number 2 *Volume 7, Spring 1961, Number 2*

Article 3

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# MAN IN SOCIETY

EARL W. KINTNER\*

MAN HAS SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND himself since the dawn of reason. A mighty hurdle in this quest for understanding is the problem of defining the proper relationship of man with his fellow men. Man is a social being. Mankind has always lived in the context of a community, be it family, tribe, city, state, nation or a church. Since the beginning of self-awareness man has sought the Good Society. The sciences of politics and political economy are concerned with communal relations. Philosophy and Religion are as much concerned with the relation of man to other men as with the relation of man to God. Most of man's religious systems exhibit as much compulsion to build the City of God here as they do to attain the Kingdom of God hereafter. Certainly our own religious heritage is full of a quest for the Good Society. I must confess that I have not lately made a careful quantitative analysis of the Old Testament, but I would venture that more of its text is devoted to the effort to establish the proper relationship between man and man than is devoted to the proper relationship of man to God. Much of that volume is devoted to the Laws of Israel. Although the laws are dispensed by Jehovah, their *subject* is communal relations. The New Testament is much more concerned with the relationship of man to God, but human relations are not slighted. After all, the Golden Rule is a rule of community relations.

I am going to examine our heritage as we focus briefly on man in society, proceeding from the perspective of the individual and emphasizing the rights and duties of the individual. It is important to note that many systems of thought do just the reverse. In them society, or

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a unit of society, is of paramount importance and determines the perspective from which all human relations are viewed. The choice of the viewpoint of the individual is an intensely Western and Christian choice. Even in today's world this perspective by no means predominates. In the East, despite years of missionary effort and cultural penetration from the West, the perspective from which community relations are defined is still that of the family or the nation. In the Communist system the perspective is that of the "mass." Today in emerging Africa we see the conflict between the perspective of the tribe and the alien perspective of the individual. I do not propose to engage in a comparison of these perspectives at this time; I merely announce my point of reference and proceed with the examination.

One's view of the proper role of man in society depends in great measure on one's view of man's nature. If one views man as a rational being endowed with knowledge and imbued with love, then one's view of human relationships is likely to be very different from another who views man as a creature prone to greed and lust and fear. Plato very clearly recognized the importance of man's nature in constructing his Republic. Thus, he felt impelled to pose and solve the psychological problem and the ethical problem before reaching the final crystallization of the political problem.

I think it fair to say that most realistic builders of the Good Society (and I include our Founding Fathers in this category) have viewed man's nature as a paradox — a combination of reason and fear, love and lust, greed and unselfishness, a creature capable of evil as well as good.

In short they view man as a creature not yet in a state of grace. Since this paradoxical creature is capable of good, he must have liberty to pursue the good; since this creature is capable of evil, restraints must be placed on his conduct.

If man is a paradoxical creature then human relationships must resolve a number of paradoxes, or if you prefer, solve a number of equations. Let us presume that in constructing our Good Society we wish to give a high value to individual liberty. Unless our Good Society is to be an anarchy we have merely made a beginning by stating this first presumption. We still must strike a balance between the need for order and the need for freedom, the need for orthodoxy and the need for innovation, the rights of majorities and the rights of minorities, the duty of governors and the duty of the governed. And our Good Society is not completely built even when these difficult equations are solved. So far we have been talking about the difficulties encountered in constructing the framework, the constitution if you will, of our Good Society. Before we finish our project we must examine the procedures we would specify, one, to change the basic structure if events prove change necessary; and, two, the procedures that will govern the day-to-day conduct of human relations within the societal framework.

The first of these procedures could be labelled the amending procedure. No human constitution-maker is wise enough to foresee all pressures that may assail his framework. Therefore, the constitution must include some process for orderly change. The structure of the amending procedure and the role that it plays in the operation of the Good Society has received

little attention from political philosophers. Perhaps a certain ungovernable egotism impels men to believe that their view of the Good Society will endure for all time to come. The whole course of human history teaches us that no man has yet reached that pinnacle. Therefore, the Good Society *must* provide some procedure for converting today's heresy into tomorrow's orthodoxy if it is to endure.

This brief glance at the necessity for an amending procedure conjures up a host of interesting questions. For instance, I have just used the words "orthodoxy" and "heresy." This usage leads me to consider the place of shared values in human institutions. Certain it is that no viable human institution can exist without some orthodoxy, without some shared values, however limited and specialized those values may be. When we speak of a free society generally we do not mean that the society has no orthodoxy; we mean only that there is an opportunity for pluralistic development within the confines of that orthodoxy. Tolstói has wisely said, "If the will of man were free, that is, if every man could act as he chose, the whole history would be a tissue of disconnected accidents." One dilemma confronting the builder of the Good Society is how much questioning of the orthodoxy will be allowed. When are shared values no longer shared? Does an institution crumble when its orthodoxy is questioned? Or can it survive if some orderly process for amending its values by some evolutionary means is provided? It is at this point we can discern a cleavage between the builders of the Good Society. Some would say that there can be no *evolutionary* changes in orthodoxy if the society is to continue; any change must needs be

*revolutionary*. Others would say that evolutionary change is not only possible but inevitable and that the framework of the society must contain some orderly procedure for effectuating such changes. In this connection you may find it interesting to read a recent article by Professor Wilmoore Kendall entitled "On Reading Milton's Areopagitica." It appears in the May, 1960, issue of *The Journal of Politics*.

We must now consider the second type of procedure necessary to the Good Society that I mentioned earlier. This is the procedure for devising and enforcing the laws and ordinances that govern the day-to-day conduct of the citizenry. This procedure must envision two processes. First there must be a process for orderly law-making. This orderly process must be built largely on compromise if our Good Society is a diverse one. And second, a fair process of law enforcement — termed by our forefathers as due process — must be devised.

Only when these procedures are linked to the basic structure do we have a complete view of the Good Society.

Now that we have viewed some of the elements necessary to construct the Good Society, we can see how very complex that society must be even if it is premised upon maximum individual liberty. Why must this be so? To answer this question, we must refer once more to the nature of man. We have said that man is a complex mixture of ideals, impulses and motives. Is it any wonder that the complexity of man should be reflected in the complexity of the state? A concomitant explanation can be found in the imperfect nature of man. Since men and societies must grope for truth amidst uncertainties, there must be a

place in the Good Society for competition and compromise. There must be some adversary procedure for determining choices. Any society that allows a place for competition must impose complex controls, lest that competition become antisocial.

What is the place of religion in the Good Society? It seems to me that religion has two places, one in the realm of motives and one in the realm of restraints. If the Good Society is to endure, then men must be motivated to constantly build a better society. And if men are to live together harmoniously, then each man must respect the rights of others and recognize restraints upon his own conduct at those points where harm to others might ensue. It is at this point that religion plays its most vital role. The freest society is the society in which a maximum number of needed restraints are *self-imposed*. Religious man is guided by his ethical precepts and, therefore, exercises *self-discipline*. Therefore, there is less

need to *impose* discipline upon religious man. Religious man recognizes that each freedom carries with it a concomitant responsibility and that an opportunity for individual development is not an opportunity for self-aggrandizement. Obviously, then, a society composed of religious men can give a higher precedence to individual liberty than a society composed of irreligious men.

It should be obvious by now that our questing voyage has come full circle. Like Plato, we find that the role of man in society and the proper relationship of man to his fellows depends upon an understanding of the nature of man. Like Plato, we find that we must solve the psychological problem and the ethical problem before we can solve the political problem. After all, the building blocks that we must use to construct the City of God are the hearts and minds of men, women and children.

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