

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

towards a christian anarchism

ANARCHISM:

The central belief of anarchism is that it is possible for a society to be based upon non-oppressive structures without hierarchies or leaders. It has an implicit faith that people can be responsible for their own actions, that it is possible to resolve conflicts without resort to coercion or violence, that a spirit of nonviolence can replace the present mistrust and hatred. Movement towards this ideal is blocked, not by any intrinsic defeat in human nature, but by the atmosphere of fear and insecurity in our society which is perpetuated by the authoritarian structures and institutions. The state-mentality in particular, assuming that people can only be motivated by 'self-interest' and fear, always uses the veiled threat of violence to enforce its will.

Seeing society as ever-evolving, anarchism does not fall into the trap of worshipping static utopias, the anarchist ideal always being on the horizon. The point is to constantly strive towards it, seeking to expand the anarchistic relationships which exist in every society alongside the authoritarian ones, always being unashamably self-critical. There can be no artificial division between the 'public' and 'private' life, the anarchist principle of freedom and responsibility in all interactions with others.

Anarchism is an attitude rather than a set of ideological doctrines. To be true to itself it must be adaptable, accepting, and tolerant while being totally opposed to all that dehumanizes and oppresses. Being essentially a rejection of worldly power (the only victor in the struggle for power being power itself), it must reject the use of violence which is at the root of power. Believing in the potential in everyone to live anarchistically (ie to love) it must use the power of powerlessness (ie nonviolence) as its means and end. It must be a way of living, of treating others - an affirmation and celebration, here and now, of that indestructable living spirit in all humanity (which some people call God! PTO)



CHRISTIANITY:

The established church structures, hierarchies and teachings; the past and present oppression implemented, assisted and acquiesced to by 'church authorities' - all this, however prominent, is NOT the total sum of christian expression. There are others, and there have been many, who have sought and followed different ways. Christianity cannot be confined to the Pope, The Church of England, grand building or whatever. Christian expression is not necessarily coercive - in fact it is the antithesis of Christianity. You need just to look at the life of Jesus to see someone turning the world upside down - and getting crucified for it.

Jesus was a refugee and eventually a homeless beggar. He thwarted all expectations of powerful leader figure. He challenged the hypocrisy of established religious structures and sought the company of the marginalised - those despised by the status quo. He talked of the first being last and the last being first, and constantly upset the reigning hierarchies by simply trying to be human. The law he sought was not one written on tablets and stuffed down people's throats, but one freely accepted in people's hearts. The love of God, by its very nature, cannot be forced upon someone. It is active, suffering, hoping, unconditional but never coercive as was Jesus's life. And the price he paid for leading such a life was high. As Christians if we are honest we can expect no less - but so often we settle for less, as the implications of being totally human to everyone, irrespective of their 'position', opinions or treatment of you and others, - of recognising the infinite and indestructable dignity of everybody around us, - is daunting. But that is no excuse

Countless people throughout the ages have glimpsed at the vision and tried to live it out. The majority of the early Christians lived communally in poverty refusing to bear arms for the Roman state. Many groups followed including the anabaptists of the Reformation, the Diggers of the English Civil War, the Catholic Worker Movement in the USA and other modern day Christian anarchists. Probably the best known Christian anarchist, Tolstoy, glimpsed at a vision of the kingdom of God that was so revolutionary in potential that the authorities made plans to call out the armed forces and commandeer public transport to control the public reaction to his funeral.

To accept God as the fulfilment of our being is not to accept an external authority, but willingly to internalise the law of love. Thus no one carries any authority by 'virtue of their position, only inasmuch as what they say and do is Truthful do they realise God's authority. Thus to place trust in governmental structures, power politics or leaders is to deny God's authority and thus our own responsibility. This means inevitable confrontation with the established order. But though the vision may be far away we must strive towards it for we know it to be Truthful (ie from God). Salvation means healing in the New Testament - it means pain and change through facing our fears which help to maintain the inhuman structures and hierarchies. Although we know that there is an alternative worth striving for so often our fears get in the way - fear of the consequences, of the responsibility, of complicity and personal contact. These fears can be overcome - 'Perfection of love drives out all fear.' The healing process is begun!

(written while in a prison cell!)

Further info on Christians interested in Anarchism (CIA)
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