

Self-Centeredness

The Trinity Tripod Letter to the editor (Nov. 10, 1964; page 6)

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TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to suggest that the political philosophy outlined by Mr. Thomas Auxter in recent issues of the TRIPOD is not quite so Christian as he believes it to be.

Mr. Auxter assumes that the Christian's primary goal is to pile up merits for himself by repeated choice of "the good." Actually, however, the entire New Testament condemns such an attitude. Merit-seeking is a subtle (and hence especially obnoxious) form of self-seeking. Mr. Auxter's conservative demanding to "be lauded for his actions," is a modern relic of the self-righteous Pharisee whom Christ denounced.

This self-centeredness is evident in Mr. Auxter's objection to government welfare programs. He complains that they deprive him of the chance to exercise charity, and so to gain more merit. He would apparently rather see private charity withheld from a starving man than see the government come to the rescue. The Christian disagrees. He knows that the person who competes for virtue will probably find an excuse for hanging on to his money as well. Nor is the Christian surprised when the champion of private charity hastens to add that the poor deserve their fate.

The source of Mr. Auxter's misconception of Christianity is his definition of goodness as an individual matter. The Christian defines it differently. Whatever else the word "love" may mean, it surely means that the idea of a solitary goodness is a contradiction in terms. Christian goodness is achieved jointly or not at all. in St. Paul's words, "We are members one of another."

The Christian therefore never has to make a transition from ethics to politics. His ethics are his politics, in that he judges his actions by their effect upon his neighbor. As Dr. Sleeper pointed out in the last issue of the TRIPOD, the Christian judges social legislation and welfare programs in the same way. Do they promote human dignity (the prerequisite of brotherhood) without undesirable side-effects? If, not, they should be improved until they do.

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