

LOVE AND ORDER

Jacques Ellul

Who loves man?

Here is the question of our times, the question asked with all the anguish it implies, in the midst of all the promises, the competition for man's favor, the prodigious achievements and the veritable miracles that characterize man's life today.

Can we really call it a question? In our day? In our hearts, we know full well the matter has already been settled. The lots have been cast. The outcome is obvious. The only one who can claim to love man is the one who provides for his needs — better still, the one who feeds him! Yet, nothing is new here. *Panem et Circenses!* Bread and games never meant that the Caesars succeeded in feeding the mobs. Perhaps the mark of our age is that, as never before, we, unlike the Caesars, finally have all the means to provide for all man's needs, to assure and

re-assure them, to guarantee them, to satisfy them completely.

Yes, indeed! If you love man, feed him! That's the criterion! Or better, if you can feed man, you truly love him. Nor is this being unspiritual! After all, doesn't St. Paul say that all the good will in the world is useless without the means, the possibility, of realizing the best of intentions?

Today, we demand proof for grandiose claims — tangible proofs. We've had enough excuses for the failures in human life. Let's face it: if you really nourish man, honestly provide for his nourishment everlastingly — not just for a fleeting instant — only then can you claim to be man's benefactor.

Obviously. And it is equally obvious that when we speak of "feeding" man, we mean more than food. Yes, quite a good deal more! Today, "daily bread" means the car and the TV, caviar and all the other "ordinary luxuries" within the reach of all men! This is "raising the standard of living," is it not? This, when all is said and done, is the tangible proof of love. And the one who practices this real love must pay dearly, in terms of self-denial, patient and responsible research and considered calculation, to say nothing of just plain old generosity. Yes, elevate man's standard of living. Nothing else matters. All the rest is words, words, words. . . .

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Love and Order translated by the Monks of New Skete.

Today, we are well-acquainted with the uselessness of talk. Words mean nothing. Language is a sham. Were we not deluded indeed when we *believed* in words? What for? All talk is nothing more than a useless convention created by the cultures of mankind. It means nothing, really; it conveys nothing. And even if for one precious instant we might think that a word passing between two human beings might really mean something, we simply can't take it for granted. On the contrary, our subtle feeling must be subjected to cautious analyses. But this analysis only results in a horrible and meaningless mis-mash; we quickly see how empty it is indeed! How, then, can anyone trust language any longer? Words — instruments witnessing to authentic love? Impossible! Have we yet to understand the meaning of hypocrisy? Here, too, we can take heart from another bit of spirituality. Did not Jesus himself condemn those who talk and fail to act? No, today, action demands the company of silence. Words may no longer accompany our actions, for they meet our ears only to vanish into thin air. Our hands might touch, but never our being!

So, then, what's left?

Feed the hungry.

But let's not mistake the point. We don't mean we've communicated anything more than the obvious. But neither have we lied about it. We never said that our words were pledges of true love. We never tried to feed others with our empty dreams and desires. We've left behind all lofty sentiments. Today, we know only too well that we are all, each of us, completely alone in this world. The rule is dog-eat-dog!

But I stray. I was speaking of *love*, was I not. . . ? Who loves man?

So, let's get back to *love*.

Talk is cheap, and language is illusion. The thing that makes a human being of me is simply the real help I give my neighbor. It is perhaps not mere chance that we realize the meaninglessness of language at the time of the greatest proliferation of all kinds of consumer goods. It seems rather that on a full stomach man need not heed empty promises and pretty words — both artificial consultations calculated, in times past, to distract him from the pain in his swollen and hungry belly. The full stomach has no need of ears. Did not the prophet chide: "You've grown fat, Israel, fat indeed, and you no longer hear the words of your God!"

But that's the way it is.

True love recognizes its duty: feed man! The leaders of mankind know only too well that unless they continue to

raise the standard of living, they will soon be toppled from power. So they strive to employ every means of modern technology to achieve that end. And so we find ourselves confronted by a curious reality: those who love man *lead* and *govern* him, and those who lead and govern him are in fact the ones who *love* him most!

We are witnesses today to a great campaign. But it is not the small peanuts of petty politicians with their promises of dams and technicians and TV's and wheat and highways. The stakes are higher indeed! Today the bidding that overwhelms mankind smacks more of Dostoevsky's *Grand Inquisitor*, that famed "poem" told by Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. And make no mistake: the Grand Inquisitor is by no means an evil politician. On the contrary. He alone loves man. Those who went before him were confidence men. They *used* man. Not so, the Inquisitor. Just watch him. He builds highways, factories, homes. He works out the complexities of economics, for, eventually, he will legitimately share the products of his farsighted industrialists with all mankind, with every man, woman and child. How could he *but* love man? He is, as it were, forced to it by the rising tide of these possibilities confronting him. It is as if he no longer had any choice in the matter. He *must* love mankind! And how consoling a thought indeed! For the first time in man's memory, he *will* be loved, really and truly! We have come out of the dark corridors of power-struggles and frustrated ambitions of man. Now everything is in the open. The evidence is irrefutable. To think that there was ever a time when one could appeal to *la raison d'Etat!* The State has no right in itself. How terribly ultra-simplistic! The State is not the ultimate reality, not by any means!

Everything done for the State used to end up in nonsense or destruction. But now we know that there is a right, legitimate and superior to the State. The State is motivated by the good of man. And today we know what is feasible. We know that the taskmaster is total self-denial. One undergoes dire pain and toil simply to spare mankind the same fate. Every worker applies himself assiduously, as every politician sets out to bring about the coming of age of mankind. They all do it not so much for themselves as for all. There may well be black sheep among us still, political men seeking self-aggrandizement, scholars craving for power. But we have already judged them, and many have already decorated the gallows. In any case, the final judge will be the Tribunal of History. We know what's going on: We need no longer be concerned with the confusion and

disorder brought about by jurists and theologians in endless debates on justice and love. We are, on the contrary, now certain who loves man. Every day shows us anew. This is not party politics or personal opinion. That kind of stuff is passé. We have gone beyond the methods and the goal itself. Behind the appearances of governments and ideologies (which are little more than words!) we are living in man's coming of age! There is no turning back! Our age has made us individuals, adults, diligent, well-fed and independent. And so the real humanist, in fact the only humanist is: the Grand Inquisitor himself!

So let us come to the Grand Inquisitor's greatest works. Our system contains a sort of logic that at once upsets and yet satisfies us. Living in hunger and terror, man could not be a man — he absolutely could not, understand! Now for the first time man does not depend on capricious Nature or on some hypothetical Divinity for his sustenance and safety. On the contrary, he depends on man for all this. Today, man has it made. Everything comes his way in abundance; so the rest — intelligence and goodness, a taste for beauty and the desire for justice — will be thrown in for good measure, for sure. No longer enslaved by his needs, he devotes himself to the superfluous — the arts and morality (for everyone knows that these are the luxuries of the well-to-do, as the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century demonstrated so well!).

But you might object, "What's so new about this? *Primum vivere!* The first priority is life, just as we have known all along."

But I answer: you haven't understood a thing! Our discussion is a different kettle of fish entirely! On the contrary, I behold the fine design of the world's architecture, developing under my very eyes, and it bothers me, the extreme intelligence of the Grand Inquisitor. In fact, he is so intelligent, yes, shrewd, that he knows he must appear before the eyes of the intellectuals as gross and superficial, crude and materialistic. This, after all, is part of *his* self-denial.

But the Grand Inquisitor has grasped fully the profundity of man and his world. He is not ignorant of the myriad spiritual truths and lies which haunt man endlessly. He has not missed the discussions — serious or foolish — which embroil men. Yes, he has understood something further, the most profound truth of all, and he knows that it can never be eliminated from man's life. Feeding man so that he will never be hungry will not do away with revolutions. It wasn't hunger that put the rock

in Cain's hand. Shiploads of food for victims of famine will not secure a ruler's power. Rising salaries is no cause for complacency in leadership. But for some reason, governments have failed to understand that it is precisely when men are no longer oppressed and hungry that they rebel, that it is precisely when they are no longer made destitute by deprivation that they rise up in arms. (They call this liberty! — and God forbid we should deny it!) But anyone who raised man's standard of living is well-aware of this simple lesson of life. He knows how far he can go before his position becomes untenable. He knows that, for all the goods he distributes, there is another which man needs desperately and which he, as a benefactor of man, cannot afford to overlook.

Yes, the Grand Inquisitor knows very well what the story is. He studies, reflects and considers the whole situation by weighing and comparing all the facts and statistics, and by applying his shrewd intuition to it all. The result of all this is that he clearly sees the importance of religion. Without religion in some form, he understands how precarious in his position and authority, that his power hangs in the balance. When man has been fed, when his stomach is full, he inevitably turns to worship. He feels compelled to worship something — the state, science, technology, race, communism, color, history, culture — even some curio-statue that one day attracts his attention from the stalls of the county fair.

Whatever we say, the truth of the matter is that man needs religion with all its rites and dogmas, and the best religion, of course, will be the most sophisticated one. Thus, regardless of his personal opinions, political or philosophical views — whatever his preferences in all these areas, the Grand Inquisitor realizes that his power can hardly be secure if he fails to take account of the spiritual in man. That, too, is a need for which he must provide. After all, man must be told why he should sacrifice himself, why he should obey, why he should work, and — most of all! — why he should go on living! Without this, all the physical nourishment in the world is tasteless and colorless, and man is left in darkness.

Power today keenly appreciates how untenable man's position is. It understands that its mission is to provide religion to complete what the temporal has initiated. But this religion must be a trim and well-disciplined spiritual force, able to meet head-on all the pride and anxiety of which man is capable — but no more — for it must be a religion which the powers-that-be recognize as actually empty and unreal. We must understand that the Grand Inquisitor must necessarily be skeptical. We must not accuse him of some kind of machiavellian motivation. On the contrary, he promotes man's progress for the simple reason that he loves man. After all, is not loving

him giving him all he needs, even when that is nothing more than mere dreams — deceptive and illusory?

Yes, power *has* to be skeptical. That is its proper role. It cannot afford to be overwhelmed by some spiritual experience that would reduce to nothing its ability for cold, detached, objective reasoning in every situation. Still, unless man worships, power cannot hope to remain in command. To achieve and maintain its own stability like a marble façade, power knows that anything goes, no holds barred. But let us not mistake this for cheap utilitarianism.

The attitude that everything must be useful is basic to our society, which a century ago fancied everything in life as either useful or useless, and itself able to decide which. Today, however, a deeper look into the heart of man shows us that nothing made by him has ever been totally useless. Everything has been geared to serve — even the unreal — even the simplest dream that lives like a phantom only in the deepest desires of man's heart. Everything has to be useful, for nothing is ever given gratis. If contemporary man has been able to drive down the boulevard of prolonged life triumphantly, it is precisely because he has availed himself of the solicitous utilization of all things by a paternal and tolerant Grand Inquisitor. It is not selfishness that maintains him in power, but rather his realization that man's condition cannot improve except his own power expand. So, in employing religion, he is not succumbing to some kind of bitterness or self-delusion. On the contrary, he is thus willing to sacrifice his own convictions, once again, his own clear-sightedness, so that man might once more be served. He hopes to spare man the cruel and inhuman curtailment and that unwavering clear-sightedness which he himself has known, to which he has vowed himself. If he himself denies it all by his own life, it is simply the more to affirm, to elevate, this adorable monstrosity, that man might stretch his hand toward it — for the spiritual goods which it contains are those which are readily consumable.

This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the whole matter. The Grand Inquisitor risks a great deal here, for he knowingly permits a very grave and dangerous situation to develop in allowing man to strive for that Wholly Other. Yet, for all his striving man is doomed to frustration, for it is a striving that can never be achieved, never accomplished, thus leaving him always frustrated and dissatisfied while provoking in him the most violent and intense hope, total involvement, and unfathomable confusion. After all, the moment man stretches forth

from the circle of this earthly life, the whole of this life automatically comes into question. It follows that in this frame of mind, man is also very likely to spit at the very bread so generously offered him by the Grand Inquisitor. And in whose name would man so scorn that bread? In the name of an illusion? Or of some certainty? Does it really matter? Not at all. What really counts is the state of confusion into which man is catapulted by the entire experience. What really counts, in this condition then, is to *save* man — from himself!

Behold the genius of the Master! The very point in question now becomes the support of the whole system. What was previously debatable now becomes unquestionable fact! What was formerly an unbearable tension pulling man toward the Wholly Other now becomes a comfortable and adorable presence gently overwhelming the creature with its luscious fruit. What had been a tormenting emptiness now becomes the most obvious reality. Revelation in Christ is perverted by Christendom. Revolution in the name of liberty emasculated by being integrated into the State. Religion, in a word, made part and parcel of the ideological system by the very one who denies all religion. A simple matter of making use of what is the most dangerous and most contradictory — dangerously delicate work done on a basic instinct more unstable and powerful than nitroglycerine itself. Thus, the Wholly Other, now totally neutralized of its own reality and power, yet the same thing nevertheless, is now absorbed into the apparatus for the greatest good of man. So it is that man can now march on toward his Omega point, for everything fits perfectly, all the pieces of the man-eating puzzle are now in place. Everything works in total harmony, for after all, it's all progress, and we can rest easy in the fact that we, too, are therefore progressing toward higher and higher pinnacles.

But what fickle finger saddled man with the most difficult of burdens by placing before him such options — however quaint and out-of-date — as happiness, liberty, progress, truth? Today we know that only man's powerlessness has been responsible for this.

Since he could not achieve happiness, man pretended he was free. Since he did not realize his own potential for progress, he contented himself with truth. But now we have transcended these limits; we have surpassed these alternatives. We see the right path today — straight, simple, well-defined: happiness assures liberty, and the progress of history leads us unfailingly into truth. Since we understand the power of images and representations, of symbols and signs, we can guarantee what man could

never before accomplish. For in the final analysis, is it not sufficient that man *think* he is living these values of justice, liberty, and truth? Would this not be enough? After all, they have never been given any concrete definition, content or meaning by philosophers and theologians. Though they are deeply implanted in man, though he is a stranger to himself, nevertheless these values are well-known to him. Though he does not really comprehend them, neither can he ignore them. So, let him *think* he is living them. What's the harm of it? After all, what are they but concepts to be lived? What's all the fuss about, all the soul-searching? And anyway, what would be the criterion that they are being lived? What is the measure of liberty? And the constancy of virtue? What is evidence of justice?

For a long time, now, we've known how fleeting is that instant they call eternity! Totally subjective! For where does true prophet end and false one begin? How does one distinguish the ecstasy that comes from God from the madness of the would-be mystic? How does one distinguish the person who has really attained freedom from the poor devil in a strait jacket who fancies himself free? The Grand Inquisitor has said it clearly: "Never before has man believed himself so free." Isn't that what really counts? Allow man the *impression* of justice, the *feeling* of freedom, let him be *persuaded* that the regime is truthful. Possessed by these images and representations, let him survey reality through them! What else could he want, what else could he live? After all, even if it points to nothing, at least *the sign* itself exists. "I might be enclosed in the shell of a hazel-nut, and still consider myself the King of Space-without-limit." These are the words the Prince of Denmark utters about himself as he reflects on his condition. However, it is the Grand Inquisitor who actually achieves this, a bit more every day, in our unconsciousness, and for our benefit!

Now here is a strange turn of events indeed! It was the realist par excellence — the Grand Inquisitor himself! — who knew so well how to discredit the Word for the profit of bread. It was he who shoved back into the pages of history the One who had nothing more than the poor words he could speak to the people. Yes, he knew well how to denounce illusion. He did this all for the sake of that confusing task of raising the standard of living. But now, forced by on-going developments, he himself becomes the master of illusion! The difference, however, is that the Grand Inquisitor's illusion comes *after* the beggar's hand has been filled, while the Apostle could no more than offer pardon to the begging hand

before him. And so, we cannot but think that the old illusion, propagated in times past, was the real deception since it diverted man from the concrete, the palpable, accountable and measurable works — after all, there is no error possible with so many tons of steel, so many gallons of acid. Whereas, the illusion foisted by the Grand Inquisitor deals with such vague and inexpressible uncertainties that one might well deny they even exist. Because of this, we might wonder if it is really an illusion after all! Is it not its own entire reality? Would it not be better for man to live this volatile image of liberty rather than some terribly cruel uncertainty, however real it be?

In the past, then, there was this constant search for an indisputable spiritual force to which everything material was sacrificed, a force that necessarily cast doubt on everything that man might do, so that in the end it destroyed all his grandiose schemes, it made even Babel crumble. But now, everything is marvelously and exactly in place. The material has been realized. Every aspiration toward happiness is satisfied to overflowing by the accumulation of goods, goods that are ever more numerous, every more plentiful, in greater and greater variety. They deify our world by glorifying it. The material achieves its fullness, its completion, and in turn so does the spiritual realize itself through living the entire illusion. For the spiritual does have its place, it does have its own role, the only one man has given it. It is no longer an obstacle or hindrance. It crystallizes that element in man that had been so dangerous because its uncertainty, its intangibility. So, the spiritual doesn't have to be anything more than illusion since it refers to the uncertain, the intangible — but it must be lived if that unrestrained craving in man is to be satisfied. And the Grand Inquisitor enables us to do just that, to live it.

But is there something still troubling us? Are we somewhat reticent before the paternalism of one who would simply assure our complete happiness? Do we have the feeling of being treated as children? Or that there are perhaps some unseen and implacable mechanics at work here, either of technology or the State? It is the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice that flashes before us once again, and it disturbs us, for the very existence of that tale is itself what makes us fear it might indeed be taking place before us, though it tries to reassure us that it is simply fiction, only a story, not a reality. But no matter, we can rest assured that the Grand Inquisitor is a man like others. He manages everything, even this troublesome point, he guides the entire system,

but he is only a man. And we are used to thinking that what a man builds he can control and manage, and so the transition is made happily. Man hasn't lost a thing, he hasn't risked a thing. The Grand Inquisitor, after all, is a man, and so man is safe. So, I can relax, for I haven't lost the game. I can leave my dignity and my coming-of-age to those who know these things, who hold the threads of the woof, who know which buttons to press. For in reality, in spite of my modest place, I am actually one of them. And inasmuch as I am myself a product of the system, am I not also someone else's inquisitor? Still, I am not the *Grand Inquisitor*, so the same question returns to haunt me: who, to be blunt, is the Grand Inquisitor?

Our trouble is that we are always thinking in terms of the Spanish Inquisition. The tortures, the dungeons. . . . With the death of Hitler and Stalin, we tell ourselves that there is no more Grand Inquisitor in the world. There is no one who can incorporate into his person the complexities of either of these infamous individuals, or of the whole bad show. . . . All of that was an accident, like the Spanish Inquisition itself, and we should therefore beware of making them anything more than exercises in style.

Still, it seems to me that instead of trying to reassure ourselves that no one is the Grand Inquisitor, it might be more realistic to understand that the Grand Inquisitor is No One. Here we best touch his true being. Doubtlessly we can, in the words of Ivan Karamazov, describe him as a bloodless, dried-up nonagenarian, but this overlooks the fact that the Inquisitor always had his face veiled. It was of the utmost importance that he remain unrecognized. In fact, the inquisitors themselves were not supposed to know each other! This was to insure the objectivity of their judgements, to preserve the case free of prejudice and hatred, as well as to depersonalize effectively the protection of truth and the exercise of justice. For, if power is to be complete, total, beyond the usual human limitations, it must be anonymous.

The Prince of Macchiavelli, like all tyrants, has the face of a man and for this reason he can be loved or hated. For the same reason, people can rebel against tyrants, they can resist the visible and obvious oppression of one man over others. For the same reason tyrants are capable of mistakes, of human weaknesses such as pride, fear, and finally death. But the Grand Inquisitor has no face. No one can size him up. Be he ten or a thousand, he is always composed of strangers, each part of the whole and unknown to all the others, but always completely devoted to each other and the whole. This is why the Grand Inquisitor can be the reality itself of perfect justice and total self-denial, love without darkness, skepticism without scorn — and not such-and-such a person. In the

face of such a reality, also, man can still feel free because of this anonymity. There is no face to hate, no being upon whose person we can heap abuse and curse with the unhappiness of misfortune. There is no personified cruelty to denounce. There is no will to constrain his own. Wherever he goes, there is that anonymous hand guiding him for his greatest good. All about him the monolith aptly demonstrates that everything exists for his happiness and personal fulfillment. Everywhere, it exercises a flexible and benevolent guardianship. The very walls of his cell withdraw from man as he approaches them, and if, perchance, he succeeds in touching one, he finds it padded. But man must still occasionally get angry and so he is provided benevolently with several little worthless accessories upon which he may vent his self-righteous indignation under the appearance of being free. That's what they do to kids, calming them by giving them cast-off dishes to smash.

Thus, gradually, the Thing takes shape. Each one hastens to add his own constructive participation, his inventiveness, good will, love for others and his passion for justice. The Grand Inquisitor can make arrows of any kind of wood. For, what he himself is and what he gives is what we have made of him and what we have given him. It is simply order. Order itself. It integrates the sum of our dreams and aspirations. It is Order made of the blinding light of so many grand designs. It is Order made by no one, but by the contribution of each. And precisely because it is Order, it orders all that seems ill-matched and phony, incoherent meddling and blundering good intentions.

So here it is. Well beyond cold-blooded plans and compelling rationalizations, it all comes together in a sort of growth which cannot be called spontaneous because it is certainly the result of calculation. *But whose?* A sort of blind growth of a root as it stretches inexorably toward that which nourishes it — blind and yet directed. In the face of this reality, the most awesome reality of our times, we had best approach on tip-toes, almost reverently . . . lest anything spiritual interfere with this growth from which man draws all his profit, and which works entirely for the greatest good and happiness of this man. And that man is you. And me.

“What are you trying to stir up, you with all your questions? Who do you think you are?”
Who would dare answer. . . ? □