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EDITORIALS

Rights and Duties

We live in an age when men everywhere are asserting, quietly or vociferously, their rights. In this era of protest, it is assumed without question that men have certain rights which belong to them as men. The exercise of power – white, black, student, economic, etc. – is seen as a legitimate way to obtain the recognition of those rights. The methods used may range all the way from legal, constitutional means to outright violence. Where does the Christian stand in this baffling situation?

It is possible to jump on the bandwagon and bless all the world's efforts in the name of Christ. We can adopt the language of protest and even of violence and claim to be more revolutionary than the secular revolutionaries. We can protest more passionately than the rest and despise the Christian past in our devotion to the Christian future.

But what of our duties? How rare it is these days to hear a Christian voice reminding contemporary man that, in demanding his rights, he is also incurring responsibilities! In our grand talk of the 'just society' how often are we told that this means an honest day's work for a fair day's wage? How often are we bluntly told that our dreams of a better society depend in the long run on the willingness to sacrifice selfish interests for the welfare of the whole? In our talk of sexual freedom how often is it pointed out that no civilization or stable social order is possible without the restraint of instinct?

Again, where does responsibility end and psychological abnormality begin? The issue is dramatically treated in C. P. Snow's latest novel, *The Sleep of Reason*, in which two young women beat a young boy to death. How far can they be exonerated from all responsibility and guilt in the name of psychological abnormality?

Presumably no Christian would want to question the rights of man – though whether these can be persuasively defended and practically sustained in a world where man is the measure of all things remains to be seen. Is it not time, however, that representatives of the Christian church began to remind themselves and others of the nature of responsibility and the reality of duties? Man, after all, is not the absolute architect of his destiny. Only a most painful and distressing disillusionment can follow the acceptance of the contemporary myth that man can have the good things of earth without those duties which love lays upon us in the name of Christ. Even secular man must learn that hard lesson.

R.F.A.