The Sense of Quality

When we lack the courage once again to establish a genuine sense of boundaries between human beings and personally to fight for them, we perish in an anarchy of human values. The impudence that has its being in the contempt for all such boundaries is just as much a mark of the rabble as the inward uncertainty, haggling, and courting the favor of the insolent; making common cause with rabble is the way toward rendering oneself rabble. When one no longer knows what one owes oneself and others, where the sense for human quality and the strength to respect boundaries cease to exist, chaos is at the door. When for the sake of material comfort one tolerates impudence, one has already surrendered, there the floods of chaos have been permitted to burst the dam at the place where it was to be defended, and one becomes guilty of all that follows. In other times it may have been the task of Christianity to testify to the equality of all human beings; today it is Christianity in particular that should passionately defend the respect for human boundaries and human qualities. The misinterpretation that it is a matter of self-interest, or the cheap allegation that it is an antisocial attitude, must be resolutely faced. They are the perennial reproaches of the rabble against order. Whoever becomes soft and unsure here does not understand what is at issue, and presumably those reproaches may well apply to him. We are in the midst of the process that levels every rank of society. But we are also at the hour of a new sense of nobility being born that binds together a circle of human beings drawn from all existing social classes. Nobility arises from and exists by sacrifice, courage, and a clear sense of what one owes oneself and others, by the self-evident expectation of the respect one is due, and by an equally self-evident observance of the same respect for those above and those below. At issue all along the line is the rediscovery of experiences of quality that have been buried under so much rubble, of an order based on quality. Quality is the strongest foe of any form of bringing everything to the level of the masses. Socially this means abandoning the pursuit of position, breaking with the star cult, an opening out upward and downward particularly in connection with the choice of one’s friends, delight in private life, and courage for public life. Culturally the experience of quality signals a return from the newspaper and radio to the book, from haste to leisure and stillness, from distraction to composure, from the sensational to reflection, from the idol of virtuosity to art, from snobbery to modesty, from extravagance to moderation. Quantities compete for space; qualities complement one another.

Revision #1
Created 2026-03-28 20:36:23 UTC by Dara
Updated 2026-03-28 20:36:50 UTC by Dara