

COMMUNISM AND THE CATHOLIC APOLOGIST

WE deplore the spread of communism as much as we disapprove of much of the inept propaganda which seeks to combat it. I do not refer to the patently discreditable propaganda associated with certain phases of Capitalism so much as to the ingenuous claptrap of respectable journals which, apart from the disrepute attaching to the quotation of doubtful statistics, sins solely by debility. I am not concerned with the advisability of the religious apologist's carefully abstaining from polemic which may be too easily mistaken for partisan political thought; nor am I involved in anything beyond a thesis based on the urgent necessity of a mutual unobstructed apprehension on the part of Catholic and Communist—of a better understanding generally of two great world influences, Catholicism and Communism.

Slight as is his real appreciation of the Church, the educated Bolshevik has greater superficial knowledge of Catholicism than has the average Catholic of *applied communism* (a recent experiment from which he is geographically more or less remote) or of a *communist theory* which is buried in tomes of an abstruseness beyond his patience. To the Western mind in the mass the Bolshevik is a rather remarkable combination of two extreme opposites. He is represented as a combination of incredible cunning and fatuousness. His propaganda, we are told, is, in its astuteness, the first step to a communist diabolarchy; but we are left to infer that he is practically incapable of intellectual process, or, if he engages at all in dispute he is to be demolished by arguments that would discredit a school debating society. In a hypothetical dispute between the average half-literate Bolshevik youth and

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the average product of capitalist polemic, I have little doubt as to who would get the worst of it. I have heard the immature product of Bolshevist propagandism wax eloquent and not wholly unconvincing. To the initial charge of brutality (if he cannot indict his opponent of the use of spurious statistics) he will respond with a bland *tu quoque*. 'The use of force in the propagation of bolshevism, far from being peculiar to the Russian revolution, is the unvarying mark of conviction. My history books tell me that nothing in the world has involved the use of so much force as has Religion.' Or simply he may answer in the sense already popularised amongst communists. 'We have not injured half as many people in the cause of a great philanthropic ideal as you of the West injured in the great war with no ideal at all, saving that of chaos and destruction.' And he will certainly wax eloquent in his defence of the Soviet as opposed to the horrors of industrial capitalism. He will explain with inexorable logic that the elimination of an undesirable class, however much tragedy and pain it entails, is the merest pin-prick compared with the infant mortality, the stunting of life, the degradation of women, the endless unrelieved misery, brutality, and indecency, of the great slums of capitalist Europe. The argument inclines (as *tu quoque* ever must) to the weakness of the negative, but it may be accounted the last word when the apologist of Capital has been known to shield himself with a buckler of spurious Christian ethics, and affirm that all economic misery is an Act of God, or the unavoidable result of Original Sin, or even (ostrich-like) that it does not exist at all. Yet the Catholic apologist who is conversant with true Christian principles and in his defence of private production leaves political economy to take care of itself, has the moral certainty of conquest. It is the work of the patient apologist to resist the temptation to quote

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hearsay and unreliable statistics, and to take the bread from the Marxist mouth—bread not fit for hungry men, a ‘puparum pabulum’ that will satisfy no more than the economic automaton—and enlist *de novo* the sympathy at least of communist youth. The reality is shown where hitherto the shadow and the negative likeness only is known. We are not straining after effect when we assert (to the scandal of the Bolshevik) that, speaking in the purely human order, the superlative types of both Christian and Bolshevik are not psychologically dissimilar. The difference is this, that the Bolshevik, animated by an economic chimera, does for Nothing what the Christian, animated by the Charity of Christ, does for the greater glory of God and the hope of eternal reward. We look no further than home for our apodeictic. The Religious is told to forget himself, to do the impossible, and he is given God’s grace, the wherewithal to do it. The Kulak likewise is told to efface himself, the Worker to sublimate himself; and they are given (if they survive the shock) a just sufficient ration and a Greater Love of the Communist Internationale. To the Catholic ascetic God gives eternal Life, to the worker Lenin grants the questionable recompense of a humanistic Nirvana. Humanity, he is told, will be the better for his sacrifice. But humanity ‘is neither you nor me!’

The Western mind is slow to grasp that the Bolshevik is a species fed entirely on economics and idealism, the idealism springing from and subordinate to the economics. And the economics are the negative business of Engels and Marx. But it cannot be too clearly emphasised that, subjectively speaking, effective Bolshevism, set upon an ascetic and voluntary, rather than an economic, basis, would be identical with some of the phases of Catholic Cenobitism. And every atom of the vast heterogeneous energy of the Russian Revolution could have been as successfully absorbed

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in any one of the great Catholic movements which have sprung, with all the dynamic of necessity, from the essence of Christianity. (The Counter-Reformation, the monastic revivals and missionary impulse.)

With the truth of many of his premisses admitted, and the legitimacy of many of his impulses approved, the communist is often quick to be convinced that the Christian Hierarchy is not to be apprehended in terms of '*tchin*,' that industrial capitalism is hardly to be confounded with Christianity, whose Founder, the Christ not of Russian poster-art, but of reality, so keenly suspected wealth and 'class'—the economic illusion of virtue.

None but those who have learnt by experience can appreciate fully the necessity of Christian protest against Soviet anti-religious propaganda. But one may be excused of cynicism in marvelling at the vigour with which nations usually so apathetic in religious matters denounce the anti-Christian front of Bolshevism, at all events in doubting the universal sincerity of the movement. Mammon is wont to masquerade as religion. The love of property is a passion legitimate and natural in man—and the greater the property often enough the greater the passion. Man, the acquisitive animal at bay, with the accumulated product of labour at stake, is desperately resourceful, and it is his resourcefulness in exploiting religion in the present instance that we have ultimately to blame for the confusion in the Russian Worker's mind of Capitalism (I mean abused Capital) with Christianity, and for the handle given to the Anti-Christian cartoonist.

Soviet atheism has been successful, mainly on account of the ease with which authority has been able to misrepresent Christianity to the People. The disciples of Marx and Lenin had merely to cite the pseudo-Christianity of the commercial world and they were provided with proof, positive and impregnable.

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Actually the real badness in Communism is found to correspond precisely with the unworthiness, the anti-social element, in what I would call Capitalist Pseudo-Christianity. It cannot be too emphatically insisted upon, says an exponent of the social encyclicals of the Popes—the pure Christian tradition—that the unworthiness and evil influence of both Communism and the abuses of Capitalism fall into the same anti-Catholic category. Yet it is precisely pseudo-Christianity (and not the Catholic tradition, the true Christianity whose very existence is veiled from the Russian proletariat) that the Socialist abominates. There can be little hope of progress until the misapprehension is removed, until we know enough about the Russian Worker to appreciate that we of the West are moving with the Bolsheviks in the same maze of confusion and misunderstanding.

There are helpful and indicative side-issues to the question. Here is a single example. Catholic and Marxist alike are constrained to oppose neo-Malthusianism. It is the Malthusian thesis that since the available means of life (Marx's *variable Capital*) increase on a smaller scale than do the workers, therefore the increase of the workers themselves must be checked. It is a proposition well worthy of the advanced forms of industrial capitalism, since the unemployment, poverty, hunger and disorder consequent upon over-population are in no way beneficial to the interests of Capital. Catholic and Marxist alike deplore the subordination of Worker to Capital, the worker employed by (rather than employing) the means of production, maintaining and propagating himself only in such manner as may suit the convenience of Capital, subjugated even in the most intimate activities of his life.

The Marx-fed youth of to-day has never realised the radical nature of Christian reform, as inaugurated

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by the Founder of the Catholic Church and preached consistently by the Popes. A Bolshevik complained to me that the reform instituted by the churches was 'too superficial, too much of a compromise to be effective.' He had never read, or was initially too contemptuous of the language in which they were couched, to read the encyclicals of Popes Leo and Pius.

We can hardly do better than use the rich ideality of the Church if we would improve the constructiveness of the Left Incline spreading throughout Europe. Some of us are acutely conscious in our Western world of the last crisis of dissolution and death, the collapse of traditions which many associate with Christianity. Our day (the younger generation feels) is yet of the old order, but there are some of us who cannot deny the prescience of change.

Unless we are going to return to the Catacombs, the Church will transcend and harness, rather than oppose, the energy of Revolution.

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