

REVIEWS

ON THE SOCIAL QUESTION

LA VIE INTELLECTUELLE¹ has great prestige in France and should be better known in England. It attempts a complete survey of the various aspects of modern life, religious, political and social, literary and artistic, scientific and pedagogical, from the standpoint of the principles of Catholic Action. It is directed by Dominicans, and includes eminent writers from both the priesthood and the laity.

In *Some Leading Myths of the Socialist Movement* in the issue for April 25th, Marc Scherer makes a psychological study of the spiritual principles of Socialism. Beyond its technical doctrines there is a Faith. It is insufficient therefore to refute a set of abstract propositions or formulas. If we would be helpful we must try to understand this Faith. At the basis of the Socialist conscience there is the protest and revolt of the spirit of man against a state of things 'hard, cruel and relentless' (Pius XI). The consciousness of exploitation and oppression is the first Socialist 'myth.' In the present economic regime the worker is considered as an instrument and knows that he is an instrument. He is oppressed because he is at the mercy of 'economic laws' commanding a social regime in which he is imprisoned. Not capitalists as individuals are responsible but an institutional regime which surpasses them. The writer urges that the most authentic Marxists are the theorists of Capitalist liberalism for whom the 'natural laws of economy' are intangible, who command a social state, determine a particular morality, and impose a conception of the world in which morality and metaphysics appear only as a 'superstructure' planted on an economic 'infrastructure.' 'To live according to the modern economic world is to accept the oppression of economic laws transcending the free-will of man.' All are prisoners of this regime but the 'masters' can at least manipulate the instruments of production and exchange. The realisation of this makes the worker understand that he is exploited, gives him an inferiority complex and makes him welcome Socialism as the 'good news' of revolt from such a scheme. He awaits the coming of this 'good news' and, holding that the inhumanity of the present system must lead to its downfall, expects a *catastrophe*. We live in a sorrowful Advent with a *messianic* hope. The Messiah is the Proletariat itself. Capitalism is discredited. The messianic Proletariat is preparing for a better future by a mystic Proletariat faith and asceticism and holiness.

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It is preparing for the Redemption of the world. This it is which animates the idea of the Class-War—which is not just the notion of a brutal grabbing of rights but rather that of a trial of faith, the manifestation of opposition to the world as it is. It is basically a spiritual and cultural problem. It is a witness to a kind of life, a conception of the world and man that shall prevail against an inhuman world. The Class-War is really the war of two conceptions of life. Shall men be the slaves of the economic regime or shall it be their servant? The culmination and synthesis is the eschatological 'myth' of the future City—a kingdom of liberty, the Kingdom of God on earth. The Popes have not condemned Capitalism as it might be formulated in abstract theory. What the Papal Encyclicals oppose is *modern* or *liberalist* Capitalism; it speaks of the 'hardened egoism' of certain Capitalists, their impatience of all restraint and freedom from all authority. The minority who dispose of capital can employ it *freely*, having only *individual* interests in view, and dispose of practically unlimited power—'a despotic economic domination,' says the Pope, using a terrible word that implies a state of *tyranny and permanent violence*. But violence calls for violence and tyranny makes revolt legitimate providing the means are efficacious and the result of their use not likely to lead to worse evils than already exist. This is not a revolt against 'an established order.' A state of permanent violence is not an order. The violence of our liberal Capitalism is identical with that of Marxist Socialism in the Soviet. Freed from all authority, especially from the imperatives of morality with its divine sanction, knowing only the necessity of 'economic laws,' it has come to the negation of man, to indifference to *human personality*. The Soviet does not deny God in the name of man, but in the name of the *collectivity*, and this leads to the negation of man. We must reaffirm the absolute value of the human person. Christianity is not only the affirmation of God; it is also the affirmation of man, of the Man-God through the Incarnation, of the God-man through the Redemption. By proclaiming the intangibility of the regime modern capitalists practise historical materialism and install themselves in Marx's 'kingdom of necessity.' In such a system it is hard to live as a Christian, for a Christian cannot take part in miseries and injustice bound up with historical contingencies and human errors. We must separate the workingman's consciousness from the Marxism with which it is unnecessarily connected. We must admit its authentic aspirations, we must put our Good News in the place of its own. We must remember our Baptismal responsibility to inscribe the words of Redemption in earthly society. *Then order will be re-established.*

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The historical parallelism between the birth and development of the Socialist Movement and the apostasy of the working masses has a lesson for responsible Christians. 'Economic Laws,' it has been supposed, are bound up with the nature of things, therefore they are posited by God. God being invited to sanction the rhythm of modern economics and its unjust results—results which have consequently been called 'necessary evils' and 'inevitable injustices.' The inverse method of arguing would have been better for Christians, *i.e.* not arguing from economic laws to Providential laws in economic designs but asking how to incarnate the law of justice and clarity in economic relations. Two heterogeneous primacies are impossible; one must choose between the primacy of economics and the primacy of the spiritual. The primacy of economics may invoke God but is death to the spiritual. To deny man's value as a *person* has led to denying God. In reality the economic order is practically free from every spiritual norm; the moral law has become legal honesty. Socialism, denying the Capitalist world, has thought it its duty to deny God—the Ordainer of the economic laws of Capitalism. Denying God it denies man. By a different way it comes to the same double-sided error and affirms the same economic materialism and the same economic primacy. How has the religion of the poor and humble come to appear as the religion of the oppressing class and the guarantee of injustice? At any rate it is a fact: the working classes look elsewhere than in Christianity for the answer to the destiny of man. That is why the Socialist mythology is a form of the religious spirit, a religion, a catholicity, in the name of the Proletariat. This fact, as Berdyaev says, is 'the witness of an unfulfilled duty of an unrealised task of Christianity.' A large part of life, especially of economic and social life, has not been lit by the light of Christ. It is not from intrinsic insufficiency that Christianity fails, but because Christians, imprisoned in an alien ideology, fail to put in clear language and effective action the mission with which they are invested. Socialism is not a danger because it is a threat to a system already moribund, but because it provides men with a false view of life. Christianity must take heed lest while men get used to doing without it, a situation should arise when it becomes unintelligible to a world which nevertheless it alone can save. Marc Scherer then outlines the hierarchy or values necessary to constitute a Christian order in the modern world.

A.M.

Social evils are ultimately due to maladjustment between the individual and the common-weal, and the particular evils of our own day may be traced to the decline of social-consciousness

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and the rise of individualism. In an article on 'The Social Problem in the light of St. Paul's Theology' in *DER KATHOLISCHE GEDANKE*, Fr. Soiron, O.F.M., holds up St. Paul as an example of this social-consciousness and the great delineator of the Christian idea of society. His doctrine of the solidarity of the baptised in the Mystical Body of Christ, whose members are hierarchically organised on a purely vocational basis according to diversities of graces and ministries, presents us with the ideal conception of society. Nor is the Apostle's idea of corporate unity limited to the supernatural sphere and inapplicable to the natural community. His teaching regarding the transmission of original sin and its consequences supposes an organic unity of mankind in virtue of our common parenthood in Adam and on the purely natural plane. The social chaos into which individualism has led us 'can be overcome only if we return to the sense of social order which Christianity, and especially the Pauline theology, has given to mankind.'

It must, however, be constantly borne in mind that the opposition between Individualism and Collectivism is a false antithesis, due to false conceptions either of individual personality or of society. These are in fact complementary and mutually indispensable, for the perfection of personality can be obtained only in and by society, and society has no intrinsic value or rightful existence independently of the exigencies of personality. We need to steer a straight course between the nineteenth century philosophies which made an absolute of the individual and the new collectivisms, whether Communist or Fascist, which make an absolute of the community. The supreme Society, the Mystical Body itself, has value only as the instrument of salvation for individual personalities. Such is the thesis developed by Prof. Dietrich von Hildebrand in his essay on 'The Corporative Idea, and Natural Communities' which follows directly on that of Fr. Soiron, and to which it may serve as a supplement if not as a corrective. Prof. von Hildebrand bases his argument on an analysis of the ideas of personality and of society as handed down in the *Philosophia perennis*. It is only with the guidance of such a philosophy, which identifies the *bonum commune* with the *bonum proprium* of the individual, that we can hope to harmonise the conflicting forces which rend modern society.

V.M.

RECENT ART EXHIBITIONS.

THE Henri-Matisse Exhibition (at Tooth's) and the Max Ernst Exhibition (at the Mayor Gallery in Cork Street) make an interesting contrast. Matisse's pictures are the records of impressions, visual impressions, Ernst's the result not of visual but