

REVIEWS

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

THE ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CHANGE. By Godfrey and Monica Wilson. (Cambridge University Press; 7s. 6d.).

Dr Wilson's tragic death at an early age last year has taken from Social Anthropology a man of talent and promise. He had shown ability as a field-worker in Central Africa and a grasp of theoretical problems in the papers in which he handled his field material. In this book he and his wife, an anthropologist of distinction herself, under her maiden name of Monica Hunter, have attempted to give a general theory of social change, with special reference to the changes now taking place in native African societies. Their achievement is rather in the plan than in the carrying of it out, for the book is more an effort to create a conceptual technique to make analysis possible than an analysis of a body of social facts.

Few would challenge its theme. The authors hold that as sociologists they must make certain assumptions if sociological writings are to be more than a mere chronicle of accidental, and therefore incomprehensible, events: that facts in the social fields are objectively intelligible, that social relations form a coherent system, and that every society tends to a state of equilibrium. A further assumption is that the total degree of interdependence, or intensity of relations, between persons in a society is the same for all human societies. From this it follows that the main general difference between primitive communities and civilized communities lies in the range of interdependence. It is a difference of social scale, both geographical and historical. Primitive peoples have a very narrow scale, or a very restricted range of relations, between persons in space and time. Direct relations may be limited to a tribe and indirect relations to a congeries of adjacent tribes, while corporate life may not go beyond small village and kinship groups. Likewise the relations between persons in time are limited to direct transmission of knowledge and tradition from one generation to the next. By contrast, members of civilized societies have a wide range of relations, both direct and indirect, and they derive their ideas and beliefs from Semitic, Greek, and other ancient sources.

Social development has always been the change of narrow scale societies into larger scale societies, and with the extension of range of social relations have taken place other changes: political centralization, complementary diversity, increased control over environment, structural complexity, non-magicality, and increased social mobility. One of the most noticeable and important changes that take place when a society expands is that, whilst distant relations increase and intensify, near relations decrease and weaken. Thus, as political institutions develop through social expansion and the State arises, the wide network of kinship ties so characteristic of

primitive societies contracts and the feelings of obligation towards kinsmen outside the family become sluggish. Patriotism is evoked by the State or nation instead of by village, lineage, tribe, or clan. All this will appear probable to those who have given any consideration to the matter. The authors go on to assert that increase in scale produces not less but more freedom in personal relations and that greater autonomy in the narrower relation goes with greater subordination in the wider.

The change over from a narrow scale society to a wide scale society always produces some maladjustment and where the change is both rapid and uneven it causes disequilibrium, with its resultant misery to the persons involved in the process. Opposition exists in every society, but in a stable society only as diversity and competition within particular fields of common values. Maintenance of uniformity within a group implies maintenance of diversity between it and other groups. Opposition, in this sense, between groups within the same society is a principle of social structure itself. But where there is radical opposition, where fundamental values are no longer shared, there comes about a state of disequilibrium in which all belief, all law, all thought and logic, all morals, and all conventions, are challenged. Social relations lose that interconsistency and coherence which alone make social life possible. In the end a community in which this is happening must by some means restore its social equilibrium or perish.

We all know that a state of disequilibrium exists in Europe. In Central Africa, where the authors worked and from where they draw most of their examples, it is even more pronounced. Politically and economically the native peoples of Central Africa have become part of a world society, but their ideas, their religious beliefs and rites, their magic and witchcraft, their marriage customs, their family and kinship relations, and so forth, are very largely those of their old pre-European narrow scale society. At every point of their social life, therefore, there is inconsistency, amounting often to glaring contradictions and open conflict. The authors attribute this radical disharmony not so much to the change from a narrow to a wide scale society, or even to the pace of the change, but to its unevenness. The Central African Negro is now wide scale in some things and narrow scale in others. For instance, Africans attach great importance to open hospitality and one of their reasons for taking more than one woman to wife is to be able to keep open house and entertain lavishly. When they become Christians and monogamous they still try to entertain as before and, as in their present economy this is impossible, conflict arises between the monogamous rule of their new faith and the custom of their pagan fathers. To take another example: the filial obedience demanded by their culture comes into conflict with the irresistible attraction European towns and way of life have for young men who have, by European policy and prejudices, above all by the segregation policy pursued in

South Africa and elsewhere, for this policy is, as the authors say, little more than an attempt to keep White and Black relations tenuous in all except the economic sphere.

The authors conclude that the disharmony in social relations now evident in most parts of the world, and in a particularly distressing form in Central Africa, is due chiefly to the range and intensity of material relations having outrun religious inclusiveness. In a phrase which has become a commonplace, material progress has outstripped moral progress. They use the word religion in a wide sense of philosophy with its dogmas and assumptions and the moral values which go with these. Harmony, order, and equilibrium in social life cannot be brought about through political and economic expansion unless at the same time the people brought into political and economic relations share the same basic dogmas and values. If they have the same fundamental dogmas and values great diversity and competition are compatible with social stability and concord within a world society. One can only regret that Dr Wilson did not live long enough to develop this theme in partnership with his wife.

E. E. EVANS-PRITCHARD.

A CHRISTIAN IN REVOLT. By J. F. T. Prince. (Douglas Organ; 6s.) Through this small but smouldering book Fr Prince aims to harpoon the consciences of those who are described as "Neglectful Christians". He makes a sincere and stimulating appeal for a fuller understanding of the social obligations which are a part of the Christian Heritage. In no uncertain language, he calls for a revolt against the apologist of Capitalism, who misuses the teaching of the Church to defend the exploitation of his fellow men. We are reminded of the necessity to study and digest the Papal Encyclicals, and, having done so, we must devote our energies to the furtherance of their practical application. Only in this manner can humanity expect to survive the twin onslaughts of Capitalism and Communism.

The author urges a constructive revolution by Catholics which will secure the position of the family as the social unit; "renewing all things in Christ—economics not excluded". The possibility of such an appeal being successful is evident from the growth of Catholic influence in continental left-wing politics. In England, of course, the position is not so favourable, nevertheless, many Catholics are associating themselves with progressive movements, and their integrity and judgment may well earn the respect and attention of the extremists among their colleagues. It is regrettable to read that frequently the Christian who finds himself in verbal conflict with the average communist is out-manoeuvred. Yet, by availing himself of the weapons provided by the Church, he has the moral certainty of victory.

Fr Prince, in his revolt, has used forceful language, which some may find disturbing; but he forbears to raise a smokescreen of com-