

WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT¹

“THERE is to-day an immense amount of nonsense talked about both Bolshevism and Fascism. It is not really necessary, in order to condemn Fascism, to become an apologist for the Russians; nor is it required that those who hate Bolshevism, as every intelligent Christian must, should cry out that Fascism is our only salvation therefrom . . . It is foolish to deny the enemy's strength, or to blink at one's own weakness.—Bernard Iddings Bell, *A Catholic Looks at his World*.”

With this text Mr. Attwater begins his enquiry into *Why Communism Gets Away with It*, why it is vital that Communism should not get away with it, and the only way to prevent it. As the text might suggest, his bird's-eye-view of the general situation is balanced and common-sense. He shows that the purely economic proposals of Communism are “eminently calculated to appeal to men suffering under poverty, distress and injustice,” and further that this part of the Communist programme is not by itself morally objectionable. But he goes on to point out that Communism is not only an economic policy; it is also a quasi-philosophy, taught and held with the fervour of a religion. “And that philosophy is false; it is dialectical and materialist, whereas the truth is metaphysical and spiritualist.” It is not easy to convince the working-man of the terrible importance of this statement. Mr. Attwater endeavours, not without a real measure of success, to reduce the issue to concrete terms.

The real reason why Communism gets away with it is that it does seem to recognize the terrible conditions of many of the working men, while the capitalist industrialism of so-called Christian countries, utterly ignoring the very prin-

¹ *Why Communism gets away with it*. By Donald Attwater. (Coldwell; 3d.)

The Coming Corporate State. By A. Raven Thomson. (Action Press; 7d.)

Distributism: A Manifesto. By A. J. Penty. (Distributist League; 1/-)

Communism or Distributism. A Debate between Fr. Vincent McNabb, O.P., and Mr. John Strachey. (Distributist League; 1/-.)

What can we do? By Barbara Wall. (Sheed & Ward; 1/-.)

The Formation of Parochial Apostolic Unions. By C. F. U. Meek. (Reprint from *Pax*.)

ciples of Christian sociology, "has, in the words of a well-known Jesuit, reduced millions of men to a 'sub-human condition of intellectual irresponsibility'—a crime against man and against God, the very crime of which we justly accuse Communism." The working man, not appreciating the value of the theory of Christianity unaccompanied by actual practice, hopes for relief from Communism because he despairs of getting it anywhere else. And "the only way to prevent Communism from getting away with it is to remove the causes of Communism." Mr. Attwater does not profess to show how this is to be done; but he does, nevertheless, give some very plain hints through the medium of some very plain speaking about notable deficiencies in our own Catholic practice. He maintains—and it is impossible not to agree with the accusation—that these latter, more than anything else, open the way for the Communist. It is no use merely to be "anti-Communist" and "to be thrown by Communist violence and success into the arms of opposite parties in which Christians should not be found." It is not even true that we are choosing the lesser evil, for "in the ultimate show-down the triumph of what is called 'the right' wing will be as destructive of Christian values and human living as would the triumph of 'the left.' "

These "opposite parties" are covered generically by the terms "Fascism" and "National Socialism." Each of these, notwithstanding their common ideology, is the indigenous growth of the country of its origin. In other countries the current authoritarian and totalitarian notions (where these exist at all) seem to be reflections or imitations of those two. In England, at least, they are represented by a hybrid result of a union between Fascism and Nazism, and this hybrid is certainly not a native growth but a foreign importation which has not shown much sign of taking root in English soil. Some effort is being made, nevertheless, to force its growth and *The Coming of the Corporate State* is the unduly optimistic title of a "completely unofficial" manifesto produced by the Director of Policy in the British Union of Fascists and National Socialists. The corporate constitution of society is definitely a most desirable and necessary thing; and this manifesto (like the Communist manifesto) contains so much that is materially relative to economic and social reform along corporative lines as to deceive, if possible, even

the elect. But it is by their source and inspiration that such reforms are to be judged. You cannot expect figs from thistles, and it is no less futile to attempt to tie fruit on to an alien tree that cannot produce or sustain it. At best—or, perhaps, at worst—these totalitarian states are like the trees on the border of the Dead Sea; they produce fruit that is attractive enough to the sight but proves upon examination to be hollow and rotten within.

Most of the contemporary efforts to deal with very real and domestic evils show the wrong approach. In a Christian society, at least, the only possible basis of either social life or social reform is the practical recognition of Christian faith and morals as revealed by Our Lord and embodied in the teaching of the Church. If the Commandment of Fraternal Charity—the one personal precept of Our Lord—is accepted as the source and working basis of social relations and the doctrine of Incorporation in the Mystical Body of Christ is the inspiration of corporate action, the Corporate Constitution of Christian Society, for which the Popes have pleaded, will come to flower and fruit of itself, as it did in the Middle Ages. But there is no other way.

It is highly important that we Catholics, at any rate, should approach these vital matters from the right angle. The Distributist League (to which a number of notable Catholics have given their support) is much more conscious of the need to recognize fundamentals than appears in *Distributism: A Manifesto*, a posthumous pamphlet of the late A. J. Penty. This latter shows how Distributism is in danger of being much too narrow in its view of what is fundamental. "Distributists propose to go back to fundamentals, and to rebuild society from its basis in agriculture." Actually one knows that the mental outlook of many of them is happily much deeper and wider than is suggested in Mr. Penty's criticism of other "isms" and facts, or by his panacea represented by "back to the land," private property and home industry. These are wholly good things in human society; but they are not the *source* of all good things in human society. Fr. Vincent McNabb has emphasized this in many places. Though *Communism or Distributism* is something of a misnomer for the Debate between himself and Mr. John Strachey which it records, nevertheless the learned Dominican does speak there, in his

brilliant criticism of Communism, from the point of view of a clear-sighted thinker who is a Distributist to the extent that an appreciation of Our Lord's social and moral teaching demands this in any Catholic. But that is not to say that Catholicism is to be identified simply and wholly with the Distributist League. Fr. McNabb also says, in that pamphlet, that he is an "old professional Communist," but no one would be foolish enough to imagine that he means to subscribe to the Communism of Karl Marx, or to that of Moscow. Even his Communist opponent realized that quite clearly. The simple fact is that superficial similitudes are no indication of basic oneness; but this truth is often disregarded in practice.

If the situation is so terrible and so urgently in need of remedy—and it is even more so than the majority perhaps realizes—and if the suggested "isms" are futile to provide a lasting remedy and, in many cases, do but increase the real evil, *What Can We Do?* Under this pertinent title Barbara Wall has written a most attractive and valuable booklet intended, as she herself says, "for the young and enthusiastic who want to *do* something for Christ in the world to-day." In it she sketches, through the medium of four imaginary letters addressed to "Mary," the basis of such action and, in a delightfully easy and convincing style, has emphasized the truth that the first duty is to know Christ with a knowledge of appreciation engendering a personal love and consequent inspiration to service in everyday life. If this duty is undertaken in a common-sense, matter-of-fact way, as it must be, it will provide a solution to personal and social problems wholly and alone satisfying to both mind and heart. It will give a sense of true freedom, that "freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free." It will mark off clearly the abyss of diversity between the modern efforts towards humanitarianism and Christian Brotherly Love. It will provide the one encouragement and outlet for the enthusiasms and activities of Catholic youth. It will emphasize the truth that Christian standards and those of "the world" are diametrically opposed and irreconcilable. It will interpret success and failure in terms of Calvary and will show that "Christ's teachings are eternal and do not vary with the booms and slumps of the industrial system." The one terrible evil of the day is "the mania to

escape realities"—the realities of the present which can only be judged in their relation to the eternal future—and we Catholics must be "a living protest against the materialist society in which we live—where the values are money-values." It is useless for us to attempt to escape the fundamental realities of the Incarnation and the following of Christ; but it is a terrible temptation.

Mrs. Wall sees the urgent need of the organizing of Catholic youth. She mentions, with justifiable approval, the work already done by J.O.C., (*Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*) in Belgium, but perhaps is not completely aware of its development in England too. Added to this there is L.O.C.K. (League of Christ the King), a somewhat more specialist organization confined mostly to student circles, which promises extremely well. But, in my opinion, something similar must be provided for the Catholics as a whole, without distinction of age, position or natural capabilities, and this is forthcoming in *The Formation of Parochial Apostolic Unions* set on foot by Mr. C. F. U. Meek and already flourishing in the South-west of England. It is an entirely spiritual thing: its object is the sanctification of the members and the winning or winning back of souls to God; its membership is open to the practising Catholics of each Parish; its obligations are spiritual ones; and members work individually and privately. We have no space at the moment to expound the magnificent opportunities provided by this organization not unjustly described as "of great importance and incalculable possibilities." But its primary value is that it approaches the whole matter in the one only way; it is a practical application of the general principles laid down by Mrs. Wall and one which can readily be shared in by all and sundry. Here we have "an organization that can bind together the good Catholics of the parish under their priest, that can bind together the parishes under the Bishop, that can bind together the dioceses in the nation, and that, ultimately, can bind together the faithful throughout the world in one mighty apostolate for Jesus Christ, under His Vicar, Our Holy Father the Pope." This is the type of action that will prevent Communism from getting away with it, will bring to birth the corporate constitution of society, will provide the true basis of Distributism, will put an end to "escapism" and will turn Catholic theory into Catholic action.

HILARY J. CARPENTER, O.P.