

## S. O. S.

FRANCE seems to lie dead. The material thing, between Rhine and Alps and Pyrenees, remains: but inanimate—without a soul.

This is the fundamental lesson which the French tragedy holds for the world. S.O.S.—save our souls! We must look to England's soul, recognize it, protect it from an invasion which is moral before it is material.

A country's soul is its life: its life is fidelity to its vocation. Compulsion paralyses life. That is why, in fighting for our freedom, we are fighting for the very life of our country; indeed, for the life of the whole world. And France's present servitude requires that we ask: what is her vocation? how shall her soul live?

France is essentially the land of freedom, of 'races' as different as Basques and Alsations, as Bretons and Savoyards. France is fashioned of this rich diversity. St. Louis gave her justice: St. Joan gave her patriotism and unity. The condition of her unity is obedience not simply to a temporal ruler, but to the great over-Lord—'Messire' as St. Joan called Him—Who entrusts His creation to the care of His children, asking in return only their fidelity to His law of justice and charity. And France, very often, has been faithful.

Having received great treasures, she has freely given them, and has been enriched by her own generosity. She has given charity through her martyrs and saints, and has been enriched with their humanity. She has given spiritual treasures through her missionaries and has been enriched with their zeal. She has given intellectual treasures through her learned men, and has been enriched with their love of wisdom. She has given material treasures—her hospitality to strangers (a few weeks ago France was the refuge of half of dispossessed Europe)—and has been enriched with a wide understanding.

This is France when she cares for her soul. When she lets material selfishness paralyse her spiritual generosity,

when she forgets that the free service of God is the essential condition of her free unity, she disintegrates. Louis XIV preferred to adorn his banners with the sun-emblem of his own royalty rather than with the heart-emblem of the royalty of Christ, and the ambition of a French king tore Frenchmen asunder, furrowed France and Europe with injustice, hardened hearts. The revolutionaries of 1789 substituted the ideals of material liberty (which meant also the right of the foolish to lead the wise) for spiritual liberty, material equality (which meant also the right to kill and rob), for spiritual equality, material fraternity (which meant also enmity against all non-brothers, as do Nazism and Fascism and Bolshevism) for spiritual fraternity, and the material ambition of many tore more Frenchmen asunder, pitted France against Europe, closed more hearts.

France is not France when she forgets her spiritual vocation, when she substitutes force for reason, emotion for religion. France is not France when she forgets her spiritual freedom: when she submits to material interests which divide, rather than to spiritual interests which unite. France to be France requires that charity be set in order in her through justice.

Those who try to set France in order otherwise than by charity no more understand the problem than do the revolutionaries. The real disorder is the material ambition which prevails in *every* political party. And the solution is not to suppress royalists or clericals or free-masons or republicans or communists, but to rebuild upon the common foundation of a common spiritual purpose, a common vocation.

Because a vocation is spiritual, it does not require any one particular material setting. In order to realize her vocation France does not require a monarchy nor a military despotism, nor, as the Maurras-Pétain group would have it, an authoritarian corporate state which pays lip-service to the Church while destroying the essential prerequisite for a Christian life, freedom. No Government can force a people to fulfil their vocation. Unless, indeed, it be a vocation to slavery.

It is in the light of France's real ideal—of her vocation, not of her sins—that the tragedy of her present enslavement becomes intelligible. Her vocation is to real freedom, the freedom of the spirit; her sin is to turn this freedom into material licence and disorder. But neither Pétain nor Maurras nor Hitler nor any despotism can cure that disorder, for there is no law without justice, no order without liberty. No authoritarian order can cure the materialistic disorder which in France and in the whole world is crying for a remedy: only the free determination of every individual to live—and to see that others are allowed to live—by the spirit of justice and charity.

M. BENENSON.

## CORRESPONDENCE

*To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.*

SIR,—The very interesting article by Dr. Strauss in the August number of BLACKFRIARS contains two astonishing statements:

(a) 'The communist religion might be regarded as atheistic humanism.'

'Atheistic animalism' would be a more accurate definition, since Bolshevism seeks to degrade human beings to the level of mere animals. The Bolsheviks deny the existence of the soul and despise the intellect.

(b) 'It seeks to fulfil the second commandment.'

The doctrine and practice of 'Class War,' which is an essential part of the Communist religion, is diametrically opposed to the Second Commandment.

Yours truly,

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