

studies, particularly of men like Coomaraswamy and Jung, are of the utmost importance. These men have come as near as may be to integrating the subjective and objective realisation of man in his approach to God. But it requires the breath of life, the supernatural view which reveals the meaning of all these manifestations, revealed all *in Verbo*. Art is fundamentally religious; all religions bear the traces of Christianity; so all art and thought must be viewed from the standpoint of the *anima naturaliter christiana*. God has made and is making all things *in Verbo*, a Word who is made flesh and dies for man's redemption.

In other words the christian holds the key; he alone can pass through the wall of partition. It is, therefore, his most urgent and pressing responsibility to make his own the works of these men. If he hears an echo of Christ's voice in Hinduism or Buddhism, in Al-Ghazali or in the natural quest of man for Unity, he must reply in the voice of Christ with such intensity that eventually the echo and the voice may be joined in one sound. That Coomaraswamy did so much more than any contemporary Christian to discover the identity of sounds is a serious rebuke to Christians, but now they alone can take up his work and bring it successfully to the beginning of a conclusion.

But now in Christ Jesus you who sometime were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh: making void the law of commandments contained in decrees: that he might make the two in himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body by the cross, killing the enmities in himself.—Ephesians 2, 13-6.

THE EDITOR.

NICOLAS BERDYAEV: 1874-1948

MARCH 23RD of this year marked the death of Nicolas Berdyaev, one of the most remarkable men and thinkers of our age. It is necessary that I should remind the readers of BLACK-FRIARS of a few essential dates and events in his life. Born in 1874, he was thus just of the age to live on the marches of two worlds, at a time of some of the greatest upheavals in history, and he aptly describes his path as lying 'between revolutions'. His entire thought was indeed pervaded by an awareness of the catastrophic destruction of an old world and of the emergence—for better or for worse—of a new one upon its ashes. This was no mere allergy to new twentieth-century topics; no mere groping around in the ruins of a desolated world in search of new assured and unquestioned values: he opened

his mind and heart to the destiny of the troubled world so as to gain a truer vision of its ultimate issue and meaning.

At the beginning of the century Berdyaev became one of the most outstanding spokesmen of a Russian 'Renaissance' which marked the overthrow of the old intelligentsia and a general spiritual and intellectual renewal. The complex cultural processes and cross-currents of the nineteenth century in Russia had brought about, towards the end of the age, a complete alliance between atheism and 'progress' on the one hand and religion and political reaction on the other. The dissolution of these alliances and the overthrow of the supremacy of political over spiritual forces was the task and in a measure the achievement of this movement. Unlike the European Renaissance, however, that of Russia was not 'in love with life', nor did it look gleefully to the future, or preserve a wholesome sanity: it had a quality, admittedly not new in nineteenth-century Russia—the sense of human tragedy. While the heart of Europe had been eaten out by the disease of wishing unpleasant things away, the Russians knew, what Western man knows today by heart, that European civilisation is sick, that European mankind is vulgar and lifeless, that people are ruled by hatred, envy and suspicion, and that human eyes have lost the capacity to contemplate the eternal.

Strange though it may seem, one of the most important sources of the cultural renaissance was a new form of Socialism, radically different from the earlier traditional, somewhat spineless and idyllic '*Narodnitchestvo*', which regarded the primitive peasant as the chief force destined to change the face of Russia. It was a Marxist Socialism, ready to face the terrifying inevitability of a technological age and society and marked by a wide outlook upon the philosophy of history. Thus it was that Berdyaev became a Marxist. His participation in various political activities, though never very conspicuous, led to his expulsion from the University and even to exile from his native Kiev to the north of Russia. Yet he never became a Marxist of the orthodox type and, while remaining true to Marxism in its social and economic aspects, he did not identify himself with its materialist philosophy, and was then, as indeed throughout his whole later intellectual development, secretly and overtly 'God-tormented'.

The beginning of the century marked Berdyaev's spiritual evolution 'from Marxism to Idealism' and thence to Orthodox Christianity. In 1909 he published, together with other contributors, *The Landmarks*, a kind of manifesto, which had an almost revolutionary effect on great sections of Russian society and contained both an indictment of the anti-religious, anti-philosophical and (politically) simple-minded older intelligentsia and an affirmation of the significance of spiritual values in the renewal of Russia. The Russian

'Renaissance' had by then reached its momentum, but soon resolved itself in the final crisis of the Revolution.

Though in many respects representative of and responsible for the new movement, Berdyaev remained, nevertheless, even then a solitary figure. He was not concerned, as many of his associates were, with mere cultural and æsthetic 'revaluations', nor was he inclined to a hasty championship of the Church for even the highest ulterior motives. He followed his path in a mood of 'difficult hope', in the all-consuming knowledge of the greatness and the terror of human destiny. He was also much more sensitive than they to the social problems of his day.

After the Revolution, and as a result of it, Berdyaev found himself in exile in 1922, at first in Germany, then in France, where he directed the Academy of the Philosophy of Religion (except for a short period in Russia after the Revolution he never held a University appointment) and a review called 'Put' (*The Way*). It was, perhaps, not by chance that henceforth he was destined to wander as an exile without mundane allegiance, for, though he was Russian to the core of his being, his allegiances were always to the world of ideas. The majority of the Russian *émigrés* were quite unable to face the facts of the revolutionary upheaval: as a result these facts became more and more unpleasant, and the 'emigration' paid the usual price of suppressed guilt and self-pity or was led to a restless search for a lost spiritual and material security and turned with arid heart in hands to a vanished past. But Berdyaev had too deep a sense of history and was himself too much a representative of the earthquake age not to see the promise as well as the tragedy of so decisive a social and spiritual transformation as the Russian Revolution. He was conscious that such events do not take place smoothly and without untold pain and he did not engage in angry and uncomprehending cries of moral fury and condemnation. The very experience of the Revolution made him look deeper for its causes and significance and perceive that it had, in effect, cut the grooves along which modern history is bound to run. Meanwhile exile and direct contact with the West enriched his thought, or, perhaps, brought out a richness that was already there and, as it were, showed him to himself.

It is by no means easy to characterise the thought of Berdyaev or to follow the inner development of his mind. He said a great deal by silence and, to quote his own words, asked questions 'in a form which, though affirmative, also in a measure concealed them'. There is, fortunately or unfortunately, no academic aridity about his themes, method and style and one cannot 'don-ify' him. The strains and stresses of his style, his repetitive and summary utterances, his occasional obscurities and vagueness in detail have been a source of

exasperation to many readers. But when we remove the magnifying glass from his work and attempt to contemplate the totality of his thought, to grasp his 'idea' he becomes fully apprehensible and we discover his real motive. Berdyaev was essentially a macrocosmic genius; and it is the total meaning which is most significant. He had something of the Russian disdain for the virtues of logic, balance and form, something of openness to limitless horizons, and yet he always focused his attention upon the concrete and individual. The truth of propositions was almost irrelevant to him, and philosophy for him was an act of faith. 'I must discover for myself that which God has hidden from me. God expects from me a free creative act'. Philosophical knowledge is no passive position of the intellectual observer, but a creative activity, with a logic all its own, in which the knower brings the whole of himself to bear at whatever point he is engaged. The effect of Berdyaev's thought is an experience, rather than the communication of a doctrine, religious or philosophical. He does not so much argue as describe a mystery intuitively; and his success or failure is to be measured by the extent to which the essential experience of that mystery is accessible. True philosophy, according to Berdyaev, is not 'objective', but the fruit of passionate personal interest and commitment. And the value of his own work is that he thought and wrote out of passion.

In the preface to one of his last works, *An Essay in Eschatological Metaphysics*, Berdyaev wrote that he considers his real motive to be metaphysical: he is a metaphysician who works in the concrete, the human, the unique, the personal. Man is the starting point of his whole philosophical enquiry. He deems that neither Idealism nor Positivism were able, for different reasons, to interpret life: the one because it disengages itself from human existence, the other because it altogether abandons the 'love of wisdom' and employs itself in hectoring those who assume it. But he also repudiates all theoretical ontologies, inasmuch as they deduce abstract relations between a contingent and an absolute being and thus 'objectify' existence and belie that character of truth which, in the words of Kierkegaard, 'torments us into reality'.

This is the origin of Berdyaev's intense concern for man and his all-consuming sense of solidarity with human destiny. 'Moral consciousness began with God's question, "Cain, where is thy brother Abel?" It will end with another question on the part of God: "Abel, where is thy brother Cain?"' (*The Destiny of Man*). He once said to me that he considered his philosophy to be Christian inasmuch as he has succeeded in showing it to be human. His philosophy is in fact pre-eminently a Christian humanism. And Christ's God-manhood is the ultimate guarantee that Christianity will not forget the image of

man and the God-created dignity of man—truths which he believed in greatest danger of being forgotten, by Christians no less than by non-believers. Hardly any other Christian thinker was endowed with such a vision of man: man in his relation to God and to other men; man tragically stricken and yet called upon to create and capable of creativity; man in freedom and in bondage; man in and over against nature and history; man in his homelessness and godforsakenness; man who must bear the presence of all the hell and all the heaven of his humanity.

From his earliest philosophical works (*Philosophy of Freedom* and *The Meaning of the Creative Act*) there emerges a sense of the contradictions of human existence which reach down to the divine-human foundations of the universe. But this had nothing in common with the interest and even fashion for deadly themes and 'inherent struggles' which seems to have today a general appeal to the schizoid mind of certain Western intellectuals. Nor is his philosophy an early visit to the Jean-Paul Sartre land of existentialism (however 'existentialist' he may be himself, or however much he may be fascinated by the confines of human existence)—a land which, indeed, he could not even accept as the human situation, or even a true allegory of its essence (see his recent *Au seuil de la nouvelle époque*), since for him in the extreme of misery light keeps on breaking in. Man can be and is being warped out of all recognition by evil, degraded and defiled, but there is no elevation of despair to a hysterical supremacy: there is recognition of light, of a transcendent meaning which alone makes tragedy significant. Hence issues Berdyaev's vision of, and readiness to fight for, a better world. Hence also his active struggle with the evil of all the social and historical 'necessities' by which the dignity and personality of man have been assaulted. He had very little faith in sociology and 'scientism' by which people claim to gain control over human development. He knew that in a world under the impact of Marx, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Freud, two great world wars, fascism, communism, and the spiritual disintegration of Western civilisation there is little ground for rosy optimism. His vision was of a different nature: it was the vision of messianic and eschatological fulfilment, which alone will resolve the strife between man and his environment, between freedom and necessity; it was the certainty concerning the kingdom of God which spells the end of this stricken world, begetting its own doom, and yet throws a light upon, and gives meaning to, its tragic pathways. Within the cycle of nature, to which he belongs, man is and will remain a creature paralysed and crushed by inexorable necessity and reduced to the semblance of a broken puppet, to a 'thing' or 'object'; but the coming of the kingdom is to overcome the tyrannies, estrangement and tedium of the

world. Not until history is ended can there be a peaceful earth and victory for the spirit of God and of man, although, paradoxically, at any given moment man is called upon to represent creatively this end and thereby, at any given moment, to end this world so full of estrangement, tyranny and tedium. This is eminently a vision, not a 'remedy' or 'solution', and it has to be judged as such: a vision which can be explained and understood only, as Berdyaev himself explained and understood it, in prophetic terms. . . .

When I saw Berdyaev for the last time, already on his death-bed, with the shadow of the spirit still resting upon his face, it seemed as if a veil of immense lassitude, patience and faint perplexity was covering the fiery intensity of an agonised, Promethean soul, engaged in a terrible struggle with the powers of this world. Such indeed was his living face: the face of a man, always serene, always kindly, always generous, and yet animated by some profound disquietude and aware of the greatness and the terror which attend human existence.

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NICOLAS BARDYAEV AND THE RUSSIAN IDEA

THE birth of an innumerable quantity of new generations cannot reconcile us to the death of one single man.' These words of Nicolas Berdyaev come towards the end of one of his latest works to be translated into English, *The Russian Idea*¹; and it has since transpired that they were written also near the end of his own life. They may serve as a fitting epitaph to the life and work of one who will not easily be replaced, and whose labour of interpreting the Russian world to the West was among the most pressing tasks of our generation in a field in which the labourers are still tragically few. His passing, therefore, is at once a blow and a challenge. We have lost one who undertook what few are willing, and fewer still are equipped, to do. But because the work must be done, it behoves us indeed not to be reconciled to his death, but rather to be emboldened by it.

It is difficult in the stormy moment of an historical crisis to reflect at all calmly on the deeper issues below the surface of the political and military hubbub. Thought about the Russian question is almost paralysed by the very fact that everybody is thinking about it. The temptation to reduce a complex conflict to the simple categories of friend and enemy, of 'them' and 'us', necessarily destroys that effort to find common ground or at least to understand the motives

¹ Geoffrey Bles; 18s.