

THE NEW ORDER

IN the enigmatic future that faces us there is one thing becoming more certain with every succeeding day of the war—the old order of civilization is passing and some new order marches swiftly down upon us. But though we know now that this new order will be here soon, we cannot tell what it will be like. It may even turn out to be no order at all, but only chaos. Hitler promises a new order, and while we are confident that he will never achieve it, we must recognize that some cataclysmic change inevitably awaits us, a revolution that will turn the whole system on which we now depend upside down. Every day brings with it death to soldiers and civilians, destruction to property; every hour records the expenditure of incalculable fortunes upon the unproductive works of warfare. As all the material benefits acquired by modern industry are poured out in a vast torrent, the capitalistic and industrial order that set up those material standards is drained of its life's blood.

The last war produced a new order of insecurity and unrest even though the actual system of capital and industry received artificial respiration and lingered on. The increasing revolt against authority and the desire for individual freedom for the lowest as well as the highest in society made the old order insecure and led to the reaction of authoritarianism. Order demands dependence and co-operation among the ordered, while antagonism and individual independence split it into fragments. During the interim of twenty years the old order was sinking, and now the bell of total war tolls its funeral.

Those who think they are fighting to preserve the old system of European life based on the domination of capital and the tyranny of mechanical industry close their eyes to evident facts, neglect to prepare for the future, and cling

blindly to the corpse of the past as it is lowered into its grave. Those who have lived on the tribute of labour in stocks and shares must now envisage a situation in which stocks and shares cease to be more than the yellowing sheets of paper on which they are recorded. Those who have learnt slavishly to depend from week to week on the wage doled out to them by the 'boss' must now envisage a time when that apparently inexhaustible stream has run dry. The old system was rotting at the core; injustice and usury were leading it to its destruction, and it would be more than foolish to attempt to re-establish it. Such an attempt would not only be doomed to failure; it would also be immoral.

Hitler's references to the new order should at least serve to remind us that a new system of social life is coming with the certainty of the leaves of autumn or the new life of spring. And since it will be a necessary effect of the war, we who fight are fighting for this new order whatever it may be. Every one, therefore, who is now involved in the struggle must look ahead to the new age and prepare himself for it. But there are two ways of preparing for the inevitable future. There are those who listen to its approaching footsteps with hypnotic fascination, wondering dazedly whether it will crush them to the dust or raise them up to a new life. They wait passively in a state of helpless fatalism, as powerless as a small child before the inexorable advance of a German tank. Even though they are determined that it shall not be an order planned by Germany, it seems to them already fixed and unalterable. There are those, on the other hand, who are determined to mould the future order according to their own plan, regarding it as patient of human control and fashioning. They prepare, not simply to accept it when it comes, but to make it come in a form designed by themselves.

Confining ourselves to the English scene, we are confronted by one of those curious paradoxes of history. Amongst those who are bound to regard human destiny

and the unfolding of the future as subject to the control of the human will under Providence, the convinced Christians, and especially the Catholics, there are many who clearly adopt an attitude of fatalistic inertia. The Marxists, on the other hand, whose creed teaches an inexorable law of material progress leading necessarily to a new order of international communism, exert every effort to form the future according to their own plans. Catholics tend to be fatalistic, while communists are formative.

We do not have far to seek for the reason why believers in the power of human free will—a power miraculously increased when transformed by grace—should remain inert. During the last fifteen years many Catholics have been keenly interested in the changing face of civilization. They have noted all the symptoms, counted the spots and wrinkles as they appeared on that face; they have discoursed learnedly on the medicine and ointment required to restore its beauty. But in spite of many words little has been done to apply the remedies, and the face has continued to become more haggard, at least in part because the different Catholic organizations have been divided among themselves and have neglected to co-operate and assist one another in putting their schemes into practice. In particular, harm has been done by applying labels to these varying and zealous groups of Catholics. Some are called 'Fascist' or 'Right,' others 'Communist' or 'Left,' some 'Pink,' others 'Proletarian.' This habit of making barriers with ill-sounding labels has obstructed the momentum of the Catholic body and left it in this state of inertia. The situation is woefully tragic since each group has been pondering deeply the social Encyclicals and wishing vainly to follow the lead set by the energetic modern Popes. Undoubtedly they have all been seeking much the same sort of solution, all desiring to form the future according to the design of the *Rerum Novarum*. But they did not unite in recognizing that the old order is passing, or that *Rerum Novarum* cannot be applied as a rejuvena-

tor of the failing system. And those labels were formed partly because of the different attitudes of the groups to the decaying order. Some appeared to overlook the antagonisms between Christian principles and industrial principles so well described in a recent book. 'The notion that the introduction of a Christian spirit into the economic and industrial mechanism of capitalism would suffice to make of it an adequate human instrument for the attainment of natural human ends, is an idle speculation The assumption that the present order can be baptized is mistaken, if only for the reason that we cannot baptize a lie.'¹ But at heart they were all really aiming at some general goal that could be headed 'The Re-christening of Society.'

Eight years ago, in an Editorial for BLACKFRIARS, Fr. Bede Jarrett wrote: 'At the present moment no single Catholic body of laymen has been moved to unfold a programme. Why? It is dangerous to lay down a policy today? There is the danger that by so doing you may divide the Catholic body? Believe us when we say that there is a greater danger in doing nothing; and that the Catholic body is already divided . . . at present we see little but inaction and reaction.' Since that date we have written and spoken many million words about the main problems of the age, but 'inaction and reaction' have remained in our midst while the new order has advanced with coat off and fists clenched. Some even welcome each bomb as a nail in the coffin of the old system, yet no effort is made to influence its heir. It is as though they feel that the successor will somehow prove better than its parent, whereas it may well be a thousand times worse. The mounting fumes of theory seem to have choked practice beyond revival while reaction and division make it impossible to stop those fumes.

As we theorize, the Marxists ignore their materialist dia-

¹ W. G. Peck, *The Salvation of Modern Man*, p. 36.

lectic and work to establish the new order according to the system which they have made their religion. Their strength and hope of success lie in their unity, energy and initiative. They all share the same clear ideas as to the goal of their activities. They do not, as far as the outsider can judge, create divisions among themselves. Reserving their labels for their true opponents they use them with effect to stir up their members to zeal for the cause. They do not wait passively, they organize, keep every unit busily engaged in grasping the myriad opportunities of the times. Their leaders go about the country, telling their disciples that 'after the Victory the workers will take over,' and we may be sure that the phrase represents something more than words. They are strong in England not because they are numerous, but because they are united and active.

This means that we who retain the full faith of Christ have come to the last rampart. If we retreat passively any further, the communists will take over. In despair, the best elements in Christianity outside the Church have turned to Socialism. Half the Socialist Party is formed of well-intentioned Nonconformists. The fast decreasing number who are left to seek a truly Christian answer to the problems of the day have no lead. Now is the time to show them there is such a thing as a Christian programme for social reorganization. Now is the time to show the Christian ideals to those in the Services and in civil life who are fighting to overthrow the threat of the new order of Nazidom. What will happen after the war if the soldiers return to civil life with no positive ideals? Before the war is over we must have a working Christian system. If we leave it till the war is finished it will be too late; Communism, or at least some form of Socialism, will have taken over.

In this time of crisis, then, we Catholics are offered a final chance of raising ourselves from lethargy and of showing a united front as zealous followers of Christ in an

heroic Christian warfare. We must set the Gospel principles to work in our lives and apply them to our immediate surroundings. There is no longer time to discuss abstract theories of social justice or wide-sweeping notions of charity. Those necessary generalities have been in our thoughts and on our lips for years past. Now we must see justice and charity brought to bear on our family life, on our business and working life, on the groups or societies to which we belong. Starting with small things, we should begin to realize our duties as citizens, our responsibilities to our own neighbourhood and to our country as the possessors of the true religion and the trustees of the great social encyclicals. Many people are fond of considering the duties of the State towards themselves and their families, but take no count of their own duties to the State. Brought up in a system of great individual freedom, they abuse that liberty and judge themselves dispensed from any active relations with the State except for a grudging obedience to laws such as taxation which they regard as necessary evils. That freedom is abused if it is not ordered to the common good of society. The State does not work automatically for the benefit of its free citizens; they must as members of the State offer their service that through common and united effort the common as well as the individual good may be attained. Perhaps we have begun to realize that responsibility now that of necessity we are all called upon to share in the war effort. But the duty of each Christian citizen even to-day goes beyond the war to the very roots of society.

This duty, then, is one from which no freedom can dispense—indeed, the more freedom the greater the individual responsibility. Free citizenship means that each member, although not forced by tyranny, is bound by honour to pull his weight. It means that every Christian father of a family must run his 'cell' in society according to principles of justice and charity not only for the good of his family, but also for the healthy working of the

body politic. It means that the labourer and the employer must do the same in their own particular spheres, that groups, societies, organizations already formed should act together according to Christian principles. In a crisis like the present this duty becomes very grave. At this eleventh hour the individual Christian must look to his local surroundings and begin to behave as an active Christian in his favourite 'pub' and in his factory, in his club and among the men working for him. He has an obligation with regard, for instance, to his local village or town council, he must endeavour to secure the right people with the right ideas for the local government and district organizations. Nevertheless, individuals alone can achieve little without the co-operation of their fellow Catholics both high and low, 'right' and 'left.'

The future thus depends upon individual effort and it would be harmful as well as useless to expect sudden and spectacular results. There is no hope of establishing a new order in Europe based on justice and charity unless those virtues have grown up from the small concrete units of our own society, from the prayers in the Catholic home, from Christian living and Christian talking in the factory, workshop or office, from the vital work of Catholic societies, from a sympathetic appreciation of the work not only of others in the Church, but also of those outside the Church. When the hidden but basic members of society begin to knock down the wall of partition and run together in harmony of aim and intention, all striving to reconstruct civilization according to Christian principles, then will there be great hope of establishing a new order fashioned according to the models of justice and charity. Sweeping universal theories will never achieve this goal, but individual, local practice linked up with the life of the Church as a whole has the power to overcome the great difficulties of the times.

Perhaps this insistence on a general awakening may seem to be just another vague exhortation which boils down to

the platitude of asking that all Catholics be good and entertain a sense of duty and responsibility towards society. Obviously a more concrete proposal is required, a plan which all may accept and apply in their own particular ways. Fr. Bede Jarrett spoke of the need of a programme that would serve as a basis for action. We need one that will be an incarnation of the Church's social doctrine, that will provide a sketch of what the new order ought to be. Such a programme has in fact been in circulation for some months. Its defects will be easily remedied by discussion and application in the concrete. It can be made a basis of discussion and at the same time a foundation upon which all may at once begin to build, for it contains most of the principles which have been discussed for so long by different groups, Catholic and non-Catholic. It appears as a belated answer to Fr. Jarrett's appeal eight years ago. The programme has already received some publicity and is entitled *Towards a Christian Social Order*. It began in a manner that augured success, for it did not seek to win over millions in a day, but began to infiltrate into the Christian body by personal contact and individual practice.

In the last few weeks this programme has shown great promise in its steadily increasing number of supporters. In particular it has taken root in the city of Norwich, where it has been set working in a concrete and practical way. In this district a group of public men have decided to put it into immediate practice, having been inspired thereto by a small number of enthusiastic Catholics. The first step was to seek ecclesiastical approbation, for although the one chance of success lies in the initiative and enthusiasm of individuals and the various units of society, to neglect the sanction of authority would lead to inevitable disaster. Mere reaction against totalitarianism can easily lead to a lack of emphasis on the obedience and authority that are the foundations of society and to cloudy ideas of freedom. The movement in Norwich was deter-

mined to avoid such pitfalls of mere negation and destruction, and so obtained the warm support of the necessary authority.

Another equally fundamental condition of success in any effort for Christian reconstruction is to submit the plan not only to the immediate authority by which God's will is ultimately manifested, but to submit it also to the final authority of the divine will in itself—that is, to put it before God in prayer, devoted supernatural prayer that seeks 'Thy kingdom come' always through 'Thy will be done.' An appeal was therefore made from Norwich to all the contemplative religious in England to obtain the support of their regular prayers. This appeal was met with magnificent generosity from most of the Abbeys, Priories and Convents of England, where men and women devoted to God spend their lives round the altar mediating for their fellows in the world, from Parkminster, Tyburn, Syon Abbey, Ramsgate, Prinknash and Douai, from Carmels, from Poor Clares and Augustinians came promises of regular prayers, of Conventual Masses, Holy Communions, and of various Hours of Divine Office. There could be no more hopeful augury of success, for in this way the practical development of the Programme can continue under the shadow of the altar, held up before the loving gaze of God.

Having laid these two foundation stones, the Programme was brought to the notice of others besides Catholics, in particular of members of the Church of England and of the Free Churches. For it was realized that no effective application of its articles could be achieved without the co-operation of all sincere Christians who are determined not merely to defeat Nazism but also in their own sphere of activity to build up out of the ruins of the war some sort of Christian order. Such co-operation can be attained through a positive attitude on the part of Catholics who should realize that the Christians outside the Church are in possession not only of the Natural Law upon which the

future society must be built, but also of a great deal of true Christianity. The good faith of these people calls down upon them the grace of God even though they do not receive it *ex opere operato* through the sacraments. And apart from this spiritualizing element they have certain convictions which will certainly be positive contributions to any effort at re-Christianizing the life of this country. Thus the Nonconformist's real and fundamental belief in the Holy Spirit, and the vital conception of worship to be found in the Church of England can help to lay really Christian foundations to the movement.

With this positive desire for co-operation the group of Catholics in Norwich approached influential members of the churches, who proved their enthusiasm for the Programme by inviting a Catholic priest to address the diocesan synod of the Church of England and the Free Church Conference on 'Towards a Christian Social Order.'

But in a country so shy of the Roman collar and the parson, an explicitly ecclesiastical movement can have no chance of success. Perhaps the most encouraging sign in Norwich is the enthusiasm with which individuals of all states and standings have welcomed the Programme. Chairman of local councils, members of Education Committees, Heads of Schools, both Secondary and Elementary, welfare workers and officials in the larger factories are supporters that can exercise considerable influence on opinion in the district. But the large number of other supporters who have no public position gives the movement a solid ground to grow in.

In this way the Catholic initiators have been able to harness a great deal of genuine enthusiasm to a practical application of the Programme. Lectures by experts on the machinery of local government have been arranged in order to explain the framework in which the Christian principles of the Programme are to be put in practice. Parallel with this practical discussion will run an explanation of the Christian principles themselves, in the course of which

the Programme will be elucidated and modified to become increasingly secure. By such means it is hoped to form a Christian public opinion conscious of individual responsibility among free Christian citizens and sufficiently powerful to insist on the application of the articles of the Programme in local affairs. It is also hoped by these means to train candidates for posts in local government who will thus be in a position to apply it in the various departments of the government. This does not mean, however, that they intend eventually to form a new political party on the lines of the Centre Party in pre-Nazi Germany. To make Christian morals a platform for a single party would be to destroy the true purpose of the Programme, for it would create divisions where co-operation had been sought. The promoters of this movement desire rather to Christianize the already existing parties, those at least that have not been condemned by Catholic authority. The fact that Catholics are allowed to belong to the other parties shows that they are recognized to be patient of true Christian principles. If this is so, then it is the duty of every sincere Christian to see those principles realized in the party to which he belongs. 'Towards a Christian Social Order' is sufficiently broad to be accepted by these parties, and the differences that are necessary for the vitality of the party system need only be concerned with its application in local conditions and circumstances. Finally, the promoters of this programme have written: 'We believe this work to be absolutely necessary if Christ is to be King . . . We hope in time this will be the nucleus of a National Movement.'

We have given some details of the working out of the Programme in Norwich because it shows clearly the part to be played by individual and local effort. In this way it seems to offer a valuable channel for some of the efforts of the National movement, 'The Sword of the Spirit,'²

² Cf. BLACKFRIARS, September, 1940.

launched by H.E. Cardinal Hinsley shortly after the programme in question was set in motion at Norwich. The ideals of the two movements are complementary if not identical, and we may hope to see a liaison working on practical lines between the two. But both are of recent birth, and it is too early to dictate the means of co-operation, particularly as they differ in scope.

If every Catholic had this programme in his hand and looked out for opportunities of putting it into practice in his own sphere of action, the new order would begin to appear growing up from the roots of society. The old and decayed trunk of the past order would fall aside to allow this sturdy new shoot to grow and expand according to the gradual and natural laws of growth. The crisis is here and the old trunk begins to totter; there is little sign of the new Christian shoot. We are fighting for Christian principles, for liberty and justice. In this eleventh hour, therefore, we may cease from vaguely but critically urging other people to adopt Christian standards and begin at last to unite in setting these principles to work at home in terms of a programme such as the one mentioned. In this way the new shoot will begin to grow into a sturdy sapling before the winds of a totally different new order blow down upon it. We have the Truth and the Spirit, we have the social principles, and we have the Programme. Action and co-operation must take the place of that 'inaction and reaction' immediately. God is offering us a last chance.

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