

CAN ANY GOOD COME OUT OF COMMUNISM?

NO one should attempt to read what I shall write unless they understand a principle which alone could justify what may seem like a justification of Communism. I think I first realised the principle when discussing Henry VIII with Protestants whom Froude's glorification of Henry had infected. The Froude-infected mind proclaims the great good that came of Henry's policy; as if the increased fertility of the infant burial place at Bethlehem justified Herod in slaughtering the Innocents. On hearing this mode of arguing I did not refuse to grant, for the sake of argument, that some or even that much good had come of Henry's thefts and murders; but I refused to grant that Henry's policy was a good policy because good came of it; or even that Henry was either a great or good man because great good had come of his way of acting.

The abstract principle which Henry VIII's legal thefts and murders made me see and accept was this: A man, a programme, a policy is not good merely because good comes of it; especially if the good that comes of it has come by the operation of a good-will. Just as there is nothing so good that a bad will cannot turn it to bad, so there is nothing so bad that a good will cannot turn to good.

If then, I venture to say that good can come of Communism I would very humbly ask responsible Editors not to caption me as "The Communist Priest, Fr. Vincent McNabb."

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My readers will agree with me in what I often tell my Communist friends, that the best and most revolutionary enactment in the Russian Bolshevist Constitution is, "If a man will not work, neither let him eat." As this Constitution is very effectively based on the principle that Religion is opium for the people it is a little distressing

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that this principle of work should not be accorded to its author, Paul of Tarsus. If the framers of the Constitution did not know that the best thing in their Constitution came from St. Paul, they will no doubt be glad to be told of it. But if they did know it to be St. Paul's, and did not tell their followers that it was St. Paul's, no doubt their followers will be glad to be told of it. Of course St. Paul is not really responsible for the principle, but only for that particular way of putting the principle. It was already in the opening beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Man's first and most necessary poverty is the poverty of work; his second is the poverty of thrift.

Our Blessed Lord seems to give us the philosophy of work in an immortal parable usually entitled "*The Unjust Steward*." As this story follows on the story of the Prodigal Son and his truculent elder brother I can never resist the inclination to think that the self-righteous elder son became the Unjust Steward.

It is especially in the adroit thief's examination of conscience—if we may so say—that Our Blessed Lord has epitomised the philosophy of work, "To dig I am not able. To beg I am ashamed." So he planned to steal.

Our Blessed Lord here teaches us that a man who will not work, if able to work, nor beg when unable to work, is stealing. For the able-bodied, work is the only title to the means of living.

To the Ephesians who had a flourishing silver-smith craft of idol-making, St. Paul explains the kind of work that entitles a man to a living. "He that stole let him steal no more. But rather let him labour, working with his hands *the thing that is good*, that he may have something to give to him that suffereth need." (Eph. iv, 28.)

The busy hours which people spend in packing up for a summer holiday is not work, but pleasure. The cracksmen's preparation for burglary is not work, but theft. Only when man's activity is turned towards supplying the "goods" needed for human life is his activity rightly called

work. Hand-work or head-work of this kind is the sole title to the means of living.

From the false principle that religion is of no social value, Bolsheviks go on to conclude that ministers of religion do not "work." Very consistently they conclude and ordain that ministers of religion being "non-workers" should not get the means of livelihood. Bolsheviks are to blame for their wrong principle, they are not to be blamed for consistency in applying their wrong principle. Consistency, if not a moral virtue, is at least an intellectual quality which offers some hope for the truth.

The growth of a large number of those who live without working is, in its bulk, a modern phenomenon. The England of 1238, like the England of 1938, had those who were called rich and those who were called poor. But it is hardly exaggeration that the two eras had only the words in common. The "poor man" of to-day was almost unknown seven centuries ago. The rich man of to-day who lives on investments and does no work of social value was practically unknown; or was known (and detested) as the Jewish Usurer. The landed aristocracy were not rich in currency or in credit. But the social services they rendered were almost as multiple in the executive and judicial sphere as those of a modern Colonial Administrator. As a class they had little or nothing in common with the modern rich man—not necessarily a financier—who lives without working and entirely by investments. In this matter I can only express my own personal opinion, which my readers can take for what they think it is worth. I am of ever-strengthening opinion that until the modern non-working rich man disappears, and the mediæval landlord reappears there will be little hope of sound social betterment.

I say advisedly "land-lord," because I hold that Communism can be beaten and as they say *bested* only by a group of freemen on the land. In a town-organization Communism can be beaten and seemingly is being beaten by an intelligentsia applying, with greater intelligence, against Communists their own totalitarianism. But this totalitarian-

CAN ANY GOOD COME OUT OF COMMUNISM?

ism which will drive out Communist slavery, will not drive out slavery. Indeed the present symptoms seem to confirm the *a priori* likelihood that the purely intellectual totalitarianism now reaping its first victories over Communism will bring in conditions still more servile and more lasting than those sponsored by Lenin and Stalin.

The good, then, that can come, *yet may not come*, from Communism is the conviction especially amongst Catholics, that "if any man will not work, neither let him eat."

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A second great good which may come of Communism is a lively sense of each individual's duty towards the groups of which he is an individual, e.g., to the family, the city, the mother-land, the Brotherhood of Mankind.

We cannot give to Bolsheviks the credit of discovering this fundamental social principle. It was already known to the Greek Philosophers and mediæval Scholastics as the principle of General Justice. The analysis of the subject given by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa* has surprises and discoveries for students of social science.

But this science of the Greek pagan philosophers, and of the mediæval Christian philosophers was little better than a science. In other words it was a thought if not a conviction when it ought to have been a life.

Communists are determined that this social science which gives us the doctrine of General Justice shall be a life; even if it costs untold deaths. Individuals and whole classes of individuals who are not of service to the group must be eliminated. Alas! the Great War with its victory that cost ten million deaths has suggested to enthusiasts of social peace the ruthlessness of war.

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We have ventured to suggest that good can come out of (a bad system) Communism, if men of good-will only see the crying need of the two principles we have named—"Every one, who can work, should work," and "Every one should work for the Community."

BLACKFRIARS

But it can never be sufficiently emphasized that "heresy is a truth in isolation," and the greater the principle from which the truth is isolated the greater the heresy. Communism as we see it in practice, if not in programme or principle, by denying God has isolated the two truths from their fundamental principle. Only the principle of a just God Who died for the individual can safeguard the individual in his rights. But the two truths of man's duty of work and of service are so far-reaching that, if isolated from the principle, they can end only in social slavery or in social chaos.

Only the Catholic Church stands between the modern world and very effective slavery; because only the Catholic Church with its doctrine of free-will and Redemption can look on Work and Service not just as a duty to the State, but as the Will and the example of a self-sacrificing God.

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