

THE COMING CONFLICT

A strange anomaly confronts us to-day. We turn from a State inordinately preoccupied with the affairs of the individual to the anarchical interests of Capital hardly conceding to the vast majority of individuals the right to live. Twin Apollyons straddle right across the way with the forces of the world arrayed severally behind them; they have enlisted, between them, every influence, cultural and to a great extent religious; whether or not it be argued that the latter is detached from its true *fons et origo*. Recurrent contacts between the two, here hostile, there sympathetic, are evidently too many and too involved for anything less than an economic atlas of the world to review. And Catholics in England do not lack their prophets to foretell the destiny of every straw in the wind. At present we must be content with little more than the acknowledgement of certain chilly spasms of apprehension that stir **us** as the westerly breath that suggests the storm-gib. For all we are very much at sea there may be precautions to suit any manner of emergency.

Or, to revert to Bunyan's metaphor, we will enquire what armament poor Christian can call exclusively his own.

To the muddled vision of this world Catholicism presents a stream of contradictions. The Church, for instance, who is the friend of sinners, is the relentless enemy of Sin. Unmollified by respectability, by the appeal of polygamy to the Law (or of marital onanism to the economy of hygiene) it is She nevertheless who flings wide her doors to the too-unclean for Mammon's Temples, that prostitute and outcast may enter with the blest. It is a matter of some scandal to our contemporary the progressive protestant.⁷

Or again, She who alone places an absolute value upon human nature relies upon it little: appraising mankind

¹ Cf. An issue dealt with admirably in the *Church Times* a year or so ago.

THE COMING CONFLICT

with the eye of the Creator, yet accrediting it with none of the infallible integrity of our Utopian Capitalist (in whom we are still asked to believe), our Utopian workmen, or of the oligarch's of Socialist rule.

So with the Catholic view of the State. Hers is not the vague emotion normally evoked by the word, nor does she apprehend a mere abstraction but an actuality. Her apprehension in short is true sanity to which a thing appears, not as it ought to be, or might have been, or may be, but as it is. Insanity is the apprehension of a single exclusive reality actual or hypothetical whence it may be argued that sanity is the balance of a thousand insanities. Balance or sanity, at all events, is rarely popular; when we suffer from dementia we find none so trying as the sane. We must not expect the Church's evaluation of the State to be popular. In the first place the muddle-headed have already perceived in it, as we have suggested, a paradox. For whereas, as Lacordaire remarks, the Church confesses man's sovereignty she declares its limits. If the omnipotence of God is conditioned by His own essence, that is to say by His justice, goodness and wisdom, then it were impossible to allow the omnipotence of human sovereignty to exercise beyond what is just and holy and right. What is the State? No more nor less than man in his sovereign degree of power: mankind invested with a moral force to guard its rights and compel its duties. To many, we have said, Catholic teaching on the State is paradoxical and unpopular. Paradoxical again because by very reason of man's sovereignty he is limited, unpopular because the world is reminded of the origin of that sovereignty and all that it implies. Here is an issue that sets us frankly against the rest of the world: we are driven to an irrevocable division.

For once we cannot agree *to* differ and unite in the effective labour of bettering the world. In the problem of human development the theory of blind evolution and the theory of Divine plan are effectively (as much as fundamentally), opposed. The children of Light have tarried with the children of Mammon and played with the cen-

BLACKFRIARS

turies, but the time has come when we must choose our ways. To Machiavelli, though his direct influence has been small, we owe the original notion of the a-moral State, a corporation, that is to say, reacting, with a freedom denied to its individual components, arbitrarily to the stimulus of necessity or expediency. The mediaeval conscience was unable to approve a dual morality, one code for the individual, another for the State. Even among the ancients (in Greece and Rome at least) the law which controlled the actions of the State corresponded with those that applied to the individual. At first, indeed, Machiavellian State-policy was a name covering merely a savage selfishness in respect of neighbouring States. But (like the pugnacious beast that devours its own young when the rest of the jungle has been finished off), State-sovereignty has in due course degenerated into a depraved internal conscience. It acknowledges as little responsibility in respect of the individual citizen as of the foreign State. State sovereignty to-day is to be recognized in the moloch set up by Fascism, Nazism and Bolshevism. And few of us in the civilized world to-day are free of the apprehension of further savage interference with our individual rights. I need hardly refer to compulsory sterilization as a single example.

We are safe in short only when our ethics are admitted plainly to be derived from an ethical cosmic principle; when, in the paradox suggested above, the State is invested with a pseudo-divine authority but limited in consequence by the revealed economy of the Almighty.

Our detachment from an ethical cosmos led naturally enough to a steady loss of consciousness to our obligations. We forget when we lament our rapidly disappearing rights that the rights of one man rest in some sense in the obligation of another. Even among practising Catholics the sense of Law is commonly distorted. The congeries that goes to compound a civil code becomes increasingly the final conception of order. As though the Issue from the Eternal Law Himself were delegated, not to conscience, but the **State**; as though a human sovereignty were the depository of the

THE COMING CONFLICT

laws of nature and of God! A passive attitude amongst Catholics (especially of the business and professional classes) in the matter of State interference with the working classes is to be heartily deplored. In a Catholic periodical even, it is indicative that on a page more than half of which is devoted to the interminable 'menace' of Communism, a line or two suffices to announce an appalling onslaught on the individual in Germany.

Sated with the hierarchical principles of the Middle Ages, revolution bore the State absolutism of the modern age, and from this, *via* the French revolution, we have evolved the bureaucratic State on the one hand, and liberalistic individualism on the other. Meanwhile, again and again, genuine revolutionary impulse has been diverted. It is not wholly to be applauded that the masses have been taught to capture State-machinery rather than destroy it. Genuinely Radical and genuinely philanthropic impulse has been directed into futile, and worse than futile, channels. There is no story more dismal than the betrayal of Radicalism, Capital's use of the Fabians to side-track Socialism. We look in vain today for the friend of the submerged. The Church alone, in her insistence that we give back to Caesar no more than the things that are his, is the sole force that is not afraid to stand up to the bully, to represent not merely the proletariat (an inspiring abstraction) but the *individuals* that compose it, to stand in the way of the worker's final and most tragic betrayal. Humanitarianism, dissociated from the incarnation, and the Cross that bore humanity as well as God, has proved a dismal failure. We have yet to try a Revolution based on the charity of Christ springing from an exasperated love of the individual soul.

When we ceased to base life on an intuition of Truth, when we turned from the supernatural to human experience, our vindication of independence was short-lived. We abandoned spiritual values in our effort to assert our dominion over nature and now we despair because by a savage irony it is nature more than ever that dominates over *us*. For the lives of *men* have become subordinated

BLACKFRIARS

utterly to the physical economy, man is discussed in terms of hydraulics and hydrostatics.

Unfortunately we retained in the pseudo-ethical cult of the reformation an ever diminishing spiritual influence, unfortunately everywhere Mammon retained the guise of religion. The break was subtle and slow. Violence had been better. An inept religiosity survived, often sycophantic, sometimes insincere, a sort of stage-parson; and in the mercantile world a genuinely sinister article, sly, canting or bullying—the Jesuit of Victorian melodrama. Enough anyway to discourage return to the old spiritual standards—enough for Marx and Lenin to call with good reason the opium of the people.

To the Bolsheviks then we should be grateful for having made the issue plain. The Bolshevik, we must admit, has made the best of a superlatively bad job: like the genuine Christian, he is conscious of the worthlessness of mercantile Christianity, unlike the rest of us he has openly abandoned it. In his promise to cope with the restrictive forces created by industrialism, in the attempt to institute a new order upon a purely material foundation, he is in fact (albeit unconsciously) simply reacting to materialist (or ‘mercantile’) Christianity.

Genuine Christian anthropology rests however upon the conception of the Triune God, investing human personality with an absolute value; for it perceives therein the nature of one made in the image of the Father, redeemed and represented eternally by the Sacrificial Christ, indwelt by the Holy Ghost. Whence a just recognition of family, clan and State (coterminous with a recognition of man’s inherently social nature) is of necessity limited by a perception of that personality whereby all individuals are equal, and heirs to an absolute degree of freedom.²

Such a conception of man leads us to perceive in the State no more than the means to an end. For here is the crux of the whole business: *Catholicism is the only force left in the world to-day that regards man as a metapolitical*

² Cf. St. Augustine *De Civ. Dei.* v. 24.

THE COMING CONFLICT

animal. It is metapolitic that will divide the world tomorrow, that which (as Martensen reminded us) precedes the political as its presupposition; that which, while lying beyond it as its objective, pervades and vitalizes it as its sole active intellectual principle. The U.S.S.R. has indeed set a make-shift metapolitic before its people: and is, thus far, superior to Fascism, Nazism and other crude nationalism. But like much else that *corresponds* in Russia to what we should find in an ideal Christian State, the Bolshevik's mock-metapolitic will collapse by very reason of its unreality. The Bolshevik State is in fact an end in itself. And this is the fundamental difference that distinguishes it from the unattempted Christian State.

There are two logical systems in the world to-day, Catholicism and Communism, both logical, both proceeding along similar lines, but from different premises. They are fundamentally opposed: what of their weapons? Waiving the disgruntled gibe (a fatal phenomenon) of Capitalist apologetic, and the inept chatter of tract-writers whose stock-in-trade is pretty well exhausted, we have yet to see in the final issue a direct disarmed conflict. That we are getting nearer to it is evident. On the one side, Russia is producing less of the old abusive, vaguely terror-stricken propaganda: while we, let us hope, are a little more sure of ourselves, more constructive, at least extending our enquiries beyond a page of pietistic journalism.

We have attempted no more than a rough indication of the combatants, their position in the field and, by way of warning, the manner in which those positions have evolved. We venture, as we have said, no prophecy as to future alliances; and we conclude on a note of hypothesis. For of one thing we are certain, that the unknown Christian State would have been far easier to erect than the ultra-secular State favoured by revolution: and far easier to maintain. I do not mean merely because Capitalist Society would have perceived therein less of a menace to property, or because mercantile Christianity would have been disarmed of the weapon it has applied so happily to anti-God Russia. But because faith is still incumbent upon us:

BLACKFRIARS

because faith in ourselves and in our freedom rests on faith in our eternal destiny.

Of this, too, we may be sure, that the world is awakening and in an unequivocal issue, in the final quest of democracy, may look beyond itself and find heaven. The newest humanitarianism would urge that the power of love has never been tried as a basis of the body politic. We do not fear that the Church will hesitate to incorporate and utilize the new consciousness that is so often called revolution. If the Church, unashamed of the legacy of antiquity, turned the blind alleys of the Gods into vistas of eternity, less need have we to discredit entirely the cult of the later Gods. For if that which constituted the renaissance was born as much of the beauty and integrity of earth as of pagan aesthetics, then the energy of Revolution owes its more generous and creative impulse to the subversive revelation of Christ as much as to those distorted fragments of it unconsciously dished up by the Victorian anarchists.

We cannot lose opportunity, nor time. Often enough we can afford to choose the complement rather than the alternative; we must be Catholic, uncompromising but imbued with the spirit of adjustment; when foundations are sound enough why should we build over the way? In the great reassortment we shall lose many and gain many: in the conflict we shall use much that the newcomers bring. And the time of the Catholic *aufklarung* is not later than to-day. The Church is conservative, not in that she lags in the rearguard of the times, she is Traditionalist solely in that she conserves the Truth, Her only Tradition: She is not retrospective, but would face the road. Canning was content, in a famous phrase, to advance with the times. For us there is more urgent counsel.

J. F. T. PRINCE.