

## COMMON GROUND

*'It is not enough to refute errors; one must overcome them by understanding their grounds. To this venerable truth Bolshevism is no exception.'*<sup>1</sup>

The magnificent struggle the Russians have put up in the defence of their Fatherland has warmed millions of hearts to them. In one stroke Hitler, the self-styled scourge of Communism, has done more for the Soviet Union than years of intensive propaganda. From one end of this country to the other, money is pouring in for aid-to-Russia funds, books and pamphlets on the U.S.S.R. are in great demand, and hundreds of thousands wait for news from the Russian front as if it were the British Isles.

As might be expected, the Communist Party of Great Britain has seized the opportunity to interest the masses not so much in the Russian peoples fighting for their own country as in the class-conscious proletariat fighting for an ideal and for a particular economic theory. Anyone who keeps a watch on left-wing booksellers will have noted the flood of pamphlets and books and the rate at which they sell. In comparatively small towns the local communists have the means to hire the main halls frequently and to boost every meeting with plenty of large posters and other publicity matter.

Does this mean that the people can be swayed to Communism or is it merely the well-known English sentimentality stirred by the magnificent work of the Red Armies? Whatever the answer, the fact still remains that the workers of this country are in danger. The post-war years will bring their problems, and he is certainly an optimist who hopes that when the war ends we shall glide smoothly into the new Britain in which justice is ready waiting for all. We must look forward to various troubles and not the least of them will be the attractiveness of some of the 'isms'; and of all the unwanted political theories, that of the Communist Party stands the best chance of success.

There are many reasons for this, and it would be as well to point out some of the more obvious ones. To the average man the world is a very confused place and of the explanations offered, few seem to bring order out of this confusion. As Miss Conolly<sup>2</sup> writes,

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<sup>1</sup> Gurian in *Bolshevism* (Sheed & Ward), p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> *Soviet Tempo* (Sheed & Ward), p. 24.

'They had been deeply impressed by the Marxian interpretation of history . . . . It was the only synthesis of world events that had come their way, and while it emphasised all the grievances of labour with which they were familiar, its omissions and flaws were in fields with which they were not familiar at all . . .' Among other points that should be considered, there is a very potent one, the essential snobbery of English society. This is a very real factor and it often acts as a handicap to working people seeking advancement in many careers and in some aspects of public life. The only way in which a worker can overcome this handicap is by pretending to be something he is not; that is by aping what were once called his 'betters.'

In mentioning this last point we would stress that it is not only the more obvious grievances that drive men to communism. There is a reason deeper than dissatisfaction with the social order, a discontent, as it were, with human life itself. This discontent should find its satisfaction in religion, but when this is not possible it often leads men to the idealism of communism.

It should always be possible to show one filled with such a discontent the fulness of religion and how satisfaction can be found in God and in the serving of God. Yet we have to admit that as far as the general run of Catholics go we show little to cause the man passing by to stop and enquire. After all, it is we who represent Christ to the man looking for a faith, and if he passes by and turns to communism it is we who have failed Christ. We are the Catholics condemned by Pius XI in his encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*. Maybe we were not guilty of the crimes he records, but we have been guilty of similar ones. The late Pope meant us when he wrote: 'It is unfortunately true that the manner of acting in certain Catholic circles has done much to shake the faith of the working classes in the religion of Jesus Christ . . . there are still too many who are Catholics hardly more than in name . . . It is the Catholic of this type who exposes to ridicule the very name of Christian . . .'<sup>3</sup> Among us to-day there are many Catholic workers full of the same greed and materialism that caused Catholic employers to prevent 'the reading of . . . *Quadragesimo Anno* in their local churches. Or of those Catholic industrialists who even to this day have shown themselves hostile to a labour movement that we ourselves have recommended.'<sup>3</sup> We have many industrialists who, if they dared, would have imitated those condemned by the

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<sup>3</sup> See *Divini Redemptoris*. A useful summary of Pius XI's views on such Catholics will be found in *Pope Pius XI*, by Philip Hughes (Sheed & Waud), pp. 269-282.

last Pope. On the other side of the social fence we have many workers who merit equal condemnation for submitting themselves so whole-heartedly to the materialistic spirit of the day.

A self-examination on these points might make us appreciate that problems are seldom simple and that it is impossible to consider the case of one man without bringing in the teaching and example of many others. It might make us probe beneath the surface and try to understand problems and to appreciate the varied causes that lead to a single act. It might make us understand that there is a certain strength in heresies that comes from the possession of partial truth. As we realised all this it might stir us to missionary activity, to the imitation of G. K. Chesterton: 'That supreme optimist . . . (who) . . . devoted his best energies to the task of recovering those Christian truths that had gone astray and were wandering in the wilderness of paganism. The extraordinary success of his intellectual apostolate he himself believed to be in some measure due to the fact that whatever Christianity has sanctified cannot be wholly lost to Christianity . . . nothing is irrevocable, nothing fatally determined, nothing beyond redemption.'<sup>4</sup>

The missionary way is one possible approach to the problem of communism and Russia and is 'a highly laudable one, especially in so far as individual conversions are concerned . . . On the other hand, its basis is too narrow . . .'<sup>5</sup> Another approach is what is called in reunion movements the irenic, this implies the 'conciliatory attitude of a man who seeks the truth towards another man or other men whom he believes to be animated by the same dispositions as himself.'<sup>5</sup> Obviously there are many communists who could not be approached along these lines, but there are many more who could and even more among those who are groping in the dark for a solution to the problems they find in life.

It is we, you and I, who are faced with the necessity of this missionary activity, not some third party or some priest. It is our responsibility and we must fit ourselves for it. We should realise the great ignorance Catholics have of social heresies (and also the great ignorance the social heretics have of Catholic social teaching). We should realise the stupidity, and even at times the falseness, of many of the charges that are made in popular publications against communists and against Soviet Russia.

How often have we heard or read long arguments proving that the communists are all wrong in wanting all men to be equal. What

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<sup>4</sup> Prof. Hogan in *Modern Democracy* (Longmans), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Religion in Russia* (Burns, Oates), pp. 65-6.

do the communists actually say about the equalitarian idea? Lenin, writing about the accusation, said it was 'an absurd invention of intellectuals,' while a Soviet newspaper wrote: 'Every Leninist knows that the levelling of needs and tastes is an absurdity fit only for the *petite bourgeoisie*.'<sup>6</sup> In 1931 Stalin said to a conference: 'It cannot be tolerated that a locomotive driver should earn only as much as a copying clerk,'<sup>7</sup> and at the same period the All-Union Committee of Trade Unions was calling for a campaign to abolish all tendencies to wage levelling.<sup>8</sup>

The popular lecturer and many other more responsible persons have painted lurid pictures of the absence of all morality from Russia. The public and repeated rejection of Christian standards by the Russian government needs to be pointed out, but there is no need to conclude from one evil that other widespread evils also exist. How many would believe the following of Red Russia? 'There is also no pornography, for Europe's obsession with sex in one form or another stops at the Soviet frontier.'<sup>9</sup> In recent years the official rejection of moral standards has been altered, for it did not take the Soviet Government long to appreciate the harm that was being done. In 1936 the Webbs are found defending Soviet Russia from the charges that Russia in resurrecting 'puritan ethics' was no longer communist. These 'puritan ethics' were manifested 'by the public insistence on cleanliness and decency of personal conduct; the prohibition of abortion and homo-sexuality; the objection within the Communist Party to sexual promiscuity among its members; and most reactionary of all the outspoken approval of lifelong attachment of husband and wife as the most appropriate setting under communism for family life . . .'<sup>10</sup>

Or how many Catholics have any knowledge of the Kolkhosi (the collective farm movement)? We are told that communism denies the right to private property. This is untrue. While the right is limited, it is recognised and accepted and even that acid test, the right to pass on wealth to children, is perfectly legal and recognised in Soviet Russia. On the collective farms the peasants have their own personal strip which may be as much as one hectare (2.47 acres), they may have (and according to Russian law must have) a house, a number of cows, pigs, sheep. The actual collective farm

<sup>6</sup> *Izvestia*, Jan. 27th, 1934.

<sup>7</sup> *New Conditions—New Tasks*, by Stalin, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Soviet Communism*, by the Webbs, pp. 709-715.

<sup>9</sup> *Soviet Tempo*, by V. Conolly (Sheed & Ward), p. 188.

<sup>10</sup> *Soviet Communism*, p. 1146 (2nd Ed.).

is owned by its members—and not by the State. It is in effect a producer-co-operative in which the members work the common land together but are rewarded on a piece-work basis. According to the 1936 Constitution the lands held by the collective farm were secured to them in perpetuity and free of rent.<sup>11</sup> There is much to be said for the collective farms, in spite of our anti-communist propagandists, and Hindus is very likely correct when he says that 'I have the feeling that even if the soviets were to collapse, Russian agriculture would remain collectivised.'<sup>12</sup>

Of course it is likely that the stories of collective farms displayed in the pro-Russian propaganda publications only represent a minority of them and that many exist under extremely difficult conditions. Yet the fact remains that the collective farm itself is owned by the men and women who work it and that it will be so owned by their children, and that each family on the farm has its own small area and its own livestock. In other words, private property does exist in the U.S.S.R. Producer co-operatives are also to be found very extensively among the fishermen, hunters and trappers. One interesting form of small group ownership is to be found among the war disabled (1914-1918 war). In small groups these men own and work small industries such as furniture making, confectionary shops, oil factories, etc.

It is of course a fact that much of this private property is a development from earlier experiments that were failures. Yet for some years private property has been growing in the U.S.S.R. and was finally enshrined in the 1936 Constitution. It is a sad fact that up-to-date private ownership is extremely rare in the towns.

One important cause for much of the misunderstandings and erroneous propaganda on our side is the fact that words used by communists and Christians have different meanings for each party. If we have not a conventional meaning confusion is bound to ensue and in this confusion bitterness is increased and the task of conversion is made well-nigh impossible. To argue with a communist with any hope of achieving clarity a Christian has to learn a new language. A personal experience of the writer will illustrate the point. After a very long discussion on the State it appeared that we meant different things, and by using several sentences instead of the simple word 'State' we found that there was a definite measure of harmony between us. A simple way of describing the difference is to say that to the Christian the State is a servant exist-

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Soviet Man—Now*, by Iswolsky (Sheed & Ward), p. 22

<sup>12</sup> *The Great Offensive*, by Maurice Hindus, p. 22.

ing for those who make it up while to the communist the State is a bludgeon. Lenin defined the State as 'simply the weapon with which the proletariat wages its class war. A special sort of bludgeon, nothing more.'<sup>13</sup> When an attempt is made to talk in common terms it is found that what the communists condemn is that form of the State that can be called 'fascist' or 'totalitarian,' even though, strange to relate, they defend the same form for the early stages of the communist state, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat.

To say that Catholics are ignorant of communism is only one side of the picture. The communist is equally ignorant of true Christianity. Marx's misfortune was not that he was a revolutionary but that he was so completely a product of the very forces against which he was revolting. As 'the doctrine of rationalism had already taken firm hold of large numbers and an economic science alien to the true moral law had already arisen, with the result that free rein was given to human avarice.'<sup>14</sup> Marx was not able to escape from this false rationalism. 'Catholicism was something quite outside the orbit of Marx's thought.'<sup>15</sup> In his turn, Lenin thought all Christendom was a reflection of the admittedly corrupt Russian Orthodox Church, and the more one learns of the evils that had overgrown the Russian Church the more one can understand that so many rejected the Church in the same gesture as they rejected the evils of Tsardom. Lenin only knew a priceless pearl 'covered with the dust of Byzantium . . . and down to our days this dust is piously preserved by Russian theologians, time-serving bishops, and the lay bureaucrats who govern the Church . . .'<sup>16</sup>

As a result of the corruption of the Russian church, even to-day intelligent people can think that the churches, as the Webbs expressed it, 'still teach the peasants that the yield of the harvest depends not so much on the efficiency of the cultivation as on the ceremonial blessing of the fields.'<sup>17</sup> To some extent the fault lies with the Catholics who might have influenced Marx in his university days. If Marx's university had possessed a Frederic Ozanam the story of communism would have been different. The University Catholic Society of his day failed and Marx was able to spend years in the British Museum ignoring everything outside his narrow, one-track mind.

<sup>13</sup> In *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*.

<sup>14</sup> *Quadragesimo Anno*.

<sup>15</sup> *Religion and the Modern State*, by C. Dawson (Sheed & Ward), p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Count Bennigson in *Religion in Russia* (Burns, Oates).

<sup>17</sup> *Soviet Communism*. Cf. pp. 1004-1016.

Mr. Dawson has written that 'The conflict between Christianity and Marxism—between the Catholic Church and the Communist Party—is the vital issue of our times.'<sup>18</sup> As the issue may be even more vital in the post-war years, it is our present duty to prepare. And our preparation commences with understanding—understanding what the thing is and why men turn to it, and also understanding the truths that we and the Marxist have in common. By building on such common ground, by using the partial truth that Marxism has, we can present the complete structure that will capture the attention of the Marxist. While it is not an exact parallel the spirit in which we attack Marxism is akin to that shown by St. Paul, 'For passing by and seeing your idols, I found an altar on which was written "To an unknown God." What therefore you worship without knowing it, that I preach.'<sup>19</sup>

Lest anyone should think that this is the prelude to united fronts or to the canonisation of Marx, we hasten on to St. Augustine's words, 'We have some things in common with the gentiles, but our purpose is different.'<sup>20</sup> Our purpose is indeed different; happiness on earth, a just social order, the end of war are all mere nothings compared with our primary object. In all our work we aim at being children of God, walking in-his presence; the Marxist shudders at the very thought of the supernatural.

Indeed, our purpose is different, yet the communist in Russia is beginning to worship the unknown God—though as yet he does not realise that what he sees is the image of God, nor that it is only the image. This image is 'the emergence of humanism . . . a doctrine based essentially on the love of man . . .'<sup>21</sup> 'It is not difficult to detect . . . the rudiments of a personalism which hitherto the Marxists had refused to recognise.'<sup>22</sup>

The Catholic Worker movements in all countries have grown up in view of the communist, so it must be remembered that 'the world is full of Christian truths run wild,' and that in modern Russia and in the modern communist parties these truths can be found, that they are a link that holds these heretics to sanity and that by searching out this link we have a hold that enables us to make personal contact. Through that contact we may hope to bring the communist to examine Christianity with freshly opened eyes and

<sup>18</sup> *Religion and the Modern State*, by C. Dawson (Sheed & Ward), p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Acts xvii, 23.

<sup>20</sup> *Contra Faustum*, xix, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Gorki in *Pravda*, May 23rd, 1934.

<sup>22</sup> *Soviet Man—Now*, Iswolsky (Sheed & Ward), p. 15.

see that what he has in rudimentary form is to be found in its fulness in Christianity.

In the evolution of Russia a new man is emerging—not new so much as a reversion to a more sane type. ‘The new world which is being unfolded to our eyes contains organic spontaneous and real values hidden by a system of shams and illusions . . . This conception is a departure from pure materialism and sociological determinism and rejects the mechanistic theory, of which, incidentally, Marx was never an adherent.’ ‘In spite of the Marxist conception of the indispensable class war, one feels a new breath . . . a timid breath, a flickering light, but a light that once kindled may perhaps never be extinguished.’<sup>23</sup>

R. P. WALSH.

## THE APOSTOLATE OF CHRIST THE WORKER

THE Apostolate of Christ the Worker, what does it convey? . . . It is a call going out from our Lord’s sacred humanity to all men, asking them to heed the lesson of the thirty years he spent in the carpenter’s home at Nazareth, supposed to be ‘the son of Joseph.’

This call goes out to a world which takes its values mainly from material criteria, forgetful of the interior preparation of the life of the soul, which alone is the safeguard of worth and stability. We are so easily caught by pride, the self-complacency of the ‘practising Catholic,’ self-seeking, and self-pity, or we are downtrodden, worn out through drudgery, forgetful of the divine instinct, by which every man longs for God in his heart.

A great number of the faithful continue to practise their devotions, while taking a thoroughly materialist view on all practical issues and clinging openly to a materialist mode of life. One part of their lives is ‘devotionalised,’ the other part ‘materialised,’ whereas the whole of their lives should be ‘spiritualised.’ This is the great lesson of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, that he as Christ the Worker has *reconciled matter and spirit in his daily working life*. It is this reconciliation of which the world stands in need to-day, and towards which the Apostolate of Christ the Worker strives.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50 and 55.