

Choose You This Day

BASIL A. SMITH

Communism and Christianity, by Martin C. D'Arcy. *New York: Devin-Adair, 1958.*

AS LONG AGO AS 1937, in a composite volume entitled *Christianity and Communism*, Father Martin D'Arcy figured as the Roman Catholic contributor amongst a group of writers whose articles had first appeared in the pages of *The Spectator*. There, in the short space available, he gave his reasons for holding that the Marxist doctrine "is a damnable one, appealing as

it does to the vivid discontents of the simple and the poor in order to rob them of Christianity, of their God and their human dignity". Yet, he added, "seldom in history has a more childish philosophy held the attention of man." Some twenty years later Father D'Arcy has given the same subject more developed and formal treatment in his book *Communism and Christianity*, first issued in England as a Penguin Special and now presented in its American edition of 242 pages. At a time when the Marxist ideology has swept Eastern Europe and the vast populations of Asia into its net, when it threatens Africa and is meeting but half-hearted resistance in some parts of the West, it is a matter of urgency

for free men who are still capable of thought to have in their hands such a succinct and perceptive statement of what the issues are.

Father D'Arcy's Jesuit training is seen at its academic best in the scrupulous care with which he begins by examining dialectical materialism as Marx and Engels themselves expounded it. He seeks also to be fair to Lenin, faced as he was with the 1917 revolution as a political problem for Russia rather than with an economic thesis for the world in general. Only then does the author proceed to expose the predicament of "double-think" into which Communism as a doctrine is inevitably landed.

How, for instance, can a theory which claims to be a scientific prediction concerning the inevitable emergence of the classless society find room for the fervent spirit of a devoted crusade? Human motives and endeavors are the vital stuff of history for Communists as for everyone else, but their dogma requires them to force the intractable facts into the clumsy framework of canonical materialism. "Matter is in movement and new qualities emerge in the dialectical process. But this only covers a mystery with words and prevents the Marxist from tackling the problem fairly and squarely." And by what rational sequence are we to suppose that the age-long process of strife and class-hatred will one day blossom into an era of flat, unending contentment for all? Even if colossal State tyranny of the sort established by Stalin should show signs of withering away into a final phase of natural brotherhood, what are we to say of the fate of those suffering ages which perished before the Millennium could arrive? One of the most telling things in this book is the pathos with which Father D'Arcy indicates the depth of our true human need as it presents itself in "the sad epitaphs on the tombs of children, the lamentations over misfortune, the cries against injustice, the hard lot of the slave and laborer, the inconstancy of love, the

crying of children in the night with no language but a cry." That is why atheistic materialism, offering some future generation an earthy paradise and nothing more, cannot hope ever to satisfy the eternal longings of man.

The distinguished level to which the author can raise this discussion makes it the more disappointing to feel that in places he shows a very limited sympathy for Christian thought and work outside that of his own communion. The theological views of Tillich, Macmurray and Niebuhr are subjected to a critical scrutiny which, very pertinently, calls in question their claim to reflect the orthodox Gospel of Christ. But are these the only—or, indeed, the most significant — representatives of a Christian response to Communism which does not draw its authority from Papal encyclicals? Let the Dean of Canterbury speak for himself. Typical Anglicans, facing the challenge of modern industrial life, have neither "fought shy of the 'folly of the Cross'" nor disregarded the supernatural "perspective in which the welfare of human society must be regarded." Following upon the work of Maurice, Christian Socialism, as preached by Scott Holland, Charles Gore and William Temple, was certainly not the expression of a lopsided theology. Such men, though they paved the way for a Welfare State only in part Christian, are in themselves evidence enough to refute the suggestion that whoever finds economic implications in the teaching of the Bible must be insensitive to the Catholic vision of the "Kingdom not of this world". They would, however, have felt that a terrible judgment of God might well be visited upon any Church which, till recently, has acted as though the promotion of personal pieties and isolated acts of charity were a sufficient discharge of its mission to the victims of large-scale injustice. The fact that men like Koestler and Gide once went over to Communism and came back disillusioned ought to have, for Christians, rather

more prophetic significance than that of an incident to be pardoned because it occurred (as Father D'Arcy notes) "in the period between the October Revolution and the Stalin-Hitler Pact". Surely, we should be looking outside Europe and ask who are going over *now*—and why?

That, however, is a question of emphasis and strategy. Christians of all persuasions will readily agree that the heart of the matter is well put in a book of which a notable passage reminds us that: "A prisoner of the Gestapo or the Politburo . . .

can, until his manhood and freedom are destroyed, refuse to tell lies about his friends and betray his country. In so doing he is holding to an absolute standard of truth and loyalty. This power comes from his being a person, one who is able to determine himself and have responsibility and liberty of thought and action, and this is the same as saying that person is spirit as well as matter, and has his ultimate destiny in a world where spiritual perfection, the perfection, that is, of knowledge and love, can be attained."

The Ballad of Aloysius Gonzaga

(After Butler's *Life*)

His father hoped he'd go to war
And when the Saint was only four
From his storehouse the Marquis
Brought him small artillery.

And at five like any soldier
He bore a pike across his shoulder
And showed that he was not afraid
By firing guns in a parade.

But when he learned the soldier talk
He gave his teachers quite a shock.
He suffered agonies it seemed
When they rumored he blasphemed.

From his infancy each day
Aloysius liked to pray
And on his knees (without a cushion)
Said the office with devotion.

He passed up an investiture
From the hand of the emperor
And (so writes Robert Bellarmine)
Never did a mortal sin.

In Florence at the age of nine
His chastity began to shine:
He wouldn't look at girls he'd meet
And never even bared his feet.

His stomach was not very good;
He couldn't eat the things he should.
He stayed at home as per the edicts
Of the African ascetics.

He spent his days in reading curious
Stories of the Saints by Surius,
And also read about this season
Of Jesuit labors with the heathen.

He started in the summer slowly
Teaching boys of Castiglione—
In the winter stayed in churches
And lashed himself with whip and
scourges.

Awake at midnight in his room
He knelt upon the floor of stone:

Three days a week on bread and water
And no heat in the bitter weather.

Extraordinary circumspection
As he prayed without distraction
Led some others at the court
To think he was some kind of sport.

He hoped to be a Jesuit
Which put his father in a fit
(Who thought there was some large
dissembling
To make *him* sacrifice his gambling).

He sent him on a tour of kings,
But Aloysius hated things
And forced his father to decide
Just before the father died:

St. Aloysius in his teens
Became a Jesuit of means;
He was afraid of being proud
And worked as meanly as allowed.

He found a room above the stair
Furnished with a bed, a chair,
A stool on which to set a book,
A single window in the roof.

He liked to meditate upon
The attributes of Three-in-One:
And when he seemed about to see
He fell into an ecstasy.

In a hospice of their own
Jesuits fought the plague in Rome;
On Aloysius' meek request
He washed the sick and made their beds.

He caught the fever and with joy
The saint prepared himself to die.
He was impatient for his call
And prayed propped up against the wall.

A dream he had, made him insist he
Would not live through Corpus Christi.
To be sure he died in June,
At twenty three, though not too soon.

JOHN LOGAN