

BLACKFRIARS

(With which is incorporated *The Catholic Review*)

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IT can never serve the cause of God and the Church to allow our intense sympathy for our slaughtered and persecuted brethren in Spain to blind our eyes to objective facts or allow us to confuse vitally important issues. The situation in Spain, its causes and its future, is by no means a simple issue, and BLACKFRIARS has inevitably run the risk of being misunderstood in its endeavours to disentangle the knotted skein. Yet surely its profound sympathy with the suffering Church in Spain cannot be doubted; even now it mourns the brutal butchery of many Dominican brethren there. Only recently we have learnt with horrified grief of the murder of five of the Fathers in Barcelona and of four other Fathers and a Laybrother in Madrid, of the burning of their Priory and Church. And it may not be doubted that many more of that hitherto flourishing Dominican Province have suffered a like fate. But it would little honour the memories of these martyred sons of the Order whose motto is *Veritas* if we, their brethren, were to shirk the search for and statement of the truth which, at its lowest, will alone help to preserve us from a similar fate. Happily, BLACKFRIARS is not alone amongst the Catholic Press in appreciating the true complexity of the

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situation, as "Penguin" indicates in the present number.

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With this general statement as to our position, let us try to make our point of view more clear than it has, apparently, been hitherto. First of all we reiterate our profound conviction that there is a diabolical agency at work in Spain, and Communism appears as its specially chosen instrument. But it would be a tragic narrowness of mind to identify the issue with the contending political parties, and be content to take sides with that party which for the moment appears as the defender of the Church against her manifest enemies, as though that was the whole of the matter. Can we so easily forget, for example, the very different attitude of another Totalitarian State towards the Church at the present time? Is the quasi-judicial persecution of priests and religious in Germany without any significance? We venture to quote a passage from the forceful leader of a Canadian Catholic paper, the *Social Forum* (August, 1936). Having outlined the dire results of a Leftist victory, the writer continues: "But in the event of a Fascist victory would the outlook be any brighter? Christ on His Cross has a dignity and a moral power which no Marxian hatred can dispel. But Christ the servant of a Totalitarian State, granted grudging liberty of cult which will take the minds of the poor off their misery, yet forbidden to open His mouth against violence, injustice and the denial of His social teaching, is a sight that must tear the heart of every true Christian. The tragedy of Spain is that she has to choose between Left and Right, between Christ on the Cross and Christ in Chains. The reason she must now make this choice is that for forty years she turned a deaf ear to Christ in the Forum. . . . Had Leo's encyclical *On the Condition of Labour* been taken seriously, there would be no civil war in Spain to-day."

We believe that Moscow is behind the atrocities and sacrileges in Spain, and behind the social unrest which prevails all over the world. But what is the secret of its power? How did a large section of the people of Catholic Spain come to be won over to an organization that has reduced them to atheism, to such brutal viciousness and senseless iconoclasm? Propaganda, diabolically inspired and clever propaganda, undoubtedly. But it must have found some material to work on, the ground in some way already prepared. No doubt

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the cloven hoof was at first hidden, and appeal was made to the natural rights of man, rights of which they had been probably deprived; it is always the devil's way, as clearly appears in the supreme example of the Temptation of Our Lord. The mass of the people in any country is easily roused, easily swayed; it needs only a persuasive demagogue to awaken it to a sense of grievous injustice, true or imagined, and it can be urged to extremes without further effort. The devil chooses his instruments with care, following upon his acute understanding of human nature; and Communism suits his purpose only too well.

It is possible that some Communists, at any rate in countries where the party has not yet come out into the open in its true colours, are individually honest and upright men striving after an ideal—and the ideal might be curiously similar, at any rate superficially, to that of the early Church where all things were in common and to everyone was given according to his needs. However superficial this resemblance may be, and however definitely absent from the minds and intentions of the real Red leaders even that materialistic utopia of the few may be, nevertheless there is that in this aspect of Communism which makes an immediate appeal to some natural and indeed right instinct in man. The Incarnation is the one thing that can rightly respond to and guide any instinct in man, for the Incarnation was for man, the teaching of the Incarnation was in view of man's rights and needs, the Church was instituted to fulfil those rights and needs. And the Church, like the Incarnation, has not failed in its mission; it is the members of the Church who oftentimes have failed. It has been said with reason that if the Social Doctrine of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* had been put into force there would have been no bloodshed in Spain to-day. Is it too much to say that unless these doctrines are even now put into force bloodshed in the other countries of Europe will not be avoided to-morrow?

Communism is the universal menace which threatens to destroy civilization and undermine Christianity itself. But how is the menace to be met? Is it sufficient to catalogue the atrocities committed in Spain? It is not without significance that a large number of apparently gentle, intelligent and even Christian people in this country is unmoved even by that. "After all," one seems to hear them say, "any govern-

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ment has a right to put down rebels, and there are always alleged atrocities in any war, and in any case Spaniards are rather hot-blooded." We who do know the true menace of the situation must therefore find some other way of making it apparent to such complacent people as these. But neither is the menace to be met by identifying the cause of God and the Church with the political enemy of Communism. For the Spanish Catholics, no doubt, it seemed to be a case of Hobson's choice; even we, who are moved to tears by their present sufferings, find it hard to resist this identification. But are we to wait until Communism is snarling and snapping openly in our midst and then look to a political party, like Fascism, to save us? Let us first consider whether the remedy may not be worse than the disease. The Church, which is strengthened and renewed by persecution and the blood of her martyrs, may be undermined and weakened by political servitude. It is not because we desire in any way to minimise the grave and imminent peril of Communism, but on the contrary because we believe we have glimpsed the true nature of this peril, that we refuse to be sidetracked, as some estimable people seem to have been, upon the Spanish question. Our concern about the conflict in Spain must not be allowed to overshadow our concern about the conflict that threatens the whole Church of God.

Monday, September the 14th, was noteworthy for two speeches broadcast to the world. Each was directed to a denunciation in the strongest possible terms of Bolshevistic Communism; but between the two speeches there was little in common. At Nuremburg, the Führer raved and threatened as never before, and it would not have been surprising, indeed, if his frenzied tirade of hatred had resulted in a European war. It was the epitome of a pagan, hate-inspired anti-Communism scarcely less poisonous and dangerous than Communism itself. At Rome, the Vicar of Christ addressed refugees from Spain. There was no mincing of words in his condemnation of world Bolshevism, no underestimate of its dangers. Twice he called it "satanic." But here was no delirious, hate-inspired abuse; rather the calm, frank, reasoned statement of objective truth. Here was no call to arms or threat of violence, no impassioned incitement to hatred; instead the call to love for our enemies, "a special love born of mercy and compassion," to prayer "that they

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may return to their Father who awaits them with such longing." Comparison of the two speeches reveals that there are two anti-Communisms which must never be confused. There was no mistaking the Holy Father's allusions to the persecutions in Germany which "aid and abet the influence and the pernicious action of the forces of subversion." There is in fact a spurious anti-Communism in which Catholics have no part. Faced by such a menace as this, a Catholic may too readily assume that any stick is good enough to beat the Communist with, that any ally against Communism may be welcomed without examination of his motives, methods or credentials. Against such perilous naïveté the Holy Father's speech may well serve as a timely warning. It is imperative that we ask ourselves whether our attitude to the Communist menace, and that of those who offer themselves as our allies, approximates to that of Nuremburg or to that of Rome. Of one thing we may be certain; the stern but loving words of Christ's Vicar, with their uncompromizing fidelity both to charity and to truth, breathe the spirit of our Lord Himself. The simple fact is that Communism can be combatted only by Christianity, by urging upon the world at large, and by putting into practice in our own lives, the principles and teachings of our Lord, especially moral and social, as expounded by His Church.

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