

BLACKFRIARS

REVIEWS

SOCIAL QUESTIONS

CHRISTIANITY AND THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION. Edited by John Lewis. (Gollancz; 6/-.)

By the "social revolution" is meant Communism. Since we do not accept the view that Communism is essentially a revolution, this book seems to us to express a merely academic debate. Doubtless there are still those who shudder at the Communist menace; they have a sympathy for their investments. In so far as it is that kind of menace—a threat to the power of those whose economic position enables them to keep in slavery the mass of wage-earners in this country—we welcome it. In so far as it stands for that it stands for justice. But in its final purpose, in the ideal at which it aims, it is not a revolution at all; it is the ultimate, the logical issue of the Capitalist order. It is reason brought into Capitalism. Here again lovers of the leisure state should welcome it. It will give them what they want. Those Christians, however, who do believe that a social revolution, in the literal sense of both those words, is a necessity if civilization is to survive, cannot be content with a reasonable Capitalism or a genteel Communism. For them, Christianity is opposed to both Capitalism and Communism, because in essence they are the same thing, that essence being the exaltation of economic values into the supreme values; the instrument of that exaltation being the machine. The machine: not once is the problem involved by it mentioned in this book. And yet it is the machine (a thing totally different in essence from the tool) which has plucked up the very roots of our culture, which has destroyed an age-long tradition of living, which is doing daily catastrophic harm to the urbanized millions of our people. How to deal with that, how, without immediate dislocation, to restore the normal life, which is the agricultural life, to the masses of devitalized social atavists who emerge from our public schools into suburbia, and to the less devitalized but still mutilated who are thrown from our elementary schools into the factories—how to give these men life—there is the problem of the social revolution. The Catholic Church is concerned with these things, not for the sake of economics, but because this order is so inhuman—tending towards the apotheosis of inhuman irresponsibility in the machine-run leisure state—so inhuman that man's nature is thwarted, frustrated, repressed, that he almost becomes incapable of being a child of grace. Christianity cannot breathe in this industrial hell; the more comforts, the more radios, cinemas, labour-saving devices, the more throttling the atmosphere; it cannot breathe, because it

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is a Spirit destined for men. And there are no men, or women. So the Christian revolution—which will come with divine fatality—entails a change in comparison with which the “social revolution” of this book is mere bird-tweeting.

As twittering the concert is well conducted. We are told all kinds of things about Christianity, mostly by those who appear to have done their exegesis some years ago. We are told by various communists what they think about Christianity; some try to be nice, but it is pleasant to find at least one who has the honesty of mind to see that integral Christianity would be the end of Communism (just as it will be the end of Capitalism). Then inevitably we have a spot of history, Communism in the early church, the Middle Ages, the seventeenth century, etc. Finally Reinhold Niebuhr writes on Christian Politics and Communist Religion: his essay is quite outside the twittering order: those who have read his *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, and *Reflections on the End of an Era* (books, incidentally, that all muckers-in should keep by their bedside) will have learnt to expect from him a profoundly realist analysis of both religion and politics: this essay will not disappoint them. It contains much wisdom. “The capitalist world is a mechanical rather than an organic one. . . . When religious piety sanctifies such a world, and tempts men to regard its relative and shifting social arrangements as a part of the ‘order of creation,’ it commits a more grievous fault than the suggestion of a similar attitude towards an agrarian social order. The stable and organic feudal world was, after all, a more fitting object of religious reverence—at least in its period of health—than the impersonal and mechanical social structure of modern civilization.” Apart from his apparent identification of an agrarian with a feudal order of society (we hold that an agrarian order is absolutely normal and indispensable for human life because only in such an order can man live in organic harmony with the rhythm of the cosmos and therefore form an organic community, but we have no hankering after feudalism!)—apart from this, the passage shows an awareness to the real issues involved which is not found elsewhere in the book.

The introduction is written by Canon Raven, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge. He finds that between Christianity and Communism there is only an “apparent conflict” and that we Christians have lots to learn. The word he uses to describe those who, like the Archbishop of York, “cling” to the Nicene Creed is “timid.” It is a strange word to apply to the adherents of that profession of faith which alone contains the dynamism for revolution in the modern world.

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