

Religion and the Marxist Challenge: Two Views

Communism and Christianity by Martin C. D'Arcy. Devin-Adair. 242 pp. \$4.00.

by *Quentin Lauer*

There can be little doubt that the majority of Christians in the world today are opposed to Communism—certainly to its practices, and for the most part to its theories. Behind opposition, however, there must be conviction based on thought, or the opposition is meaningless. Nor is the negativity of mere opposition sufficient; the Christian must seriously reflect on the positive aspects of that which he proposes as a substitute.

In an effort to remind Christians once more of what both Christianity and Communism involve, M. C. D'Arcy, the English philosopher-theologian, has given us a very readable book, and in it he has drawn up an impressive balance-sheet.

As is to be expected, D'Arcy, the Jesuit, speaks with the accents of a Roman Catholic, but there seems little doubt that in doing so he speaks in behalf of most Christians. He accepts the authority of the Roman Catholic Church to present the authentic teaching of Christ. For the most part, however, any Christian will recognize his own beliefs and convictions, especially in their opposition to the salvationism, the creed, and the morality of the Communist colossus. We might say, in fact, that Father D'Arcy is somewhat more successful in setting forth the common principles which are essential to all Christianity than he is in outlining the principles on which Communism is based.

One becomes somewhat uneasy at the facility with which Father D'Arcy sums up the philosophy of Marx and Engels—above all, he is superficial and even inaccurate in

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presenting the thought of Marx's great forerunner, Hegel. Coming to Lenin and Stalin he is decidedly better, but he is unquestionably at his best in comparing contemporary Communist ideology with the teachings of Christianity. Here the indictment of Communism loses nothing of its force nor its accuracy by being suffused with Christian charity for those who hope to create a better world on the basis of dialectic materialism.

Most important is D'Arcy's recognition that Marx evolved more than a social theory which could be reconciled even with Christian thought. "Marx meant his view to be a complete answer to life and its problems, to be a philosophy which was complete in its truth and the fulcrum to change the world."

Because it is this, and because it is essentially materialist and atheist in conception, no compromise with Christianity is possible. It is possible to sympathize with the over-all social ideals of Marxism; it is even possible to share its concern with the material needs of man on earth. But it is impossible to accept its dogma of a purely material dynamics of society or its studious exclusion of belief in God as even a tolerable course for man in his approach to the problems of life. The only conclusions which an unprejudiced examination of the two positions will permit is that, despite superficial similarity of aims, Christianity and Communism are diametrically opposed.

The opposition between the two positions, however, should not be seen as that between a completely this-worldly and a completely other-worldly viewpoint. "Christianity . . . claims that it can meet Marx on his own terms and offer a better program for civil life." Christianity is by no means alien to man's temporal concerns; rather, it is definitely "committed to this world, where God became in-

carate." The whole of history since the Incarnation bears the signature of Christ, and there is no need that the temporal and the eternal should conflict.

At the same time, it would be treason to Christianity to soft-pedal the supernatural, to ignore "the folly of the Cross." The Christian is well aware of temporal concerns, but for him they are not ultimate; the finality of time is in eternity. Here he cannot agree with the Communist: "Whereas with Christianity the end is independent of time, Communism puts it at a future date."

Nor can he agree with the Communist's willingness to sacrifice the present generation for a temporal utopia for some future generations, precisely because he "assigns an imperishable reward to each single individual and generation." The Christian, of course, recognizes the value and the nobility of self-sacrifice, but he sees it as intelligible only "if the cause fall within a large philosophy of life which inculcates other reasons and motives for living."

Christianity is not without a dialectic of history, but it cannot be a materialistic dialectic nor one in which the individual is destined to be swallowed up in the collectivity. Rather, it is a dialectic of "conscious and unconscious striving toward a unity and order." In such a dialectic, there is not only room, but a need, for tolerance, since only thus can both the common good and individual freedom be safeguarded.

It is true, of course, that too many Christians simply use religion "to oil the machinery of the State," to make of it a means to a temporal end, and an unworthy one at that. This, however, does not invalidate the claims of Christianity. Rather, it puts upon Christians the responsibility of living out the principles of charity and justice, which are not the "inventions of bourgeois capitalism" but the legacy of Christ, to whom all look as to their Lord and Master.