

If death were the end

It is most disturbing to see with what inconsistency some Christians seem to believe that we might at least agree with the marxian communists on matters pertaining to political philosophy and economics. They want us to be more discerning and appreciative of Sovjet views since, for example, according to their official constitution, they tolerate religion.

This apparently broadminded attitude is most disturbing. But, this was to be expected, since our own conception of temporal welfare has itself become so vague and definite one-sided in its overemphasis of material goods, as if these were the really incontestable substance of the human good. We maintain that no one has the right to determine what the human good, which is the purpose of civil society, consists in—as if, to be begin with, that were a question of right! It seems that the fundamental needs of man are the needs of his animal nature—that is, need of material goods. The substance of human society, it is held, may be maintained on the basis of material security. All the rest, it seems, is a matter of choice.

But, does this not suppose that there is really no fundamental difference, even from the point of view of material goods, between a society whose members conceive human life as a mere phase—and an aimless one at that!—in the evolution of matter; who conceive our life as an entirely provi-

sional existence— in the end, to total extinction; there would be no difference, then, between such a society, and one whose members are believed to be ordered, even in temporal society, mainly to temporal spiritual goods; whose members are believed to be each endowed with an immortal soul and are judged, now and for the future, by the unerring judgment of God?

In other words, they would have us believe there would be no difference of social importance, between such a man, and one who believes that tomorrow it will be as if he had never existed and holds the same view in regard to his neighbour. There would be no marked difference, from the viewpoint of the terrestrial city, between an individual, or, what is more, between a social leader who feels obliged to conform even his actions which concern the human terrestrial good to a superior and eternal end, and a leader, or, even a common individual, who is thoroughly persuaded that this ordination to a superior end is in reality a betrayal of man; who believes that religion is of all social and individual diseases the most dangerous of all; who believes that religion undermines and definitely compromises the well-being of society; who believes that the first and main effort should be planned and bent upon curing men of this disease; who maintain that this remedy must at times be withheld only to better assure the "cure."

It seems that we should be grateful to the Bolcheviks for their broadmindedness in these matters. We are narrow, wicked.

intolerant; we refuse to recognize their good faith; it is we who deny liberty of conscience since we dare oppose ourselves to those who prefer to kill the soul in place of simply killing the body. We are the rebels, since we set ourselves up against society which has the right to teach our children, to teach them only what is necessary to the good life of man. How hypocritical we are!

We are going to take as an example of the doctrines which deny immortality, a philosophy whose negation of a hereafter is not content to be abstract,—a philosophy which sees in the belief in immortality a danger so portentous for society, that we must exterminate it at all cost and by all means: this philosophy is marxism. Also it is, in my opinion, the most profound of all the philosophies which reject immortality. If its affirmations and the positive things that it promises us are always the most superficial, for example its identification of all good with material goods, that does not prevent it from being far reaching in laying stress on its explicit negations of the most profound things that could be.

Even certain catholics today maintain that marxist communism and christianity have a common aspiration. "Communism is, in spite of its extreme methods, based on a genuine desire for social justice and human brotherhood." (C.I.P., March 20, 1943, p. 4, col. b)

I would like to show you that it is true that these two have something in common, above all in so far as they consider the most fundamental principles, but that it is a question

then uniquely of the kind of community that exists between an affirmative and a negative proposition bearing on the same subject. Thus there is something common between all those who deny the existence of God and all those who affirm it: they treat of the same subject.

Mercy and cruelty are contraries, and contraries are in the same genus. Mercy and cruelty are each the manifestation of power, and both are exercised upon the weak. For the christian, it is mercy which is the primary root of all things; for the marxist, as we will show, it is the contrary of mercy which is the principle of all things. That is what we have in common. Each speaks of fraternity, but for the one this fraternity is rooted in a divine virtue, in charity; for the other it proceeds from hatred. For the former, God is the principle and the term; for the latter the negation of God is the principle and this same negation is the term, as we will show.

The christian says that to possess eternal life one must give everything, even life itself; the marxist also teaches that one must give all, sacrifice all, not only this life on earth, but more than anything else, eternal life,—to gain what? It is his way of diabolically imitating the absolute gratuity of the gift of God, who gives all and takes nothing for Himself; and who, so that his gift might attain the very fullness of gratuity, has suffered all without Himself needing deliverance. God has suffered in order to give His divinity; the marxist requires suffering to give himself nothingness.

We, too, believe that human history is moving from catastrophe to catastrophe. The terrestrial future of which the Evangelists speak most expressly, is certainly not reassuring for those holding the idea of inevitable temporal progress of humanity: "It is a future that will have as a terrestrial term the abomination of abominations, and will have reached by wars and revolts of people against people, by earthquakes in divers places and by famines; and brother will deliver his brother to death and the father his son; children will rise up against their parents, and put them to death; and all this will be done in the name of a fraternity which will cloak itself with the name of Christ; a very contagious fraternity because Christ Himself warns us of its power of seduction. The tribulations of our temporal future will be "such...as were not from the beginning of the creation. And unless the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh should be saved." (Mark 13, 19, 20)

We too, therefore, believe in a catastrophic future, a future ordered to an ideal life to come, a life which is in some way the justification of these catastrophes. But we do not believe that a purely terrestrial ideal, no matter how exalted, could justify even what now goes on in the world, and this is possibly only a very remote beginning of what is yet to come.

Yes, we do have some things in common. But now you can see how this must be understood.

The opinion I have just quoted might be called dangerous because it is equivocal. Unfortunately, it is not even

equivocal. Actually, it attributes to marxist communism "a genuine desire" for justice and for fraternity. We are therefore very far from the opinion of the Church which has declared it intrinsically perverse. More than that, the opinion cited conceals an equivocation. By abuse, the term "communism" can be ambiguous. It be used to denote all the persons called communists, that is, (a) those who are truly such, and (b) those who appear to be such, who believe they are communists without really knowing what communism is fundamentally all about. Among the latter there are certainly some who would like to see justice established in society, but it is not in virtue of the communist doctrine of marxism that they could have this "genuine desire".

The communist doctrine of which we are going to speak is not, therefore, the non-communist doctrine of the man who falsely believes himself to be a communist; we will speak of the official doctrine, the one that is taught officially, the one that you can find for yourselves in the doctrinal authorities of marxism, supported and recommended by those who now hold power, for those who have the courage to assimilate this doctrine.

We are going to treat of its position in the face of the problem of immortality.

What then, according to marxism, is the end of humanity?

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Among all the philosophies of Progress, it is marxism which is most actively reaching towards the future. It seems desirous of realizing in a very concrete manner the still obscure aspirations of all the other doctrines of Progress. Most of the time the idea of Progress is an idea quite passive and confused. This Progress is at the same time indefinite and fatal. It is considered as a function of time. In spite of what men do, progress would come about. The most violent reactions could obstruct it only in appearance and for a time provisional. But in marxism the idea of Progress becomes an idea properly so-called, that is to say, a practical conception of the future, an idea "factive" of a future which would be our work, which would be the fruit of our conscious and deliberate activity.

We see that, according to marxism, purely natural things, from the inorganic to the brute, do not act for an end. Action for an end is the privilege of man. "A spider, writes Marx, accomplishes operations which resemble those of a weaver; the bee, in the construction of his waxy cells, is like an architect. But above all what distinguishes the poorest architect from the most capable bee is the fact that the former has constructed the cell in his head before realizing it in wax. At the end of the work a result is produced which, at the beginning, already existed in the representation of the worker, consequently in an ideal manner. It is not only a modification of forms that he effectuates in nature; it is also a realization in nature of his ends; he

knows this end which, as a law, defines the modalities of his action, and to which he should subordinate his will."

We are in our time actually in a phase of the evolution where man can have a truly practical idea of the end of the complete man. This end is not one which is predetermined for him by nature. Finality is retained within the limits of human action. The end to be realized in the future is an end which man sets up for himself and one of which his own action is the principle. The conception of this end becomes clearer to the extent that he increases his power over the means of realizing it.

The end to be realized in the future is therefore no longer as in the passive doctrine of progress, a speculative conception of a condition which would be achieved no matter we do for or against it. It is a conception purely human and humanly practical. This conception, it is held, should pre-exist in our representation in an ideal manner; not in an idealistic manner, but in a perfectly realistic manner, therefore in a manner conformed to the concrete power that man has obtained for himself. In short, marxism has well understood that there is no truly practical knowledge without the power of execution. If man can propose practically an end for himself, he also has the power to execute it. The faculty of proposing an end for himself is the result of his power. The faculty of proposing concretely the end of the complete man is the sign of the burgeoning in him of absolute power.

In the humanitarian doctrines of Progress, which aspire to a purely human emancipation from all misery, the sentiment of pity is apparently the original mover. But to the extent that humanity is yet unable to free itself of all misery, this pity remains forcibly frustrated with respect to the present. The greatest misery of humanity is in some way identified with its weakness. This impotence, therefore, allows only an abstract pity. In the face of such pity, actual misery does away with itself by taking on an abstract character. Misery takes on an abstract character the moment it is conceived as inevitable: we abstract from the misery of others as we see it in wars. You know the current saying: we're living in a new Era, a great time! As if those who speak that way an ideal worthy of the death and destruction that...

Now, here again, marxism takes an attitude which is resolutely active. The weakness of misery, Marx holds, is not just weakness. On the contrary, it is in reality power. It has the power of exasperation. A power of revolt rises within them, a tension that will suddenly explode. It conceals an immense practical drive. Therein resides the antagonistic tension which is the lever of all progress. Therefore, far from excluding it, far from withdrawing from it into an abstract world—there to await the power to overcome it, one must deliberately embrace it in order to grasp the force hidden within it. One must use misery for the liberation from all misery, to such a degree that misery becomes, not simply a provisionally inevitable condition, but an always more powerful

lever for the conception and the realization of the ultimate end. The goriest battles, the most violent revolutions thus become things which take place quite naturally and should not be discouraged. They are only apparent catastrophes, likened to birth pangs. And in this very act, misery is at the same time fruitful and surpassed. Without misery, there would be no antagonism. As Marx said: "no antagonism, no progress." Far from being a provisional obstacle to Progress and drawing us away from the end, it is that which brings us closer to this end; it is the irresistible power for the conquest of this end. "That alone is invincible which begins to grow and develops itself."

Thus the marxist conception of misery is apparently a conception which is fundamentally optimistic. The most horrible suffering of humanity is only one side of the picture. Without it man is not conscious of himself and remains impotent. The happy man is really a weak man. His power is purely apparent, sterile. He is an obstacle to progress. "Social reforms never come about because of the weakness of the strong, but always because of the strength of the weak". The marxist believes not only that humanity is moving towards always better conditions; the revolutions themselves, caused by misery, are the more profound according to the greatness of the misery, the more fruitful according to the extent of their destruction. Revolutions become ever more studied and calculated; and they are the reason for an ever growing hope, and witness of an ever more lively faith in the power of misery.

In short, it is taken for granted that men should suffer frightfully and increasingly as we approach the end, for the type and condition of man at the term of the progress pursued, is so great that they can be given birth to only in the most universal suffering. The new man should arise from the power of misery. Far from running away from misery, men conscious of the end to be pursued should, on the contrary, realize its power and direct it.

The marxist does not conceal the sacrifice to be made in order to attain his ideal. This sacrifice is total. It must comprise our life in all that it is. Total emancipation demands total sacrifice of self.

To what does the total sacrifice of all those who tend actively towards this emancipation lead? What exactly is the end of this struggle which is as frightful as it is scientific? Why do men put up with a brutality ever more refined and "courageous"?

The conscious organization of social production undertaken for the sake of the most violent and most bloody revolutions in history, and in which men will kill each will inaugurate "a new epoch of history, in which mankind itself, and with mankind all branches of its activity, and especially natural science, will experience an advance that will put everything preceding it in the deepest shade." (DN.19-20)

In this new order the individual will enjoy his own personality, autonomy and liberty. Each can "be developed in any aspect which pleases him, society, controlling general

production, will allow me to do this today—that tomorrow..."

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Will man then be emancipated for all time? For the sacrifices will have been stupendous. Many generations of millions of individuals will have given their lives. Will they have vanished into nothingness for the sake of some permanent good?

How does the marxist answer this question?

Evidently, the ultimate fate of the individuals of that ideal life and time, will still be the same as ours. They will die a total death. The "end", the cause for which we will have acted, will not be able to prevent that end from coming about. For every human being it will, in the last resort, soon be, as if he had never existed. In the end, the lot of man is no different from the lot of a beast.

The finality, the action for a purpose, of which we have spoken does not reach beyond the human sphere. Purposeful action makes sense only within the limits of humanity. If we take humanity in its totality, its existence is again comparable to that of an individual, for, in virtue of the general principle that "all that arrives at existence deserves to perish", humanity itself will one day be exterminated.

"Nevertheless, "all that comes into being deserves to perish." Millions of years may elapse, hundreds of thousands of generations be born and die, but inexorably the time will come when the declining warmth of the sun will no longer suffice to

melt the ice thrusting itself forward from the poles; when the human race, crowding more and more about the equator, will finally no longer find even there enough heat for life; when gradually even the last trace of organic life will vanish; and the earth, an extinct frozen globe like the moon, will circle in deepest darkness and in ever narrower orbit about the equally extinct sun, and at last fall into it. Other planets will have preceded it, others will follow it; instead of the bright, warm solar system with its harmonious arrangement of members, only a cold, dead sphere will still pursue its lonely path through universal space. And what will happen to our solar system will happen sooner or later to all the other systems of our island universe; it will happen to all the other innumerable island universes, even to those the light of which will never reach the earth while there is a living human eye to receive it." (DH.20)

Humanity was originally the product of blind forces, of forces which do not act for an end. It will one day be engulfed in the night of unconsciousness by these same blind forces. And then it will not even be known that we have existed. Whether we have existed or not, whether we have struggled or not, struggled for justice or for injustice, all this will be absolutely indifferent. It will not even be a dream. The eternal night will have engulfed even the memory. Your suffering will be ignored as will your death. The very "you have been" will no longer be.

Does this mean that the possibility of another humanity will be erased from the universe? "But however often, and

however relentlessly, this cycle is completed in time and space, however many millions of suns and earths may arise and pass away, however long it may last before the conditions for organic life develop, however innumerable the organic beings that have to arise and to pass away before animals with a brain capable of thought are developed from their midst, and for a short span of time find conditions suitable for life, only to be exterminated later without mercy, we have the certainty that matter remains eternally the same in all its transformations, that none of its attributes can ever be lost, and therefore, also, that with the same iron necessity that it will exterminate on the earth its highest creation, the thinking mind, it must somewhere else and at another time again produce it." (DH.24-25)

The whole of humanity, and with it the very memory that it was, will be exterminated "without mercy". We are subjected, therefore, to a power without mercy. A power which is all the more terrible because it is absolutely blind, inert. All the more terrible, I say, since it exercises this sovereign cruelty in perfect innocence. Its cruelty is worse than cruelty in the ordinary sense, since, in its cruelty, it cannot even reasonably be called cruel. This "inhuman power which rules all things", as Marx says, is not even a person; it is not even an animal. It is matter in all its crudity; it is stone against man; the stone which may crush the brain. Stone—at the same time murderous and innocent.

But, it is said, we have the certitude that matter will always exist. What a consolation! But who is going to rejoice in

that? Matter itself is quite indifferent to it, if it is truly matter. So we have the certitude that in other corners of the universe other humanities will arise. That means that the same cruel game will be played over and over again eternally. The power of matter will always be a power without mercy. Let us rejoice therefore in this power, this power of the inhuman, which gives birth to life, which creates hope for the sake of destroying it.

With regard to the other humanities which will arise in other regions of the universe, our attitude cannot be other than that of the blind and indifferent matter which produces them. Our action can contribute nothing to their future. The lot of these humanities is already sealed. They will pass, by the same stages, from wretchedness to liberty ultimately crowned with total and merciless extermination.

And why not? Why not assume the attitude of matter, which has no attitude. The blind forces which have spewed man onto the earth, are they not equally indifferent to his destiny? After all, we are the children of night; night begot us; and this self same night will engulf us. We were made without mercy; is it astonishing then that we should be exterminated without mercy? What could be more logical?

Marxism places us before the most improbable paradoxes. Man, it says, is the superior product of matter; man is the most perfect being. He is superior and more perfect than the matter of which he is the superior product because he can act for an end according to an intelligent plan; because he has the light of intelligence, a light coming from the obscurity

of unintelligence. He is very superior to all other beings because, by producing his own means of subsistence, he can, somehow, make himself.

However, for all its perfection, this most perfect being, this jewel of the universe, is sheer weakness, the plaything of a power which does not play. Do we seek power? That which, in comparison with intelligence seems powerless, that is what is mighty. The unconquerable might, the real might, is the might of the inhuman. The imperfect is incomparably more powerful than the perfect. It is the indomitable ~~power~~ of the imperfect which begets the hopelessly weak power of the perfect; it is the night which outshadows the light it has produced; death begets life and death engulfs it; it is death that is invincible; it is non-being which reigns over all. The true power? It is that which is not. Here apply the words of the late Paul Valéry: "l'être n'est qu'un défaut dans le non-être." Inert matter is mightier than life because it does not live; it is immortal because it is lifeless; darkness outreaches light because it is blind.

Life, therefore, is the great tragedy of being. The condition of life is essentially tragic, since, on the one hand it tends to maintain itself, and on the other, it can live by and for death; man lives in the certitude of death; he who contemplates life stares death in the face. Why does man not say: why live, since I am already dead? But why should he complain when there is no one to hear his complaint? Eternal matter is absolutely and just as eternally deaf. Whom could man accuse?

Would you accuse a stone for having killed a man? Matter is cynically innocent of the life of which it alone is the author.

How could the marxist console us for living? How can he conceal from us this literally incredible farce which is human life? Truly the lot of man is worse than that of the brute. The beast does not ask why it suffers when it does. Man's immense sorrow is as useless, as it is ineffable the more useless because man desires nothing as much as the utility of his pains. His life is, therefore, a condition of despair; man is despair itself.

We are the children of despair. Worse than that: we cannot even reasonably say nor think it. For, at bottom, even our despair is quite vain. It serves no purpose whatsoever.

But it would be insanity to consider things in this way, the marxist will tell us. Obviously a merciless power, cruelty if you wish, is the first root of all life. But that is not our affair; it concerns no one. Matter, the author of all things, is not a self, it is no one. Even though you are a man, you cannot expect to live and think as a man. If there is the despair of life, since it is really of no one's doing, how could it reasonably concern us? You must not think of these things! If you did, you would then begin to curse your own existence. You would begin to curse all life, and, more deeply, that very blind, inert power which rules it. Yet what could be more absurd than such a malediction? We only curse someone who is responsible. That cursed inhuman power, the blind power that spewed you forth alive, is innocence itself.

It could not be subject to responsibility! Your malediction is as vain and empty as your despair! This manner of thinking is harmful. In a well ordered society we could not tolerate the question of "to be or not to be". Such questions should be banned as reactionary.

Do you not see how all such considerations are quite useless? The night does not understand. Almighty matter does not live. Your clamorous despair will not have been. Your curse will not have been. Who would understand your cry? Since "an inhuman power rules over all," why should not human life be fundamentally inhuman?

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Could the marxist have pity on the miserable? It is said that marxist communism and christianity draw upon a common source. Is it, then, pity to identify the end of man with that of a dog? Is it pity to teach that we are, at bottom, the plaything of a blind, merciless, inhuman power, and not even the plaything of a diabolical will? Is it pity to teach that all man's suffering, all his labors, will be climaxed by total and irrevocable extermination?

Mr. Davies could see no great difference between God and the natural forces of communism: "There is one very noble aim which our countries share in common, whether it be motivated by God, as we believe, or what you might term great natural forces..." A.v., mercy and cruelty are, fundamentally the same

thing. Light and darkness are synonyms.

Marxism a pretext for the denial of all mercy? Indeed we agree upon fundamentals: i.e. we agree the subject—but not on what is it to be affirmed or denied about this subject.

The marxist does not conceal these negations. To all fundamental questions he replies by negations. Yet how can we explain his apparent tranquility in absolute despair? What can be the true motive force of his action admittedly doomed to failure before it is even undertaken? Why is he even interested in negation? The answer which the marxist authors give to this question, and the true answer are two entirely different things.

"The practical force with which the marxist thinkers and their disciples cling to their errors, can only be explained by a love of these errors powerful as death. I say powerful as death, because the marxist should sacrifice his entire being, he should face total death, the complete annihilation of the self. He is compelled to draw all his energy from absolute despair. His entire action, always bent on violence, can end only in the total destruction of the self. Death, it will be to him, as if he had never existed. No reward, no justice, no pity. How could his pains be compensated by some heritage which he might leave behind? Who could be his heir? Humanity? But humanity itself is only a multitude of selves; all await the same fate. For each human individual it will soon be as if he had never been. Whether he acts or not; whether he acts well or badly; what difference could it make?

It makes a great deal of difference! we are told. It makes a difference even in acting! Do we not here have the essential condition of an absolutely gratuitous human action? Does not man owe to himself this absolute generosity? The true marxist can live only in total frustration. The power and weakness of negation. He could desire this life only in so far as it allows him to be an author of negation. Let some life always be, that negation may be! He perpetuates himself in death by transmitting this negation from generation to generation.

It is difficult to see how their negation could have, even to them, the meaning and the impact it is purported to have, unless there were He whose being would vouch for its meaning and for its life?

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