

INITIATION TO CHRISTENDOM

Tribute to St. Thomas More

EUROPE has gone out of Christendom. There are still perhaps Christian nations, whatever this may mean to-day, there is a strong though disunited Christian tradition living in many millions of people and representing, through them, a power of public import still, there is the Church Catholic, and many other forms of "organized religion." But Europe has gone out of Christendom four hundred years ago. This is not merely another way of saying that the sixteenth century saw the break-up of the formal religious unity it had possessed throughout the Middle Ages. Europe is not merely the name of a continent and a mere factual unit based on the neighbourhood of nations and peoples living within its boundaries. Mr. Christopher Dawson in his admirable work *The Making of Europe* and others of his books has recovered the true meaning and significance of what Europe has been in the history of mankind—not the natural scene of the lives of peoples like any other similar scene, *but Christendom*. The religious revolution of the sixteenth century was from the religious and Catholic point of view the gravest event, but it had no less grave accompaniments in fields quite beyond the strictly religious domain. Nor was the Reformation the sole cause—it was in fact just as much an effect. England might never have gone beyond breaking up the ties, with Henry VIII, that bound her up into Christendom, and yet have severed herself from the most living reality of a thousand years of European history.

It was Sir Thomas More who realized that most clearly. "I am not bound, my lord, to confirm my conscience to the counsel of one realm against the general counsel of Christendom," he said during his trial. In this case it was not the Saint himself that was defendant, it was Christendom. It was the "General Council" of Christendom that was put on trial, and found guilty of treachery by "the Council of one realm" *in secession from Christendom*. Apart from the

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official voice of the Church, St. Thomas More has perhaps been the last witness to the reality of Christendom. Statesman as well as saint (a marriage of which modern times can conceive only as being in divorce), he could not but be martyred. I must refrain from writing on what, in commenting on Mr. Christopher Hollis' life of Thomas More, I have termed More's notorious holiness. I had been in physical pains for days, thrown from laughter into tears and from tears into laughter, when reading, for the first time, the full story of his life. I am not sure that I should ever get through telling it even to such an audience as my little girl, without my balance being strangely disturbed. But there is that other thing which is within the compass of every student of political history and philosophy, that which makes Saint Thomas More the outstanding representative of an order to which England had belonged in belonging to herself and to which she was lost in Henry VIII's reign. It is true that any great revolution in history is an event as well as a process going through successive phases of development. But it was Henry VIII who set his country on the road to secession, and it was his Chancellor and ex-Chancellor who most nobly fought the losing battle. St. Thomas More was a visionary (in the intellectual, not in the psychological, sense of the word). He simply *saw* that it was not a question of an old against a new order, but of order against the perversion of order.

Perhaps that order was derelict and broke down because it was ripe to fall. Thomas More knew perfectly well the defects and deficiencies in the actual state of that order. But to him it was utter folly to put down Order and its inherent possibilities for self-restoration, in exchange of ordered Destruction. St. Thomas More died for a cause in which far more than a single country was involved. He died not only for England, part and parcel of the Christian Order, he died for all of Europe since he died upholding that order. And, as I have said, Europe has gone out of Christendom though it has not rejected Christianity formally. The secession has been universal. It may be argued that this course of things was wholly inevitable, and that it was merely the

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natural outcome of the growth of national States during the last centuries of the Middle Ages and other causes fully discernible for the historian. But nothing in history is inevitable except just this that *men and nations must reap what they have sown*. In the present order of things we are reaping what has been sown by the destruction of the European Order, that is, of Christendom.

The Christian order has broken down not merely in the realm of religion, but in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the nations. We can trace all the evils of our age to one common source, which is the secularist conception of Autonomy. In the Christian Order things are seen and done, thought of and worked upon in reference to an ordering centre, which is God. This relationship is basic for the order whatever its name or title to authority, since it is of the very essence of order. When that fundamental relation is taken out of the order of things, it follows, not that there will be chaos in the full and strict sense of the word (since even the perversion of Order implies still a semblance and a certain measure of order), but that what has been substituted as a "new" order is vitiated even when and where it is successful. Might we not perhaps have to acknowledge the merits and successes of this age as a sort of brilliant vices—the merits of its very faults? However this be (and of course we are all in the mess), we ought clearly to recognize what we have lost, what Europe, what the world has lost in the wild quest for autonomy. Apostasy means the death of the Soul. The secession from Christendom has meant the heaping up of perplexities under which Civilization is succumbing.

What the nations of the world need, then, is nothing less than a new *initiation to Christendom*. The Roman Catholic Church has in the most solemn way raised Blessed Sir Thomas More, glory of England and of the Church, to the honour of her altars. St. Thomas More is one of the Knights of that Realm that ought to be, and which he used to call Christendom. If Europe is ever to be restored to the fulness of the glory that was hers when she was Christendom, we must raise Sir Thomas More to be our sainted Leader in the

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crusade for the Recovery of Europe. The canonization of Thomas More is a solemn appeal addressed to the peoples of Europe to make Europe again what she had been meant and made to be. St. Thomas More is the Intercessor in the cause of the Restoration of Christendom, which is vital to the life of humanity.

OSKAR BAUHOFFER.

NOWHERE ISLAND

IT is only of late years that Communism has come to excite an emotion rather than an opinion. . . . Until a decade or two ago, it distinguished itself from Socialism in that it dealt with distribution or consumption whereas Socialism concerned the mode of production: and whereas Socialism was a theory of economics the appeal of Communism was to sentiment, one might even say to religion. Their common ground lay solely in a recognition of the equality of Man. But it was Communism that associated itself with the now century-old hope of the perfectibility of Man.

Historically Communism was of course forbore by such as the Essenes, whose economy of life was however inspired by the urge to escape (rather than repair) social ills. They are described by Philo: "None had his own house but shared his dwelling with all. Living in colonies they threw open their doors to all their sect that came their way. They had a common storehouse, common expenditure, common garments, common food (syssitia). They gave what they earned to a common fund for the support of the unfit."

The Communist colonies of last century were ineffectual enough and are notable largely in that their origin was philanthropic and motivated, if not by pessimism, at least by the urge to escape.

Communism, as we know it, was anticipated in literature only by a Saint—in the *Utopia* of Thomas More. Here was a state in many respects indistinguishable from the economy of the Soviet, comprising four million souls, superintended