

UNIVERSAL DIAGNOSIS: THE TRUE MENACE¹

LIKE everybody else who is inane enough to write letters to the paper and put an address at the bottom I get a certain number of circulars sent to me—sometimes even that most exciting of all things, an anonymous letter.

I have therefore been assured in the past six months that the troubles of the nation in general and my troubles in particular are entirely due to drink: and I have of course been assured that I shall get cancer if I continue to smoke, and, inevitably, that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Three circulars came to me (I wish I could say I found them all together on my breakfast table, it would sound so much more impressive—actually they did come within a week of each other), one telling me that Rome was at the bottom of all our troubles (not the Rome of Mussolini of course, but the Scarlet Woman). I cannot remember all the dark and sinister places in which She was featuring—the Colonial Office was one and the Ministry of Education another (I think), certainly She was responsible for the Soviet—Pope Benedict XV having apparently initiated the Russian Revolution so as to get rid of the Orthodox Church.

The second circular (in order of appearance) told me that Communism was at the bottom of all present evil—not merely the Bolsheviks but everybody everywhere who refuses to believe that every Communist is necessarily an incarnate Devil.

And the third was about the Jews. I think it is worth adverting to it in detail. At the top of the leaflet I was implored not to send my son to the shambles of a Jew-made war, and the leaflet went on to tell me all about the great "Jewish Conspiracy." It was quite the best of the three. I kept it and showed it a few days later to two very dear friends of mine. They laughed a good deal, of course, but I could see that really behind it all they were inclined to take the thing seriously. One of them said, "After all, the Jews

¹ A paper read to the Parkinson Club, Birmingham, May, 1936.

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are at the bottom of a good deal; look at Bolshevism, international finance (Jewish names everywhere)”—and from Banks they went on to all kinds of other sinister concerns, dance bands, the cinema, etc. Now one of these good friends of mine is an Irishman and the other is a well-known protagonist of all things and persons Italian, and I am afraid I was indiscreet enough to ask whether they had ever noticed the remarkable prominence of Irish and Italian names amongst the gangsters and gunmen of America. Did they not perhaps think (along similar lines) that the ruin of the United States of America was being plotted by a combined conspiracy of those two great Catholic nations Ireland and Italy. They were very cross. That *reductio ad absurdum*, by the way, has subsequently appeared in the Catholic Press.

But to the serious: there are of course Jews and Jews: there are also Christians and Christians. To talk about an “anti-God” Jew is as fatuous as to talk about an “anti-God” Christian. A Jew (I am not talking of renegade Jews) is essentially a worshipper of the same God, the same Jehovah, whom we worship. Even amongst unfaithful Jews would it be an easy matter to prove a formulated conspiracy? Some of them are to be found amongst revolutionaries, Communists, others in the ranks of the great capitalists. Are they all in league?

As for Jewry in Russia, it would be particularly difficult to fit it in as a unit of this (legendary) Jewish conspiracy. (The sort of conspiracy we were told about in a contribution to the *Catholic Gazette* of February this year—the conspiracy we read of in the discredited “protocols of Zion.”) If Israel is plotting against Christian civilization, then the Jews of *Russia* can hardly be associated with the plot for the simple reason that they are rapidly losing their integrity *as Jews* and, by mixed marriages, becoming merged into the New Russia.

So much for the Jewish menace.

I have adverted to it at some length because I think it is a good example of our tendency to hit on a scape-goat (other than ourselves) for the mess the world has got into, and the worse mess that is threatened. Personally I think that of all

the irritating phenomena of our press (Catholic as well as secular) the most irritating is its tendency to facile analyses, sweeping arbitrary judgments in what are acutely complex problems. We are naturally fond of investing an honest prejudice with a halo—our personal opinion tends to become dogma, we present our pet schemes and remedies as ocumenical. That is bad enough, of course (it means regarding the contribution as the entire sum, the ingredient as the whole pudding). But that is not all. We develop Ku Klux Klan symptoms—everybody hears about the innumerable things we are out against, and very few seem to know what we are out FOR.

This brings me, I think, to circular Number Two: Communism. I suppose of all the Menaces and Perils beloved of our Editors, yellow perils, red perils, perils from the gentiles, and perils in the city, this peril may be called Peril Number One.

It is a subject on which I have written nearly fifty articles, and about which I am afraid I am generally considered to be rather a nuisance. I had a letter the other day from someone unknown to me who said he was sick of the red rag. I wrote back to say I was equally sick of the Bull. The Pope has defined what is wrong with Communism and condemned it. But he did so, I imagine, more that we might remedy our own economic system (which has rotted into Communism) than that he might be reported the day after in huge headlines "*Pope Condemns Communism*" followed by the usual diatribes about the iniquities of the Left. It has been found convenient to give a great deal more prominence to the critical portions of the social encyclicals than to the constructive. I mean the portions criticizing socialist economics: the judgment upon our own unworthy practices is frequently kept out of sight altogether. After all, it is very comforting to hear other people condemned. The reactionary naturally likes to be told about the latest iniquity of Moscow. The true blue feels a very good boy when he is told what mischievous fellows the radicals are.

No reasonable person will deny that the Devil *has* found willing hands in the Bolshevik. Atheistic atrocity has been

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useful to him not only because of the intrinsic scandal but because of the handle it has given to pseudo-Christians nearer home. A way of diverting attention from their own meanness and materialism—equally diverting attention from the generosity and unselfishness of many revolutionaries. The greatest accomplishment wrought by Evil to-day is the anomalous spectacle of so-called Christian influence defending privilege and election, and anti-Christian influence demanding justice for the proletariat.

The (secular) conservative press discovered that it had a vocation to warn the world against Bolshevism, "the enemy of civilization and Christianity." I will not swear to the degree in which our newspapers are interested either in civilization or Christianity, but I have not much doubt as to their interest in purse and pocket—and their vocation to defend it against the menace of Socialism. Socialism means, of course, not merely Moscow, but the social conscience. (I have heard the Dole dubbed Bolshy Legislation, the Means Test being presumably the Christian Corrective.)

It is almost a truism to insist that it is the negations of Communism that are anti-Christian. I say this in spite of the conviction of many that atheism occurs mysteriously somewhere in the economics from which the U.S.S.R. gets its name. Communist economics may be corrected by Christianity. What is positive in it may actually be fulfilled in Christianity. Only it must be a genuine Christianity and not the pseudo-Christianity that is so often mistaken for it.

Here again I have to be wary of falling into the clap-trap of arbitrary judgment, associating pseudo-Christianity exclusively with pocket-consciousness or *laissez-faire*. Pseudo-Christianity does not merely manifest itself as a snobbism, an exclusivism which likes to consider itself as a very small ark outside which the multitude perish. Nor even simply a pharisaism, a legalism, a faith without efficacy. It is also an idealism, sound if incomplete theory divorced from expression in material action. It is precisely that idealism which accounts for subjective, irresponsible analyses and condemnations like those circulars which I have mentioned.

This article was suggested to me (as I said) by three

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circulars. I might have called it "Salvaged from the waste-paper basket," as it is I only salvaged one—but the rest were the same, the same easy, arbitrary diagnoses: seeing the Devil solely in Jews or in Communists, just as a century ago the British public saw the Devil exclusively in Popery.

I hope, at least, that some of us are old-fashioned and platitudinous enough to attribute the mess we are in to one thing, to sin. I do not mean only original sin. If I *did*, then we could justify *laissez-faire* (which means shrugging your shoulders and relegating all economic misery to compensation hereafter). I mean our shortcomings subsequent to the fall, and subsequent to our conversion to Christ.

I go on to hope that we are honest enough to convict *ourselves* as a corollary of the aphorism that Charity begins at home.

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