

The Missionary and the Commissar

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The Movement of World Revolution,
by Christopher Dawson. New York:
Sheed and Ward, 1959.

CHRISTIANITY and Communism have one important element in common; they share a preoccupation with the meaning of history.

"Christ is risen on the world," said Lord Acton; and Christians of every era have asserted that the proof of the validity of the Christian religion is a proof derived from history. The birth of Christ ushers in a "new order of the ages," characterized not only by sanctification but by a recreation and amelioration of the social order. Indeed, in Christian thought the supernatural and the natural so interpenetrate one another that any action in one of these realms immediately produces consequences in the other. Not only is the Christian God the God of history, but He has made Himself, by His incarnation, subject to history that He might redeem and overcome it.

Marxism is no less tied to the historical process for its justification. "Marx is risen

on the world" it is asserted, and his historical materialism has ushered in a "new order of the ages." True, it is a completely naturalistic order, in which men seek their beatitude through the instruments of expropriation, class warfare, repression, and murder. True again, it has only a paltry forty years of astonishing if incriminating success to compare with two millennia of Christian progress. None the less, the challenge of Marxian historiography must be taken seriously, for historical materialism provides the sole intellectual weapon in the Communist arsenal. Communism as a system is only as adequate as its reading and interpretation of the facts of history.

But historiography at the present time seems less and less able to evaluate facts and reject or justify interpretations. False objectivity and intellectual nihilism have gone far to dissipate the historical consciousness of Western man. There is real danger that history will become meaningless, historical scholarship Alexandrian, and Western man, unwilling to learn from the present, will find himself unable to learn from the past.

Mr. Christopher Dawson in his latest book, *The Movement of World Revolution*, seeks both to challenge the Marxian theory

of revolution and to restore the historian to the role of interpreter and guide to the future. That he is successful in both attempts comes as no surprise to those who are familiar with Professor Dawson's previous work. It is more surprising, however, to discover an historian who is able to present a work of major historical synthesis in the compass of two hundred pages and in a style that is fresh, clean, and vigorous.

In the first half of his book, Professor Dawson establishes the primacy of Western, and more narrowly, European history for any valid interpretation of the past. At the same time he demonstrates clearly that the continuing revolution which has characterized Western culture cannot be explained in terms of the "mode of production," as Marxians would like to have it, but can be understood only in terms of the dynamism of humanistic Christian philosophy. The rationalism and supernatural charity which characterize Western society and set it off from all the stagnated cultures of the non-European world are not evidences of a "superstructure" rooted in a particular "mode of production" and its concomitant class relationships. The mastery of the natural, social, and economic environment which has characterized Western man is, rather, a reflection of dynamic reason and dynamic faith. Marxism itself is Christian heresy, and succeeds only where Western Culture has already wrought the more basic revolution. So it is that although World history has outgrown the confines of European geography it possesses meaning only when viewed from the perspective of the West.

This fact becomes all the more apparent when one considers the impact of revolution upon the non-European world. To this task Professor Dawson addresses himself in the second half of his book. World his-

tory is a by-product of the activity of the missionary, the adventurer, and the merchant. It was the dynamic of European expansion which shook the Mogul's power in India, loosened the grip of ancient custom and superstition in Africa, and forced the gates of Cathay. The revolution which now threatens to engulf the non-European world was made in the West and forced on a reluctant and changeless colored world. So much is this the case, as Dawson rightly observes, that although Oriental and African nationalism is intensely anti-Western, it is at the same time completely the product of Western thought. It looks to the West and not to the ancient heritage of Asia and Africa for the pattern of the society which it seeks to construct. Even where Communism triumphs, as it has in China, the victory is the victory of the West over a decadent Confucian society.

Yet the revolution is not complete. Western intellectual and social forms, perhaps more especially in their totalitarian expressions, pave the way for a more thoroughgoing spiritual revolution. Here Dawson harks back to the era in which Christianity took its rise, and suggests that the one world which the West has made will not be unlike that great Hellenistic, cosmopolitan civilization. The lower middle classes of the urban centers of this new civilization, stripped of their traditional cultures and cast adrift in an amoral and nihilistic world, will turn to the one religion which has both caused and survived the wreck of ages, cultures, and empires. It is interesting to speculate that the historian of the future may find the missionary to have been the most representative man of Western Culture and to recognize that the "mite-box" and the missionary society were more revolutionary instruments than gun-powder, steam, and the communist conspiracy.

Latin America and the Modern World

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Latin America, by J. Fred Rippy. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958.

Globe and Hemisphere, by J. Fred Rippy. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958. *Foundation for Foreign Affairs Series No. 1.*

The Tragedy of Bolivia, by Alberto Ostria Gutierrez. New York: Devin Adair, 1958.

IN THE NOTE on "Liberalism" added to the 1865 edition of the *Apologia*, John Henry Newman wrote, "If I might presume to contrast Lacordaire and myself, I should say, that we had been both of us inconsistent; —he, a Catholic, in calling himself a Liberal; I, a Protestant, in being an Anti-liberal; and moreover, that the cause of this inconsistency had been in both cases

one and the same. This is, where both of us were such good conservatives, as to take up with what we happened to find established in our respective countries, at the time we came into active life. Toryism was the creed of Oxford; he inherited, and made the best of, the French Revolution."

With nearly a century added to such inconsistencies of terminology, the situation today seems almost beyond repair. This is illustrated by the plight of words in Bolivia. In his *Globe and Hemisphere*, Professor Rippy writes, "Willmoore Kendall . . . predicted [in 1956] the early demise of the Paz Estenssoro-Siles Zuazo regime, and denounced the State Department for its financial support of this radical 'Left'." But in his book *The Tragedy of Bolivia*, Dr. Ostria Gutierrez spares no effort to convince the reader that the regime headed by Victor Paz Estenssoro, president of Bolivia from 1952 to 1956, and Hernan Siles Zuazo, president since that time, is the ideological product of the "radical Right"—that is, of German Nazism and