

Communism
and the
Conscience
of the West

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A R C H B I S H O P
FULTON J. SHEEN



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Dedicated to

MARY GRACIOUS MOTHER-HEART

of the

WORLD'S SAVIOUR

in

PRAYERFUL HOPE

of

THE CONVERSION OF RUSSIA

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN (1895–1979) was one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century. As the first Catholic televangelist on prime-time television, his program, *Life is Worth Living*, inspired an audience of nearly thirty million people weekly, more listeners than St. Paul ever could have reached during a lifetime of preaching. With his eloquent writing and preaching on television and radio, he movingly and masterfully portrayed life, eternity, love, sorrow, joy, freedom, suffering, marriage, and so much more. His memorable style was distinguished by his booming voice, his Irish wit and wisdom, and his warm smile.

In this carefully selected set of books, Sheen offers clear guidance on the problems affecting all people in today's world, including key ideologies that seek to destroy the Church and society, including Marxism and Freudianism, what is today called "Cultural Marxism." His spiritual and practical wisdom cover a wide variety of

subjects that range from discussions of down-to-earth spiritual and moral problems to provocative conversations on the meaning of life, family, education, Christianity, world affairs, and more. Together they add up to a stirring and challenging statement of Bishop Sheen's whole philosophy of life and living. With ease, Sheen shows the relationship between human reason and religion. He shows that the world of today has reached a point of irrationalism that is in utter contempt of lasting truths. With honesty and capable scholarship, Sheen has something to say for everyone. His works are of immediate concern to all men and women seeking understanding, belief, and purpose in these troubled times.

Bishop Sheen reminds us that if we are to help cure the modern world of pessimism and despair, hatred and confusion, we must enlist as warriors of love and peace. Sheen's daily Holy Hour before the Most Blessed Sacrament was the catalyst behind his preaching and writing but also his great love for the Blessed Mother. She was the woman he loved most, "The World's First Love," in addition to his great love for St. Thérèse, patroness of the foreign missions.

Sheen wrote over seventy books, many of which are still widely read today. When the first nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated in 1930 on NBC, Sheen was chosen as the first preacher. He hosted this nighttime radio program for twenty years from 1930 to 1950 before moving to television where he had his own show on prime-time TV from 1952 to 1957. Sheen twice won an Emmy for Most Outstanding Television Personality and was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. But more important than any earthly awards, Fulton Sheen's tireless evangelization efforts helped convert many to the Faith, especially Communist organizer Bella Dodd.

Entombed in a side altar at the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Peoria, Illinois, Sheen's cause for canonization was officially opened in 2002. May readers be inspired by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, a timeless voice described as one of the greatest Catholic philosophers of our age.

P R E F A C E

Every book should contain at least one idea. The one idea in this book is that the philosophy of communism and to some extent the Revolution of Communism are on the conscience of the Western world. This idea is not new. It has always been a part of the Christian tradition that the guilt of humanity at any one segment of the circle is to some extent the guilt of the circle itself. Closely allied to this is the other idea that the so-called Russian problem is not primarily economic or political but philosophical: it revolves around the nature of man. Here too the conscience of the Western world is involved, for the Western world generally has lost the concept of man as a creature made to the image and likeness of God, and reduced him either to a component part of the universe, to an economic animal or to a "physiological bag filled with psychological libido." Once man became materialized and atomized in Western thinking, it was only natural for a totalitarianism to arise to gather up the fragments into a new totality and substitute

the collective man for the individual man who was isolated from all social responsibilities.

This distortion of the true nature of man was due principally to the philosophy of historical liberalism, which saw man as endowed with no higher destiny than the economic. There is no word more “dangerous” than liberalism, because to oppose it is the new “unforgivable sin.” The word can be used in three senses: (a) As a philosophy which believes in the progressive achievement of civil, social, political, economic and religious liberties within the framework of a moral law. (b) As an attitude which denies all standards extrinsic to man himself, measures freedom as a physical power rather than a moral power and identifies progress by the height of the pile of discarded moral and religious traditions. (c) As an ideology generally identified with the doctrine of *laissez faire*. The first kind of liberalism is to be encouraged, prospered and achieved. The last two are false for reasons well known to those who are familiar with Laski, Hocking, Tawney, Weber and the Papal Encyclicals. It is the third kind of liberalism, called historical liberalism, with which we are very briefly concerned in this book. A little-known fact is that communism and the Catholic Church are one in their opposition to historical liberalism, but for very different reasons. The vast majority of profound thinkers who see the dangers of monopolistic capitalism as well as totalitarian capitalism are also opposed to it. Professor William Ernest Hocking among others points out three defects: “(1) It has shown itself incapable alone, of achieving social unity. (2) It has cultivated a pernicious separation of individual rights from individual duties. (3) It has lost its emotional force, because its emotional basis was in a serious degree unrealistic.”*

* *Lasting Elements of Individualism*, p. 40.

But this is giving undue importance to a word and an idea which plays no major role in this book and distracts from the general idea intended to be expressed, namely that up to this time Western civilization has been the superior civilization of the world. This was due not to the fact that it was “white”—though many imperialists among others assumed that it was—but to the fact that it was Christian. As Western civilization loses its Christianity it loses its superiority. The ideology of communism rose out of the secularized remnants of a Western civilization whose soul was once Christian. Communism is therefore, as Waldemar Gurian has said, both an “effect and a judgment” on Western bourgeois civilization.

For that reason communism is not treated as an economic doctrine, which it is not primarily, but as a philosophy of life. Nor is it viewed as a challenge to monopolistic capitalism, which itself stands in such need of regeneration. Rather communism is seen as the dehumanization of man by making him a social animal for whom an economic machine is the total meaning of existence. Communism represents an *active* barbarism outside Western civilization which has made inroads because of the *passive* barbarism within, which manifested itself in the general demoralization of society. It is the passive barbarism from within which contributes to some extent to active barbarism without for, as Toynbee shows, sixteen out of the nineteen civilizations which have decayed from the beginning of history until now, decayed from within.

The basic struggle today is not between individualism and collectivism, free enterprise and socialism, democracy and dictatorship. These are only the superficial manifestations of a deeper struggle which is moral and spiritual and involves above all else whether man shall exist for the state,

or the state for man, and whether freedom is of the spirit or a concession of a materialized society. It has not been given to every age in history to see the issue as clearly as it has been given to our own, for we have a double incentive to work for the peace and prosperity of the world: the first is the Gospel in its fullness, the second is the communism of Soviet Russia. The first teaches us that happiness comes from living rightly; the second, that misery comes from acting wrongly.

The author expresses his thanks to the publishers for their careful editing, to the Reverend Marcellus Scheuer, O. Carm., for reading the manuscript, and to Mr. Blair Taylor for his many helpful suggestions.

CHAPTER ONE

The Decline of Historical Liberalism and the Rise of the Antireligious Spirit

It is a characteristic of any decaying civilization that the great masses of the people are unconscious of the tragedy. Humanity in a crisis is generally insensitive to the gravity of the times in which it lives. Men do not want to believe their own times are wicked, partly because it involves too much self-accusation and principally because they have no standards outside of themselves by which to measure their times. If there is no fixed concept of justice how shall men know it is violated? Only those who live by faith really know what is happening in the world; the great masses without faith are unconscious of the destructive processes going on, because they have lost the vision of the heights from which they have fallen. The tragedy is not that the hairs of our civilization are gray; it is rather that we fail to see that they are. As Reinhold Niebuhr put it: "It is a strange irony of history that a commercial and industrial civilization which might have had special reasons for being apprehensive about its vitality and longevity, should have

been particularly optimistic.” The basic reason for this false optimism he attributes to the fact that our civilization is mechanical rather than organic. Nothing is more calculated to deceive men in regard to the nature of life than a civilization whose cement of social cohesion consists of the means of production and consumption.¹

The very day Sodom was destroyed, Scripture describes the sun as bright; people saw Noah preparing for the flood one hundred and twenty years before it came, but men would not believe. In the midst of seeming prosperity, the decree to the angels goes forth but the masses go on in their sordid routines. As Our Lord said: “For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the ark, and they knew not till the flood came, and took them all away; so also shall the coming of the Son of man be.” (Matthew 24:38, 39) Well may Our Saviour say to us what He said to the Sadducees and the Pharisees in His time: “When it is evening, you say: It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning: Today there will be a storm, for the sky is red and lowering. You know then how to discern the face of the sky; and can you not know the signs of the times?” (Matthew 16:2, 3)²

Do we know the signs of these appointed times? Most people are afraid to face the unpalatable fact that not a single *positive* major objective for which this war was fought has been achieved. Few realize that barbarism is not only outside us, but beneath us; that science, by making us spectators of reality, has blinded us to the necessity of being actors, and that the atomic bomb, by putting human power in our hands, has hidden the weakness of our hearts. The signs of our times point to the truth that we have come to the end of the post-Renaissance chapter of history which

made man the measure of all things. More particularly the three basic dogmas of the modern world are dissolving before our very eyes. We are witnessing first, the liquidation of the economic man, or the assumption that man who is a highly developed animal has no other function in life than to produce and acquire wealth, and then like the cattle in the pastures, be filled with years and die.

The basic assumption of bourgeois civilization was that the best interests of the world, the state and the community could be served by allowing each individual to work out his economic destiny as he saw fit. This is known as the principle of *laissez faire*. As far as possible individual life is unregulated by the state, whose function is purely negative, like that of a policeman. The less the state does, the better. It was not long until the evil of this principle manifested itself. If every individual is to be allowed to work out his economic destiny as he sees fit, it will not be long until wealth is concentrated in the hands of the few and the vast majority are reduced, as Hilaire Belloc showed, to a slave state.³ Thus from a false economic system which insisted only on *personal* right to property and forgot the *social use*, the world reacted to a totalitarian economy which insisted on *social use* and forgot *personal* rights. As a result the *homo oeconomicus* died and the *homo politicus* was born.⁴

Secondly, the modern world is witnessing the liquidation of the idea of the natural goodness of man, who has no need of God to give him rights, no need of a Redeemer to salvage him from guilt, because progress is automatic and inevitable, thanks to education and science. This false assumption had its roots in Rousseau, who reinterpreted the Christian tradition by making man naturally good and blaming institutions and civilizations for evil. Comte, Darwin and Spencer were subsequently invoked to support the

idea that man was on the road to becoming a god. But modern history has completely dissipated this false philosophy of man, as the interval between wars shows man becoming increasingly dehumanized. The interval between the Napoleonic and Franco-Prussian wars was 53 years, the interval between the Franco-Prussian War and World War I was 43 years, and the interval between World War I and World War II was 21 years—and this at a time when man has all the *material* conditions necessary for his happiness. Having lost the purpose of life which religion supplied, modern man became increasingly frustrated as his disappointed hedonism turned to pessimism. Thus man, who isolated himself from the religious community, now by reaction finds himself absorbed by the political community as despair becomes the dominant note of contemporary philosophy and literature.⁵

The third idea being liquidated today is rationalism understood in the sense that the supreme purpose of life is not the discovery of the meaning and the goal of life, but solely to devise new technical advances to make this world a city of man to displace the City of God. Rationalism properly understood is reason concerned with ends and means to an end; modern rationalism is reason concerned with means to the exclusion of ends. This was justified on the grounds that progress made ends impossible. The result was that man, instead of working toward an ideal, changed the ideal and called it progress. Paul Tillich says that “the decisive feature of the period of the victorious bourgeoisie is *the loss of control of human reason over man’s historical existence.*”⁶

Reaction has set in and man who surrendered his reason in the proper service of the term discovers that the state has pre-empted it as *planning* reason, so that now there is no reason but state reason which is Fascism, or class reason

which is communism as there was once a race reason which was Nazism. Other manifestations of irrationalism are to be found in Freudianism which makes the subconscious the determinant principle of life, or Marxism which supplants reason with historical determinism, or astrology which puts the blame on the stars.⁷

In more general terms, our day is witnessing the end of historical liberalism. Liberalism is a dangerous term to use simply because the modern mind never makes a distinction. If liberalism means a system which believes in progress toward freedom as the *right* to do whatever man *ought*, then liberalism is to be encouraged. If liberalism means a progressive repudiation of law and truth in the sense that freedom means the *right* to do whatever man *pleases*, then it is to be condemned. In the latter sense, the liberal is opposed to the reactionary though both have something in common; they never see permanence and change together. They take one to the exclusion of the other. The reactionary seizes upon permanency to the exclusion of change, and the liberal upon change to the exclusion of permanency. The reactionary wants things to remain as they are; the liberal wants change though he is little concerned with direction. The reactionary wants the clock but no time; the liberal wants the time but no clock. The reactionary believes in staying where he is, though he never inquires whether or not he has a right to be there; the liberal, on the contrary, never knows where he is going, he is only sure he is on his way.

The terms reactionary and liberal are so relative they mean little to thinking men who have either a knowledge of history or a remnant of reason. For example, the liberal of the last generation invoked liberalism to free economic activity from state control; the liberal of today invokes

liberalism to extend state control of the economic order. The old liberal was a defender of capitalism; the new liberal is reacting against capitalism and wants some form of collectivism or state control. The old liberal wanted liberty of press, speech and conscience within the framework of democracy; the new liberal, reacting against the old liberalism, wants the liberty without the framework as its safeguard. The old liberal rebelled against taxation without responsibility; the new liberal wants the taxation as a handout without responsibility. The old liberal 50 years ago was materialistic in science. His son, who calls himself a liberal, is today's reactionary for whom science is idealistic. The French liberals who protested against the authority of king and altar in the name of liberty were reactionaries, for they did not believe in extending that liberty to the proletariat. Many liberals who wrote they believed in the equality of all men kept slaves. To change it around, every reactionary is protesting against the last liberal. Sometimes in one man the liberal and the reactionary meet, as they did in the case of Milton. Milton was a liberal who favored a free press and protested against licensing of books; and then when a handsome salary was offered him he reacted against his liberalism and became an official censor of books.

We have in the world reactions against reactions; revolts against revolts; the reactionary and the liberal are on a seesaw, and think they are going places because they are going up and down or see their momentary triumph over their opponent. The new liberals are at war against the old liberals; the new rebels in rebellion against the old rebels. The liberal of today will be the reactionary of tomorrow. This so-called liberalism is only a reaction against the latest liberalism.

When we say liberalism is dying, we mean neither liberalism in the sense of a progressive acquisition of rational freedom, nor a progressive deterioration of rational standards, but historical liberalism with its roots in the seventeenth century or even earlier, which in the economic order became capitalism, in the political order nationalism, in the social order secularism, and which by reaction today has become totalitarianism.

Classic treatises on the history and development of historical liberalism are known to all scholars. Harold J. Laski, for example, in his work *The Rise of European Liberalism*, referring to its relation to an earlier philosophy of history writes: "It was in the interest of profit-making that Liberalism had broken the discipline of the medieval *Respublica Christiana*. . . . As an organized society, the liberal man at bottom had no defined objective save the making of wealth, no measurable criterion of function and status save ability to acquire it. . . ." ⁸ The more remote background of historical liberalism is to be found in the classic treatise of R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, in which he closely links up Puritanism with the rise of capitalism. ⁹ "A creed which transformed the acquisition of wealth from a drudgery or a temptation into a moral duty was the milk of babies. . . . The good Christian was not wholly dissimilar from the economic man."

From a divergent point of view, but still correlating the break-up of religious unity to the rise of economic man is the equally important treatise of Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. His thesis is that it was the change of moral standards which converted a natural frailty into a virtue. ¹⁰

In any case it is becoming increasingly clear that historical liberalism is like a sundial, which is unable to mark time

in the dark. Liberalism can function only in a society whose basis is moral, where the flotsam and jetsam of Christianity are still drifting about the world. From another point of view, historical liberalism is a parasite on a Christian civilization, and once that body upon which it clings ceases to be the leaven of society, then historical liberalism itself must perish. The individual liberties which historical liberalism emphasizes are secure only when the community is religious and can give an ethical foundation to these liberties. It may very well be that historical liberalism is only a transitional era in history between a civilization which was Christian and one which will be definitely anti-Christian.¹¹

The second great truth which the signs of the times portend is that we are definitely at the end of a nonreligious era of civilization, which regarded religion as an addendum to life, a pious extra, a morale builder for the individual but of no social relevance, an ambulance that took care of the wrecks of the social order until science reached a point where there would be no more wrecks, and which called on God only as a defender of national ideals, or as a silent partner whose name was used by the firm to give respectability but who had nothing to say about how the business should be run.

The new era into which we are entering is what might be called the religious phase of human history. By *religious* we do not mean that men will turn to God, but rather that the indifference to the absolute which characterized the liberal phase of civilization will be succeeded by a passion for an absolute. From now on the struggle will be not for the colonies and national rights, but for the souls of men. There will be no more half-drawn swords, no divided loyalties, no broad strokes of sophomoric tolerance; there will not even be any more great heresies, for heresies are

based on a partial acceptance of truth. The battle lines are already being clearly drawn and the basic issues are no longer in doubt. From now on men will divide themselves into two religions—understood again as surrender to an absolute. The conflict of the future is between the absolute who is the God-man, and the absolute which is the man-God; the God Who became man, and the man who makes himself God; brothers in Christ and comrades in Antichrist.

The Antichrist will not be so called; otherwise he would have no followers. He will not wear red tights, nor vomit sulphur, nor carry a trident nor wave an arrowed tail as Mephistopheles in *Faust*. This masquerade has helped the Devil convince men that he does not exist. When no man recognizes, the more power he exercises. God has defined Himself as “I am Who am,” and the Devil as “I am who am not.”

Nowhere in Sacred Scripture do we find warrant for the popular myth of the Devil as a buffoon who is dressed like the first “red.” Rather is he described as an angel fallen from heaven, and as “the Prince of this world,” whose business it is to tell us that there is no other world. His logic is simple: if there is no heaven there is no hell; if there is no hell, then there is no sin; if there is no sin, then there is no judge, and if there is no judgment then evil is good and good is evil.¹² But above all these descriptions, Our Lord tells us that he will be so much like Himself that he would deceive even the elect—and certainly no devil ever seen in picture books could deceive even the elect. How will he come in this new age to win followers to his religion?

The pre-Communist Russian belief is that he will come disguised as the Great Humanitarian; he will talk peace, prosperity and plenty not as means to lead us to God, but as ends in themselves. He will write books on the new idea of God, to suit the way people live; induce faith in astrology

so as to make not the will but the stars responsible for sins; he will explain guilt away psychologically as inhibited eroticism, make men shrink in shame if their fellow men say they are not broad-minded and liberal; he will be so broad-minded as to identify tolerance with indifference to right and wrong, truth and error; he will spread the lie that men will never be better until they make society better and thus have selfishness to provide fuel for the next revolution; he will foster science, but only to have armament makers use one marvel of science to destroy another; he will foster more divorces under the disguise that another partner is "vital"; he will increase love for love and decrease love for person; he will invoke religion to destroy religion; he will even speak of Christ and say that He was the greatest *man* who ever lived; his mission, he will say, will be to liberate men from the servitudes of superstition and Fascism, which he will never define; he will organize children's games, tell people whom they should and should not marry and unmarry, who should bear children and who should not; he will benevolently draw chocolate bars from his pockets for the little ones, and bottles of milk for the Hottentots.

He will tempt the Christian with the same three temptations with which he tempted Christ. The temptation to turn stones into bread as an earthly Messiah will become the temptation to sell freedom for security, making bread a political weapon which only those who think his way may eat. The temptation to work a miracle by recklessly throwing himself from a steeple will become a plea to desert the lofty pinnacles of truth where faith and reason reign, for those lower depths where the masses live on slogans and propaganda. He wants no proclamation of immutable principles from the lofty heights of a steeple, but mass organization through propaganda where only a common