

RELIGION IS AN OPIATE

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It is said that the heart of Russia is a red square. What is meant is, of course, that gigantic plot of land in the center of Moscow where lies the embalmed body of the dead Lenin. Where maneuver the gigantic armies of atheistic Russia under the sinister eyes of the purging and liquidating Stalin, “the glorious army which has never lost a parade.”

Ironically it was here, in the days gone by, that there had stood for centuries the most sacred shrine of Russia—the shrine of the Iberian Virgin, the Queen of Peace. Here thousands of pilgrims from all the Russias would gather in intercession, day and night imploring the Mother of God to intercede with her Divine Son for the healing of their infirmities and sicknesses.

But today on the blank wall facing this chapel, the Soviet overseers have painted in giant letters that detestable sneer of Karl Marx: “Religion, the opium of the people.”

The first reaction of the average Catholic is to shrug his shoulders at this as derisively he says to himself, “What foolishness. How could this man write such rot. And how could intelligent men accept such an inane statement?” Then with typical common sense the average Catholic will say: “Well, why bother with such drivel!”

STALIN INTERPRETS MARX

And such would be the wise thing to do, were it not for the fact, incredible as it seems, that this is one of the fundamental teachings in Russia today. A teaching that is penetrating deeply into the hearts of over a hundred and sixty million people in Russia itself. And millions of other people in other countries who have been ensnared by the false glitter of Communism. Thus it is advisable to consider this catch phrase for what it is worth.

It is pretty generally argued that Karl Marx meant something entirely different from what is the popular interpretation of the phrase today. Be that as it may, Karl Marx is now dead, and whatever he did mean when he wrote the phrase will never be known. And just how large the religious aspect of life loomed in his economic theories will never be known either. Nevertheless, “religion, the opium of the people” has now assumed a definite meaning and interpretation for the followers of Stalin.

Briefly it is this: Religion is an opiate to numb the faculties of men against the injustices all about them. To make them content with a miserable state in life. To accept oppression, grinding poverty, lack of the comforts of life, and misery. Religion accomplishes this, they say, by preaching that this is God’s Will for the individual man. That men are to forget such things in this life by laboring only for the reward of heavenly delight in the world to come. In brief, religion is dope!

THE TRUE CONCEPT OF RELIGION

But if there is anything that religion is not, it is not this. The very nature of religion contradicts such rot. Religion comes from the Latin words “re” and “ligio,” meaning to bind and rebind. Hence, religion is that bond which binds a man’s soul to his God. And rebinds God back to the soul of that man. Not one man in ten thousand is an atheist in the true sense of the word. Only a fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” Then why the argument against religion? Because of the prevalence in the world today of loose talking. And still worse, loose thinking. And the still worse, no thinking at all. So we have the vast number of people whose concept of religion is utterly vague and indefinite. Unfortunately, they confuse certain “isms” with religion itself.

FALSE PHILOSOPHIES

For instance, people speak of the Mohammedan religion. But Mohammedanism is not religion, it never was. It is simply a fatalistic philosophy. It probably is, in truth, an opium. To anything and everything the Mohammedan replies: “It is the decree of Allah.” Nothing can be done about it. Whether it be pestilence, or disease, or suffering, or poverty. Be resigned and accept it.

It is the same with Hinduism and Buddhism. With their philosophic teachings of re-incarnation. Men are born, and reborn into this world, to suffer or be rewarded according to the consequences of a former life. Everything is set and fixed. There is no relief. All things are decreed. Certainly, a most vicious fatalism. Man-made philosophies at their very worst.

It was also true, in the centuries gone by, when men left the true faith of God to found their own churches, only to wander into this same error and falsehood. Error soon contradicts itself. It leads to bigger and greater errors. Out of the dilemma of contradicting errors soon arose "predestination." It seemed an easy way to escape the logic of Catholic teachings. Everything is predestined from eternity. Either men are saved or they are not. If they are of the elect then it matters not how they sin, they shall be saved regardless. If they are not of the elect, then it matters not how good a life they lead. No matter how straight a path, it avails them nothing. They are condemned and that is all there is to it. A cheap philosophy for men to rid themselves of the discipline for just and moral living. A subterfuge for men to rid themselves of responsibility for sin.

CATHOLICISM A LIVING SPARK

It is only natural that confusing such fatalistic philosophies with religion should naturally have surrounded religion with the calumny and contempt that unfortunately encircle it today among the ignorant and unthinking. But to the thinking man, the educated man, the man who knows the history and the truths concerning the Catholic faith and its teachings, the fact stands out with super-abundant proof that religion, instead of being an opium, is the exact opposite.

For the Catholic Faith is no fatalistic philosophy. It is no man-made scheme of philosophy. The Catholic Church is the living, visible, teaching organization founded by Jesus Christ to bring to mankind the God-given truths of life, death and eternity.

This truth and the contingent truths of the existence of God, the Divinity of Christ, and the establishment of His Church, have been proven again and again.

But what we are interested in right here and now is, is the Catholic religion the opium of the people? Does it meet in any way the popular concept of this phrase?

The facts of the case are that the Catholic Church has not, does not, and never will take her stand otherwise than by the side of the poor. Injustice, poverty, oppression, and abuse, it fights with all the force of its very being. The voice of history declares that the Church from the time of Christ to the present day has been persecuted and oppressed because she would not keep silent. But how could the Church do anything else, when it considers the life of its Founder?

JESUS CHRIST

At the very outset of His public ministry did He not declare in His synagogue: "The spirit of the Lord is upon Me, wherefore He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, He hath sent Me to heal the contrite of heart; to preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward." An opiate?

Did Christ meekly accept the abuses so rampant in His time? Read the story of the Cleansing of the Temple. When with His scourges He drove out of the Holy Place men who were engaged there in dishonest dealings. And remember this was at the very beginning of His public life.

Of course, the future life must be a legitimate concern of any religion worthy of the name. Its primary and first concern. But it is just as certain that a true religion of God cannot have that as its only concern. Men live in the present life.

Here again we must have recourse to Jesus Christ, Himself. Surely, the greater part of His teachings concern man's life in this world. He came to bring to mankind the truth about life, death, and eternity. And His teachings concerning this earthly life are placed by Him as first and foremost.

A CHARTERED COURSE

Probably the best known of Christ's teachings is that beautiful "Sermon on the Mount." There is no question that here is contained God's expressed plan for His people as to the life they should lead on earth. Certain it is that there is

scarcely a word in it about life after death. Rather, it is a very practical outline of how men should live their lives here in this world. We are not certain whether it was given all at once or whether it is the gathered-up fragments of what Jesus said during His public ministry. All we know definitely, is that it is the Word of Christ. The fundamental outline of His teachings concerning this life. And as such is the command of Almighty God.

How can one read the “Sermon on the Mount,” and then assert that Christ’s message was opium for the people? It makes one realize more than ever, the perversity of eyes that will not see, and ears that will not hear.

TIME AND ETERNITY

It was a revolutionary teaching then. It is revolutionary now. It utterly disrupts any fatalistic philosophy or vicious complacency men may have regarding this boasted modern civilization. Inevitably the future life is mentioned in it. Because after all, life is short and eternity is—well, eternity. And from the very nature of life, men realize and must realize, that this life can only be a preparation for the eternal life which is to come. For inevitably the future life is affected. It must be a reward or punishment.

Hence Jesus was speaking in the present tense. He was simply but forcibly telling men as plainly as He could, that if they live this life, as they should live it, then they have nothing to worry about concerning the eternal life to come.

DEFENDER OF MAN’S RIGHTS

And, on the other hand, He drove home as vehemently and strongly as possible that there are sins which cry even to Heaven for vengeance! What are these sins? They are: Murder! Oppression of the poor! Defrauding laborers of their wages!

Furthermore, He declared God shall hold guilty as accessories to such sins not only the partakers of these crimes, but all who consent, who conceal, provoke, praise, keep silent, or who defend them.

Finally, was Christ asking men to be content with injustices, misery and exploitation when He cried to the leaders of His time, “Hypocrites! Ye fools! Ye generation of vipers!”? Nor was Christ content to simply cry out in words, but fitting His actions to His words, He so infuriated the exploiters of His time that they could do nothing else but murder Him. For murder has always been the refuge of tyrants in power. As it was then, always has been, so it is now. Although today, for the sake of politeness, it is called purging and liquidating.

The Crucifixion of Christ is the unanswerable proof that His religion was no opium for the people. He was crucified in the most frightful agony because He was challenging injustice, poverty, oppression and exploitation of the “common people.” He would not keep silent. Hence, they put Him out of the way.

FOLLOWING CHRIST

But has the Catholic Church followed steadfastly in the footsteps of Christ? Has She held aloft the banner of Christ as the Leader of the poor, oppressed, and exploited?

The Catholic knows the answer is affirmative. Nineteen hundred years ago when Christ founded this living, visible, teaching organization and sent it forth in His Name, He gave to mankind three solemn promises. “And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” “And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever. The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it **seeth** him not, nor **knoweth** him: but you shall know him; because he shall abide with you, and shall be in you.” “And behold I am with you all days, even to the con-summation of the world.” Believing that Christ was God, the Catholic knows His promises were kept. Even to the smallest detail.

A DIVINE CHURCH

Individuals might go astray. Christ even foretold this. But nevertheless, the Church, which is His living, visible, teaching organization, would carry on His Name, with His powers, to bring inviolate down through all ages His message to mankind.

Hence Catholics know that the Church has not and cannot fail. The Omnipotent God, the Eternal Truth, has solemnly promised that it would not.

But what about the non-Catholics who do not have this assurance of faith?

Sometimes uninformed and unthinking men make the thoughtless snap-judgment remark that the Church and Christianity have failed. Or they may repeat the biting words so often quoted: "Christianity has not failed, because it has never even been tried." But what then is the answer to them? What is the truth? To obtain the truth one has only to scan the pages of history! Even in histories written by enemies of the Church the truth clearly stands out in bold relief.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS NOT FAILED CHRIST.

THE CHURCH IN HISTORY

When the Catholic Faith began its work of bringing the truths of life and death and eternity to mankind, history tells us that the Church stood face to face with a vast slave state. A pagan world in which sixty per cent of the population were slaves in every sense of the word. True, many of them were well treated but the vast majority were not. They had no legal freedom or status. Into the amphitheater of battle came the Catholic Church crying forth as the fundamental basis of truth that all men were created by nature equal. In the face of persecution the Church would not and could not say anything else, although the soil of the Roman Empire ran red with the blood of her martyrs. But by their martyrdom, slavery was doomed. Not immediately abolished, it is true. But steadily and surely counteracted and overcome.

Then history records the gigantic struggle against the Barbaric oppression.

Then the fight against the fatalistic domination of Mohammed.

But, scarcely had the smoke of this battle died away when there began the life and death combat against the exploitation of the feudal system.

Battle followed battle! War followed war! The forces of aggression, exploitation, greed and oppression are never idle. But always is the Church valiantly and steadily battling against them.

Does this picture of history carry any suggestion of doping the people?

History emphatically tells us that down through the ages, without ceasing, the eternal truths have been indefatigably proclaimed and upheld by the Church.

But the battle must always rage. Thus, scarcely before the Church could recover from the exhausting combat of feudalism there came the sixteenth century with its new economic and philosophic upheaval. Undermining moral values. Driving the supernatural from the life of the people. Throwing mankind into a new kind of slavery. Industrialism came into being. Capitalism was born. The Church stood fighting but all seemed lost.

AN INSPIRED LEADER

But instead of losing heart, the Catholic religion relying upon the promises of Christ, severely disciplining itself, came back into the fray. Fearlessly she proclaimed justice to a world that had lost all sense of justice. Proclaimed the human brother-hood of man to a world which had become individualistic to the extreme. Fiercer and fiercer came the struggle until it was climaxed with that great encyclical of Leo XIII.

May we take from this encyclical some extracts and let the reader find out for himself just how much of an opiate the Catholic religion is? Just how much it would numb the faculties of man to injustice, poverty and submission. Here is a plan to think over. Not a five year plan. But a plan for all time.

Concerning Labor: It is honorable to earn one's living by labor. Every worker should have his rights as a human and a Christian, respected by his employer. On no account can any human be regarded as a mere chattel slave or instrument of making money.

Concerning the Family: The state does not possess the right to exercise control over family affairs.

Concerning Social Struggle: The worker unprotected by guilds as in former times, has been victimized by his employer and by the greed of infected competition and usury. The great masses of the people are thus enslaved by the wills of a few men.

Concerning Ownership of Property: Ownership of property should be as widespread as possible. Wealth should not be confined to a few hands at the expense of the welfare of many. There should be a more equitable distribution of property.

Concerning Governments: Governments should be constituted without involving wrong to humans and without violating the rights of the Church. Two powers, civil and ecclesiastical, have been appointed by God over the human race, each within its way supreme. In case of a conflict between the two, it should be remembered that all powers are ordained by God.

Concerning the Purpose of the State: To make the lives of working people more comfortable. To enable them to make some provision for themselves, and to lead lives as human beings and Christians.

Finally, Concerning Liberty of Speech and the Press: Within the bounds of moderation, such liberty should be the right of every man.

Leo's great encyclical startled the world. Capital and labor began to hesitate and to think. But at this time science brought into practical use electricity in its multiform applications. Quickly followed the auto-mobile with its imperious demands for new roads, and the multiple necessities of a new and giant industry. The tremendous resources of Australia began to develop. Production raced to a new incredible height. The World War reached forward to take mankind in its fiery grasp.

IN OUR DAY

Then came the debacle. We are all familiar with its disaster. Russia embraced Communism. Striving for perfection of a Slave State. Italy striving to avoid the horror of Communism became Fascist. Germany dreading Communistic evil became Nazi. In Australia came the gaunt specters of the depression. Unemployment, hunger, and want.

And what about the Church? Persecuted and martyred as always. Lashed at the pillar in Italy, crowned with thorns in Germany, crucified in agony in Russia. Would it dare to speak?

ANOTHER COURAGEOUS POPE

Into the teeth of an antagonistic and hating world, the aged Pontiff in Rome flung a new encyclical. And mankind gasped at its fearless wisdom and power. What did Pius XI say?

Leo's words were confirmed. Without God and obedience to God's teachings there can be no right ordering of society. The injustice and irrationality of the Capitalistic system is bitterly flayed. Communism, Fascism, and Nazism are condemned! The poor are oppressed and suffering. And this must not be.

Once again, if any man thinks the Catholic religion is the opium of the people, let him read the encyclicals of Pius XI. The "still, small voice" thundered above the roar of the world which would stifle it. For here and here alone, is salvation and peace and security for the fearful and trembling nations. Thinking men begin to realize that in religion lies the only hope for mankind. That unless the Church fights on, and unless men listen, heed, and obey it, it is the end of humanity and civilization. And well they know it.

The question is answered!

Clearly! Definitely! Completely!

As in the time of the early Apostles, the Church stands openly and immovably on the side of the people.

Fearlessly it contends and fights oppression, greed and the inhumanity of wealth, brute force, and hatred.

It is undeniable. The Catholic religion with the Popes as its head, from the time of Christ to the present time, has stood for the Divine qualities of justice and mercy in human relations.

If this be opium of the people, then the Catholic religion gladly admits her guilt.

AUSTRALIA IN THE FUTURE

Inevitably, the question narrows it-self down to this. We in Australia, what part will religion play in our future life?

After all, religion is a God-given instinct. And as such, it can never be conquered. Inevitably, man will return to religion. The ever-present visitation of death in our midst. The universal admission that virtue is its own reward is not sufficient for the moral living of this life. The briefness of this life and the instinct of a new life beyond the grave. All these and many other factors imperiously demand the reason why of our existence. The ultimate purpose of life. And these in turn demand the Revelation of the Almighty, Eternal God Whose own we are.

Surely, no Australian wants an atheistic government in control. Today we are pretty much familiar with the

conditions in Nazi Germany and Communistic Russia. Do we want the same thing in our country? God forbid! Sudden arrests in the middle of the night! Innocent people held months without trial! Concentration camps! Men condemned by tribunals without opportunity to know of what they are accused or who is the accuser! Terror inspiring more terror! Favoritism! Diabolical cruelty! Fiendish punishments and deaths!

OUR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Because we have been a deeply religious nation, whether we like it or not, Christian environment and Christian principles have more or less molded our lives. Thus we view the present setup in Russia and Germany with unmitigated horror and nauseating revolt. To the average Australian, cold-blooded cruelty and the fiendish, diabolical torturing of other men is as foreign as the Voodooistic cruelty of the African jungles.

What has made us sane, kind, neighborly people? The answer is our religion! And our religious fore-bearers!

NOT FOR AUSTRALIA

Down through the ages history points out only too clearly that religion is the only force, the only power, that prevents men from sinking to the level of beasts. And even lower than that. When anti-religious forces prevail even for a short time, what is the result? Bloodshed and cruelty! Purges and liquidations! The destroying of all decency, morals and self-respect! Womanhood sinking down to the lowest level! Woman becoming the chattel of the State! Only an instrument to satisfy lust and a bearer of children! Suspicion, dread, and fear in the place of peace, security, and true happiness! For the less favored in these nations, life becomes a living hell. And even for those in power, unless they are wholly depraved, happiness can be only the happiness of jungle beasts.

For the belief in God, the duty to worship God, is an instinct in every human soul. And when man suppresses this God-given instinct, the end is bound to be one of remorse and disaster. It has never happened otherwise. It never can be different. From depravity to depravity. From cruelty to more cruelty. From deceit to treachery. From treachery to betrayal. With the realization that every day brings death closer. With the fear of death that only those who fear annihilation can fear death.

If there is any lasting peace, contentment, or real, true happiness to be had living in this way, where can it possibly be found? Surely, those who have lived such lives have failed to show even the slightest semblance of inspiring happiness or thrilling contentment.

FOR MAN'S HAPPINESS

In the future the Catholic Church will continue as it has in the past. Teaching the real brotherhood of man. Not the common brutehood of a race. Insisting on the truth. The truth acknowledged in the heart of every man, but the only solution for the world crisis is brotherly love. The brotherly love which is simply a reflection of the Charity of God.

Surely, thinking men realize that this can never be brought about by the world's weapon of war. The rolling of the battle drums, the barking of cannons, and the staccato of machine-guns are not a solution. Rather they are an aggravation of inhumanity instead.

In the last analysis, calmly and coolly reasoned out, men must realize that the only way by which they may build a peaceful and happy world is through the religious teachings of sacrifice and brotherly love.

GOOD WILL TOWARD ALL

Sacrifice! That is, the voluntary sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the community. In the sacrifice of the class for the welfare of the nation. In the sacrifice of a nation for the benefit of a race. In the sacrifice of a race for the welfare of mankind.

Brotherly love! One hesitates to use the word "love." So many use this word today meaning only shallow sentimentality. But it was no shallow sentiment of which Christ spoke. Love, in the words of Christ, meant to have a good will. A good will that could not be discouraged. For as long as men are men, and that means until the end of time, there must be inevitably friction and conflict. For all men are inclined to be thoughtless and heedless at times. Even the saints had this failing. Thoughtless words, actions, omissions cause untold anger, misery and suffering.

Sometimes even the best of intentions and words and actions may be interpreted wrongly. The fatigues of life, the perversity of the human mind, the ravages of sickness, mental and physical, and the countless other individualities of each and every man, woman and child are bound to irritate and annoy. Bound to cause, sometimes at least, resentment and hasty anger. Then this brotherly love, this exercise of good will, is put to the test. It is thus with individuals. It is thus with nations.

Then too, the inequality in conditions of life, the chasm between the rich and poor, poverty and squalor, disease and crime. They will always be with us until the pride of life is overcome by sacrifice and love along the lines inculcated by the infinite wisdom of God through Christ.

WHAT RELIGION GIVES

Religion insists on taking things as they are. Religion brings out that truth so oftentimes overlooked that men are human beings. Not machines, slaves or chattels. For God has created men with intelligence, reason and common sense. And giving men these powers, man is sup-posed to use them to the best of his ability.

Good government is no exception. Whether it be of individuals, communities, or nations. There must be order and law. Naturally there could be no power of ruling unless there could be enforcement of this law on the will of others. Without government we should have anarchy. But the only kind of government and ruling that religion will commend is the rule of justice tempered by mercy. A government ruling without aggression. Guiding without driving. Bringing into line the unruly and self-willed without force or cruelty. A government guiding and ruling without conquest and brutal domination. A government, in other words, which realizes as religion teaches, that all power is from God.

But even then, as long as religion is religion, must the Church do its duty. Demanding for men their rights, protecting them to the best of its ability from any tyranny, oppression and brutality. Always in the past has religion been forced to fight. Always in the past has religion won. Because oppression, greed, exploitation and aggression are of men. While religion is from God.

Attila and Leo! Emperor Henry and Pope Gregory! Napoleon and Pius VII! Bismarck and Pius IX! Always the fight has been to the finish, but justice always won.

True it is, infinite patience is sometimes required to realize this. The patience of years, of decades, even of generations, to realize that religion will fight on until victory is achieved.

So, too, in the future. Religion will win in the end. That much is certain.

Inevitably, religion must lose some battles, but rest assured, it will always win the final one.

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