

BLACKFRIARS

CONTINUITY

THAT solidarity of mankind by which the fault of the first man was the guilt of all and by which his integrity would have been the safeguard of all, means for us now continuity of the past in the integrity of the present; this Christ offered on our altars for the sins under which we suffer.

As Christ's Agony and Passion were the acceptance, in the person of all mankind identified in the person of the Word made flesh, of the consequences of sin, so now is the spiritual and physical suffering of the human race under untold malice and injustice the consequence of sin. Its acceptance is actually an implied condition of our incorporation in the Mystical Body.

For the Church is not a devotional abstraction, not a spiritual Utopia; it is the present real body of redeemed mankind, of men whose common lives are weighed by the purchase of the Blood of Christ. So its holiness is not that of an ideal somehow raised above reality, but of reality itself made sacred by the Incarnation, the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ.

Made sacred at a price
made sacred in the price paid for it
united to Christ in His acceptance of it
united by its first piercing His divine humanity
received into His divine person even to its logical limit,
His death on the cross
but willingly received and so sanctified
made sacred in the person of Jesus Christ, our God who
rose from the dead
made sacred because it was accepted utterly and it was
God who accepted it.

The purchase of the real is thus the life of the Church. Small wonder that the historic Church can be intelligible to us only through the Agony, Passion and Death of Christ. There is no other conceivable way for us to approach it.

There is no communication to us of Christ's Incarnation in which our nature, presanctified in the person of Mary (herself in her integral sinlessness a recapitulation of all mankind) is restored to God without the free acceptance by Jesus Christ

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of our historic reality, of our continuity with the past, of the consequence of sin. Jesus accepted humanity in His Incarnation: He accepted *us* in Gethsemane. As the Incarnation is the unique *pied-à-terre* by which the two natures of God and man were united in one Person, so the Agony and Death of Christ are the unique means by which our real selves may be united to Him in one Body. We know that our flavour in His mouth was a bitterness which He nevertheless drank.

It is not the Incarnation considered alone which implies for us a *de facto* acceptance of the result of process in the present order of society. The argument favoured by the "mucker-in" involves either a non-sequitur or some theological forgetfulness. It is rather the redemptive action of the Church which involves, as the unique condition of its effectiveness, the acceptance of the consequences of sin. What is redeemed *in us* is not our nature, but ourselves. In Christ our nature stands for ever integrally restored. *That* is no battleground, for in it is nothing but victory. The battleground is our lives.

In proportion to the depth to which the social body is to be touched by redemptive action is the intimacy with which the consequences of its sins are to be accepted as being also ours. Ours because the body is ours and if we have sinned we have shared in the sins of all men. But ours too precisely as members of the Body of our redemption, because Christ has purchased them and has obliterated them by His Death. Continuity with the past and with the process of man's historical living is in this sense an implied condition of our incorporation in the Mystical Body. In Christ it is conceivable that one moment in the life of mankind should follow another. Considering ourselves not merely as material organisms subject to change but as the children of God who are also sinners, it is necessary to add that, save in Christ, life in time is impossible.

The continuity of redemption with history is that which is principally envisaged here. The continuity of grace with nature is a different but not alien concept. The important thing is to avoid confusion of the two. Confusion may react in two ways: (1) in an acosmic pessimism which cannot conceive of the Christian's continuity with the present order of society save as some sort of compromise, and consequently rejects it; (2) in a metaphysical optimism, cosmic and con-

tinuist, which is suspected by the other side of no very real appreciation of the historical complications of sin. Confusion is made worse by the use of theological analogies in a question whose solution lies in a theological penetration of economics, sociology and psychology.

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EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

POETRY AS PROPAGANDA. An article on *The Value of Poetry* by Father Richard Kehoe, O.P., in the January number of the DOWANHILL COLLEGE MAGAZINE deserves wide circulation:

It must be said immediately that by "value" in this title religious value is meant. Jeers and laughter perhaps. It *does* seem unenlightened to be prepared to treat poetry as some high form of propaganda. Nevertheless, there is a very important, a supremely important sense according to which this is justifiable. What is needed is very careful discrimination. One must not fall back into the heresy which regards poetry as being only a relative, that is a representational thing, the purpose of which should be to describe faithfully, represent accurately, in beautiful language and figures, this world of ours: simply to be a lovely clear mirror of physical and human nature and of their values.

The true sense in which it must be loyally proclaimed that poetry is essentially independent and autonomous in its truth and its beauty is contained in the statement that poetry like all art means creation, not imitation. Suppose a new flower were to appear on the earth. We should consider its beauty absolutely, not relatively: it would be beautiful for us not because the texture of its petals was an equivalent of the texture of a lovely face, nor because we saw in it a symbol of the glory of Solomon; it might mean such things for us, but that would be "accidental." Essentially it would be beautiful *in itself*, according to its own nature: to be appreciated it would need to be studied in itself, allowed to speak for itself. So with a poem. Its truth, its beauty are established by its own inherent laws, rhythm, nature; that is, they do not belong to it simply by reference, by association: for example, inasmuch as it calls up the beauty of sunrise or of the wake of the moon on the sea. It is *itself* a beautiful thing, as beautiful perhaps as the dawn or as moonlight. You insult it by suggesting that it is only an echo or a reflection of something else. In this indeed lies the glory of art, that it is a new creation by man. And in this its primary religious significance is to be found. It is a new world