

## EXTRACTS

NEW LIFE (July–August, 1950) has shown a deep perception of the needs of the day in making Cardinal Suhard's pastoral on the priesthood available in English under the title *The Priest in the Modern World*. The Cardinal realised that the world or the 'City' in which we live is in the making, and can be either the City of God or the City of Satan; and it is the priest's duty to work in unison with the priesthood of Christ to secure it for the former. For this very reason there will be tension and conflict in his life, for he is 'the man of God but a man among men'. He must incarnate the divine and the eternal in human ways. To preach integrally, the Word of God must be born again in his soul; he must be the 'Sacrament of Christ' in his life of poverty, chastity and obedience. So the priest will be an enigma, a 'sign of contradiction among men'. He is so like the rest of men, inevitably so involved and interested in all things human; yet he is apart and different. So simple, yet so inscrutable, adaptable, yet unchanging—the friend of all, yet given to none. All the paradoxes of the Gospel somehow come to life in him.

The priest stands for the truth that the world 'can only become fully the City of Men by becoming the City of God'. Owing to his training, he may grow up with too keen a sense of his separateness from the general run of men. He is rightly conscious of being a 'man of God', but 'he is a man of God so as to become the man of men'. He must bridge the abyss between 'the Church and the City of Men'. The feeling will often assail the priest that he exists for the chosen few—the *pusillus grex* who will consent to receive his ministrations; that the larger world outside the Church is no more than an incongruous frame within which he must continue in his lonely task. But this outer world exists to be ultimately incorporated in the Church; and this raises practical problems:

The task confronting the present generation of priests and those who come after them will be one of thinking and planning and loving in terms of the entire world, while with humble submission accepting reality with all its obstinate conservatism and inevitable flaws. The presence of the Church in the world of tomorrow very largely depends on the clearheadedness, prudence and breadth of mind with which this is done.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of these words. To think and to plan as Christians calls for a mind purified and strengthened by Charity. 'Clearheadedness, prudence and breadth of mind' are qualities for which a price must be paid. 'Clearheadedness' calls for hard intellectual labour, 'prudence' for moral discipline.

'breadth of mind' for the humble tolerance which goes with charity. We talk of the salvation of souls: we mean the 'salvation of men', for 'souls inhabit men of flesh and blood'. The Church in her task of 'restoring all things in Christ' is called upon 'to baptise not only the whole of mankind but the whole of man and everything through him'.

Towards the end of the letter the Cardinal treats of the spiritual life — 'the first condition of being a priest is to understand it. . . . Priestly effectiveness is first of all a matter of spirituality'. And the established practices can never be neglected:

'prayer, spiritual reading, days of recollection, retreats, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, Examination of Conscience, regular Confession, a well-said Office, Mass celebrated carefully and with deep recollection; these are spiritual values no priest can neglect, much less despise, without an imprudence whose consequences could become gravely culpable.'

But the priest's spiritual life must find expression in his moral character, and here he must give an example of a full humanity;

'if he wants the faithful to imitate him in an age made sceptical by the abuse of propaganda, he will have to shine forth first of all by his own example, and supernatural virtues. But these, if they are not to seem strange or despicable, in an age that calculates and compares, will have to rest more than ever before on genuine natural virtues, supernaturally practised. Reception of the priesthood dispenses neither from loyalty nor courage nor broadmindedness, nor a sharp sense of justice. Without these qualities the priest will never touch what is best in man and in contemporary humanism, and he should not be surprised if he does not.'

The virtues here selected for our notice are those which come from contact with common realities; they are not pre-eminently the virtues of a man wholly withdrawn from the world!

An equally realistic word follows, touching the culture which should mark the priest out from among his fellow men. If the priest is to be a 'Teacher of the Word' . . . 'he must acquire a culture which enables him to see the world, and men, and things from God's angle.' In other words his culture must be basically theological: basically but not exclusively so, for, as Pope Pius XI says in his Encyclical on the Priesthood:

'They must actually attain a higher standard of general education and learning. It must be broader and more complete, and it must correspond to the generally higher level and wider scope of modern education as compared with the past.'

And we may conclude this meditation on the Cardinal's great letter with words of his own:

'The priesthood was founded by *Love*, it is *Love* itself. . . . The priest has left all, abandoned all. . . . one good he wants for himself. . . . in this human world he has chosen *Love*. . . . He wants it for his brethren. . . . become now his only concern. . . . with it as a lever he can raise the World.'

And Love, be it said, is one of God's secret Names.

ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION, the time-honoured problem, is taken up once again in the Belgian counterpart of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT—*Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven* (Louvain: January 1950).

The relation between action and contemplation, between external and internal activity, constitutes one of the basic problems of the whole of human life, and leaves its impress on the entire civilisation. Our entire human culture will be fundamentally determined by our solution of this problem.

A wrong conception of the relation between the two is in fact the cause of the half-hearted Christianity of today. The Church has never wavered—contemplation takes precedence over action, and action is good only in so far as it ministers to and arises from contemplation. But today, on the contrary, people will say that contemplation is useless, while they lay the emphasis on what is achieved and visible results.

In this atmosphere of economic, industrial and technical efficiency, . . . spiritual withdrawal and interior surrender to the divine workings, have been forced more and more to wither away.

This disease has affected religious as well as lay life. Religion is essentially a means of union with God; and it is accomplished only in an atmosphere of prayer and recollection. But, in the modern atmosphere of efficiency, the religious is like a tropical plant transplanted to a hard climate. Now all prayer is directed to living rightly, whereas before, all right living was directed to prayer.

NOUVELLE REVUE THEOLOGIQUE (Louvain: February) translates the Pope's discourse to the Congress of Religions—8th December, 1950—and Père Carpentier comments on the pronouncement. He sums it up under five major problems for which the Holy Father seeks a solution: (a) Religious, particularly religious priests, tend to be separated from the 'hierarchy'; (b) the inclination to identify the priestly state with the state of perfection begins to exclude religious from an official part in the apostolate; (c) the desire for efficiency and practical achievement condemns the uselessness of the religious; (d) the attraction for activity among the religious themselves; and (e) the problems of adaptation of religious life.

LA VIE SPIRITUELLE (March), devoted to Easter as the Christians' 'Exodus' in the sense of the flight to the Promised Land, contains a useful omnibus review of recent works about the clergy.