

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

THROUGH SOCIAL ACTION TO THEOLOGY. It has been repeated, times without number, that Catholic action must be the fruit of Catholic contemplation. Catholic social action, if it is to be effective and worthy of the name, must be rooted in Catholic theology and Catholic dogma: there can be no real "practical Christianity" which is not based on real understanding of revealed Christian truths. Perhaps this is not yet so fully realized among us as it should be; and the example of the group of Anglican social workers represented by the Church Union School of Sociology, the League of the Kingdom of God and the quarterly review *CHRISTENDOM* is not without value to ourselves. The Editorial on *The Return to Theology* in the current number deserves quotation:

The Oxford Summer School (of Sociology), as a notice in this number and the publication of its preliminary papers show, is going back to theology. Perhaps it would be even truer to say that it has been thrown back on theology. After ten fertile years, in which nearly every aspect of contemporary civilization has been scrutinized in the light of the Faith, and the true path forward indicated in many directions, it has become apparent that the forces which block the way to the approach to a Christian order have their origin in the sphere of ideas. They are, indeed, ultimately nothing other than heresies, but heresies which in some cases are assuming the character of competing religions. The Monist Materialism of Moscow, the Racial Messianism of Berlin have now passed the stage of tolerating Christianity. . . . In such circumstances it is unrealistic to talk of "Christianizing the social order." It is necessary first to Christianize the mind and will of Christians themselves, that they may understand the world in which they are living, and where its purposes and assumptions are at variance with the revelation of God. And for this it is essential that we return to theology—those of us, that is, who have not to visit it for the first time.

Mr. Christopher Dawson has already insisted on the mutual benefits which would accrue from the collaboration of theologians and sociologists. The quality of the work which is being done by this group of Anglicans, and the new life which they are infusing into Anglican theology, is evidenced in almost every number of *CHRISTENDOM*. Another good example of their work will be found in the essay

of the Rev. V. A. Demant in the June number of *THEOLOGY* on *The Catholic Doctrine of Freedom in Relation to Secular Totalitarianism*—its debt to Continental Catholic writers enhances rather than reduces its usefulness to ourselves. But they are not satisfied with theologizing sociology. The *CHRISTENDOM* Editorial continues:

But if, as sociologists, we have to return to theology under the pressure of the world situation, it is equally the duty of our theologians to aid in establishing contact between the Faith and sociological issues. . . . Leading Christian thinkers in this field have not, perhaps, been as prompt as they should have been to recognize that sociological problems impinge upon, when they do not actually fall within, the sphere of moral theology, and that it is unrealistic—and to some extent even futile—to discuss the moral dilemmas in which the faithful may find themselves altogether without reference to the social circumstances which so often create them. . . . But indeed it is not merely the scope of *moral* theology which is at issue here, but rather the whole doctrinal mission of Christianity. . . .

Catholics could probably put forward an even better case for the necessity of Theology—both dogmatic and moral—for true Christian social action. But the example of the Church Union Summer School, which has obtained the services of some of the best Anglican divines of the day to lecture on purely theological subjects, should not pass unheeded. It is, moreover, an enterprise which should prepare the way for our closer understanding with those non-Catholic Christians who are zealously labouring to establish the Kingdom of God in modern society.

CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS. Possibilities not only of mutual understanding but of collaboration in this direction are suggested by the joint manifesto issued simultaneously in the current issues of *COLOSSEUM* and *PLATFORM*, the organ of the Seven Years Association. More particularized than a manifesto can be is *The Possibility of a New Christian Order* by Jacques Maritain in the former of these periodicals. (A pity it has not been rendered into more lucid English.) Having treated of the possibilities (real but remote) of establishing a truly Christian society, M. Maritain has some wise things to say regarding the means to be taken here and now to bring it about. He bids us eschew hope of quick returns. We are summoned to political action, and political

action which will call for heroism, but our objective is a distant one and we must take the "long view."

Foresters work for the future condition of the forest, which they have calculated exactly, yet which neither they nor their children will ever see. In the same way the vigour of this mode of political action is measured by a distant object; the end directly determining it consists in exact but distant achievement, and it is in function of this end that all the rest is ordered. . . . It is only (and nothing is more truly human) the refusal to sacrifice the future to the present, a *conversion* towards an end and a *concentration* on a centre which is not the present order, but instead, a new Christendom demanding long preparation, on a wider scale and with greater patience than that of the generations of militant socialists who prepared the communist revolution in Russia. Nothing is really more scandalous (and in the most revolutionary sense, because it is revolutionary even with regard to revolution) than belief in "Christian politics" and pretending to work in this world along the lines of Christian political action. The Christians who realize all this know that the first way to serve the common good in this world is to remain faithful to the values of truth, justice and charity which are the principal element of it. And with as much enthusiasm and a better claim than the disciples of Proudhon and Marx who, at the cost of all the abnegation needed, keep and nurse in their hearts the future of their revolution, the Christian keeps and nurtures in his soul and in his actions the germ of the ideal of the new Christian order which it is his mission to prepare in time and for time, for the earthly history of this poor world.

The voice of the disappointed and despairing sage? A corrective at least to much current misguided enthusiasm and impatience; and a truly Christian and philosophical view. But we must be on our guard against a *purification des moyens* which may be used as a pretext for not taking any means at all and relapsing into lethargy. And while our attention must be ever focussed on the ultimate and remote objective, that is no reason for reacting into an indifference to the here-and-now to which we individually are called.

THOMISM AND THE SCIENCES. The May number of KULTUUR-LEVEN contains an important article by Fr. De Petter, O.P., on a *Neo-Thomist Theory of Science*, treating of the need for a critical synthesis of the modern sciences based on Aristotelian-Thomistic principles. At present, Fr. De Petter finds, there is an antithesis between philosophy and

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science, philosophy having largely succumbed to the trends of thought of the sciences. The *Geisteswissenschaften* of Dilthey, the philosophy of Bergson, and suchlike, are little more than attempts to safeguard philosophic thought against the materialistic tendencies of the physico-mathematical sciences. Although some modern scientists like Eddington are careful to circumscribe the domain of exact science so as not to encroach on philosophy, there is need for important work on the part of the philosopher. A place must be found for the newer sciences within the traditional framework. The author contends that this can be achieved by widening the thomistic generic notion of science in order to include the more highly differentiated branches of modern science. His suggestions are valuable; but one wonders why he persists in speaking of *Neo-Thomism*. *Neo-Thomism* is either Thomism or not Thomism at all; unless we are to suppose that Thomism *tout court* is some obsolete mediæval lore, the *neo* is as meaningless as it is ugly.—Another excellent article in the Flemish Dominicans' review is that on *New Catholic Church Architecture* by V. Marres. The author, himself a well-known architect, gives some illuminating reflexions on how a Catholic church should be built, and illustrates his observations with reproductions of his own plans. His churches, accommodating 300, 650 or 900-1000 people, show how a restrained modern style can admirably combine beauty and function.

NARROW MINDEDNESS. From a model essay by the Headmaster of Blackfriars School, Laxton, in the current number of THE HOWARDIAN:

. . . A narrow-minded person is a person whose mind only grasps a very tiny portion of the things that are in the world to be grasped, and who does not realize the fact. According to this definition the so-called broad-minded person who thinks Catholics very narrow-minded is really proving how extremely narrow-minded he really is himself because he simply does not understand what he is talking about. That is the first characteristic of a really narrow-minded person—he talks about things he does not understand as if he understood them perfectly. We are all of us apt to be narrow-minded in this sense about some things. The danger is that our narrow-mindedness may become a settled habit, which makes us unwilling even to try to understand things that at the moment we do not appreciate. . . .

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The development of the capacity to appreciate ought never to stop—and it never will stop provided we give ourselves a chance. Education is its motive power and if we neglect our education we shall become narrow-minded, failing to appreciate what we ought to appreciate; and, what is far worse, sometimes boasting of our lack of appreciation as if it was something to be proud of. When we speak of education here we do not mean only that formation which we get at school; that is only the beginning. . . . School and Schoolmasters supply the material and can help in giving advice and direction, but the work itself must be done by the determination and enthusiasm of the individual. Only you can prevent yourself from becoming narrow-minded.

CONTEMPORANEA. AMERICAN REVIEW (Summer): *Sculpture in the Machine Age*. Eric Gill at his strongest. *A Note on Nicholas Berdyaev* by Austin Warren draws attention to Berdyaev's subjectivism, individualism, idealism and anti-institutionalism. "It is puzzling to find Berdyaev's books sponsored by a leading Roman Catholic publisher and winning their chief public among the Catholic intelligentsia. . . . In the last analysis Berdyaev's is a 'world-fleeing' rather than a 'world-penetrating' attitude. . . . He cannot help those who, whether Christians or humanists, believe that it is the function of the highest to incarnate itself." *Humanism and Religion* by Chas. F. Ronayne compares and contrasts the Christian humanism of Fr. Gerald Vann with the autonomous humanism of Irving Babbitt.

CLERGY REVIEW (April and June): *Servile Work* by Rev. L. L. McReavy. Theological, historical and juridical learning combine with common-sense to plead for revision of commonly accepted interpretations of a precept of the Church.

COLOSSEUM (June): *Energeticism in the Totalitarian State*. Mr. E. I. Watkin simplifies, perhaps over-simplifies, the philosophy of Fascism and Nazism.

G.K.'s WEEKLY (June 13): *What the German Churches are fighting for*. The last instalment of a series by Prof. Charles Sareola: "Hitler has worked an amazing miracle. For the first time in German history all the Christian Churches are joined in a conflict in which the issue will be decided not by political or military weapons but by the weapons of the spirit." *A Memory* by G. K. Chesterton. Jubilee day in a little French town. G. K. at his best.

HOCHLAND (June): *Die Ueberwindung des Liberalismus* by Prof. Ernst Michel is mainly, despite the innocuous title, a singularly lucid and courageous statement of the Christian case against secular and racial totalitarianism.

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- MONTH (June): *Abbot Chapman on Prayer* by the Most Rev. Alban Goodier and *Mr. E. I. Watkin, Philosopher* by Vincent Turner: gentle but incisive correctives to two recent books.
- ORATE FRATRES (May 18): *Liturgy and Popular Devotions* by the Most Rev. L. J. Kerkhofs. Wherein they differ, and how the latter should be used to promote and popularize the former.
- REVUE DES JEUNES (May 15): *Quinze ans de théâtre sur le plan chrétien* by Henri Ghéon. An authoritative account of efforts towards a "Catholic theatre" in France since 1920.
- VIE INTELLECTUELLE (May 25): *Désagregation de l'art*: a philosophical soliloquy on tendencies in contemporary art, with the moral to be drawn, by Wladimir Weidlé.
- VIE SPIRITUELLE (June): *Le journal spirituel d'un jeune chauffeur de camion*: a saintly lorry-driver's spiritual diary. *La rationalisation de l'Apostolat*: an admirable and courageous presentation of the need for lay Catholic Action, and an exposure of the evils of a purely clerical apostolate. *Théologie mystique et psychiatrie* by G. Rabeau and *La notion de "psychopathologique" dans ses rapports avec les problèmes mystiques*. Two important papers by a theologian and a psychiatrist on the possibilities and value of collaboration in the study of mystical states and phenomena and in spiritual direction.

PENGUIN.