

## OBITER

THE PRIMACY OF THE COMMON GOOD may seem a hackneyed title, little suited to attract the reader to an important topic, but *La France Catholique* (14th October) draws attention in these words to two of the Pope's utterances on the question of the social order. Wisely it points out that neither is to be considered as an *exposé* of the whole question, but that each sheds light on certain aspects of the Church's social teaching. In his message to the German Catholics the Pope showed that the Church's concern for the proletariat has not arisen in a day, but goes back sixty years to *Rerum Novarum*, and this concern is not speculative, but is based on real facts. The Church's social teaching penetrates to the *consciencies* of Christians of whom its social action demands immediate sacrifices.

This reminds us, says the French journal, of the apostolic accent of the noble admonition: 'Our duty is not to weep, it is to act. . . .

This is action's hour', repeated incessantly for the last 10 years by Pius XII. This insistence ought to make each of us reflect.

How have we responded to this call?

But action is of no avail without knowledge, and the Pope returns to the keystone of this social doctrine—that of the primacy of the common good, which must be constantly before men's minds. Class-consciousness obscures that primacy, and the modern apostolate itself is in danger of being carried away by some such false consciousness. The Pope speaks, too, of the *apparent* opposition between capital and labour. Class-consciousness and this opposition are part of the marxist stock-in-trade. The Church's social action must aim at resolving these oppositions by an understanding of the real issues—and the common good of course provides the answer.

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FICHES DOCUMENTAIRES (for October) which contains the French translation of both these papal utterances also contains a long article on the social and religious situation in Italy. In that country the birth-rate is still going up, so that every year work has to be found for 20,000 new workers, with unemployment standing at the two million level. Here is to be found the cause of communist success in that Catholic country, especially with the cost of living increasing so greatly. In face of such economic crises the social teaching and social action of the Church find very difficult obstacles in the way of their effectiveness. The Italian Government has to encourage emigration and greater industrialisation, and in addition, with 45 per cent of its population agriculturalist, it plans to start a certain number of small holdings. The people themselves have formed an important syndicate, the C.G.I.L.—the General Con-

federation of Italian Labour—which in view of the Church's suspicion of national, monopolist syndicates is treated with caution by the Pope and the clergy. We can see how difficult it is in such cases as these for the Church to be effective in its social action and how everything seems disposed in favour of marxist prosperity. Needless to say there is a great deal of activity in Italy in the realms of Catholic social study and action. But that country remains an outstanding example of the profound difficulties facing the Church in her effort to bring the moral law and the gospels to bear on modern social conditions.

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THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT is one of the most hopeful of the systems sponsored by the Church in many parts of the world to solve this terrible impasse, not between Capital and Labour, but between the Gospel and Industrialism. *The Catholic Worker* (October) gives examples of its effectiveness in the West Indies. Fr John Sullivan, a Boston Jesuit, has done much in Jamaica on the lines of the Antigonish movement in Nova Scotia.

As he saw the problem it was the job of himself and of his fellow priests to help the Jamaicans to get to Heaven, but when people have no dress and no paints but lots of pride, there is no use in holding catechism classes—you must first get them clothes.

The Credit Union started by Fr Sullivan has spread to many parts of the West Indies including Grenada where Fr A. H. Bowering, O.P., has done a great deal on these lines for the islanders in their staple industries of nutmegs and cocoa. It would seem that the territorial unit of an island provides the greatest facilities for furthering the Cooperative movement. If so perhaps the strongholds of the faith in the future will be found in island communities.

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EXISTENTIALISM, it has been said, died in France when it was born in England. Not being of a logical bent the Anglo-Saxon is too liable to pick up the backwash from the sharp thrust of the keen Gallic mind. Now the backwash is turning into a confusion of waves and we are treated in *La Vie Spirituelle* (October) to the 'Anti-existentialism of Maurice Blondel'. Blondel apparently suggested in 1946 that this popular philosophy was a rather juvenile affair and he surely expressed the suspicions of many of us when he said, 'The acceptable meaning which has been given to this term "existentialism" does not seem precise or clear enough to avoid the obvious danger of failing to bring to the *philosophia perennis* any illuminating or helpful meaning'. And the author of the article, Jacques Paliard, considers the criticism in terms of the application of the distinction of *esse* and *ens* to the foundations of existentialism.

Blondel is, of course, too inclined to dissociate essence from existence in his quest for the essence of action. But there can be no doubt that the true critique of existentialism must follow the accurate distinction of *esse* and *ens*; so that it is perhaps unfortunate that Dom Márk Pontifex in the *Downside Review* (Autumn) should attack the scholastic thomist teaching on 'the meaning of *esse*' as put forward by Fr Hilary Carpenter, O.P. Fr Carpenter has done a great deal already to clarify this very abstruse metaphysical concept, and his article in *Dominican Studies* (January), which Dom Pontifex criticises, went a long way towards the clarification of the bases of existence. However such discussion is always valuable and we may hope that the discussion will continue and lead to a much clearer approach to this new and elusive philosophy called 'existentialism'.

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THE NEW ENGLISH WEEKLY which has sustained a very high standard of intelligent comment over a number of years has been compelled to cease publication. It is distressing to see the small independent journals such as the *Weekly Review* and the *New English Weekly* being steamrollered by competition with Big Business in the realms of the Press. Great honour is due to the editor, Mr Philip Mairet, whose comments every week always implied a sure and intelligent foundation. The success of the weekly in the last ten years is due to his unflagging energy.

L'ART SACRE, on the other hand, has reappeared after a year's apparent defeat. The subject of the October issue is the Decoration of Churches (Blackfriars Publications; 3s.), a very important subject since modern church architecture has become so functional and mathematical as to make the problem of decoration very acute. Pères Regamey, Roguet and Couturier all contribute articles of interest and the review is full of most instructive illustrations.

LOCUM.