

## A RECALL TO REASON

IF any new proof were required to establish the rapid decay of the society in which we live, none more convincing could be adduced than the increasing volume of appeals to reason which have been issued by competent authorities of late years. It is an unhappy reflection that this iteration is made necessary by the disregard with which they have been met; for it is axiomatic that the frequency of such appeals is governed by the heedlessness with which they are received.

A recent issue of the *Tablet* contained a report of the moving address made by the Pope, from what was thought to be his death-bed on Christmas Eve, as well as a careful commentary on the *Recall to Religion* made a short time previously by the Archbishop of Canterbury. On another page news was given of the latest book written by the Master General of the Order of Preachers. *Appel au Bon Sens*<sup>1</sup> has created something of a sensation in France and it will, perhaps, not be out of place to suggest some reasons for this; particularly as the book is not likely to have a wide circulation among English readers. Not only the style but the purpose of the *Appel* is French, as the following paragraph makes clear. The author suggests that his illustrious predecessor Lacordaire, were he alive to-day, would address his fellow countrymen in some such terms as these:

O mon pays, nous vivons tous en ce moment des heures difficiles. Comme le reste du monde vous êtes aussi en proie à bien des crises, contre lesquelles vous luttez avec intelligence et énergie. Jamais il n'a été plus désirable de voir tous vos enfants s'unir autour de leurs chefs responsables pour vaincre les ennemis du dedans et du dehors. Malheureusement, vos enfants n'ont pas tous l'air de le comprendre; il leur arrive encore de se disputer entre eux. Si presque tous sont d'avis qu'il vous faut accumuler des forces matérielles pour rendre nos frontières inviolables, beaucoup n'ont pas l'air de se douter que les forces matérielles ne peuvent rien sans les forces morales. Or, c'est de forces morales que vous avez surtout besoin. Il les faut restaurer partout dans les consciences individuelles, dans la famille, dans la profession.

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<sup>1</sup> *Appel au Bon Sens*, M.-S. Gillet, Maître General des Frères Prêcheurs (Editions Spes, Paris; 15 francs).

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Nous avons besoin dans la société d'autorités qui commandent, de sujets qui obéissent. Alors seulement nous éprouverons le besoin et nous comprendrons le devoir de nous unir et de centupler nos forces par notre union. Ce jour-là, nous n'aurons plus rien à craindre, ni à l'intérieur, ni à l'extérieur.

Mais pour en arriver là, ô mon pays, vous devez dès maintenant faire appel à la bonne volonté de tous vos enfants sans exception, de ceux-là aussi—ne disons pas surtout, pour ne blesser personne—qui par vocation doivent prêcher, en même temps que la vérité, la justice et la charité, et rappeler à tous leurs concitoyens qu'ils doivent s'aimer les uns les autres comme le Christ les a aimés. C'est pourquoi, au nom des Frères Prêcheurs français je viens vous offrir, pour vous aider dans votre tâche difficile, leur bonne volonté à tous, soutenus, fortifiés qu'ils sont par deux amours indéfectibles et qui loin de se nuire, se renforcent l'un l'autre l'amour de l'Eglise et de la patrie.

It is not necessary to be very familiar with the chaotic conditions which prevail in France to see why this re-evocation of the famous preacher of Notre-Dame has rallied the spirit of serious Frenchmen. There was, they thought, no longer any new thing to be said, and indeed there is nothing in the three hundred pages of this book which has not been said before both by others and by the author himself; but it would seem that Père Gillet has hit upon a method of "getting across" which has been crowned with success. In a chapter devoted to the revival of Thomism he emphasizes the need of adapting tried principles to the problems of the modern life, and especially by complementing the deductive method with the inductive which is accessible to all. And a comparison with his last book,<sup>2</sup> issued about two years ago, indicates that the Master General practises what he preaches, for a glance shows a deliberate change of method to suit a wider range of readers.

This method of restatement has a great advantage over more synthetic appeals such as pastorals and wireless addresses whose effect is restricted by the absence of any elaboration. Here the individual who is moved by the argument will find within a few pages sufficient matter to prevent him from putting off research until another day. In an age

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<sup>2</sup> *Culture et Ordre Social* (reviewed in BLACKFRIARS, August, 1935).

when reliance on authorities supplies the lack of grounding in principles, such a book constitutes a valuable armoury for the individual defender of principles; easier than encyclicals, less cumbrous than text-books, it is the more needed to-day when facile argument holds sway.

The book falls into two distinct parts. The first entitled *Sagesse d'hier* is devoted to full-length portraits of three outstanding characters of the past century: Lacordaire, Ozanam and Pius X. Their career serves to illustrate a stage of development. Lacordaire was the champion of liberty: he won freedom for Catholic life at the time when it seemed most threatened—*liberté de croire, liberté d'enseignement, liberté d'association*. The story is well known, but it is particularly encouraging in the dark days through which France is passing. Less familiar but equally encouraging is the career of Frédéric Ozanam. He is known as the founder of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, but, as is pointed out here, these grew without premeditation out of a small assembly of pioneers. What has been too little appreciated is the prominent part played by Ozanam in working out the basic principles of two outstanding features of Catholic life to-day, namely *the apostolate of the laity* and the relations of charity to justice embodied in the phrase *social justice*. A hundred years is a long time to wait for recognition, but there are notable signs that the true value is beginning to be given to the influence of the unassuming professor who, if and when he comes to be elevated to the altars of the Church, will serve as a model to every *paterfamilias*. The third figure, who passed from the stage more recently, is also too little known. The Pope who stemmed the tide of Modernism is perhaps better known as the Pope of frequent Communion, but the far-reaching effects of the policy of Papa Sarto, as he is still affectionately called in Italy, on the spiritual complexion of contemporary Catholicism have yet to be described in full. The rapid progress of the process of canonization should do much to bring the inspiring character of Pius X within the knowledge of the millions who owe so much to him.

Among the correspondence which followed the *Recall to*

*Religion*, to which we referred earlier on, there occurred a letter which ascribed the drop in moral standards to "a purely naturalistic interpretation of man, inconsistent with religion in any proper sense." The writer insisted that the very ideas of manhood and its essential values had changed seriously since the War and appealed for a doctrine of personality truer to all the facts, which would revive reverence for human nature. Now it happens that this theme is a favourite of Père Gillet's and it is interesting to see the object lesson which he finds in the Missionary endeavour of modern times. The contrast in method between the approach to the civilized and the uncivilized man serves as an introduction to the second part entitled: *les Follies d'aujourd'hui*. The study of so-called civilized society is complicated by *l'individualisme social* which flows from the deliberate elimination of all but natural values first from business and now from morality, so that, in fact, society is to-day anti-social in its principles. This paradoxical situation is tragic because it is founded on a double fault: a want of accuracy and a want of common sense: hence the appeal to reason. So brief a summary cannot exhaust the analysis or the argument, but it enables one to see that the only solution to this *confusionisme* is provided by Christian charity. Here there is an important passage which distinguishes unprincipled charity or natural benevolence from true charity based on supernatural faith and grace. Condensed into a few terse lines which theologians would take for granted there is in it more sound psychology and common sense than goes to make many a manual of social science, and with it is a persuasive optimism which is truly inspiring.

The chapter dealing with the part which the renewed study of St. Thomas has already played and is destined to play has already been mentioned. It sums up the case for reason and ends with the confident assurance, based on M. Bergson's letter to Père Gorce, that the old principles will soon triumph in philosophy as well as in theology. Another chapter is devoted to the social doctrine of the Church. The absolute incompatibility of Communism with Christian ideals is clearly established and, in passing, recognition is given to

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the writing of Marc Scherer.<sup>3</sup> The opportunity for concerted action is insisted on in the last chapter on the necessity for peace. Here again the dangers of a *fausse mystique* are exposed. "Laissons là l'idéologie et consultons l'expérience." The constitutions of religious orders prove that it is men, not they themselves, who need to be changed; but because there is no agreement as to the basis of morality there must be a revival of the traditional culture if civilization is to survive. Only the humanities will ensure that common ground which is necessary for the true reverence of one another which is the basis of peace at home and abroad. These are the concluding words of the *Appel*: "En même temps qu'à l'Humanisme, la société doit donc revenir au Christianisme. Il ne s'agit pas pour cela de retourner en arrière, d'opposer une fois de plus la tradition au progrès; il s'agit seulement d'assurer à tout ce qui change, dans l'homme et dans la société, des bases humaines immuables; de contrôler et de limiter l'accidentel par la sauvegard de l'essentiel; d'assurer en un mot sur la matière la primauté de l'esprit. A ces conditions, mais à ces conditions seulement, nous pourrons arriver à rétablir dans le monde une paix durable, à la fois humaine et chrétienne."

HERBERT KILDANY.

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<sup>3</sup> *Communistes et Catholiques* (Les Editions du Cerf; 5 francs).