

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

THE CHURCH UNITY OCTAVE is, even humanly speaking, doing much to arouse Catholics in other lands to a sense of the tragedy of divided Christendom and to the need for labouring for the restoration of unity. In many Continental Catholic churches (as well as in many non-Catholic places of worship) public prayers are offered daily during the Octave. But good-will is not enough; it must be enlightened and directed by understanding of the issues involved, of the persons concerned, and above all of the theological principles which must govern any valid work for reunion. Hence the practice is spreading of accompanying the observance of the Octave with a daily sermon or address on some particular aspect of the problem. The congregation of the basilica of Sacré-Cœur at Montmartre was singularly fortunate this year in being addressed by an eminent theologian who has made the subject his special study—Père M. J. Congar, O.P. His important addresses are to be enlarged and published in volume form; meanwhile we must rest content with the brief summary in *LA VIE INTELLECTUELLE* (February 10). The preacher first drew attention to the nature and gravity of the present situation:

There exist Christians who do not form part of the Catholic Church, and, what is worse, it seems that the heritage of Christ is itself divided. It is high time that we asked ourselves if we have done all we should to put an end to this monstrous state of things. We should no longer disguise the fact that each day it continues widens the chasm that divides the Church. By the very fact that the division continues, it gets worse. Originally the divergences concerned precise points of doctrine. At the time of Calvin, a Catholic and a Protestant knew exactly what it was that separated them. Words still had the same meaning for both of them. They could still converse with one another. But that state of things has gone long ago, never to return. Their words no longer mean the same thing. When a family quarrel continues for a long time, it assumes an intensity out of all proportion with the motive that originally started it. Its very continuance has now become the principal reason for our divisions.

Père Congar gave his audience an account of some contemporary reunion movements and criticized the theories behind them. With these theories he contrasted real "Cath-

BLACKFRIARS

olic Ecumenicism," and explained the Catholic doctrine of the Church—her unity, visibility, catholicity and adaptability. On January 24th, last day but one of the Octave and anniversary of the death of Cardinal Mercier, he referred movingly to "the gesture of the dying Cardinal in leaving his episcopal ring to his friend Lord Halifax. This gesture resounds still as a heart-rending appeal to the whole of Christendom. If the Malines Conversations failed, it was because too much was expected of them. They had, nevertheless, a greater importance than has yet been recognized. They sowed a seed of which the fruits will one day be gathered."

SEPARATED BRETHERN. An indispensable preliminary to an intelligent approach to the problem of Christian unity is an accurate understanding of the status, from the theological standpoint, of non-Catholic Christians. To this Père Congar devoted one of his addresses:

The Church has never ceased to affirm that all men can be saved, whatever their beliefs may be, if their souls are in the right dispositions. But what precisely is the position of "heretics in good faith" with regard to the Church? It is often said that they form part of the "Soul" of the Church. This manner of speaking is neither very accurate nor of very long standing. Following the tradition of certain theologians it would be more exact to consider them as *partial Catholics*. They are Catholics in those points in which they have retained the Truth; "for Christ can have no fruit without His Spouse."

A little baptized Protestant differs in no way from a little baptized Catholic, since there is only one Church and only one Baptism. He is a little Catholic, and he will remain such during the years of his childhood, to the extent that he is not indoctrinated with non-Catholic teaching. His conversion to Catholicism will not be a rupture, but, on the contrary, the fulfilment of the infinite graces he received in Baptism.

Dissident *forms* of Christianity are quite another question. This problem is set not in the moral but in the doctrinal sphere, and we may well ask what is the ultimate reason for their existence. Evidently each schism has had some immediate cause or causes, but would these immediate causes have been effective had not some more profound reason existed? And should we not seek this reason in the very manner in which God has willed to save the world? Christ is King; but He is also and chiefly Priest and Victim. Christ is King; but His royal prerogatives are, as it were, held in check, put into parentheses, by His Priesthood. It is

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

because God has willed to save us by His mercy that the net of salvation cast upon the world transcends the boundaries of His Church where His Kingship rules supreme.

Dissident Christians are our "separated brethren." This very exact expression should dictate our attitude towards them. We must love them as brothers, not treat them as reprobates. We must pray for them and ask them to pray for us, without forgetting that if it is a loss for them not to be in the Church their separation is also a very great loss to ourselves. Understanding better our own faith, we must also learn to know *their* beliefs and even to understand them.

Parallel with this practical work, there is immense work to be done in the theological sphere. Light must be thrown on many points which have too often been left obscure. Restricting ourselves to a purely defensive attitude, we have insisted too exclusively on doctrines which have been controverted; we should pay no less attention to doctrines to which Protestants are themselves attached. We must not let them think that, in order to return to the Church, they must reject those truly Christian values to which they rightly hold fast. What we want is not that our separated brethren should abandon that part of the heritage of Christ which they have kept intact, but that they should share with us the totality of that heritage which is not to be found outside the One and Catholic Church.

THOMISM TO-DAY. An excellent Editorial on *The Lesson of St. Thomas Aquinas* in the current number of *COLOSSEUM* discusses again the function of the twentieth-century Thomist:

The lesson of Saint Thomas Aquinas surely shows the function of the intelligence, open and avid for further truth, open to the newest speculations concerning the cosmos, prepared to draw from the least suspected source theories calculated to explain the data we have before us. It is worth thinking of the shock, in the thirteenth century, amongst minds with less vision and less grip of the real nature of truth, caused by St. Thomas's use of Aristotelian and Arabic sources. In the thirteenth century, as to-day, as throughout the history of mankind, there were people who said that anything new was dangerous.

But it was of the very character of Saint Thomas's mind to take cognisance of and sift out all the data available in his time, whether historical, psychological or scientific: to sift it for the grains of truth that lie here and there, here scattered, there assembled in heaps. The lesson for us is that we should sift out all the data available—not in *his* time, but in *ours*. . . . We give ground to prejudice [against Thomism] if, in discussing the history

BLACKFRIARS

of Thomism, we confine ourselves to the problems which faced Thomism in the thirteenth century—problems raised by Nominalism, Christian Platonism and Arabic speculation. These are, often, dead problems, and as Fr. Gerald Vann has said, scholasticism as such is dead, but Thomism is a living system which has continued to our day. We are doing a greater service to Thomism if we give an account of how it faces the key philosophical problems of to-day. Bergson and Whitehead are a lot more important than Siger of Brabant: so are Heidegger and Husserl.

The trouble often lies, as this Editorial hints, in the abuse of Thomist textbooks. Textbooks have their indispensable place; they must be a help towards, not a substitute for, thinking things out for oneself.

The great vice of "textbook" philosophy and "textbook" apologetics, taken alone, is that they provide a "pat" answer to any question under the sun, and the answer may be made not so much to acquire further truth about God's universe as to "refute" an opponent as quickly as possible. It seems to us that the main virtue in reading Bergson—to take an instance—is not find out how to "refute" him, but to find out what he says, and how much of it is true. It is to find out further truths, further aspects, even the psychological *nuances* of an approach, that philosophy should be studied: and once we have derived what element of truth resides in a writer, then we can rest assured that "propaganda will take care of itself." We ought not to write so as to make propaganda, but so as to tell the truth, so far as we can, about every aspect of the universe which may come into our ken.

But the task before us is not merely to integrate the truth in subsequent philosophical speculation into the Thomist synthesis; Thomism is the concern not only of the professional philosopher as a system to be studied, it should be made a working personal philosophy of life for all. How is this to be done? The experiment of the Aquinas Society founded more than a year ago in a stable at Leicester by Fr. Mark Brocklehurst, O.P., suggests a way which deserves to be widely imitated. Papers read to the society have covered an immense variety of interests besides those explicitly concerned with the exposition of Thomist principles. One session indeed was devoted to the projection of a Soviet film. The idea of the Society is explained in the first *Report* recently issued:

Its inspiration, obviously, was partly found in the London Aquinas Society and similar groups, but from the first we were

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

conscious of a special aim which, as the year passed, became more articulate. The list of lectures appears, as a whole, not to have much to do with St. Thomas Aquinas. But they are something more than a haphazard group. It has been our policy to discuss subjects as expressions of, or factors in, a "world-view," the "world-view" of which the philosophy of St. Thomas is the framework. In other words our task has been, not the academic one of the study of technical philosophy, but the much more hazardous one of the presenting of a living philosophy. . . . The experiment revealed over and over again that "men's differences are ultimately theological." No "world-view" can stop short at a philosophy; it must surrender to a theology.

Were such groups formed throughout the country the results might well be tremendous. The crying need is for a strong nucleus of laymen who do not merely "know" scraps of Thomism, but who think thomistically and are accustomed to apply it to the changes and chances of life. Such a nucleus in all the big centres, containing members representing all classes and walks of life, would take us far towards effective Catholic Action.

JOBS. In the same number of *COLOSSEUM* Mr. Bernard Wall takes *Penguin* gently to task for some of his remarks on "mucking-in." *Penguin* hastens to explain that he was *not* "inclined to blame Messrs. Dawson and Maritain for not telling *A* what to do." He only asked whether the pre-occupation with "purifying means" and planning remote ideal "new orders" will not induce *A* to do nothing at all with regard to his *hic et nunc* everyday existence. Mr. Maurice Reckitt expresses our misgiving from a somewhat different angle in the current number of *CHRISTENDOM* when he writes: "Generalizations about 'personality' and 'fellowship' of which we are so prolific have become merely a kind of escape-mechanism by which we burke many of the questions upon which the Church has the primary responsibility for the enlightenment of mankind. . . . They ask for leadership and we give them a cliché." Principles, ideals, ultimate aims are indispensable and must never be lost sight of. But, if they are to be more than pretexts for disregarding our daily duty, neither must we lose sight of our calling here and now in the world and the environment in which we find ourselves.

But Mr. Wall's article is mainly concerned with criticism

BLACKFRIARS

of our phrase about the Catholic "regarding his suburb, his job and his milieu as precisely the God-given means for the working out of his salvation and the salvation, eternal and temporal, of those with whom they bring him in contact." Mr. Wall interprets this—we venture to think rather gratuitously—to mean that "we are to accept 'jobs' and 'milieux' without distinction . . . accept as right and just the *fait accompli* of our transitional period of history." He goes on to show that most jobs nowadays, in many respects at least, are hateful, non-religious, sub-human. We have not questioned it. We are simply facing the facts that (1) Catholics *do* and often *must* live in suburbs and have jobs; (2) that, taking Divine providence into account, these jobs must be regarded as vocations from God; (3) that these jobs are moreover integral parts of the actual social-economic structure in which and on which we live and have to live, however corrupt it may be, and are consequently acts of service to our neighbour and a fulfilment of our obligation to the commonweal; (4) that although, or rather just *because*, these jobs are hateful, hard, non-religious, inhuman and the rest, they are the *de facto* means which Providence has appointed to each of us whereby each is to work out his salvation; and (5) they afford actual opportunities to help bring salvation, eternal and temporal, to others working in the same job or milieu, whether through official Catholic Action or through private initiative. While we are grateful to Mr. Wall for throwing further light on the appalling difficulties which beset the good Christian in modern society and on the evils inherent in it, and for urging the necessity for radical reform, we do not think these facts can be disputed. And they are of the utmost importance in guiding *A* in what he is to do and how he is to do it; he sees that his job is his vocation and his cross, something neither to be muddled through with nor spurned, but to be *embraced*. Statements that "religion can never thrive freely in a social milieu which is not based on religious principles" and that "sanctity and suburbia are simultaneously unthinkable" seem to us to miss the essential paradox of sanctity: that it thrives best on its opposite, and that where sin abounds there does grace the more abound. Mr. Wall himself truly reminds us: "The Gospels, and the heroic—I might almost say foolhardy—life which is their ideal, is the only possible answer a Christian can make to 'What is *A* to do?'"

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

- CONTEMPORANEA. AMERICAN REVIEW (February): *Christianity of Modernism* by Cleanth Brooks, Jr.: a pungent criticism of popular liberal protestantism.
- CLERGY REVIEW (March): An important document from His Grace the Archbishop of Westminster on the organization of Catholic Action in England, "hastily thrown together . . . for the purpose of provoking constructive criticism and suggestions." *The Family and the Farm* by Richard O'Sullivan, K.C.: "The hope of England in the way of Land Reform must rest with those who retain the idea of marriage as an indissoluble unity . . . identifying the idea of *economics* with the *welfare of the family*." *A Recent Discussion on the Mass* by J. A. McHugh, O.P. *The Outside of the Cup* by Basil Wrighton: the use and abuse of externals in religion—and some other abuses.
- CATHOLIC WORLD (March): *St. Thomas the Catholic* by S. E. Dollard, S.J.
- COLOSSEUM (March) should on no account be missed. Besides the above-mentioned contributions: Reminiscences of *Léon Bloy* by Jacques Maritain; *Men as Gods* by T. S. Gregory; and an illuminating article on the political situation in Spain by a Catholic professor who, though he lost everything in the Asturias revolt, has plenty of judicious criticism for the Right and equally judicious sympathy for the Left.
- COMMONWEAL (February 21): An admirable editorial on the censorship of art and literature.
- ORATE FRATRES (February 22): *Sic Currite: Thoughts on Lent*: the principles and aims of Christian asceticism: these are social, not individualistic; seek subordination, not suppression.
- PAX (March): *The Exemplary Value of Monasticism* by W. E. Orchard: "The religious orders, even of the most solitary and austere kind, do not cut themselves off from concern for their brethren in the world."
- REUNION (March): *The Immaculate Conception* by Vincent McNabb, O.P.
- VIE INTELLECTUELLE (February 10): *Charité chrétienne et dissensions politiques* by H. D. Noble, O.P.: a scathing comment on some methods of Catholics in politics. (February 25): A chapter from Mauriac's *Vie de Jésus*.

PENGUIN.