

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

MUCKING IN AGAIN. *Penguin* has learned, with some surprise and distress, that his paragraph in last month's *Extracts and Comments* on *Mucking-In* and *Sanctified Detachment* has been interpreted by some readers as a condonation, if not an approval, of "activism," the secularization of religion, and of the "Americanism" concerning which Leo XIII had such strong things to say. He has himself, in previous issues (e.g. in November, 1934, August and September, 1935) expressed himself unequivocally on these lines of approach to the position of the Catholic in the modern world, and has constantly reiterated, both in extracts and in comments, that the only effective and specifically Christian and Catholic action in secular society can be brought about only by a deepening of specifically supernatural life. The Christian can pull his weight in the world only by withdrawing from the spirit of the world and, in the traditional sense, despising it. Nor does the policy of "mucking-in" as he understands it, in any way involve, as some critics seem to suppose, *approval* of the existing order of society—whether it be the Nazism of Germany or the suburbs of England—but it does mean the determined and deliberate acceptance of the existing historical situation, not as our ideal, but as our God-given *material*. We cannot be too grateful for students like M. Maritain and Mr. Christopher Dawson for their analyses of the evils inherent in that material. We would only draw attention to the danger—and we think it is a real one—that we become so disgusted with it, and so preoccupied with the preparation of our tools, that we neglect to tackle it and, perhaps, find pretexts for ignoring it. But, it is perhaps necessary to say again, there can be no specifically Christian "penetration" without detachment, for without detachment there can be no genuine Christianity. On all these points, we may recommend an article by Fr. Conrad Pepler, O.P., in *THE IRISH ROSARY*. After describing the attitude of those who regard the Church as a utility, a panacea, an instrument of worldly betterment, he continues:

To-day, when all Catholic eyes are being trained on Catholic Action, this attitude towards the Church is specially dangerous. Though most people are very vague as to the essential elements

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of Catholic Action, they all seem fairly convinced of this one practical fact that Catholic Action demands immediate, constant and hectic activity in applying Catholic medicines to modern diseases. Organize men's Catholic Clubs or Bridge parties to occupy a leisure otherwise possibly misspent; set on foot Catholic Land Movements and help to redistribute property. . . . But the Church is not a utility. The Church is a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ true God as well as true man. The Church can solve the modern problems of the world, not because that is her aim, but because natural order is bound to follow, we might almost say as a by-product, from the infusion throughout the world of her supernatural personality. Jesus Christ the Head of the Church is not a social reformer nor yet an artist, still less the leader of a political movement. He is the source of supernatural life. We cannot merely use Him as a wizard to remove physical evils and restore human happiness. . . .

What then must we do to recover the true attitude towards the Church and to drop this materialistic pragmatism? That we cease from all good works, relinquish our interest in Catholic Action, the social problem, the liturgical revival, throw over all activity and become Carthusians in miniature? By no means. These activities, encouraged by the Church as they are, are good through and through. But we must develop true perspective and proportion, so that we have always before our eyes the essential nature of the Church and not merely its attractive external covering. When Our Lord was asked what must be done to ensure salvation, the first part of His reply dealt with loving God to the utmost, while we have learned from childhood that this love of God must be for His own sake. In other words our first and pre-eminent duty lies in a life which is devoid of any utilitarian motive. . . . Only by prayer and by fixing one's whole attention upon God can one become a good Christian within the Body of Christ, reaping one's sole inspiration from divine grace. Then, once having set foot upon the ladder of perfection and become a vital member of the Church, it is possible to begin to develop the powers given by grace and so to branch out into external activities, but not before. . . .

Need we say that these fundamentals must be taken for granted *before* the "penetration or segregation" issue can be discussed?

CATHOLIC ACTION IN ENGLAND. This theme is so important that we may be allowed to quote from Fr. Martindale's concrete application of these principles in the January MONTH. He sketches the recent history and the present condition of religion in England, and concludes:

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The multitude has lost its religious faith, and the upshot of all this, as regards the convictions on which conduct is based, is at best the idea that something may be true-er than something else, or true-er for me, or true-er in this generation than it used to be. This obviously cuts at the root of any religion that claims, as Christianity does, to be absolute, universal and final. That means that Christ Himself holds no unique and everlasting position.

But this situation, Fr. Martindale shows, is not to be met by competing the "world" on its own ground. "If Christianity, that is, Christians, are to make any headway at all, it must be by offering themselves as something quite different and better in a different *way*."

Should Christians, then, in their apostolate for Christ, wholly neglect this-world considerations? I do not mean that in the very least. They should, indeed—but I fear they do not—take the initiative in what concerns housing, employment, wages, drains, recreation and general culture. They have the highest model and inspiration. They have only to ask themselves what would *Christ* think of the degrading and deplorable conditions of living implied in bad housing, sweating, overcrowding, dirt and disease of the slums and, in consequence, to be much keener to reform them than are others who have no such Christian principles, motives or ideals. It is part of Christian doctrine that Man is body-soul, a unit; and that Christ came to save *man*, not merely souls at the expense of the body, or even society. We think much, and rightly, about personal sin—would that we thought more: but little about social sin; something about charity, but very little about justice. . . .

I am sure that every Catholic, indeed, every man of good will, should be equipped at the very first possible moment with something Christian to *do*, even, or especially, if it involve some self-sacrifice. There is no use at all in trying to make the Christian religion—the religion of the Cross—humanwise palatable. This means a great intensification in the teaching of what are called the virtues; be they "natural" (like truthfulness or self-control) or supernatural, like self-regardlessness for Christ's sake; self-forgetfulness amounting to complete self-sacrifice. Christians—the reproach is world-wide and age-long—are the greatest hindrance to any coming of Christ's Kingdom; as, of course, they are the greatest help. Alleged Christians, in the mass, are morally indistinguishable from others, and often, taken one by one, below the spiritual level of unbelievers. Is it your experience that the most pious are always the most charitable? It isn't mine. In simpler-minded days, Christians began to say: "It is hopeless for me to try to live properly in 'society'; let me get out of it."

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They then became hermits. Very soon—almost at once—they thought of something better still—to create a Christian society. Allowing that they could not do so in the world at large, too irremediably corrupt, they made monasteries, and lived in Christian communities. Now the Holy Father's constantly reiterated *commandment* is, that we are to *Christianize society itself* and on the grand scale. This is the essential idea in "Catholic Action." . . .

A fact, we think, that cannot be over-emphasized. But the question still remains open whether or not the means to this will not be found to be the formation of semi-segregated Christian groups *within* existing society.

ERRATUM. A correspondent informs us that we were mistaken in asserting that "it was THE MONTH that coined the term The Church Dormant." The credit seems to be due to Mr. Timothy O'Donohue who contributed an article under this title to BLACKFRIARS so long ago as March, 1924.

CONTEMPORANEA. CATHOLIC STUDENT (Glasgow University): *Distributism* by S. McGrath, *Thoughts on Distributism* by A. Kean: some of the pros and cons.

CHRISTIAN FRONT (10 cents from 22 Easton Place, East Orange, N.J.) is a very promising new "magazine of social reconstruction."

CITE CHRETIENNE (January 5): An excellent number devoted chiefly to sex problems: An editorial on the Holy Family; Raoul Rey Alvarez summarizes and comments on contemporary marriage and birth statistics; Marcel Laloire examines and criticizes *La politique démographique des états totalitaires*; Dr. De Guchteneere and Canon Dermine, in *La question de continence périodique* and *La continence périodique et le devoir de fécondité*, soberly describe the nature, uses, abuses and moral implications of recent discoveries regarding the "safe period," and remove many misunderstandings and misapprehensions; Prof. De Greef contributes a shrewd article on the problems of adolescence; Abbé Jacques Leclercq sums up in an article on *La double fin du mariage*. This issue (3 Belgian francs from 22 rue Josaphat, Brussels) deserves a wide circulation.

CROSS AND THE PLOUGH (Christmas): "The greater part of the matter in this issue was selected to set forth our central policy and philosophy."

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DOWNSIDE REVIEW (January): *The Unity of the Church in St. Paul* by Dom Ralph Russell: a simple summary of St. Paul's doctrine of the Mystical Body: *Religion and the Modern State* by T. Charles-Edwards.

DUBLIN REVIEW (January): *England and Italy* by M. Mansfield: the background of anti-British feeling in Italy. *Cardinal Pole's Eirenikon*: Fr. Vincent McNabb presents the Legate's great call on the Council of Trent to penance and humility, blaming the Catholic ecclesiastics for their part in the schism.

EASTERN CHURCHES QUARTERLY (January): the first issue of an excellent review.

HOCHLAND (January): *Laienhilfe in Urchristentum* by Heinrich Vogels: argues that whereas the distinction between the teaching and learning Church is essential to Catholicism, that between cleric and layman as now recognized is not; pleads for a restoration of the place which the layman occupied in the primitive Church as a crying need for the Church in the modern world.

NEW SCHOLASTICISM (January): *Ethics in Art and Literature* by Kurt F. Reinhardt.

ORATE FRATRES (December 28): *The Cisca Plan*: how the implications of the doctrine of the Mystical Body are being applied in Catholic Action in Chicago.

REUNION (December): *Towards the Unity of Christendom: The Psychology of the Church Unity Octave* by Abbé Couturier: how the Octave of Unity is an effective means towards Christian unity. *The True Basis of Anglicanism* by Dr. S. H. Scott: the Papal Primacy acknowledged by the first four Councils: "It cannot be impossible therefore for a Body which anyhow receives the first Four General Councils to be once more united visibly in communion with the Successor of St. Peter."

VIE INTELLECTUELLE (December 25): *Civilisation, Culture, Humanisme et Catholicisme* by A. D. Sertillanges, O.P.: an excellent statement of the inter-relation of Grace and Nature, of the Religious and the Secular, of the Church as including and integrating "the world."

PENGUIN.

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ERRATUM. We much regret the inaccurate enumeration which appears on the cover of the January issue of BLACKFRIARS. It should, of course, read Vol. XVII, No. 190. We trust that no inconvenience will be caused, to librarians and others, by this mistake.

EDITOR.