

CORRESPONDENCE

"VICARIOUS SACRIFICE"

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS,

Sir,—The "Theological Eye" which you claim in your April *Extracts and Comments* has failed you in your criticism of my article "Vicarious Sacrifice."

You will agree that the subject I dealt with was that a suggestion exists to "Christianise" Industrialism without any attempt to modify the essential affront to human dignity involved in mass-production work, and that certain groups of young Catholic workers are being encouraged to accept the present industrial basis as a species of self-immolation. Such was my thesis right or wrong. It was developed in terms, and with reservations as to the necessity for due caution in the reaction, which you are careful not to quote.

You retort, after a highly offensive introductory phrase, with a passage from *Divini Redemptoris*. In this passage the Pope is speaking of the mission of all "Catholic working men, young and old," to play their part in the reconciliation to the Church of their strayed comrades. The reference to "sacrifices" in mines and factories bears only on this, and may reasonably be taken to mean the scoffing, contempt or persecution which this process may provoke. Certainly it has no possible reference to the quality of Industrialised work as such, for this is not in question in any part of the passage.

That is, the Pope is talking of something quite different from the matter of my own article.

I refrain from expressing any opinion on the quality of this kind of controversy, in the conviction that on reflection you will withdraw willingly from so untenable a position. For the same reason, I will not make a very easy point arising from your final quotation.

Yours faithfully,

H. ROBBINS.

PENGUIN REPLIES

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS,

Sir,—The issues raised by the article "Vicarious Sacrifice" and by Mr. Robbins' letter are of such moment, and are a source of such perplexity and personal anxiety to many at the present time, that I would beg to take very full advantage of the opportunity you kindly offer for further comment.

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Your readers may read the article for themselves in the current number of *The Cross and the Plough*. The following will, I think, be found a fair summary of its contents:

1. The Son of God immolated Himself. The Saints have followed His example. Such self-immolation "must depend upon a pre-existent sanctity, for it infringes every law of prudence that a man should abandon the very essence of his manhood. In this sense, the saints are above the law: their act is for homage and not for imitation: and certainly not for precept or counsel."

2. But in any true sacrifice (a) "the end must be proportionate to the means;" (b) it must be freely made: "no pressure is tolerable."

3. The article then attributes to "certain Catholic youth movements on the continent which are out to 'Christianise' industrialism" a "strong immolationist tendency" and a type of vicarious sacrifice which denies both these essentials."

4. Then follows the passage quoted in April *Extracts and Comments* which represents the object of these movements as the provision of cheap cars, wireless sets, etc.

5. "The project is favoured chiefly in quarters which are not themselves under the harrow of Industrialism;" notably in certain contributions in *Colosseum*, *BLACKFRIARS* and in France.

6. "The danger is serious, and the need for protest imperative." Reasons for this are then given; "many Catholic publicists" who "have taken refuge in the ultimate illusion—escape for themselves, a consecrated degradation for others," are denounced; and the article concludes with the passage I quoted last month which denounces, without any reservation whatever, the urging of "industrial victims to a religious industrial martyrdom" as a "heresy" with an "ugly head."

Mr. Robbins in his letter does not dispute that this article was intended to describe the J.O.C., and on the basis of that description to denounce its methods and ideals as heretical. It was against *that* that I protested and protest.

I cannot claim to speak on behalf of the J.O.C. But I think that it could counter Mr. Robbins' attack on such lines as these:

1. Self-immolation does indeed suppose a pre-existent sanctity; the fostering of such sanctity is the aim of J.O.C. For, whatever may be the meaning of this "law of prudence," such prudence is false if it contradict the law of Christianity according to which a man must lose his life to save it. The self-immolation of Christ and His saints emphatically *are* to be objects of imitation and not merely of homage, and this *is* of counsel if not of precept. The Jocist believes that heroic sanctity is demanded of him, and that, as the Pope has said, this is no time for mediocrity.

2. In sacrifice, not the end must be proportioned to the means, but the means to the end. It must indeed be freely made; but this does not rule out any element of compulsion. Calvary was no less a sacrifice because it was a forcible execution; but it was also a

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sacrifice because it was freely accepted and offered by Our Lord. So a Jocist may and does, in the sublimest sense of a much abused cliché, make a virtue of what may otherwise be a necessity.

3. I do not know on what authority Mr. Robbins says that the J.O.C. is "out to Christianise industrialism" (an ambiguous phrase); but it certainly is out to Christianise the industrial workers, and to Christianise them as such. But the sacrificial element in the Jocist way of life denies neither of the given essentials, for

4. the end and the means of Jocism are not at all what Mr. Robbins represented them to be. I am sorry that he considers my description of this passage as a "grotesque caricature" to be "highly offensive." He brings forward no argument to show his unpleasant picture to be veracious, and I am convinced that anybody acquainted with the real ideals and heroism of the J.O.C. would consider my description of this paragraph from his article to be euphemistic—as indeed it was intended to be.

5. It is indifferent to the rightness or wrongness of Jocist ideals and programme by whom they are favoured. But in actual fact the leaders of the J.O.C. are, for the most part, themselves industrial workers; even its priest-founders and inspirers are ex-workers or of working-class stock and upbringing.

6. Hence I need not trespass on your space to discuss the reasons which Mr. Robbins brings forward for his "protest," for it is precisely my point that the J.O.C. he attacks is a J.O.C. of his own imagination and not the J.O.C. of fact.

Of course it is true that §70 of *Divini Redemptoris* the Pope is talking of something quite different from the matter of Mr. Robbins' article. The Pope is talking about sacrificial ideals which are in *fact* embodied in the J.O.C. Mr. Robbins is talking about a movement of his own invention whose aim is to dehumanise the workers in order that we may have cheap luxury commodities. He does not deny that it was the same J.O.C.—which has so often won the admiration and gratitude of the Holy Father—that he thus stigmatised.

But the Pope is urging the industrial workers to "a religious industrial martyrdom," and it was precisely this that his article called "heresy."

Yours faithfully,

PENGUIN.

OUT OF MIND, OUT OF SIGHT

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS,

Sir,—Being a resident Medical Officer in a large Scottish Mental Hospital, I read with great interest the article in your March issue entitled "Out of Mind, Out of Sight," and have felt I should like to endorse from the inside what "Onlooker" so