

(who knew nothing of his learning and had never read a line he had written, but only appreciated his holiness), his innumerable converts and correspondents, the penitents who flocked round his 'box' and owed their soul's health to his counsel and sympathy, the wise, the unlettered, the great, the simple, young and old—every kind of person was influenced by his amazing personality.

But only the recording angels could tell us the whole story.

ANGLO-CATHOLIC SOCIOLOGY TODAY

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IT is now some thirty years since a group of High Anglicans, moved by the disorder of the times—the first world war having recently ended and the promises of its ending being unfulfilled—were inspired to study and promote a Christian sociology which would be based on definite doctrinal assumptions. Before their decision, two approaches to the social problem were in vogue in the Church of England, the one an attempt to encourage amity between employers and their men, an endeavour illustrated by the work of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, a cautious movement encouraged of late years by many of the Bishops, and the other, more specifically aggressive and political, a propaganda which found expression in the Church Socialist League by a body indifferent, on the whole, to doctrine, but persuaded that Socialism was not incompatible with, if not essential to, true modern Christian practice.

To neither of these objective did the new 'League of the Kingdom of God' (later to be renamed the 'Christendom' group) subscribe. Its principal inspirer, much influenced by the earlier beliefs of Maurice and his follower, Canon Widdrington, insisted that Christian living postulated a common life in which Christian values are embodied. He criticized what he called the 'Manicheism' of the modern Church in ignoring social justice as

essential. The loss of the regulative, basic idea of the Kingdom of God, come out of the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension, had been disastrous. This theme, embodied in an essay, *The Return of the Kingdom of God*, by Canon Widdrington, in the first published symposium of the group, *The Return of Christendom* (1922) was the fundamental notion from which all else followed: 'The two foes the Church must defeat are Manicheism within its borders' (he accuses the medieval Church, surprisingly, of this error) 'and Materialism in the world'.

That there are some deficiencies in Canon Widdrington's thesis, arising for the most part from his failure, like that of so many Anglicans, to appreciate the full nature of the Mystical Body, the Catholic Church, will not be denied by a Catholic. Thus, he asserts with vigour that the Kingdom is not the Church on earth. The Church, he says, is but an instrument to promote the Kingdom; but his warning against pietistic subjectivism is one all Catholics accept. What he fails to see is that this is essentially a Protestant heresy, and, though individual Catholics may fall into it, it emphatically is not true of the Catholic Church which is not only objective but supernatural. Of the Church suffering and triumphant and of the Sacraments he writes little or nothing—indeed, the chief fault of the Canon and of many of his followers is their failure to relate their mainly sound conclusions to full Catholic apprehension. They accept in the main the economic outlook of St Thomas, often derived in their case from Belloc and Chesterton, but lack his and their approach to the transcendental things of God; in particular they tend to ignore the end of man. His fulfilment in the Beatific Vision is not correlated to their sociology, as is the case with the famous papal pronouncements *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, or to the place of man on earth in the social sphere.

Maurice Reckitt, whose recent published lectures and addresses, *The World and the Faith*,¹ contain the essence of the conclusions of the League and the Christendom Group, its successor, has now become almost the doyen of the movement, for many of the original contributors to its first publication, *The Return of Christendom*, such as Arthur Penty, have died or ceased to take an active part in the work. Yet, when we read his recent book, we cannot help being struck by the extraordinary tenacity with which this

1 *The World and the Faith*, by Maurice Reckitt (The Faith Press; 10s. 6d.).

body of Christian sociologists, with so little support from their co-religionists, have adhered to their original opinions. In Chapter Ten of *The World and the Faith*, in a lecture entitled 'The Validity of Christian Sociology', the Incarnation is said to be the 'Hub of human history', 'an intervention, as Dawson has written, by God in the life of mankind by direct action at certain definite points in time and space'. Reckitt quotes Dr Casserley, an eminent member of the Group, as stating that 'Whether we like it or not, the foundations of our thought and civilization are theological', or as Professor Demant, another distinguished colleague, has declared: 'God cannot be exploited, he can only be worshipped'. Most significantly, Mr Reckitt points out how 'the Faith in the latest decades is beginning to return in that very element in society, the intelligentsia, where it first began to be undermined two centuries and more ago', whereas 'unfaith is rife, and perhaps extending among the masses in suburbs'. This is a most far-reaching statement, more true perhaps outside than within the Catholic communion.

Again, defining Christian sociology, he says that it is a study which can only be understood in the light of the Christian doctrine of Creation, while, as Mr Davey, a contributor to the Group's second symposium, *The Prospect of Christendom*, written in 1945, has declared in that work, 'Since the Christendom we are trying to depict is no dream but our idea of the city of God that is in fact being wrought out of all the multitudinous and particular occasions of time and space, our task involves us in a scientific study of life as it is now'.

Thus the Christendom Group, throughout their existence, have always sought to apply their principles to immediate social problems. To this end they maintained, for a long time, a monthly journal, *Christendom*, edited by Mr Reckitt, of most excellent quality; it is now, alas, defunct. Reckitt, however, has also associated himself with G. K. Chesterton in the production of *G. K.'s Weekly*, and from his intimate knowledge of that genius, has given us in *The World and the Faith* most illuminating and sympathetic comments both on him and Belloc. Indeed, it is a disquieting fact that the influence of those great thinkers, more particularly in their criticism of modern large-scale capitalism and finance, has exercised more influence and has been more profound among the Anglo-Catholic sociologists than

it has with many more recent Catholic economists.

Mr Reckitt admits he is no intransigent Distributist. Though holding tenaciously to the Catholic conception of personal property, in productive processes he favours the guild and generally, as his chapters on the Middle Ages show, thinks in common with Chesterton, that we have much to learn from a society, with all its failings, so basically religious. Indeed, the medieval inspiration is present in all the thought of the Group from *The Return of Christendom* onwards, for in those days, 'No conception of a secular purpose distinguishable from man's spiritual end had yet been formulated.' (*The World and the Faith*, p. 121.)

In sad contrast Mr Reckitt presents us with a study of the modern world in the paper, 'The Sickness of a Technocratic Society'. In this neo-technic age, he quotes 'Things are in the saddle and ride mankind'. Not only private avarice, as Tawney had written in his *Sickness of an Acquisitive Society*, but a deeper malady exists today, developing since the Victorian age, in the insistence on speed and power to be achieved at all cost, and above all a fatalistic acceptance of noise and sensation, mechanically engendered by a desire to sell more and more products, often useless or deleterious, to avoid bankruptcy—a worship of material achievement (and destruction) which the prophets would certainly have denounced as idolatrous—all of which are unrestrained by any governing conception of the nature of God's purpose for mankind: a defection which is now menacing our precarious 'civilization'. The Welfare State, of which Mr Reckitt also writes, has been said to be 'a rather desperate effort to snatch security out of a civilization as essentially insecure perhaps as any in history' (*The World and the Faith*, p. 159), and yet, in another sense, 'as unparalleled social altruism'. Neither of these hyperboles commends itself to the writer. The Welfare State has arisen through the neglect in past ages of social justice, but we must be 'existential', that is, in the world in which we are. The Welfare State, as Mairé has written, is 'a prudent calculation of what it is dangerous not to do'—a 'kind of secular substitute for divine providence and mercy' (Casserley, *The Retreat from Christianity in the Modern World*), but as the present editor of BLACKFRIARS has written (quoted with approval by Mr Reckitt), 'The professional social worker has the opportunity to translate the soulless business of "welfare" into the personal action of meeting another's needs'. Mr Reckitt

ends his lecture on the Welfare State with one of his favourite quotations from Chesterton: 'One must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it'.

Enough has been said to show that the sociology of these Anglican Churchmen is well worthy of study by English Catholics. It will be found that their conclusions are, for the most part, remarkably consistent with the great Papal encyclicals, as applied to the particular problems of England at the present time. It is interesting to ask: How far has the work of the Christendom Group influenced their own communion? In some ways there would seem to be an actual recession since the death of Archbishop Temple, who so well understood their attitude towards contemporary society, and the Anglican Bishops of late have shown little of that interest which displayed itself in the conferences such as C.O.P.E.C. and that at Malvern or in the actual episcopal pronouncements made at the time of the great trade disputes before the second world war. The failure to maintain their journals, *Christendom* and the *New English Weekly*, points to the same melancholy conclusion. Yet Mr Reckitt and his companions, undismayed, continue to preach the gospel of the Kingdom and social justice, and we Catholics, fortified with an authority they do not possess, nevertheless admire those who do not allow their dogmatic uncertainties to obscure the clarity of their sociological beliefs.

The comparative failure of this gallant group to interest their fellow Anglicans in their challenging sociology is not, perhaps, so remarkable. It may well be that, in the end, Catholics nurtured on thomist traditions will prove themselves to have discerned more clearly the true objective of the *Christendom* writers than the authors themselves. In any case, the close study of these writers (even when there may be disagreement, as perhaps about the nature of the Kingdom) can only be advantageous. We may see in their work a continuation of the criticisms of Belloc and Chesterton in their condemnation of monopolistic finance and capitalism and in the destructive exploitation of natural resources and the undue urbanization of life, criticisms often insufficiently emphasized in the pronouncements of some recent Catholic economists.