

## BLACKFRIARS

### REVIEWS

#### CATHOLIC ACTION

- PETIT CATECHISME DE L'ACTION CATHOLIQUE. Mgr. Fontenelle. (Paris : Bonne Presse, 1 fr.)
- BRIEF CATECHISM OF CATHOLIC ACTION. Rt. Rev. Mgr. R. Fontenelle. Translated from the French by the Round Table Conference of Catholic Action, Weston College, Weston, Mass. (St. Louis, Mo., U.S.A. : Central Bureau C.C.V. of A. Price not given.)
- L'ACTION CATHOLIQUE. Essai de synthèse. Paul Dabin, S.J. (Paris : Bloud et Gay, 15 frs.)
- L'APOSTOLAT LAIQUE. Paul Dabin, S.J. (Paris : Bloud et Gay ; 12 frs.)
- CODE DE L'ACTION CATHOLIQUE. A. Guerry. (Paris : Editions Spes ; 7 frs.)
- ROME ET L'ACTION CATHOLIQUE. P. Romain. (Paris : Editions Spes ; 4.50 frs.)
- L'ACTION CATHOLIQUE. Traduction française des documents pontificaux, 1922-1933. (Paris : Bonne Presse ; 18 frs.)

Less than a year ago a BLACKFRIARS reviewer could write: 'Catholic Action has an exotic sound to English ears.' Latterly it has become almost too familiar—a catchword. And, as is the way with catchwords, it is frequently used in our Press and Pulpits with singular lack of appropriateness or understanding of its meaning.

An excuse for this may be found in the almost complete lack of authoritative literature on the subject in this country. To the reviewer's knowledge not a single book dealing methodically with Catholic Action has yet appeared. For reliable information it is still necessary to go abroad, where an immense literature of Catholic Action has sprung up during the past decade. Since French is the most familiar of foreign tongues and the vehicle of some of the very best works on the subject, a notice of a few of the standard books in that language may serve as a useful bibliographical appendix to this issue of BLACKFRIARS.

First place must be given to the most elementary. Mgr. Fontenelle's *Petit Catéchisme* has the advantage of having recently appeared in an English translation published in America. Simple, short, authoritative, almost 'official,' it

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should be published and broadcast in England without delay, perhaps with some such small adaptations for local needs as have been made for the American edition. Paragraph 12 is apt to convey the false impression that the Lay Apostolate is no more than a substitute for that of the clergy rather than a distinctive mission; but apart from this slight want of due emphasis, the *Catéchisme* is to be recommended as the best and most reliable booklet for the Catholic rank and file. Its widespread propagation in this country would dissipate many current misunderstandings and enable our people to gain a clear idea of what Catholic Action really is and what it involves.

Père Dabin is a first-rate scholar and thinker who has applied his talents to the study of the theory and practice of Catholic Action. His two books, though definitely popular in their appeal are addressed to more advanced students than is the *Catéchisme*, but are indispensable to *leaders* of C.A., whether clerical or lay. His *L'Action catholique* is a veritable *Summa*; a systematic treatise which is a mine of information and a model of logical exposition. Its scope is perhaps more immediately practical than that of *L'Apostolat laïque* which, though confessedly *une œuvre de vulgarisation*, is a precious theological study of the idea of the Lay Apostolate which is the dogmatic basis on which Catholic Action rests. The author first traces the history and development of the teaching of the Church—of the Fathers, theologians and Popes—from New Testament times until the present day to the extent that they have any bearings on the ministry of the laity. He then examines in turn the terms which together compose the definition of C.A.—*participation, laity, hierarchy, apostolate*. This analysis is followed by chapters on errors which attribute too much or too little to the rôle of the laity in the Church's apostolate, on the nature and degrees of the obligation which the lay-apostolate and the call to C.A. imposes, and on the scope and limits of lay initiative in its direction. The work concludes with a fine chapter which develops the truth that the idea of the lay-apostolate is an application of the doctrine of the Mystical Body. Although essentially a popular exposition of speculative Theology, the work is full of points of the utmost practical importance. But its chief value lies in the fact that authentic Catholic Action cannot be put into effective operation unless its dogmatic foundations have been well and truly laid. Père Dabin is at present engaged on a two-volume work on the 'Priesthood of the laity.'

The value of the Abbé Guerry's *Code* is of an entirely different sort. It is a *vade-mecum* for the apostle of Catholic Action and of equal value to the priest and the layman. Every word in it

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is a quotation from a pronouncement of one or other of the last five Popes. The Abbe has codified extracts from their writings and skilfully arranged them in logical sequence. With the aid of the copious index, the pronouncements of the Holy See on every conceivable subject—from the Kingship of Christ to almsgiving and disarmament—can be discovered in a moment. An invaluable book for every Catholic which, like the preceding, calls for speedy translation.

*Rome et l'Action catholique*, written in 1927, deals chiefly with local difficulties, misunderstandings and divisions which have proved obstacles to the effective establishment of C.A. in France; but it contains much of wider interest and many warnings may be taken from it by Catholics in other countries.

The last book on our list is the first in importance, for it contains the primary sources of all the others and of any reliable work on the subject. It is an exhaustive collection of documents relative to C.A. which have emanated from the Holy See from 1922 till 1933. It will probably astonish the English reader to find that, together with the statutes of C.A. in countries in which it is already organized and copious indexes, these documents occupy 600 pages of small type. A work of the first importance to all who would study Catholic Action at its source.

V.W.

TU ES PETRUS. (Bloud et Gay; 60 francs.)

This is the latest comer in the series of manuals of Catholic Action, of which *Le Christ, Ecclesia, Liturgia*, were such excellent examples. The book is divided into five parts: (1) The institution and powers of the Papacy—with articles by Vaganay on the Scripture problems, and Magnin on the Pope, the Church, the Episcopate, etc.; (2) Canon Law and Liturgy—Villien on papal elections, Magnin on papal centralization, Cabrol on the Popes and the Liturgy; (3) the history of the papacy—articles on the various periods by Bardy, Mollat, Christiani, Mourret, etc.; (4) the papacy and the temporal powers; (5) the papacy and the life of the world—with a notable article on the pontifical teaching as to Catholic Action by Dabin. It will be seen that it is a thorough and inclusive book. We only regret that more space was not allowed for the specifically theological treatment of the question: the Pope not merely as the juridical head of the Church but in his relation to the Mystical Body; and the doctrine of infallibility should have received much deeper and more extensive attention. With this reserve, and it is a fundamental one, the book may be commended as a work of great practical utility.

A.M.