

AMERICAN CATHOLIC CROSSROADS. By W. J. Ong, S.J. (Macmillan, N.Y. \$3.50; 24s. 6d.)

This is another contribution to the great current awakening of American Catholics to the needs of higher education. Since we are following some way behind on the same track it applies to us as well. Fr Ong divides his thesis in two. In Chapters 1 to 4 he argues out the consequences of the new grasp of the material universe and awareness of history that have come to us in the last two centuries. Though revelation is completed, we need to understand that its consequences and in particular the role of the Church reveal themselves in history, especially in the history of ideas: including, whatever St Augustine may say, those ideas about the material universe of whose importance we are more aware today than ever before. This history develops in a necessarily plural society. A segregated Christian society busy cultivating its own garden has never been anything but an awkward necessity and often an excuse for inactivity. It is impossible today because of the crumbling of geographic frontiers. In any case, many of the most important historical issues involve a sort of internal pluralism and must be worked out in a dialogue within each individual; that for instance of Church and State, God and Caesar. We should be pressing on to develop a dialogue with everyone on all issues, remembering that the Greek *catholicos* means literally not 'universal', a levelling term, but 'through all things', respected in their distinctness. True, Christians have plenty to sweep on their own doorsteps. But we should be like St Paul: 'At the very time he was preaching the gospel elsewhere, St Paul was writing his letters to the Corinthians and the Philippians and the Colossians in an effort to straighten out the chaos he had had to leave behind'. There is an interesting comparison in Chapter 3 between Fr Hecker's apostolate in America and St Paul's dialogue approach in his apostolate to the gentiles. Within the Christian himself there should be a dialogue between secular knowledge and revelation, illustrated by the interplay between the rhetorical tradition of antiquity and Christian personalism, by the relation of medieval scholasticism to the early world of modern science, and by the mutual influence of modern ideas of history and evolution and the Christian or Jewish idea of history as continuous progress—not merely a circle—and as the struggle with the Adversary. Understanding of religion as of other things is always within the terms of a culture. Twentieth-century man can grasp many truths of revelation at a deeper level than his predecessors, but only on condition that he uses the tools that modern secular knowledge puts at his disposal.

In Chapters 5 and 6 Fr Ong works out some of the consequences of these ideas for the universities, especially in America, where, as he

points out, they are more than elsewhere the direct responsibility of the Church. Catholic and especially clerical scholars must be prepared not merely to defend established truths or solve problems lobbed back from the intellectual battle-front, but themselves to take their share, whether in theology or in secular fields, of that part of the work of creation which consists in developing the intellectual universe. The Church has a special duty to promote higher education and research in secular as well as sacred subjects, because of its concern with understanding and explaining the meaning of the Word in history. This interest is expressed not merely in the founding of colleges but in the commitment of priests and religious to careers of learning. The commitment of a priest who teaches in a university is not to the work of a chaplain. It is to integrate in his own person 'natural knowledge on a scale both massive and particularized . . . with the special participation in Christ which priests and religious are given'. His personal influence will be in proportion to his success in achieving this integration; to his standing out as one who has made a unity of his religion and his scholarship. The layman's vocation in scholarship is similar, though with its own special character; the layman, being less set apart from the secular world, can 'testify to the solidarity of the Church with mankind itself and with the natural world in a way that the witness of priests and religious cannot do'.

Fr Ong's style will not quite pass my stiffest test, to be easily absorbed on first reading in a railway carriage while commuting after a heavy day (I did in fact apply this test). But it is clear enough on more careful reading. His matter speaks for itself. It is an excellent contribution to discussion; one too short to attempt all the answers, but which raises all the questions. I think Fr Ong is a little hard on those who use what he calls the politico-religious approach to the place of the Church in the modern world. We are not quite as un-historical, or should I say un-evolutionary, as he suggests. He could perhaps have sharpened the contrast between the vocation of the lay and the clerical Catholic scholar. Both certainly have a vocation to integration. But I think that for the priest or religious the accent is more specially on integration in the sense of a wide synthesis, while for the layman (but this depends very much on personal qualities) it might more often be expressed in specialized pioneering. He also gets rid of a sizeable load of problems by disclaiming knowledge of such administrative matters as teaching loads or methods of university governments. But these are not so much criticisms as examples of the questions which this highly stimulating discussion raises. I recommend it whole-heartedly.

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