

CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—My attention has been called to a review of a book of mine, *A History of Christianity in England*, in which it is stated that I have misrepresented the decisions of the Biblical Commission. As this is a serious statement I must ask your reviewer to specify precisely what these alleged 'inaccuracies' are as distinct from any interpretation that may have been put upon them since their promulgation.—Yours etc.,

E. O. JAMES.

King's College, University of London.

SIR,—Concerning Professor James's objections to the charge of misrepresenting the Replies of the Biblical Commission on p. 153 of the book which I reviewed in the September BLACKFRIARS.

Prof. James has described in eleven lines of English text the contents of Replies which, in Denzinger, require some 358 lines of Latin. Clearly great fairness of mind would be necessary to accomplish this task without misrepresentation. Prof. James's attitude of mind can be seen from his speaking of the Commission's 'indiscriminate condemnation of the principles of biblical criticism' before referring to the Replies, and speaking of their 'naïve obscurantism' afterwards.

What Prof. James has done is to select from certain Replies the phrases or assertions which he thinks will displease 'advanced' biblical critics most, without indicating the general tenor of the Replies which is the context of these phrases. Nor does he indicate that the Commission give very full reasons for their conclusions, every word of which has been carefully weighed. There is no mention either of those portions of the Replies which expound the lines of criticism freely open to Catholic commentators.

In detail: on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Prof. James omits all mention of the important qualifications to be found in Denzinger 1999 and 2000. In his reference to the Creation narrative he has brought together two statements from different Replies of the Commission (Denz. 2122 and 2123) without indicating the context and emphasis of those Replies. He says that the Commission asserts 'that it is historically *certain*' (Prof. James's italics) that St John is the author of the Fourth Gospel. What the relevant Reply says is that internal evidence is to be held to confirm the tradition which 'indubitanter' attributes the Fourth Gospel to St John. On the Pauline origin of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the order of the Synoptists he fails to mention the contents of the Replies Denz. 2178 and 2159 which are necessary to an understanding of the Catholic position in these matters.

Biblical criticism is a very serious and complex subject and the Catholic contribution to it since 1906 has been of the greatest

importance, provided by men of the highest knowledge and intelligence. It should not have been dismissed by Prof. James, in a presumably non-controversial work, with contemptuous brevity.—Yours etc.,

PAUL FOSTER, O.P.

SIR,—It is good to find Mgr Davis in the October BLACKFRIARS discussing so fairly and openly the early Christian attitude to war. Whatever the relevance to the present of these records of the past, it is certainly important that Catholic writers should not discuss the moral problems of war without some knowledge of the historical evidence.

It may be worth noting that the best-documented Catholic account of this subject is to be found in the article *Militarisme* by Dom Leclercq in the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne*. Two interesting texts are not mentioned there. One is the decree of St Innocent I given in Migne *P.L.* 20, col. 624 under the heading 'De Epistola Innocentii Papae I ex Concilio Nicaeno'. It runs: *Post militiam si conversus fuerit, et iterum militaverit, XIII annos poeniteat*. The range of this may be narrower than at first appears; it should probably be connected with the ruling of St Siricius to the African bishops (*P.L.* 13, cols. 1158-9), repeated by St Innocent himself (writing to the pacific St Victorius, *P.L.* 20, col. 472), that anyone who after baptism wears the *cingulus* of a soldier is not to become a cleric (not a deacon, says the 8th canon of the Council of Toulouse).

The other is the passage of St Athanasius *On the Incarnation* (ch. 51-52, *P.G.* 25, cols. 187-190), where he makes it one proof of our Lord's divinity that once nations have become Christian they cease to fight each other, and sees in this a fulfilment of *Is.* 2, 4. There are obvious reasons for not pressing this text of St Athanasius, but it is melancholy and instructive reading.—Yours, etc.,

MARCELLUS.