

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

DIAGNOSIS of contemporary ills is a task at which THE NEW ENGLISH WEEKLY excels. We present two specimens from the issue of June 4. Exhibit No. 1 concerns Population:

Whilst even Russia, with a population larger than all the British Empire outside India, takes thought for more children, we British actually fail to populate our possessions, and conduct highly competent, unofficial propaganda for contraception, sterilization and so forth, whilst maintaining a large portion of our population upon a scale of nutrition that is even more deterrent to growth than to procreation. The popularity of such phenomena as the Dionne and other cases of multiple births is interpretable as psychic compensation for the frustration of normal philoprogenitive instinct. Not the least gloomy sign of a depression that seems to have reached the very loins of the British people, is the now "advanced" attitude affected in Labour circles towards eugenic questions. We suppose that the meeting of Labour women which called for sterilization of the unfit thought itself as modern and progressive as *Reynold's News* in publishing the proposals of "Euteleogenesis" for artificially procreating the whole of posterity from a few selected males, without disturbing the marital relations of the population. Lenin would have told them better: and *Reynold's* would have been wiser had they reprinted his powerful article denouncing contraception for the workers as fundamental cowardice and defeatism. His conclusion, if overdrawn, is at least nearer the truth than anything Labour will deduce from intellectual dalliance with the eugenic fantasies of decadents. Whatever there may be in these biological speculations (and it is yet too little to act upon) they ignore the dependence of psychic health upon the normal relation to sex and posterity. Any temporary gains that may be possible by stimulating, preventing or otherwise interfering with procreation are thus probably purchaseable only at an extravagant price. And as for the notion that these things could be usefully done by the decrees of governments as yet manifestly incompetent to affect race-improvement by the only sure means of rural reconstruction, adequate nourishment and just distribution—this surely belongs to the most insufferable twaddle ever peddled to our cheated generation in the sacred name of science.

No less felicitous is this diagnosis of the contemporary attitude to the challenge of Christ:

Amongst those who have grown up in a generation where an easy scepticism as to Christianity is almost a *sine qua non* of

BLACKFRIARS

intellectual status, very few have in fact come to terms with themselves over Christ. At least no less than Shakespeare, Christ "abides our question." The common attitude is a protectively non-committal one, in which are involved varying degrees of indefinite tribute, or rational disclaim, of respectful relegation to a non-urgent future. Around Christ is set a fence of inhibition, and the moderns perch upon it. Primarily it is an inhibition springing from the intellect, allied to that peculiarly base form of fear, intellectual snobbery. The intellect, with its scientific prowess and its powers of cold ridicule, has acquired an unprecedented prestige and an over-swollen authority. Experience is now so invaded beforehand by mental awareness of a multiplication of reactions learned as necessary, that a fully unprejudiced attention is now possible to practically nothing. Experience is not only thus pre-digested; often it fails to be experience at all, for this cellaphaned prophetic knowledgeableness is allowed to replace the very thing it anticipates, and becomes a sort of certificate issued to dispense with the embarrassments of actual experience. It is a technique, and a subtly-developed one, for avoiding the unpardonable sin in a self-conscious world, the sin of being found without an attitude, which is based, of course, on the morbid vanity that experience must never command, but always be commanded. So genius, borne away on the winds of experience, has to be disinfected—hence modern biography, appeasing safety and vanity alike. The intellectual consciousness is quite unwilling to accept mystery, seeing it merely as a synonym for the yet unfulfilled part of science's task. Christ, with his mystery, and his call for decision, cannot be disinfected, so He has to be ignored.

CATHOLICS' SECTARIANISM. "Physician, heal thyself." We hasten to add some searching and necessary *self*-diagnosis from COLOSSEUM:

Not only are Catholic groups seen as sectarian by the non-Catholic world—which they often are in spirit—but even the Church herself is seen as a sect. This is a terrible misfortune because it blacks out completely the possibility of understanding the Church. Catholics are viewed as sectarian not only if they attach themselves rabidly to some outworn political form, but even insofar as they are precisely Catholic. The essential dogmas of the Church and the spinal idea of the spiritual life, that is to say, the completed idea of man, are seen as an oddity. Man himself has been banished as it were from the central mass of mankind. This situation makes it not only humanly impossible for most human beings to see the Church as she really is, instead of a mere caricature, but it makes it extremely difficult for us ourselves to realize the true nature of the Church. Time and time

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

again, in books by Catholics, in the Catholic Press, it is apparent that writers tend to see the Church in the light of a *reaction against* something positive, against the non-Catholic world. It is a fault we fall into easily. We easily see the Church as an organization which *denies* the affirmations of the great world, which says "nay" to the world's "yea," "thou shalt not" to the world's "thou shalt." We are so acutely conscious of the big unbelieving world round about us, its bases seem so positive and solid, and ours, humanly speaking, so negative and flimsy. The world round about us seems so established in its own right that *we* seem to be the Protestants. The main current of history seems now to be flowing quite outside the Church. We forget that God's Providence is somehow working in history, and that historical evolution is not something independent and opposed to ourselves. We cannot hold up our hands in horror about it, or take a defensive attitude to it, because the Church is the explanation of it. Somehow the true idea of the relationship between the Church and the world and God's Providence in history must be re-awakened.

THE POPE'S MOTIVES in persistently warning the world against Communism are so widely misinterpreted that this passage from a COMMONWEAL editorial deserves further publicity:

The reason why the Holy Father—as he watches Communism consolidate itself so triumphantly in Russia, and its followers win such tremendous advances in Spain, and France, and Mexico, and various South American countries, and also winning converts constantly in other lands, the United States notably included—is "more painfully preoccupied for purely human, social and state institutions than for the Catholic Church," goes straight to the centre of the Catholic faith. "It is not," as he told the world, "because we are not profoundly afflicted also by the thought of tribulations which the forces of evil prepare for the Mystical Body of Christ in the persons of the good and faithful servants of God, and still more by the thought of the shipwreck that so many souls will suffer in the unchaining of error and vice, sustained by violence, deceit and iniquitous laws, as we already see repeated examples. But the Church is a Divine institution and has in its favour the Divine promise. Adverse force may assume most threatening proportions, their assaults may become more violent and insidious than ever, but it is written that they cannot prevail against the Divine Word which cannot be cancelled." But human institutions—free governments, family rights, individual liberty, property rights, freedom of education—these may, these indeed do, disappear like dust in the wind of communistic revolution.

BLACKFRIARS

REVOLUTION—CHRISTIAN OR COMMUNIST? BLACKFRIARS has insisted repeatedly in the past that the Catholic opposition to Communism is not counter-revolutionary. The essential issue between Catholicism and Communism is well restated in LITURGY AND SOCIOLOGY (April-May):

Communism and Catholicism. Each is a fundamental and integrated way of life, each requires of its members self-discipline and sacrifice, and each offers a solution not to this or that dilemma but to the dilemma of life itself. They are the only two faiths left in the modern world that have any red blood in them. Each contradicts the other. It so happens that both oppose some of the same things (though for vastly different reasons). Both oppose the abuses of *laissez faire* capitalism. It is right that these abuses should be opposed. It is true that to oppose them effectively requires concerted action. Therefore, some ask, why not form a united front between Communism, the Church and all other sympathetic groups on the basis of those points upon which all are agreed, in the meantime reserving the right to differ in details? Would not this be more sensible than remaining divided in the face of a common enemy?

The answer is to be found in one of the "details," as the Communists so fondly refer to the belief in God. Their inability to conceive such a belief as anything other than a personal eccentricity gives the measure of the gap between the two camps. Yet this, and this alone, is the central issue, as the prophet of Communism himself admitted when he said that "the criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticism." Communism is based on the worship of man. Catholicism is based on the worship of God. We believe first and foremost in the spiritual nature and destiny of man as a creature of God. This belief means that the external forms of social organization (economic, political, legal) cannot be the whole story of social change, as the Communists would have us believe. At the same time, however, it enables us to see these social forms in their true light as means, not ends.

The task of the Catholic, therefore, is not to ally himself with this or that group which promises to produce a new Jerusalem by shifting the price level or changing the means of production, but to realize the revolutionary nature of the sacramental life itself. For the Church was nurtured in revolution, and her doctrine is shot through with it. If one doubts this, let him imagine what would happen if every Catholic in the world really acted like a Catholic for half an hour. There is enough revolutionary material in some of the papal encyclicals to make the Communist Manifesto read like a study in conservatism. The reason this isn't more obvious is, as we have suggested, that Catholics have fallen down on the united front that they should be forming with the Holy

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

Father. Then, too, revolution stands in the popular mind for external violence. But a moment's reflection should show that this association is purely accidental. St. Francis was a revolutionary if ever there was one, and yet he was the gentlest of men. This is not to say that the liturgical life may not wreak violence within the souls of those whom it transforms. That, however, is a different matter. It only serves to show that that internal form of revolution which it is the primary function of the liturgy to bring about is more difficult than the more obvious sort which expresses itself in the disruption of the social fabric from top to bottom. Yet it is this internal revolution that influences and changes the external world itself most profoundly. The Christian revolution transforms without wrecking, it rests on Faith, the most stringent of virtues, and offers nothing in the way of quick results.

CONTEMPORANEA. CLERGY REVIEW (June): Fr. J. Murphy, S.J., concludes a helpful and balanced account of *The Development of Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament*. He maintains that the revived appreciation of the Mass in its sacrificial aspect must not ignore "the affectionate sympathy for the sacred Humanity which moved men to visit Christ" in recent centuries. A "Parochus" writes: "I do not think that we will make much headway against the lapse of boys and girls from the Faith when leaving school until we devise a system, at least in industrial areas, whereby these young people are kept more or less together in the same factories. . . . What usually happens is that after being cared for like a hothouse plant in schools our children are transplanted into snowdrifts when they leave school."

COLOSSEUM (June): Another strong number. Basil Wrighton sketches the task for Christian thought to-day; G. de Reynold states the Case for Italy as the "common-sense" of a "neutral"; Socrates tries to make Mystes see sense about the Bourgeoisie; "Viator" tries to solve "the paradox of our religion being founded for the poor: while in modern Europe the poor in a frenzy of indignation burn our churches and the clerical party which defends our churches is composed of the rich and privileged"; G. M. Turnell finds the revolutionary poets not so revolutionary; Barbara Wall that "Christians are too little interested in Christ to be Christ-like," and blames—the Evangelists! Important correspondence on Should Thomism speak the language of Kant? and What is the function of the Catholic literary critic in the matter of "clean books"?

ESPRIT (June) with the slogan "La femme aussi est une personne" applies the principles of personalism to La Femme with cus-

BLACKFRIARS

tomary thoroughness. Lively and thought provoking articles on every aspect; Mounier's *La femme chrétienne* demands instant translation.

G.K.'S WEEKLY (June 18): Memorial Number: tributes and memories from His Grace the Archbishop of Westminster, Robert Lynd, E. C. Bentley, Hilaire Belloc, Fr. Vincent McNabb, Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, and W. R. Titterton.

HOWARDIAN (Easter): *The Discipline of Christian Life* lucidly explained by A. T.-A.

IRENIKON's tenth anniversary number. Dom Rousseau's *Réflexions sur des symptômes unionistes* admirably outlines the task for theology to-day.

IRISH ROSARY (June): Fr. T. E. Garde, O.P., recalls and elucidates a neglected aspect of Eucharistic doctrine and devotion in *One Bread, One Body*.

LEFT REVIEW (June): *Art, Pure and Mixed* by Eric Gill: revolutionary art or artistic revolutions?

NOUVELLE REVUE THEOLOGIQUE (June): In *Existence tragique: la métaphysique du Nazisme* P. Thielmans, S.J., gives a useful account and constructive criticism and the philosophy of Heidegger.

PAX (June): Dom Theodore Baily introduces Prinknash-Doulton religious statues—truly "a great opening for a serious reformation of our so-called objects of piety"; but the accompanying photographs do them far less than justice.

SCRUTINY (June): *A Note on Hopkins and Duns Scotus* by W. H. Gardener: further *correspondances*.

TERMINAL (Summer Term): This number of the excellent organ of London University Catholics includes Fr. Thomas Gilby on *Setting for Euthanasia*; Mr. L. G. Bussell on *Catholicism and the Modern World*; Mr. Anthony Downes on *Evolution*; Mr. D. Brass on *Toes and the Twentieth Century*; and Prof. Temple on free-will.

PENGUIN.