

CORRESPONDENCE

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To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS,

CHRISTENDOMS NEW AND OLD?

Sir,—The article by Fr. Victor White, O.P., in your November issue is of great interest, and one is tempted to be over-long in comment. But this temptation I must resist, for certainly I am not the man to discuss the question on the technical philosophic ground chosen by Fr. White, and my gratitude for his courteous references to myself makes me glad that I am not called upon to risk further misunderstandings. Perhaps you will permit me, however, to make some comment upon a few derivative points.

1. Fr. White seems to criticise me for over-simplifying my terms in *The Sun of Justice*. A good example of this is his reference to my "dangerous spatial imagery," where I say that Grace is built on Nature. But the whole point of my book is that it is for non-technical folk, including working folk to whom philosophic terms and precision are a closed book. But are these "infantry of the Church" to be deprived on that account of the clear concept of Social Justice which is their due? The whole of our history and literature bears witness to the contrary, from the time when Our Lord said: "The stone that the builders rejected is made the head of the corner." A spatial image surely, but not dangerous?

2. I should not have said that M. Maritain's *Humanisme Intégral* was as fluid in its acceptance of modern institutions as Fr. White implies. That again is not a matter for me. So far as I am concerned, you are already aware that I have never held the position that old institutions should be valued for their age, or new ones rejected for their youth, but only that both new and old must be tested by the eternal principles. This is fundamental, and seems of obligation to all concerned. Fr. White seems to suggest that M. Maritain has gone, and that I should go, further. It is impossible without faring much worse. Fr. Vincent McNabb said recently: "The Jews came out of Egypt in order to fit their surroundings to their ethics. We moderns in order to stay in Egypt are prepared to fit our ethics to our surroundings." That is the dilemma which confronts anyone who tests by time or space instead of by principle. Nothing that I have said means more: but no Catholic, it seems to me, can mean less.

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3. I am all in favour of looking realistically at our world, which is the reason why, e.g., I did not discuss system of tenure; an omission for which Fr. White, somewhat strangely, criticises me. But his argument is summed up in the passage "in practice this means the difference between a policy of revolution, transformation, integration, and a policy of destruction and substitution."

It is entirely a mistake to suppose that I belong to the latter group, while M. Maritain and Fr. White belong to the former. For on applying our theory of testing by eternal principle to the real world around us, we find it is the world which embodies a policy of destruction and substitution. I cannot justify a repetition of the analysis of Industrialism which occurs in my book. But it is now clear that Industrialism, *of its nature*, involves the following effects.

- (1) The rapid exhaustion of irreplaceable raw materials.
- (2) The rapid exhaustion and erosion of vast areas of agricultural land.
- (3) A difference in rhythm, as between industry and agriculture, which sets up breaking strains.
- (4) An unpermissible emasculation of human work, with other deadly strains on the human organism which have been demonstrated, e.g. by Dr. Alexis Carrel.

There are others, but these will serve.

I said in *The Sun of Justice* that Industrialism was a system which depended for its success upon the consumption of our capital resources. So far as I know, this position has never been disputed. But clearly such a system cannot be reconciled with the Catholic philosophy of permanence and renewal, and if so, we must renounce the attempt to accept any essential principle of Industrialism. That is, as Fr. White rightly holds, we must renounce "a policy of destruction and substitution," and do all in our power to pursue "a policy of revolution, transformation, integration." That, I submit, is an adequate summary of the thesis of my book, and probably M. Maritain would accept it as a summary of his massive work for the application of the Perennial Philosophy to our dreadful problems.

Yours faithfully,

H. ROBBINS.

Weeford Cottage, Hill, Sutton Coldfield.
13th November, 1938.

REVIEWS

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS,

Sir,—As a humble student of St. Thomas and St. Antoninus, I should like to make an observation upon the subject of Father White on Mr. Robbins. It is perfectly clear that the Fathers and Doctors of the Church advocated a certain type of society, basically agricultural, with commerce a very secondary factor, individual and responsible craftsmanship implied, expressly self-sufficient, and of a not unpleasant frugality. This ideal corresponds very closely with that of the classical writers, and approximates to the Galilee of the parables. Mr. Robbins, it would seem, stands in the line of the strict interpretation of St. Thomas. Father White, if one may compare this sociological disputation with the theological arguments of the Counter-Reformation period, I must regard as standing in the place of the deviationists—the Molinists and Suarezians. He is a kind of sociological Molina!

(Rev.) W. P. WITCUTT.

St. Anne's, 96 Bradford St.,
Birmingham 12.

REVIEWS

THEOLOGY

THE WHOLE CHRIST, The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition. By Emile Mersch, S.J. Translated by John R. Kelly, S.J. (Coldwell; 21s.)

Le Corps Mystique du Christ of Père Mersch should by this time be too well known and treasured to need any commendation. Praise would be an impertinence: it is the standard work on this most sublime of subjects. It is neither a speculative nor a devotional treatise; it is before all things a collection and chronological systematisation of sources, tracing and scrutinising the revelation in Scripture of the mystery of our redemption "in Christ," and the development of the doctrine by Christian thinkers, contemplatives and preachers from the Apostolic Fathers to the present day. Without depreciating the immense skill and erudition with which the author displays the successive stages in that development, the book will be valued above all else as a superb anthology of quotations from the great minds which, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, have done most to mould the tradition of the Church in the gradual unfolding of her consciousness of her own identity.