

REVIEWS

CURRENT AFFAIRS

THE RELIGIOUS PROSPECT. By V. A. Demant. (Frederick Muller; 7s. 6d.)

This book of only just over 250 pages in length is a really fine and practical defence of the status of persons. It is practical in aim, because it is concerned to show how man may be able, can only be able, to regain his balance in the world as a person, a balance which he has lost so that he see-saws wildly between extremes of individualism and collectivism, all of which involve some form of slavery and an agonising denial of the demands of human nature, the pain of which drives him to soar or sink again to a new form of the other extreme. The book should be practical in effect, because the remedy proposed is put forward not only as the outcome of deep thought and wide consideration, but an appeal is also made to the heart as well as to the head.

It is noticeable that the democratic and the totalitarian (whether Communist or Fascist) leaders alike gain much of their attraction from their attempt to restore to man a self-respect and sense of personal dignity of which he feels himself to be deprived. Somehow, under Liberalism, which emphasised so strongly the value of the person as such, men came to be treated in fact as economic counters; Marxism tried to reinstate them precisely as economic counters; the Fascist solution of the same problem is to deify not the economic collectivity, but the blood unity of the race, or the will unity of the State. Mr. Demant finds that the cause of the failure of Liberalism to produce results consonant with its teaching was that the well of that teaching was polluted by certain unreflective assumptions which were incompatible with it. Moreover, he sees the Totalitarian replies to Liberalism as foredoomed to failure in the form of action and reaction which in very desperation can only become violent, precisely because they too are making just the same assumptions. These are summed up for us in the simple metaphysical terms that man has no real being, but is simply an aspect of becoming. The only possible remedy is to reintegrate the scattered elements of human nature which are hypostatized and exalted by the different extremist theories, to become convinced of the limited character of that reintegrated nature, and above all to accept the fact that man has 'a pivot outside history,' a ground of his being outside the temporal flux, a relation to a

transcendent God who has chosen to work, not merely on His creation from without, but, through the Incarnation, from within. So long as the human person is assumed to be but an eddy in a flow of bare events, whether or not a purpose of some kind is postulated either as immanent in the flow or as standing beyond it (the immanent of will of the Fascist State, the future classless society of Marxism), so long will it be unable to maintain itself in a position from which it can dominate the course of the world, and achieve a destiny proportionate to its dignity.

In what form is this renewed assumption of man's having a ground of his being outside time to be inculcated? It has already been intimated that it must be in Christian terms. But in the theological as in the political sphere we must be certain to synthesise, in the strict sense of transcending while uniting, the extremes. The orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation and Redemption alone assure man of the significance of the historical process and of his own life. If the modernist view be taken that the Incarnation is only another, even though a supreme, aspect of the cosmic process, or if with the Barthian school we emphasise the transcendence of the redeeming God so much that He sets the world free without permeating it, in either case we fail to give to created being that divine meaning which every member of it should have. Further, we need to recognise not only our relation to our Creator, but also to our Redeemer. By forgetting the former, we lose that true notion of the nature of our being which would preserve us from swinging to and fro across our point of balance in our need to find our proper goal. By ignorance of the latter, we fail to see, not indeed our essential nature, but a contradiction that has entered into it with sin, impairing its harmony, and causing us to deify now this, now that part of the disrupted unity.

Mr. Demant, then, wishes to propose to us 'the dogma with which men may handle their historic existence.' In an all too general way we have set out the main trend of his contentions, minimising however the very live and dynamic dialectical apparatus which he employs. That apparatus is notably open to criticism in one particular. It is absolutely fundamental to an understanding of a book which is in general most attractive to read, that the author's peculiar use of the terms 'doctrine' and 'dogma' be clearly grasped. This use is quite adequately profounded at the start; yet in a serious work which treads at least on the borders of Theology, it is surely barbarous to employ the term dogma to signify 'the indeliberate and habitual outlook with which men approach their problems of living and think-

ing'; and doctrine for 'the more conscious body of thought that is recognised as matter of conviction or opinion.' The term 'dogma' at any rate has a fixed significance which renders it wholly unsuited to fulfil the task here assigned to it. Another suggestion, also connected with the dialectic, is that the exposition of the relation of Creator and created, would be greatly helped by the introduction of the notion of finality. The conception of the former as the ground and meaning of the latter does not make the process of becoming intelligible, and suggests that the author has not been wholly successful in overcoming a type of dualism which he deplures. There are indeed one or two passages which ascribe personality to man just because he is a being, and which, quite consistently, take contingent being right out of the temporal flux. That seems to indicate that the solution of the false liberal-totalitarian 'dogma' (presupposition) is not carried far enough; the possibility of bare becoming—in things other than man—is apparently accepted. Thus while the Protestant dualism is rejected for the 'Catholic tension' the elements are at times rather juxtaposed than successfully shown as set in tension. These defects, though, may well be faults of expression rather than thought, for there are other places which negative them. On the natural plane as well as the super-natural he strenuously denies any ultimate alienation of creatures from the Creator. 'The doctrine of Creation affirms both a link and a distinction between God and the Creation; but the distinction is not an alienation, as it is in many forms of Oriental religions . . . Some factor has converted the distinction into a contradiction. There is Fall to be overcome.' But 'becoming or creatureliness is not the Fall' (p. 169).

The chapter entitled 'The Slope of Liberalism,' and the following one, with its valuable and generous criticism of Marxism, are two of the best. But there is a fine notion which recurs often and gives indeed a character to the whole, viz. a recall of thought to being, of religion to doctrine. 'An entirely ethical preference has no religious force, for without conviction that the one is a revelation of the transcendent God, there is no reason for believing the New Testament ethics to be a fuller revelation of God immanent than Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. No doctrine of divine immanence which traces its activity only on the side of one's moral preferences is worth a moment's consideration except for the purpose of hastening its disappearance as a hindrance to Christian realism' (p. 178). With this recall to truth and the real, there naturally goes a recognition

of the important part that knowledge must play in man's salvation, political or eternal. It is only by understanding his relation to God that he can keep his personality clear of the flood of becoming; it is only by faith that he can know the Redeemer as God-Man. Not wholly consonant with this is a fideist strain which sometimes appears; e.g. on p. 68 religious teachers are said to be alone 'the guardians of the truth of a transcendent reality, which truth is the only guarantor of the truth of being.' Similarly in the last two chapters faith is actually presented as a condition *sine qua non* of thought. These points we have indicated may be taken to show that some factors in this speculative line have either not yet been perfectly assimilated or have not found an adequate mode of expression. Yet such criticisms must not be taken to nullify what we have said of the enthralling nature of a book that pulses with life, and is sustained by many elements of a sound and vigorous philosophy.

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NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. By Nathaniel Micklem, Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford. Issued under the Auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. (Humphrey Milford: Oxford University Press; 8s. 6d.)

THE NEW RACIAL PAGANISM. By Mario Bendiscioli. Translated from the Italian by George D. Smith. (Burns, Oates; 3s. 6d.)

The 'Church conflict' in Germany has already been the subject of a pretty considerable literature. But this literature, even when it has been above suspicion of exploiting the sufferings of Christians in Germany in the interests of international discord, has seldom risen beyond a desultory journalism which displays little understanding of the nature or gravity of the issues involved. It was high time for an objective and (so far as is possible) scientific study of the situation; and it is particularly gratifying that Chatham House, convinced (as Viscount Astor says in his Foreword to Dr. Micklem's book) of its 'fundamental importance for the destinies of mankind,' should have undertaken to lend its patronage to so thorough and careful a study as that which Dr. Micklem gives us.

The choice of the Principal of Mansfield College to undertake this exceedingly difficult and delicate study was a singularly happy one. He has brought to the task a rare combination of qualifications. He has not been content, in the manner of the