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IN A WORLD REDEEMED . . .

AND the Word was made flesh. No Catholic worthy of the name can stand outside the realities of faith and of grace, and seek to live his life as one alien, aloof and "secularized"; at best he can only detach himself by taking up hypothetical attitudes of mind. The Incarnation means that a new world, transcending the limits of time and touch, is flung open to him; and he is necessarily of it and in it, inextricably caught up, so that the only "escape" is no escape but death of the soul. "All things betray thee who betrayest Me." He must live and move and have his being in an atmosphere saturated by grace. He must experience at once the exhilaration and crucifixion of having mind and will set heavenwards, for our citizenship is in heaven, and of still living amidst the world's realities, very much a man among men, with no right to be estranged from human interests. Further, there must be growth in the life of grace; and this necessary growth entails deeper appreciation, more vivid realization of what the Incarnation means, of what grace means, of the supreme reality of the Mystical Body—all this and more must play upon his whole being in all its complexity, and not least upon his mind; for his mind looks out upon a world leavened by grace, wholly centred in, and only fully knowable in terms of, the Incarnation. A glance over the course of history shows a tangled skein, hard to unravel; yet the Catholic can be conscious of the extension of the Incarnation in time, of the mysterious life of the Church, and can say "Vicisti Galilae," for the Incarnation means Redemption and therefore hope.

But besides the working out of the Incarnation in time, and more important, is its intrinsic meaning, its inner law. One sentence¹ from St. Thomas is as a flash of light in a domain wherein so much must remain mysterious: "foremost in our consideration of the mystery of the Incarnation

¹ "In mysterio Incarnationis magis consideratur descensus divinae plenitudinis in naturam humanam quam profectus humanae naturae, quasi praexistentis, in Deum" (*Sum. Theol.*, III, xxxiv, 1 ad 1).

is the condescending descent of God's fullness into our human nature; and secondarily only the upward movement of human nature unto God . . ."—words written of the Head, but no less true of the whole Mystical Body, and expressive of the essential dynamism of the Incarnation. There are two great trends in the universe: man's upward movement towards God, and the lowly descent of the Word made flesh ("Who is our Way in the pilgrimage to God"); but the upward movement to God is ever *consequent upon* God's descent and the outpouring of His grace into the hearts of men. First things first. God became man—the capital and saving truth and supreme starting point, for God alone has the entire initiative: that man might become God-like—the second great theme in the Christian scheme of life. And there is no other régime; for the Incarnation has been and is. It only remains for the believer to realize its implications and make them operative in himself. From God then the entire initiative, the life of grace, the first move, the first impulse in every thought and action, from God alone growth in knowledge and wisdom and favour, with its final fruit in the vision of the Divine Essence. In a word, a God-centred attitude towards life and all else is alone permissible to the faithful Catholic.

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Has the God-centred ideal ever been realized? Has there in fact ever been an "Incarnation-conscious" period in history, when men spontaneously and naturally ascribed the first initiative to God? M. Maritain in his latest work² deems that the ideal came nearest to realization in mediæval Christendom, the "Christian age." He combines measured terms with vision, making full allowance for many failures and shortcomings in the *de facto* order; nor would he gainsay the material findings of a Dr. Coulton.

The Middle Ages attained, almost as fully as is perhaps possible in this world, a realization of the Incarnation and its all-pervading influence in the realms of mind and therefore of all human life. In analyzing the basic elements of all

² *Science et Sagesse*. (Editions Labergerie, Paris. 20 frs.)

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culture M. Maritain makes a fascinating survey of the ancient world, tracing the fluctuating fortunes of "wisdom" and "knowledge" in the East, among the Greeks, and in the Old Testament. Antiquity, for him, is characterized by *compétition des sagesses*. Against this stands the world of mediæval Christendom, characterized by synthesis and hierarchic order in all Wisdom and Knowledge, human and divine; a great spiritual order, the supreme order for the mind: an order that could distinguish and dispose in hierarchic array grades of knowledge differing in kind: the infused wisdom of mystical contemplation, the virtually revealed knowledge of theology, and metaphysical knowledge—all three distinct, and yet in a wondrous way correlated, for the lower grades each rouse in man a yearning for the higher, and there are vital links and a harmony between them all. And with order in the mind, there is hope for the various dependent orders, whether political, social or economic. It was the achievement of this order that made mediæval civilization truly great, despite its many tragic shortcomings (perhaps best mirrored in the vernacular literature). Yet it is important to note that this order was no mere architectural plan, no mere "frozen music" of the mind, but something vital springing from an acute consciousness of the fact that the human mind can do little that is right, true and lasting unless borne up by the Spirit that breathes where He wills.

Obviously, however, such ideals and achievements are not of historical interest only. The underlying principles are vital, vivifying, eternal. M. Maritain disclaims the rôle of prophet, but lays down some indispensable conditions for the recovery of the world of to-morrow from the man-centred separatism which may be said to have originated with Descartes, and for restoring once again that true order, hierarchy and living interplay of all wisdom and knowledge—perhaps only possible at the great rare moments in human history when men are Incarnation-conscious.

Now the Incarnation commands the entire allegiance of the Catholic; and as a thinker he must philosophize in an atmosphere of explicit faith and baptismal grace. This is the

fact: hence the problem of Christian philosophy. Readers of M. Maritain, especially of his work *De la Philosophie Chrétienne*, will be quite at home with the position which carefully distinguishes between the *nature* of philosophy and the conditions of its actual existence in the human subject. Only thus can be maintained the completely rational and autonomous character of philosophy (a point that can scarcely be over-emphasized), and withal the fact that it is a quality of mind in living human beings, so that various "states" or settings of philosophy can be distinguished—e.g. pre-Christian, Christian, non-Christian, as the case may be—factors which are of capital importance in the actual existence and development of philosophy.

But it can very soon become clear both from theoretical considerations and from everyday experience that a thomist notion of Christian philosophy is fraught with problems, and perhaps martyrdom of mind. Consider two of the questions treated in *Science et Sagesse*: first, the difficulty of contact and intercourse between the thomist and a non-Catholic thinker, and secondly, the problem of the nature of moral philosophy—a question to which M. Maritain rightly attaches capital importance.

The non-Catholic philosopher lives in a certain atmosphere, setting, which is *not* that of faith and grace; and it can soon become glaringly evident that the thomist and the non-Catholic philosopher are in many ways poles apart, and on either side the air is charged with potential misunderstanding; and the very term "philosopher" is equivocal. The thomist, as a philosopher, may struggle to maintain the strictly rational and autonomous character of philosophy, he may (and should) watch over the strictly rational character of his work and language—and after it all, still fail to disarm suspicion; whereas the non-Catholic may nominally reject all "adventitious" data, but almost all unknowingly and in spite of himself integrate in his philosophical system a large element which is by no means strictly rational. And the difficulty is increased because half a hundred other factors are influencing the thomist and the non-Catholic each in his own way. We in England can be very conscious of non-

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Catholic traditions that hedge us in on every side, and can say feelingly as M. Maritain said some years ago—*la pente de l'esprit moderne est contre nous*. Our very language is as a worn-out currency little fit to convey thomist notions: think what the terms "personality," "charity," "science" would mean in a classic text—and then in a present-day evening paper! And in this connection we can make our own the words of a contemporary³: "The modern English language and ethos have grown up outside the Catholic tradition, and many expressions which are essential for the presentation of the Catholic thesis are now Greek to the educated Englishman. This is a sign of the tragic separation from the central tradition. It is tragic not because we are incomprehensible, but because history is incomprehensible and the Catholic conception of man's nature. This explains why discussions on details between Catholics and non-Catholics are liable to end up in mere cavilling. . . . Scarcely a term is used which is not coloured by the general outlook, the *weltanschauung* of the man who uses it."

And yet there is no need to despair: something can pass between two heterogeneous *milieux*; it is the privilege of intellectual beings to understand languages other than their own; intellectual sympathy and humility are potent, and prayer more potent still.

Next, concerning the nature of moral philosophy. All human conduct is either in the province of moral Theology or of *adequate* moral philosophy, or of both. But why an *adequate* moral philosophy? (An ungraceful term, but accurate.) First, because speculative and practical philosophy are fundamentally different. The domain of practical philosophy is that of human conduct and actions, τὸ πρακτικόν. But human acts, human conduct, are exercised in the concrete, historic, existential order; and moral philosophy to be valid must envisage them thus. Now faith tells us that man's ultimate end and purpose, to which all his acts are directed, is *supernatural*, and failure to take cognisance of this would mean moral philosophy's lapse into invalidity,

³ *Colosseum*, December, 1935, p. 245.

for it would fail to consider human acts as they really are, i.e. posited in the existential order. And so moral philosophy must take over some data known by faith alone; it must "borrow" principles from the higher discipline which is Theology. Thus moral philosophy must be, in the language of the scholastic commentators, a "subalternate" science; it remains purely rational in its method, human in its outlook, but part of the material upon which it works is derived from Theology. Moral philosophy must be "adequate," i.e. must put the mind in conformity with its object or human conduct in all its range. A moral philosophy that would totally abstract from man's supernatural destiny is a completely hypothetical notion; such a science in fact only *could have* existed had there been no Fall and no Redemption. Nevertheless adequate moral philosophy does not merge into moral Theology, nor indeed approximate to it. For though they may treat of the same matter, human acts and man's progress towards his ultimate end, and of the ultimate destiny itself, nevertheless they are in themselves totally different, for the light in which they envisage the same matter is in each case different *in kind*. Theology, and therefore moral Theology, is a "divine" science whose gaze falls upon an object common to itself, to faith and to the beatific vision; the theologian's standpoint is that of faith; but moral philosophy, while utilizing theological data, remains purely rational in its outlook, and proceeds in a more lowly way from earth to God. Adequate moral philosophy can only be confused with moral Theology if we have of the latter the monstrous notion that it is a mere application of philosophical reasoning to revealed truths . . .

The notion of an adequate moral philosophy thus (far too tersely) summarized is by no means an intellectual luxury which might equally well be pruned away so as to leave human conduct to the good care of Mistress Theology; rather does it exemplify the thomist's solicitousness for all human values. Baldly to deny a philosophy of human acts (rational in its outlook and procedure) would mean a loss and a lessening, cultural impoverishment; the thomist must treasure all that is, and *de facto* establish the nature of that

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moral philosophy, viz, ‘subalternate’ to Theology. We can note too how necessary the doctrine is to rectify our whole attitude towards ethics in the Christian dispensation; how satisfying too and enriching for a mind that is at once Catholic and rational. It is the moral philosophy for man as he is here and now in this everyday world where every little choice and commitment of his free-will can be incipient eternal life; and it is surely difficult to conceive of any notion of moral philosophy that would ring truer or be more consonant with the laws of life of a redeemed humanity.

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These are but two elements in a score of good things to be found in *Science et Sagesse*. Its great value lies in its synthetic character, and in the freshness of the presentation of basic but sometimes misunderstood thomist principles—familiar principles perhaps, but the familiarity may be of the sort that permits careless reading and not the familiarity that comes of assimilation and understanding. The *nouveauté* is not so much of subject matter but of exposition; and consolidation is the keynote.

The *Eclaircissements* or second half of the work is a more technical elaboration, very necessary for theologians and philosophers, lay and clerical, but perhaps too long drawn out for the great run of readers less patient of technicalities and still less of apologetic amplifications. For M. Maritain has had and has many critics whose onslaughts may be burdensome, but, fortunately, must be profitable: repeated criticisms and discussions are as smelting and tempering preparatory to a still sounder presentation of fundamental thomist theses. And M. Maritain’s work has had time and occasion to ripen and mature; which is all solid gain.

We can be grateful to him for this valuable work, for its depth and its vision. If we may say so, he is a great worker for the conversion of England; his will have been no small share in the struggle to rebuild a Catholic tradition and ethos. And may the day come when those who are working in the unity of the Mystical Body to reintegrate the riches of the Incarnation, will reap the fruits that he has sown. Riches of

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the Incarnation, and so riches of the mind too. *Science et Sagesse* manifests to us something of the knowledge created and uncreated which is part of the treasury of the things of the spirit; a treasury that is unlocked to those who would take a God-centred view of the world, a view that realizes full well that all potentialities and capacities find their fullest expression and development in the synthesis of faith and reason that is thomism. And thomism is the only valid humanism: integral humanism that takes cognisance of eternal Wisdom and Knowledge, and with it too of all the complexities of knowledge human and profane—even the most lowly, for they are rightful elements that have place and meaning in a world redeemed.

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