

BLACKFRIARS

CHRISTIAN SOCIOLOGY

CHRIST AND THE WORKERS. Stanley B. James. (Sands; 5s.)

This book irresistibly suggests comparison to a gold mine. There is in it much that is pure gold. But this has to be sorted and sifted out from much that is irrelevant or less valuable. And the gold in it makes it more than worth while doing the hard work.

The central thesis of the book is this. There is for the Church an entirely new problem: in the growth of a class that is as a class hostile to Christianity. The worker, says Mr. James, is torn by two apparently conflicting loyalties, to Christianity, and to a general movement for the betterment of his conditions whose leaders tell him that established Christianity has held him down. The existence of this problem is proved by concrete experience, words of working boys given in the book. The problem is not yet quite so acute in England as in some other countries. But it is present and growing.

Mr. James points out that it is the more acute as the trend of social movement in the "civilised" world is towards an age of the Proletariat superseding an age of the Bourgeoisie. He quotes Christopher Dawson on this. And quotation apart, the forces at work in Europe to-day prove it.

Then Mr. James draws out this fact: that the Church always tends, in the spirit of peace and order, to work through existing régimes, and has been working, as once through Feudalism, more recently through the commercial ascendancy of the Bourgeoisie, and is hence identified with this régime, not only in the eyes of the workers, but actually in the methods of many of her members—he gives as examples: the ascendancy of polite discussion over action; the allowing of that to be given back as alms which has been won by no fair business means. This latter has been done to avoid Radicalism. It is now condemned. "The wage earner is not to receive as alms what is his due in justice." (*Divini Redemptoris.*)

The problem therefore is very great: that of a coming age, with a good deal of right on its side, working to supersede Christianity. The reply to it has been found by the inspired wisdom of the present Pope and certain leaders of Catholic Action. The Church driven to look into her resources by the circumstances of the time is to head the worker movement—and chasten it at the same time—"to kindle and restrain." She is to bring out that to be a worker is the state of predilection. It was chosen by God. The worker is an Apostle. The first Apostles were workers. "The worker," says Pius XI, "must be apostle of the worker." And as the early Church was

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built upon the poor (it was the gibe against her) so she is now to build upon the worker. This programme is not opportunist. It is simply that circumstances and the inspiration of the spirit that dwells in the Church arouse Catholics to the knowledge of a forgotten truth. It is rather an act of contrition.

The final stage of Mr. James' argument is the triumphant one. It has begun. The J.O.C. is really doing this work. The Pope has said so. It can be seen. The consciousness of human dignity that might be lured into a grubby materialism by Communism, is being fulfilled in the workers conscious of their vocation as Brothers of Christ, Apostles, reformers of society. And even in this country, as extracts from the enquirers of the Wigan Group of the Y.C.W., which he quotes, prove, the transformation has begun. And this is New Age. It is a warfare with an enemy, Communism-cum-Militant Atheism, which has replaced by action (the only refuge of the Proletariat whose strength lies only in numbers and determination), the discussions and polite agnosticism of the Bourgeois period. Its issue can only be seen by faith in the last resort. But facts, the marvellous work of the J.O.C. especially, point to a great hope.

This "potting" of Mr. James' argument necessarily leaves out much, many great truths in fine words. Especially the beginning of the last chapter, the "Crucifixion of Labour," is such thought and such writing as makes you hold your breath.

There are defects in the book, irrelevant matter and exaggerations. A drawn-out comparison of the position of the workers to that of the Jews in the divine dispensation is overdone. The identification of the Church with the Bourgeois régime is likewise overdone. Piers Plowman occurs too frequently. Parallel as he may be he is past history and not the only prophet of the revolution in the present Worker Movement in the Church.

But such imperfections only throw into relief the greatness of this book in its essential thesis and in many unforgettable passages. The gold is well worth sifting out.

FINBAR SYNNOTT, O.P.

THREE THEORIES OF SOCIETY. By Paul Hanley Furfey.
(Macmillan; 8s. 6d.)

Those who have read Dr. Furfey's *Fire on the Earth* will be aware of a certain transatlantic naïveté in the writing of its author, an ardour in urging the ideals of Christian charity, a degree of gusto in denouncing the mode of life of the self-interested rich. The ground plan of the present book, with its expressed intention of "turning to a discussion of the validity of the various ways of studying society" in the hope of clearing in