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A CATHOLIC KINGDOM

THE plight of Austria has been recently placed before English Catholics in reference to the Peace Treaty. 'It is impossible', wrote W. J. Igoe in *The Catholic Herald* (January 24th) after a visit to Vienna, 'to convey to the average Englishman the misery of this foodless, fuelless capital of a country split into four zones. Unless the peace treaty guarantees to Austria internal independence and material help from outside, nothing can save this ancient Catholic nation'. It is in many ways a test case. A Catholic nation in the very heart of Europe, it has always played an important role in international politics. Mussolini gazed on it with covetous eyes; Hitler with greater dexterity grabbed it as the first step in the realizing of his pan-teutonic claims. Austria is a nation worth studying and worth supporting for many reasons, social, political and religious.

But for Catholics it presents special problems. It has always been a Catholic nation, and shortly before the *Anschluss* it was represented to us in this country as a model Catholic country in which the social doctrine of the Church was seen to be working, where the encyclicals were studied by leaders like Dolfuss, where the Church had liberty to exercise her influence in all ranks of society. Then Hitler came; and the contributors to this number of BLACKFRIARS, English ob-

servers and inhabitants alike, agree that what might be called in the jargon of those days a 'Catholic front' collapsed immediately. The Catholics who should have led the nation, the intelligentsia, were soon raising their arms in enthusiastic Nazi salutes. There were even high ecclesiastics to be found ready if not anxious to come to terms with a power which was already persecuting Christians in Germany.

What was the reason for such a widespread betrayal of Christ? It is said that wherever the Church has no opposition and becomes associated with the ruling class, its members grow lukewarm, conforming to the outward practice but forsaking the inner spirit; in fact they incline to become pharisees of a materialistic kind. The recent history of many 'Catholic states' becomes too easily an argument against Christ's Church. Where the challenge of the enemy of Christianity does not make itself heard the Church is in a more precarious position.

There is one particular evil, however, which seems to lie at the root of most of these modern failures among individual Catholics to maintain the purity of their religion and who thus collapse into the evils of Nazism, the Black Market, or anticlericalism without a struggle. The very idea of religion has become associated with politics, or even more often with Sociology, so that we can only think of the success of religion in terms of the effect it has on wages, on family life, on the distribution of property. Stated thus the claim may seem exaggerated, but a close examination of the Catholic Press and even of ones' own conscience will show a marked tendency to measure heavenly truths by this-worldly standards. The virtues which we are urged to cultivate are social virtues—charity which does good to the sick and the poor, worship which draws many into one social unit, and inevitably justice and mercy. We are asked to shun in particular the vices which have an evil consequence on society. Birth-control and over-much beer are anti-social.

In a Catholic journal chosen at random the front page contains announcements of an English Bishop who sits on a committee for a 'united Europe', of the French Catholic party being ready for opposition, of a deceased Cardinal who 'like every true Liturgist was keenly interested in Social Reform', of a protest from Newcastle about the state of Poland and Yugoslavia—in fact the only non-political or non-social news, apart from the adverts for Gin, Horlick's and Wine, is that the list of the Popes has been revised. Now, clearly, birth-control and alcoholism are evils which a Catholic must abhor and repudiate; the Catholic Press, too, must concern itself principally with the affairs of the world which have reference to Catholicism, for Catholic news limited to piety and propriety would hardly be news. But here it is a question of emphasis. It is by emphasis that

we can detect whether or not the spiritual does retain its primacy.

These social aims, we vehemently insist, are good and necessary. Justice must be done; charity will overcome social fissures. And the evils inherent in these sociological religions must be overcome. But do they not reveal an overbalanced emphasis? Religion itself is a virtue by which we *give* to God his due; it is not commerce with God by which we bargain for a good time on earth in exchange for our recognition of his over-lordship. God's blessing brings many joys and sometimes even prosperity while we are still on earth, but religion does not demand such blessings, does not even demand that the sting be taken out of suffering when it is 'offered up' to him. For although religion is a part of justice, it is only what is called a 'potential part', because it does not, it cannot, completely fulfil the idea of justice. We are bound to give God his due; but we are not sufficiently apart from God to be able to give anything which is not already his and which he does not already possess. The virtue of religion moves us to give God all the good things which he himself already possesses but which he has entrusted to our care; to return them to him intact and augmented by the co-operation of our own free will in the act of offering. We cannot say to God, Because you have a grand social plan for us we come to worship you, or, Because we want to live here at peace and in prosperity we offer a tithe of what we own. Religion bids us come before the Lord convicted of Sin, begging his merciful countenance to turn towards us and to accept our whole being in spite of the degradations to which we have submitted it.

A religion whose principal aim is to found a social order, however good and equitable, has little to do with the kingdom of heaven, preached by our Lord and committed to the care of his Church. Christ's kingdom is not of this world and he has made no guarantees that those who follow him will receive anything but the stripes and blows which constitute the outrageously unjust treatment of persecution—insults, calumnies, confiscation of property, and finally even death for an innocent man. This was the kingdom which our Lord commanded us to seek first, a kingdom where the subject risks this sort of treatment at the hands of fellow-men. If we seek that kingdom first then all the rest will be added unto us. If we seek that kingdom *because* all the rest is added, then we are putting it *second*. If we seek it for the social security and the culture and civil amenities that it provides, then we may discover other kingdoms offering more attractive utopias, speedier solutions to the present critical needs of society.

So ingrained in the modern character has this sociological dye become that these words will not easily be understood. We have grown accustomed to look at all our difficulties through 'this-worldly'

eyes. There is nothing easier than to fall into such a habit to which the whole of fallen nature inclines. And it needs the constant preaching of the kingdom of heaven to remind people that there is any other point of view. When such preaching is silent for many years, or is scarcely heard above the ceaseless din of modern life, words about the kingdom become a foreign language. Christ's voice cannot be heard. Only the many voices of Christians are heard squabbling over property, wages and zones of Europe. We are speaking here of course of the private Christian voice, not of the voice of Christ's Church teaching the way of salvation, nor of the inner voice which directs so many to sacrifice all in a holocaust for the Beloved Spouse whose dwelling lies in the heart of that kingdom. The quiet Christians who go to Mass and receive Holy Communion and the other Sacraments and go unselfishly about our Lord's business—they know the language of the kingdom. But as soon as the Christian begins to write in the Press or explain his views to his neighbours, he will almost inevitably be proclaiming a 'this-worldly' organisation because he discovers instinctively that only about this world do men who read or listen understand.

In viewing the future of Catholic states such as Austria, therefore, we should keep the issues clearly before our eyes. It is certainly desirable that an independent and Catholic nation should be re-established in the heart of Europe, but do not suppose that this has anything to do with Catholicism as such. Or else we shall find the same easy collapse of Austrian Catholics as occurred after the *Anschluss*. There is nothing strikingly supernatural about such a nation or its constitution. Heaven knows we had enough trouble with the confusions of the issues over Spain, and we are finding it troublesome enough to be clear-sighted regarding Poland, Yugoslavia and Italy. What we need is a little more of the Sermon on the Mount with its beatitudes and a little less of 'brave new orders' with their panaceas for peace. Our Lord had to teach the Jews that he was not come to establish social security, that it was blessed to be poor, blessed to be outcast, despised and persecuted. He has continually to teach us the same lesson. We are with the Jews for ever inclined to look for the establishment of the kingdom of this world. This will be established neither in Austria, nor in Poland, neither in Spain nor in Italy. But much will be added to all these countries if only Catholics could be persuaded to seek first the kingdom of God and its justice.

THE EDITOR