

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor, BLACKFRIARS.

Sir,—May a recent convert, of no intellectual or literary ability and only a housewife to boot, say a few words à propos of the article in December BLACKFRIARS—'The Christian and the post-Christian', by Geoffrey Ashe?

There are many roads to the Church but there must be numbers that came the same way as I did and perhaps a brief account of my background (which is so typical) and my subsequent reception into the Church may throw some light on to the problem of Catholic apologetics and Catholic literature for the non-Catholic in general.

My mother was a sincere and practising member of the Church of England, but she died when I was thirteen years of age. My father only thinly concealed his total lack of sympathy with any church: he was a tolerant 'liberal-freethinker'; Christianity, to him, was a system of ethics. He was against all organised religion. Not unnaturally I imbibed this way of thinking for many years. However, when I became a student those movements that were vaguely Christian attracted me, particularly if they had practical programmes for 'doing good'. I read the gospels, lives of Christ, particularly those on the 'Jesus of History'. Eventually I asked to be confirmed in the C. of E., but this was an emotional move and did not serve for long. This church seemed empty, lacked focus, and I drifted away from it. All this time I was reading, quite haphazardly, any books on religion which came my way. More and more I broke away from organised religion and came closer to Quakerism. I got hold of Quaker books, read pretty extensively, and finally came to accept Quakerism as the truth of Christ. Christ was within, he was a very real presence in the Quaker meeting, no creed or dogma could enshrine his spirit. In this faith I lived for several years. More and more as the truth of the indwelling Christ became apparent, I read in Catholic spiritual literature—all the moderns I could lay my hands on—and the mystics (i.e., Catholic mystics!) such as St Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross, and most loved of all, Julian of Norwich. Although I could not understand very much of what I read, it meant something to me, whereas non-Catholic writings no longer did. Somewhere there was a key: could I find it? I read on, plucked up courage to talk to a Catholic friend, borrowed some books, and after reading one of them—Fr Martindale's 'The Faith of the Roman Catholic'—was shown in a blinding flash what the Catholic Church really is. I was given the vision, and saw the truth that the Church is Christ's Mystical Body, that we are all members of it, that he dwells in his Church and in us. The saints too became live people, who are still members of the Church though exalted, and who have power to help us, the earthly members. Without any knowledge of Catholic dogma or doctrine, or at least only hazy knowledge, I knew

that for me there was only one thing to do, and that was to ask for reception into the Catholic Church.

Now here comes the point: only those with such a background of prejudices and misconceptions can possibly know the frightful revulsions that have to be overcome by the non-Catholic. All the dreadful things I had ever heard about the R.C. Church loomed large and seemed important; all the genuflecting, the frightful statues, the bleeding hearts, the supposed idolatry, above all the real unpleasantness in one or two Catholics I had met, almost choked me with revulsion. Only the vision I had been vouchsafed kept me from turning back.

From all this it seems to me that if the non-Catholic can be presented with books that show what the Church really is, the meaning behind the Catholics' behaviour in church, why 'Gospel Christianity' so dear to liberal-Christians is not what Christ intended, and then follow it up with apologetics that have some meaning for moderns, I venture to think that many more non-Catholics might be reached.

Once inside the Church it becomes increasingly difficult to think as a non-Catholic; what seemed important before no longer is so, and one cannot easily recall the old attitude of mind. That is why, it seems to me, writers that are in close touch with non-Catholics are more likely to broaden the scope of apologetics.—Yours etc.,

EILEEN BARKER.

To the Editor, BLACKFRIARS.

Sir,—Mr Geoffrey Ashe's paper, 'The Christian and the Post-Christian' in your December number, is refreshing, particularly in its plea that Catholic popular apologetics need some radical bringing up to date. How often, when reading pamphlets and popular manuals of the kind intended to appeal to inquirers of today, does one not get the depressing feeling that their writers' arguments are really directed against a form of Protestantism that has almost ceased to exist!

Mr Ashe, touching on the familiar objection to the Church based on the shortcomings of Catholics, suggests a triple line of defence against it, the third line being the 'sociological' one.

Doubtless this line of inquiry needs development, as he says, but there is already a very telling example of its use given in an essay of Baron F. von Hügel on 'Central Needs of Religion' (*Essays and Addresses*, 2nd Series, pp. 126-129). The account is too long to quote, but in it the Baron relates how Dr James Martineau, the Unitarian leader, advised an earnest inquirer after religious truth to live for two six-month periods, first among a class of cultured neo-Pagans, and then among a class of traditionally believing Catholics, and to note the results. The experiment was tried and had a happy and illuminating sequel. . . .—Yours etc.,

MICHAEL HANBURY, O.S.B.