

BLACKFRIARS

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RE - UNION : SECULAR OR SPIRITUAL ?

We make no apology for returning, in this issue, to a subject already opened in the August number of BLACKFRIARS. The topic is of such importance that all should have a clear view of the problem and its possible and probable solutions. The wiser men of to-day are searching for some system of drawing nations together again into some supra-national body. The Unity of Europe is their chief preoccupation, and rightly they have to consider what each nation should give, rather than what it can get, at a Peace Conference. They have also to consider how each nation is to be induced to relinquish their rights in certain respects, and here they will find unyielding opposition. It is obvious that instead of acquiring more power and further possessions Great Britain, Russia, the U.S.A., together with Belgium, Switzerland, Rumania—the whole tribe of nations—must individually be prepared to hand over certain sovereign rights to some international power. Lionel Curtis has recently argued the case once again in his *The Way to Peace* (O.U.P., 1s.), and Professor Leibholz in the present issue of BLACKFRIARS makes the position quite clear. The national governments should be left free to push forward social reform at home, while they can safely

leave foreign policy to an organic union of nations in which their sovereignties have been in that respect absorbed. The trouble with the old League was that it was based on the principle of national sovereignties, which Mr. Curtis rightly shows to have been the main factor in its ruin. There must, of course, be some central law and authority to which all will submit, and many will add that this authority must have the power and physical force to implement the law.

Mr. Curtis presents the Union of the States of America as a practical example of how men can be persuaded to relinquish their independence for the sake of a common good. But the realist will hardly be persuaded that such a union is within the reach of any groupings of European States. We are not faithless pessimists when we say that the realist is right. Such a union of European nations will hardly emerge from a world-wide war which has intensified the distrust of nation for nation and fixed within the hearts of men the seeds of hatred and revenge. It is not practical politics in a house full of fighting lunatics to pick out the stronger men from the *melée*, to tell them to combine and quell the riot, and to announce that the house is to be run in future by a representative council of lunatics. Distrust of each other is not thereby removed, nor sovereign individualism overcome by words.

The wise who seek unity are, however, too negative; they are, as a rule, inspired by the desire to avoid future wars, rather than by the idea of bringing men to live for a higher, common good. There is no objective international thing to which any nation can trustingly relinquish its sovereignty, so the fear of war remains predominant, and servile fear such as this is opposed to the union of men in mind and heart. There is no change of heart about territories acquired by past aggression. There is scarcely a nation that does not consider all other nations as its inferiors, as well as in many cases its potential enemies. Can there be hope for a union built up on self-interested fear and suspicious pride?

Then these wise men do not as a rule possess the depth of wisdom to see that they are confining their solution to the same sphere as the problem. Their international order remains in fact a political and economic order, and therefore still a national order. Their union of States remains in the same category as the individual State—hence their finger always points to the U.S.A.

The hope of Union lies in the power the individual States still possess, not only to sacrifice sovereignty, but to rise together to a higher order, an order in which they recognise the common nature of man, with a common morality issuing from that nature. This

common, and therefore really international, morality, being superior to political organisations, must regulate the union of nations, and each nation, the *polis*, must be prepared, or be made, to submit to the law.

The main difficulty of this position is to know what the moral code is and to know how to insist upon its fulfilment. For this there must be some central authority which is non-political, non-national, and above the nations. Since such an authority would not be in a position to exercise political pressure, a general trust would have to exist among those who are ruled by it to allow moral pressure to be effective. But above all this, central authority must have higher and super-natural powers to supply what is lacking in the weak, natural code of morality. The central authority must therefore have some sort of super-human teaching power to declare what in general is right and what is wrong, since individual men are seldom clear as to what is the natural law. It must also have a super-human healing and strengthening power to overcome the self-interested fear and pride which prevent the nations from living according to the moral code that comes from human nature.

This sort of union among the nations was attempted in the Middle Ages with the spiritual authority of the Pope as the heart of Europe. That was when Europe approached nearest to unity. But it would be foolish to hope for a return to that state of affairs which depended also on the feudal system for its success. Such unities are organisms which grow; they are not invented and set in motion according to plan. Nevertheless the principles from which the medieval unity grew, must be the principles for union to-day. There are no others, for there is only one human nature. It is here that Catholics, who still acknowledge the supreme spiritual authority of the Pope and belong to the non-political, universal fraternity of the Church, can and should play an important part, as a contributor shows elsewhere in these pages. But if Catholics play this part as though it were an exclusive game of their own, they will only become separatist, which means a descent to the political level where they are regarded as rivals to Communists, Socialists or Fascists. It is no use even to hope for re-union of people until those who play their part in the union can remain free from the habit of judging the whole unity exclusively in terms of its parts. They must get 'beyond politics.'

What we need above all to-day is an historic sense of Europe's religious and cultural past. We cannot build a unity with the broken masonry of the nations which at their best will never fit together. The present situation contains in it the seeds of the past, but most

people refuse to look at that past except with eyes trained to see only political and economic values. The people who should hold the key positions in the work for reunion of nations are such men as Mr. Christopher Dawson, men who can gauge the deeper realities. Mr. Dawson has a profound knowledge of the cultural and religious background of the present situation. His books, particularly *The Making of Europe*, *Progress and Religion*, *Beyond Politics*, and *The Judgment of Nations*, should become the textbooks of all those who have a real desire to rise above the politics of sovereign States that get what they can and hold what they get, and who see the vision of a united Europe rising out of the smoke of war. If a unity is to grow, it must grow according to the nature of man, according to the genius of the peoples and nations which differentiate human nature, and according to the religion which was instituted by God to gather the broken fragments of that nature and mould them into a nobler unity in the brotherhood of charity.

THE EDITOR.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN BELGIUM UNDER GERMAN OCCUPATION.

By Rev. Fr. Dantine, O.P. (The Belgian Ministry of Information.).

This account of the Belgian Church from 1940 to 1944 reached the Editor on the day Brussels was liberated. What was written as an interim report has become a summary of the whole story of the dignified independence of the Belgian Church during the occupation. It ranks with the work of Cardinal Mercier at the end of the last war and happily tells very much the same story. The author remained in Belgium until March 1943 and the facts of the last 18 months are collected from reliable sources at the Belgian Ministry of Information. The main difference between this and the former occupation is that the Germans were this time hostile to the Church as such and once they abandoned the policy of cajolery they seized opportunities of persecution, inevitably offered by such things as espionage on the part of some of the clergy. In a case like this one might have expected the Catholics of the occupying Power to come to the rescue of their suffering brethren in the occupied countries. The German bishops did in fact protest to the Fuehrer towards the end of 1942 at these attacks on religion. The protest is quoted in this booklet, and it gives a clue to the ineffectualness of Catholic solidarity. The German bishops say: 'It is not possible for us to prove in detail all the facts mentioned in this memorandum because of the obstacles placed in the way of personal investigation on the spot.'