

## COMMENTARY

**THE JESUIT CENTENARY.** The four centuries that have passed since the death of St Ignatius Loyola have been profoundly marked by the Society he founded: the history of the Church would have been very different if the bullet that wounded Ignatius at the siege of Pamplona had found another target. It is a pleasure for this review to add its tribute to the many that are being evoked by this month's celebrations, and particularly so in that this number includes an article by Father Martindale, who contributed to our first number thirty-six years ago and has remained a faithful friend ever since.

It is a mark of the providential greatness of the Society of Jesus that opinion in its regard has never been neutral. A battle scarcely allows for detachment, and the initial impetus of the Jesuits in a Europe divided by heresy has extended to the whole world, divided now more calamitously than ever before.

This direct and realistic understanding of the needs of the Church in every situation has sometimes caused misgivings and indeed opposition within the Church itself. The military commander and his professional troops can seem to suggest campaigns altogether too audacious for those who long for a quiet life. And it may be that the claims of 'action', imperative as they are, can overshadow the perennial contemplative centre of the Church's life. The true dimensions of the Church's catholicity must include many elements which, by themselves and of themselves, would indeed be incomplete as reflections of the universal and enduring mission of Christ. But the capacity to adapt that mission to the existing circumstances of the society in which we live, of making the Church contemporary in that sense to the world in which it works, is crucial to the Gospel. 'All things to all men' is not a counsel of expediency: it is simply the charity of Christ in operation. And it has always been the glory of the Society of Jesus.

During the last War, in France, when the disasters of defeat and enemy occupation of necessity made old divisions seem irrelevant, a Jesuit who had engaged in fierce controversy for years with a Dominican, happened to meet him in a prison camp. A pity, he

said, that it needed a war to make the arguments seem so unimportant. The story has a moral, it may be. Intellectual exchanges can seem like pitched battles, and the alleged rivalries between the Orders of the Church are usually grounded in a debate which arises from the perfectly valid differences of spirit and emphasis that are theirs. But, in the common service of Christ and the Church, the exaggeration of such differences can be a pity, and, in the grave crisis of our time when the question is no longer of a sectional advantage but of the very survival of Christian civilization itself, it can be a disaster.

Fortunately, in this country at least, the circumstances of Catholic life have allowed for few vested interests, and although in the past disputes between 'seculars' and 'regulars' enlivened the memoirs of Victorian bishops, no one at this time of day would want to revive them, still less to create fresh grounds of conflict. But it is none the less true that the differing functions of the religious orders within the unity of religious life itself, as well as the differences between religious life as such and the obligations of the pastoral clergy, deserve to be respected and if need be defended. There is no room for differentiation unless specific functions determine its existence. That is why in wishing the Society of Jesus well on the fourth centenary of the death of its founder, the Church must want the Jesuits to be as Jesuit as possible—to preserve and indeed to extend that powerful missionary spirit which created the true Reformation and confronted the claims of a 'new religion' with the burning zeal of an Ignatius and a Francis Xavier.

The Church is not a monolithic structure in which variety has no place, and the Jesuits remain the lasting proof of the Church's capacity to include new forms of life to revive its unchanging mission. The reform itself becomes venerable as the centuries pass, but its meaning and its worth remain.

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