

EXTRACTS

A NEW FRENCH REVIEW might justifiably be met with a groan; they swarm like bees. But *BIBLE ET VIE CHRETIENNE* from Maredsous (published by Casterman for £1 a year) must be regarded as an exception and welcomed cheerfully; for it is a Benedictine quarterly and, as its title indicates, considers the Christian life in the light of *Lectio Divina*. The first number, as first numbers usually do, sparkles with stars. Père Bouyer writes on the Word of God and the Church, Père Daniélou on the Canticle of Moses as expressing the Easter joy in the Paschal Vigil, Père Gelin comments on Psalm 22, Dom Charlier does the same for the passage of Isaias 52-53 on the suffering and glorified Servant of Jahwe, Mme Lubienska de Lenval contributes a fascinating sketch of the place of gesture in the Bible, and so on. Not very Benedictine in its authorship, one might think; but that is as it should be—reviews written exclusively by a single Order always tend towards sectarianism. Here we have Benedictine inspiration among every type of Christian and uttered under Benedictine auspices; a perfect ideal. (The quarterly may be had in England from Basil Blackwell, Oxford; in Ireland from Gill and Son; in U.S.A. from Moore-Cottrell.)

LUMIERE ET VIE, of course, comes very close to the same style of review, and perhaps the only difference is that this is under Dominican auspices with not quite the same insistence on the Scriptures. The February (1953) issue is concerned with the Crisis in Morality, not, as the Editor points out, with the crisis in morals which would amount to the prudish expression of horror at the way people behave today. Morality—*La Morale*—is a kind of grammar of morals, a system of reference which each of us invokes to justify our decisions. Outside Christianity a number of new terms of reference has arisen.

Marxism sets forth a morality. It demands the recognition of man as an economic and social being and it bases all on that. Atheistic existentialism, where liberty is the only value, also sets about to create its morality. Nazism, leading to strange and cruel aberrations, attempts to set rules of conduct.

Christian morality now also makes persistent demands to be related once more effectively with 'natural morality'. All this is dealt with in the issue, which has a lot to say about the untranslatable term 'engagement'. Christian life involves a great risk and we must throw ourselves into it without hesitation; we cannot go on playing for safety, but become *engaged* in the reality of risking all for Christ and for Christ-on-earth.

THOMAS MERTON, the indefatigable Cistercian writer, is contributing a series of articles on 'Action and Contemplation in St Bernard' in *Collect-*

anea Ordinis Cisterciensium (Rome and Westmalle), and in the January issue he writes:

Commenting on the Gospel of the Feast of the Assumption, St Bernard compares the monastery to the family which Jesus used to visit at Bethany. In the monastic community we find Lazarus the penitent, Martha engaged in administration, and Mary the contemplative. All three are necessary to make the monastery what it ought to be, not only materially but above all spiritually. They are the effect of the good order of charity in the community. It would be a distortion and a caricature of monastic life to demand that a community consist exclusively of one or the other of these 'orders'. . . . Mary has chosen the better part. And yet not even Mary has a monopoly on the Cistercian ideal. . . . We are not to believe that the monastery *ought* to be peopled entirely by Marys but that since human nature is what it is, we must be content to let two-thirds of the community live below the level of our vocation. That is by no means the case. It is *better* that the community should live on their different levels. . . .

This is a reasonable statement that needs to be filled out by the doctrine of the body of Christ on earth, for all are members of the same body and all share in the same life of Christ in God.

In the *Tijdschrift voor Geestelijk Leven*, Jan., '53, there are some articles of interest. The first, on 'Abandonment to Divine Providence', sets out to show that this 'holy abandonment is a state of soul which arises out of the exercising of the divine virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity in their relation to divine providence'.

Then there is an article on 'Meditative Prayer' wherein the writer sees meditation, or mental prayer, as necessary to the spiritual life as exercise is to corporeal life.

Another, whose title may be translated as 'The Losing of One-self and the Possessing of One-self in Marriage', shows that a proper understanding of marriage 'leads to the realisation that everything in married life, even the material, little happenings, are only so many means to the perfecting of the ideal of marriage'. The author has some pithy statements on the change that comes about when the children begin to arrive: 'You will no longer walk so much with your head in the air; always you will be looking down at your feet to see that you do not tread on your children.' 'Never will you light a fire without remembering that fire burns.' 'Never will you eat a sweet without remembering that there are little mouths that also like sweets.' 'Never again will you say with so much assurance "at such and such a time I shall do this or that"; now all your plans will include "perhaps".' 'Never again will you slam closed a drawer with your knee because there is always the possibility of a little hand being in between.'