

REVIEWS

FREEDOM AND CATHOLIC POWER. By Paul Blanshard. (Secker and Warburg; 16s.)

This is the English edition of a book which, since its appearance in the United States in 1949, has sold 150,000 copies despite an organised boycott by the Hierarchy. If Mr Blanshard is right, the circumstances in which I, as a layman, have read it, and now review it, entail for me automatic excommunication. *Verb. sap.*

Not a single one of his facts, he says, has been refuted. I cannot myself refute any but a few slips. But 'facts' are a matter of selection as well as of accuracy. The truth, and nothing but the truth, with insufficient regard to how representative of the *whole* truth about the matter the analysis is, can still be the refinement of partiality. Likewise the publishers' blurb, in qualifying his 'hard-hitting' as 'not vituperative or scurrilous', is thus far correct: but, for all that, one of the literary qualities which make this book such racy reading is the sustained refinement of malice throughout. The technique is to say in two lines, now and again, that you are concerned with the Catholic Church not as a religious body (for that apparently would be presumptuous of you, and illiberal) but with it as a political institution seeking power; meanwhile, you throw a sop or two to heroisms and sanctities that no stretch of the imagination could impugn, and give a meed of grave approval to certain 'liberal' Catholics endeared to you by characteristics which (alas) make them so unrepresentative of the rest; and then, having established your good faith and your sense of democratic responsibility, to let fly. It is a good technique for the purpose (and all the telling quotations from first-hand Catholic statements are genuine). He implies that the world learnt it from the Jesuits.

This, the 'climate' of the book, is all the more a pity in that he does have some shrewd points. Not only because if you throw enough mud at an institution vitiated by human failings some of it will justifiably stick, but, too, not all is well within the Catholic Church, in its human aspect as a worldwide society, and constructive criticism is needed and in some matters overdue. Moreover, the problems into which Mr Blanshard divides his indictment are the relevant problems to examine. They are: How the Hierarchy works; Church, State and Democracy; Education and the Catholic mind; Public Schools and public money; the Church and medicine; Sex, birth-control and eugenics; Marriage, divorce and annulment; Censorship and boycott; Science, scholarship and superstition; Fascism, Communism and Labour; Tolerance,

appeasement and freedom; and the 'Catholic Plan for America'. The ground-plan in all these is the American scene, but an introductory chapter paints it as 'a British problem too'.

There is a good deal that is *simpliste*. 'As late as the fourth century the Roman Church played quite a minor rôle. The notion of Rome's primacy developed after this, and Rome's universal jurisdiction began only in the ninth century.' 'Who determines what subjects come within the sweep of infallible power? The Pope, of course. . . ! If faith deals with ideas, and morals deal with behaviour, is not the whole range of human experience encompassed within the Papal claim?' 'If a democracy in Spain expels the Jesuits and seizes Church property, then it is a murderous outlaw. If a democracy in the Netherlands supports all the Catholic schools with taxpayers' money and pays the salaries of the priests, its divine right to govern is recognised as authentic.' 'The penalties imposed upon Catholic professors for departure from orthodox dogma almost never reach the level of public revelation because the dissident Catholic has no real forum for the discussion of grievances.' 'The whole educational policy of the Church has been imposed upon Catholic people at the point of a theological gun.' 'In practice, even in dealing with Catholic mothers, they are able to use a loophole that has been developed in the mother-foetus rule by Jesuit casuists. This rule permits an *indirect* killing of a foetus. . . . 'The ritual required of the Catholic nurse is most specific. The only liquid that is valid for valid baptism is water. Nothing else will do, and if it is not available the child will never reach heaven.'

The point about those quotations is that they are representative of what can be found on very nearly every page; and that they are certainly not the observations of an uninformed author. He has indeed a flair for lucid and precise summarising of theological points—when he cares to exercise it. Nor does he fail to underline obliqueness in Catholic writing when he finds it. 'Note how adroitly Fr Connell suggests [*re* Euthanasia] that the desire to end a patient's suffering may be an unworthy desire by some relative to get rid of a burden.' Yet *innuendo* is his own *forte*.

He can descend to this:

'In practice this priestly rule, when applied in cases of acute nephritis, means that no doctor may save the life of a mother by loosening and withdrawing the contents of the womb even when the total to be removed is less than a level teaspoonful, or not large enough to cover a thumbnail. Father McFadden, incidentally, although he writes with great authority on medical matters, does not carry an M.D. after his name. He is a member of the Order of Hermits of St Augustine.'

And this:

'The [Lateran] treaty, of course, was dishonoured by Mussolini almost as soon as its ink was dry, and the Pope then scolded the dictator with a few sorrowful and indignant phrases in his Encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno*. . . . His only genuine anti-Fascist—as distinguished from anti-liberal—utterance was his attack on Mussolini's anti-semitic laws of 1938. By that time his experience with Hitler had taught him that he could not afford to condone racial fanaticism officially.'

This is the kind of material that one will put on one's shelves much lower than the works of H. C. Lea, and only a little higher than H. G. Wells' *Crux Ansata*. It is good reading, but dear at sixteen shillings. The Encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* are 'vague and amorphous' in what they say in praise of freedom and democracy, but clear enough to rank as decidedly pro-fascist pronouncements. The Catholic League for Decency is apparently strong enough and well enough organised to have driven out of business dozens of newspapers in its first year, and yet that is one side of a picture whose other side is a 'leakage' of over fifty per cent. Have it both ways.

In this way he fouls his own nest. For many readers will give up, on these counts, after two chapters, and thereby fail to come up against the substantial matters of relevant adverse comment on the Church which come later, and which warrant some heart-searching among the places and people concerned.

It is not without significance that, in dealing with the educational level of the American Catholic schools, and still more the Universities, his 'editorial' embellishment of the narrative is at a minimum and he tends more to let facts make their own impression. His reflection that 'the hierarchy has stifled self-criticism among its own people by refusing them permission to read both sides of vital controversies on matters of social policy', has a carry-over into realms of intellectual maturity, and of higher education policy in the light of it. To explanations of the *Scapular Militia* of 1943, he tartly rejoins that the circular issued 'did not promise salvation to those devoted to the Virgin: it promised salvation to those physically clothed in the scapular'. He faces the claims made for St Anne of Beaupré, and the exposition of her bones, with a Catholic Dictionary of the Saints which roundly declares that 'not even the identity of her name' can be definitely asserted about the mother of our Lady. He quotes Dr J. A. Reyniers, of Notre Dame, writing in *America*, on the proportional Catholic output of Catholic scholarship—'only one-fourth as much as our numbers warrant'.

The overtones in much that he has to say on authoritarianism and

superstition are gross. It would be a pity nevertheless if the whole indictment were shrugged off on account of them. The Church is not consistently 'priest-ridden', yet authoritarianism does so easily breed a type of mind voluntarily *prone* to leave initiative and responsibility to tutors and clergy, where the Encyclicals say that responsibility and initiative are ours. The core of trenchant criticism lies there, though Mr Blanshard obscures it by too much theatricality of the Galileo and Inquisition types. On one pioneer experiment he is indeed to be congratulated by all, Catholic apologists and non-Catholic critics alike. His chapter on 'the Catholic Plan for America' reviews the fundamentals of Catholic social teaching as set out in authentic Catholic sources, singles out as basic legislative issues the schools and divorce and birth-prevention, and then, in terms of these, drafts the Amendments to the United States Constitution that can be expected when the birth-rate-differential shall have enabled a Catholic majority-population in the U.S.A. to pass them by ordinary democratic means. This chapter, excluding its sections on the 'Plan' as already operative in Quebec, Latin America and elsewhere, is technically first-class controversy, and worthwhile debate.

Nevertheless (finally) Mr Blanshard is a dubious asset of the cause he champions, and that cause is essentially negative and emerges nowhere clearly. If you lambast the Church for tyranny and superstition and obscurantism, and allow it to be inferred (by many readers, no doubt) that the loyalty and devotion and training and self-sacrifice to be found among the faithful are not so much the spiritual strength of the Church (which your treatment has neglected) as parts of the 'machine' for world power; and if you set all this up in baleful contrast to a (never-described) democracy, and as 'un-American', you may be suggesting to ordinary readers (the less subtle ones—the great majority) that they should throw out the baby with the bathwater. The liberalism from which Mr Blanshard stems has been doing precisely this for four hundred years. How much longer?

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VRAIE ET FAUSSE REFORME DANS L'EGLISE (*Unam Sanctam*, XX). By Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P. (Paris: Editions du Cerf.)

The sheer bulk of this volume may deter all but more leisured and hardy readers, and the ardour even of these may be somewhat damped by the announcement on page 1 that it is only the first of a series of seven such volumes of *Essais sur la Communion Catholique*. It would be unfortunate if the mere quantity of the work, and the time and attention which it demands, should put it out of the reach of those whom it most concerns. For while the thinker and the scholar will find it of the greatest interest, its practical applications are mostly the affair of those busy and