

THE ETHICAL AFTERMATH OF AUTOMATION; edited by Francis X. Quinn S.J.; Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland; \$4.25

Most general treatises on automation, like most treatises on the social teaching of the Church, are pretty boring: and the boredom is of much the same kind in the two cases. It is because there are only, at a general and non-technical level, about half a dozen points to be made on the subject, and the interest to be gained from putting them in order and providing illustrative examples is strictly limited. At first glance, this book looks as though it might be an exception: but actual reading belies this opinion. However, it has an interest which no other book on the subject shares: namely that it consists of eighteen papers which were given in 1961 to a conference of American students for the priesthood at Woodstock College, Maryland. Before examining the defects of the enterprise it is worth pointing out how sensible the idea is in theory, and how interesting it would be to have something done in a seminary in this country on pressing problems of contemporary society with outside experts taking part in large numbers.

One of the most obvious defects of this book is that none of the speakers was given the time, or perhaps invited, to tackle his subject properly. The result is a collection of remarks continually leading up to a statement of the problem and then breaking off. This at least is what the best papers do. The worst merely offer clichés in a pious tone. Sometimes the reader can complete the sentence he has begun without bothering to read the rest: e.g., all the old stuff about social equality meaning 'levelling down'—otherwise called 'extreme democracy', 'extreme nondiscrimination' or 'the equal treatment of unequals' (Mr O'Neil) is typical of the thought level and analytical capacity of the worse contributions. There is no sustained analysis of the concept of social equality itself. However, this kind of thought seems profound and searching put beside some of Senator Barry Goldwater's dicta—such as the following proof that 'the American businessman is no longer the hard-hearted man such as was found back in the twenties . . . He is concerned about his employees. He knows that if his employee goes out of work, he himself will pay part of his support through taxes, through charity . . . So he wants to keep that person either working for him or gainfully employed elsewhere'. This hardly squares with the later remark that the main cause of the troubles concerned with automation, etc., is 'the overbearing desire of people in business, people in unions, people in politics to present as entitlement for man only the material—"what's in it for me?".'

The best contributions come from two sources: the Jesuits and the trade unionists. It is noticeable how liberally-minded the Jesuit contributions are, especially compared with those of the laymen, Fr Norris Clarke of Fordham for example, on the 'Cultural Dimensions of the New Leisure' is trying to get to grips with an urgent social problem in a constructive way, and his paper could be seen as the beginning of a debate on the possibility of a 'common culture' such as has been going on in this country for some years; even if part

of his solution is what Orwell scornfully called 'salvation by fretwork'—i.e. the pursuit of worthwhile leisure-time hobbies as a consolation for frustration at work.

But in contemporary America the bogey of unemployment looms larger than the cultural issues. There is throughout the book an undercurrent of serious discussion about the adverse effect of automation on employment, at least when it comes at a difficult moment economically. Both the unionists and the clerics seem agreed that the optimistic conclusion that automation does not cause large-scale redundancy is unwarranted: and there is a fairly sharp disagreement between them and the businessmen (including Catholics) as to the morality or desirability of governmental initiative in problems of re-location and retraining of displaced workers, the provision of pensions, etc. But in spite of the division over this issue, it is still seen as a small disagreement between groups who both regard themselves as part of a very united society—united in its principal aims and ideals. Frequent allusion to papal utterances on the need for co-operation between management and labour helps to solidify this impression. But it seems to me that this atmosphere of togetherness may be the very thing which inhibits positive thinking on the subject: for it is precisely this absence of any sense that the nation is really divided into two camps (roughly: the haves and the have-nots) which makes constructive analysis of any possible alternative to the present social situation impossible. An alternative vision of society is urgently needed if the problems of a technological world are to be solved in a Christian way: but is such a vision possible unless a large number of people feel that, as a class, they are under-privileged and are determined to do something about it?

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THE OUTCASTS, by Edith Sitwell; Macmillan; 10s. 6d.

SELECTED POEMS, by Stevie Smith; Longmans; 25s.

SELECTED POEMS: YEVTUSHENKO, translated with an introduction by Robin Milner-Gulland and Peter Levi, s.j.; Penguin Books; 2s. 6d.

Dame Edith Sitwell's disapproval of the bulk of the poetry written in the last ten years is well-known, and in the preface to her own new volume she takes another crack at it—'there has been a general attempt on the part of incompetent versifiers to remove all grandeur from poetry, to flatten it down into the lifelessness of the lesser Victorian verse'. These are harsh words, but, charitably, she quotes no names. It seems justifiable to assume that her own practice is to maintain or restore the grandeur. But (alas for the poet who wrote *Façade*, *Gold Coast Customs*, *Still Falls the Rain*) the grandeur is illusory. It is no more than an apparatus of plurals, 'large' adjectives, capital letters, fleshless symbols.