

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

CATHOLICS AND THE NEXT WAR. The problem of conscientious objection continues to trouble many Catholic consciences. In the event of the failure of Catholic, and other, endeavours to avert another international war, "what is *A* to do?" Following on Mr. Watkin's plea for conscientious objection, referred to last month, comes *Catholics can't* (=mayn't) *Fight* in a lively new American periodical, THE CATHOLIC STUDENT of New York. The drift is indicated by the subtitle: *They can if they find a just war which is as likely as Mussolini retiring to a farm in Abyssinia*. The case for the intrinsic immorality of modern warfare and the consequent immorality of participation is convincingly set out. The solution of this problem receives a very different emphasis in the more abstract treatment given to it by the French theologian Père de la Brière, S. J., in ETUDES (October 5) under the query: *L'objection de conscience est-elle parfois légitime?* He distinguishes three classes of conscientious objection: (1) that which declines all military service on the ground that all war is of its nature intrinsically immoral; (2) that which declines this or that particular military service on the ground that a particular war is judged to be immoral; (3) that which declines obedience to a particular military command judged to be immoral, such as the killing or mutilation of prisoners. The first class, Père de la Brière maintains, "merits, from the doctrinal standpoint, pitiless reprobation." Of the second he says: (a) the question is not always absurd; (b) the general rule to be followed is unquestionable, namely that there is always a presumption of right in favour of the civil authority and the imperative exigencies of the common good of the State; (c) exceptions are conceivable only in "circonstances monstrueuses qui déborderaient toutes les règles ordinaires du droit." He is more liberal, though not altogether encouraging, towards conscientious objectors of the third category.

It is well that these familiar, and scarcely disputable, principles should be recalled. But they hardly touch the anxieties and questionings which are haunting the minds of many Catholics at the present time. The Pope (as well as many theologians firmly supported by our own reason) has

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condemned in advance the next Great War as murder and suicide. To what extent, it is being asked, is it permissible to co-operate in such an act? Can the presumption which, admittedly, can normally be claimed in favour of civil authority be held still to stand in view of these denunciations by moral and religious authority? Must we not rather conclude that the presumption is that the next big international war will be an immoral one? Criticisms in *THE MONTH* (November) of *A New Peace Society* also ignore this question, and seek to comfort us with the assurance that "'Resist not evil' has no reference to that entity, itself the creation of God, the civil government." Neither exemption of the State from Christian moral principles nor disregard for the real question at issue is calculated to inspire confidence in the theologians. Nor can we take great comfort from the thought that few Catholics will be given the time or the liberty to "object" even should they wish to. Father Gillis, quoted by *THE CATHOLIC STUDENT*, has well said: "Whoever acts against his conscience commits sin. Conscience would probably put an end to all war if it were given its rights. But when wars arrive, or even rumours of war, the first thing that is killed is conscience. And there is the supreme tragedy and crime of war, not the killing of the enemy, but the killing of the conscience." Theologians will do a service if they can explain how Catholics may join in the next war without objective sin. But they should beware lest, by shirking the real issue, they arouse the suspicion of doing its work of killing conscience in advance of it.

OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE. An article under this heading by a Catholic journalist, Mr. Peter Hutton, in the November number of *THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER* demands attention if only as a symptom of what is being thought, felt and said by many keen Catholics at the present time. We cannot always endorse Mr. Hutton's very sweeping and severe judgments on his fellow-Catholics, clerical and lay, but they may well serve as a scheme for serious self-examination; they call for refutation by deeds rather than by words. We extract a few salient passages:

From nearly every Catholic pulpit the people of Spain are now damned as cordially as once they were blessed. What used to be thought of as perhaps the most Catholic country in the world is

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now held up as an example of all that is evil and dangerous. In nearly every Catholic newspaper the atrocities committed by the "Reds" have been described in the grossest detail. Innumerable pictures of "Red" soldiers outraging sacred objects have been scattered liberally over their front pages. Articles and phrases of almost incredible malignance have appeared even more frequently in the columns of journals professing the Catholic Faith than in the ordinary secular capitalist Press. If Catholic voices are uplifted against the outburst, as one or two have been, they are silenced with an unmannerly sneer, a brutal accusation, or silent contempt. It is forgotten that these "Reds," these men and women who are committing sacrilegious and bestial atrocities, are, nine-tenths of them, baptized Catholics. . . .

All those Catholics, driven by necessity or ignorance into support of the Popular Front, will have to be answered for to God by the Church, that divinely inspired Church which has had in Spain an uninterrupted opportunity and a privileged position for nearly a thousand years. When that day of reckoning comes it will not be the souls of the poor who will suffer, but the bishops, priests, monks, friars and nuns, all those Catholics in fact who, with knowledge and privilege and the ever-ready grace of God inspiring them, could not raise a finger to lead a Catholic proletariat out of its intellectual and physical plight.

The Church is like a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. No one could be unaware of the Church. Yet many could claim that they did not know her social teaching, that all they knew was that the Church was sublimely indifferent to all politics and economics except Communism. Even some rulers of countries could be excused for not knowing more. . . . It is practically impossible to find anything on the Church's social teaching outside rather obscure pamphlets, Papal encyclicals which only a heroic few seem to take seriously, and an occasional article in a learned monthly. To learn what the average Catholic actually thinks about politics, society and economics, it is only necessary to hear a few Catholic sermons or to open any "popular" Catholic paper. The evils of the present regime are passed over in silence by clergy and Press alike, when it is in fact largely those evils which are the cause of the immorality, the birth control, the revolutionary propaganda and those similar matters which seem to interest clergy and Press to the exclusion of everything else.

THEORY VERSUS PRACTICE. Continuing his indictment, Mr. Hutton goes on to maintain that "This extraordinary and tragic situation has arisen as a direct result of the Protestant Reformation," and the consequent counter-Reformation.

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“Philosophically, the Reformation meant the expulsion of the supernatural from the life of the people . . . the substitution of materialism for Catholic realism. . . . After the Reformation man’s conception of himself in relation to the universe was totally different from what it had been before. And it was totally wrong.” It has, moreover, profoundly affected Catholics themselves:

But the Faith stands firm. The Church cannot fail. The question is, Are Catholics going to fail the Church—and the world? It is very hard for a Catholic, unless he be an enclosed religious, not to fall into the habit of unconsciously taking for granted a thousand things in this bourgeois make-believe which are totally anti-Catholic and absurd. It is on account of this deplorable mistake that Catholics have done so little to forward, seem almost ashamed of, their heritage of social philosophy. What does the Church really stand for in the modern world, in practice, relative to our everyday twentieth-century problems? The answer is drastic. In a world which is as antagonistic to her as it is alien, she must be “against” nearly everything. Yet how many perfectly good Catholics fail to realize this? They are told without ceasing that the Church is “against” Communism. But that they never seem to learn—and it is because so few Catholics have ever taken the trouble to analyze Communist philosophy—is that if the Church is “against” Communism it is because its philosophy is dialectical and materialist whilst hers is metaphysical and realist. But in this case the Church must be nearly, if not quite, as violently “against” bourgeois Capitalism, which is equally materialist from her point of view. So far as the law of property is concerned, Capitalism has deprived millions of men and women of the power of owning property just as effectively as the Communists could ever hope to do. The only difference is that capitalists discriminate in their own favour. And, if Communism and Capitalism have erred by Materialism, Fascism errs equally villainously by Idealism while retaining all the sins of Capitalism about the law of property. Furthermore, where it is materialist or idealist, a State which claims the attributes of God, as does the Fascist State, must surely be anathema. Or is the Church really secretly on the side of the rich and the oppressors and the warmongers? Does she really only use religion to keep the people quiet, to comfort them with notions of a better life to come where the rich shall burn eternally? Is she merely an instrument used by the ruling class to stave off the revolution of the masses? That is what the Communists try to prove; and so long as the Church continues in her cowardly and unworthy policy, they will find it remarkably easy.

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Mr. Hutton then gives a good outline of what Catholic social teaching really is, quoting the encyclicals on wages, labour, the family, the existing social evils, ownership, democracy, liberty, Church and State.

These examples of the Church's teaching should afford some clue to the real state of affairs. They certainly explain why the Church has lost the confidence of the proletariat in Spain, for they show what was needful to gain it. Had these principles been energetically translated into action, Europe at this moment might have presented a very different appearance. In England, especially, where the Catholic Church is chiefly made up of proletarians, a tremendous opportunity has been missed. Most of these encyclicals were written about forty years ago; that fact alone demonstrates how much warning was given, how great a chance was lost. But the warning was not heeded and the chance was lost.

We cannot share the extremity of this pessimism any more than the severity of the indictment, the harsher passages of which we have not reproduced. But if it is not yet too late, it may soon be so.

CONTEMPORANEA. CHRISTIAN FRONT (November): *The Jocists* by Barbara Wall: "an ideal form of lay Catholicism."

CLERGY REVIEW (November): *The Gemeindehelferin* by Edward Quinn: German Catholic Action brings back the Deaconess. *The Psychological Conflict of the "Roman" Anglican*: a sympathetic explanation of the much-abused "pro-Roman."

COMMONWEAL (October 23): George Shuster revalues Coventry Patmore and "his understanding of love and criticism of society. . . . His amatory poems are wonderfully knowing treatises on the *ars amandi* . . . more of concrete value to married people than in any treatises I know."

ESPRIT (November): *Défense de la culture* by Henri Davenson: Marxist culture—*snobisme à la mode*—criticized and contrasted with personalist culture. Two Spanish Catholics give their view of the facts about the causes of the Spanish war and of clerical complicity in two revealing articles.

IRISH ROSARY (November): *Where Ireland bleeds* by Vincent McNabb, O.P.: "A Christianity which is only believed and not lived is no match for a Communism that is lived as well as believed."

MAGNIFICAT (No. 11): *Why say Office?* by J. D. Crichton: what Liturgy is and is not.

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MONTH (November): *Communism and Peace*: excellent "Comments on the International Peace Campaign" showing its underlying bogusness and concluding with the timely warning: "We who are the enemies of Communism should do a poor service to Christianity and peace if we allowed ourselves merely to be jockeyed into an indiscriminate support of Fascism with its utterly a-moral foreign policies. Nothing, speaking of our own country, has in fact made public opinion remain indifferent to the Holy Father's denunciations of Communism so much as the widespread popular identification of the Catholic Church with the least desirable aspects of Italian Fascism during and since the Abyssinian war."

ORATE FRATRES (October 31): A much enlarged special number, commemorating tenth anniversary, makes a complete liturgical handbook.

PLYMOUTH DIOCESAN RECORD (November): *The Background of the Spanish Tragedy*: another unprejudiced Catholic voice.

THEOLOGY (November): Father Henry St. John, O.P., presents a good explanation of the doctrine of Form and Intention in reference to Anglican Orders.

PENGUIN.