

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

SAINT DOMINIC AND COMMUNISM. Under this heading Père Chénu, O.P., comments in *LA VIE INTELLECTUELLE* on the latest Papal Encyclical. We translate freely:

Politicians have had something else to smile about. While nations are being torn by violent ideological tempests, while economic instability delivers millions of men over to daily agony, while the armaments race destroys our hopes of peace, while open towns are being bombarded, Holy Church, in this tragic month of October, 1937, lifts her voice to propose . . . the recitation of the Rosary! What a feeble weapon!

Let us confess that when we read in the papers the other day, alongside accounts of the Hitler-Mussolini meeting and the bombardment of Shanghai, the extracts of the latest Papal Encyclical, we could not resist a first impression of pathetic weakness, a sense of unreality. So much are our Christian fervour and hope still bound up with confidence in purely temporal means!

Nevertheless, to justify his confidence in the power of this poor little weapon, Pius XI appeals to *facts*. This, he says, was the means employed by St. Dominic when, once before, popular enthusiasm for a new kind of society aroused half Western Europe against the existing social order and against Christian truth. Dominic made the people pray their *Paters* and *Aves*.

Perhaps some Christians, versed in history, think they can see in our time a new Simon de Montfort, a new "crusade" like the one patronized by Innocent III who sent his legate, Peter of Castelnau, to lead an army of "defenders of civilization," of the family, of property, against the "barbarians." Perhaps they will even look for a new Inquisition. No. It is none of these things that Pius XI advocates. Just the Rosary of St. Dominic. A little, simple, rather monotonous formula of prayer . . .

Europe then, as now, was in a state of ferment. Not only was there much external violence, but also, as in our own days, an epidemic of feverish pseudo-mystical enthusiasm combined with material pride and greed. Cathari, Vaudois, Waldenses, and many other sects whose names are now forgotten, preached an anti-social and anarchic gospel not unlike much communistic "mysticism" of the twentieth century. Pius XI himself remarks the resemblance. It is on account of this resemblance that he appeals for a renewal of the prayer of St. Dominic against the new Albigensians.

What was this prayer of St. Dominic? Amid all the turmoil

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of the popular sects of his time, there really was a call, as yet but dimly understood, for a new order of society which would replace the decaying Feudal System. It is true that, in times gone by since the fall of the Roman Empire, the Feudal System had been the backbone of Western civilization. The Church herself had given a religious sanction to its oaths of vassalage. She had flourished on it, using the temporal power as an instrument for achieving her own spiritual aims; the great monasteries were themselves part and parcel of the system.

Yet the system had had its day; the privileges and power of the ruling classes were becoming petrified; new generations were arising in revolt. The interested parties of the old order offered resistance; the whole equilibrium of the social structure was threatened. Feudal lords, with prelates and abbots, associated (unconsciously without doubt) their jeopardized positions with the welfare of Christianity, and compromised divine truths with dying human systems, forgetting that even the most splendid of temporal civilizations are but fragile, passing supports for the mystical Body of Christ. The sectaries made the most of the situation, and found it easy to tar the Church and the old order of society with the same brush. It was easy to make the people laugh at the pompous legates sent against them with their brilliant equipage, wealth and armed forces.

Dominic, with the intuition which his sanctity gave him, understood the realities of the situation and the remedy it called for. He threw aside all the pomp together with the authoritarian social outlook which it symbolized. For him there were to be no large estates, no feudal power, no rich abbeys. He left the lonely valleys and the cultivated fields to dwell with his brethren in the working-class districts of the towns. He adapted for his brethren the suffrage system of government like that of the new Communes, and he made them join the new university Corporations. The mendicant poverty of the Dominicans enabled them to be independent, spiritually and socially, and so to invade the monopoly of the false mystics. The old-fashioned prelates were seriously disquieted at these goings-on, but the far-seeing Innocent III gave them his blessing and encouragement . . .

In this way we sons of St. Dominic are proud to be considered, as it were, the born adversaries of communism. We are proud to hear our holy Father the Pope proclaim the living efficacy in our own day of the prayer of our holy Father St. Dominic. We are proud to see that in our own day St. Dominic's method of independence from temporal forms of society has been made a fundamental law of all Catholic Action. Our Dominican refusal to ally ourselves with earthly powers and movements still arouses misgiving and even some protest . . . But our rosary is still the witness of our independence and the symbol of our fidelity.

BLACKFRIARS

THE MIRAGE OF FASCISM. The same number of *LA VIE INTELLECTUELLE* treats briefly of recent differences of opinion between *COLOSSEUM* and ourselves, introducing the subject with:

In *England*, *Colosseum* shares with *BLACKFRIARS* the merit of dealing with the utmost frankness with the study of the problems which the modern world sets the Catholic conscience. This is not always brought about without some controversy, but it is precisely the mutual respect and intellectual generosity which governs differences of opinion between these two reviews which is an example to French Catholics. *Colosseum* is "fascist"; *BLACKFRIARS* shows more independence with regard to the choice of political opinions to which its friends urge it.

There follow some extracts from recent *COLOSSEUM* editorials on the subject of Fascism and of "realism" in politics, which our French contemporary agrees with us in finding "disquieting." And then it gives an extract from a valuable letter from Dr. Waldemar Gurian in the September number of *COLOSSEUM*, the conclusion of which, for its own sake, is worth reproducing here:

No, Mr. Editor, it does not seem to me to be possible for the Christian of to-day to identify himself with a Party. As a Christian he cannot support the "Fascist" mentality. He must, as you rightly say, know who are his friends and who are his enemies, and the mere use of flattering expressions in regard to Christianity does not suffice to make a person the friend thereof. The Fascist restoration of authority and renewal of culture has nothing to do with the renewal of true authority and Christian culture. Secularization has only assumed new forms, struck a quicker tempo and one therefore more likely to deceive large numbers of people.

To-day the hour has come for a Christian revival—that is certain; not with the powers of this world but without them. The Christian must ask himself to-day whether his faith has not become too "worldly," whether he has not come to regard the Church too much as a power for promoting political parties and good situations. Certain it is that for our apocalyptic times (and even those who to-day are still living in peace and security will soon become aware of this mark of our times), the harmless belief in progress and cheap indignation at the fact that in the twentieth century the rule of violence based on the masses has raised its "monstrous head" are altogether out of keeping—but it is equally out of keeping to set our hopes on a Christian revival which begins to show itself in Fascism.

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And so I would ask you to regard my letter as a protest against every sectarian mentality, be it of the Right or of the Left—since it is peculiar to every sectarian mentality to flee from the tension between the present and the immediate past, to forget the words “My Kingdom is not of this world” and “Thy Kingdom come.” . . . For this kingdom is found neither in “social progress” nor in the strong totalitarian State. Neither the atheism of Karl Marx nor the atheism masquerading as religion of Dostoevsky’s “Grant Inquisitor,” which determines the world to-day more than one thinks, can be regarded by the Christian as anything but trials of his faith.

The current number of *COLOSSEUM*, by the way, suggests that it is not quite so determinedly “fascist” or committed to *Realpolitik* after all. It contains many excellent things, including the full English text of M. Maritain’s *Sur la guerre sainte*, a fine rendering by Mgr. John O’Connor of Claudel’s *Aux martyrs espagnoles*, *The Desecration of the Artist’s Work* by Peter Wust, and *Modern Religious Art* by Nicolette Gray.

SOME QUARTERLIES. *ARENA* offers a good number devoted to analyses of Marxism in its various expressions and aspects; the whole issue is admirably conceived and edited, and should prove permanently useful so long as Marxism exists.—In a strong number of the *DUBLIN REVIEW* Douglas Duff writes on the Palestine imbroglio and the guardianship of the Holy Places; Mrs. Norman contributes an understanding introduction to Léon Bloy; W. A. Pantin is generous to Mr. Baskerville and writes an mediæval monastic scholarship; Michael Derrick’s enthusiasm for Dr. Salazar is almost infectious (but just how is it possible for this dictator to travel “as an ordinary citizen, hearing unrecognized the gossip of himself in the train or street”?); Waldemar Gurian describes current *Terrorism in the U.S.S.R.*; and Fr. Edward Quinn treats excellently on *Church and State in the Newest Age*.—From *THE SOWER* we extricate this good sense from a book-review:

My readers will remember a letter recently published in all the Catholic newspapers and signed by several distinguished Catholics deploring amongst other things “the reckless discussion” of social and economic problems. Obviously recklessness is to be avoided; but what, I am afraid, these gentlemen do not realise is that silence can be reckless too, in the sense that it

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recks nothing of the growing feeling of injustice that is driving good men into the arms of the Communists. It was one thing to preach patience and endurance in the pre-industrial era when famine stalked abroad, when there was not enough food to go round, and when men tightened their belts that women and children might be fed; it is quite another thing to counsel restraint to men who have to walk the streets lined with well-filled shops and are denied the chance to earn enough to buy food because their work is not wanted. In these circumstances, which is the more dangerously reckless, to say that a way *must* be found and *can* be found to allow the people access to the surplus goods of the earth; or, to say that nothing can be done, that we are bound by the inexorable laws of economics, that dividends are more important than human beings, and that if food cannot be sold at a profit it must be destroyed and workless men must go without? Reckless? Did someone say, reckless? If the rich and the comfortably-off think that they can preserve the *status quo* by standing aside from this conflict they are living in a fool's paradise.

As usual, THE DOWNSIDE REVIEW is distinguished for the rare quality of its book-reviews.—CHRISTENDOM, on the other hand, is particularly disappointing in this respect this quarter; but there is ample compensation in an unexpected Nativity Play by Charles Williams, in *Evangelism and History* by J. V. Langmead Casserley (an uncommonly shrewd critique of current philosophies of history) and in V. A. Demant's *Philosophy of Church Social Action*.—THE CRITERION shows an unexpected concern for *The Plain Man and the Economists*; there is also a rendering of *Purgatorio Canto VIII* by Laurence Binyon. A passage from a book-review by the Rev. Charles Smythe runs:

About the Oxford Conference (July 1937)—the World Conference of the Churches (with the unavoidable exception of the Church of Rome) on Church, Community and State—least said may well be soonest mended. Heralded by the inevitable article by Professor Ernest Barker in *The Times* newspaper, it appears gradually to have assumed more and more the character of a Protestant ramp, or at least to have developed a very noticeable list in that direction. The Eastern Orthodox were notoriously unhappy and uncomfortable; the Catholics were embarrassed; and the Conference concluded with a signal exhibition of that generosity of heart and poverty of imagination which is liable to assail the Anglican Communion in its more portentous moments. But there is no use in crying over the spilt milk of human kind-

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ness, which, fortunately, it never takes long to mop up. The Epilogue was very prettily spoken by the B.B.C., and included tactful references to the American business men whose presence at the Conference had been so much felt. And that (let us hope) is that.

Those of us who see a perilous "treason of clerks" in the unqualified partisanship of Right or Left on the part of the *élite* may feel some alarm at THE CRITERION'S reviews of current periodicals, entrusted to a Mr. Hugh Gordon Porteus. Except, it would seem, in the quarterly of the B.U.F., this gentleman sees nearly everywhere "a leftish attitude" whose "anchor is in Moscow." He finds that "the Catholic periodicals are "rather non-Communist than anti-Communist"(!) and detects "an apologetic and wheedling note, suggestive of a bad conscience where wealth is concerned . . . in the flirtations with Marxism of the 'younger' Catholic organs." His supreme contempt is reserved for BLACKFRIARS, which "has been skating for some time on the thawing ice of Marxism" and whose "editorial tone is almost ingratiating when it faces Left." One of our articles is "an attempt to show that His Holiness is not really so disgracefully anti-Red," and another "might have strayed from the pages of *Left Review*." Amusing enough in ACTION—but THE CRITERION!!!

CONTEMPORANEA. CHRISTIAN FRONT (Oct.): *The Capitalist Press*: a strong editorial.

CROSS AND PLOUGH (Michaelmas): *Art in England Now*: a broadcast by Eric Gill. *A Letter to the Land Movement* from Vincent McNabb, O.P.

ORATE FRATRES (Oct.): Karl Adam begins a series on *The Dogmatic Bases of the Liturgy*.

PAX (Oct.): *Incorporation in Christ*: first instalment of a promising theological essay on membership of the Church.

REUNION (Sept.): St. John (O.P.) before the Latin Gate. *The Setting of Papal Infallibility*: a paper read to the Oxford University Reunion Society by Victor White, O.P.

VIE SPIRITUELLE (Oct.): A posthumous paper by Père A. Gardell, O.P., on *Le Sens du Christ*.

PENGUIN.