

or canonical consecration, the resolution to keep perfect and perpetual chastity or virginity is suggested to many, especially young women, by an infinite variety of circumstances. They may want to live in this way in order to help old or ailing parents, bring up nephews or younger brothers and sisters in place of a mother prematurely dead, or apply themselves to works of Catholic action requiring complete freedom, works which the obligation of the married life would not allow them to undertake or to do so well.

BENOIT LAVAUD, O.P.

(translated by Walter Mitchell).

OBITER

THE APOSTOLATE, FRANCE AND DR BUCHMAN

Maxence van der Meersch, the author of *Fishers of Men*, a novel about the J.O.C. and author, too, of a controversial study of St Thérèse of Lisieux, was interviewed recently by a French Catholic review. 'The Church', said M. van der Meersch, 'is primarily responsible for the apostasy of the masses. Her message is too much mixed up with wealth, too little adapted to those it should be reaching. Preachers are content to expound dogma; they stuff their flocks with doctrine instead of teaching them how to live'. We are scarcely surprised that he goes on to praise the work of 'Moral Rearmament', with its 'absolute love, absolute purity, absolute honesty, absolute disinterestedness. "Begin by putting your own lives in order", says Moral Rearmament, "and then you can start talking about God".'

There is no more familiar phrase in French Catholic writing at the moment than '*prise de conscience*', unless indeed it be '*témoignage*'. M. van der Meersch's confusion of means and ends is, one supposes, exceptional, but his impatience, his despair of traditional methods and his undoubtedly generous impulses are reflected in much 'Catholic Action' propaganda. There is a real danger that the success of the vocational movements, such as J.O.C. and J.A.C., can lead to a class-consciousness and a separation from the common life of the faithful that are wholly disastrous. One is told of Catholic workers who avoid their parish churches on the grounds that they are *bourgeois*, and increasingly the specialised organisations find their inspiration away from the primary unity of family and parish. The papal emphasis on the function of the workers as the apostles of their own environment can be twisted into a sectarianism which is completely

alien to the idea of Catholic Action, which may be defined as the apostolate in so far as it engages the joint work of clergy and laity to secure a spiritual end.

The need for stocktaking, for a '*prise de conscience*', is evident. And in *Les Trois Tentations de l'Apostolat Moderne*¹ Henry Duméry examines the field of Catholic Action in France today. 'The greatest need of the Church is always the primacy of the spiritual life'. This is his text, and its applications are found in the three temptations, namely in the alienation of the spiritual life by pragmatism (the primacy of money and material achievements), by a false messianism (the dangers of propaganda and public repute) and by clericalism (the distortion of lay and clerical functions in the state and in the Church's life). None of these temptations are new; they are implicit, indeed, in the Church's existence in the world. 'If there is a danger for our apostolate, it comes not from the loss of its efficacy but rather from the loss of its purity. If it remains true to itself it will, sooner or later, be effective; if it is not so, then it has already missed its purpose'.

The dilemma of Catholic Action—in which too spiritual an emphasis may seem to create an ineffective 'other-worldliness' and in which too great a concern about temporal things may endanger its spiritual basis—is, as M. Duméry remarks, largely due to the complex setting in which it has to work. For it works in the world as it is, and not in an ideal vacuum. To despair because its achievements seem so slight is to despair of the efficacy of divine grace. And the plausible 'simplicity' of Buchmanism is in fact a rejection of the Church's reality: the Mystical Body of Christ is the community of all the redeemed, at every level of race and colour and class, united in their Head, destined for heaven. And they are destined not as individuals only but as members sharing in a common life which far transcends the divisions of social function.

In *Journal d'un Catéchumène, 1946-1947*,² Dr J. Jovenroux attempts to do for the bourgeoisie what the Abbé Godin so marvelously did for the workers in *France, pays de mission*. Unlike M. Duméry, Dr Jovenroux is not concerned with general questions, or rather he sees them in the light of his own experience set down in this diary of a year's work as a member of a group of Catholic professional men in Paris. The 'unbelief of believers', the loss of the consciousness of God, the sense of frustration in perhaps the most difficult section of Catholic Action: these are some of the considerations that suggest the need for a catechumenate within the Catholic setting

¹ *Rencontres*, No. 28; published by Editions du Cerf.

² *Rencontres* No. 27; Editions du Cerf.

itself. It is a remarkable book, and of a kind perhaps only possible in a country that has produced the *Pensées* of Pascal and, at another extreme, the works of Godin, Michonneau and Boulard. A personal testimony must be judged in terms of its writer's integrity. Much of the *Journal* reflects a strong reaction against the organised methods of the contemporary apostolate. Once more the appeal is to a spiritual primacy, to a contemplative way of life 'which is the only way out of the prison in which we poor prisoners find ourselves'. The dangers of a Catholic Action 'which has for its primary end the modification of social life' are faced, for its concern with class and social conditions 'can easily become a pseudo-activity, an idol which can bar the way towards true spiritual problems'. Instead of relying on the gratifying façade of organisation we must start at the beginning: the way of redemption begins with ourselves. 'We must be firmly grounded in the Faith, we must take the armour of the supernatural life, we must begin with ourselves, we must so renounce ourselves that we can dare to begin to be all things to all men'.

From a small group, conscious of its vocation, finding in a problem shared the way to a problem solved, one in charity as it is one in hope: from such a group, that is a catechumenate learning the business of the apostolate as it must be learned in humility and patience, the external work of 'conquest' may one day begin. And the miseries of the professional classes are no less real because they are often less material than intellectual. The futility of much professional work, the constant impact of the State, the insidious threats to personal liberty, these are real obstacles to the apostolate, and they must first be realised at the manageable level of experience. Dr Jouvenroux describes most movingly the evolution in himself, and in his friends, of the sense of vocation. The problems of friendship and sexual life, the need for 'another', the mood of anarchy induced by much education: these are real factors to be examined, and they must be integrated in the life of grace before one can turn to the large generalities of Christian action in the world.

M. van der Meersch, and the authors of these two books, have much to say on material means. Indeed '*l'argent*' has become almost an obsession in some French Catholic circles. The ghastly apparatus of graduated *pompes funébres*, seat-rents and the rest has latterly been under heavy fire. And the wider problem of Christian poverty has taken on a more urgent significance in a world where 'workers' are aware of their power and are organised to use it. Here once more Catholic Action is threatened with a tendency to find in the traditional discipline of the Church an obstacle to the progress of the apostolate. Opportunely, therefore, the latest number of the *Cahiers*

*de la Jeunesse de l'Eglise*³ is devoted to Christian Poverty. 'We can no longer ignore the existence of a category of men whom society puts aside . . . Jews, negroes, displaced persons, the rootless and alien of every sort: these masses of the forgotten are a reproach to us, a source of disquiet. They can become an obsession, from which we must at all costs be delivered. That is why we should be glad to hear the Gospel speak of the poor'. The beatitude of poverty can only be realised when the Church in her members 'lives that paradoxical mystery', when, that is to say yet again, the deep spiritual implications of the Gospel command more than a notional acceptance. Poverty is the abandonment of the means of the world; accepted, it is a means of redemption. This does not mean that we should acquiesce in material distress and social injustice. But it does mean that we should recognise that 'we cannot deliver the oppressed until we ourselves are redeemed'.

The sanctification of the apostle is, then, the primary concern of the apostolate. *La Vie Spirituelle* (November), in a number wholly given to this subject, recapitulates in a series of profound articles the truth, for want of which Catholic Action in the world may be dissipated in a humanist perfectionism. 'Union with God, the soul of the apostolate' is the title of one article, and its conclusion is the best answer to M. van der Meersch, distinguishing as it does the essential from what is transient, the Church from the inadequacy of some of its members, and tradition from a mere traditionalism. 'The interior life remains the soul of the apostolate', says M. Lochet. 'The formula is more necessary than ever; it must be properly understood. Through a failure to understand the unity of man, the body has either been too much despised or excessively exalted. We must be rid of the dilemma: mistrust of the body or the cult of the body. Its dignity must be recovered through its submission to the soul. So, too, through a misunderstanding of the unity of the spiritual life, action has either been given too large a place or on the other hand has been despised. Again we must avoid this dilemma: spirituality through the interior life or spirituality through action. We must keep what is positive in both extremes, namely we must realise that action is not just a dead time but rather its enrichment through union with God, and also we must recognise that active work needs a time of contemplation for it to remain alive. The exercises of piety are not a principle of life apart from the rest of life; action is not of itself sanctifying, unless it be through adhesion to the will of God which animates it. Prayer and action have no meaning as a way of life and of unity except in the service of union with God who is their

³ *Le Temps du Pauvre*. (Rond-Point de Petit-Clausart, Seine; 220 francs.)

centre and their soul. It is this link that binds the apostle to God, both in his prayer and in his action, which makes a unity of his life; which assures him that while he is wholly engaged in temporal things he yet is their master, while assailed with pre-occupations he is yet at peace, while faced with all sorts of difficulties he is never discouraged, while yet in the world he is not of the world. When grasped by the event by his love he grasps God on whom all events depend. When he is seized with anguish because of the failure of his work among others, by his love he seizes God from whom no soul escapes. Beyond all that distresses and disturbs him in time he has an anchor fixed in the peace of eternity, for his heart is fixed on God.'

ALDATE

REVIEWS

PARADOX IN CHESTERTON. By Hugh Kenner. (Sheed & Ward; 7s. 6d.)

Once there was an ineffectual don that durst attack our Chesterton. Now comes a don defending him and to good purpose. The anthology we have long desired of Chesterton's good things is here at least begun. A somewhat excessively donnish introduction need not put the reader off, for the book is full of meat and solves one of the mysteries of Chesterton. The introducer proves his quality in such passages as: 'Embarrassed by the Chesterton fan who is keen about the *Ballad of the White Horse*', and so on.

After this it is not startling to find that in the opinion of the author and the introducer, Chesterton was no poet, although he wrote a thick volume of verse and several subsidiary volumes. The introducer shows a defective sense of the value of words, for here he alters the meaning of a word called poetry. If Chesterton was no poet, neither was Shelley nor Belloc nor anyone you care to mention. Fancy that the ballad of *Lepanto* is no poem; and is not the Harp of Alfred in the *Ballad of the White Horse* such poetry as none could make but Chesterton? 'Cry Haddock and let slip the dogs of war'. As well say Shakespeare's weak point was dramatic effect, or that he was too fond of rhetoric.

The introduction is both profound and suggestive, but seems to us to need careful re-writing. The language is too far away from concrete meaning, too aloof, too abstract, to say nothing of one's feeling that concrete words would express the meaning better. But it contains a telling diagnosis of the philosophical distemper which worked out from the Thomist normality to that Cartesian itch for certitude; that wrong sort of certitude, smothered in a world of raving disorder, but still dryly sure of itself, explaining the universal by the particular, and mental science by physical.