

# BLACKFRIARS

## A MONTHLY REVIEW

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### THE PLATFORM FOR AN ELECTION

IN the midst of the drowning sea of words and the storm of superficially conflicting opinion that accompanies a General Election our thoughts return to the vision of Christian co-operation. Not that we may pin any hope on a Christian Party, for that always tends to subordinate the faith to politics, sending us to church to seek social security. But the plethora of electioneering promises and schemes drives us back to the fundamental need of a rebirth of a Christendom which will embrace all men no matter what nation or party. It has been said that Christianity, or Christendom, is a platform upon which all parties in England may still stand; yet one is bound to ask: do any of them stand upon it, and in fact has it still sufficient elevation to be worth standing on?

There are two types of scheme or extensive plan upon which an electioneer may build his platform. We are only too familiar with the one exemplified by Sir William Beveridge's Report, but expressed in almost every political promise of the day. It is a mechanical contraption, worked out by mathematicians and engineers which, when once put together and set in motion, will produce wealth and work for all almost out of nothing. Political planners of this sort lay down lines along which all citizens are to be made to run like the tram of the well-known limerick. Their lines are to be organised in a wondrous way by insurance agencies and labour exchanges until no loophole is left through which a man may escape or refuse to

co-operate with the scheme. But who or what is the citizen, receives little consideration. The planner has no time to think about what sort of thing the lines are made for—not even whether it be a bus or a tram. He takes the citizen as he finds him to-day, perhaps in the hidden and insufficiently recognised miseries of the vast industrial areas, or with an increased tendency to sexual immorality and divorce, or becoming finally paganised so that religion has no longer any meaning for him. The plan will merely organise these facts and attempt to fit them into the general machine: industrialised amusements must be provided as an anodyne to the industrial pain, advertisements will at once assist contraception and prevent venereal disease, religion will be removed from education. These plans and promises tend to treat man as a dead machine which has been constructed just as he is found to-day, in July 1945. They are indeed houses built on sand. They may be architecturally very imposing and even beautiful, but when the winds of revolution or war come they are soon swept away.

In other words the majority of social and economic plans lack foundations. The foundation is the second type of plan which ought to be the platform for an election—the groundworks and the lay-out rather than the superstructure. The hope of a lasting reconstruction of our wrecked society lies in building it firmly on the ground plan of human nature, so that our homes may be constructed not on the sands of avarice, competition, passion, but on the rock of the rational animal with all the variety of design that this simple definition implies. For the scheme of human nature includes not only the singular reactions of an individual mind and will radiated in an immortal soul, but the relations and cohesions of many such minds and wills among themselves and with the rest of creation, and all this within the embrace of their eternal destiny bought for them by the blood of Christ. Such a plan may well be summed up in the word 'Christendom'—a conception that represents a society of races, nations, classes of men living in harmony in this world with the principles of their life springing from a divine source in the Christian Church. Christendom provides no clear cut solution for unemployment, social unrest or international war; but it provides the only solution of the infinite tangle of human unhappiness which all flows originally from the abuse of man's nature.

A great welcome is thus due to PROSPECT FOR CHRISTENDOM,<sup>1</sup> which contains sixteen 'Essays in Catholic Social Reconstruction' by the Anglican group which supports the socially constructive

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<sup>1</sup> Faber and Faber; 12s. 6d.

quarterly *Christendom*. For the *Prospect* does not consist in a series of plans for bringing the Church up to date and making it 'work' in modern society, but rather in an analysis of the present state of society in light of the nature and destiny of man as God made him. From this analysis of our position the outline of the foundations upon which we must build naturally follows, showing how we must treat man as an individual, as a family-man, as a member of society and of creation, in order that a stable system develop in the future. Thus in the second essay Dr. Demant presents an accomplished and lucid scheme of the relative positions in the social order, the family and other social relationships, of culture, politics, economics, etc., showing the different types of priority involved. And Dr. Mascall continues the theme in quite the clearest essay of the book (*The Person and the Family*). He distinguishes, along the lines already familiar to readers of M. Maritain, between Person and Individual, and from this fundamental analysis he proceeds to that of the family and marriage in such a compelling manner that it must surely give the most fervent advocate of easy divorce, municipal creches and contraceptives pause to think whether such plans do in fact lead to the Garden of Eden he anticipates.<sup>2</sup>

The most notable contribution is without doubt that of Mr. T. S. Eliot, though it is the most difficult—even Mr. Eliot disconcertingly announces that he is not certain that he grasps his own way of looking at culture and religion. The dextrous way in which he sorts out the different meanings of culture for the individual, for a group or class, and for a whole society, and applies the analysis, is not only fascinating as a study in discrimination but fundamental for the understanding of the wider implications of the nature of man. For considerably more is implied in the simple phrase 'Rational Animal' which sums up man's nature than the mind and will of a corporeal being empty at first but filled up in the course of time with abstract ideas and selfish desires. It implies all these 'Cultural Forces of the Human Order' of which Mr. Eliot writes; it implies the relation of man to the natural rhythms of the universe of which he forms a central part, so that man must treat other natures such as that of the land with respect, an implication discussed with ability by

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<sup>2</sup> One doubtful strain is played vigorously in this essay: the author accepts wholeheartedly the theory of marriage popularised by Doms and others in which the secondary ends become primary. and he even writes: 'Although the essential meaning of marriage is the mutual union of husband and wife, the procreative end is by no means to be belittled' (p. 51). It is surely hardly opportune to insist on a change of emphasis, which may easily be made an excuse for sterility, just when the sterility of marriage 'for love' is proving so disastrous. The Holy See has in fact recently condemned Doms's theory.

Patrick McLaughlin. It implies the relation of cause and effect between man and technology, work, politics, etc., all of which are here treated with insight and commonsense by such competent authors as Philip Mairet, William and David Peck, Ruth Kenyon and T. M. Heron.

Evidently a work of this sort will not have fulfilled its purpose unless it stir criticism and enquiry, and there are many things which we could not accept without further discussion. Thus we would ask Mr. Mairet for further proof that the power of finance is giving place in the modern revolution to the power of the technocrat, in the person of the manager whose position is due to his technical skill; proof too that love, and never need, is the mother of science and invention. And though we would agree that mechanical power is not evil in itself, and that Christendom to-day has to attempt to restore the balance due to the abuse of good machinery, to *save* mechanical industry, we are nevertheless compelled to wonder what earthly chance there is of redeeming or purging modern technique. Again, when Mr. Heron, who as managing director of Cresta Silks must know a great deal about industrial production, sets forth the ideal of *Laborare est orare* for the machine minder and the server of the conveyor-belt, a suspicion of the doctrinaire or academic approach begins to assail the reader.

Although we advise the readers of BLACKFRIARS to acquire, read and assimilate this *Prospect*, it is likely that with many this suspicion will grow into a conviction that the ground-plan outlined does in fact stop short of reality; there is only half a plan; it stops short at the concrete reality of Christendom itself. Its ethics, its rational psychology, its analysis of society are all well reasoned and important philosophical statements, but the book seldom reaches the theological level, though the authors themselves often claim to be writing theology. Where it is concerned with revealed, supernatural truth it is frequently confused and misleading. We have to realise that the nature of man is now unhappily a fallen nature, and in the analysis of modern human needs, and in the subsequent reconstruction, the fact of sin and the supernatural destiny of man must be introduced. This is precisely where Christendom comes in to cure, to strengthen and to complete the natural state of man. Person, the Family, the State, the Land, Culture, these things are of themselves not supernatural and originally could have existed peaceably in a natural paradise of men. But now the *gratia sanans*, acquired by the Crucifix for Christendom as a whole, is a necessary part of the ground plan, at once deepening the foundations and raising the structure built on them to a height and withal to a secure height. This comes

through Christ and his Church, and without a clear idea of this Christendom is meaningless. The essay on the *Idea of the Natural Order* does not clarify the distinction between natural and supernatural; and although the first contribution deals with the *authenticity* and therefore with the authority of Christendom, the Church is hardly touched on and authority is treated with suspicion. Yet the Church and divine authority must in themselves supply the true foundation for redeemed society to be built on, and the Church must be definite in its social form, not composed of a loose agglomeration of moral well-wishers living in a pious anarchy. Coupled with this vagueness, and even silence, about the nature of the Church there is in this book a resentment of the Church of Rome. The general editor, Mr. Maurice Reckitt, is particularly conscious of the 'Roman' claims to true Catholicism when writing about *Catholic Sociology and the English Situation*. He seems anxious to show that 'anglo' and Catholic will make a more integral combination in the wider Christendom than the Englishman who adopts a Catholicism which knows no natural boundaries. One reason for this unnecessary restlessness seems to lie in too great a sensitivity to the accusation of being medievalists and of wishing to put the clock back. Any Christendom group naturally looks back to the day when Christendom was composed of a single Catholicism among many nations; but perhaps there is some feeling of danger from Rome in this attitude and a danger too of antiquarianism. These dangers the authors hasten to dispel as being hindrances to the laying of the true foundation in England.

All this shows the need for more intensive efforts towards true Christian co-operation in our time of crisis for Christendom. Firstly, there is evidently still a need for a better understanding between the followers of the different creeds, although great advances have been made in this direction since the war began. But a better understanding in itself is not enough; even enemies can get to know one another. In fact this hopeful *rapprochement* will bear no fruit unless it be made to follow the logical course of breaking down the barriers and drawing the different religious bodies into a real and operative union. It is only through some unification of this sort that we can move towards the re-establishment of Christendom, where the medieval pattern would become the foundation without being an anachronism and without embarrassment to its supporters. The basic structure of Christendom is the Church; and the prospect is without hope unless men are willing to give their minds to considering her as something more than at best an innocent pastime for those so inclined. If the future depends on reconstructing the social, political

and economic pattern in accordance with the nature of man, this implies a reconstruction in accordance with the nature of the Church. If we are vague and incoherent about the latter we shall find it difficult to apply in the concrete, however philosophically sound we may be, what we know of man and his environment. Our judgments may be valid as far as they go, but they will prove ultimately impracticable.

We must therefore build on the plan of human nature, of a human nature fallen through sin and raised through the life and death of Christ, given in the Church. Belloc's dictum, 'Europe is the Faith and the Faith is Europe,' would be nonsense if interpreted as restricting the one saving catholic truth to a single continent. But if it is the faith that makes Christendom and if Christendom alone holds the key to the future of Europe and the world, the dictum is sound sense.

If the Christians in England could work together socially and politically, and could refuse to wreck the basis of co-operation by setting limits and deliberately ignoring doctrinal differences, they could provide a platform for any election and for any party, a platform being constantly raised higher and becoming safer as it is more closely compacted. This co-operation, which could look theology in the face without fear of unpleasant and discordant bickerings, would bring hope to the land, set an example to the rest of Europe, and provide a much more lively Prospect for Christendom.

**THE EDITOR.**