

FAITH AND SOCIETY¹

WHAT are the relations between Christianity and the social order, between the Church and those societies in which men live? Sometimes the Church is blamed because she has not solved effectively the many evils which afflict organised humanity, because she has not stopped war, for instance, or issued a remedy for the unemployment problem. Sometimes, on the contrary, her teaching with regard to current questions is disdained¹ as either too medieval or too corrupt to be of use. In any case, the assumption is there; she *should* have something to say to enlighten a world in darkness. Another factor that has increased the demand for a statement of the implications of Christian principles is the emergence of a new and formidable political and economic force, equipped with a fighting doctrine. Communism, with its practical and apparently successful realization in Soviet Russia, is a challenge not only to the capitalistic societies to which it is formally opposed, but also to the basic ideas which have formed the Christian tradition. Lenin, of course, identified the two and saw in religion nothing but a support and sanction of the dominant regime: for him as for Karl Marx it was simply 'dope for the people.' The fact that he was wrong makes it all the more urgent to clarify the issue and make the independence of Christian teaching plain.

This book is a commendable effort in that direction. It has a twofold aim. In the first place it seeks to give a systematic account of the history of the Christian

¹ *Faith and Society*. A Study of the Structure, Outlook and Opportunities of the Christian Social Movement in Great Britain and the United States of America. By Maurice B. Reckitt, M.A., Editor of *CHRISTENDOM*. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1932; pp. xxi, 467; 15/-.)

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Social Movement in England with some reference to its growth in the United States. Mr. Reckitt begins with its rise under Kingsley and Maurice in 1848, just at the moment when the failure of the Chartist had made justice seem a farce for the working classes. It continued in various forms, and became in 1889 the Christian Social Union under the leadership of Henry Scott Holland, Bishop Westcott, and Bishop Gore. The War, at first a blow, became an opportunity, and the movement grew and, conjoining with other sympathetic groups, culminated in the great COPEC meeting in Birmingham in 1924. All this is lucidly told with the natural enthusiasm of an adherent, but not without a critical sense of certain defects and weaknesses. Mr. Reckitt incorporates also an account of Catholic activities in the same direction. He pays a tribute to Cardinal Manning, and describes *Rerum Novarum* as 'the Charter of Social Catholicism' which 'stands to that movement in the same relation as the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels does to revolutionary Socialism,' and he sketches the rise of the Catholic Social Guild in 1909 due to the lead of that 'ardent young Jesuit,' Charles Dominic Plater. He indicates the main features and functions of the Guild, and mentions its Annual Summer School at Oxford and the important foundation of the Catholic Workers' College there, in 1921. In his chapter on America he provides an interesting section on the work of American Catholics on social questions, especially that of Fr. John Ryan and the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Council at Washington—a work that perhaps is not so well known in this country as its significance deserves. We stress these Catholic sections of the book because they illustrate its admirable objectivity; at the same time, it is impossible not to feel that the dogmatic differences which divide the various Protestant allies of the movement

must prove fatal to the attempt to prevent an organically united Christian teaching on any important issue. The author realises that Christian morals flow from Christian faith; but he does not seem to face the inexorable conclusion.

It is this flaw in consistency of thought and logical vigour that would seem to be the reason for the unsatisfactory character of the latter half, the constructive section of the book. Its aim is to suggest the elements of a Christian Sociology for to-day. There is a discussion of Politics, the limits of the State and its relations with the Church, the problem of the desirability of Christian participation in public political life in the modern world. Then follows a chapter on World Order, international problems and the Christian contribution to the securing of peace. Finally, two chapters are devoted to various aspects of the present day economic situation, the nature of work and the relation of the worker to industrial technique, the employment of the probable universalization of leisure, the Just Price and the Social Dividend, interest and investment, and the question of the control of industry.

Even this brief and almost unfair outline must indicate that the stricture 'unsatisfactory' is to be taken only in a qualified sense. Mr. Reckitt's attempt is certainly courageous. He takes a comprehensive view and does not neglect any of the relevant realities, however complex and difficult they may be. Nor are his enquiries fruitless: very often they afford an instructive insight into a problem, or a criticism that is both valid and useful. In any case the book is of great value simply because it has asked very necessary and urgent questions, and asked them not at random and disconnectedly, but from a central and unified standpoint, that of the spiritual nature of man. After reading it no one could say that Christians lack at least an intelligent approach to the social questions of the day.

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Thus our criticism is united with a definite admiration for Mr. Reckitt's work. Nevertheless, that criticism remains, and it is, we think, a fundamental one. It is concerned with what seems to be an assumption underlying the whole book. We do not know whether the author's outlook has been influenced by the writings of Karl Barth, but his insistence on the opposition between the Church and the world seems to lead him to posit a sort of essential Christianity which is not only different from, and exalted above, the natural order, but is, if not opposed, at least unrelated to it—a position that sounds like a distant echo of Barth's apocalyptic teaching. Not that he states such a thesis in any explicit way, but it has struck at least one reader that something like that must be in the author's mind. And, further, it is difficult, owing to the dogmatic uncertainty referred to above, to understand what precise body of doctrine Mr. Reckitt holds to be essentially Christian, from which Christian social principles proceed. The fact that he is an avowed Anglo-Catholic does not, unfortunately, make that point clear.

It is in his method of approach to the various elements of Christian Sociology that we find both this neglect for the natural order and a certain vagueness as to what the Church and Christianity definitely is. To consider, for example, his chapter on Politics. When treating of the elements of a subject we expect some discussion of its nature. It is true that Mr. Reckitt quotes definitions of society by Dr. Temple and Suarez, but we enter upon a discussion of the relations between Church and State before we are quite certain what precisely either of those bodies are. It would have been much clearer, to say the least, if he had led us step by step to an understanding, first of all, of what a nation is, its moral function, and the various exaggerations of nationality, and then de-

scribed what differentiates a state from a nation, the justification of its authority and judicial power, in what sense it is a moral person, its limitations, and its ordination to the spiritual power. In this way both the natural and supernatural would have their rights, their co-ordination would be evident, and *both* orders would be seen to come under the Christian purview. Again, in his chapter on internationalism we suffer from a similar vagueness, and we ask is there one internationalism, that of all loving Christians, or are there two, that of the Church and that between States? If the treatment had been methodical we should have progressed from the idea of the State as a moral person to that of its personal relations between itself and other states, the relations of justice and charity, and the idea of the 'international common good.' This is the method of Catholic theologians from Vittoria to Père Delos, which has the advantage of letting us know exactly where we are. It would have become clear that although the Church is, by reason of its origin and divine mission, the most perfect international society, it is not the only one. There is another which has its sanction in the very nature of man and of the State. It is distinct from Christianity as the temporal society is from the spiritual. This is ancient doctrine, but in conformity also with the modern Encyclical of Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*. Another instance is the section on peace. We miss any statement of the doctrine developed from St. Augustine's famous definition, which would have showed us the nature of peace as a stable dynamic order, indirectly due to justice, directly caused by charity. We should have had also some explanation of the Church's concern for world peace apart from her essential concern for peace in the individual soul.

Such a criticism might be continued with regard to the chapters on economics in this book. But perhaps

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enough has been written to indicate the general quarrel a Catholic might have with the author, and also to suggest how what is valuable in his work might receive positive supplement and correction. The quarrel would be a very amicable quarrel, because Mr. Reckitt can claim to have made a successful effort to make others think, and a Catholic may well find in *Faith and Society* a stimulus, a provocation, and a help in working out his own social philosophy.

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