

## BLACKFRIARS

of common ground in premisses and therefore of fruitful discussion. Thomism, as Dr. Box remarks, transcends the limits of time and space; the corollary is that its expression, its method of approach, its emphases in exposition, can and ought to change with the change of outlook which the centuries bring; and contemporary thought will seem less remote from that of St. Thomas in so far as we approach the perennial problems from their standpoint rather than from his. So it is, for example, that Thomists are stressing the essential importance of intuition in the Thomist psychology, an emphasis which at the least makes it plain that Thomism stands *between* the anti-intellectualism discussed in this volume and the extreme rationalism which is its opposite; or again that by stressing the humanism of St. Thomas we are in a position to find common ground for discussion with the pagan humanism which, so anti-Christian in its conclusions, contains nevertheless so much truth in its premisses. Only thus, moreover, do we by learning and assimilating what is true in our age come nearer to possessing the *verité entière*.

These very tentative reflections are prompted by a feeling that, in the brilliant exposition of contemporary thought with which Dr. Box's learning provides us, and his masterly summary of the Thomist position, there is more of juxtaposition and less of exploration of possible rapprochement than there might well have been; perhaps this is to fall into the stupidity of complaining that Dr. Box's wine, which, as Professor Taylor remarks, is of the kind that needs no bush, is sherry and not port. For it remains that one would have to look very far to find such an exposition and discussion of the two types of thought in so small a compass; and though there are judgments here and there which one would like perhaps to question, the study must prove invaluable for the student of either side who wishes to enrich himself with the achievements of the other.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM IN THE MODERN WORLD. By J. E. Lesslie Newbigin. (Student Christian Movement Press; 2/6.)

Much of the most weighty criticism of current orthodox Christian teaching centres upon the question of legalism. The New Testament confronts us with St. Paul's dictum, "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified"; and a great deal of Christian teaching and practice seems to be in contradiction to it. What must be our reaction to those who criticize us on this score? Mr. Newbigin answers: "We are inclined to dismiss too easily the criticisms which are being levelled against Christian morality. We shall correct this danger if we take our bearings by the New Testament. . . . If we do so we shall find—I believe—that we must listen to these criticisms with the utmost seriousness, not

merely because they are so powerfully supported and so widely accepted, but for the more important reason that they are in many respects nearer to the New Testament than a great deal of our Christian teaching on the subject. They are in certain respects nearer to Jesus and farther from the Pharisees than we are. They are nearer to Paul, who was accused of setting law at naught, and farther from those who so accused him than we are. . . . Our real peril is the reverse of antinomianism; it is pharisaism. We shall do well to listen to our critics" (pp. 12, 13).

Mr. Newbiggin examines Professor Macmurray's writings by way of discussing constructively this central theme; for Macmurray's conclusion is that only by eliminating the notions of duty and obedience shall we arrive at a sound moral theory. The good life, as he has stressed, and as we must agree, "must have the whole emotional force of an integrated personality behind it"; but the morality of obedience, he thinks, is mechanical morality, an "imposition" (so the author resumes his thought) "of the intellect upon the emotions," and "it is paid in stunted life, repressed emotions, blunted sensitivity. Upon this blind alley we must resolutely turn our backs. It has proved fatal. We must throw over the ideas of law, duty, obedience as the basis of morality, and make it our first task to educate the emotions in objectivity, taking the risks that come from trusting them. And then the good life, instead of being the deadening imposition of intellectually formulated patterns upon the backward emotions, will be the spontaneous, natural, immediate response of our whole personality to the real world as it informs our minds and stirs our emotions" (p. 18). Mr. Newbiggin agrees with Macmurray in stressing the dangers of legalist morality. These he summarizes under three heads which are clearly tantamount to a denial of the Gospel: (1) corruption of moral motives: "that seed of egocentricity which turns free, spontaneous, self-forgetting goodness into 'good works' done with an ulterior motive"; (2) corruption of moral standards, following on the legalist supposition that by externally fulfilling the law we may regard ourselves as "good": "the Christian is one who has for ever given up the hope of being able to think of himself as a good man. He is for ever a sinner for whom the Son of God had to die because by no other means could he be forgiven"; (3) "to make the improving of our character the direct aim of our actions corrupts morality," for "true goodness forgets itself and goes out to do the right for no other reason than that it is the right." (Here, in this last point, one cannot but see a too Kantian emphasis: disinterestedness is not in fact incompatible with eudemonism, as St. Thomas's moral theory for example shows, and one would urge that the danger here is rather lack of subordination than of sheer exclusion.)

The author now presents the other side of the paradox: St.

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Paul also said "the law is holy"; and in a careful analysis of Macmurray's view he finds contradictions and fallacies which are due precisely to the exclusion of obedience and duty. "We cannot escape these dangers by trying to remove the category of obedience altogether. Legalism by itself is the way to bondage. But obedience to the word of God as He confronts us in living personal challenge is the one thing that can set us free" (p. 48). Is there a solution to the paradox? "There is a morality of obedience to an impersonal moral law conceived after the manner of natural laws, and a morality of obedience to a personal God" (p. 21). External imposition, regarded as such, is one thing; assimilated so as to become the inner law of the structure of a being, quite another thing; the first, bondage; the second, freedom; and the Christian life is in the gradual passage from the one to the other. Duty "belongs to the road which Christians must travel, but not to the goal to which they go" (p. 91); for the growth of the spirit is in learning to "love the will of God and not only to obey it" (*ibid.*).

Some Catholic theology, as an article in BLACKFRIARS (*The Spirit Quickeneth*) pointed out, has much for which to reproach itself on this account. The criticism must not be left to those outside the Church, for here as elsewhere it is in part through our lack of self-criticism that so many remain outside. Our danger too is "the reverse of antinomianism; it is pharisaism"; we shall remedy licence, not by "binding upon men burdens too heavy to be borne," but by trying to show that the Christian burden is, as Our Lord said, sweet and light. There is a tendency to regard any attempt to expose the dangers of legalism as an attack upon the idea of law, and thus one of the essentials of Christianity is apt to be obscured precisely in days when it is more than ever urgent to make it plain. This sincere, profound and courageous study of the Christian paradox is, then, of importance quite out of proportion to its modest size; it hits the nail upon the head; and if it has the circulation one would wish for it, it must do immense good.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

## SOCIAL THOUGHT AND ACTION

CATHOLIC SOCIAL ACTION. By A. M. Crofts, O.P. (Alexander Ouseley; 7/6.)

As a text-book based on a wide and intelligent use of the Papal documents concerning Catholic Action, this book is a helpful analysis of the "principles, purpose and practice" of the lay apostolate. In addition to his use of what may be called the Church's "constitutions" for this apostolate, Father Crofts establishes its theological basis, drawing out the implications of the