

THE CHURCH AND NATIONALISM

I SUPPOSE that most of us have been reading of late, and reading with keen enjoyment, the excellent translation of M. Maritain's *Three Reformers*, which Messrs. Sheed and Ward have published to our common debt. For my part, I have read the book twice already, and I hope to read it again; for good literature resembles fine wine, which no man of sense gulps down in a hurry as does a barbarian, but lingers over lovingly, sipping it contentedly whilst he distinguishes its different merits. I have also read some of the reviews which the remarkable treatise spoken of has occasioned in the press; and it is on one of these—namely, that which appeared recently in *The Times Literary Supplement*—that the following observations are based. The critique I mention is on the whole a very just one. The writer of it seems well qualified for his task; but there is one remark of his which seems to me highly debatable.

Speaking of Luther, he says: 'He separates faith and reason (which M. Maritain shows that Luther feared and detested), God and man. Imbued with the spirit of Church discipline and authority, in which he had been trained, he produced the immediate effect of an autocratic Erastianism throughout Germany, and was thus one of the ancestors of political nationalism.'

The revolt against the Church in which Luther engaged was bound to occasion reactions, proportionate to these efforts and sympathetic to them, in the purely political sphere. Thus a form of 'political nationalism' was, in the circumstances, a necessary consequence of the main cause of the Lutheran heresy. The latter, says M. Maritain, was the effect of an 'universalisation of his self, a projection of his self into the world of eternal truth.' Thus Luther was an individualist in matters of faith. What sort

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of individualism it was that his example diffused throughout a part of Christendom. M. Maritain discovers in a few pregnant words. 'He delivered man (he says) from this intelligence, from that wearisome and besetting compulsion to think always, and think logically.' It must be allowed that this was a bad beginning for Luther's individualism in matters of faith: his purely political concepts seem to have been equally maladroit, of a piece, in effect, with the rest of his lop-sided, ill-digested, and illogical polemics.

Our reviewer implies that it was by means of exerting 'an autocratic Erastianism throughout Germany that Luther there succeeded in establishing a political as well as a religious creed of his own making; and on the former account he regards him as 'one of the ancestors of political nationalism.' I confess I find these different expressions rather hard, or at all events such as need some explanation. In the first place, Erastes neither affirmed nor denied the peculiar doctrine which, after his death, came to be associated with his name, but apparently so associated in England alone; and, in the second, was not the aim, if not the effect, of Calvinism (which was for long the 'spear-head of Protestantism') to set the Church (by which expression I intend, of course, the heresy here spoken of) on the head of the State? The general effect of the religious changes styled Protestantism was to disturb the previous balance of things. It wrought fearful mischief to religion; but it also did immense damage in the political field. In the latter, its greatest hurt was to destroy the just balance of power as between the Church on the one hand and the civil authority (the State) on the other. In fine, the civil power in Europe suffered as much by reason of militant Protestantism as the Church did.

Further, I regard the expression of 'political nationalism' as highly objectionable. When, pray,

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at what precise period of history, was nationalism otherwise than political? Is it not of the nature of nationalism to be political? and, though it were differently formed, should we recognise it? and in the event spoken of, what power would it have to secure the ends commonly proposed to it? It seems to me that these are questions which they who reason in the sense indicated might find it hard to answer to satisfaction other than their own.

When, in the reign of Robert the Bruce, the nobles and commonalty of Scotland addressed their famous remonstrance to the Pope, surely they spoke politically enough. From time immemorial (they affirmed), Scotland had been a free country until Edward I of England, posturing as adviser and friend, became its tyrant and oppressor. But now (they continued), they had a lawful king, and him they would support with their arms against all comers, unless, indeed, he should prove faithless to the trust reposed in him, in which event they would cast him out. Was not this 'political nationalism'? Moreover, it would be easy to supplement this instance by others of a like nature drawn from the Catholic experience of different nations.

Naturally, having regard to its origins, there is a deal of cant and humbug uttered about Protestantism. Both are used when it is sought to claim for this disruptive creed (which is often done nowadays) persons and institutions of merit that adorned society long before the heresy glanced at appeared, before the unity of Christendom was shattered by the Germanic sectaries and their dupes. The Church has ever been tender of the just rights of nations, and sensible that as between the civil and the religious power there should exist a division or balance of authority no less just.

R. ERSKINE OF MARR.