

The chief article in this month's *New Blackfriars* develops the radical theological position being worked out by Brian Wicker in recent issues, and which he argues in greater detail in a book advertised to appear this April. Here he gives definition to his views by contrast with a superficially similar position – the 'secular christianity' of Ronald Gregor Smith. Wicker's objection is not of course to secularity as such: it is common ground that this world is of the first importance to a christian. The mistake of 'secular christianity' lies in its taking too *little* account of this world, for that is the effect of rejecting all ideology. Once again rejecting ideology means succumbing to the empiricist syndrome which seems so natural to British minds that it looks hardly ideological at all.

In this Gregor Smith is similar to progressive christians of a very different kind, the authors of the recent rather confused anthologies edited by Michael de la Bedoyere. They too aimed to eliminate doctrine from christianity, though this time in favour of gnostic mysticism. What remains is a vaguely 'personal' religion without concern for society's actual structures. So Gregor Smith's ideal secular christian is the hero of resistance to the Nazis who, before the crisis, cultivated his estate in quietist isolation from his fellow-men.

The cultivation of personal relationship – and can we dissociate from this the Cistercian abbot or the Carmelite prioress who appear in our pages this month, different as they might first seem from, say, Mr E. M. Forster? – has its own importance and value. Yet a christianity which never gets beyond the personal is as distorted as a christianity of pure unworldly hope. Radical christianity emphasises the necessarily impersonal relationship we ought to have with all men bound to us in the world's societies. In this it remains true to the gospel. There is, for instance, no suggestion in the parable that in order to love the man who needed his help the Samaritan should strike up a warm personal friendship with him. We shall not change the condition of the oppressed by retiring to our estates, spiritual or otherwise, for the greater comfort of our friends.

L.B.