

A COMMON GROUND

'THEY must be guided by that universal love which is the compendium and most general expression of the Christian ideal, and which therefore may serve as a common ground also for those who have not the blessing of sharing the same faith with us. A great deal of confusion in the matter of co-operation with non-Catholics might have been avoided if we had insisted more strongly on the obvious sense of the words of Pope Pius XII in which he called for a common front in the promotion of peace. A common faith is expressly excluded as a basis of co-operation, nor is anything said here about a general recognition of the Natural Law; the common ground is discovered in universal love, an activity of the will rather than an intellectual outlook. That is not to say that we may not take full advantage of a genuinely Christian view of life in individuals who honestly fail to identify authentic Christianity with the Catholic Church, or that we may not expect others to observe the Natural Law and inculcate its precepts; but the one thing that we can *generally* demand is good will, which, as we know, is the condition for the infusion of sanctifying grace and supernatural charity. We cannot perceive the workings of grace, but we have to assume that one who gives signs of good will is imbued with this supernatural and universal love of which the Pope speaks, no matter what his speculative ideals may be. Such a basis is wide enough to include those who do not profess Christianity at all; as there are so many of them in Europe to-day, 'those who have not the blessing of sharing the same faith' can scarcely be meant to cover only the various groups of non-Catholic Christians.

There are certainly many such in Great Britain, and that is one of the main difficulties in appealing to common Christian belief. If they possess the good will necessary for co-operation, and if we assume therefore that God has enriched that good will by sanctifying grace, we must also assume that they possess the infused virtue of faith, even while they are explicitly rejecting in all sincerity truths which we know we are bound to believe. But we cannot appeal for co-operation on the basis of a virtue of which they themselves are ignorant, nor draw up plans for the future in the light of God's uncovenanted mercies. We have to start from what we all know and recognise.

We can no longer presume on the part of the majority even that minimum of Christian belief implied in the acceptance of Baptism,

whether by explicit profession in adult life or by the persistence of the virtue of faith first received through the valid administration of the sacrament. A fairly wide contact with the non-Catholic poor over a period of years in the North of England and some knowledge of their lives in London would lead the writer to the view that scarcely more than fifty per cent. of the under-thirties of this class have gone through any form of baptismal ceremony, and the procedure of the Church in receiving converts implies serious doubt as to the validity of practically all such baptisms.

Whether validly baptised or not, the number is increasing of those who either repudiate Christianity altogether because they do not think it to be true or make a Christian profession without appreciating the implications of their creed. The days of bitter controversy are happily past, but this may be due less to the growth of co-operation among Christians than to the fact that the great majority of our fellow-countrymen do not take the subjects of controversy at all seriously. They have no wish to maintain the claims of their own communion to be the true Church of Christ, they neither deny nor affirm His divinity, to some 'Christians' His very existence seems unimportant; the more articulate assert the 'spiritual' truth of Christianity, attempting to make a distinction between this and historical and still more dogmatic truth. Thus Liddell Hart can write (and learned reviewers praise him for having written): 'In reflection came the thought that the Church had created, and continued to create, needless and endless difficulties for itself by the excessive emphasis that it gave to the historical aspect of Christianity. And that if it were only willing to present the Christian story as *spiritual truth*, these difficulties could be overcome—while its progress would be all the better assured.'¹ Whatever we may think of this attitude, no one can claim that it indicates the slightest hope of co-operation on a basis of common beliefs.

That the British public generally is nominally, but no longer *consciously* Christian, was most clearly revealed in the recent discussions on education both inside and outside Parliament. The injustice from which we suffer will not be the result so much of anti-Catholic feeling as of the prevalence of the impression that dogmatic Christianity has nothing to do with the formation of the human person. Some of our opponents, it is true, and many of our friends, have recognised the basic principles behind our claim, but the more general tendency has been to accept the vaguely defined Christianity of the agreed syllabus. This is the attitude even of the devout

¹ *Why don't we learn from History?* (Allen and Unwin, 1944), p. 61.

Anglican layman; ardent Christian as he is, he is anti-dogmatic and irritated by clergymen who insist on the necessity of dogma. And he is himself a rarity amidst the vast numbers who call themselves 'C. of E.' for lack of any other Christian profession. In this country, at least, the appeal to definite Christian beliefs is scarcely likely to attract more than a small section of the clergy and a few exceptional laymen.

It is sometimes claimed that the Natural Law provides a common basis for action, even outside the ranks of professing Christians. Here a distinction has to be made: the Natural Law must be presupposed in all friendly co-operation and social action, otherwise anarchy would reign everywhere—no promises would be reliable, no life sacred; but it need not be explicitly invoked, and if it is, the principles will at once be disputed by those very persons who had been most ready to co-operate. In fact, the principles of the Natural Law which most urgently need to be applied to present-day society are those which are most strenuously repudiated, not by the good pagans alone but by believing and intelligent Christians. If we are not in agreement with the Church of England about divorce and birth-control, there would seem to be little left in the Natural Law which is vital to modern problems and on which we can agree; yet these things are not merely tolerated in practice by leaders in that Church, their intrinsic evil is denied in principle and the opposite view described as irrational and based on a false interpretation of Scripture. Hence a reviewer in *The Guardian* (July 7th, 1944) can praise the general trend of the late R. A. L. Smith's *The Catholic Church and Social Order*, but feels constrained to add 'There will be no agreement that contraception is *always* sinful, or marriage completely indissoluble. These are, in fact, Roman Catholic doctrines resting, not upon rational proof, like the prescriptions of the natural law, but on the interpretation placed by Catholic theology on the teaching of Scripture.' The absence of a common outlook could scarcely be more firmly emphasised.

The divergence goes deeper. The whole conception of the Natural Law is itself confused, and our learned contemporaries often have great difficulty in distinguishing it from the laws of nature. Of Natural Law in the Thomistic sense they are almost wholly ignorant; the root of the trouble being their distrust of reason and suspicion of logic.

First principles are no longer considered certain; since evolution is the one permanent truth, the thinkers of to-day who repudiate them must be heard instead of the philosophers of yesterday who accepted them. Thus Clement C. J. Webb, reviewing E. L. Mascall's

excellent work on Natural Theology, *He Who Is*, found it necessary to rebuke the author for his temerity in holding to the principles of the *philosophia perennis* and, without attempting to investigate their validity, implied that they had merely been borrowed from one philosopher who had been out-distanced by other more up-to-date thinkers: 'On p. 39 it is to be observed of the principle that "the greater cannot arise from the less" which is quoted from Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, that, though assumed by the great majority of philosophers in the past, it has in our own time been rejected by such evolutionary thinkers as Bergson, Alexander and (I think one may add) Croce.'²

This questioning, critical, and (in a wide sense) agnostic attitude descends from the leaders of thought, through the lesser intellectuals, to the great literate masses, the product of twentieth century compulsory book-learning. Their outlook is reflected in and conditioned by such periodicals as *The New Statesman* (the most widely read—not merely circulated, but read and absorbed—and perhaps the best written of the weekly reviews) and books of similar tone and outlook. For them Christianity, especially in its Catholic form, is sometimes an antiquated, albeit noble faith lending itself to exquisite art, but more often the troublesome survival of an ancient superstition. The Natural Law is replaced by a socialist philosophy of life, tolerant of religion as a private idiosyncrasy and vaguely ethical in relation to the under-dog.

That is the predominant mood of the public. It is not universal, it may not even be the mood of an absolute majority; but it is the mood of far greater numbers under the guidance of more effective personalities than is the positive Christian outlook or a rational outlook based on generally accepted principles. In all this there is one solid ground for hope, the good will of these unreasonable, unchristian contemporaries of ours. To that good will we can appeal, on it in so far as it implies a real love of God we can base our co-operation; but we do not start from a common intellectual outlook.

The point at which co-operation begins is the agreement on the aim which all, for a variety of motives, desire to attain. The next stage is agreement about the material means of attaining it. All that is possible without any attempt to discover a more general common outlook, and it presupposes only good will. Inevitably in the course of co-operation discussion about *views* will arise, and Catholics will rejoice to find that *individuals* agree with them about a great number of speculative truths; they will also find it necessary to

² *Journal of Theological Studies*, January-April, 1944, p. 115.

explain the Catholic viewpoint in a friendly spirit and to link this up with the problems towards the solution of which they are co-operating. This latter is a task not lightly to be undertaken, and on its highest levels requires very delicate and intelligent handling. In a subsequent article I hope to outline the formation necessary in the person who undertakes this task, notably in the Catholic writer who has to make his appeal to this post-Christian Britain, uncertain of natural principles, but still desirous to love the unknown God and using its resources in the way calculated to call forth the response of grace.

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R E V I E W S

THE LADY OF THE HARE. A Study in the Healing Power of Dreams.
By John Layard, M.A., D.Sc. (Faber; 12s. 6d.)

Those who know psychological analysis only as a long protracted process will be astonished at Dr. Layard's boldness in attempting to record a whole case within sixty pages covering twelve interviews. Those who know the analyst's consulting room only as a gruesome torture chamber in which hideous secrets are painfully extracted from a resisting victim will be shocked that he should attempt to present a case-history to the general public at all. Yet they will not need to read very far into the book to realise how gravely they were mistaken. For the Jungian school, of which Dr. Layard is a faithful but by no means slavish pupil, the very word 'analysis' abandons its modern connotation of purely intellectual dissection, and resumes its ancient meaning of 'unloosening' or 'liberation'; the 'unconscious' is no mere Augean stable of repressed vice but the very means to health and wholeness, to be approached with profound humility and reverence. The story which Dr. Layard tells has sometimes an almost idyllic quality which will delight and refresh many readers, even among those with no previous interest in formal psychology.

It is true that the exceptional character of the case facilitates the brevity of the record. The real 'patient' was a high-grade mental defective girl who soon proved wholly impervious to any direct attempt at analytical treatment; but Dr. Layard refused to throw up the case on that account, and set about to analyse her quite non-neurotic, but seemingly maladjusted, mother. It was a procedure for which there is perhaps little precedent or warrant in 'orthodox' medical psychology, but Dr. Layard, realising the