

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

CATHOLIC ATROCITY-PROPAGANDA. The vilest feature of modern warfare—viler than poison-gas which kills only the body—is the *spiritual* poisoning of the masses, and this most especially by the systematic arousing in entire nations of man's basest and most soul-destroying passions of hate and revenge by press, radio, camera and cinema. The quasi-absolute warfare of to-day necessitates this spiritual corruption and degeneration of the civil population, and the dissemination of atrocity-propaganda is its most effective form. The grim determination which must be maintained by every man, woman and child if the strains and horrors of modern warfare are to be endured, and if what is ironically called their "morale" is to be sustained, needs to be nourished by harrowing accounts, true, false or embellished, of the crimes of the other side. Posters urged us to "remember" (not Christianwise forgive and forget) Louvain, Scarborough, Edith Cavell, the *Lusitania*. Italians must be goaded by Ethiopian mutilations; Ethiopians (and Sanctionists) by Italian gas and Red Cross bombings. Spanish Reds by the memory of the brutalities of the Asturias; Spanish Whites by that of the assassination of "Fascist" leaders and (this is our point) of burning churches, butchered priests and violated nuns. Thus, deliberately and scientifically, the fever of revenge (still euphemistically called "reprisal" as a sop to Christian and humanitarian sentiment) is enkindled and fostered, the ethics of war are forgotten, and "war" becomes a demoniacal massacre enflamed by the personal hatred of whole peoples and classes—a thing, it needs to be said, which has nothing whatsoever to do with the *bellare* of St. Thomas Aquinas.

That modern states and parties should be compelled to resort to this sort of thing is bad enough in all conscience. That Catholics *as Catholics* should participate in it and allow the spirit of hate and revenge to be exploited by capitalist Press Lords, with approval from Catholic pulpits, is intolerable. It should go without saying that the prayers and the most deeply felt sympathy (the word is grotesquely banal) of Catholics throughout the world are with the Catholics in Spain during the present almost unprecedentedly

hideous persecution. That a Catholic *esprit de corps* should on that account induce us to side with the insurgents and have no sympathy whatever with the "rabble" in their resistance to what they believe (and their opponents seem to give them plenty of reason to believe) to be the threat of an oppressive, murderous and reactionary tyranny, not only does not follow, but is fundamentally un-Christian. If butchered Spanish priests and religious are "martyrs" indeed, then it is to God alone that their blood cries for vengeance—the vengeance of His mercy. It is irrelevant to this that General Franco is a devout Catholic known to Our Special Correspondent, and even that the ideology of the Red leaders is anti-God. The fact is that the struggle in Spain is a detestable and sinful business, and should be regarded as such by Christians. Refreshing, therefore, to turn from the attitude adopted by many Catholic periodicals to this eminently Christian editorial from SEPT (August 7):

I marvel at those of my countrymen who are so confident of the rightness of their political creeds that they can make an epic of this catastrophe and can raise the champions of their particular political theories to be martyrs of democracy or heroes of patriotism. That, precisely, is the pseudo-heroism of civil wars; they involve, more inevitably than international wars, the struggle between opposing *ideas*, the conflict of theories and sentiments. It is that, perhaps, that gives them their peculiar cruelty and impassioned violence. Of all wars, civil wars are the most foul, they produce the greater number of criminal atrocities—whatever may be the bravery of the participants. War between nations never produces complete disorder; it is essentially the impact of two opposing *armies*. But civil war means total anarchy, social chaos, the unloosing of every brutality. Soldiers in the field seldom lack respect for soldiers on the other side, and they will treat them as soldiers. When civilians fight they must *hate* one another and behave like barbarians.

I can find little to admire in this Spanish disaster—but much to deplore. I deplore that these insurgents have had to confide the cause of national order to rebel generals and mobilize colonial troops against their own flesh and blood. And I deplore the loyalty of these republicans who defend a blood-guilty government which is powerless to restore the order it has allowed to be destroyed.

As to the religious persecution, we and our press cannot have it both ways. Either the Spanish priests and nuns are "martyrs" or they are not. If they are, it is sacrilege to

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exploit their blood and sufferings to enflame fratricide or to bait foreign intervention on behalf of the insurgents. If they are not—but who will say they are not?

MUST GOD GO FASCIST? The temptation for Catholics to give moral and material support to the Spanish insurgents in their struggle with the common enemy of the Communized Left is but one form of a larger problem which, owing to the changed tactics of Moscow in the formation of United Fronts and the consequent new political groupings, is rapidly becoming an acute one. On the legitimacy of participation in the new United Fronts of the Left authority has spoken unhesitatingly and unmistakably, and events in Spain have rapidly justified the rightness of its prohibition. (It may be remarked, in passing, that this is not a merely Continental issue; it may very soon become critical for the consciences of British Trade-Unionists and Labourites.) But United Fronts of the Left engender United Fronts of the Right, and the question of the legitimacy and desirability of co-operation with Fascism becomes pressing. Before the insurrection in Spain, Don Luigi Sturzo had already contributed to THE DUBLIN REVIEW some *Experiences and Reflections* which, coming from a writer of his wide experience of political realities and uncompromizing fidelity to authentic Christian principle, command particular attention at the present critical moment.

The problem facing all true Catholics is . . . whether they can in conscience accept, or, worse, promote, a State regime that denies civil and political liberties, thus depriving themselves of the necessary instruments for asserting, or in any case defending, moral values in public life. . . .

We will pass over the practical experiences of Catholics under dictatorships, for whom the problem of choice no longer exists. It exists instead for the Catholics of France, Spain [alas, it seems no longer!], Belgium, Holland, and elsewhere, and even in England, where British Fascism finds no few sympathizers among young Catholics. Do Catholics find that the Fascisms of the various countries (whatever name they may adopt) possess that minimum of morality without which membership or even support must transform itself into a "co-operation in evil," in the sense in which the phrase is used by moralists?

Don Sturzo relates some of his own experiences in Italy, and continues:

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From the day when Fascism won success in Italy, not a few Catholics have asked themselves whether it would not be better to accept a totally authoritarian regime in order that religion should be respected (as it is believed to be respected in Italy today), rather than to have to deal with secular democracies which are often anti-clerical. To certain of my Spanish friends (not members of the CEDA) who a month before the revolt in the Asturias and Catalonia asked me if it would not be better to support a *coup d'état*, not so much to restore the monarchy as to create a civil or military dictatorship and to prevent the domination of the Left, I replied that they had not the patience God has. They always want an immediate remedy for an evil present or seemingly to come. . . .

Unhappily, as often as the champions of a good, honest, moral idea wish to impose it by force, they spoil it, and produce instead feelings of reaction and hatred. I do not question the use of force by the State in accordance with law to preserve public order and repress crime; what I deny is the use of force, by the State, or worse still by private individuals, to obtain a political advantage or to enforce conformity. . . .

Although, for the most part, Catholic moralists and writers will naturally opt for legality and against the use of force, at the same time the concealed or avowed sympathies of not a few, even among friars, monks and priests, will be with the parties of the Right, which are well armed, are supported by the clamorous youth of the universities, and do not rule out violent *coups d'état*. . . . They themselves would never take part in violent ventures, and perhaps have never had a revolver or a bludgeon in their possession. They would shrink from hitting a political adversary just because he was an adversary; they would not hurt a fly. . . . Such Catholics and ecclesiastics do not want the risks of Fascism, but they want its advantages. But do they believe that they are thus free from offence against Christian charity and morality, and cannot be charged with co-operating in evil? Or do they believe that the end, a given order in the State, justifies the illegal and violent means used by the various forms of Fascism for its attainment? Or do they believe that the order to be inaugurated will not imply that deification of the State that is the spirit of totalitarianism, and must deprive Catholics themselves of all human means of combating State pantheism?

At the Summer School of the Catholic Social Guild M. André Toledano voiced the common belief that the days of the old liberal-bourgeois states were numbered and that, politically, the future lay with the authoritarian states of the Right and Left. From the Christian standpoint, he thought,

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there seems to be little to choose between them: it is the choice between honest-to-God anti-God and the not so honest exploitation of God as the State's Big Policeman plus the safeguarding of clerical life and limb and the material possessions of Holy Church. It is true that the Right, speaking generally, at least offers us the opportunity of administering the Sacraments and, within strict limits, something of the Word. But meanwhile? It is necessary to assert and re-assert that if the Left will not have God, it does not follow on that account that He is on the Right.

THE GENESIS OF GOD-HATRED. But why this feverish, insensate hatred of religion among the Spanish mob? For ourselves, we believe that the answer to that is something to fill us with shame and fear rather than righteous indignation. For when we have said all that has been said—the Spanish Church's relative indifference to social evils, her political associations, wealth, clerical privileges (all apt to be exaggerated)—much still remains to be explained. Marxist agitators? But can we believe that these would have such success were there not some deep-seated resentment to agitate? Even the fact that those of the clergy who, directly or indirectly, live on dividends are willy-nilly and even in spite of themselves dragged into the class-struggle on the side of Capital (a fact which in their seclusion and indifference they are too apt to forget) does not wholly explain these happenings. We have to explain the fact that men and women who yesterday were at least nominally Catholics are to-day swept by a frenzy of hatred, not merely against ecclesiastics, but against the Church, against religious emblems, altars, the Host. (Witness the photograph of a firing-squad expending precious ammunition on a monster statue of the Sacred Heart.) The hatred of a Nero, a Marx, a Lenin for Catholicism is milk-and-water compared with that of the ex-Catholic, whether its expression be purely literary or through physical violence. The fact is notorious; what is the explanation? We make no particular reflections on Spanish Catholicism (and we are well aware of the heroic sanctity of many Spanish Catholics, even before the persecution) when we suggest that the answer is to be found in the rottenness of conventional, bourgeois religion which crushes the spirit of man. Do we not know that when the salt has

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lost its savour it is good for nothing but to be trodden down by men? J.-K. Huysmans summarized the genesis of God-hatred from bourgeois Catholicism when he wrote of

l'esprit étroit, le béguinalisme fou, la crainte des idées, la panique des mots. On leur cache tout de la vie. . . Ils ont, avec cela, le sentiment religieux amorti par l'accoutumance; ils perdent les forces eucharistiques par l'abus qu'ils en font; ils ne croient plus que par routine et, pris de scrupules, à la pensée de se défendre, ils se terrent, n'osant bouger, de peur de pécher contre la charité ou de perdre leur reste de foi. Ou bien alors, ils sautent d'un extrême à l'autre, se révoltent et n'ont plus qu'un but, se venger sur leurs maîtres de la compression qu'ils ont, pendant toute leur jeunesse, subie.

Huysmans had in mind, as the quotation shows, the ex-seminarist (and there are said to be many such among the Spanish Reds), but we shall not be far wrong in finding a similar explanation, not only for the abnormal hatred of the apostate "intellectual," but also for that of simple Spanish townfolk and peasants. The moral for ourselves need not be laboured; and may the blood of the Spanish martyrs be the seed of a renewed Spanish Church.

SCANDALPHOBIA. It is, we believe, to the spiritual rottenness of "respectable" bourgeois religion that we must look for the ex-Catholic's peculiar detestation of Catholicism. A French poet, one of many whose spirit revolted against the deadness of their religious upbringing, laid his finger on the canker when he said that the pious Catholics of his home town "feared scandal more than they feared sin." Scandalphobia paralyzes and corrupts real religion and morality as little else can, yet it is still, in effect, the *maxima virtutum* for far too many Catholics. Originally, and still theologically, scandal-giving means putting a stumbling-block in the way of others and inducing them to sin; nowadays (the evolution may be traced in the *Oxford Dictionary*) it has come to mean not doing anything to hurt one's own individual or corporate reputation—and in practice often comes to mean not doing anything valuable or creative at all. It is a purely negative and negating "virtue," though it sometimes assumes a nauseating positive form of systematized humbug under the name of "giving edification." "L'esprit étroit, le béguinalisme fou, la crainte des idées, la panique des mots." At all costs, notwithstand-

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ing their Confiteors and Mea culpas, the sins of Catholics must be hushed up, nothing new or unconventional must be ventured, nothing must surprise or shock, they must cultivate the completest spiritual and mental inertia, in order that the followers of Christ, who should be His "fools," may be "respected." Under a scandalphobian regime theology dies; instead of being *fides quaerens intellectum*, the adventurous search for the discovery of new implications of God's revelation and its applications to new situations and problems, it becomes the parrot-like repetition of old formulas. Those who should venture all for Christ, become paralyzed by timidity lest the knowledge of their own failings and mistakes, moral or intellectual, should sully the Catholic, and especially the clerical, name. Jealousy for their own corporate and individual honour stifles the dynamism of grace and the primacy of love for God and neighbour. Whence comes this paradoxical situation in a Body which is professedly the ark of salvation for sinners? Its origins and history are related in an article in HOCHLAND (August) entitled *Die Niederlage des Moralisten*. It is there shown to be the outcome of factors for which Catholics are by no means solely to blame, but which is none the less deplorable. In Germany the Church's persecutors are taking the utmost advantage of Catholics' scandalphobia by attacking its central dogma of the Unimpeachable Respectability of the Clergy. It is not always to be wondered at that in other countries men of spirit are found inclined to spew out of their mouths the tepid, devitalizing formalistic religiosity which it sometimes engenders.

POSTSCRIPT. Confirmation of our diagnosis comes in "Viator's" excellent summary of the Spanish situation in the CATHOLIC HERALD (August 21):

. . . the destruction of churches afforded a clear sign that the largest number of Spanish people in many districts, apart from the rich, had no more use for the Church. It was often only the destruction of a shell whose kernel had already decayed. . . . Far from developing the true spirit of Catholicism, it ought to be said that many Catholics in Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, used the Church as an excuse for preserving an inadequate social order, and an intellectual indolence which left them far behind the needs of modern Spain. . . . It was here and there

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in those last legalistic stages of spiritual decay when the Sermon on the Mount collapses into something like Pharisaism, and religion degenerates into discussions on the length of a woman's sleeve. . . . The Church, it is certain, will gain nothing if it creeps back to power under General Franco's bayonets: only a thorough spiritual cleansing and revival can save Catholicism in Spain.

Meanwhile, the Rothermere Press has sent prepaid telegram forms to the clergy inviting "support" in their "efforts to make clear to the British people the campaign of Reds in Spain against Christianity and Civilization." But OSSERVATORE ROMANO remains firmly neutral and anti-interventionist, a Catholic Spaniard in SEPT (August 21) shows how the insurgent army has betrayed his country, and Mauriac in FIGARO (August 18) shows the irony of their Assumption celebrations of the Badajoz massacres.

CONTEMPORANEA. CATHOLIC WORLD (August): *The Ethics of War*: a handy summary by the Editor: "Even after war is in progress, it is required by Catholic ethics, dating specifically from St. Thomas Aquinas, that 'nothing must be done contrary to the spirit of justice and love.' If anyone shall say that such a requirement is idealistic and in modern days impossible, so be it. Fr. Stratmann, the renowned Dominican who has made a life study of these matters, does come to such a conclusion, and he has been called 'pacifist' in consequence. But it is one thing to call names and quite another to escape the logical consequences of a principle." Mary Sinton Leitch in a Devon cottage *Enjoying England's Inconveniences* and deploring our cheapening modernization: Yankees *do care*.

CLERGY REVIEW (August): Fr. T. J. Fitzgerald shows that, and how, *Parochial Preparation for Catholic Action* should begin at once without waiting for the Bishops' scheme. Fr. C. C. Martindale writes with customary verve and wisdom on *Anglo-Catholics* and, more especially, on Anglo-Catholic converts: "It is not our job merely 'to get them out of that state of mind.' . . . They may be bringing something we haven't got but should have"—the idea of the lay apostolate and congregational worship, and "we can freely welcome their contribution."

G. K.'s WEEKLY (July 16 and 23): Two very important articles on *Art and Property* by Eric Gill put practically Everything into a Nutshell. *G.K.'s* goes from strength to strength, and Gregory Macdonald's weekly *Looking On* should never be missed.

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- PAX (August): *Why this ignorance?* by Jean Guitton: "Faith is not the obvious, straightforward affair that many 'cradle' Catholics assume." Why not, and what we must do about it.
- REVUE DES JEUNES (July-August): *Le martyre du catholicisme allemand* by Ernest Kiesewetter: a grim account of the methods employed to crush Catholicism in Germany and the ideology which animates the persecution.
- VIE INTELLECTUELLE (July 10): Sixty pages devoted to the Oxford Groups, concluded by a penetrating and sympathetic theological analysis and valuation by Père M. J. Congar, O.P.

PENGUIN.