

L'ÉGLISE DANS L'ŒUVRE DU PÈRE LACORDAIRE. Textes choisis par Yvonne Frontier. Présentation par H. M. Féret, O.P., *Les Editions du Cerf, 14.70 NF.*

This collection, from Lacordaire's books, sermons and letters, of his teaching about the Church serves to remind one that he was very much more than a mere popular preacher. He was that, of course, and in that role he broke with the formal maxims and rigid structure of the eighteenth-century sermon, his preaching was self-conscious and dominated both by the needs of his audience and his awareness of the problems of mid-nineteenth-century society. Though his whole training was classical, and though Rousseau, Chateaubriand and St Augustine were the greatest influences on his mind when he was a young man, he felt as a romantic, and was able, through his passion for liberty, to speak with power in the world of Victor Hugo and Delacroix. Well founded in traditional theology, and, as he grew older, with a growing knowledge of St Thomas, he never argued in the abstract; apologetics, for him, began with the miracle of the Church, in whose life one discovered Christ her master.

This is not to say that Lacordaire was unaware of the problems of the Catholic facing the effect of the Revolution. He was strong and brave enough to reject that timid hankering for the old régime that characterized so much of nineteenth-century ecclesiastical thought and action. The clergy could no longer remain 'shut up in the sanctuary' or dominated by a narrow and timid piety. He spoke to men in an age when, as Montalembert said, to see a man in church was more surprising than to see a Christian in a mosque. For him, as for them, force, absolutism, led to slavery, and to a corruption of the spirit, and he tried to show that Christian liberty, founded on a respect for rights, could perfect human society. His first conferences at Notre Dame in 1835 mark a real turning point in the

history of the Church in France, for his work, with that of his friend Ozanam, made it possible for the middle class to return to the Church. In the end he failed – perhaps because his very success with one group blinded him to the future, which did not lie with the prophets and the middle class. But his failure as deputy for Marseilles in 1848 was only the prelude to his refusal to accept the *coup d'état*. 'I grieved to see the laws trodden underfoot by an act of military violence.'

His importance for our day lies in his dedication to liberty. In its name, and he meant the liberty of the sons of God, he asserted the right of the Christian layman or priest to be a free citizen in a new world; he rejected the methods and devices of a corrupt paternalism; the informers, trials without a hearing, and exclusive reliance on force. Trust and liberty do not need, and are always compromised by, the methods of Caesar. It was this conviction that led him to make a very clear distinction between the Rome of the Caesars and the Rome of the martyrs, and though he had a strong and vivid sense of the Petrine function, he was not unaware of the dangers of contamination for the imperial cult of power. The Church, and how difficult it was for those influenced by the old régime to recognize this, was most powerful when poor, and when she cared for justice for its own sake. He knew well that Proudhon was right when he said that the Church, if she had resolutely embraced the cause of justice, would still have been queen and kept the heart of the people.

It was the tragedy of Lacordaire and his generation that the years of revival among the middle class were those in which the Church, between 1830 and 1870, lost effective contact with the proletariat, for whom socially and

personally, God died. Yet within his realization of the need of the Church to be independent of the idolatry of any temporal system, and his sense of the necessity for a living dialogue with real people, a dialogue characterized by intense interest and passionate love, a solution may well lie. The harsh, carping apologetic of Veuillot, for all its human cleverness, is worse than useless in

the new world: the values of the Gospel have to be demonstrated as valid in post middle-class society and in this task the example of Lacordaire is surely not without value, with his intense faith in the power of grace and his belief that contemporary man can hear the gospel. *J'espère mourir en religieux pénitent et en libéral impénitent.*

Ian Hislop, O.P.

VICTORIA R.I., by Elizabeth Longford; *Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 63s.*

Queen Victoria was an expert at brinkmanship and part of the fascination of this massive biography lies in the constant tension, domestic and political, that the old lady created around her. For it is the Victoria of the long widowhood and the Jubilees who haunts the imagination, rather than the ardent and prolific wife whose career was cut short by the death of Prince Albert. Until her own death nearly forty years later, bemoaning her poor health and lonely helplessness, she dealt faithfully with Palmerston, Gladstone, Disraeli, Salisbury, Joseph Chamberlain, Wilhelm II, Bismarck, Cecil Rhodes and her enormous family connections with nearly every European court.

Lady Longford has achieved such a splendid portrait that it is a compliment to list a few shortcomings. She is scarcely fair to Disraeli. She does not emphasize Prince Albert's success, an exaggerated one, perhaps, in instilling conscientiousness into the lively Hanoverian he married; the Queen's hours at the desk were crushing – the old lady returned from a Darmstadt wedding to find twenty-three despatch-boxes waiting for her. The concentration of the study on the personality of Victoria leaves room only for sketches of the surrounding figures. The atmosphere and material progress of the reign get cursory allusions.

That being said, it remains to express gratitude to Lady Longford for such a comprehensive and sympathetic survey. She has had some new and valuable material to draw upon while her own liberal and catholic mind has added dimensions to a portrait whose main traits have long been familiar. Queen Victoria's religious opinions and attitudes are discussed and shown, not surprisingly but refreshingly, to have been honest and realistic. The relationships with John Brown and other familiars are sensibly ventilated. The Queen's attitude to the future Edward VII appears more appreciative than accepted legend allows. We get glimpses of the gaiety, broad humour and charm she could display and which explain why the long years of service of Sir Henry Ponsonby and others were not impossibly purgatorial.

Anyone must be intrigued by such an intimate study of the workings of Court and Cabinet. But Victoria had an indefinable genius, despite her obstinate seclusion, for transcending the limits of class and colour. Lady Longford suggests very plausibly that the Queen's dislike for Gladstone was largely because he was a popular father-figure rivalling her own matriarchy over the ordinary people of the country, with whom she felt, often correctly, at one. We learn, too, how she detested colour-bars, and, indeed, was so