

**PERSONALISM.** By Emmanuel Mounier. Translated by Philip Mairet. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 15s.)

**THE NEED FOR ROOTS.** By Simone Weil. Translated by Arthur Wills, with a Preface by T. S. Eliot. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 18s.)

These books, in different ways, bring to light what is one of the most important tasks confronting Catholic apologists. There is evident in the world a new feeling for Christian truth and Christian values, but in so many instances, going beyond 'traditional' Christianity, either virtually or explicitly it rejects any form of institutionalism. For the apologist, one of the main points of interest of these two books is the extent to which they voice, or give support to, such a movement.

Obviously there is a sense in which the Christian life is, and must be, a renewal. And in Mounier's *Personalism*, which is a summary of his whole position, there is much to welcome, because it is both old and new. He himself points out that this view of the human person as an effective reality is the fruit of Christian teaching and tradition. But that is not important. There seems no doubt that personalism in that sense is very close to, even identical with, the truth about the human person implied in Christian faith. But what is important is to raise the question as to whether this identity or similarity is something comparatively superficial hiding a deeper dissimilarity or even opposition. And the grounds for raising the doubt at all are not fanciful. The section of the Introduction called: 'Brief history of the notion of the person and of the personal condition', makes it quite clear that *Personalism* cannot be judged without some reference to its more immediate sources, namely as part of a more comprehensive movement of thought, the main characteristic of which is a protest against Hegel, who led thought into a dead end. It is not universal among men of the movement to have Christian, or even religious affinities. Marx and Sartre must be included, as well as Mounier and Marcel. But the movement has put forth this vigorous, religious and Christian shoot.

Personalism is an interpretation of the universe in and through the human person. Christianity is a revelation of the human person and human life in the Divine person-made-man, the Redeemer. It is not academic for the Catholic apologist to ask, is personalism going my way? There are two important reasons why the question should be asked. It is a common characteristic of those who protest against Hegel to lay claim, at least tacitly by their assumptions and technique, to have arrived at, if not the end of the philosophical search, at least the beginning of the end. And one of the things that so many of them leave behind is 'traditional' Christianity. Secondly, they are missionaries and apostles. Their philosophical speculation is born of chaos and confusion. They aim to establish order. As Marx himself said, the philosopher

must no longer be content to interpret the world, he must change it. Personalism is a gospel. But to what extent is it the Gospel renewed?

The latest book of Simone Weil to be translated is of a very different nature. It was originally written during the war in answer to a personal request of the French authorities in London for a report showing possible ways of effecting a regeneration of France. It is full of astonishing and penetrating intuitions. There are many things that are remarkable for their depth and accuracy, like her analysis of justice and the correspondences of obligation and right. There are many things that reveal an unerring practical judgment, like the passages on work, property and education. And there are things that are strangely compelling, like the passage on compassion for one's country. And the pattern of the whole is so satisfying, with its high contemplative view but with the genuine practical sense and attention to detail of the true contemplative.

Mr T. S. Eliot, however, in a very judicious and gentle preface, prepares the reader for the angularities of Simone Weil; her unaccountable prejudices, the violence and relentlessness of her opinions. It is sad to read that one who knew her does not remember 'ever having heard Simone Weil, in spite of her virtuous desire for objectivity, give way in the course of a discussion'. Not that one can imagine for a moment that she was dominated by pride. She was too wise for that. But she did not carry her wisdom lightly. It seems to have been a burden to her, and she was lonely in bearing it. And that should not be the way of wisdom. It should possess, rather than be possessed, and thereby bring peace and quiet, and being possessed by it we share it with others and are at one with them. Mr Eliot says, 'all her thought was so intensely lived that the abandonment of any opinion required modifications in her whole being; a process which could not take place painlessly, or in the course of a conversation'. One cannot help wondering why, for example, her views about Greece and Rome were not inevitably matured, on the one hand from within by her remarkable contemplative insight, and on the other hand from without in the ordinary course of communication. Perhaps it was that the only authority she could experience was that of her own intuitions and perceptions, and she could conceive of no way of remaining true to herself and submitting her intuitions to a social and external test. The life of the spirit, for her, was an inward reality and force that redeemed, and when it was strong enough, made use of realities external to the soul. It is significant that two of the main obstacles that kept her from entering the Church were that the Church is social and sacramental. She did not feel strong enough to resist what she could only regard as the baleful influence of its social character; and she did not feel perfect

enough to benefit by the rite of Baptism. Whereas, the truth is that Grace is not only the force that redeems the Gravity that is in us and in the world; it is in a sense born of that Gravity. Gravity itself has been redeemed. The rite of Baptism is not what we make it: it is the rite of Baptism that makes us.

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PIERS PLOWMAN AND SCRIPTURE TRADITION. By D. W. Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé (Princeton University Press., Geoffrey Cumberlege; 25s.)

The authors have analysed the B-text of *Piers Plowman* in the light of the medieval exegesis of the time, thus revealing a developed unity which so often escapes the modern student of Langland. The subject is a fascinating one. But it hides many pitfalls for the modern scholar who may so easily be carried away by his own science and come to imagine the clerk who began to write on the Malvern hills as similarly preoccupied with the details of gloss and commentary. The authors have attempted to avoid these dangers by explicitly excluding any enquiry into Langland's direct sources from which he drew his doctrine and interpretation. They have chosen instead to relate the whole poem to a somewhat piece-meal assessment of the kind of interpretation that was used in the fourteenth century. Thus they shut out the Franciscan and Dominican biblical commentators on the ground that Langland disliked the Friars. This leads to a somewhat fantastic display of unrelated learning with strange conclusions. For example the ordinary teaching in the schools regarding the bishop as holding the state of perfection *par excellence* is set down as proper to the 'secular masters' and as attacked by the Friars (p. 21). A few minutes with St Thomas's *Summa* would have revealed a different perspective. And surely all this is laboured unnecessarily. Langland was bred in an atmosphere redolent of Scriptural phrase and interpretation. The biblical teaching was a huge river to which every school provided a rivulet and from which in one way or another all the people drank. He was no constant student ready to distinguish what was proper to the interpretation of the Friars (though the authors themselves ought to have acquainted themselves of this). In his capacity as bedesman he must have heard a great many sermons and read often the homilies in the Breviary. His sense of Scripture is for the most part sound and general, and it is in tune with the whole thought of his day. It is hard for us now to visualise how much the imagery of the Bible and of the Cross ran through the minds of men of that age. The Bible was the principal book. Now we breathe the atmosphere of science: but when Mr T. S. Eliot mentions a motor-car in a poem we need not analyse all the technical scientific works on