

humanity, the suffering world. Christ came with power to *heal*, to heal both the soul and the body; it is the Church's office to carry on that work of healing and restoration. 'As we write these words there passes before our eyes, alas, an almost endless throng. . . . ; sick, poor, mutilated, widows, orphans. . . .' (107). Wherever there is suffering, there the Body of Christ must be to heal and console. But there can be no healing without power; and there can be no power without prayer³. That is the catholic action from which none can be excused.

To be a member of Christ's mystical Body is, in these days especially, as great a responsibility as it is a glory. 'Look down, we beseech thee, Lord, on this thy family.'

GERALD VANN, O.P.

TRENDS OF CATHOLIC THOUGHT ON THE CONTINENT

AMIDST the turmoils of the war, of which the Eternal City itself has become one of the centres, the Holy Father has issued two Encyclicals devoted entirely to subjects interest in which is apparently confined to theologians. These are the Encyclical on biblical studies and the earlier *Mystici corporis Christi*. The encouragement given through the first of these Encyclicals to the study of Holy Scripture is of the greatest significance with regard to countries which, in that respect, still labour under ideas formed during the Penal times. But what interest to these is the refutation of certain theological errors as given in the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*? Where, in English Catholic literature, have the excesses of the liturgical movement or the exaggerations of the teaching on the mystical Body of Christ, referred to in that Encyclical, been advocated?

The passages in which the Encyclical concerns itself with those errors clearly refer to the Continent, in particular to Central Europe. If we regard the spiritual position of German-speaking Catholics as

³ In this context the Pope singles out for special commendation the *Apostleship of Prayer* as an association 'most pleasing to God' (107).

one of the most important points in the reconstruction of Europe and its Christian tradition, those errors gain in topical significance. The history of Catholic theology and philosophy of the 19th century reveals two main influences. The one, mainly concerning philosophy and dogma, originated from the philosophical movement known as German idealism. Far from being confined to Germany, however, it comprised, in its very origin and foundation, at least France as well. It influenced not only German Catholics whose teachings the Church condemned, such as Hermes, Guenther, Frohschammer and in later years Schell, but also French and Italian thinkers including Lammenais, Bautain and Rosmini. All these thinkers were concerned with the problem, which, as Kant's disciples had keenly felt, the great leader of German Idealism had left unsolved, namely the relation between revelation and cognition.

Whilst it is not necessary to restate the various errors into which the Catholic adaptors of Kant's, Fichte's and Hegel's philosophy fell, it is worth remembering that at present both Communism and Fascism expressly invoke Hegel as their philosophical master, whilst Kantians and Hegelians still occupy the majority of non-Catholic philosophical chairs in the Anglo-Saxon world. The system of Krause, a minor epigone of the German idealists, was, for many decades, the recognized state-philosophy of liberal Spain, whilst in modern Japan, the only European school to be officially represented in academic teaching (of course, apart from the Catholic schools) is Hegelianism. Both Croce and Gentili are to be regarded as Hegelians.

On the other hand, Biblical criticism, the second of the great external influences on 19th century Catholic theology, is also derived from German idealism. Dr. Kissane, whose *Isajah* (Dublin 1944) is the most recent production of Catholic biblical studies in the English-speaking world, would be the first to acknowledge the impulse, however negative, given to Catholic exegesis by Wellhausen, Milman, etc., and who can think of these names without going back to Bauer and even Herder?

In the 20th century, the Church has rarely published extensive refutations of errors advocated by individuals which could be compared with the Papal Letters addressed, in the cases of Frohschammer and Guenther, to the archbishops of Munich and Cologne respectively, or with the Decree issued by the Holy Office on Rosmini, not to speak of the Syllabus of 1864. However, if we study the lists of theological and philosophical books placed by the last four Popes on the Index, it would be hard to point out any whose errors are not due to the influence of German idealism.

Since the last war, however, it has become a fashion to belittle the intellectual achievements of the great period of European philosophy a hundred years ago, and accordingly the fermentation caused by it in 19th century Catholicism is sometimes not fully appreciated. An outstanding feature in that influence was that it was mainly concerned with the universities. (Germany enjoyed the unique privilege of having her theological students entirely educated in state-universities, some of which, such as Bonn, were the traditional hotbeds of modernism; this privilege was, in recent years, abolished by the State itself). On the other hand, the striking increase of Catholic theological books and its influence after the last war was mainly due to non-academic activities. Writers like Fr. Matthias Laros (whose books were repeatedly condemned), Otto Karrer and even Prof. Guardini (who held the professorship for Catholic philosophy in Berlin University) expressly aimed at the non-academic public, exercising their influence even among the Non-Catholics.

The decisive characteristic of that literature was however not so much the non-academic or even anti-academic tendency, not the claim to represent real life as contrasted with the school-room and study, but the more deeply rooted distrust of reason, a preference for either the lower powers of common-sense or the propagation of the higher intellectual and spiritual powers, such as intuition. At this point, the contrast with Catholic literature in the Anglo-Saxon world is perhaps most remarkable. It may be safely said that whilst, in the 19th century, Germany offered fierce resistance to the Thomist revival, to this day the influence of German idealism on the Catholic literature in Central Europe still outweighs that of neo-Scholasticism. It was there that the liturgical movement (which indeed exercised a very deep influence on the religious life of the people) was interpreted as an avenue of return to tradition avoiding the dryness of Scholasticism. The war-cry 'back to things!' of modern anti-idealistic philosophy (headed by Husserl), that is the renunciation of subjectivism in epistemological matters, seemed to be a secular counterpart to the return from the subjective forms of devotion to what was known as *the* liturgy, namely the austerity of the martyr-Church. Similarly Dom Casel's interpretation of the holy sacrifice in the light of the *mysteria* of Hellenistic religion had its secular fore-runners and counterparts in Rhode's 'Psyche,' Nietzsche's praise of Dionysos, Kassner's sympathetic analysis of Greek religion and Keyserling's and Steiner's theosophy.

Amidst the political, economic and mental catastrophies of the years after the Russian Revolution, Central Europe developed her fundamental distrust of the power of Fichte's *Ego*, Hegel's reason

or Schopenhauer's will-power. Nietzsche's belief in the superman was regarded merely as a travesty of reality or as a political bogey. One of the latest examples of Catholic interpretation of that situation is Johannes Reeb's book *Christentum Wende oder Ende?*¹

Generally speaking, this book belongs to the circle round the Institute for modern popular Education, the great arsenal of intellectual armament of German Catholics, organised by two young laymen, Heinz Raskop and Dr. Josef Pieper, at Dortmund. It is, however, characteristic that this Institute did not actually publish Reeb's book. Not only does it compare unfavourably with the Institute's publications,² but it is also far more popular. The author gives in some two hundred pages an outline of two thousand years of spiritual history and of the present-day religious situation. De-Christianisation, Mr. Reeb says, begins as early as 1300 and reaches its climax in present-day Collectivism which, however, is 'merely' liberalism, its alleged antagonist, carried to its final consequences. Taking up the distinction between theoretical conviction and real experience, as made by Newman and modern philosophers such as Bergson, Blondel, Marcel, Dilthey and Jaspers, Mr. Reeb develops the contrast between the merely spiritual idea of the reality of the Church as held by the Reformers, and the Catholic conception of the living reality of the Church. Closing as he does all 'merely' intellectual avenues of approach to religious realities, Mr. Reeb comes to the conclusion that a considerable part of mankind is at present 'without grace' and, accordingly, without living communication with Christians.

At this point Mr. Reeb's book appears to be a moderate representative of the theory of the unity between the Christian and Christ which, according to the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, has led other authors astray. In recent decrees of the Holy Office quite a number of Catholic books published in Germany and Switzerland have been condemned for that reason. One Pelz gave his book the title *The Christian as Christ* (1939), whilst a certain Kassiepe chose the suggestive title *Errors in Devotional Life* (1940). The connection with the anti-academic tendency and the excesses of the liturgical movement becomes obvious in the title of K. Borgman's book (also condemned), *Popular Liturgy and Pastoral Theology*.

¹ *Die religiösen Sinndeutung der Gegenwart aus der Vergangenheit für die Zukunft.* (Benziger: Einsiedeln, Köln, 1941.)

² Otto Kuss, *Die Theologie des Neuen Testamentes.* (Pustet, Regensburg, 1936.) Leo v. Rudloff, O.S.B., *Kleine Laiendogmatik.* Ibid., 6th edition (17th thousand), 1936. *Katholische Christenfibel* (Bachem, Köln, 1937.) The Institute also published an excellent selection of dogmatic texts from the Fathers, and an abbreviated translation of Denzinger's *Enchiridion.*

Whilst none of the latter three books are available (presumably they were withdrawn by the publisher), I should like to dwell on one of the most outstanding representatives of modern Continental heresies, as I may assume that I am the only person in these countries to own a copy of Georg Koeppen's work *Die Gnosis des Christentums*,³ a book which, shortly before the war, was recommended to me by an experienced Catholic book-seller as a best-seller. The fact that—a few months after its publication—it was placed on the Index was probably due to the severe criticism which it received from two learned Jesuits, Fr. Urs von Balthasar⁴ and Prof. Rahner. The German Jesuits attributed such importance to Koeppen's book as to have it reviewed by their leading theologian in the first article, in 1940, of *Scholastik* (the last issue published before the invasion of Holland and the confiscation of the College at Valkenburg⁵). Dr. Dillersberger, a Salzburg Benedictine, on the other hand (whose fine book on Virginité is well known), hailed it as the most Catholic book of this century.⁶

Mr. Koeppen starts his book: 'Theology is the business of Saints. Universities and scholars have done much for theological scholarship, but the creative impulses originated from men fulfilling the ideal of heroic life.' In contrast to the identification of 'reason' and 'thinking' which, as the author erroneously states, is still prevailing among us, he aims at showing that Gnosis and other alogical forms of thinking are lawful and indeed superior means of approaching religious truth. In fact, Gnosis is the 'form of thinking' coordinated to revelation. Koeppen fails to make it reasonably clear what is the relation between Christian Gnosis and heretical or pagan gnosis, or what is its place in the history of the human mind (Old Testament). He makes an unconvincing attempt to distinguish his own anti-academic attitude from the Reformers' anti-scholasticism by turning to Hegel's dialectic: 'In Gnosis the logical forms of thinking

³ Otto Müller, Salzburg, 1939. Jakob Hegner said: 'I read the manuscript during one night and accepted it within twenty-four hours.' The book has 350 closely printed pages!

⁴ *Schoenere Zukunft*, vol. xiv (1939), p. 11, 74-77.

⁵ *Scholastik*, 1940, No. 1, pp. 1-14.

⁶ *Schoenere Zukunft*, vol. xv (1940), p. 54.

⁷ The expression 'form of thinking' is borrowed from contemporary non-Catholic philosophers, notably Professor Leisegang, who wrote not only a book bearing that title, but also a study on Gnosis. Some authors such as Dilthey and Spranger distinguish 'religious thinking' from other forms of equal right, such as military, economic, aesthetic thinking. Leisegang, on the other hand, distinguishes, in the history of Christian religion, various forms of thinking, such as St. Paul's circular, St. Thomas's antinomial and Hegel's triangular form of thinking. There is no objective truth beyond in either case.

are *aufgehoben*,’ (a word which means at the same time : preserved, eliminated and elevated), or by using the still more magic wand of modern Existential philosophy : ‘Gnosis is existential cognition.’ The real danger comes to light when the author claims that his Gnosis is not only a realisation or imitation of, but actually a *Gleichschaltung* (identification, a word now hopelessly linked up with the idea of political ‘liquidation’) with the internal life of the Holy Trinity.

The topical significance of this error lies in the fact that whilst the flight into objectivism was caused by the realisation of the ‘Decay of the West,’ the present-day longing for a surrender of reason and amalgamation with the God-man is a genuine reflection of the spiritual desolation prevailing on the Continent. Prompted by the manichean tendencies in the theology of Karl Barth, the leader of German Protestant theology after the last war (without whom, incidentally, the Confessional Church would never be what it is), Catholics have been inclined to overstate their case. Headed by its leader, Dr. Pinski in Berlin, the German *Katholische Akademikerverband* was a centre of that rather e. oteric, unreal optimism which can be summed up in the belief that, through the liturgy, man becomes deified.⁸ Held in between combattant anti-Christian powers and visualizing the ever-rising tide of religious indifference (the extent of which cannot be realised in England), religious-minded persons naturally tend to a closer connection with the objective fundamentals of their faith. However misguided this longing may be, it deserves sympathy and psychological understanding. The heresy of modern Continental mysticism is a kind of self-defence, and by a timely condemnation of its excesses the Church has not only given a warning to other more lucky countries, but set up a guiding light to those who walk in the darkness of material and intellectual oppression. In the light of these facts, the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis* is a document of highly topical significance for all who realize that the fate of Christian Europe is at stake in far deeper a sense than a merely political interpretation can visualize.

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⁸ Pinski, *Die Sakramentale Welt. Heiligung der Welt*, 1938.