

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

THE CATHOLIC THOUGHT ASSOCIATION is an American counterpart of the Aquinas Society movement in England. A suggestive account of its aims and methods appears over the signature of Father Vincent C. Donovan, O.P., in *THE COMMONWEAL* (December 18):

Lack of intellectual and moral discipline explains our chaos. We are trapped in the blind alley of the senses. . . . Because of lack of thought, fetishes and superstitions intrigue us. There are the superstitions of wealth, of power, of social position, of sex, of ego in all its stupid and dangerous forms. Mass instruction has by no means developed keen intelligence. . . .

Asceticism of the body for physical reasons profits us nothing as human beings unless there be also genuine asceticism of soul. Keeping fit is restoring to order the many elements that constitute man. In a certain sense it is truth, which, as St. Thomas says, is adjustment to reality. We have the faculty of thinking to keep us continually adjusted to reality. If we had exercised that faculty in conformity with laws as inherent to it as gravity is to nature, we would have realized that if it be practical to consider material things, it is much more logical to consider their Source and His purpose in creating them. Through applying our intellects to immediate human problems we would have arrived at the solution—man's most characteristic act, reflection, directed to the Author of it. Here is the truth that shall free us from a self-created chaos.

This is the truth which Pilate asked about, but which Thomas Aquinas clarified for us. Thomistic teaching is the synthesis of truth. Possessing a truly catholic mind, Thomas probed everywhere for truth. Herein, of course, he was a real philosopher. He sought not merely knowledge, but wisdom; he wasn't content with mere causes, but sought the cause of the causes. He pursued God as the modern scientist searches for microbes or electrons. In this Light which gives light Thomas was able to achieve an order within himself which is seen in the marvellous clarity of his teaching. The universality of truth which the scholars recently gathered at Harvard finally recognized as existing and which they aim collectively to give to mankind Thomas achieved and gave to us seven centuries ago. His "Summa Theologica" is the summary in principle of truth in every order of existence. It never pretended to be a scientific treatise, any more than the Bible. But if scientists had first become philosophers and followed the method and principles of Aquinas, not only is it probably that we

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would have made even greater strides in scientific knowledge, but the chances are we would have achieved the art of living.

Because we have been lost in things rather than sought their fundamental relationships, we find ourselves in an intellectual, moral, economic and social traffic-jam to-day. As a consequence Behn is right when he says: "A time which, like ours, must deal in sober earnest with so many things, is passionately interested in the problems of philosophy. Many people I know are looking for guidance." We know of no better guide than Saint Thomas Aquinas. This conviction gave birth two years ago to the Catholic Thought Association. A very varied group of the laity sought the help of Saint Thomas's religious brothers, the Friars Preachers, to reinterpret for them the teachings of Saint Thomas in the light of *modern needs*. *The immediate result has been the development of a number of Thomistic centres throughout the country where courses are given in and on the great work of Aquinas. The Catholic Thought Association aims to make his teachings more widely and deeply known and applied. It seeks to stimulate and direct thought. . . .*

The best summary of the organization is that implied by its name. Its title signifies Saint Thomas's own statement that names should represent realities. The association is "catholic" in that like the Fathers of the Church it realizes the seeds of truth are everywhere, and it is for us to take them and develop them. It is "catholic" also in the synthetic sense of Saint Thomas's own *Summae*; in its lectures it is an integration and application of universal truth as far as modern problems are concerned. But it is truly Thomistic in the sense that it is also Catholic. Faith steadies, clarifies and guides the seeker of truth. The lectures expose Catholic principles of life. But while it is of great importance that the average man's knowledge of these principles be more than the Catholic ABC's commonly accepted as sufficient, the Catholic Thought Association aims at a goal beyond this necessary one. It seeks not only to extend and deepen the knowledge of Catholic principles, but it believes this can be done only by those interested bringing their own thought to assimilate Catholic Thought. The discussions after the lectures are an adaptation of the mode of teaching in scholastic times when a lecture aimed to stimulate and discipline the mind rather than to instruct or merely to titillate the senses and entertain.

CONTRACEPTIVE LOVE. A neglected but essential aspect of the ethics of contraception receives thoughtful treatment from Dr. E. Lyttelton in the Anglican review **THEOLOGY** (January). Our arguments against Birth Control commonly fail to meet the arguments actually employed to condone it:

What we want to learn is the most plausible and powerful

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argument in favour of contraception for the vast majority of married couples who cannot plead overcrowding or any other unnatural impediment to perfect liberty of action.

The plea of course is this: that abstinence from conjugal intercourse mars and undermines the sacred unity of the married life and prevents the third purpose of marriage from being fulfilled—viz., the mutual society, help and comfort. In other words, cohabitation is the *signum efficax amoris*, and if it is interrupted the mutual affection of husband and wife is seriously jeopardized.

That plea expresses a truth, but at the same time contains a fallacy. The truth is that the sexual act is not only the symbol of the spiritual union between man and woman, but is in actual fact the consummation of the closest physical union possible of the two. That is the explanation of Christ's words: "they two shall be one flesh"; also of St. Paul's terrific warning against fornication, namely, that the act brings about a complete physical intermingling of two bodies, that of the sinner with that of the harlot (I Cor. vi, 15, 16). Such consummation of union, when hallowed by the Church, is "sublimated" and transformed into an act symbolical of the closest spiritual union possible and efficaciously promotes the union. . . .

The fallacy is in assuming that there is no essential difference between the natural complete sexual act and the act incomplete, artificially interrupted and marred by contraception. But there is all the difference possible. The significance and interpretation of the one lie in the completeness of the physical union; but the significance, purpose, and intention of contraception lie in incompleteness, separation, and disunion. The one, because it is by nature physically unitive, may help to promote the ideal progress of two souls through Eros to Agapé: through the physical to the spiritual. The other by marring the physical union is separative in meaning and intention: it checks and forbids that passage into the spiritual which is the crowning glory of the marriage union. It is a calculated attempt to retain the essentially transient element of physical passion, and thereby eliminates the possibility of the transformation of earth into heaven: of the temporal into the eternal.

Some such explanation, however clumsily expressed, is required for the undeniable strength of the instinctive repulsion felt for contraception, not only by the piously disposed but by many who practise it; not only by the Christian Church to-day but by the consensus of our spiritual forefathers, reaching back far into Old Testament times. If there is any truth in the contention that the practice is a safeguard of the spiritual union of man and woman, what possible explanation is there of the verdict of such

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men as W. E. Gladstone, Andrew Clark, the great physician, and R. H. Hutton of the *Spectator*, expressed independently some sixty years ago: "Horrible!" That was all. It is idle to maintain that this repulsion is nowadays confined to the dwindling number of puritans alien from the heart of the problem or deficient in natural passion. We must not forget that there is every inducement for ordinary human beings to defend and uphold a practice which affords relief from an almost intolerable tension between opposing claims, and that that inducement has been operative not only to-day but always. Yet in spite of it the instinctive repulsion persists, and again is not confined to the strait-laced or the old-fashioned. What are we to make of the pathetic complaint of a contraceptionist to Dr. Gore: "Of course it's very beastly, but what are you to do?" . . .

The writer goes on to show that insufficient stress has been laid in discussion on the subject that "What is wrong in contraception is in the essence of the act itself. For disguise it as we may, it is difficult to repel the blunt accusation made against it many years ago that it is in essence mutual self-abuse. It has become necessary to call a spade a spade, because it is nowadays contended that, speaking physiologically, there is much to be said for the practice in moderation." It is, of course, precisely on these grounds that it is condemned by Catholic theology and *Casti Connubii*. He concludes:

Let us remember that however severe may be the tension and the perplexity when perfect agreement between man and wife seems impossible, there is no limit to the significance of God's promise to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask. All the most baffling problems of conduct to-day are due to our languid belief in the Pentecostal Gift.

In conclusion let us revert to the claim made by the votaries of the line of least resistance: that it safeguards the matrimonial union. An agreement between two human beings to follow a line of conduct lower than that approved by conscience means a partnership in progress down the Broad Way. But agreement to help each other to live in obedience to the Law of the Cross simply because it is Divine brings about perhaps the most beautiful manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven upon this earth: a truly Christian home, where young souls are trained in an atmosphere of that renunciation of the world which St. Paul speaks of as the transformation of humanity by "the renewing of the mind."

The whole of this remarkable article should be read.

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THE SPANISH TRAGEDY. SEPT for January 8th reaffirms and defends its neutral attitude in words which we may make our own:

We are often reproached for what is called our indecision and lack of partisanship, especially in regard to affairs in Spain. Our critics regard us both as simple souls unable to free ourselves from undue scrupulosity, and as astute calculators who decline to pronounce on an event until they see which way the wind blows.

We flatter ourselves that we are neither the one nor the other. We profess to be just simply Christians; Christians who decline to pass judgment without sufficient evidence, or to confuse the orders of grace and nature, of morality and technique. We claim, moreover, to be Catholics who are anxious to preserve the primordial and permanent interests of the Church. These facts alone should explain our caution, without our being charged with naïve scrupulosity or a subtle Machievellianism.

Some would wish that we should declare ourselves unhesitatingly and without restriction or qualification for General Franco; that we should join the ranks of those who proclaim his campaign as a crusade of Christianity against atheistic Marxism. It is, we are told, all so clear and simple. Why hesitate?

Because, precisely, it is not clear and simple at all. On one side, it is true, there is the vast majority of Spanish Catholics; but there are also Moslem troops, masonic generals (though it seems to be untrue that Franco himself was ever a freemason), Hitlerite soldiers and fascists of the *Falange* who fight against what they call clericalism. On the other side are communists, anarchists, cathedral-burners, priest-murderers—but also some great Catholic names, a Bergamín, an Ossorio y Gallardo and almost the entire mass of Basque Catholics. Faced with such an imbroglio, we cannot join with those who pronounce categorically and without reflection for one side or the other.

Whatever may be said to the contrary, the Spanish war is not a crusade. It began as the result of a pronunciamento, and it involves too many political factors for us to liken it to a reconquest of the Holy Sepulchre.

It is fully understandable that, for political considerations and with political aims in view, Catholics should have joined the ranks of Franco; and we are far from blaming them for that. But to identify the cause of Catholicism with that of the Nationalists, to associate the Cross of Christ with Franco's standard—that is quite another kettle of fish. Rather does it seem our duty to stress the Church's transcendence and independence of every political party, no matter of what nation nor how many Catholics it includes in its ranks.

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It might seem that we thereby discourage hopes for the immediate future. But even if Franco is successful, it is by no means certain that that will be beneficial to the interests we have most at heart. We may apply to Spain, and to all nations, what the Bishops of Belgium have recently said in an admirable pastoral letter to their flocks: "It is to be believed that a Catholic-inspired dictatorship will, in the long run, do more harm than good from the religious standpoint, both by reason of the hostility it would provoke, and especially by reason of the violent reaction it is bound to engender when it finally collapses."

The Belgian hierarchy declines to be enticed by the fair promises of would-be dictators. It is not so short-sighted, and it is right. And the duty of Catholics throughout the world is to be equally far-seeing.

The same weekly follows up in its issue of January 15th with a *Témoignage chrétien sur l'Espagne* reproduced from LA CROIX. After a distressing account of alleged happenings behind the lines of the insurgent as well as of the "Government" parties, it concludes:

All this has helped to create in certain circles a state of misgiving regarding the government which has been formed to guarantee order and justice. It is said that the Spanish civil war has broken out for the defence of Christian civilization. But in view of the horrible scenes which have been taking place both at the front and behind the lines, I am compelled to pause to ponder on the meaning of those two words: civilization, Christian civilization. If all this is for civilization, why these acts of barbarity? If all this is for *Christian* civilization, how reconcile them with the precept of the Master that we should love one another?

But, alas, the Spanish war has but one objective: *extermination*.

Those who would simplify the Spanish disaster to a Holy War of Catholic Spain against anti-God revolutionary forces should read also the *Réflexions* of a Spanish priest in the January number of ESPRIT. He points out, among other things, that the Pope, so far from proclaiming Franco's campaign as a crusade which all Catholics should join, has roundly recognized the civil war as the evil which it is: a thing unthinkable were we to regard it as a "Holy War." REVUE DOMINICAINE of Ottawa (December) publishes a well-balanced editorial on the subject of the Spanish war which draws attention to some disquieting "totalitarian" pronouncements of the Burgos Government. It concludes:

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Catholics should therefore rigorously moderate their approbation of and adhesion to the party which seems most likely to emerge victorious from this frightful disaster. Doubtless, an imperfect order is better than anarchy, and, from that standpoint, we prefer to opt with Unamuno for "civilization" against "barbarism" and chaos. But, from the Catholic point of view, the victory of the Right can be the object of our hopes only to the extent that it is a lesser evil.

While we must pray for Spain's deliverance from Red domination and all it implies, it is still not easy to share enthusiasm for the lesser evil which seems to be its unavoidable concomitant.

THE LESSON OF SPAIN. But while remaining neutral with regard to the political issues of the war, we cannot afford to remain indifferent to the lessons of the martyrdom of the Spanish Church. Some reflexions of a Catalonian priest deserve to be pondered upon. We quote from *THE COMMONWEAL* (December 18):

As the horrible war in Spain drags on, it becomes more and more apparent how fundamentally critical is the situation of the Church. Spectators of the tragedy are, indeed, inclined to think that the task of rebuilding will be the affair of many sacrificial generations. We note that P. Palau, S.J., renowned during twenty-five years as the apostle of Catholic social and caritative action in Catalonia, has drawn a bitter but necessary lesson from all that has happened in a series of articles written for *Il Criterio*, of Argentina. "The duty to listen to hard sayings when one's heart bleeds with sorrow is a bitter experience," he writes. "But is it not worse still to hide or deny the truth? The enormous evils which have now burst upon Spain in the form of a terrible catastrophe are not the work of to-day merely. This is no sudden whirlwind which swooped down unexpectedly in a night. The origins must be sought for many years back. Though one cannot praise too highly the heroic example given by some Christians, the fact remains that our people as a whole, which loved to term itself the Catholic nation par excellence, could not resist the sin of arrogance and as a result piled up grievous faults. It so loved and idealized its history that it ignored the need for adding anything thereunto. It did not sense the importance of examining its conscience to see whether it was fulfilling its social duties; and still less did it understand how Christian life was ebbing away, not only in official circles but even in the great masses of the people. Catholicism became something like a caste of specially elect souls,

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having no fiery love for the lost and the forgotten. It was a Catholicism which often limited itself to cursing the godless, in the false notion that it sufficed to hope that God would of His own accord destroy the enemies of Spain in due time." P. Palau rebukes in particular the "sectarianism" which sundered Catholics into warring groups, quarrelling about matters that needed above all the influence of a united Catholic society. These things are worth repeating in Argentina, he thinks, for a reason akin to that which underlies the ancient maxim—"There but for the grace of God go I!"

Condemnations of the shortcomings of the Church in Spain should, however, be tempered by the thought that it has at least been thought worthy of its martyrdom. There is much truth in the concluding sentence of a remarkable article in *THE TABLET* (January 16) comparing the economic position of the established Church of England with that of the Church of Spain:

Modern anti-clericalism in Europe is not the fruit of irritation with supine and hypocritical wealth. It is the hatred of men who want to impose one set of secular doctrines against those who stand in their path and maintain by example and precept another doctrine and a wholly different view of the purpose of life and the nature of the end of man. It is an involuntary tribute, and does honour to the Christians who arouse it and become accounted worthy to suffer great things.

REVUE DES REVUES. Our admirable contemporary *ESPRIT* now publishes a pungent feature under this caption. A selection of views on some English-speaking periodicals from the January issue combine instruction with entertainment.

On *GK'S WEEKLY*:

L'hebdomadaire fondé par G. K. Chesterton pour défendre sa théorie du Distributisme (retour à la petite propriété individuelle) continue sous la direction d'Hilaire Belloc. Le communisme est sa bête noire. C'est un peu pour les Anglais une façon de se sentir Européens!... Les Numéros du 3-12 et du 10-12 publient une lettre de G. B. Shaw, qui tente de convaincre Belloc que le Communisme russe apporte la solution cherchée par les Distributists!... et la réponse de H. Belloc. Ce dernier goûte peu l'humour irlandais. "Le communisme est le remède du Capitalisme exactement comme le prohibition fut celui de l'alcoolisme américain." Or tous les hommes aiment la bière.—Oui, mais à quand la grande tournée? Nous préférons d'excellentes notes sur l'asservissement financier auquel aboutira le réarmement actuel.

—Signalons aussi d'admirables petites fables d'Esopé, mises au goût du jour.

On the November number of **THE AMERICAN REVIEW** :

Etude du sculpteur anglais Eric Gill sur la Propriété et la Morale Catholique. Les américains de la revue sont incroyablement humanistes et cultivés. Numéro à lire par ceux qui ont lut *The Last Puritan* de Santayana et qui s'intéressent à un milieu très intelligent mais qui reste à l'ombre des universités.

On the current number of **COLOSSEUM** :

Une admirable présentation. La pilule est bien dorée! La démocratie en entend de dures. Et certes, telle qu'elle est, c'est bien mérité. Mais l'Action Française "habille mieux!" Le Fascisme est couvert de fleurs,—et le corporatisme,—et la culture; Franco est le grand sauveur.... Pas la moindre petite épine là-dessous.—Je croyais Bernard Wall anglais; il paraît qu'il est catholique aussi. Alors, nous ne comprenons plus.

On the November number of **BLACKFRIARS** :

Pour son 200e anniversaire [*sic!*] le P. V. McNabb rappelle la position adoptée par lui et ses collaborateurs:—refus de toute concession; compréhension toujours plus affinée de notre époque et des personnes.—Certains commentaires sur l'objection de conscience et sur le drame espagnol ont bien toute la pénétration et la justesse attendues, ils n'ont pas peur d'appeler les choses par leur nom et de dénoncer toutes les équivoques....

CONTEMPORANEA. CATHOLIC SURVEY (Bulletin of the C.C.I.R.):

Excellent special number devoted to *The Task of Catholics in the Maintenance of European Order*: John Eppstein, André Toledano, A. Menidizabal Villalba and C. C. Martindale are among the contributors.

CRITERION (January): *The Religious Philosophy of Paul Elmer More* by Philip S. Richard: its significance in the revolt from religious romanticism. *Sibelius as a Teacher* by B. de Törne: first-hand recollections of the master. *Divine Democracy* by W. G. Peck: argues that Christianity implies democracy and that democracy necessarily rots without Christianity: "the failure of what has passed for democracy in the modern world, the rise of the totalitarian State, must not be allowed to confuse Christian thought."

DOWNSIDE REVIEW (January): *One Aspect of the Christian Fact* by Dom Christopher Butler: a brilliant and valuable essay on the essence of Christianity as "the invasion of the historical order by the transcendent, supra-historical order."

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Catholic Tradition and English Literature by Dom Hilary Steuart: the past debt of English prose to Catholicism, and "through Hopkins Catholic tradition is again operative in English literature." An important review of Dr. Kidd's *Roman Primacy* by Dom Ralph Russell.

DUBLIN REVIEW (January): *Spain's Two Republics* by Prof. William C. Atkinson: an illuminating comparison. *Rome and Anti-Rome* by Don Luigi Sturzo.

HOCHLAND (January): *Festgabe für Karl Muth*.

IRISH ROSARY (January): A good comparative statement of *Catholic and Communist Social Ideals* by M. G. S. Sewell.

NEW GREEN QUARTERLY (Winter): *Grace and World Order* by Maurice Reckitt.

ORATE FRATRES (December 27): *The Holy See and the Liturgical Movement* by Bernard Capelle, O.S.B.: collection of Papal pronouncements and audiences indicating the authentic scope and character of the movement. *The Liturgy and Language* by Lancelot C. Sheppard: a case for the vernacular soberly presented.

VIE INTELLECTUELLE (December 10): A moving tribute to R. M. Rilke by Daniel-Rops. (December 25): An informative account of the Austrian experiments in the corporative organization of society by J.-T. Delos, O.P.

PENGUIN.