

too much on a kind of natural purgation by faith and grace at the level of intellect they ought perhaps to remember those who are undergoing that purgation at the level of will. If Gilson is right, Thomism is a true existentialism, rational in temper, but still acknowledging the mysterious thing existence is—owning a God of Israel who proclaims himself I AM THAT I AM.

It is no accident that so great a writer as Forsyth should be antagonised by some of the metaphysical speculations in Christian theology—an antagonism which springs from the abstractions of the intellectualism of which these speculations are so often an expression. He turned to Kant's moralism as a prophylactic—and perhaps there was no need for him to do so; but it may be that though the Kantian has to find his way to a deeper agnosticism, he has something to teach the Thomist in the way he takes the reality of morality seriously.

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NEWSPAPERS

CATHOLICS are bound to be interested in the hearings of the Royal Commission which will investigate the press. We have too many memories of the press treatment of Mexican and Russian persecutions to be able to sit on the fence as indifferent observers.

The motives which led to the demand in the House of Commons for such an investigation were varied but sufficiently strong to carry the day. Since then a United State delegate to UNESCO, Mr Chester Bowles, has demanded a world-wide inquiry into the forces behind the press, radio and films. He was reported to have stressed the need for an investigation into the influences which prevent the free flow of information. The British delegation supported Mr Bowles by asking for a fact-finding survey on circulations and the trends of popular periodicals and their control. The president of the sub-committee before which this question was raised considered that such an inquiry would have to concern itself with the question of false news.

It is something that this question is being raised. Even if no solution comes from either our own Royal Commission or the international investigation it will be something to have the facts checked and placed on authoritative record.

There are several aspects of the 'press problem'. They may be related or they may not. The popular discussion of the subject has been on the monopoly tendencies. We do not need to worry about proving this to be of less importance than the problem of the contents

of papers, and the practices of journalists, if we can lead the investigation from monopolies to truth and the frequency with which truth is distorted.

In this country the tendency to monopoly has caught the public fancy. Except in the provincial evening world there is no monopoly, but there do exist several major groups which have eliminated rivals and which to some extent share out the available market between them and effectively keep out newcomers.

Of the eight national dailies existing in 1900 only three still maintain a separate existence and of the seven other national dailies founded since 1900 only four still survive. Such papers as the *Tribune*, *Westminster Gazette* and the *Daily Graphic* all fell by the wayside as casualties in the fierce battle for circulation. There is a truce at present in this war but it will be resumed when the newsprint shortage is over.

The main result of this conflict has been to set a high standard of newspaper production which in effect imposes a vast entrance fee on newcomers that tends to restrict entries to the very rich. It was rumoured that £2,000,000 had to be spent before the re-organised *Daily Herald* became self-supporting, and costs have increased since that time in a manner that is rather frightening.

Let us look at the groups that dominate the press.

The main force is Lord Kemsley. 2,144,000 homes have one or other of his six dailies; over five and a half million read his six Sunday papers; well over a million buy one or other of his eight evening papers; in addition there are the thousands who buy his seven weekly papers and his six sporting papers.

The Kemsley group is part of the old Berry Brothers group which now is in three parts, the groups of Lord Kemsley, of Lord Camrose, of Lord Iliffe.

Lord Camrose is only interested in the *Daily Telegraph* in the newspaper world, though he controls Amalgamated Press with a capital of over six millions and 150 weekly and monthly publications.

Lord Iliffe came out of retirement to buy the *Birmingham Post*, *Birmingham Mail* and the *Birmingham Weekly Post*. He is also interested in the *Midland Daily Telegraph* and the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*. It cost Lord Iliffe and his friends £2,225,000 in cash to purchase the Birmingham group listed above in 1943, a further illustration of the capital needed in the newspaper business.

The other giant groups are the modern development of what was known as the Harmsworth group. This includes the Associated Newspapers Ltd. (*Daily Mail*, *Evening News*, *Sunday Dispatch*, etc.); the 'Sunday Pictorial Newspapers Ltd.' and the 'Daily Mirror Newspapers Ltd.' which now has the second largest reading public of any

daily (3,650,000 as compared with the *Daily Express's* 3,872,140).¹

There are several smaller groups and the only national independents are *The Times*, *Daily Worker*, *Observer*, *Reynolds*, and the *News of the World*.

More important than the owners are the contents of these papers. Anyone familiar with the Sunday press must be alarmed at the moral influence of the two most popular Sunday papers which between them have 12,162,018 readers. An overwhelming majority of the homes of the country are penetrated by these papers which more than any others specialise in the 'juicy' side of life.

This direct attack on moral standards is dangerous but it can be guarded against. It is more difficult to guard against suppression of news. Among the recent examples one of the most outstanding is the way in which several papers reported the trial of Archbishop Stepinac. Many examples could easily be collected to show how often the Catholic position has been ignored or misrepresented. An investigation might show to what extent this is the policy of the owners and to what extent it is the result of the type of journalist employed. It is perhaps undesirable that one journalist should complain about other members of his profession but it is a sad fact that the standards of mental honesty among some journalists are not as high as they might be.

Charges of minor breaches of the profession's standard of conduct are often made. To avoid second hand evidence three examples may be quoted to illustrate what is, unfortunately, all too common.

(1) At the World Trade Union Conference in Paris in September 1945 the present writer was asked by the correspondent of a well known national daily to look after his interests for a couple of hours. On his return this correspondent looked through the notes prepared and was glad that there had been no dispute. He said, in explanation, that his paper wanted one story a day and that story had to illustrate the editorial point that the Congress was splitting.

(2) Two years ago Common Wealth held its congress in Liverpool; two young journalists covered it for a well known group of papers. They did not average one hour per day in the hall and were certainly not interested in reporting the congress. They wanted stories that would be written up to put this small political party in a bad light. The stories that did appear bore little relation to any part of the

¹ Recent reorganisation of interests between the 'Associated Newspapers Ltd' and the 'Daily Mirror Newspapers Ltd' have resulted in the *Daily Mail* becoming more independent. The recent appointment of a new editor has further strengthened this independence. The main force among the *Daily Mirror* shareholders is now Mr Cecil King, a nephew of the late Lord Northcliffe and first cousin to Lord Rothermere, owner of the *Daily Mail*. In politics he is reputed to be 'centre' and a friend of Sir Stafford Cripps.

transactions.

(3) Some time ago a familiar daily announced on its front page that 6000 Liverpool dockers had voted for a break-away union. Having covered the entire unofficial dock strike and being in touch with the dockers the present writer doubted this, especially as no other paper had it, and he rushed to check up. There had been no meeting, no vote, no 6000 and no break-away union.

There is no need to elaborate the lessons that can be drawn from these examples. They are comparatively unimportant because anyone who reads more than one newspaper would not have been taken in. Because many newspapers send their own representatives to such events as those mentioned it is possible to arrive at the truth by comparing the various accounts.

The danger is more acute in foreign affairs. Because it is expensive to maintain a world wide staff, papers have to rely for normal news on the agencies. If important news breaks anywhere special correspondents will be rushed there.

Special correspondents are not to be trusted one hundred per cent. Many special correspondents from the world press went to Bratislava to report the trial of Dr Tiso. After a few days the correspondents went back to Prague and continued reporting the trial at second hand from there. With the best will in the world there could be no certainty that the reports were fair. There was once a great exposure of a famous correspondent of a Canadian paper who reported the Spanish civil war from Paris cafés. A friend of the writer's who recently spent some months in Spain came back wild with anger at some correspondents who knew no more about Spain than the clubs and official offices.

The agencies have a good reputation and on the whole they deserve it. Our great British agencies certainly never deliberately circulate anything but the truth. Yet they also have to depend on the human element. One agency sent a man to Persia during the recent troubles there. He was a very competent man but his own views and his background were such that those who knew him also knew the type of story that would come. This is difficult to avoid. A Catholic Actionist going to a Catholic country will meet and mix with the Catholic Actionists of that country. A Socialist drifts into socialist company. Then there are countries that want correspondents vetted by themselves. We are now used to journalists returning from Russia and setting out to confess to the lies they told while there because of the censorship and the difficulty of getting first hand material.

To a large extent this type of problem is one that can only be

solved by journalists. If there is a high professional standard most of these complaints will vanish.

The public can also be trained to detect these 'errors'. This is not easy and cannot reach more than some of the public. Intelligent newspaper reading might be taught in the schools (it is in some). Adult education might show how newspapers have to select the news and how their bias does affect the selection. Special encouragement might be given to the 'better' papers, that is, to those who do try to present the news honestly. It is an elementary but useful precaution to read more than one paper and though we might hesitate to recommend that course it is possible for readers to exchange papers or to buy different papers each day of the week.

Royal Commissions will not solve the newspaper problems. Higher moral standards among journalists and among readers is the only solution.

There is a case to be made for limiting the circulation of papers. More local papers would promote a healthier industry. It is not good that of the 25 millions who buy a Sunday paper 24 millions buy a paper that is edited in London. This makes for undemocratic control and for the imposition of views. These local papers need multiplying and encouraging. At present we have 126 daily papers but the twelve published in London have well over 15 million readers while the provincials total perhaps 3-4 millions. This predominance of London is unhealthy.

The present day press undoubtedly lowers our standards and the tendency towards sensationalism is encouraged by the profit motive which demands ever increasing sales. Cannot we find hope for better standards if circulations could be limited or if on reaching a certain magnitude newspapers should become trusts? The newspaper belongs to the community and it is at the same time a moulder of and a reflection of the community's culture.

Some control is necessary. Positive steps to encourage journalists to raise their own standards must be taken. The training of readers is a primary task both in schools and in adult groups. A strict law compelling the printing of corrections in a style and size that bears some relation to the original error is needed. One could go on making suggestions for a long time. It is to be hoped that Catholic bodies will prepare now for the Royal Commission and work out a policy on what should be told the Royal Commission, if anything, but also how its findings should be followed up.

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NOTE—For the facts of this article and for further study the reader is referred to *Report on the British Press*, P.E.P. 1946; *Millionaire Press*, Schaffer, Labour Research Dept. 1946; *Newsprint*, Sir Walter Layton, London 1946; *World's Press News*, London, weekly; *Stock Exchange Year Book*; *Directory of Directors*; *Advertisers' Weekly*.