

Commentary

THE PROBLEM OF *THE REPRESENTATIVE*. The expected storm over *The Representative* is now dying away: it was not of the ferocity which might have been feared. In the acting version, at least until the final scene, the play remained too much on the level of a thesis to rouse the same passions as it did in Germany. This bears out the judgment of Justus George Lawler in his article, under an alternative translation of the title, in the October issue of *BLACKFRIARS*. The English reaction in general was less to try to justify the actual figure of Pius XII and his policy, although this was ably done by Catholic and non-Catholic spokesmen, than to draw a personal lesson for the present. The way in which the subject was treated by TWTWTW may be taking as fairly typical: it presented both sides of the case, but finished by challenging the audience on contemporary issues—were they themselves protesting vehemently enough against the current injustices of racial intolerance.

The problem of the play of course remains, the age-old problem for the Christian conscience, how to keep the balance between outspoken simplicity and silent prudence. It is not likely ever to be solved by a single directive. It is a tension and will always be one. We may wish now that Pius XII had spoken out in the name of the whole Church, just as one may wish that all bishops everywhere, as representing the people who believe themselves to be the people of God, would speak out vehemently and continuously on such questions as racism. It seems true to say that for a very long time the emphasis in Catholic leadership has been an inward-looking one, a guardianship of the simple, an over-paternalistic custody of the deposit of the faithful. The very deep pastoral concern from which this springs is one pole of the tension and validates, in so far as it can be validated in isolation, the prudence which keeps the voice down. But it tends, if it persists in isolation too long, to enfeeble the outgoing and dynamic aspect of the Church's function, her kerygma to the nations, proclaiming the anger of Christ at injustice and the summoning of all men to the kingdom of his compassion. Slowly after the beleaguered centuries of defence and controversy, the momentum has been picking up again, beginning with the social encyclicals of Leo XIII and his successors and continuing with an ever widening reference in the work of the late Pope and the present Council.

However, even if at the level of the collective and the 'representative'

the voice of the Church may seem to be too soft, this does not excuse the individual Christian whose conscience is sending out warning signals from raising his own voice. There is a danger that, if there is no strong encouragement from above, the individual, out of sheer diffidence, will not pursue his good principles to their conclusions. It is a danger for all who live in comparative security, but especially for Christians who are accustomed to expect authoritative direction. In this issue we print the first part of an article by Thomas Merton. Its background is the current crisis over the status of Negro citizens in the United States, a crisis on the details of which it would be impertinent for a European to utter condemnations unless he is reasonably certain that he is doing all he can to see justice working in his own milieu. But its implications are universal. We have to ask ourselves how much of our liberal humanist intentions are real, how much a buttressing of the image of ourselves we want to preserve: how much do we rest in a general intention of good will while we remain secretly, even unconsciously, thankful that we are not forced by circumstances into a real commitment which will be painful either way, either by shattering this image, or by asking us to accept radical changes in the framework of our lives.

The greatest service that the Negro leaders in the United States have done and can do is to continue insisting that it is White society that is sick, that the breaking down of the neurosis of colour prejudice may be painful but the pre-condition of a structure which will be stronger and richer than before. A similar tendency can be seen in the writings of the rising generation in Africa; alongside the violence of political speech and action, there can be found what might be called a compassion for the unhappiness of White society itself and a determination to make that society realise that the African has gifts and qualities that the European needs for his own health. Perhaps this attitude is limited still to a few of the leaders and writers on the Negro and African side; it is remarkable that after such oppression and neglect, or patronising benefaction, there should be any willing to push their Christian or humanist principles to such a conclusion. It must be matched by a corresponding courage from other Christians and humanists who are after all only accidentally white.