

BLACKFRIARS

VOL. XXII

JULY 1941

No. 256

'DANGEROUS TIMES'

IN his Whitsuntide address the Holy Father, Pius XII, further developed the principles of the Right Christian Order for Society. To the Five Peace Points concerning the relations that must exist between states he adds the principles—the Christian view of the Family, Property, and Labour—needed for the internal order of the State. 'These are the principles, conceptions and rules under which we may co-operate as from now on in the future organisation of that New Order for the birth of which out of the dreadful effervescence of the present struggle, the world is waiting and wishing.' We have the Holy Father's authority for making our effort in the present struggle positive in character, not simply to slay the 'Beast from the Abyss,' but also to re-fashion a healthier countryside than the one in which it made its appearance. This effort towards reconstruction should be identified with our war-effort to give the latter real driving force. Catholics are rightly urged to co-operate with all sincere Christians in working and fighting for a happier state of society. And we may, to that extent, welcome less clear pronouncements from the representatives of Protestant States. Thus President Roosevelt declared: 'To-day the whole world is divided between human slavery and human freedom, between pagan brutality and the Christian ideal. We choose human freedom, which is the Christian ideal.' And Mr. Eden, stating the British war aims for the first time, claimed that 'only our victory can restore, both to Europe and to the world, that freedom which is our heritage from centuries of Christian civilisation and that security which alone can make possible the betterment of man's lot upon the earth.'

But in the general frenzy for planning and reconstruction it is difficult to keep a level head and to follow the Pope's lead steadily and soberly. It is easy to become befuddled with a vague idealism which brings foggy dreams of a vast Christian revival accomplished in a few months, of a world full of Christians with all their differences buried for all time. If we are to have any measure of success in the movement towards a Christian social order we must count the costs; and the odds against it are exceedingly heavy. The might of Germany or of Russia is as nothing to the power in a far wider field of the forces ranged against such an order. We must start this planning and reconstruction in a spirit of realism by which we 'first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether we have wherewithal to finish it'—for it is the finish, the end that counts.

First of all there is the vast mass of people to whom Christian values are almost completely alien, and who has 'no time for that stuff' or is antagonistic to it. The majority of the working classes can be said to have no practical Christianity, but only a certain natural goodness in human fellowship and society. More than this, even the Christian workers, those who know the value of Christ's religion, and try to realise it in their own way, seem to have little enthusiasm for the present schemes of social order. It seems fairly clear that most of those now engaged in working for the right Christian order are those to whom capitalism has been kind, those who would incidentally lose considerably in any order not based on the old system. And we may be excused the suspicion that the plans implied in American policy or in Mr. Eden's speech include ultimately a return to the financial despotism of New York or London and a 'liberal' freedom in which avarice and lust are given wide scope.

Then, in the second place, even those who may be called enthusiastic Christians have such divergent views that only a negative aim, that of overcoming the threat of paganism, can hold them loosely together. Order in human affairs depends upon the end to which men's actions are ordered. A different goal or purpose produces a different order. Now it is clear that the true Christian order has one single

goal which regulates the whole of social as well as individual behaviour, and that is the Beatific Vision, the Communion of Saints in the next world. The whole social order is, then, subordinated to this one end. The Christian view of life is fundamentally other-worldly; every follower of our Lord has to seek first the kingdom of God and to rest assured that all the rest will be added unto him. How many Christian 'planners' realise that they should not be planning for this world but for the next? Those who make their reconstructions irrespective of the beatific vision and place the end and goal on this earth are not in reality scheming for a Christian order and their co-operation will bring division and ruin. And if the order depends on its ultimate goal and that goal is the unbroken vision of the Blessed Trinity, what positive contribution to this future order can he make who denies this basic dogma of faith?

And springing from the Blessed Trinity is the Incarnation of Christ our Lord, God and man in hypostatic union, and from Him springs the one Church, the hierarchy and the seven grace-bearing sacraments. That is the framework of the order that starts from the right end and is therefore the right order. Many Christians are impatient with dogma—hence our present disorders, our many churches and our rootless sentimentality. Some deny the divinity of Christ. Others, like Laurence Housman, visualise a Christian order purified of all institutionalism; rising above law and the Church, mankind becomes united in a fervid and anarchical act of charity, for God seems to be an impersonal Love surging up inside Christian men. This 'Preparation of Peace' is but one manifestation of a spirit of pseudo and antinomian mysticism which is no more Christian than the spirit of H. G. Wells's world orders. And yet such heated visions of the future, deliberately cut off from the framework of the Church of Christ, parade under the name of Christian orders.

But even if we take the still smaller group of true Christians who are agreed at least on such basic dogmas as the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation and the institution of the Church, our path leads through a maze of possible misunderstandings. Take these principles that the Holy

Father has laid down for the New Order within the State. 'In the family,' for example, 'the nation finds the natural roots of its greatness.' And the leaders of the churches in England had already added this point to the five peace points in the famous letter to the *Times*: 'The family as a social unit must be safeguarded.' But do even these Christians know what is meant by the family? Will the large number who see nothing essentially wrong in divorce and the still larger number who favour birth control be able to co-operate with Catholics in an order where the family is so basic? And are there not equally fundamental disagreements on private property and on the nature and purpose of labour? How, for example, can an established Church shake itself free of vested interests? How are we to begin to formulate an order in a country whose Government officially supports abuses of the family and society?

One last fact must be faced in a realist's summary of the difficulties. Granted that somehow there can be found a working agreement on general moral principles among Christians so that we may begin to work in harmony, what may we ultimately hope to establish? The Christian religion has existed for nearly two thousand years, and yet as we turn back the pages of history we find it difficult to fix on a single period in any section of the globe when a Christian social order was well established. Do we hope to succeed in an age of subtle and widespread materialism when even the 'ages of faith' failed to order society satisfactorily? That would suggest a fair and flourishing spiritual pride. In fact, we can at best expect little more success in society than the average Christian achieves in his own personal sanctification, and that is never stabilised in this life. The religion of Christ, in any case, is other-worldly.

So much for the difficulties arrayed against any ordering of Christian society; but we do not set them out here to counsel despair; we would not sign our own doom with the Pacifist who wrote, 'Christianity is dead, and therefore Europe is dead.' That would be the state of the unrepentant sinner who hands himself over to his sin. There does remain a large measure of hope if it lies only in the

Pope's command to work for a new Christian order. If we follow the lead of his Holiness—and many Christians are showing alacrity to do so—we shall have a single, clear-cut principle of order. Then it should not be impossible to stir the people as a whole with enthusiasm for Christian reconstruction. *The Catholic Worker*, which is giving full support to the plans based on the letter to the *Times*, could become a dynamic instrument in rallying the workers to this standard. With sufficient support from the Catholics of this country it could find its way into the hands, the homes, and eventually the heads, of most British workmen. There are other means too, such as the Y.C.W., and its various activities and literature—particularly *Front Line* which will provide inspiration for Christians in the forces.

But our most fundamental hope lies in a gradual clarification of the ultimate end of society, a spiritualising of the plans for social reconstruction. If the movement towards a deepening of the spiritual life of Christians does not neglect the dogmatic bases of that life, but on the contrary tends all the time to settle doctrinal differences, co-operation among Christians will bear the fruit of true unity and strength. The order for which we are working must be one in which Christians are agreed in their faith about the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Church, as well as about the nature and purpose of marriage, the morality of ownership, and the distinction between true and false freedom. It is surely not too much to say that this is at last within reach now that the warring spirit of Christian sectarianism is losing its fire, and the members of the churches are meeting one another with sympathy instead of with controversy.

This clarification of ideals and doctrine must go hand in hand with a purging of the materialism which is endemic to the age. Our present life and thought is tainted at its source and it will be bitterly painful to clear the disease from our system. But with a return to the standards of the Cross, with a revival of a positive mortification that finds its inspiration in the Passion of our Lord, together with a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a flood of sanctity rising in the nation, we can hope to overcome

the vague mysticism that clogs the minds of some of our liveliest writers with a natural fog when they could be illuminated with the cloud of unknowing. This will be the task of the *Sword of the Spirit* which has already won a very wide support among Christians. Though this movement still gives the impression of not having found its feet, it has during the last weeks shown signs of clearly defining its purpose and setting to work on these lines with a hopeful vigour. Certainly we cannot leave it to a particular society to create the spirit among us. Every individual Christian must take the initiative in living a life of personal sanctity, but at the same time he should support the movement of the *Sword of the Spirit* and allow it to direct and canalise his new-found energies and enthusiasms. The Spirit breatheth where he will, it is true, but he is a Spirit of union, and he works within the Church.

These words should explain the nature of this number of BLACKFRIARS, for there is hope for our plans for reconstruction only if we insist on the importance of dogma as the basis of Christian life and only if we live in the purifying furnace of the real love of God. Fr. Vincent McNabb's article shows us the picture of one so in tune with the Passion of our Lord that he could die with him rather than deny a dogma of faith, and that the dogma of the Papacy. It is in the spirit of St. Thomas More that we must begin to reconstruct his native *civitas*. B. Henry Suso can lead the way in the spiritual life and defend us from the woolliness of a pseudo mystic love that would avoid all discomfort as well as any form of institution or law. But in case this attitude of other-worldliness should seem to spell escapism and unreality, we have the example of the Foundress of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, brought up in the spirit of St. Dominic, and fashioned in the stuff of which saints are made, yet fully conscious of the temporal needs of her fellows and spending her life in a work to assist the destitute and reunite the severed classes of society. Her Congregation continues her work for a true Christian order and deserves to be more widely known in this country, as it is another sign of hope for the future. Finally, John of St. Thomas's treatise on the

Gifts of the Holy Ghost is the classic on this subject, and Fr. Justin McCann's translation of a typical passage should point the way to a deepening of the spiritual life. We hope that the whole treatise will eventually be available for English readers, for it would help to give a new and keener edge to the *Sword of the Spirit*.

The review of George Herbert's poems, also, is not without significance in this respect. It points to a spiritual man of delicate sensibility whose spirit was nourished in the Church of England when it was still within earshot of the Church in which More died.

We do indeed live in 'dangerous times,' but it would be foolish to hide our face from the dangers. We must face them with the bold front of realism if we are to contribute anything to the new, or better the right, order. Without desiring to be apocalyptic, the words of St. Paul to Timothy seem to us to have some relevance to present times: 'In the last days, shall come *dangerous times*. Men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasures more than of God: having an appearance indeed of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Now these avoid' (II Timothy, 3).