

Gentiles (itself a flagrant breach of the Concordat), he finally gave way along the whole front in January 1939 because he feared that Mussolini might scrap the Concordat altogether. It did not, in fact, last another half-century. What Pius had really compromised, however, was the claim that the papacy has stood out firmly against the 'modern world': faced with the paradox of Fascist reactionary-modernism, he could not maintain a policy of opposition to a régime which ostensibly glorified the family and rejected 'Bolshevism'. And all this was perfectly obvious to that other Italy outside the Vatican, not all of it Catholic and some of it Communist, which would not compromise resistance.

Dr Pollard's workmanlike account of all this helps one to understand why a majority of Italians returned to a moderate civic liberalism after 1944 and sat lightly to the Church's claim to authority. What was not easily forgiven was the Vatican's willingness to take advantage of an authoritarian state to try to change united Italy into a modified version of the old Papal States. European Catholicism had accommodated the loss of the temporal power very easily; by 1900 only a handful of French Catholic royalists really cared. Historians speak of the papacy as being strengthened by what happened. In the Vatican, on the other hand, the sense of loss was acute, the wound did not heal. But Pius XI misread the signs of the times when he imagined that the new Fascist régime offered a means by which some of the lost authority could be recovered, and that miscalculation affected the Vatican's powers of recovery after the national revolution of 1944. Little by little it begins to look as though the Curia was right all along, as though the loss of the temporal power did not strengthen the papacy, but deprived it of the chance of becoming the centre of a modern state. Modern Bologna, for example, is the work of the Bolognese, and not of the Papacy which once governed there, and it is the lack of this hard experience on the ground which still makes it difficult for the leadership of the Catholic Church to come to terms with progress.

JOHN KENT

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY. THE IMPACT OF COMTEAN POSITIVISM by T.R. Wright. Cambridge. Pp xiii + 306. £27.50.

It is easy to make fun of Comte. A naive systematizer, who tried to reconcile several incompatible strains in the thought of his time, he was at once a romantic enthusiast in his worship of woman, and a naive materialist, who thought that the transitory theories of scientists could never be superseded. He was, as Mr Wright says with judicious understatement, 'frequently surprised at the "desertion" of men who had never been his disciples.' His letters are full of complaints of persecution and conspiracy, characteristic of egomaniacs. He took phrenology seriously. And it is hard to resist a smile when we find that this most rigid of theorists of monogamous romance, who absolutely forbade the remarriage of widows, was separated from a wife who could always get money from him by threatening to come and live with him. While he found his 'ange' in Clotilde de Vaux, who was not his wife, he decreed absolutely that every other man must find the 'ange', where he himself only found a 'démon'—in his wedded wife.

Nevertheless, the story of his influence on England is a fascinating one, and Mr Wright is to be warmly congratulated on the lucid and discriminating way in which he has told it. His book is not flawless (how many books are?). He is less at home in dealing with Comte's literary influence than with the history of the positivist movement itself. He is in some methodological difficulty in dealing with the case of George Eliot, since he is sometimes tempted to attribute to direct Comtean influence elements in her work which both Comte and she borrowed from the general Catholic tradition. (The cult of the Virgin Mother is an example.) And he makes a bad slip when he tells us that Lydgate in *Middlemarch* thought of joining the Saint-Simonians, but omits to add that he did so 'in order to turn them against some of their own doctrines' (*Middlemarch* cap. XV). More important, he does not

insist strongly enough on that cardinal distinction among the nineteenth century religious doubters: the distinction between those, like Pater, who were not sure whether orthodox Christianity was true or not, but were sure that, if it wasn't, nothing else could take its place, and those who wished to remove from orthodoxy some of its fundamental doctrines, so that it might then become credible to them. The first group contained some very lucid thinkers; the second a lot of muddled heads.

Apart from these minor blemishes the book is excellent, and hardly to be faulted; it gives a detailed and convincing account of the positivist schism, ostensibly about ritual, but really perhaps about whether the movement was to be a substitute religion or a simple club for mutual moral improvement. And it presents some fascinating examples of distinguished people's encounters with Comte's ideas. Of these, Mill's is of particular interest. Mill was very like Comte in some ways. Both had a talent for abstract, systematic thought, with a weak sense of probability and a naive ignorance of human nature. Both mistook their personal emotions about one woman for an objective judgement that that woman was destined to be a unique inspiration for the whole race. But while Comte was arrogant, Mill was modest, and ready to admit his mistakes, and he came to think that his early enthusiasm for Comte had been one of them. Also, Mill, with his immense industry and conscientiousness, could not but distrust a man who refused to read new books in the interest of 'cerebral hygiene'. It is amusing, too, that that much overrated figure, G.H. Lewes, who has received unwarranted credit from his association with the genius of George Eliot, should have declared that in Comte 'History has had its Newton'. Frederick Harrison, the best-known of Comte's English disciples who remained faithful until his death in the 1920's, was a refreshingly normal man of letters, a hunting man, described by Trollope as 'a jolly butcher on a hippopotamus'. He was standing refutation of the plausible accusation that Comteans were just quarrelsome cranks. Kegan Paul was for a time a positivist, and, looking back, saw positivism as a useful stage on his journey to Catholic conversion. It is sad, but not surprising, to find that Comte's reverence for science aroused little gratitude in scientists; the forthright Huxley called Congreve, the official head of the movement in England, a donkey.

But if we cease to think of positivism as an intellectual system, and think of the motives and anxieties of those who were attracted by it, we cease to be conscious of absurdities, and find serious issues. The people who desperately desired to find the sanctions of conscience, the human solidarity, and the comfort of ritual in new forms, because for them the old forms were unacceptable, stand out in history with dignity. They were emphatically 'homines bonae voluntatis'. And yet, the gradual decline and final extinction of the movement cannot surprise us. Leslie Stephen, in his essay 'A Bad Five Minutes in the Alps', put his finger on one great weakness, there was no real comfort in the prospect of death. If you cannot believe in the Resurrection of the Body, it is better just to accept death as an unalterable fact. All philosophical comfort, all falsely cheerful talk about 'joining the choir invisible', only makes matters worse. Mr Wright notes that most leading positivists were of depressive temperament; and, even though that may not be blamed on positivism, positivism did nothing to help them. And then, in the context of history, positivism may be seen as one member of a long series of fashionable creeds, depending on particular accidents of history and intellectual fashions. When circumstances change, they disappear. Those who live by the *Zeitgeist* perish also by the *Zeitgeist*.

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