

THE CHURCH AND INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY by Gregor Siefer; *Darton, Longman and Todd, 50s.*

Dr Robert McAfee Brown, Professor of Religion at Stanford University and an observer at the Vatican Council, recently wrote that the movement of the 'worker-priests' was 'an expression of social concern which, though now under full papal condemnation, remains in the opinion of non-Catholics one of the most creative expressions of the Spirit in the last half-century of Christian history.' This opinion serves to underline the importance of Dr Siefer's work which is a fully documented history of the priest worker movement in France from its beginnings up to its final dissolution in 1959. It is perhaps important to point out that this work was originally prepared as a dissertation for the faculty of philosophy of the University of Hamburg. The author is not directly concerned with the theology of the movement but with a sociological analysis. He grants that some form of theological analysis is necessary 'in itself' but has tried to confine his study within the framework of one academic discipline.

In describing the origins of the experiment Dr Siefer shows how important it is to make the necessary distinction between the *Mission de France* and the *Mission de Paris*, and how the movement although receiving its early impetus from Godin did not follow the techniques which he himself had suggested. Experience soon showed that evangelism was not enough and that some form of identification was called for between the priest and the 'workers' world'. It became clear to them that they had to take root, and it was around this concept that the misunderstandings and final conflict between priests and bishops arose. There is a tragic inevitability in the way in which the worker

priests were forced along this collision path. The way in which they had to prove their solidarity with the working masses, i.e. that their presence was not merely a new manoeuvre or stratagem, was by becoming unprivileged wage-earners. But 'both priests and workers gradually perceived that sharing the life of labour alone was only a transitional stage unfruitful in itself'. They had to go further and choose a field of action – either the factory itself, as a shop steward or a member of a works' council, or in a Union, or in the neighbourhood (the *quartier*) in which they lived. 'In continuing on this path, becoming like ordinary people and laying aside the mentality of the self-complacent believer, lay the danger of a paradoxical consequence: the poverty of the really poor was only completed by the absence of faith. Stripped of all his consolations and hopes, the priest then found himself at the unforeseen end of the path which he had set out upon and trodden with such confidence'. Hence, when the blow fell (and the priest workers were ordered by their bishops, acting on instructions from Rome, to quit all temporal commitments by March 1st, 1954) the agonizing dilemma became acute.

There were many bishops, among them cardinals, who fought desperately to save what they considered an essential part of the Church's mission in France. But to no avail. The final blow came in 1959 with Cardinal Pizzardo's letter to Cardinal Feltin which contained the absolute ban on industrial work of any kind by priests. The problem of a dechristianized working class remains, and the debate continues, too. In March last year when Fr Lehodey was appointed Secretary General of *la Mission Ouvrière* he emphasized

the need for the priest to bear witness in the world of work. A couple of months later the *Mission de France* published a number of interesting studies on this same question. Perhaps, if there are to be further experiments, they will be begun in the light of a great deal more scientific informa-

tion and study in depth, and will thus avoid the fate of the first experiment from which nobody emerges with their reputation enhanced. To show why this was so is the point of Dr Siefer's work and he has completed it admirably.

John Fitzsimons

RURAL REVOLUTION IN FRANCE, The Peasantry in the Twentieth Century by Gordon Wright: *Stanford University Press and Oxford University Press, 40s.*

'France is a peasant Republic' – Gordon Wright begins his book, *Rural Revolution in France*, with that sentence borrowed from Alfred Cobban. Written in 1949, the statement is well on the way to becoming untrue. In outlook, political customs and economic build-up France has borne the stamp of peasant traditions for centuries and right up to the present date. It was an historical inheritance that even the industrial revolution did no more than partially encroach upon; but within the last fifteen years an abrupt change has begun to undermine this state of things. The peasant population is rapidly diminishing, while the local gentry who formed the rural set-up (lords of the manor, doctors, notaries, etc.) are losing their influence. They are being superseded by a surging wave of young agriculturists, open to progress, wishing for modernization, well-informed on the general problems confronting their generation, vindicating their place in national life. They constitute the spear-head of an authentic revolution fermenting the rural populace in France. These facts form the basis of the interesting story that Gordon Wright has to tell.

The revitalization of rural France is being brought about under the action of many factors and could be looked at from various standpoints. It would be possible to consider it at the level of economic structures and to demonstrate under pressure of which economic laws agriculture has been forced to abandon its autonomy and enter the market cycle and, on that account to submit to the laws of competition and modernization. Again, one might analyse the influence of technology and show how the application of

agricultural science and the spread of mechanized farming has broken up the ancestral pattern of production and completely re-orientated the peasant mentality. Gordon Wright has chosen to describe the rural revolution from another point of view. He shows how the conflict between conservative and progressive tendencies runs its course through the professional organizations, the great syndicates, the political parties, the parliamentary groups and how the one and the other have made capital out of the outstanding events with which the troubled history of French politics has been starred: the prosperous years after World War I, the great slump, the popular front, the Vichy régime, the fourth Republic, the Gaullist era. With an extensive fund of information at his command and a rare gift for analysis, the author has succeeded in penetrating into the hurly-burly of professional and political institutions and has tracked the groping passage of a reviving agriculture.

In spite of a still passive section of the peasantry and a few notable traditionalists with their gaze fixed upon the past, two forces seem capable of putting new life into the French countryside: the forces stemming from Marxism and those animating the Christian ideal – both of them professing a coherent doctrine and both with militant convictions. Profiting by the Liberation, the communists attempted to take the peasantry in hand. They foundered in face of the barrage of opposition they encountered and, above all, on account of their failure to grapple with the real problems of agricultural life. That is why there is little trace left of their attempt, outside a few restricted areas. On the other hand, Christian