

EXTRACTS

NOVA ET VETERA is an intelligent quarterly, already in its twenty-ninth year, emanating from Geneva. It is concerned with current theological and philosophical trends in a readable form, avoiding that rather untidy, ragged mountain of words which characterizes the majority of French theological quarterlies. Professor Jacques Maritain is a frequent contributor and Charles Journet the editor. A recent number includes an apropos article on God's speech to man by Père Kælin, O.P., who shows the necessity of combining love with the act of intelligence in listening to the Word of God, and how these words demand not only submission to an external authority but also the forming of interior concepts, of analysis and judgment. He goes on to consider the manner in which our Lord has spoken to us and compares his language with that of the mystics.

The mystics speak of divine things in so far as they have proved them. Their experience is a knowledge of God by connaturality of love. As such this remains incommunicable. And their language, in order nonetheless to say something of what they have experienced, adopts a special form, a unique tone, which sets us in a world altogether other than that of the words of the theologians.

Jesus did not always reveal a new truth. Often he exhorts, consoles, commands, threatens. Never does he seek, like the mystics, to evoke, or describe or sing of his spiritual experience. He forbears in his words, shall we say, from breaking forth on a lyrical note in the excess of his joy or the excess of his suffering. . . . How mysterious is the reserve of Jesus! If therefore we call the mystic language in the strict sense that which tries to express an experience in its very subjectivity, Jesus's language is not a mystic language. But in a wider sense we can call mystic the language which betrays a mystic experience without in any way striving to describe it. Here Jesus is incomparable.

BUT when it comes to trying to express the full but normal Christian life, language always seems to fail. Of late the French have attempted to sum it up in the expression *la vie théologique*, a word that is difficult to transpose into English. The 'review of the modern apostolate' *Evangeliser* (Editions de la Pensée Catholique, Brussels) in an issue devoted to 'the preaching of the Kingdom of God' has given a neat summary of the phrase. Writing of the law of this Kingdom as the law of the *vie théologique*, Père Olivier says:

We are called to live the life of God. This life is essentially a life of knowledge and of love the object of which is God himself. The vital acts of the Christian, then, will themselves be acts of knowledge and love whose object is God and his mystery. The whole conception of morality, the whole teaching of the law of the Christian life will be

orientated towards the exercise of the truths of God. Most Christians know in the realms of morality only the morality of the cardinal virtues and a morality that is merely natural. They are like men living in an immense palace who do not put their noses above the cellar manhole. They remain in the basement of the Christian life. When they have kept justice, when they have been sufficiently temperate to avoid habitual heavy excess, when they have carried out a certain form of courage . . . (as to prudence, they don't speak of it, they know it so little or so mistakenly) they are not far from imagining that they have reached the limits of the christian life. . . .

APPLYING the supernatural view of the Christian life to the realms of medical ethics, the editor of *The Catholic Medical Quarterly*, celebrating its hundredth issue, writes:

Important as it is to keep the 'human' basis of medicine as wide as possible, it is no less important to keep its spiritual basis so also. . . . The mere memorising of a kind of Catholic doctors' Highway Code will not tell us the deeper reasons for acting in a particular way, and without a knowledge of those reasons we cannot do justice to ourselves as rational beings. Many of the medico-moral problems concerned with married life can be understood only in the light of the knowledge of what the Church intends married life to be.

THE NEED to keep on the theological level, that is, on the level of divine faith, hope and charity, is felt especially in those spheres where natural developments have been most marked. Thus in the sphere of psychology the supernatural end of man's life can well be forgotten. When we read an article, for example, on the psychological testing of candidates for religious life (in *Review for Religious*, November), we should be on our guard lest we forget that such tests of a vocation, though extremely helpful and even necessary in doubtful cases, are only secondary compared with the test of such things as generosity or charity without which religious life can be that of a rather ill-run club. 'The manifestation of virtue', writes the author of the article, Fr Beir, S.J., 'is sometimes ambiguous, and what externally passes for virtue may actually be no more than a cover-up for a psychological problem. Natural submissiveness and deep-seated inferiority can easily pass for humility, overly-conscientious stirrings for perfection can be no more than psychological defences against fear of criticism and inability to tolerate failure, while genuine apostolic zeal is not always easy to distinguish from a paranoid discontent.' All this is very well—indeed, the article is timely enough; but it is all too easy to become engrossed in such investigations of a subjective nature till one is never sure of a motive and suspects everything as 'purely natural' or warped. The genuine love of God seasoned by a lively faith is not so difficult to discern. The supernatural end must be preserved as the supreme test.