

EXTRACTS

In the effort to find a new way of tapping the immense, though now sealed, energies of the faith of our Lord, people today are sinking many different shafts. In Germany the fervent Christians have joined the popular movement against moralism and casuistry and some have adopted instead what they call the 'Ethic of Situation'. To a matter-of-fact English reader such phrases naturally sound academic and remote from true spirituality. How, one instinctively asks, does such an ethic link up with 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life', and 'If you will be perfect, go, sell all you have and come, follow me'? The *Supplement* of the *Vie Spirituelle* (September 1951) provides us with the answer by translating an article on the subject by Walter Dirks, who describes what is meant by 'ethic' and what by 'situation'. The desire is to find the quick response to the actual situation in which moment by moment the Christian finds himself, and to overcome his hesitant refusal to accept what is. This brings the new perspective with its immediate 'Yes' of acceptance:

We recognise soon or perhaps at once a new situation which we have not heretofore recognised, which we had been unable to recognise. Perhaps it is this that touches the mystery of the lightning progress of the great saints: the fact that they say 'Yes' constantly, at once, without delay, and that from the new level so quickly reached they see immediately a new 'impossibility' and immediately say 'Yes' . . . This explains why it is precisely the great saints who think themselves, at the end of their lives, the greatest sinners. God has led them on the way of the 'impossible' to perspectives which we cannot see and before which even they had been tempted to discouragement. This is the royal way. This is the same as the 'little way'. The two Teresas are both to be honoured as patrons of the 'situational idea'.

This may still appear unnecessarily remote from practical living, but the *Vie Spirituelle* itself devotes its October number to showing how the 'little way of spiritual childhood' is to be properly understood as the great way of spiritual maturity. The articles are perhaps more practical, and to the devotees of St Teresa of Lisieux the number will be invaluable as an interpreter of her true spirit, showing how 'infantilism' is to be avoided and how the full Christian obedience of which Mr Dirks speaks brings virility and stature to the children of God.

FICHES DOCUMENTAIRES (Louvain), that invaluable monthly set of leaflets which keeps us in touch with movements and ideas throughout the world, introduces in its September-October issue the person of Padre Bevilacqua, editor of *Humanitas*, as a great power for a new Christianity in Italy.

He is not a judge, nor an apologist, nor a critic; he is a soul of fire fed by an intellect specially suited to the discovery of a christian humanism, enemy of every equivocation and compromise.

Padre Bevilacqua (whose name must surely provide a paradox to his nature if what they say of him is true!), writes of 'the Modern World and Christ'. He attacks the general state of fear among men and their answer to fear with Stoicism; he attacks the *Timidité devote* which strikes such a contrast with the vigorous audacity of the marxist. He seems to be pointing with greater and more certain gestures to what those Germans have called the 'Ethic of Situation'. The English-speaking world would perhaps recognise his words as bearing more immediately upon the strength and revolutionary power of the Gospels.

ANGELS are sometimes used by the devoutly timid in the same way as St Teresa of Lisieux—as an escape from the tremendous dangers of the modern 'impossibilities' of Christians. It is good to find a theologian, Fr Jerome Toner, O.P., setting forth the immensely powerful doctrine of the angels as an antidote to modern materialism. In *Doctrine and Life* (Oct.-Nov.) he writes with St Thomas at his elbow and he quotes:

As regards things to be done, human knowledge and affection can vary and fall from good in many ways; so it was necessary that angels should be deputed for the guardianship of men in order to regulate them and move them to good.

So perhaps also the angels will help us to face the 'situation' and overcome 'the impossible'. This is what the Society calling itself the *Philangeli* regards as a neglected aspect of Christian life; I wonder if Fr Toner knows of them?

The GITA has its own publishing house in Poona which has kindly sent the Editor of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT some of its latest publications. It is strange how much of what is written on the great Indian tradition of spirituality seems to call out for the full Christian doctrine to complete it:

Let the roots of my life rest in silence: then will my flowers bloom and my leaves will sing upon the mind of the Spirit. I sit in silence: what memories arise! And each memory is a procession of distant days! And whistling through the processions comes the word: 'Thou art the *atman*: deathless art thou, and in the Eternal is thy home!'

And so, despite the aim of this publishing house to provide books for those who believe that knowledge is one and that all true leaders of both East and West have lighted the way forward by the wisdom of the heart, we are left always with the same feeling that there is only one Leader who could lighten the way clearly, that these sages need the Word made flesh as the valley of dry bones waited for the word from heaven. They are near to receiving flesh, but the flesh must be the flesh of Christ.

THE PILGRIMS' NEWS-LETTER of Aylesford (October, 1951) writes of active contemplatives:

They had come into a desert hoping for something—they knew not what—prayer and quiet and the contemplative life. They soon found a life of ceaseless activity, with just enough time for their essential spiritual needs. It did not look like the contemplation they had envisaged, and yet it was contemplative, and quickly created a truly contemplative spirit. You can plan your contemplation and create a conventional setting, and only end up by becoming an artificial mimic. It is possible to be busy and yet never lose the sense of God's presence if you are busy with God's will. . . . No time for newspapers; no time for the wireless. In a shorter time than is realised a conventional habit is broken, and you get on very well without these things. The world and its futilities go with them.

READERS wishing to clarify for themselves the medical and moral implications of lobotomy and leuchotomy have the opportunity to do so with the appearance of *La psycho-chirurgie* in the Cahiers Laennec. The sixty pages of expert testimonial, accompanied by Fr Tesson's comments as a theologian, are written with all the clarity and incision associated with French thought. One writer, for instance, says: 'We should like to be sure that there will never be any relapses. As far as we can see from our own experience (i.e., myself and my colleagues), these are far more numerous than one would gather from Anglo-Saxon publications, which too often fail to mention in their statistics even those relapses which can be ascertained.'

In another 'Laennec' publication, *Psychanalyse et Conscience Morale*, P. Tesson, Beirmaert, Dr Nodet, Pasche and Caruso focus the moral problems of analysis. P. Tesson's contribution is particularly clear. He distinguishes between 'the feeling of guilt' (an instinctive, affective reaction which does not necessarily signify a real fault), 'the recognition of moral failing' (which may be made by any man, whether Christian or not), and the 'sense of sin' ('which can only be given by faith').

'Laennec' publications may be obtained from P. Lethielleux, 10 Rue Cassette, Paris, VIe.

LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

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