

clay in Sussex soil—are there no cattle in Sussex meadows—is there no water in Sussex wells—is there no wool on Sussex sheep? Be a *monastery* then—a MONK—a thing apart, aloof from the world; indeed be a world apart, a self-sufficient, self-supporting kingdom; and though you surround yourselves, your lands with a high wall of brick and a higher wall of silence, your sermon will be the heart and hope of all the sermons we apostles will preach in the daily exercise of our craft of apostle.’ ‘Go forth, Christian soul, to the unfallen earth, and there amidst the tares and briars sing the song of work that is worship. Soon around your croft will gather a sheaf of homes and homesteads, where the GREAT SACRAMENT may prepare the ploughman for the furrow, the monk for the choir, the priest for the altar.’

And finally a quotation from *Nazareth or Social Chaos*, so that we may remember the dangers of abuse of this same life on the land. Fr Vincent’s seer near Lindisfarne is speaking, describing the state of the old monasteries before the reformation: ‘Fields added to fields, lands bartered and bought till the distant holdings of an Abbey were far beyond a day’s journey even on horseback. The Abbey lands, once a sufficient croft round a House of God, now become an estate too wide for the soul of it to be present in every part. Its limbs were swelling. It was sickening to death.’ Then 400 years of even worse absentee landlords. And now, says Fr Vincent: ‘If there is one truth more than another which life and thought have made us admit, against our prejudices and even against our will, it is that there is little hope for saving civilisation or religion except by the return of contemplatives to the land’.

So we must return, and return in every possible combination, as families, as supernatural families (religious communities), and as solitaries. But it must be a religious return and a working return, a return to Nazareth.

JOHN TODD.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### CATHOLICS AND POLITICS

*To the Editor, BLACKFRIARS.*

Sir,—Had my article on *Catholics and Modern Politics* no other merit, it would have more than justified itself in winning from Mr Douglas Woodruff so persuasive an *apologia pro vita sua*, and I should like first to join with you, Sir, in paying tribute to ‘his energy and single-minded devotedness to the Catholic cause’. He is, of course, right in his conjecture that a number of my remarks were made with *The Tablet* in view. Not all of them, however, and there are places where Mr Woodruff is unnecessarily on the defensive.

For instance, where I speak of what should be our attitude towards the State, I had in mind those who have to negotiate responsibly with Government officials and not those, such as journalists, who may exercise to their heart's content the Englishman's privilege of abusing his rulers. Again, he has taken the 'unimpeachable high Toryism' (the phrase, incidentally, was not coined by me; it was used humorously in my hearing by one who largely shares Mr Woodruff's political sympathies!) with which I jestingly taxed *The Tablet* too much *au pied de la lettre*. Toryism, anyhow, appears to be by no means easy to define, if we are to judge by a recent correspondence in *The Times*. But if a journal consistently praises the speeches of His Majesty's Opposition, with at least one member of which it is officially associated, while no less consistently exposing the misdemeanours of those whom it somewhat ominously describes as 'Mr Attlee and his friends', it has no right to complain if it receives a Party label.

Mr Woodruff protests also at my fathering Burke upon him and, more seriously, that I have misunderstood his appeal to the New Testament doctrine of Vocation. With the idea of vocation as this is illustrated in the lines which he quotes from George Herbert I am, of course, in cordial agreement; though I should not wish to follow Mr Woodruff in all the deductions he draws at this point. As for Edmund Burke, has the Editor of *The Tablet* forgotten that as recently as 18th September 1948 his journal (p. 179) was to be found extolling 'the much profounder and more organic conception of society which the Catholic mind of Burke so well described as a partnership of the living and the dead'? In the same context we are counselled to beware of what 'lurks behind contemporary slogans about "equal opportunity".' The writer of this article speaks of 'vocation' in a way to add fuel to the flames in the heart of any Marxist:

This has meant, for the great majority of men, performing laborious, essential tasks to provide the material basis on which the superstructure of an increasingly civilised existence could be raised. The acceptance of this by the mass of faithful Christians, content to do their duty as it lay before them, and to play their part, generally a lowly part, in the complex of society, is the great secret of the positive achievements of our European civilisation.

A few weeks later (9th October 1948, p. 233) we find this complacent doctrine applied to the situation in the Europe of today:

The population of Italy increases by nearly half a million a year. Children come very easily into the world there, bringing nothing but their skill and energy. Most Italians understand very well that a child's lot in life must chiefly depend on what its parents can do for it, and that this hungry half million have no automatic title to take and share the wealth painfully created by an older generation.

So much for the Italian peasants! Mr Woodruff, needless to say, is too kindhearted a man to advocate a policy of leaving the poor to starve; but if Catholics can write in that way, we need not wonder that their opponents can write in this:

... the old liberal Capitalism remained alive, but had undergone a strange metamorphosis; for who, even a little while ago, could have foreseen that Catholicism would have become the principal standard-bearer of the European capitalist system? It has become so because, in face of the decline of European Capitalism, Catholicism, covering itself with a veneer of social doctrine, alone has the toughness to resist the demands of economic progress, and can therefore serve as a rallying point for all the motley elements opposed both to Communism and Socialism in its Western forms. This 'third force', however, though it is powerful in obstruction, has so far shown itself altogether lacking in constructive quality and, to the extent to which it retains influence, has become unavoidably the pensioner and dependant of American Capitalism, which alone can lend it the power to keep the peoples it rules over from starvation leading to mass-revolt. (G. D. H. Cole: *The Meaning of Marxism* (1948), pp. 285-6.)

This may be dismissed, if you like, as an example of the *irrisiones infidelium*; but I am confident that Mr Woodruff would agree with St Thomas in thinking it of great importance not to give unbelievers grounds for misunderstanding the Church. It was with a view to meeting such an attack as the above that I tried to work out with some care the three distinct elements which, as it seems to me, underlie the contemporary conflict, viz., (i) the *economic* issue between the Capitalist and Communist conception of property; (ii) the Anglo-American *political* dispute with Russia; (iii) the *religious* opposition of Christianity to Marxism. If Mr Woodruff regards discrimination of this kind as the drawing of 'a class-room distinction', then I am afraid that he must accept the charge of being unphilosophical and untheological. He may think little of my wisdom in these matters, but he will recall from the days when he used to read Aristotle that that philosopher held it to be the mark of the wise man to be able to distinguish. It is moreover demonstrable that the Holy See is in the habit of observing just such distinctions as these in its directives to the modern world.

Is Mr Woodruff without any appreciation of the fact that, for example, while I personally warmly approve of the alignment of forces embodied in the Atlantic Pact, I should at the same time be strongly opposed to giving any formal and explicit blessing in the name of the Church to that political instrument? Is there not, too, something rather insular in the assumption that *The Tablet* has a better understanding of current controversies than those 'Catholics on the Continent' for whose opinions its Editor has so little respect? Mr Woodruff is concerned, as are we all according to our lights, with 'saving Europe'; by which phrase he would doubt-

less mean, or at least include, the social structure as it now exists. But the Church is concerned in a far more ultimate sense with saving the world, including, one day, the people of Russia—which is quite a different mission, having man's final destiny in view and therefore demanding the use of means proportioned to that end. Some words from Berdyaev's last work are worth quoting in this context, as being the witness of a man deserving of respectful attention when Christianity and Communism are being discussed. I cite them, not necessarily as making them my own without qualification, but it is surely of some interest to compare them with the views of the Editor of *The Tablet*:

It is not the fear of Communism which should dominate: nor the formation of an anti-Communist front which would inevitably degenerate into a Fascist front. What is necessary is the christianisation and spiritualisation of Communism, at the core of which we must know how to discern the positive elements of social justice. The highest spiritual values must be defended for they are everywhere oppressed and denied. But there is such a thing as a false method of defending spiritual values, which in fact only contributes to the reinforcement of materialism. Only too often spiritual values have been invoked in the defence of an unjust social order, and this has given the impression that they were the peculiar property of the bourgeois classes created to serve this very purpose. This has always been affirmed at the same time by those who would preserve the bourgeois order, as well as by Marxian Communists. Authentic spiritual values, especially those of religion, lie, however, beyond the realm of classes and social orders. In any case it is certainly not the bourgeois and capitalist period of history which has created them. It is staggering to observe the obstinacy with which quite thoughtful Catholics are ready to assert that the nationalisation of trusts is contrary to Catholicism and to defend the bourgeois forms of property with which they are associated. This is the sort of spiritual condition which in France is now ripe for social revolution of a particularly violent kind. The position in England is in this respect infinitely healthier. (*Towards a New Epoch* (1949), p. 46.)

Finally, I think it can be shown that, in crediting me with the view that 'Catholics should be rather ostentatiously aloof and apart from the conflict of our time which the Communist challenge has precipitated', no less than in his insinuation that I wish to identify the Church with 'the dominating fashion and mood of the age' and that I might conceivably qualify for Cardinal Tisserant's censure of Italian Christian Democrats, that 'they want to be neutral in a conflict which is about their own survival', Mr Woodruff is lacking in his accustomed perspicacity. The appeal of my paper was not for neutrality but for facing the fundamental issue; once this has been made clear, I counselled that we should take our stand upon it and resist to the end. As for identifying the Church

with any human polity, I believe that the whole of what little I have written on the relation between religion and politics stands in refutation of that charge. Nor can I end without expressing very genuine regret that Mr Woodruff should find my plea for 'the primacy of truth and the way of good will' not to be 'very practical . . . or calculated to help either our fellow countrymen generally or the Catholic body in particular', because in this I was merely echoing the words of the Holy Father in his Allocution, *Confirma fratres tuos*, to the Cardinals last Christmas Eve, words which I happen to think very practical indeed:

*We remind all those who glory in the name of Catholic Christians of a two-fold sacred duty, indispensable for the improvement of the present condition of human society:*

1. *An unshakable fidelity to the patrimony of truth, which the Redeemer has brought to the world.*
2. *A conscientious fulfilment of the conception of justice and love, which is necessary for the triumph on earth of a social order worthy of the Divine King of Peace.*

To the upholding, however incompetently and obliquely, of these two principles my paper was intended to serve.—Yours, etc.,

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## OBITER

EUROPEAN POLITICAL PROBLEMS feature largely in an excellent number of the *American Catholic Review of Politics* (April: from Duckett, 18s.6d. per annum). Klaus Knorr analyses the 'Problems of a Western European Union', distinguishing the growing idea of a permanent 'Union' of the States outside the Soviet hegemony from the conception of a federation in which power resides in one centre and which in the present state of mutual distrust and unrest would be impossible. The problems of unification, as Mr Knorr shows, are many and varied; but with Britain's decline as a great power, French jealousy of Britain and hatred of Germany, and at the same time the common threat from the East which urges 'union', Germany is placed in a key position.

The Germans will increasingly come to occupy a favourable bargaining position; naturally they will be dissatisfied with anything less than a status of equality in a western partnership. What other peoples would act differently under such conditions? . . . A sober study of German reactions against the Versailles settlement reveals that it is unwise to continue repressive policies until they can no longer be maintained in the face of mounting German pressure and Western doubts. . . .

At the same time a number of smaller nations regarding the hope-