

# BLACKFRIARS

## A MONTHLY REVIEW

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### THE BREAD OF THE WORD

IN the last issue of BLACKFRIARS we had occasion to insist on the efficacy of the Holy Eucharist in the present time of distress. That subject alone would require a long essay if justice were to be done to it. But it should never be allowed to stand alone; an additional essay of equal length and importance would have to follow it, an essay on the bread of the Scriptures to feed the starving peoples of Europe. We have already insisted that the first thing to do with a starving man is to feed him, not to preach to him. People are happily aware of that necessity. But that is not the only thing to do. Subsequently he must be fed spiritually by the bread of the Eucharist, and equally he must be fed with the bread of the Word of God in the Scriptures. These two spiritual foods should never be taken separately; they are closely associated with one another and have been so from the beginning.

In the ages of faith the two breads of the Spirit were granted equal importance and frequently insisted upon. The celebrated chapter of *The Imitation* on the Body of Christ and Holy Scriptures sums up the tradition of centuries:

*In this life I find there are two things especially necessary for me, without which this miserable life would be insupportable to me . . .*

*These also may be called two tables set on the one side and on the other in the store house of Holy Church. One is the table of the holy altar having the holy bread that is the precious body of Christ; the other is that of the divine law containing holy doctrine,*

*teaching the right faith and firmly leading even within the veil where is the holy of holies . . .* (Book iv, chapter 11).

If the sacramental food is taken as the only spiritual sustenance there is a great danger of lapsing not only into a formalism in which the externals become the only reality, but also into a type of superstition in which the Body of Christ is used as a kind of charm or talisman. The Holy Spirit working through the tradition of the Church has in his wisdom designed the administration of the Eucharist in such a way that its reception is preceded by the reading of Holy Scripture. In the Mass the Epistles and Gospels, and sometimes the lessons from the Old Testament, precede the Offertory and Sacrifice and Holy Communion; and that is the only right and just order. In order that the mind and heart of man be able to make the acts of love which are the true effect of the Eucharist, he must have his mind and heart turned to God and instructed by God's word. Otherwise his mind will be unresponsive; ignorance, error and sheer dullness will actively impede the working of the Eucharistic grace.

Unfortunately, owing to heresies surrounding the Word and the Book, Catholics have become unaccustomed to reading the Scriptures. The gibes of Protestants are in this respect often unhappily justified and the average Catholic stands at a great disadvantage in his knowledge of the Scriptures when compared with his opposite number in other Christian Churches. This is not, as some people have thought, the fault of the Papacy with its powers of authoritative interpretation, or the Vatican with its Biblical commission and institute; on the contrary, while the Popes of the last three or four generations have recalled the faithful to the Sacrament with the encouragement of frequent, even daily, Holy Communion, they have equally insisted on the need for the Scriptures as the daily food of Catholics (cf. the article by Father Bullough in this issue). But the response to this latter call has been slower and the danger of a one-sided sacramentalism has begun to appear.

It is possible, and apparently it happens often in practice, that a man receive the Body of Christ frequently and yet remain for years in the same state of deep-rooted tepidity, of uncharity towards neighbours, ill-temper and selfishness of a type which has become associated in men's minds with the pious and the *pratiquant*. It is possible, furthermore, in social life to communicate frequently, to be very energetic in matters of religion, and yet to remain almost entirely on the natural plain, unshaken by the Gift of Wisdom, insensible to the deeper spiritual realities in the persons and events around. How can this anomaly be explained? Often, it seems, the Catholic communicant tends to approach the sacrament on the same natural

level because the mind lacks the supernatural light, of which the *Imitation* speaks as the other needful spiritual sustenance. If this is so, it would account for the way so many naturally good things, undertaken under the ægis of the Church, are quickly corrupted by the spirit of the world.

If a Catholic movement or activity is inspired by purely natural motives, however good the motives may be in themselves, the spirit of the world very quickly seizes on the movement and turns it to its own ends. A spiritual gesture which in the past would have been taken for granted, is now turned into a good 'story' for Catholic journalism. Should a man wish to lead a hermit's life today he must set out in the utmost secrecy or the spirit of the world will catch him in the form of photos and headlines in the press. In the old days it was possible to do public penance; now even the Gospels have their 'story' value and religion is *used* on the screen to stir unwholesome wells of sentimentality. The noble pilgrimage, one of the first true pilgrimages for centuries, which will start to Vézelay as these words appear, is fraught with the same dangers; it is surrounded by the spirit of the world trying to destroy it by turning it into a stunt. Christians of this country must protect it by their own hidden prayers and penances and by refusing to allow its romantic appeal to carry them away. In the spirit of a crusade, thirty strong men are carrying a heavy wooden cross some three hundred miles on foot from Dieppe to Vézelay. It is undertaken in the true spirit of prayer and penance; it must be fed by all well-wishers with the spirit of the Gospels in prayers and sacrifices . . .

But to return to the theme of this editorial, a great deal of the modern concern to re-establish a Christian society, working at least *towards* a Christian social order, has been confined to the natural sphere in which politics and economics predominate. There is no crime in trying to Christianize politics and economics, but when the effort is restricted to this purely natural plane it is being laid open to a frontal attack from the powers of this world. Thus it has been said that Catholics who are murdered by Russian Communists will not gain the martyr's crown because they are not being killed for the faith. The Church having become identified in the minds of her opponents with a social-political system or programme, her members are slain for being capitalists or right-wing reactionaries. Persecution is coming more and more to be levelled at the supposed social and political doctrines of the Church and not against the faith that teaches how God is Three in One, how the Triune God loves the world, how the Son became Man and died. The Church's opponents are mostly indifferent to that side of her life and teaching. And the reason for

that is at least in part because the vital supernatural doctrines of the Church are not frequently on the lips of her members. Her members sometimes perhaps speak rather the language of the pagan sages, like Plato and Aristotle, than of the Word of God in Christ Jesus and promulgated by St Paul. Their message sometimes becomes almost exclusively a matter of apologetics in which human reason is pitted against human reason. And a theology that is guided and dominated by human reason, though it may be accurate, will be dry and arid, leading not to wisdom and virtue but to dispute and fruitless controversy. The doctrine of Catholics does often appear to those outside the Church as arid legalism and dubious argumentation.

Any truth that there may be in these criticisms of the way we present the Church to the world must surely be due to the lack of the nourishment the Scriptures can give to the soul. If we neglect the Scriptures we shall tend to use the sacraments for social, humanistic ends. The act of love which is the ultimate reality of the Eucharist might be sought precisely in order to establish a peaceful settlement on earth, and in that form it would not satisfy a single starving man. In order to prepare the mind, keeping it Godward in its gaze, it must be fed with the Word in Scriptures at the same time as the will is fed with the Word in Sacrament. Indeed, the Scriptures are sacramental in form. And when the mind is lively with the doctrine of the Word it can raise all these natural, humanistic, purely reasonable motives to a higher level, where grace and super-nature predominate, directing all activities. If to the distracted world Catholics hand out a purely natural ethic, saying: Take this and digest it and afterwards we can give you something more palatable, they will be giving out stones instead of bread, and men will continue to die of this terrible famine.

It is not a matter of the printed letter of the Bible alone, each reader making up his own petty ideals and truths from the words. Catholics have the supreme advantage of the Word still living in the Church directing and interpreting the written words of the Bible. Without the voice of the Church authoritatively to direct their eyes to the hidden meaning they would remain like the courtier of Queen Candace; Philip asked him, Canst thou understand what thou art reading?—How could I, said he, without someone to guide me? Catholics have a Philip always at their side to guide them. And still they do not read. Do they expect the Holy See to be pouring out authoritative doctrine all the time, whether they ask for it or not? Where there is a demand there will be a supply. If all began assiduously to read the sacred text, then would the guidance be forthcoming. The courtier of Candace was reading when Philip came

up with him. Philip did not cajole him to take up and read. And those who read the Scriptures are reading a book entirely different from any other book precisely because they have the authoritative support of the Word of God, in his Mystical Body the Church, to open their minds to the inner meanings and mysteries. What they read and understand is for life; it deepens their living faith and so pervades the whole of their being. In this way do they acquire a supernatural outlook which cannot be wrested from them by the spirit of the world; for whereas 'the world' has plenty of plans and -isms to compete with the social teaching of the Church, it has nothing to compete with the gift of wisdom or the life of faith. And the world must be presented with nature and reason transformed by grace, elevated to the new level of the supernatural, where the sacred gestures of prayer and penance are unassailable, because life there is mostly hidden, revealing like the bergs of ice in the Atlantic only a fraction of their total expanse. In order to feed the starving today, therefore, men need this secret, mysterious bread which will generate the life of the Gospels into their hearts. They need the mysterious bread of the Word revealed and the mysterious bread of the Word enfleshed. Both are the essential food of souls. EDITOR.

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#### THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL ASSOCIATION

*President:* His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. THE Association was formed in the Spring of 1940 with the approval of the Hierarchy of England and Wales, and its aims were formulated as follows: (1) To promote knowledge of the Scriptures among Catholics by lectures, publications, and other means. (2) To provide Scripture scholars with the opportunity of meeting one another. A committee was formed and Cardinal Hinsley became president. In 1942, public membership was started and the annual subscription fixed at the modest figure of half-a-crown. For this, members received occasional leaflets, bibliographies of Catholic works in English on Scripture, answers to questions sent in, and the use of a Scripture lending library. One thing soon became evident—there was a definite need for such an association. It was further recognized that much good work might be done among non-Catholics as well. The Bible—however differently it is interpreted by non-Catholics—is at any rate a possession which we have in common with them. Our common regard for the Scriptures may well be the means of bringing many outside the true fold to a knowledge of the Church's teaching. Consequently, membership of the Association was thrown open to non-Catholics. The annual subscription is now 5s., to be paid to the Treasurer, C.B.A., St Edmund's College, Ware.