

BLACK FRIARS

A MONTHLY REVIEW

Edited by the English Dominicans

Published at Blackfriars, St Giles, Oxford

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CHRISTIAN DISTRIBUTISM

IT is possible that cursory readers of recent issues of BLACKFRIARS have gathered a false impression of our present position. Inevitably some, seeing that we urge Catholics not to identify the Gospel of Christ with right wing politics, will accuse us of identifying the 'Good News' with the left. Such an inference would be the opposite of the truth.

For now that we have to face a cataclysm which even Father McNabb, despite his frequent prophecies of disaster, can scarcely have visualised except possibly at the very end of his life, we are driven more and more forcibly to the Gospels alone for the inspiration to restore all things. Sooner or later we have to decide whether modern 'total' warfare can ever be justly waged, whether led by good-hearted post-Christians we can commit ourselves to the possible employment of instruments which will decimate or completely wreck our fellow human beings all of whom are called to be the sons of God. And the judgment must rest upon the present, urgent duty of each one of us as a follower of Christ. Although the impression of sitting constantly on the mouth of a volcano on the point of eruption is sensed for the most part in terms of the material destruction consequent upon atomic warfare, yet people are beginning to realise that the issues are more fundamental, that the possibility of banning certain instruments of slaughter or of preventing war altogether is not sufficiently radical to be of any prac-

tical value. They must now begin to realise that the crisis is that of the resurgence of the power of evil. That power thinks to seize the opportunity of completely overthrowing Christ as his members grow weaker and less convinced. The crisis is not one of Communism versus the rest, not a matter of the right to possess property or of the struggle of classes for power. Rather is it the power of atheistic materialism pitting itself against the incarnate Word of God. Those who have had experience of the countries beyond the iron curtain report that whereas in England we can sit back and discuss these problems in comfort as though they were merely a concern of ideas and policies, in those countries people can sense the presence of evil, the concrete power of evil which we know to be concentrated in the devil. Such power cannot be defeated by distributism or the return to the small holding, but only and uniquely by the supernatural strength of Christ. Christ of course may use these gentle and human policies in the struggle, but he controls the whole sweep of divine truth in his campaign. 'All power is given to me in heaven and in earth.' And a limitation of that power to the natural forces of earth would prove ineffectual in the present struggle.

Further, when we come to descend into the more personal problem of what the individual follower of Christ can do in so titanic a conflict the conclusion becomes clearer and clearer that the final victory lies with the Christian family, wherein all the natural functions and activities are raised to a supernatural level and given the permanent strength of self-sacrifice and self-forgetful love. We individuals may hold up our hands in horror at the modern methods of war and at the devilish activities of the enemies of Christ, terrified by the fate of princes of the Church dehumanised and cast aside like rags, but we know that we cannot do anything very directly to stem that tide of evil. We know too that the evil lies in the heart of everyman, that the universal break up of society is not enclosed behind any iron curtains but is within our gates—the increase of self-seeking and self-indulgence in human relationships. In all this the Christian family held together by the bond of the sacrament and ultimately rooted in the land is the only practical reply, beyond the realm of mere words and resolutions, in the concrete lives of men, women and children. It is interesting to find Hardy failing just here despite his concern for the Wessex peasant. It was the theories of Chesterton and Belloc implemented often by the burning faith of Father Vincent McNabb which have in fact come nearer than any other to a concrete solution to the problem of what an individual should do in face of the advance of the modern monster.

A generation ago this was all summed up in the word 'Distribu-

tism'. But Distributism itself has been shown to be not enough, to be too much of an escape, too impracticable even for enabling the individual to stand up against the flood tide of mass production and industrialism around him. The principles of a redistribution of property and a return to the land are sound and necessary but as soon as they are set up on their own they tend to become another political platform of a small and ineffectual league which cannot hope to rival the great forces in politics which are all moving in another direction. It necessarily becomes isolationist and futile. These principles of natural social health must be kept to the fore in all Christian activity, but they must be allied to the definitely and specifically Christian apostolate. In other words the insistence must be all the time on the Christian family and the imperative need of each Christian unit of society to live up to its high ideals. Instead of suggesting that this is impossible in the present world and indicating legitimate methods of limiting the family, as has often been done in the last two or three decades, we should be insisting all the time on the self-dedication implied in the sacrament of matrimony so that all the children become gifts from God and the important thing in life is not the amount of wages but the building up of the home, home-education, the prolongation of the spirit of the Holy Family. The foundation stones of such homes are Christian poverty, Christian chastity and Christian obedience.

If this programme were followed the individual family would naturally be thrown back on to the principles of distributism. It would lead the individual Christian families to realise that wages are not wealth, that work on the land is more recreative than leisure in a factory, that education is not a matter of exams and jobs, and all the other home truths that distributists have been telling us for so long. But it would be coming from inside the average industrialised Catholic family and not from the lips of the few rather cranky specialists. It would be springing from Faith rather than from nature.

It has always seemed as though the great Catholic movements for the apostolate of the workers have tended to stop half way. They show the Catholic worker how to sanctify his surroundings, how to meet the Communist with Christ at his side. But they should surely go on from there to show him the ideal of his Catholic home life; they should be opening the door for him to take his wife and kids out of the factory and on to the soil. Is it not possible to wed the methods and zeal of the Catholic apostolate with the principles of Chesterton, Belloc and McNabb? Would this not lead to a Christian revolution beyond politics, spreading from the heart of the Christian family, the holy family?

THE EDITOR.