CORRESPONDENCE

CHRISTENDOMS, NEW OR OLD?

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS

SIR,—Criticising zealous lay-apostles in their noble efforts to do what we professional preachers and theologians too often fail to do—convey Catholic truth to 'non-technical folk, including working folk to whom philosophic terms and precisions are a closed book'—is not a task which I relish. It is only because I feel very strongly that such folk might be gravely misled by Mr. Robbins' image of grace as a 'superstructure,' and because I believe that it conveys a thoroughly dangerous and false idea of the interrelation of grace and nature such as must necessarily vitiate any Christian sociology based upon it, that I venture to comment on his defence of that imagery in your December number.

My objection to the image, I hasten to explain, was not that it is a *spatial* image, but that it is a *dangerous* spatial image. I would go so far as to say that it is a false image. The initial trouble about likening grace and nature respectively to a superstructure and a structure is that a superstructure and a structure do not occupy the *same* space; a superstructure as such does not in any way impenetrate and transform the substructure. It is a structure built *on top of* another structure, a mere continuation of it, in no way modifying, perfecting, or affecting it inwardly. It is something secondary, adventitious, an afterthought, maybe a luxury. It is, moreover, something eminently undynamic. Still more serious—a superstructure depends for its own perfection and stability on the perfection and stability of the substructure, instead of vice-versa. I would not suggest that Mr. Robbins would maintain such deplorable errors regarding the relationship of grace to nature, but I do suggest with all deference that these are precisely the errors which that image conveys—errors which are disastrous to a sound Christian sociology.

Scripture and Catholic tradition are rich in images which portray the relationship of grace to nature: images of Light and Warmth, of life-giving Sun and Rain and Dew; images of Fire and Flood, of Spring and Resurrection; images of Transformation and images—in word and deed—of Healing and Cleansing; images of a change of raiment, of a 'new creature'; images, above all and in greatest abundance, of *Life*. Are we indeed so 'industrialised' that these images no longer have any meaning

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for us, so that we must needs talk of 'superstructures' if we are to be understood? Or can it be that these images do not square with our sociological prepossessions—and, if that be so, is it perhaps those prepossessions rather than the images that may need modification?

The comparison of our present lot with that of the Israelites in Egypt seems to me to betray a failure to grasp the far greater complications of our own 'dreadful problems.' Israel was an exclusivist, national and racial religion. We are a *Catholic* Church, responsible for the salvation of all mankind. The Israelites could legitimately, at the behest of a Moses showing signs and wonders, flee from the Egyptians. Our orders are not to spoil the Egyptians but to save them and *love* them—even though, in the process, we must be compelled, if needs be, to mass-produce bricks without straw.

To Father Witcutt I can offer little but a lame *non intelligo*. From some illuminating pages of *True Humanism* I have learned what Molinistic sociology is, and I cannot understand how that could be laid to my charge. But a sociological Molina! 'A certain type of society, basically agricultural, with commerce a very secondary factor,' etc., is an admirable formula, and certainly I have said nothing to gainsay it. But it does not get us very far; and is itself capable of an immense variety of applications, and has, as a matter of historic fact, found a large variety of realisations. The point of my article was that we should not bluff ourselves into thinking that when we have enunciated these very general *principles* we have reached practical and practicable *conclusions*. That is a fact of which the author of *Dying Lands* must be at least as conscious as I am.

Yours, etc.,

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

REVIEWS

LITERATURE AND CRITICISM

THE COLOURED LANDS. By G. K. Chesterton. (Sheed and Ward; 7s. 6d.)

Gilbert Chesterton in one of his essays said that lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling. He describes with obvious relish how from the same horizontal position one might work with paint in a really sweeping and masterly way with several pails and a broom, laying on the

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