

Library Signpost

Welcome To Maritain

By Rev. Benedict Egan

Rochester's first Christian Culture Lecture series at Aquinas Institute comes to a brilliant conclusion this Sunday evening with Jacques Maritain on the platform.

The best wine of this feast of wit and wisdom is being served at the last. Jacques Maritain is peerless among present-day men of philosophy. And I am assured by those who know him well that this personal life is marked by a remarkable holiness and devotion.

Gilson, himself a great philosopher, says of Maritain: "Jacques Maritain is growing greater and greater with the years, and I am not at all sure that even we, who admire him so much, are fully alive to the lasting significance of his work. He is one of the deepest thinkers of all times."

The Protestant philosopher, Reinhold Niebuhr, says: "Men like Maritain belong to that small company of great spirits in any age from whom one may learn, even if one holds completely different presuppositions. There is in all his thought such ripe wisdom about the ways of man, such generosity of judgment in dealing with an opponent's position, such gentleness of spirit and such profound insight on vexing problems that no decent person could read him without profit."

Dr. Mortimer Adler writes: "I discern in Maritain's 'The Degrees of Knowledge' the outlines, at least, of a synthesis of science, philosophy and theology which will do for us what St. Thomas did for philosophy in the Middle Ages."

The Anglican Dean of Exeter wrote in the London Sunday Times: "It is a privilege to be allowed to observe the workings of a first-rate mind, wholly consecrated to a holy mission."

May I join this jury of superlatives without seeming to be pontifical? I am an all-out admirer of Maritain's thought and life. But there is one thing particularly that strikes me about him—something that is uniquely his gift among living authors. It is the sense and instinct of what the Bible calls "the holiness of truth."

One of the divorce casualties of modern life is the divorce between truth and the affections. Most people regard the truth as cold and forbidding. Talk to them, for instance, about the Trinity; no spark of fire sets their hearts aflame with adoration. Speak about the Hypostatic Union of the divine and human and nature in the Person of Jesus Christ; no glad magnificent flowers bloom in their souls. But Jesus, who is Truth and Love Incarnate, says to us: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8, 32)

Now Maritain sees truth as a wholeness, as a harmony, as a mirror of the living and beautiful God. For Maritain, truth shines and glows with beauty. In him, truth begets love. More than any living writer outside (perhaps) of Claudel, he seems to have experienced the full force of Patmore's golden saying:

"There comes a time in the life of every one who follows the Truth with full sincerity when God reveals to the sensitive Soul the fact that He and He alone can satisfy those longings, the satisfaction of which she has hitherto been tempted to seek elsewhere. Then follows a series of experiences which constitute the 'sure mercies of David.' The Enemy, who can assault us only through the flesh, has had his weapon taken out of his hands. The sensitive nature is, from day to day, refreshed with a sweetness that makes the flesh-pots of Egypt insipid; and the Soul cries, 'My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.'"

In the book of her memoirs, We Have Been Friends Together, Raissa Maritain's wife, feelingly describes his impression on her in the days of their early love:

"For the first time I could really talk to someone about myself, emerge from my silent reflections in order to share them, put my torment into words. For the first time I had met someone who at the outset inspired me with absolute confidence; someone who from that moment I knew would never disappoint me; someone with whom I could so readily come to an understanding on all things. Another Someone had pre-established between us, and in despite of such great differences of temperament and of origin, a sovereign harmony."

He was even then overflowing with inner activity, with goodness and generosity. He was entirely without prejudice: his soul was as though brand new, and seemed constantly to discover for itself its own law . . .

I can vouch that this is, word for word, my impression of Maritain as I read his wonderful books. I have never seen the man; this Sunday will be my first chance to do so. But I feel I know him, with that deeper communion and recognition which arises between the souls of people, and which is akin to the knowledge of the angels in heaven. To me, he is a Prophet—a spokesman of God. But he is at the same time a spokesman of Man, for he has a pathetic sense of the gropings and prostrations of human nature as it aspires toward the Light. His writings are a haunting harmony of the splendor of truth and of the tears of our living.

Rochester Catholics who really understand the greatness of the Church and of its best men in this crucial hour, will come to Maritain's lecture this Sunday, if only as a tribute to a great man, whom the Holy Spirit fondly led by the magnet of Truth into the Church. They will not be rewarded with a display of sparkling wit, for Maritain is not that kind of lecturer. But, for a space, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, they will be given a glimpse of "the hid battlements of Eternity," and a pull of homeickness for our true fatherland.

Selected

"In this era of tempestuous storms and human disasters may the fury of the winds cease and the tranquility of the waves be restored, that on the ship of mercy goodness and fidelity may sleep hands and justice and peace embrace."—His Holiness, Pope Pius XII.

EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 20)

What a horror that the very crime of mass murder that stands as one of the worst abuses of the dictator, should be proposed in free America! Thank God, the proposal comes from only a few! Thank God, it comes not from those who have the wisdom or the common-sense, the understanding and the vision, to be considered legitimate advisors in caring for our afflicted ones!

An apt suggestion for the Euthanasia Society of America, Inc., is to erase the "America," and sign up for immediate service with the enemy of America whose ideas in this matter coincide with those of the organization. Perhaps "Murder Incorporated" would be a more revealing title.

FIVE NAZARETH SCHOLARSHIPS

An opportunity that should mean much to the young women who are finishing high school this June, is offered by Nazareth College at this time. Five scholarships are offered free to those who qualify. One scholarship is offered in each of the five Dioceses of the Diocese. The scholarship is for four years, and is valued at \$1000.00.

The awards will be made on the basis of regents ratings as of January, 1942. Applications should be sent to the Office of the Dean by April 15, and must include a letter from the Pastor and from the Principal of the high school.

This is a valuable offer to the young women of the diocese, and should serve to awaken new interest in the recently completed Nazareth College. A highly trained faculty presides over a school in which the material equipment is in keeping with the scholastic standing of the institution.

WHOSE SINS YOU SHALL FORGIVE

The completion of their equipment to serve men as other Christs was given to the Apostles on the evening of Easter Sunday. Late on that day Jesus appeared to them, breathed upon them and said the words: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

They had already received power as priests to celebrate Mass, as Bishops to confirm, to ordain other priests, as shepherds of souls to anoint the sick. They were to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature.

Sin and temptation were not to pass away. Man's life here on earth was to continue to be a trial. He was to retain his free will: to be able to choose God or the devil, virtue or vice, righteousness or sin.

The mission of the Apostles could not be effective unless they could care for the problem of sin; their preaching would strengthen men as it informed them on what was right, what was wrong. Holy Mass and prayer would still further strengthen them. But they needed a sacramental power that would at once take away sin and at the same time give a special grace to avoid it in the future.

That sacramental power was given the Apostles on Easter Sunday. For 1900 years it has been exercised in the Church. It is a judicial power, in which the Apostles and their successors are bound to decide in the case of each candidate for sacramental absolution whether or not he is worthy: whether his sins are to be remitted or retained. A good confession means he is worthy: a bad confession means he is unworthy.

In our Easter rejoicing, there should be room for a special prayer of thanksgiving to the Risen Saviour for the power of absolution given to His Church in the person of the Apostles.

'Quiz' Corner

May a Catholic serve as a pall-bearer at a non-Catholic funeral?

To act in such a capacity is considered a mark of respect and not an active participation in non-Catholic religious ceremonies, and is, therefore, permitted.

Are Catholics allowed to eat frog's legs on Friday?

Yes. Frogs may be classed under amphibians, or at least in a doubtful class of animals, hence the law of abstinence does not include them.

When did the Church begin the custom of the blessing and use of Holy Water?

The use of Holy Water in the earliest days of the Christian era is attested by documents of only comparatively late date. The Apostolic Constitution, which goes back to the year 800, attributes to the Apostle St. Peter the precept of using Holy Water.

Are the Ukrainians Greek Rite Catholics recognized by the Roman See? Can their priests offer Mass in a Roman Catholic Church?

Yes, the Ukrainians Greek Rite Catholics are in communion with the Holy See and come under the jurisdiction of the Holy Father.

In the United States, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Diocese has its See in Philadelphia with the Most Rev. Constantine Bokachewsky, D.D., as the Bishop.

A Greek Rite priest can offer or celebrate Mass in a Roman or Latin Rite Church.

As medical science lengthens men's lives, the war lords keep shortening them, thus making certain the countries won't lose business.

According To The Doctor

MILK, A FOOD, NOT LIQUID

Down in Texas where cattle are "beef" and that's about all, the hands look with scorn upon any one who drinks milk. Yet in Wisconsin, the attitude of the citizen is quite the opposite. Cattle are "dairy" as well as "beef," and milk is food, good food.

It isn't likely that the big chief cigar man of rations and restrictions, Leon Henderson, will clamp a wartime cap on the milk bottle. The supply is adequate, or should be, for the health of civilians and soldiers.

Milk is a good food regardless of the scowls down Texas way. A single quart of whole milk will furnish more than 50% of a person's essential food requirements for a whole day. This is true, regardless of whether the milk is drunk straight, or used in soups, desserts, in cooking, or in dairy products such as cheese and butter.

The Church, by the way, places milk in the category of food, not liquid, a distinction not accorded coffee, tea, hot chocolate (when made with water), or even beer. That may seem trifling to some of you, but there have been seminary professors who inclined to the belief that because of the yeast content, beer might be termed liquid bread—this possibly for the benefit of the boys who don't want to go out the wagon for Lent.

The use of milk, naturally, is beneficial only when it is good milk. Good in its source, in its handling, refrigeration and in its freshness. Regulations in this state relative to the dairy industry, however, tend to insure that milk bought from reliable dealers and dairy concerns is scientifically cared for, so that the food value remains fairly constant.

True Propaganda

By Rev. James M. O'Ma, C.S.P.

My eye has just fallen upon a rather startling sub-heading in the daily article of a newspaper columnist. The title of the piece is "Psychological Warfare," sufficiently interesting in itself, but it was a paragraph heading, "St. Paul as Propagandist," that riveted my attention. Nowadays to call a man a propagandist is almost the same as to call him a liar. Every one remembers the ancient joke about the ascending scale of mendacity: Mars, a—Jarn, statisticians. That wicked trio has been lately augmented into a quartet, in which the fourth member—the propagandist—pushes the others into the background.

But of course it was not always so. "Propaganda" used to be a good word. For many hundred years it was used almost exclusively of religion. A good many priests still living and working in the United States received their theological education in a college at Rome over whose portal the phrase "De Propaganda Fide" is cut in the stone. Needless to say, the "propaganda" they learned in that college was not lies, or half-truths or that curious mixture of truth and untruth which is more dangerous than the lie direct. What they were trained to propagate was the faith.

So after all it shouldn't have startled me to see St. Paul put down as a propagandist. The first College of the Propaganda was composed of the twelve Apostles, and St. Paul, having a direct divine vocation, became a more powerful and successful propagandist than any of those twelve.

In that article—a very good little piece by the way, signed by George E. Sokolsky—the higher view is taken of propaganda. The writer says, "Propaganda must be based on fundamental truth or it perishes before the public can absorb it"; and he adds, "haphazard plays upon words, wise-cracks, smart sleazy stunts do not serve in this field."

He could have gone much further. The full truth is that unless a propaganda agency hands out the bad news with the good, the recipient—I had almost said the victim—of the propaganda gets wise and becomes perhaps wadily suspicious. When he gets into that mental state, some important statement, though it be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, will "leave him cold" with skepticism, or make him hot with anger. Even if truth had no rights of its own, even if the violation of the truth were not a kind of blasphemy against God Who is Truth, it would still be better always to tell the truth and never the untruth for pragmatic reasons.

That's the kind of propagandist St. Paul was. He blurted out the truth, even when it hurt his own people and put a rod in the hands of the enemy. When, for example the Corinthians, recently converted to the Gospel went backsliding into terrible sins—even those, says St. Paul, that the heathen would not commit—he said so; in fact he wrote it down and what he wrote down has been read from that day to this in all the churches of the world. I dare say he had critics amongst the timid, the cautious, those who put "prudence" ahead of all other virtues. They probably tried to persuade him to "leave that out," whenever he wrote and despatched one of his honest admissions of the evil that infested the early Church. But he must have said, "Let it stand; it's true," for there it is until this day.

Not only in the New Testament but in the Old, there is the most terrific truth-telling. There is no other ancient literature—especially no other ancient Oriental literature—in which the sins and crimes of kings and priests and people are recorded. In the Orient they flatter kings. Look at the fulsome titles given the Pharaohs of Egypt and the kings of Persia. When we read their epitaphs today either a sickish feeling comes over us or, if we are in another mood, we laugh at the encomiums heaped upon them by their sycophants and even by themselves. You don't find in the Bible such eulogies of Solomon and David. The writers of the Book of Kings spoke out about their own leaders just as boldly as Jesus was later to speak out about the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

In fact, truth, the unvarnished truth is written all over the Bible. That's one reason why we believe it. Quite apart from its divine inspiration and even without the Church's dogma that the Scripture contains no errors, we can see as we read that it bears upon its face the mark of its own veracity.

So the writer was quite correct when he called St. Peter a master of propaganda in the good sense. He would have said that the whole Bible is a superb example of propaganda as it should be.

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Five Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

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At the direction of the Administrative Board, National Catholic Welfare Conference, the Very Rev. Michael J. Reedy, General N. C. W. C. Secretary, appeared before the House of Representatives Committee on Education in opposition to the Harrison-Black-Fletcher Bill as written.

The Rev. Adolph L. Gabbani, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church, Auburn, was preparing to mark his 40th Sacerdotal Anniversary on April 11, 1937. Coming to this diocese from Buffalo, Father Gabbani established the parishes of St. Anthony's, Elmira, and St. Francis of Assisi, Rochester, before going to Auburn.

Catholic pastors of Frankfort and Seneca, New York Territory, were arrested by Nazi secret police in connection with demonstrations by the faithful against the removal of crucifixes in public schools and their replacement by Hitler pictures, according to authoritative reports received in Amsterdam.