

Book Notes

The Spirit of Christ, by Fr. James, F.M.Cap. (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Bookshop, 1946, \$2.50) is an attempt to give the reader a glimpse of the spirit that is of God, as it is manifested in some of the most memorable incidents of our Saviour's life, to show the workings of that spirit in Him and how by His example we are taught complete surrender to God. A concrete example of the life of Jesus demonstrates to the soul how it should ascend to God. The attractiveness of the Divine Person of Jesus is most apt to draw to God the soul which contemplates it at length, and this book helps the soul to do. This book is part of a longer work, another part of which has already been published as *Person of Jesus* by the same author. It is essentially a commentary on I Cor., 2:12, where St. Paul speaks of our reception of the spirit that is of God, not the spirit of the world. The author interestingly shows how this "spirit" which animates a man determines his "philosophy of life," and this at a time when the latter phrase is on men's minds so frequently that we need a reaffirmation of the true "philosophy of life,"—that which is based on the spirit which animated and guided Jesus, the true Exemplar of men.

lacking thought for those whose minds flag in meditation, Rev. Herbert Nash, S.J., has prepared a reader volume of "spare" meditations, *Send Forth Thy Light*, Westminster, Md.: The Newman Bookshop, 1946, \$2.00) to supplement ordinary subjects treated in the standard books of mental prayer. It is the thought of the author that the soul has, for one reason or another, been unable to find and keep the freedom which it should have in prayer, it may be able to gain it through the use of these meditations. However, in the ways of the contemplative prayer, the setting, the neglect of which so often results

in the loss of freedom in prayer. The points of meditation are usually three, followed by a brief summary in some three words or more, and a *littera* to be recalled from time to time during the day, renewing the fruits of the morning's meditation. The foreword of the book contains some useful observations on meditation and mental prayer in general, truths which need to be repeated from time to time even though they have been learned when one was a tyro in this matter of meditating. Since the meditations are "spares" they are not arranged in any particular order and may be taken up whenever the soul feels the need of such assistance in attaining its freedom. This book, small enough to be carried on vacation, when mental prayer usually seems more difficult, will afford a welcome "lift" for those who find themselves in need of aid.

No more inspiring example of lay apostolate and Catholic action could be offered to our present generation than the one beautifully portrayed in Katherine Burton's latest work *Difficult Star* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947. Pp. x+239. \$2.75). This is the life story of Pauline Jaricot, the foundress of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Born of a very prosperous family of silk merchants in Lyons in the year 1799, she died there in obscurity in 1862, after spending most of her life in the service of the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. Her most inspired work, however, was the organization of a group of men and women with the object of collecting money to aid the foreign missions. The author must be congratulated for a work which has all the absorbing interest of a novel, the reliable solidity of history, and the inspiration of hagiography. The cause of Pauline Jaricot has been introduced in Rome. The book is very appropriately foreworded by the National Director for the United States of The Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

DOES CATHOLIC DOCTRINE CHANGE?

It was one of the basic contentions of the Modernists, who were condemned forty years ago by Pope Pius X, that the teaching of the Church has changed substantially in the course of the centuries, and should continue to change in future. Accordingly, among the propositions reprobated by the Sovereign Pontiff in the decree *Lamentabili* we find such statements as these: "The principal articles of the Apostles' Creed did not have the same meaning for the Christians of the early ages as they have for the Christians of our time. . . . The progress of the sciences demands that concepts of Christian doctrine be reformed regarding God, creation, revelation, the person of the Word Incarnate, redemption."¹

This same view of the changeableness of Christian doctrine prevails among many Protestants of our time—and quite logically, too, since to them the Church is a merely human organization, subject to error even in its most fundamental tenets, and consequently quite likely to discover in the course of time that what was formerly taught as the word of God is actually error.

Of course, no Catholic could accept in its unqualified form the statement that the teaching of the Catholic Church is subject to change; for such a statement, as it stands, is irreconcilable with the fundamental Catholic dogma that one of the prerogatives with which Christ endowed His Church is infallibility. At the same time, to exclude all manner of change from the Church's teachings in different periods and under different circumstances would be contrary both to history and to theology.

The purpose of this paper is to lay down the general principles on this subject and to point the way to the solution of the majority of the problems which center about the unchangeableness or changeableness of the Church's teaching. Certain particular problems of a theological or historical nature that offer special difficulty are not within the scope of this article. The priest engaged in the active ministry should be equipped with sufficient knowledge of the subject to meet at least the chief difficulties that may be proposed to him. Sometimes a difficulty of this

¹ DB, 2062, 2064.

nature comes in the form of a question from a devout Catholic—for example: "Hasn't the Church changed its teaching regarding the age for First Communion? Formerly a child had to be at least ten years old before receiving the Holy Eucharist; now he can communicate at the age of seven. How can that be reconciled with the Church's claim to infallibility?" Sometimes the problem is presented in the form of a suggestion that the Church adapt her teaching to modern ideas. Such is the theme of Dr. Harry McNeill in a recent issue of the *Commonweal*, in which he asserts: "Our ethical training is too often ill-adapted to the developing child. . . . This is manifest in classic inadequacies in our teaching of religion. . . . This is also manifest in the domain of sex education where our negativism is notorious."² Sometimes, too, the problem arises in connection with a statement of the secular press, which is calculated to puzzle Catholics or to lead them astray, so that priests must be prepared to explain to them the true doctrine. Thus, some months ago the news magazine *Time*, commenting on Pope Leo XIII's doctrinal pronouncements regarding the relation between Church and State, asserted: "Though Leo's views are still repeated by a few academic theologians, they are largely ignored by the U.S. hierarchy."³

When we discuss the possibility of a change in the teachings of the Church, we are referring primarily to the *Ecclesia docens*, the official teachers of divine truth, namely, either the bishops in union with the Pope, or the Pope alone in his capacity as the teacher of all the faithful. Participating to a limited degree in the authority of the *Ecclesia docens* are the Roman Congregations (such as the Holy Office) and the Commissions (such as the Biblical Commission) inasmuch as they are delegated by the Pope to make doctrinal pronouncements on certain topics. The constant and common teaching of theologians can also be reduced to a pronouncement of the *Ecclesia docens*, for the magisterium tacitly approves an opinion which is universally taught for a considerable length of time.⁴ On the other hand, the views of individual theologians or of individual bishops do not constitute the teaching of the Church, and hence can be erroneous and subject to modification. Secondarily, the *Ecclesia discens*, the

body of the faithful, is also to be reckoned with when the possibility of a change of doctrine is discussed. For the belief of the *Ecclesia discens*, which receives its doctrine from the *Ecclesia docens* and is preserved in unity of faith by the grace which flows from the Head of the Church, will correspond to the changeableness or unchangeableness that is found in the official teaching of the magisterium.⁵ Here, too, it is quite possible for erroneous notions to be found in a portion of the believing Church for a time, with the possibility of subsequent rectification. Thus, in the early centuries there were some of the faithful, particularly in the East, who believed marriage can be dissolved by adultery. Hence, the problem of change of belief is pertinent only to the universal Church.

Let us begin with certain factors or occurrences which might be designated as changes in the Church's doctrines, yet are not incompatible with the correct Catholic notion of doctrinal unchangeableness. First, there can be the application of traditional Catholic principles to new discoveries, with a consequent modification of some practice hitherto in vogue. For example, it was scientifically proved a few years ago that real death often does not take place until a considerable length of time has passed after apparent death. The Church gratefully accepted this scientific discovery, and now it is the common practice for priests to administer the sacraments some time after all signs of life have ceased, if there was no opportunity of giving them while the person was evidently alive. There is no change here in the Church's teaching. She still proclaims that only the living can receive the sacraments. But the Church has now learned a natural truth, not contained in the deposit of faith, and she is glad to utilize that knowledge for the benefit of souls, though it entails a certain measure of change in her practice.

Again, until quite recently it was taught by all moral theologians that it is unlawful to remove the fallopian tube of a woman in which an ectopic pregnancy is in progress, until the tube has been ruptured. Nowadays it is held by many reliable theologians that the excision of the tube is permitted as soon as it is discovered to contain an ectopic fetus.⁶ No condemnation of the Church has been delivered against this second view. But, again,

² *Commonweal*, XLVI, 15 (July 25, 1947), p. 352.

⁴ Cf. *DTC*, IV, 2195.

³ *Time*, XLVII, 8 (Feb. 25, 1946), p. 44.

⁵ Cf. Mazzella, *De religione et ecclesia* (Rome, 1885), n. 784.

⁶ Cf. Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology* (New York, 1938), II, 174.

we have a case, not of any change in the *Church's* teaching, but of a new application of her teaching, brought about by the findings of *science*. For the traditional teaching of the Church still holds—namely, that a *present* danger to the life of the woman must be established to justify an operation which will produce, as an indirect effect, the death of a fetus. But nowadays, medical science has discovered a fact unknown to the doctors of a previous generation—that from the beginning of the tubal pregnancy there is a dangerous pathological condition *actually present*.

Secondly, it should be noted that some of the official pronouncements of the Church are couched in language which indicates that the *present expediency* rather than the *absolute truth* of a certain doctrine is the object of the declaration. This is particularly true of decisions of the Holy Office and of the Biblical Commission, which frequently declare of a certain opinion no more than "it cannot safely be held." This simply means that up to the present no sufficient arguments have been adduced for the opinion in question; it does not exclude the possibility of such arguments being produced in future. An example of this type of definition was rendered by the Holy Office in 1897, declaring that it was not safe to deny or to doubt the authenticity of the Joannine text on the "Three heavenly witnesses."⁷ Twenty years later the same Holy Office declared that it was not the purpose of this decision to forbid scientific investigation on this question, with due submission to the judgment of the Church.⁸ As is very evident, when an opinion which at one time the Church declared could not safely be taught is later established by new arguments, it can be accepted by Catholics without any implication that the doctrine of the Church has changed. There is no inconsistency in holding that a view which at one time could not be reasonably maintained because the arguments were insufficient can later be demonstrated by virtue of new proofs.

Thirdly, changes in the Church's legislation by no means indicate changes in her doctrine. It is quite easy to perceive this in such disciplinary measures as the laws of fast and abstinence, the regulations regarding the eucharistic fast, marital impediments of ecclesiastical origin, etc. But in other matters changes sometimes occur which at first sight might be taken for doctrinal

⁷ *I John*, 5:7.

⁸ *DB*, 2198.

modifications, yet actually are legislative enactments. A good example is the enactment of Pope Pius X regarding the age for First Communion. When he issued his memorable decree on this subject through the Congregation of the Sacraments on August 8, 1910, the Pope declared the "age of discretion" (at which the obligation of receiving both Penance and the Blessed Eucharist begins) to be about the seventh year.⁹ Now, for centuries theologians had been commonly interpreting the phrase "years of discretion," used by the Fourth Lateran Council as about the tenth year, at the earliest, in reference to the time when the precept of Easter communion commences, so that the obligation of receiving the Holy Eucharist would begin to bind considerably later than the precept of Confession,¹⁰ and this interpretation was apparently accepted by the Church. One might be inclined to say that the decree of Pope Pius X rectified a false notion that had prevailed for hundreds of years. Actually, however, the explanation of this modification is this: the Church has been delegated by Christ to determine how frequently the faithful are to fulfill His command to eat His flesh and drink His blood,¹¹ and what qualifications are required for a worthy reception over and above the state of grace. Among some Catholics of the Oriental rites Holy Communion may be given to infants, with the full authorization of the Church; but by virtue of the same ecclesiastical power there is required in the Western Church some intellectual appreciation of the Real Presence on the part of those who communicate. For hundreds of years the intellectual appreciation demanded by the Church through her acquiescence to the common theological view was such as would ordinarily be possessed only by a child of about ten years. Pope Pius X legislated that henceforth that measure of understanding would suffice which is usually found in a child of about seven years. His decree must not be taken as a correction of an error that had long prevailed throughout the entire Western Church as to the sense of the phrase "years of discretion." On the contrary, it was an exercise of his supreme legislative power, ruling that in future less intellectual maturity would be a condition for a worthy

⁹ *DB*, 2137.

¹⁰ Cf. St. Alphonsus, *Theologia moralis* (ed. Gaudé, Rome, 1905), Lib. VI, n. 301.

¹¹ *John*, 6:54.

communion than had previously been required, and imposing the obligation of annual communion on those who have attained to this degree of knowledge.¹²

Fourthly, the doctrinal growth which has taken place in the Church since its establishment is certainly not to be reckoned a change in the accepted sense. This growth consists in a more profound, a more scientific, a more explicit grasp of the deposit of divine truth committed by the Son of God to His Church. In this way the Church, both *docens* and *discens*, arrived at the more complete cognition of such doctrines as the two wills of Christ, the Immaculate Conception, the presence of the whole Christ in every part of each species, etc. And beyond doubt this growth in appreciation and understanding of divine revelation will continue until the end of time. But this manner of subjective progress is very different from the modernistic concept of the evolution of doctrine, according to which contradictory tenets have been propounded by the Church at different periods of history.¹³ This type of change the Catholic Church rejects; but the possibility of the growth of the faithful in the understanding of the faith the Church fully accepts.

In what, then, does the unchangeableness of Catholic doctrine consist? In the first place it means that nothing has been added or ever can be added to the deposit of public divine revelation since the death of the last apostle.¹⁴ Such has ever been the teaching of the Church, based on the conviction that the truths proclaimed by Christ (including what was revealed to the apostles

¹² It is true that the decree of the Congregation of the Sacraments declared that those theologians who distinguished between the age of discretion required for Penance and that required for the Holy Eucharist (and consequently taught that First Communion must be deferred until the age of ten or over) were in error (*AAS*, II [1910], 579). It would seem, however, that this statement is to be taken with certain qualifications. The meaning would seem to be that it would have been more conducive to the spiritual profit of the young if theologians had not made the distinction in question and thus induced the Church to base her legislation on a less commendable view. It must be remembered that the legislation of the Church at any one period is not necessarily the most prudent and the most advantageous to souls; and her legislation is often guided by the more common theological opinion. Even saintly bishops, like St. Alphonsus and St. Charles Borromeo, taught that First Communion should be deferred until the tenth or twelfth year.

¹³ Cf. *DB*, 2059 f.

¹⁴ Cf. *DB*, 2021.

by the Holy Spirit) were intended as the completion of the Message of God to the human race. Moreover, all definite pronouncements and explanations of revealed truths rendered by the Pope with the fulness of his power for all the faithful or proclaimed officially by the body of bishops in union with the Pope (either in council or in their respective dioceses) are infallible, and consequently unchangeable.¹⁵

It would be a grave mistake, however, to believe that the infallibility of the Church is limited to the proclamation of revealed truth. There are many doctrines, not contained in the deposit of faith, but so intimately connected with it that the authority to teach revealed truth infallibly would be rendered in great measure ineffective unless the infallible magisterium extended to them also. On this account it is held as certain by theologians that such doctrines constitute a genuine object of infallibility, though indirect or secondary.¹⁶ And when there has been a definitive and official pronouncement on such a doctrine by the infallible magisterium, this doctrine too is unchangeable for all time.

To this indirect object of infallibility pertain dogmatic facts—particular happenings or incidents, closely related to revealed truth. Such, for example, is the fact that Anglican Orders are invalid, defined by Pope Leo XIII. It is pathetic that there are many members of the Anglican communion who are willing to admit all the teachings of the Catholic Church save this declaration, and are fervently hoping that one day the Church will reverse Leo's decision. It would seem that this view was encouraged even by some Catholics at the "Conversations of Malines" conducted by the late Cardinal Mercier. But the Catholic answer to those who manifest such a hope must be the absolute denial of any possibility of a change of the doctrine enunciated by Leo XIII. His decision was evidently definitive, pronounced with the fulness of his teaching authority, for he asserted that he was "*most fully confirming*" and so to say renewing the decrees of his predecessors" and that "with certain knowledge" he was pronouncing and declaring Anglican Orders null and void.¹⁷

¹⁵ In the words of the Council of Trent, the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the Pope are "ex sese, non ex consensu Ecclesiae, irreformabiles" (*DB*, 1839).

¹⁶ Cf. *DTC*, IV, 2184.

¹⁷ *DB*, 1966.

Confirmatory proof is given in a letter of the Pope to Cardinal Richard, in which he said it had been his intention *rem absolute judicare* and *penitus dirimere*.¹⁸

Under the indirect object of the Church's infallibility comes also what is known as general discipline. This means that in the dogmatic or moral teaching of the Church, which is included in a practical manner in what is commanded, approved or authorized for the spiritual welfare of all the faithful, by virtue of the protection of the Holy Spirit there can be found nothing that is false or detrimental to souls.¹⁹ This does not mean that there cannot be improvements in the Church's methods of exercising her ministry in the course of time. She can use, and does use, the natural helps afforded by scientific research in psychology, pedagogy, sociology, history, etc., to render more effective her efforts to teach and to sanctify and to govern those whom she yearns to bring to sanctification and salvation. The Church does not even disdain to utilize any fragment of truth or goodness that she may find in a false or pernicious philosophic system. Dr. McNeill, quoted above as criticizing Catholic ethical training, believes that Catholics can derive much benefit from Freudianism. If by this he means that certain techniques of this system, free from its tainted philosophy, could be employed advantageously by the Church, his view might be acceptable.

But, on the other hand, to hold that for centuries the universal Church has employed methods of dealing with souls that are positively harmful cannot be held by anyone who believes that the Church is endowed with infallibility and is protected and aided in her mission by the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Ghost. On this account there is a dangerous ambiguity in the statement of Dr. McNeill: "Our ethical training is too often ill-adapted to the developing child. . . . This is manifest in classic inadequacies in our teaching of religion. . . . In the domain of sex education our negativism is notorious." This might be understood in the sense that the *Ecclesia docens* as a whole has failed egregiously in its task of teaching the faithful.

Apart from arguments based on Catholic faith, a simple summary of the facts pertinent to this last assertion, if it be

¹⁸ Cf. Sydney Smith, "Anglican Orders," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, I, 498.

¹⁹ Cf. *DTC*, IV, 2197.

understood of the Church as a whole, suffices to show how unfounded is the accusation. For twenty centuries the Catholic Church has been instructing her members about sex. Some of this instruction is proposed negatively, as God Himself propounded His Commandments on this subject: "Thou shalt not commit adultery. . . . Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." But the Church's teachings on this subject are not exclusively negative. She points out the dignity and merit of chastity, whether it consists in the exact observance of God's law in the conjugal state or in the acceptance of Christ's counsel in the state of virginity. Those who have followed her instruction and used the supernatural helps she provides have been able to restrain their inordinate sexual impulses and to experience the happiness promised by Our Saviour to the clean of heart. Can those who preach and practice Freudian psychology point to a similar success? And can any Catholic regard it as possible that the Catholic Church will radically change her method of teaching sex as a result of Freudianism and incorporate into her methods of guiding immortal souls the system of an atheistic philosophy which regards human beings as mere animals?

Besides the infallible teaching of the Church on matters contained in revelation or connected with it, there also are pronouncements of her official teachers which are authoritative, though not infallible. Such are decisions of the Roman Congregations or Commissions, and also doctrines taught by the Pope officially, but without the intention of using the fulness of his authority, and of giving a definitive decision. The statements of the Sovereign Pontiff in Encyclicals are usually in this category. The faithful are obliged in conscience to accept such decisions internally, for even though their correctness is not guaranteed by the charism of infallibility, those who formulate and promulgate them are undoubtedly aided by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, every natural precaution is taken before such declarations are published, particularly the meticulous supervision of men who are specialists in the matter involved.²⁰ The acceptance of these decisions is not an act of divine faith, but is rather an act of obedience, known as religious assent. It could happen that one who is very well versed in the subject of such a decision would be

²⁰ Cf. *DB*, 2008, 2113.

convinced that it is erroneous, and in that event he would be justified in withholding his assent although he should communicate his ideas promptly to ecclesiastical authorities and not attack these authorities openly. But such an event could occur only most rarely. The general rule is that all Catholics, learned and unlearned, clergy and laity, must acquiesce wholeheartedly to these authoritative (though not infallible) decisions of the Church, confiding in the prudence and wisdom of those who proclaimed them and in the protection of the Holy Ghost over the official teachers of the Church.²¹

Obviously, it is possible for the Church to change her doctrine on a matter proposed in one of these non-infallible pronouncements, but such a thing can happen so rarely that (apart from the exceptional case mentioned in the previous paragraph) it would be most rash to impugn a statement of this nature. Yet, at times we hear Catholics criticizing such teachings, apparently with the erroneous idea that they are bound to accept only the infallible pronouncements of the Church. A particular example will be appropriate.

In his Encyclical on Christian Education, Pope Pius XI asserted that the system of coeducation is "fallacious and hostile to Christian training."²² Now, to claim that the Sovereign Pontiff based this statement on false pedagogical notions, or that he intended his denunciations for the Latin countries, not for Anglo-Saxon lands, and that at some future time the Church will reject his teaching by approving coeducation as the better system betokens a deplorable misunderstanding of the teaching authorities of the Church. There are, indeed, occasions when coeducation in Catholic schools or colleges can be tolerated because it is the most practical method of securing a Catholic education for the greatest number of boys and girls. A pastor who can obtain only a limited number of religious teachers can justly reason that it is better to have coeducation than to have half of his children attending a non-Catholic school. But to propose coeducation as *per se* ideal in the face of the Pope's teaching is undoubtedly forbidden to all Catholics.

And so, with the qualifications explained above, we can say

²¹ Cf. Van Noort, *De fontibus revelationis* (Bussum, Holland, 1920), n. 251 f.

²² DB, 2215.

that the doctrine of the Catholic Church does not and cannot change. To the enemies of the Church this is an indication of her blind stubbornness and of her unwillingness to adapt herself to the march of progress. But to Catholics this unyielding attitude of their Church is only the logical consequence of her belief in the constant assistance given to her teaching office by the Spirit of God who dwells within her, guiding her in the way of truth. There is no substantial change in the Church's doctrine, because truth needs no change. The Church does indeed take into consideration the particular circumstances of the times when she enunciates her moral doctrines, but she does so without any modifications of the principles she has always maintained. Intelligent Catholics know that there is no need to apologize for the intransigence of their Church. Time and time again in the past she has been told that her doctrines are outmoded, that she must conform to the progress of science, yet she has continued to proclaim her traditional doctrine and has seen the so-called modern doctrine itself rejected as erroneous. To those who are privileged to propound the teachings of the Church officially this should be an inspiration to explain Catholic doctrine clearly and unequivocally, without any anxiety as to what the world may think or say, for they speak in the name of the Church and the Church speaks in the name of the living God.

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FALSE CHRISTIANS

How wretchedly blind indeed, to profess themselves Christians—that is followers of Christ—and yet to believe and follow the maxims of the world, rather than the maxims of the gospel of Jesus Christ: to obey the laws of the world, of the flesh, and of the devil, their mortal enemies, rather than the ordinances of their Saviour; to prefer lies, deceit, and empty vanity before truth; darkness before light; slavery before liberty; misery before happiness; hell before heaven; and Satan before God! My soul, see thou never make so wretched a choice.

—From the *Meditations for Every Day in the Year*, by Bishop Challoner, (the meditation for Nov. 9).