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The Words Ring True: Before His Face

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This volume could hardly have made a more timely appearance on the scene, coming as it did just when it was needed to help us explore the rich treasures contained in *Mater et Magistra*. Those who start their study of the encyclical after reading this work will see how the doctrine has developed over the years, why it has to develop, since, as Pius XII said, "Not only is social doctrine a constant guide for practice, it is itself also guided by practice".

The reader cannot but be impressed at the vision expressed in the social teaching of the popes, and the emphasis on the positive and on progress and on the freedom of the individual. Those who have latent prejudices against such teaching will probably have their suspicions and fears allayed if they will apply themselves objectively and honestly to this book to see for themselves just what the Church does teach and just what she claims for her own field of competence. Those who have no such prejudices will find their faith fortified by reason and be able to give to others a justification for their proud attachment to the social doctrine of the Church of Christ.

G. W. HEALY

THE WORDS RING TRUE

BEFORE HIS FACE: Meditations for Priests and Religious. By Gaston Courtois. New York: Herder and Herder, 1961. 349 pp.

Superlatives are generally suspect. But the temptation to indulge in them is very strong when one is reviewing a book like that of Father Courtois. **BEFORE HIS FACE**, translated from the original French edition **FACE AU SEIGNEUR** by Sister Helen Madeleine, may be recommended unreservedly to all priests. It should prove particularly useful to those who, under pressure of parish work and almost through no fault of their own, have lost their taste for meditation, or whose spiritual ideals may have grown dim with the passage of time and their fervor faint. Upon such souls Father Courtois' words will fall with all the light and warmth and penetration of grace itself.

The book contains twenty-five chapters each of which consists of: 1) a *meditation* presented not precisely in points, but rather in the form of a conference; 2) a *discourse* in which our Lord speaks directly to the prayer and the latter responds; 3) an *examination of conscience* often surprisingly detailed; 4) *resolutions*

in keeping with the meditation and examination; 5) *spiritual reading* which invariably consists of excerpts from other authors on the subject matter of the chapter; 6) *subjects for discussion*, a relevant point or two intended to provoke further reflection; 7) a short *prayer* not infrequently directed to Our Lady for the grace of the meditation, and finally 8) a *thought* or concise and pointed statement, again frequently borrowed from some other author or saint, which crystallizes and pungently reiterates some aspect of the matter which formed the subject of the chapter.

Nowhere perhaps does the book's truly classical greatness appear more clearly than in the *Discourses*. Attempts to paint our Lord's picture or to portray him on stage or screen are almost always disappointing. So too are well-meaning efforts to place upon his lips words other than those recorded in the Gospels. Yet surprisingly enough one does not feel that sense of inadequacy in the discourses Father Courtois puts upon the lips of Christ. The words ring true, possibly because the author heard them in the depths of his own soul's prayer before putting them down in writing. For example, in the chapter on Hope we read:

My son, my priest, come close to me. I need to speak to you this evening... You rely too much on yourself, on your own efforts, on your merits, on the talents that I have given you, on your fluency, on your successes. You have not placed enough confidence in me, in my passionate love for you.

Listen to me. Hope is a secret force which you can find hidden in your soul, a force whose power can take possession of you, lift you on high and make of you a man of greater influence, of great courage, of great possibilities, above all of great practical results, not necessarily in the visible order of things, but on the invisible plane of the Communion of Saints. I have placed you where you are so that... you may renew the face of the earth.

Without hope, your soul is narrow, your horizon limited, your influence brief, your life languishing, your action inoperative, and the work of the redemption stands still. My son, ask me for an increase of hope.

My son, it is in truth a great grace from me that you feel your weakness, but it should make you turn to me and lean on me. Many souls waver in their trust because they do not trust my goodness, but rely entirely on themselves. They lose hope as soon as they feel tepid. They deceive themselves in basing their hope on their own worth and not on my goodness. And so their hope wavers with their dispositions.

True hope does not consider only the merit which virtue or faults can earn or deprive the soul of. It takes into account only the unfailing love of God for man, for every man, always. Come to me, my son. Trust in me and not in yourself.

If I sometimes allow your prayer to be difficult it is that you will not make idols of my gifts. Tenderness of heart in prayer, the movements of my grace, the divine relish which accompanies it, all this is good, sometimes useful, but it is not I. ...Seek not my gifts nor put your hope in them, but in me with my will...

The time of flowers is past. Now is the season for fruits. Have confidence still.

In conclusion, we recommend *BEFORE HIS FACE* once again to all priests and religious unreservedly. We are almost tempted to offer a guarantee that every priest who makes use of Father Courtois' book with even a minimum of effort and conscientiousness will find not only the season of fruits but a bit of the flower-time too; he will begin—if for a while he had ceased to do so—he will begin again to seek and desire and to find Christ in himself, in every one and in every thing.

J. J. KAVANAGH

CHAT WITH A PHILOSOPHER

LE PHILOSOPHE ET LA THÉOLOGIE. By Étienne Gilson Paris. Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1960. 259 pp.

M. Gilson's view on Christian philosophy can be oversimplified thus: a Christian philosophy is a philosophy in which theology has become immanent; but, paradoxically, this union with theology enables philosophy to become more distinctly itself. Since M. Gilson has exposed this view in his other works, the subject of the present book is not new. But the manner—one can almost hear M. Gilson's urbane and witty conversation—is a surprise.

He talks about the personal background behind his stand on Christian philosophy. He first became interested in the question when his studies in modern philosophy convinced him that the moderns did not receive their philosophical notions directly from the Greeks, but through the mediation of the medieval thinkers. Philosophy, therefore, must have existed during the middle ages; but where could philosophy have