

Reviews

tional organisations going *pari passu* with a renewed emphasis on tribalism. But Bergonzi is surely right when he indicates that, ultimately, Chesterton is not truly politically or socially prescriptive, even in his medievalism: his love of the small is really a love of home ("Heaven is everywhere at home," p. 3; "the short heaven of first love," Bk. II, ch. 3, p. 65), and constitutes a protest against whatever is going on in society ("this Paradise of Fools," Bk. II, ch. 1, p. 38), because it generally militates against the loving heart. One sometimes wonders if he ever really converted: did he escape the pessimism of his youth, when he looked at the material world and saw "the doom of failure that lies on all human systems" (Bk. V, ch. 3, p. 159)? Perhaps the really superb biography of Chesterton which is still waiting to be written will dare to address that question. "What is a State without dreams?" (Bk. II, ch. 1, p. 43); what, indeed, is a man without dreams? In this novel one can fairly see a sceptical, Quin-like Chesterton considering his outward show of heraldry, his public face, yet groping through the London fog towards the Notting Hill of Catholicism.

Kevin Morris
Hale, Cheshire, England

* * *

Trees, Why Do You Wait? America's Changing Rural Culture, Richard Critchfield (Washington: Island Press, 1991), \$15.95.

Economics as if God Mattered: A Century of Papal Teaching Addressed to the Economic Order, by Rupert J. Ederer (South Bend: Fidelity Press, 1995).

Trees, Why Do You Wait? (a line taken from a poem of Archibald MacLeish) is a plea for the preservation of rural culture. The author maintains that "village life is not only vital in itself but is also the fundamental basis of all civilised behaviour, including our own" and that the "breakdown of the American family and social ethics, along with crime, drugs, homelessness, and so on, all go back to our urban society's movement away from its agricultural base." The bulk of the book is an examination, part anecdotal, part statistical, of two rural communities, one in North Dakota, which, far from any urban centre, struggles to survive as an agricultural-based community, and the other in Iowa, which has experienced an influx of urban workers who commute to their jobs from the village. Critchfield includes a wealth of observation on rural life and farming, and many interesting and valuable suggestions. He also writes well in his sketches of the men and women whom he met in his visits to these two villages.

Often the book seemed to me unfocused. Critchfield's exact opinion of modern expensive mechanised farming equipment is not entirely clear,

though he seems to favour its intelligent use, that is, not to go overboard with it. He does not discuss the many people who are successfully farming with horses, for example, nor of the long-term effects, both social and ecological, of the use of modern methods. According to a notice at the beginning of this book, the non-profit Island Press, the book's publisher, has received money from some of the foundations that seem most dedicated to destroying all that is traditional in rural life throughout the world, for example, the Ford Foundation, the George Gund Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and various Rockefeller Institutes. But it seems that these donors do not exercise a stranglehold over the books that they indirectly subsidise. For despite at least once chanting the ritual phrase about over-population, the author is by no means hostile to traditional ways of life or to religion. He criticises the baneful influence of the big-city media and of drugs on rural life and proclaims more than once that "Religion . . . is the core of any culture." He is well aware of the stabilising, even *conservative* value of rural culture, views that would hardly seem to earn him respect at cocktail parties in New York or Washington. This work has some interesting parts but it is definitely not a necessary book to purchase or to read.

The second book that I shall review concerns Distributism, a subject dear to the hearts of Chestertonians, even though they seldom agree as to its exact meaning. It is sometimes asserted that the English Distributists were far out of the mainstream of twentieth-century Catholic social teaching. The article on the Distributists in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, for example, takes that tack, and seems to think that Distributism is something from which English-speaking Catholics had better recover as quickly as possible. But the truth is not as bad as all that. It is true that Distributist thought often emphasised certain things that were not necessarily equally emphasised by Continental Catholic social theorists, but, in its central tenets, it is solidly part of the corpus of social teaching which has been elaborated by successive papal encyclicals in the last hundred years. For instance, the present Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, has put great emphasis on the virtue and principle of solidarity in his social teachings. But is this not akin to the principle of cooperation, a principle which Father Vincent McNabb, for example, champions? Compare Father McNabb's statement, "Co-operation is necessary," with Pope John Paul's "the principle of solidarity . . . is . . . one of the fundamental principles . . . of social and political organisation." If this is so, then it behooves those who may consider themselves disciples of McNabb and Chesterton and Belloc always to ground themselves on the official social teachings of the Church, since an interaction between these two emphases in Catholic social thought cannot but be fruitful.

With this thought in mind, we can turn to the new book by Rupert Ederer, Professor Emeritus of Economics at the State University of New York at

Buffalo, a book which treats of the papal social encyclicals, beginning with *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and ending with *Centesimus Annus* (1991). The author, who modestly refers to himself throughout as a commentator, in the first place offers a faithful summary of the content of each encyclical. But beyond that, he also explains much that might be unclear to many readers of the encyclicals themselves, such as the conditions that called for the publication of these noteworthy documents, their reception by the Catholic and non-Catholic worlds and their subsequent effects. He also discusses themes which they have in common, such as the increasingly international outlook of these documents since Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*, an outlook necessitated by a world economy which is more and more inter-related. No longer do countries look to autarky even as an ideal, something that some nations tried to implement during the 1930s. Now, instead, it is exports and trade that are expected to be the saviour of the nations. But here, just as in domestic economic affairs, it is justice and the other virtues that must be observed. If our contemporary politicians do not make much effort in this respect, it is not the fault of the Popes, who, again and again in the last hundred years, have pointed them in the right direction.

More than once in this work, the author discusses the hostile response to papal social teaching on the part of those whom we, in the United States, usually call "Conservatives"—with more consistency known as Liberals in Europe. Even *Rerum Novarum* did not escape such a fate, until—behold!—with *Centesimus Annus*, this attitude suddenly changed. Now the Pope was warmly and ostentatiously welcomed to the Capitalist club. But did he really apply for membership there? In one of the most detailed sections of the book, Professor Ederer discusses what Pope John Paul actually said about Capitalism and the free market in *Centesimus Annus*. His conclusion is that, far from endorsing what the neo-Conservatives mean by Capitalism, the Pontiff's vision of a just economy includes many elements that they would likely find distasteful, elements such as his demand "that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the State, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied." Thus the present Pontiff is not at odds with what his predecessors taught, nor is *Centesimus Annus* a whole new departure for the Church, despite what certain Catholics with an undeserved reputation for orthodoxy have insinuated.

Earlier I mentioned the principle or virtue of solidarity. Now solidarity, of course, pre-supposes justice, as Pope Pius XI taught in *Quadragesimo Anno* in his discussion of *social charity*, a term which is equivalent to *solidarity*. And, in a sense, it is this principle which sets a Catholic approach to economic and social questions apart from any other approach, whether Socialist or Capitalist. Socialism camouflaged its materialism with a false covering of fraternal solidarity. But, in practice, it revealed its ugly face. Even the more

mitigated forms of Socialism have shown a disdain for the traditions of Christian civilisation and have tended toward a Statism in both economic and family matters. But what of Capitalism? Although recently some writers have argued that Capitalism is dependent upon the moral and theological virtues, is it not the case that they are using the words in what logicians call an equivocal sense? Or is it not true that any virtues which Capitalism originally did depend on, virtues such as hard work or thrift, have been by now undermined by Capitalism itself? What relation does the multi-million dollar fee of someone who serves as an advisor to a corporate buy-out or merger have to the reward for the foresight or self-denial which the early captains of industry may have had? Since its only principle is the making of money, Capitalism quickly moves from production to the more lucrative business of financial speculation. And just as much as Chesterton and Belloc hated that sort of money manipulation, so have the Popes sternly warned that economic activity must be redirected toward the common good, that is, toward the service of mankind. Whether that which would result from heeding these papal warnings may fairly be called "Capitalism" or something else, such as "solidarism" or "Distributism," is less important than the changes that would actually occur in the world of work. At all events, whatever we might *name* such a system, it would not much resemble *our* form of Capitalism. I should perhaps note the presence of some misprints in this work, especially in its earlier sections.

If Catholics are to concern themselves at all with what used to be called "the social question," they had better rely on the authentic teachings of the Vicar of Christ. And in doing so, they can with profit consult Professor Ederer's book in order to find a solid and trustworthy introduction to those teachings. For they have no choice. Either they build upon the rock of the genuine teaching of a succession of Supreme Pontiffs or they build upon the sand of human error and partial truth. Catholics may do whichever they want, but only in one case will they be helping to build the city of God.

Thomas Storck
Greenbelt, Maryland

* * *

Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community by Wendell Berry (Pantheon Books, 1993)
\$20.00

Somewhere is better than anywhere.

—Flannery O'Connor

Wendell Berry is one of that class of writers whom the orthodox believer discovers with both joy and sadness—joy at his clarity and plain sense—and sadness at his reluctant identification with ("organised") Christianity. In one essay, he owns it as his "native religion, for better or worse," as if he were a