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The Catholic Experience of the Church

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Book Reviews

THE CATHOLIC EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH: A Reexamination of the Apologetic of Cardinal Dechamps. By Richard J. Cronin, S.J. (*Logos* no. 11). Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1976. 200 pages.

The latest volume in the *Logos* series presents us with a welcome study into the historical origins of the transition into modern apologetics, namely, the apologetic of Cardinal Dechamps. This study was originally presented as a doctoral dissertation in Paris by Father Richard J. Cronin, well known in Manila for a decade of untiring and inspiring work as Chairman of the Theology Department, Ateneo de Manila. The work's publication after so many years proves upon reading to be of a relevance and interest that could not have been foreseen even a few years ago.

What the book presents to us is a clear, forthright analysis of the change exerted by Cardinal Dechamps of Belgium in the common apologetic stance of Catholic theologians in the last century, through his novel "Method of Providence." Part One of the volume presents the essentials of Dechamps' apologetic of "Interior" and "Exterior" Facts, its unifying core as well as its influence on the First Vatican Council's work and decrees. A critical evaluation follows in Part Two, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of both "facts," relating their content to the work of Blondel and Rahner, and finally judging the success of Dechamps' apologetic to defend "the faith of the average Catholic."

For a scholarly study, the book reads with deceptive ease; it takes a conscious effort on the part of the reader to become aware of the sharp critical analyses, and balance of interpretation, which the author has presented so disarmingly. This is especially the case in the excellent summary conclusions and evaluations appropriately interspersed throughout the work (pp. 46-49, 68-72, 116-18, 159-60, 188-90).

Concerning the surprising relevance and interest of this study for today mentioned above, the first point would be the need of apologetics itself. Since Vatican II it has become the fashion to stress the subjective, personal commitment and conviction as an intrinsic constitutive element in any faith-stance.

This worked an admirable and long overdue corrective in the excessively rationalistic and objectivistic presentation of the faith according to the so-called "traditional apologetics" – the "Method of the Classes" in Cronin's study. But this reaction against the admittedly inadequate, one-sided apologetics of the last century tended unfortunately to put in question the whole apologetic enterprise. Everyone suddenly seemed interested in arguing exclusively from within their faith commitment. To question this faith in any way was quickly reduced to an attack on the believer's personal sincerity. Any attempt to discuss faith "objectively," or to inquire into the possibility of "objective criteria" for faith, seemed to be taken as completely nonsensical. This over-reaction is only now beginning to dissipate, and Cronin's work presents us with a forceful reminder of the permanent need, especially for the believer as such, to come to grips with his own act of faith as a responsible act for which he can reasonably be held accountable. Sincerity alone is not, ultimately, an adequate norm for the type of conviction, commitment, and trust which the Christian Revelation calls for.

In this respect it is interesting to note that *The Catholic Experience of the Church* is the first work on apologetics in the *Logos* series. The ten previous volumes of the series include works on scripture, revelation, comparative religions, God, morals, spirituality, and ecumenism; Fr. Cronin's present work adds to the list the traditionally well-honored field of apologetics.

A second point in this study of particular relevance for today is Fr. Cronin's analysis of precisely the *subjective dimension* – Dechamps' "Interior Fact" – of the faith of the ordinary Christian. This is especially pertinent for those attempting to work seriously in the indigenization of the Faith. The work of indigenizing philosophy and Catholic theology in a truly Filipino context, though long overdue, has unfortunately barely begun. Yet already certain inherent problems are being felt, not the least of which is the delicate discernment between the personal and the merely private, between authentic subjectivity and subjectivism, between true interiority and capricious whim. Here Cronin's analysis, not only of Dechamps' "Interior Fact," but of Rahner's pertinent thought in this area, can be of real assistance toward gaining a certain perspective and historical depth, by providing some solid, thought-provoking, historical precedents.

Treating the subjective dimension of faith and apologetics inevitably raises the question of the *epistemology* of both the act of faith itself, and then of any critical attempt to justify it. Here Cronin lays the ground work in supplying for Dechamps' epistemological gaps by a basic exposition of *knowledge by signs* (pp. 152–60, 185–88). Nothing more could be attempted in a work of this size. But perhaps it would not be amiss to indicate here the tremendous advances that contemporary philosophies of language, as well as certain branches of the social sciences (e.g., the sociology of knowledge), have contributed in this field of human knowledge and demonstration. It is

no longer sufficient for theologians or scripture scholars, when using basic terms such as sign, symbol, myth, proof/argument, etc., to comment on some text of St. Thomas, or even on the creative work of their confreres (e.g., Rahner's "Theology of Symbol"). The growing influence of a scholar such as Bernard Lonergan indicates current theology's growing awareness of the interdisciplinary collaboration needed to deepen its grasp of man's heuristic structures – or more simply, *how* we experience, understand, judge, believe, and decide, when we do these acts.

A final point of this work's particular interest for today would be its analysis of Dechamps' "Exterior Fact," the Church. In today's liberation climate wherein "institutionalized violence," "oppressive structures," and "structural sin" have become by-words in current theological jargon, a serious, calm, reasoned invitation to look at the Church apologetically, not dogmatically, much less prophetically, can be a blessing of no small moment. It is true that much more than the brief postscript (pp. 191–95) would be needed to bring out all the pertinent correlations between Dechamps' pioneer efforts in this line and Vatican II's view of the Church and subsequent developments. The book of Avery Dulles, S.J., cited on p. 193, offers a good example of how sophisticated and nuanced our views of the Church have become since the time of Dechamps. But the fact remains that Cronin's work focuses our attention on the Church as precisely one fundamental ground why the *average* Catholic commits himself to his faith. In this day of advanced Scripture-study groups, of prayer-sessions and charismatics, of liberationists of every hue and description, perhaps – just perhaps – another look at the Church, through the eyes and heart of the average Catholic, might indicate a far more fruitful field of apologetic endeavor than the latest theological best seller on "Why Do We Need the Church?" would lead us to suppose. At least Cronin's work forces us to consider, in a renewed way, the essentially ecclesial and social dimension of the Catholic Faith. This alone would be cause enough to acknowledge our indebtedness to the author for this gem of a reasoned, thought-provoking, challenging probe.

Joseph L. Roche

NUEVA PASCUA DE LA NUEVA ALIANZA. Actuales enfoques sobre la Eucaristía. By Miguel Nicolau, S.J. Madrid: Ediciones Studium, 1973. 412 pages.

Nueva Pascua de la Nueva Alianza by Fr. Miguel Nicolau, Professor of dogmatic theology in the Pontifical University of Salamanca, Spain, offers the reader the result of fifteen years of teaching. The scriptural vision of the Eucharist, followed by the doctrine of the Fathers and primitive liturgies, prepare the way for the study on the reflection of theologians and the official teachings of the Church. The first three parts of the work constitute the