

A New Magazine

[Review of] *The Canadian Observer*, edited by Richard Bastien; annual subscription: \$29.

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by Father Daniel Callam, C.S.B.

THE FRENCH have a word for it: *haute vulgarisation*, i.e., making the results of advanced scholarship available to the general public. *The Canadian Observer*, a quarterly journal, promises to be a fine instance of such *vulgarisation*, which in this case, to quote Mr. Ben-Ami's editorial, is in the service of "conservatism [as] a sound and moral political philosophy."

The lead article, "Faith, family and good government" by the editor, Richard Bastien, is a wide-ranging assault on liberalism reminiscent of Cardinal Newman's critical stance towards it as ultimately incoherent as a philosophy. Bastien notes, trenchantly, that liberalism represents "an endless enlargement of the role of the State, which acts more or less as a new divine Providence." I was confused, however, to read on page 5, "All conservatism requires is acknowledgement of a natural law founded solely in reason" and then on page 9, that "all philosophical systems claiming to be based on *reason alone* have turned out to be utterly irrational"—as has, in fact, been definitively established by John Rist in *Real Ethics* and is the theme of an interview, dating from 1990 and reprinted here, with Leszek Kolakowski, the severe critic of Marxism and irreligious liberalism.

There is a pleasing variety in the articles, from Barbara Kay on feminism ("it's dead") to Dominic Manganiello on Christopher Dawson on Dante. Rory Leishman's "Islamic Extremists," with an impressive survey of conditions in Europe and North America, examines the dangers of militant Muslims to Canada but without raising the broader, crucial question one might expect in a magazine of this calibre: Is violence accidental or constitutive of Islam? Kolakowski, incidentally, takes the former view: "One cannot say with any certainty that it is the destiny of Islam to be bellicose, aggressive and repressive."

There are six book reviews, including, I was pleased to note, *Catholic Converts* from the recently established Justin Press. The review of *Bad*

Students, Not Bad Schools should fill the letterbox of the next issue. The book's thesis—that there are significant differences between men and women, among the various races of the world and in native ability—is bound to strike some readers as sexist and racist. Attention should also be drawn to John Bryson's excellent review article on *Atheist Delusions* by David Hart. The issue closes with a charming piece on the meaning of "home" by David Beresford, preceded by a series of short "Politically incorrect observations" by the editor, along the lines of Father John Neuhaus's "The Public Square" in *First Things*.

I should note that there are misprints and grammatical errors as well as some awkward writing, especially in Salim Mansur's "Fiction Tells a Greater Truth." Spelling and conventions flit between British and American, highlighting, perhaps, the Canadian origins of the publication. Also, the bibliographical information in the book reviews is confusing, incomplete and inconsistent. These fledging faults will, not doubt, be soon attended to, so that *The Observer* may all the more effectively deliver its important message to the Canadian public. ❧