

BOOK REVIEWS

ALPHONSE SAMMUT, O.F.M. Conv., *The Eucharistic Fast in the Light of the Last Papal Documents — Christus Dominus*, 6th Jan. 1953; *Sacram Communionem*, 19th March 1957 (Pontificia Facultas Theologica S.cti Bonaventurae O.F.M. Conv. in Urbe, Dissert, ad Laur., 89). Padova 1957, Ed. *Miscellanea Francescana*. In-Svo, pp. XX-156. 14s./6d.

In these last years the whole Eucharistic fast discipline has been reordered, mitigated and simplified to the utmost. Pope Pius XIII of holy memory promulgated first an Apostle Constitution: *Christus Dominus* (6th Jan. 1953) to which the Holy Office attached an Instruction, and then a *Motu Proprio*: *Sacram Communionem* (19th March 1957). It was by this last Papal document that the already outstretching concessions of the *Christus Dominus* were made easier and extended to all the faithful. Thus the *Motu Proprio* abolishes all previous legislation and opens a new era in the history of the Eucharistic fast (pp. XVIII, 55).

What motivated the innovations in the decade 1950-60 were not the idea that the traditional law was in itself too severe or the fear of an attitude of rebellion against Church legislation on the part of the catholics (p. 55). The changes and mitigations of the Eucharistic fast reveal the maternal care of the Church who is fully aware of the many hardships ensuing from the frightful wars of this century and of the conditions of modern life which impaired in no small degree bodily health and constitution (pp. XVIII, 55). A solution had to be sought and the Church prudently intervened offering to the faithful an easier access to the Eucharistic banquet (pp. XVIIIs) which fortifies them in the long and wearisome journey to their eternal salvation (p. XVIII).

No more fasting from midnight is required from the communicants. Only a minimum of three hours fast from solids is now prescribed. Water may be taken any time before Mass or Holy Communion (p. XIX). The catholics all over the world gratefully thanked the prevident Father, who so paternally

stretched out his hand to help his children reach the Fruit of life (pp. XIX, 56).

The Author undertook to present his work to the public from both historical and canonic-moral point of view.

In the historical survey, which is the first part of his work (pp. 3-51), Fr. Sammut offers very rich and useful information about the ecclesiastical origin — in opposition to the divine origin — of the Eucharistic fast. From the obscure beginning of this discipline, the Author leads us to its solemn approval by the Council of Constance in 1415 (p. 33); to its codification in the 20th century (pp. XIX, 45) and to the subsequent declarations and dispensations preceding the *Christus Dominus* in 1953 (pp. 65ss). Fr. Sammut did all this by reproducing quite an abundant number of quotations taken from the Fathers of the Church, the Decrees of the Councils and other official Acts of the Popes through the ages.

The Author then tackles the canonic-moral part of his work (pp. 55-126), which is mainly a commentary on the last documents emanated by Pope Pius XII which led to the present Eucharistic fast legislation. The main reason why Fr. Sammut comments at length on the Apostolic Constitution, although in many instances outdated, is that the *Christus Dominus* still holds good in many points. The Constitution is indispensable if we aim at a faithful interpretation and application of the law (pp. XIX, 109). Here again the Autor makes ample reference to authoritative Canonists and Moralists, not dispensing with modern Authors, to give the right interpretation of the concessions embodied in these Papal documents (pp. 69ss). But the discussions which followed the promulgation of both the Apostolic Constitution and the Instruction of the Holy Office far from exhausting the argument opened the way for cases and queries in endless succession. The same thing happened soon after the *Motu Proprio* was promulgated, and the inevitable examination of Moralists and Canonists revealed quite a number of difficult points which called for careful study and urgent solution (p. 107).

The Author follows the path traced by the Constitution and the attached Instruction to interpret faithfully the *Motu Proprio*. This is done, of course, in the norms which do not oppose the *Motu Proprio*, because they still maintain the force of Law (p. 109). The actual Eucharistic fast discipline is very well expounded by Fr. Sammut who tries to give his share towards a better understanding and a more faithful application of the law.

All the pertinent official documents by Pope Pius XII and by the other Sacred Congregations are included in this important work as an Appendix (pp. 127-156). A lengthy and up to date bibliography adds much to the scientific value of this work.

Fr. Sammut is to be congratulated for the clear exposition, the helpful annotations, the clever and satisfying solutions to quite a good number of queries which he tackles in his work. It is our pleasure to underline these interesting features to all those who are fond of historical matter and canonic-moral implications of such a deep theme.

This work is available from leading booksellers.

I.P.M.