

## BLACKFRIARS

human flesh (taken for granted, e.g., in Harnack's *History of Dogma*). The "knave or fool" argument for the divinity of Christ (p. 44) needs discrimination to-day, in view of the work of analytical psychology. And it is really true that all *Jesuanismus*, however regrettable, is "an inane speculation with no influence beyond a don's armchair and is futile outside a professor's study"? Whilst Chapters V and VI required at least a note on Mark xiii, 32, with the solutions of Catholic exegetes, Chapter XII, on the other hand, is a masterly outline of the present tendency with regard to Hellenic influence, though perhaps a passing reference to its role as a psychological framework for doctrinal formulation would clear the ground for some enquirers. The same applies to the last chapter, on *Pagan Trinities*, since the widespread variety of these triads seems minimized, no doubt owing to space, whilst their psychological origin is not, after all, too obvious.

NORBERT DREWITT, O.P.

AN INTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS. By Reinhold Niebuhr. (Student Christian Movement Press; 6/-.)

"Confused and tormented by cataclysmic events in contemporary history, the 'modern mind' faces the disintegration of its civilization in alternate moods of fear and hope, of faith and despair . . . Its optimism had no more solid foundation than the expansive mood of the era of triumphant capitalism and naturally gives way to confusion and despair when the material conditions of life are seriously altered." To this statement of the too obvious truth Dr. Niebuhr adds an indictment: men are ceasing to look to the Christian Churches for light and guidance in our present chaos because they find them incapable of helping them. Liberal Christianity, on the one hand, having devoted its energies "to the task of proving religion and science compatible, a purpose which it has sought to fulfil by disavowing the more incredible portion of its religious heritage and clothing the remainder in terms acceptable to the 'modern mind' . . . has now discovered rather belatedly that this same modern mind, which only yesterday seemed to be the final arbiter of truth, beauty and goodness, is in a sad state of confusion to-day." Religion remains the loser. "Modern culture is compounded of the genuine achievements of science and the peculiar ethos of a commercial civilization. The superficialities of the latter, its complacent optimism, its loss of the sense of depth and the knowledge of good and evil . . . were at least as influential in it if not more influential than the discoveries of science. Therefore the adjustment of modern religion to the 'mind' of modern culture inevitably involved capitulation to its thin 'soul'." Hence charity became merely the "prudential mutuality so dear and necessary

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to a complex commercial civilization"; Christ became the "good man of Galilee"; and failure to retain the sense of the depths of evil produced the optimism which assumed that "the law of love needed only to be stated persuasively to overcome the selfishness of the human heart," and which in consequence neglected the "necessary mechanisms of social justice at the precise moment in history" when technical development more than ever required them: "the purely moralistic approach of the modern Church to politics is really a religio-moral version of *laissez-faire* economics."

Orthodox Christianity has arrived, according to Dr. Niebuhr, at a similar inability to help the world. He enumerates three causes. First, its "sacramentalism": "the natural world (including, unfortunately, the social orders of human history) is celebrated as the handiwork of God; and every natural fact is rightly seen as an image of the transcendent, but wrongly covered so completely with the aura of sanctity as to obscure its imperfections." Secondly, its pessimism: "the 'sinfulness of the world' was used as an excuse for the complacent acceptance of whatever imperfect justice a given social order had established." Finally, acosmism: "reaction to naturalism drives Christianity into an other-worldly dualism in which the transcendent ceases to have relevance to the historical and temporal process."

Dismissing, then, these two historical types of interpretation of Christianity, the author goes on to examine the ethic of Jesus in the light of the Gospels; and concludes that it is not a social ethic, and that the effort to make it so has resulted precisely in its degradation. What must be done, then, the author concludes is to "reduce the anarchy of the world to some sort of immediately sufferable order and unity" by political, economic and social coercion; and then to supplement this (and here is the relevance of the law of love to social life) by the "refinements which voluntary and uncoerced human kindness and tenderness between individuals add to it." "If the error of the mediaeval system of politics was to take traditional equilibria of justice for granted . . . its virtue was to seek the refinement of this justice by the love of individuals . . . The most grievous mistake of Marxism is its assumption that an adequate mechanism of social justice will inevitably create individuals who will be disciplined enough to 'give according to their ability and take according to their need.'"

Impossible to do more than touch on the line one would take in countering the author's main contentions. His statement of the Christian ethic is based on the examination of a few texts; but the devil can quote scripture; and his discussion leaves out of count all those words and events which make it plain that Our

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Lord's objective was the *Ecclesia* of mankind, a living organism, and His Law its constitution; that the Spirit was to guide the Church as such; that the old law of social justice was not abrogated but changed and perfected; that therefore Dr. Niebuhr's interpretations are possible only on the theory of a self-contradiction on the part of Our Lord. Again, with regard to his indictment of orthodoxy, one would argue, on similar lines, that what is attributable to the betrayal of Christians must not be attributed to the Church of Christ as such: that "sacramentalism," pessimism, acosmism, are indeed to be found in fact among Christians, but very definitely not in Christianity, and that it is not the traditional teaching which is wrong, but the practice.

Impossible, on the other hand, to do justice to the value of the book: first, as an outstanding presentation of a point of view which is coming to be more and more widely held; secondly, as a penetrating discussion and criticism of the deepest elements, and their manifestations, in our world; lastly, as a salutary shock to our complacency, for it brings home very forcibly and uncomfortably the fact that it is only the un-Christian behaviour of Christians that makes possible an indictment which on questions of historical fact is so unassailable.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

## LITURGY

THE HOLY SACRIFICE. A simple Explanation of the Mass. By Rt. Rev. Fernand Cabrol, O.S.B., Abbot of Farnborough. Translated by C. M. Antony. (Burns Oates; 2/6.)

Many liturgical studies fail because they lapse into a craze for hunting up old manuscripts and a veneration for the ancient merely because it is ancient. They produce the type of liturgist who will fight to the death for Gothic chasubles, the only apparent reason being that they were worn in the fifth century. And this in turn produces the reactionary who calls himself a *theologian* of the Mass and condemns all history and the evidence it affords, saying we must get back to principles—and, presumably, stay there! In this book we find neither of these views even in their milder forms, but rather an admirable synthesis of those two very necessary elements in liturgical study, together with the realization that the study of the Mass, and, indeed, of all liturgy, lies neither in *mere* history nor *mere* theology—if such things do exist—but in the happy co-operation of the two.

This book is an attempt to popularize some of those liturgical researches which up to now have been made intelligible only to the technical scholar. As a rule efforts of this kind are ruined by superficiality and incompleteness: