

rather than one pleading a case? Historians must flee bias, but neutrality is too much to ask: one can only devote this amount of research to a topic with which one has a sympathy and a passion. Both are in evidence here: he reveals the nuances of Thomas with the greatest care, and moves the argument forward with a passion that affect the reader. When finished, one feels the satisfaction of having spent one's precious reading time well and as having gained a new insight into Thomas. We are thus in Dr Boland's debt.

So who is this book for? It will obviously be of interest to those who work on Thomas, and to the devoted band of scholars who keep the flame of Christian Neoplatonism alive. But it is also a work using one of the classic methods of the history of ideas, watching how an idea arises and evolves in a sequence of thinkers, each of whom re-use the tradition in a web of inter-textual relationships. This phenomenon of a change within a continuity of borrowing is well exemplified here. As such it deserves attention from scholars of the larger fields of medieval philosophy and theology. Certainly, no one in future will be able to study the issue of 'the Platonism of St Thomas' without reference to it. Incidentally, those who still refer to Thomas 'baptising Aristotle' (or anyone else for that matter) might like to know that this is probably the best antidote to such crudities available in English.

The work is doctoral research reworked as a monograph, and as such the quotations from Thomas are left in the original. This will limit the appeal of the book, as a whole, to students; however, I know of no work where the various strands of Greek non-Christian thought on the ideas as exemplars is so concisely and conveniently treated than in part 1 and teachers of undergraduates in classical philosophy will no doubt find this section, read on its own, of value for students. Lastly, in this area the ability of language to communicate precisely is pushed to the limit and often passages have to be read and reread to make sense. However, here the author has a fluency and skill of communication that are enviable. The book is clear, well-written, and only on the very odd occasion does one have to retrace the argument. The result is that a most difficult question in the history of Christian thought becomes accessible and the reader is delivered directly to the questions at issue rather than faced with another obstacle: the reading of the book!

THOMAS O'LOUGHLIN

**LOOKING AT THE LITURGY: A CRITICAL VIEW OF ITS CONTEMPORARY FORMS**, by Aidan Nichols OP, *Ignatius Press*, 1966. Pp. 126 £8.95

This work is based on a series of lectures given by the author to the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy in 1995. In it Fr Nichols turns his attention to the history of the Liturgical Movement and its contribution to the reformed liturgy following the Second Vatican Council. He then offers an anthropological and sociological critique of modern liturgical theory and practice. He deals with issues relating to spontaneity, intelligibility of word and symbol in liturgical action, the active participation of the faithful in liturgical celebration, and the implicit Pelagianism of much modern, popular liturgical activity. A considerable portion of the third section, on the idiom of

worship, is devoted to examining and discounting the theories often advanced for the widespread modern custom of eucharistic celebration *versus populum*. Finally, the shortest chapter in the book presents some practical proposals towards preventing the 'further erosion of the liturgical patrimony of Western Catholicism.'

It is useful to have an intelligently, freshly-argued and accessible critique of post-conciliar liturgical practice. The revisionist case is not always put with such cogency and scholarly reasonableness. The origins of the Liturgical Movement are examined with concise rigour exposing a number of heroes and villains. Dom Bernard Botte, a liturgical theologian, historian, and monk of Mont César in Belgium, is not favoured, whilst Dom Guéranger of Solesmes, long out of fashion with those in the Botte stable, enjoys a measure of rehabilitation. The true inspiration of the Liturgical Movement, in accordance with the scholarly work of Waldemar Trapp, is located in the German Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, together with its less significant counterparts in northern Italy and France. The similarity between the respective programmes of Enlightenment theologians and liturgists, and those of their twentieth century counterparts, has long been evident and has been an important plank in the 'Traditionalist' opposition to the modern liturgy. It can be found for example in the work of Michael Davies on the Council and its reforms published in 1980.

The substance of Fr Nichols' case is that the corpus of theological opinion, which was allowed a wide degree of latitude both at the Council and in its immediate aftermath, deployed its expertise in recreating the liturgy in an idealistic and inorganic way. It was successful in this, since it was backed by the fullness of a Church authority as yet immune from the lacerating criticism it has subsequently received. Just as the *periti* at the Council enjoyed an influence out of all proportion to their actual numbers, so the lobby of liturgical theologians, fortified by a pattern of association and familiarity fostered in twenty or thirty years of meetings and conferences and professional academic contacts, proved a formidable reforming machine. Thus was achieved a revolution by technocrats which discounted the pious sensitivity and ecclesial sensibilities of the faithful people of God. These are grave charges which will perhaps be answered by those competent to meet them.

It is often claimed that the disappearance, or effective annihilation, of centuries of liturgical custom and tradition was the result of a *trahison des clercs*. Clearly, as many bishops admitted subsequently, they were not fully aware of the changes that were to follow the passage of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Council's charter for reform. In retrospect, it unravelled a cultural nexus of meanings and experiences which has proved impossible to reconstruct. The ceremonies, with their mysterious splendour which any former altar boy over forty will recall with a bittersweet nostalgia, the magnificent tradition of plainsong and polyphony, which, even if massacred in most parishes at the obligatory *Missa Cantata* on Sundays, by a sexagenarian choir of sacristans and schoolmistresses, was a significant gesture in the direction of a doxological and prayerful confession of faith. All were swept away in the bright optimism that tomorrow surely belonged to us. The sense of optimism, which many knew at the time, has been replaced in many quarters by a dour pessimism

bordering on fatalism. How did what seemed eternal vanish so quickly? Was there a real and widespread feeling of bereavement as the reforms were established? Perhaps historians can best answer these questions.

A glance at the profile of the episcopate in that vast and triumphal procession with the full panoply of Byzantine, barbarian and baroque papal magnificence, which marked the opening of the Council would disclose a predominantly white and western European Church. In the past thirty years we have had to reconsider what it is to belong to a Latin Church whose European constituency is in notable decline. Much of the pressure for change at the Council came from within the bounds of the old Carolingian Empire. It is ironic that it was precisely the Carolingian and medieval contribution to liturgical development which was excised in the conciliar reform in favour of a return to the pattern of the post-Constantinian patristic Church. The experience of the European Church can once more be read from its advocacy of a return to the primitive purity of a Church fresh with evangelical fervour and with a world to conquer. In the bright dawn of the mid 1960s few considered a return to the catacombs. Those Franco-German theologians who opted for a pastoral, missionary liturgical platform disclosed not only their own rejection of the triumphalism of the past but their intense concern for a religion-less future. Whether this was an adequate basis on which to construct such a wide-ranging liturgical reform is not yet clear.

Father Nichols presents a well-argued and discreetly combative case. His book should be required reading in seminaries and houses of religious formation and would serve as an ideal seminar text. It might also help to stimulate that debate and reflection on the liturgy which is currently lacking in so many areas of Church life.

ALLAN WHITE OP

## Book Notes 1

It has taken me a long time to find a good book on the sacraments. *Sacraments Revisited* by Liam Kelly (Darton Longman and Todd, £9.95) is the first book I have enjoyed reading on the subject since Herbert McCabe's *New Creation*—and that was published in 1964. As well as being an invaluable resource for personal reflection, *Sacraments Revisited* is ideal for catechists and those involved in adult education, and for use in parishes and in RCIA groups. It will help all of us to look afresh at those special occasions in our lives, which we may too easily take for granted, and help us towards a deeper faith.

Bishop Vincent Nichols offers us his reflections on the Mass in *Promise of Future Glory* (Geoffrey Chapman, £6.95). All those who wish to understand and pray the Mass more deeply will be helped by this book. Clearly and attractively written, it draws on sources both ancient and modern, presenting the liturgy of the Eucharist in a way that makes sense to an ordinary Catholic. A particularly good feature of the way the Mass is presented is that Bishop Nichols never looks at the 'inner moment' of the Eucharist without linking it to the 'outward movement' to which we are called.

A book recently published on a similar theme is *The Shaping of Sunday* by Vincent Ryan OSB (Veritas, £4.99). Fr. Ryan emphasises the need for an underpinning of Sunday practice by a deeper knowledge of the traditions of the Irish people through the centuries. This fascinating book