

## Reviews

THEOLOGY AND THE UNIVERSITY—an ecumenical investigation, edited by John Coulson; Darton, Longman and Todd, 1955.

This book is the latest in the series of volumes which have come out of the deliberations of the 'Downside Group'—a group of clergy and laity, gathered together under Roman Catholic auspices but including other Christians and non-Christians, for the regular discussion of important problems facing the Church in the modern world. It is the most successful, and also the most specific book in the series so far. The discussion arose, not out of some vague general concern, but from a particular concrete situation: namely the possibility of full Catholic participation in the establishment of a new department of theology at one of the provincial universities. The particularity of the problem has, it must be admitted, caused a few awkwardnesses in the book. For example, the initial establishment of general degree courses in theology-plus-something else, which is really due to the academic structure of the particular university, seems to be given undue emphasis as though it were the ideal to be sought. But the precise nature of the starting point has, in general, sparked off reflections of a wider interest than those to be found even in the volume on authority.

The Abbot of Downside starts with a discussion of the ecumenical opportunities of initiating such a scheme, and he is followed by two articles (Monica Lawlor and Herbert McCabe) giving a 'phenomenology' of the Catholic undergraduate; product of Catholic schools and victim of Catholic apologetics. He is a somewhat repellent but also pathetic creature, torn between two worlds, faced with grave intellectual difficulties for which he is inadequately equipped, and saddled with a bastard culture which he must shed if he is to grow up properly, whether he loses the faith along with it or not.

After an excursus into Newman's attempts to sketch the lines of a genuinely adult, Christian education (by the editor), the American experience of Catholic universities is examined by Daniel Callahan, and the experience of Continental universities by Peter Fransen. The American experience reveals the personal and academic deficiencies which beset, rather than the integrating ideal which is supposed to sustain, the idea of a Catholic university. The Continental experience is different, and there some Catholic institutions have attained genuine academic reputations and have done much good. The reasons Père Fransen puts forward are important—as for instance in Louvain, which is under the jurisdiction of the whole hierarchy (not the local bishop). Furthermore, the bishops 'not only tolerate, but are fully ready to defend the traditions of the university and its academic autonomy, and to permit considerable freedom of thought and discussion' (p. 85). More important still is the conclusion that there is no one 'Catholic' solution, and each country must solve its problems within the tradition of its own university structure.

All this is prolegomena to the main purpose—which is the discussion of the British experience in the light of the present task of theology. The pivotal paper of the whole book is Charles Davis's on 'Theology and its Present Task'. The basic argument is simple. The great artists, scientists and philosophers, few in number, give us the fundamental mental pictures by which an age lives. They are its 'creative centre'. Theology must be carried on at that creative centre if it is to be fruitful in itself, and have any impact on its world. It therefore needs the university, which is its natural habitat, because it is there that the creative centre is to be found. The divorce of theology from university studies, among Catholics, has been unhealthy: it has prevented the right questions being asked, it has prevented lay people from studying it, and it has made ecumenical contact almost impossible. It is essential at the present time that theology be restored to its right place at the centre of our culture, both for its own sake and for that of our total cultural health.

The existing state of affairs in British universities is examined by Professor Reid (Aberdeen), David Jenkins (Oxford), Alan Richardson (Nottingham) and Mgr Francis Davis (Birmingham): all these contributors demonstrate, in their own ways, the truth of the thesis outlined by Charles Davis, and the urgency of a solution.

Part IV consists of two confrontations between theology and other disciplines—examples of the 'creative centre' at work. The first (concerning literature) is more successful than the second (philosophical analysis), partly because the two speakers have the same precise problem in view (roughly: is there a distinction to be drawn between the aesthetic value and the cognitive meaning of a poem?) but also, I think, because in the present state of affairs literary criticism is a more interesting business for theologians than is logical analysis. The trouble in philosophy is that the most interesting problems for the ingenuity of the logical analyst who is interested in religion are those which the theologian now feels to be peripheral (like transubstantiation—the subject of Anthony Kenny's paper). This is not a criticism either of the philosopher or the theologian: it is a reflection of the state of the 'creative centre'—a state not unconnected with the absence of the incisiveness of Catholic theology in university departments. What passes for 'theology' in most discussions of philosophers is a thin rationalist jam spread on the all-absorbent dough of an obsolete liberalism. But that is partly 'our' fault, and it is up to us to put it right.

The final section (Needs and Proposals) includes some practical suggestions for courses, designed to give a 'theological literacy' to lay undergraduate students in an ecumenical setting (Laurence Bright). These are important, and have been discussed in more detail in a subsequent conference, some of the papers for which appear in this journal.

The book adds up to an impressive argument, backed by a weighty body of expert, articulated and passionately stated evidence. Its practical outcome ought to be that, in all universities, Catholic participation in theological study and teaching should become accepted as normal, and that proposals should be made

for making sure that it is. It is clear that, in the main, the universities are already prepared for this step, and are ready to negotiate on it. The question remains: are the Catholic authorities aware of the argument, of the weight of feeling which lies behind it and of the fact that the ball is now in their court? For the argument is now so powerful as to be unassailable, except in matters of minor detail. Probably we shall not have to wait long to see whether we are going to rise to the challenge or not.

BRIAN WICKER

THE INCARNATION IN THE UNIVERSITY, edited by Vincent Buckley; Geoffrey Chapman, 5s.

The fact that this reprinting of *The Incarnation in the University* will undoubtedly be welcomed in university chaplaincies up and down the country ought to be sufficient to shatter anyone's complacency. How far has the renewal in the Church really penetrated into the lives of the laity, and what are the prospects for the future? A first answer to that question might be optimistic, but there are grounds for a more searching look at the situation, and in particular at the kind and depth of theological literacy attained by the average Catholic undergraduate. For the reform in the Church is essentially a theologically-centred one, and will talk of 'reform', 'English in the mass' and so on can lead only to disaster unless there is a widespread realisation of the reasons and necessity for change. If, as has been true in the past, the typical undergraduate is to be brought up on the sort of diet which this collection of essays represents, and which is little more than a development of his school 'religion', then his literacy will be extremely patchy, and the prospects for a renewal of life within the Church correspondingly reduced.

The main inadequacy of the book lies in its datedness: first published in 1955, the failure to reflect the development in the Church in the last decade is not surprising, but there is no real justification for reprinting when the inadequacies are so deep-rooted. Consider for example: 'Hence the "logic" of these papers. They begin with theology because theology admits of a reasonable degree of definition, can provide the relevant context . . .' (p. 20)—which hardly answers the important question: how relevant is my Christianity to my life in its context? The results of this sort of approach are only too predictable, since the sort of theology referred to in the quotation is likely to be inadequate, anyway. It is a pleasure to relate, then, that two of the papers in the collection (those of Vincent Buckley and William Ginnane, which are both quite excellent) are mercifully free of such remarks as ' . . . reward consists in the enjoyment by the intellect of the Beatific Vision . . .' (p. 73). All that one can say of the sort of theology that informs such remarks is that it may provide a relevant context, but it is unlikely to be a very rewarding or persuasive one. Opium of the people?

The essays on the Church and her place in the university have the same basic