

As Sartre puts it: 'God, the supreme value and end in the transcendental order, represents the permanent and ultimate limit of being in terms of which man insists upon being told what he himself is. To be a man is to move towards the attainment of the existence of God. Or, in other words, man is fundamentally a desire to be God'. Man's vocation is a call to unity: unity in himself, union with God, union with other men. Consisting of body as well as spirit, human existence is situated in history. Man is historicity: an existence progressively achieving meaning through time. Disunity is the inevitable consequence of sin, and man's awareness of this disintegration within his being and of the historicity of his existence, produces the sentiment of *anguish*. Should he avail of this sentiment to 'go it alone', to close in upon himself, man's anguish will make him egocentric. He will end up in the pessimism and despair of existentialism. Should he on the contrary convert his anguish into an awareness of that infirmity in which grace can operate, man will have opened the way to the saving power of God. Anguish will turn to hope. Ultimately, therefore, it is only by the grace of God that man can give meaning to his existence and realize the vocation to which he is called. Christian hope, then, is the only alternative to existentialist despair.

N. FOLAN, O.P.

SECULAR INSTITUTES, by Gabriel Reidy, O.F.M.; Faith and Fact Books, Burns and Oates, 8s. 6d.

This addition to a series we have come to expect much of does not disappoint us. It is authoritative, compact and complete, as far as is possible in a field so rapidly expanding (though not in this country). It contains a list of approved Secular Institutes and a bibliography that is, as it claims, select and not merely haphazard. This is a book that could do much to dispel the ignorance or, still worse, the uninformed enthusiasm for Secular Institutes that is still widespread fifteen years after the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* of 2nd February, 1947.

In that Constitution, Pius XII spoke of 'new and unrivalled forms of confederation which particularly answer the needs of the times', so it may seem strange that Fr Reidy takes us through a succinct, stiffish course of history with chapters on the earliest beginnings of what grew into the formal religious life, the Monastic Age, the Rise of the Friars and Third Orders, the Counter-Reformation and the Revolution and Post-Revolutionary developments. But as we read on we realize the stupendous scale that is the only correct one for considering what is 'new' in the Church. Pius XII himself in *Provida Mater Ecclesia* wrote: 'It is plain to all how closely and essentially linked has been the history of the Church's holiness and of her universal apostolate with the history and annals of canonical religious life. By the grace of the Holy Ghost, that un-failing source of life, they have daily developed in amazing diversity and been

further strengthened by a new, ever deeper and more unshakeable unity'. There is a paradox here worth some thought. The unity of the Church is something built-in. It is given from the beginning by Christ her founder, not an ideal only to be achieved hereafter. And yet in practice this unity may be realized more perfectly by the formation of groups within it reflecting the Church's hierarchical nature. This is why, as St Bernard said, we have only one life by profession but we must embrace them all by charity.

Of course no book can ever be a substitute for practical experience. We learn more about the religious life by meeting religious than by reading it. Or is it only different things? Anyway, it is to be hoped that parish priests, chaplains to schools and others who need to know of these new developments in the life of evangelical perfection will find it possible to familiarize themselves with the movement at first hand. Meanwhile, Fr Reidy has provided them and others interested in the subject with an admirably reliable 'grammar'.

MARY EDWARDS.

THE LAYMAN AND HIS CONSCIENCE, by Ronald Knox; Sheed and Ward, 18s.

This book is a retreat at home for the laity and was described by Mgr Knox himself as a 'flick round with the duster', but in effect it fluctuates between the penetrating and the somewhat superficial. The author deals with various aspects of the relationship of God and man, from the meaning of detachment to the use of sacramentals, and he makes the reader take a critical look at his ideas and attitudes. The need for a positive approach is rightly emphasized. He points out that developing our spirituality, so that we grow closer to seeing things as God see them, is more effective than making negative resolutions to avoid particular sins.

Mgr Knox's colloquial style will irritate some and may well be helpful to others, but his discursiveness often weakens the force of his argument. His conclusions are sensible and often illuminating but the illustrations which he uses to prove his point are sometimes misleading. He sees the importance of basing our thinking on the scriptures which are the word of God but his interpretation of them is often based on personal speculation and takes no account of developments in biblical exegesis. He treats St John as if he were another synoptic evangelist; for instance he suggests that as the cleansing of the temple appears at a different time in the story in St John from that in the other evangelists, this event might well have taken place twice over. He uses this comment to illustrate man's constant need for cleansing, which is a valid point, but the argument is misleading for the arrangement of the events in the fourth gospel is in the main not chronological but based on the significance intended to be conveyed.

The author also underestimated the place of the love of God in the Old Testament. To show its lack of importance he cites the fact that the love of God is only mentioned thirty times in it. This seems a rather arithmetical approach