

THE GRAVE OF GOD. Has the Church a Future? by Robert Adolfs. *Burns and Oates, London, 1967.* 157 pp. 13s. 6d.

In this intelligent and wide-sympathied book Fr Adolfs addresses himself to a question which is real enough to most of us, especially those who have to hand on the tradition they have received, and which did not arise at the Council. It is a question not of *aggiornamento*, of bringing the Church to today, but of the future: Christ is with *us* to the end of time but is he with this *institution*? The question can be asked by so many of mothers, of teachers and priests, of oneself, not because the Church has faltered in the past but precisely because she has known, all too often, more than was good for her. One young man remarked to me: 'If the Church claims to tell us about the private life of God how can we take seriously the claim to tell us about the public life of men?'. Fr Adolfs suggests that the 'death of God' theologians are making an attempt to rescue us from this easy deployment of the word *God* and the assumption that we can docket and file the divine reality. These men, he supposes, are seeking to reawaken the sense of wonder in the presence of God that was so strong among the Hebrews. They have, like the Hebrews, come to know God as a 'call'. They encourage us to ask: 'What place has the Church between us and this call?'.

We have, therefore, to take stock of the Church's position in our situation. Fr Adolfs thinks that the Church has opted out of the growing moments of our society and is no longer 'present' in the world except as an establishment relic; 'the logical conclusion to be drawn from this is that, if the Church continues to do what she is now doing, and to be what she is now, then she has no future. Her fine churches and beautiful cathedrals will become the sepulchral monuments, the graves of God and of Christianity' (p. 66). We are fast becoming irrelevant. It is not that to insensitive materialistic men of the world we seem irrelevant, but that to those who would know Christ the present structure so often says nothing helpful. Fr Adolfs makes a striking analogy: 'the Church is in a similar position to the Indians in the United States. Their way of life could not be made to fit into modern American society and they have consequently been put into special reservations where "they cannot do any harm". So it is with the Church. She has become a "religious reservation" with its own pattern of life' (pp. 107-8). We have

come at last to the end of the Constantinian road.

Fr Adolfs, however, is not simply joining in the popular hunt. Most of us have been treated roughly by those who imagined they knew in what precise way we were unlike their orthodox selves, and there is always the temptation to take a swipe back at them. Fr Adolfs has better use for his time. He actually suggests a way through. He takes his starting point at the person of Jesus—where else is there for a Christian to start from?—and the emptying he undertook 'taking the form of a servant' (Philippians 2, 7). The Church cannot be greater than our Master. It is not renewal, *aggiornamento*, that will serve today, but *kenosis*, emptying. Here Fr Adolfs is constructing an argument similar to that of Bishop Robinson in *The New Reformation* (which makes it the more likely that he is in the right) and of the late Bishop Bekkers of 's Hertogenbosch (which makes it almost certain) who wrote of the Philippians passage: 'In Christ's complete emptying of himself—and by this I mean not only his death, but also his, so to speak, keeping low company with man—we must look for the poverty of spirit. And we have to imitate this at our own level by an analogous emptying of ourselves.'

The future, therefore, has a place for the Church, but a Church which looks rather different from the present institution. Fr Adolfs has suggestions for all kinds of changes: a Pope who actually lives in his diocese and has no Nuncios, a plurality of cult, a return to the ruling of 428 when Celestine I censured the Bishop of Arras for introducing a special clerical dress, a married clergy, a welcoming of women to the ministry of baptizing babies and anointing the sick, and many another. Above all he asks for a Church which is structured in terms of persons. Fifty years ago Eugenio Pacelli, as a young canonist, worked for a Code of Canon Law which would be based on the 'right of the person'. He lost to the advocates of territorial placements. We are now caught in the results of his defeat—one wonders why in those centralized times he did not, as Pius XII, repair the folly—and have to work for people within arbitrary geographical limits or else make efforts in factories and schools and clubs and bear the accusation of infringing the 'rights of parish priests'. This is a matter requiring urgent reformation.

There are some who, on seeing the title of this little book, are likely, in accord with their habitual procedures, to dismiss this middle-aged parish priest, teacher and prior as just another of those awful young clerics that some-

one ought to stop. These, doubtless, will complacently return to their digging. Sensible men put their trust in the Resurrection.

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AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, by Peter Brown. *Faber and Faber, London, 1967.* 463 pp. 70s.

St Augustine provokes more violent and contradictory responses today than any other Father of the Church: he assaults our emotions so fiercely that it is hard to write about him without being infected by his passionate committedness. The total impact of his ideas and the way they are presented are so often either overwhelmingly attractive or utterly repulsive that it is remarkable that Mr Brown has been able to write a good biography of the saint which is unpolemical and yet tough. Two things give the book its distinctive flavour: Mr Brown is primarily a historian and his command of the sources both primary and secondary enables him not only to place Augustine illuminatingly within his historical and social context, but also to do justice to his role as an ecclesiastical politician. Secondly, Mr Brown takes as one of his principal themes St Augustine's feelings: his developing and astonishing knowledge of the *psyche*, his own moods and emotionalism and the effect these factors had upon his standpoint as a controversialist. The side of Augustine that Mr Brown emphasises is well illustrated by his citation from *Tract. in Joh.* 26, 4: 'Give me a man in love: he knows what I mean. Give me one who yearns; give me one who is hungry; give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the Spring of the Eternal country. Give me that sort of man: he knows what I mean. But if I speak to a cold man, he just does not know what I am talking about.'

Emphasis on Augustine as theologian of the feelings is not new; but what is, I think, new is the way this biography develops the theme so as to yield a great many important insights. For instance, Augustine is repelled by Pelagius because of his facile psychology: the latter assumes that conversion is both easy and final and that a perfect life is primarily a matter of will-power. Augustine knows that for himself and for most people this is simply not true. Again, what distinguishes the *Confessions* from other ancient conversion narratives, pagan and Christian alike, is not only the concentration on feelings and emotions, but the author's realization in Book X that he is still a spiritual

convalescent, not the cured, the totally changed personality of the conventional ancient stereotype.

Mr Brown's approach has two signal advantages. First of all, it provides a unifying theme which makes his book satisfying at a purely literary level. Secondly, it gets him out of the impasse in which so much writing about Augustine in the past has been stuck. Some scholars (Gilson is a distinguished example), misled perhaps by Augustine's own *Retractions*, have treated him as the builder of an intellectual system, 'Augustinisme', which was completed in all essentials by the time he became Bishop of Hippo and which subsequently underwent no more than modification of emphasis under the pressure of controversy. Even Gerald Bonner's *St Augustine of Hippo*, published in 1963, an excellent book from which the biography under review has profited, is occasionally marred by this static view of its subject, as well as by a slight tendency to do less than justice to Augustine's critics, ancient and modern, and to discount his more disquieting attitudes and opinions. Others, reacting away from the traditional approach, have crudely divided up his life into segments, for instance making him out to be a neo-platonist with a mere veneer of Christianity until about 395, as Alfaro did, or with Allin drawing a sharp distinction between an earlier 'catholic' and a later 'anti-pelagian' illiberal period. Mr Brown's more sophisticated approach saves him from either of these extremes: his admirable fairness and honesty give us a man far removed from the passionless figure of popular hagiography, more formidable than the genial subject of van der Meer's *Augustine the Bishop* and equally removed from the crypto-Manichee of some contemporary intellectual demonology.

The most serious defect is the imbalance inevitable in view of the author's decision to concentrate on Augustine's attitude to feelings and emotions. To assert that 'the life of feeling was what really counted in personal growth' is the underlying theme of the *Confessions*, is eccentric, to say the least. Moreover, important