

Reviews

MARY, MOTHER OF THE LORD, by Karl Rahner; Herder-Nelson, 1958.

Newman once remarked, in connection with certain devotions and their language about Mary, that it would be a strange son who measured his praise of his mother, and a mean spirit to censure such enthusiasm. Fr Rahner has written a series of theological meditations which demonstrate that there can be an exact theology written in joy and love.

He presents us with an understanding of Mary that is immediately relevant to each one of us. Mary shews what God does for each one of us if we let him. All her privileges derive from sources which are the springs of our lives also. Sinless, she yet represents not the wonder of the paradise garden, but 'the perfect victory of the grace of Christ in the weakness of the flesh', the woman who is redeemed. As in his larger theological works Rahner stresses our unity in one flesh with Christ who was born of Mary. The flesh is already saved in a woman 'who has wept, suffered and died like the rest'. Rahner understands a scriptural mariology as one which opens out a theological anthropology enabling us to understand how it is that the praise of man is also the praise of God who has called man to his own life.

Mary is the perfect Christian because she perfectly fulfilled her part in the history of the salvation of men, her actions serving the salvation of others, devoted to all others from the beginning to the end of time. Mary is the perfect Christian because she received God not in abstractions and figures but in his Incarnate Word, in grace and in flesh and blood. She gave herself wholly to God and her actions were wholly within his will. Her perpetual virginity is a sign of the total dedication of her whole being and life to the service of God and the people of God. Her motherhood is a sign of how much God loves men and what glory he has prepared for those who return his love. We too have been made the holy temple of God. In us too he dwells. We too are filled with his light and life. We too have received the free gift of his love.

Mary is a sign of the Church, the community of the redeemed. And the Church is the visible and tangible work of God set among the nations. If the word of the Church proclaiming a holy faith is to be heard by men the Church must be able to point to one at least who has received the full effect of redemption by the grace of God, in whom God has a perfect victory, as a promise to men that 'God does not give the Spirit in measure'. Mary is one of the human race in which each is dependant not only on God but upon all other men in whom and through whom as his co-workers God brings about the realisation of our friendship with him. No doctrine concerning Mary, says Rahner, could have importance and significance for us if it were not the case that 'each of us is responsible for the salvation of his brethren, and can and must intercede for them with prayer and

sacrifice and aid'. Mary is mother of the Lord and our mother. She is not a mediatrix as Christ is mediator, but she is a mediatrix as we are mediators. She belongs to us as we belong to one another. We are to bear one another's burdens in our daily lives as parents and teachers and priests and doctors and members of 'bus queues. It is wonderful to read such May Devotions, to realise Mary's work in the worshipping community and to realise the work of all the baptised, standing together, the holy company of the redeemed, bound together, important for one another, before the eyes of God.

At the end of one of these meditations Rahner prays 'May the blessed Virgin forgive us for having spoken more about man in general than about her alone. She was meant'. In all that he says about Mary we see ourselves transfigured, and in all he says about us we see Mary as our example, the woman who because the Lord is with her prays for us now.

HAMISH SWANSTON

THE COMING OF HIS KINGDOM, by Alois Winklhofer; Herder-Nelson, 30s.

The Egyptians made a covenant with Death, and their memorials shall lie beneath the Aswan waters, and their graves be plundered to satisfy the idle curiosity of visitors to the British Museum. 'I am a God of the living', says the Lord. Our expectation is of an eternal kingdom and our hope is certain. What part, then, has death in our condition? Karl Rahner has presented us with a theology of death, Teilhard de Chardin has urged us to share his vision of the last things, now Fr Winklhofer issues a set of theses, ill-disguised by pious rhetoric and references to second-rate modern novels, as a commentary on the death of the individual and the end of the world. Winklhofer is described in as mendacious a blurb as one might meet in a year's reading as having relied on the insights of Rahner and Teilhard and at the same time placed these insights in the matrix of traditional theology.

In his introduction to the book Fr Matthew O'Connell laments that biblical theologians have lately paid attention to death, the resurrection and the second coming of Christ 'at the expense of the intermediate realities of which Scripture says so little'. Winklhofer, however, remedies this sorry situation. If we are to progress in our understanding of the faith presented in scripture we must of course have a developing dogmatic and speculative theology which is alive to new questions in the Christian community. But the kind of book, of which Winklhofer has produced an example, which regards scripture as a compendium of dogmatic remarks to be adduced when reasoning has had its way, does not seem much to the purpose. Three examples of his characteristic misuse of scriptural revelation may be enough to shew the folly at work in various ways. Winklhofer states without qualification that 'Elias' in Mt. 17. 11 refers to Christ himself: but Mt. 17. 13 is explicitly opposed to this interpretation. He is insensitive to the strangeness of tone in his remark that 'Scripture confirms the pro-