

commitment, not escape. Fr Laplace in his excellent book makes this point from the beginning. He is at pains to stress the 'concern for realism' which true spirituality has. There will be a growing need in the future for such realistic help from spiritual guides as the springs of initiative in Christian living become interiorized, passing from external structures to the individual conscience.

There are two excellent analyses of the spiritual dialogue in Fr Laplace's book, one of its growth from shy and often inhibited beginnings to free and easy mutual trust, the other of the qualities the guide should bring to it. Fr Laplace draws on truths about counselling which are accepted in current social thinking—though he is careful to distinguish his field from others and warns us not to play the psychologist. A good point that emerges from the book is the stress on freedom, not only in the sense that freedom must be the *atmosphere* of spiritual help but also that it is the goal—the director is a liberating agent; he sets free forces which

enable the person to become the man he is meant to be. Freedom is the dynamic of the process, not just its background.

Fr Laplace recognizes the value of group counselling and the 'révision de vie' in the process of Christian growth but rightly says that individual counselling is still necessary. Many will want to see the connection between the two brought out more plainly. The author leaves the impression that the two coexist alongside each other and that he is interested in individual direction only. In some communities, circumstances make it possible for the spiritual guide to encourage the two to interact, so that the group meeting and the individual interview are made to help each other. When this is so, spiritual formation is enhanced and enriched, and it is no longer possible to speak only of individual direction.

There is a welcome note of concerned but dispassionate tranquillity throughout the book, which shows that Fr Laplace has well learnt the lessons he is teaching. JOHN DALRYMPLE

**THE DIARY OF A RUSSIAN PRIEST**, by Alexander Elchaninov. Translated by Helen Iswolsky. *Faber & Faber, London, 1967. 255 pp. 45s.*

The last few years have seen the publication of numerous volumes that make available to the Western reader some riches from the treasury of Russian spirituality. These volumes have proved a real source of inspiration and new life to the Western reader through their capacity for setting him in a mystical world without any of that contrived and tortured effort that seems inseparable from mystical vision in the tradition of the Latin church. It must also be conceded that this availability of a rather exotic tradition has in some cases led to an unhealthy *Schwärmerei* on the part of certain westerners—as if everything coming out of the Russian church were worthy of veneration and preservation even when it smacks of superstition and obscurantism. It is not a beard and a pair of piercing eyes that make the *starets*—for, as Fr Elchaninov says in this book (p. 206)—'I do not feel called to the role of a *starets* and I recognize my profound unworthiness to be such. In general *starchestvo* and "obedience" imply too great a responsibility and are far too difficult for both parties, to be undertaken on an impulse.'

Nevertheless it is clear both from Professor Obolensky's foreword, and from the introduction by Father Elchaninov's widow, that Fr Elchaninov possessed rare gifts as a

spiritual director. So it was perhaps natural that these fragments from his diary should be published along with various smaller pieces such as extracts from his letters to young people, especially those to young priests, as well as *A Talk before Confession* and *A Retreat in a Monastery*. These writings have been available in Russian for over thirty years and some of them were published in English by Fedotov in 1950, but the present book is the first full English version.

Perhaps the editors might have taken more to heart St Seraphim's saying, 'No one has ever yet repented of silence', because it is not always easy to see from the extracts published here why Fr Elchaninov was such an outstanding spiritual director. Certainly there are many penetrating and helpful observations to be found in these writings, but there is also a number that strike strained and jarring notes (notes that would doubtless have sounded quite harmonious when heard face to face from the lips of a revered priest). And one feels that many talented and devout Christians must keep diaries which display very much the same insights and blind spots as do Fr Elchaninov's. This feeling is strengthened when one comes across quotations from the great in the diary which by contrast make the diarist's own

entries seem as laboured as other minor mortals': when, for instance, he quotes St Seraphim's saying: 'My joy, acquire a peaceful spirit, and thousands of people will find salvation near you.' At the same time it is also true that he really does know how to derive inspiration from these great teachers, as

when he remarks: 'Participation in culture is, from one point of view, a compromise so far as the spiritual life is concerned. Is not the method of deifying the world from within—the way which St Seraphim followed—a more sure course? Then everything else is transfigured as well.'

DONALD NICHOLL

**COMPLETE COURSE OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**, by Derek Lance. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1967. 12s. 6d.

Derek Lance has provided an admirable structure for the formal aspects of religious teaching in school, based on wide reading, experience in the classroom and reflexion. As such it would appear to be more readily assimilated into the context of a Grammar School curriculum but of great value to all teachers and students at Training College.

No one should use it without a thorough reading of the Introduction. In the latter there is a section of revolutionary import—'The Pupils'. At last someone focuses our attention on the subjects to whom we address our improved catechetics. As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the levite have tended to pass by, immersed in their discussion of content—albeit 'Christ-centred'! The real needs of the children as human beings, living in a particular situation, have been largely disregarded. And these needs cannot be discovered by a syllabus of religious instruction and cannot be met by generalized discussions on method. Many of them are suffering from wounds of various sorts: emotional, social and cultural. Until we begin to take the words of the Gospel seriously—'In so far as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me'—no pedagogical expertise will meet the real problem.

Alienation can express itself in various forms—for instance, either by an intense sectarian religious activity or by indifference and apathy. The fact remains that alienation in any form has a religious significance. The human order as such is a religious order. God did create the world and man, and created man in his own image. We know from experience that this image in us and in the world is radically awry. But we believe in the possibility of renewal in the death and resurrection of Christ, which embraced not only mankind but the whole of creation.

If this be true, a radical calling in question of assumptions underlying the zest for new systems of religious instruction would seem to

be needed—a new focus and order of priorities.

If you believe that God created man in his image, that he has entered into the history of the world in the person of Christ, that the work of Christ in men and in the world must be continued through his followers, then surely the whole life and activities that constitute a school have a religious import because they subserve the restoration of God's image in man and the achievement of the Kingdom of God in the world. The full human development of each human person becomes an imperative implication of belief in a God of love. The work of transformation is indeed the work of the Spirit but the Spirit works in and through the human order. Indeed our awareness of the true dimensions of the latter is itself due to the promptings of the Spirit. (Since writing the above, I have browsed through Gabriel Moran's *God Still Speaks*, where the points I have touched on are admirably developed.)

In this perspective too, the contemporary debate on the need of a common culture and the fight for the Comprehensive school have a religious import. Either we believe in building up brotherhood among men or we acquiesce in the very real forms of social and educational apartheid. In acquiescing in the latter we would seem to repudiate the claims of Christ in advance: 'In so far as you have done it unto the least of these my brothers, you have done it unto me.' This would seem to be the crucial test of a Christian, of a religious school. The lilies of progressive catechetics will hardly serve to meet that challenge. We need rather a change of heart, of perspective and of priorities.

For these reasons we should not dissipate our energies on the question of abolishing Catholic schools, but rather seek to ensure that Catholic schools are indeed 'catholic', which is not the case at the moment. Catholic schools are sectarian, doctrinaire and motivated by the individualism ('saving my soul' in the 'religious' order) and cupidity (the material gains I can acquire by exams) of the present educational