

## REVIEWS

CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD, by Jacques Leclercq, translated by Kathleen Pond; Geoffrey Chapman; 12s. 6d.

WORLD CATHOLICISM TODAY, by Joseph Folliet, translated by Edmond Bonin; Newman Press; \$3.25.

Let it be said at once that Canon Leclercq has written a masterly and stimulating little book about laymen as they should be; and incidentally, it might be added, about priests as they should be as instructors of laymen. The author is one of a distinguished group of Louvain professors, and has managed to write one of the most profound popular books I have ever come across. Fundamentally the schemata are no doubt quite simple: the priest should form the layman, the layman should transform the world. In his spiritual function as mediator to men of God's grace the priest *par excellence* exemplifies the primacy of the spiritual in valid distinction from the temporal; the layman then goes on to make the principle of the Incarnation his own by Christian love leavening the temporal order to which he is by a real vocation committed. In practice no one will deny there are snags by the score.

But because at long last we are coming to recognize the proper roles of priesthood and the lay state *within* the Church (two *ecclesiastical* functions, one theologian has called them) Canon Leclercq makes bold to say that only now are we approaching maturity in Christianity. No longer in theology is the Church to all intents and purposes identified with the ordained and the vowed, the priests and religious producing the goods for the layman to consume while he meekly fulfils his duties in life like any other good citizen: 'What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain. These are matters they understand . . .' (from a letter sent by Mgr George Talbot to Archbishop Manning in 1867. Mgr Talbot lived habitually in Rome). Nowadays the layman as perhaps never before is called on to take the temporal order seriously. The world which is a stranger to Christ desperately needs him in its midst, as it needs the priest and religious to be fervently faithful to their own calling which demands of its nature to be somewhat apart. No longer need the layman seeking to devote his life to God necessarily feel obliged to direct his steps to the cloister: there is an arena in the world ready-made for heroic virtue, and Canon Leclercq looks forward to a new type of sanctity developed in saints at the coal-face and the bank counter. In the love of neighbour which is how the Christian expresses the social dimension of his morality he must not be content with individual acts of charity: lay people must use their talents to the full to influence the organization and institutions of their society, as likely as not an established *disorder*, as the author aptly terms it, and only if their commitment to the secular order is without false reserve will their charity be effective. The Catholic layman must not be encouraged to look to those officially Catholic countries which, while proud of displaying their allegiance, give irrefutable evidence of backwardness and oppressive injustice: no one derives from them

the notion that the true faith is a source of human progress.

It all begins within the Church, and that is where it should end. The layman must regard the society he is hoping to form as a support for the spiritual order, to realize the conditions for his fellow-men most perfectly to offer themselves to God, to find in the faith the superabundant fulfilment of their highest aspirations. A renewed activity must find its support and its term in contemplation. Canon Leclercq is not afraid of hitting hard in order to impress on us that we have as yet a long way to go: 'One of the signs of religious decadence is that a non-believer entering a Catholic church during a Sunday Mass will not perceive that he is in the midst of a community at prayer'.

There is little we need say about *World Catholicism Today*. It consists of superficial statistics, six chapters making rapid estimations in various fields; whereas all that is worthwhile in sociological appraisal is detail which will show light and shade, and that can only be had by more painstaking soundings than those Dr Folliet has made. Nevertheless for the really uninformed there is quite a lot of information.

The translators of both books are to be commended.

THEODORE TAYLOR, O.P.

RETURN TO BELIEF, by Yvonne Lubbock; Collins; 21s.

*Return to Belief* is the record of the author's search for 'some meaning and purpose in life'. Brought up a nominal Christian, she was for many years so much occupied with her profession that she did not choose to look beyond it, but in middle life she came to see that the nominal agnosticism of many of her friends was merely a cloak for indifference. Deeply 'absorbed in their snug pursuits' they found it convenient to take the fashionable line that asking whether life had meaning was itself a meaningless question. But she 'had seen the grinning skull' and was not content. Mindful also of two theophanies experienced in childhood, she set off alone to enquire of the great philosophies and the world religions (including Christianity) the truth about God and immortality. Her search was to take twenty years, and was to lead her to the Church.

Her description of how she discovered Plato is impressive, for there are advantages in coming to philosophy mature yet untaught, but in general her early steps seem rather slow and uncertain. It is only as she went on to study more recent philosophies that she was able to formulate with increasing discrimination the questions she wished to ask, and as she tackles in turn Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel and Kierkegaard her writing gathers momentum. In a sense the culmination of the book comes half way through, when she recognizes the choice that Kierkegaard put before her.

If one looks to find a conventional happy ending the book will disappoint. Her last chapter 'The Church' contains a most salutary reminder that the image