

by Agnes Yendell

'The Church in Mission' is a collection of papers by various authors, mostly translated from the French, which have been published in recent years.¹ There are eleven; and nine would have been enough. After an excellent introduction from *Information Catholique* we are given two papers on missionary theology which make weary reading. Presumably it is a prudent convention, before launching into any subject, to survey what has already been done, but in the field of theology this can be tedious, and the reader begins to wonder whether the Church is well served by writings which wrap up a few simple ideas in many yards of abstractions. In these sixty two pages we learn that whereas at one time the primary aim of the missions was said to be to plant the Church in pagan lands, which took precedence over the aim to save souls, more recent thought has reached the conclusion that the first cannot be done without the second. There is an interior as well as an exterior Church, a *res* of which the visible Church is the sacrament. That the theologian is not redundant when dealing with living issues can be appreciated in the articles by P. A. Liégé, who writes realistically and economically on 'The Theology of the Church and the Mission Pastoral' 'Religious Liberty' and 'Before the Catechuminate'. His third paper contains this important paragraph:

'By failing to respect (the pre-catechuminate) one fills up the Church with nonconverts who have a contagious effect on the others: one turns the Church into an institution of this world, similar to others, instead of the sign of the Spirit raised up above the nations.'

There is a practical instruction on the three stages of the catechuminate by Francois Coudreaux, which reads as from experience, and an excellent article by Bernard Botte on 'The Problem of Adaptation in the Liturgy'. As we try to adapt the Church's Liturgy to the new nations we must remember that it is rooted in the Scriptures and Hebraic tradition, and that the Graeco Roman world of the early Church had to absorb this religious culture, which was not their own.

At the beginning of this book there are some useful statistics. In countries where the principle religion was animism (the Phillipines and different parts of Africa and Central America) the proportion of Catholics is now 30 per cent of the population. In countries of

¹*The Church in Mission* ed. Robert E. Cambell, M.M. Maryknoll publ. \$5-95.

Chinese religions, such as Confucianism, the proportion is 4 per cent. In Buddhist countries (Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia) 1.8 per cent. In Japan (Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism) 0.3 per cent. In India 1.32 per cent. In Moslem countries 1.03 per cent. Christ in his Church has made little impact on Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.

It can be assumed that Christianity has had an influence greater than these numbers suggest, perhaps owing to colonialism and humanitarian institutions. But colonialism has gone for good, and of the baptised Christians who remain how many are nominal? By this word we mean not only those who do not practise their religion, but also those whose understanding of it is so superficial as not to be a power in their lives.

Father Hillman's study of mission theology² carries weight in coming from a worker in the field. He was the first priest sent to evangelise the nomadic Mazai in northern Tanzania, and in his introduction he acknowledges his debt to a warrior of that tribe, who led him into 'another world of cultural and spiritual values, including primordial monotheism,' as well as to Karl Rahner, who contributes a sympathetic foreword to the book.

Fr. Hillman is not alone among missionaries in seeing some danger in the ambiguous way in which a new sense of the word 'mission' has worked its way into the Church. So conscious have we been in Europe of the encroaching paganism in our own once Christian civilisation, that the word 'mission' has been freely applied to our pastoral duty in order to stir up the right kind of zeal. But Fr. Hillman and others distinguish sharply between reclaiming the lost sheep and preaching the gospel where it has never been heard. In 'Fidei Dominum' (to which it seems that many of the faithful have turned deaf ears, especially with regard to the redistribution of priests) Pope Pius XII insisted that the responsibility of each bishop for the Church's missions abroad is of equal weight with his pastoral duty to his own flock, and Fr. Hillman's view is that any church which shows no missionary impulse is in danger of stagnation through turning in upon itself.

The author's emphasis is throughout eschatological. 'The Gospel must *first* be preached for a witness among the nations, and *then* shall the end come; and *then* shall the Lord return.' He even asks whether the Church may cease to exist visibly among some of her older peoples. 'From the missionary viewpoint, the present problems of some of the first to have been evangelised cannot be given priority over the last who have not yet been evangelised once.' He stresses the presence of the visible Church as a sacramental sign among the nations. Her fulfilment is not measured by the numbers of Christians in the world versus the number of non-Christians, for only a few are chosen to stand for all among their own people. Nor is it an ever-

²*The Church as Mission* Eugene Hillman, CSSp. *Sheed and Ward* 9/6.

lasting kingdom anywhere on the earth, as its precarious historical existence has already shown. The goal of the missionary should therefore be symbolic rather than quantitative. It is to plant the Church where it has not been before, and Fr. Hillman would define 'where' in terms of distinctive ethnic-culture units, the 'peoples' of the social sciences, described in Scripture as 'every tribe and tongue and people and nation' who make up the unity of mankind.

'The only authentic reunion of mankind is that which God initiates and accomplishes in the hearts of men through Christ, Who brings it to visibly signified completion in His Church as she progressively, if sometimes sluggishly, becomes in historical extension what she is: the sacramental *Lumen Gentium*.'

Fr Hillman's chapter on 'Salvation' could well be read by any Catholic interested in the subject of salvation outside the Church. The author begins by the relevant quotation from Dante's *Paradiso*: 'A man is born on the shores of the River Indus, and there is no one there to tell him of Christ. . . . All his desires and deeds are good, so far as human reason sees, sinless in life or speech. He dies unbaptised and without faith; where is that justice which condemns him?'

The answer to this is to enlarge our understanding of the saving act of Christ, which though it took place in time and space was for all men everywhere, and in all time. This doctrine of salvation is elaborated with knowledge and ample reference to the doctors of the Church, both ancient and modern. With the sense of the universal salvific action of God there is at the same time an urgency that the visible Church should become established everywhere, 'for then will the Lord come.'

It is clear that these ideas are not aimed against the more usual missionary zeal for saving souls, but are concerned rather with the right framework for it. Fr Hillman's thesis is a refreshing re-examination of Our Lord's command to teach all nations. It does not alter the command.

With Fr van Straelen's book we meet the nub of the problem for most thinking people.³ This is a beautifully produced book, modestly priced for its contents, and very readable. The author, a Dutch missionary priest who has been in Japan since 1935, was appointed professor of Modern Philosophy and Comparative Religion at Nanzan University, Nagoya in 1950, and was also a *peritus* at the Vatican Council, appointed by Pope Paul. On the back cover we find a quotation from Bishop Charles Heerey of Nigeria, 'The confusion found in many texts on mission theology is the basic reason for the drop in missionary vocations today'. For Fr van Straelen has an axe to grind. We can say at once that if this particular axe had to be ground no one could have done it more competently.

He is appalled by the utterances of 'armchair theologians', of whom Karl Rahner seems to be the chief, and would have them all

³*The Catholic Encounter with World Religions* H. van Straelen, S.V.D. *Burns & Oates* 16/—.

come and work in a mission land for at least ten years before they make rash statements such as confuse the missionaries, and also the possible recruits to a missionary vocation. The book is full of a wide scholarship and experience and contains interesting quotations from various distinguished authors. In the first chapter the author shows the great difficulties of a fruitful dialogue with the Hindu or the Buddhist. He finds no deep points of contact, and describes the baffling obstacle created by the syncretism which is common to both religions, and on which there is no doubt that they pride themselves (contrasting it perhaps with Western prejudice and domination, though Fr van Straelen does not say this). The author goes on to point out the limits of 'accommodation' in presenting the Christian religion. His own experience was to make every effort towards cultural adaptation during the first ten years of his missionary life, only to find in the end that these things were not wanted. Throughout this book the author maintains the uniqueness of the Christian religion and the new life which the Catholic convert leads, though he accepts the modern view that nothing should be done to destroy the good in the convert's former life and culture. He seems to think that his adversaries in armchairs do not accept this position. He has come across the idea that all the Christian has to do is to help Hindus to be better Hindus, Buddhists better Buddhists, and Moslems better Moslems, and will of course have none of it. There is therefore in his third chapter 'Christianity is not a Mere Fulfilment' an excellent study of the Christian as always to some extent a stranger in the world, cut off from his former way of living, and subject very likely to the dislike of his former associates on account of his new ethic.

After this the author sets out to demolish the ideas of Karl Rahner, particularly his notion of 'anonymous Christians', who, in Rahner's view, are to be found in all the religions of the world, and even among agnostics and atheists, and whom God saves without our knowledge. The author also deals with H. R. Schlette, who goes further in regarding pagan religions as ways of salvation. There is much that is useful in this chapter, if it is taken as a check on extreme conclusions. Fr van Straelen's impression of the East is that there is 'a twilight at the present time in the great non-Christian religions, notwithstanding temporal uprisings of reactionary movements which will continue for a certain space of time'. Indian universities study mostly Western philosophy, which more and more underlies social, political and spiritual life. In Japan students and teachers desire to see, experience and learn from the dynamic West, and there Buddhism is said to be no longer alive. Even Islam is being left behind by the more emancipated Moslems. He quotes Christopher Dawson: 'Wherever the new forces develop freely and in proportion as the peoples of Asia and Africa take their equal share in the cosmopolitan civilisation of the modern world, there will be a new

religious need, which will not be satisfied by the traditional answers of the old religious cultures.' There is also an impressive quotation from Fr Danielou's book *The Salvation of the Nations* which shows how there is in every other religion a Satanic force which separates it from Christianity, and with which the Christian missionary is in spiritual conflict.

This book is convincing and evokes the reader's sympathy. Nothing we think or say now should cause us to forget the heroic and often saintly labours of many devoted missionaries past and present. But the ways of Christians in mission countries have not all been good, as we know. One might think from this book that they had. In fact its weakness is its axe-grinding, which is bound to be one-sided. People are seen in the religious blocs to which they nominally belong, rather than as the one body of mankind in Christ. The author's arguments from practical experience must have value, but is it not possible that Rahner from his armchair can see the wood of which these trees are only a part? We cannot afford to be complacent about the missions. We do need a new approach at the end of this post-Constantine era; and although such a viewpoint as Fr van Straelen's can provide the conserving salt for the new mixture, taken by itself it is backward looking and monolithic. This in spite of a clear devotion to the work of the Council and the aims of Pope Paul. A man can pray with the Pope Paul for 'a new spark of divine charity, a spark which . . . may really produce in the Church and in the world that renewal of thought, activities, conduct, hope and joy which was the very scope of the Council' and yet not be aware of the new lights which are coming into the thinking of the Church on this subject: the oneness of mankind, in whom Christ is waiting to be made known, the contribution to the fullness of Christianity which Eastern spirituality could make, and the universal salvific action of the Holy Spirit present everywhere. Here and there we are given glimpses of the author's outlook, for instance the complacency with which he announces the acceptance of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible for Catholics and Protestants, without any sense of this step being scandalously overdue; a long footnote in praise of the Curia; another, equally irrelevant, on Karl Rahner's observations on obedience (one can sympathise with his complaint against long sentences, but not with his view that obedience is a 'perfectly simple' matter); and at one point there is the gratuitous announcement that England is a very under-populated country. But the following paragraph reveals the level of judgement which largely permeates the book. The author is speaking of the impact of Eastern religions on the West: 'Those intellectuals who come to us' (in Japan) 'constitute an élité in every sense of the word, whereas those Westerners who fall for *Zen* or *Yoga* are often cranks, emotionally disturbed people, or unbalanced artists, who look for the exotic and for a temporary

change, and who never continue lifelong their allegiance or their admiration for those religions'.

There may be some truth in this, though it is a rash generalisation, and it also betrays a preference for intellectual values which is one of the maladies of the Christian West. But, as a judgement, the error of the half-truth is serious because it is humanly superficial. It is on the same level as the observation accusing the Indian of spiritual pride and of 'being in love with his own idea of God'. (We have only to put our ears to the ground and hear what the Indian says about the 'Christian' obstacles to holiness!) We can imagine the Galatians getting keen on Zen (or Yoga or anthroposophy) and being rebuked by St Paul, but only in terms which would enable them to find in Christ what they had been seeking in these cults. They are cults rather than religions, and much of their wisdom could well be incorporated into Christianity. Later in the same paragraph the reason given for deviations from the Church is that 'they want to get away from Catholicism's severe demands'. But this is too easy. The Cross can only be embraced by those who are able, potentially, to relate the whole of their natures to it. The failure to achieve the necessary connection between nature and grace may equally be due to a superficial presentation of Christianity (which would mean very little to an artistic or mystical nature) or to a lack of openness about the problems that arise in peoples' lives.

This author follows Ricciotti in regarding St Paul's sermon at Athens as an example of unsuccessful 'accommodation'; he would have done better to 'preach Christ crucified'. But would St Luke have reported this sermon so carefully if it was merely a cautionary tale? In fact it did bear some fruit in conversions, and for us it is one of the numerous examples of the cosmic sweep of St Paul's Christianity. We do not know, unfortunately, how St Paul would have confronted the great Eastern religions. But we can rely, not on the letter of his example in a different situation, but on the Holy Spirit which inspired him. There's not much about the Holy Spirit in this book. What there is seems to inspire the hierarchy and stop there. The rest is 'perfectly simple'.

To pass from Fr van Straelen to Fr Jarrett-Kerr⁴ is to step from the aula of St Peter's to the back streets of, say, Buenos Aires. Remembering Fr Danielou's diagnosis of Satanic influences in non-Christian religions one is bound to ask 'And has Satan left the Catholic Church alone?' Catholics know that there is an imperishable perfection in the heart of the Church such as cannot be found elsewhere, but no one else knows this unless they meet it. And since the authority which goes with it is founded on a mystery, the *claim* to authority can very easily be seen by non-Catholics as assertiveness and domination. Moreover it has often actually been this in the hands of a secular power which is nominally Christian. Fr Jarrett-Kerr tells us that he

⁴*Christ and the New Nations* Martin Jarrett-Kerr C.R. S.P.C.K. 6/6.

has attempted to provide a new outlook, 'the ability to see God's world, and God himself, through non-Western eyes; the imagination to feel with the outstretched hands of the recipients what the gifts we give them really weigh'.

He succeeds in this admirably, as far as we can tell. No one can read this book and remain complacent about the past. If the work of the men of God was often undone by the lust for power and conquest of their compatriots, so that the people of the country were unable to distinguish between the two kinds of 'Christians', there is also evidence of the missionaries themselves making use of violence and injustice to an extent which may be a revelation to Christians of today. Some of it was a long time ago, but this author shows that it is not forgotten, and that its milder forms have survived into the present century. The book should be read for its facts, and for its social orientation, as well as for its ultimately hopeful outlook, 'For if Christ truly became man, then the Third World (Africa, Asia and S. America) is required to complete his humanity – to reveal that it was a total incarnation'.

The addresses collected by Christopher Derrick were given at a Convention of the Catholic Art Association of America.⁵ The book is expensive but there can be no doubt about the value of its contents. There are papers on Latin America, China, Israel, and American Indian culture, but those which bear particularly on the subject of this article are the ones by Paul Crane S.J., Dom Bede Griffiths and Dom Damasus Winzen. Fr Paul Crane faces the realities in the new Africa and calls for a dedicated and informed leadership from the Christian laity. 'It is difficult' he says 'to convey adequately in words the strength of young Africa's present desire to achieve modernity at all costs. . . . From the cultural point of view, the Church in Africa is dealing with a dynamic as distinct from a static society.' The Church's major task 'is one of influencing the rapidly evolving societies of African states in such a way that they come to rest on the only durable foundation there is, that of respect for human dignity.' The author complains that many of the Christian communities he met in Africa struck him as not having a real community life, but of being only 'collections of the baptised', and of not making a mark in the larger society. 'African Catholicism is an inward-looking thing.' But he ends on a note of hope with regard to the young African students with whom he has been in close touch in this country. Here, he hopes and believes, are the potential leaders.

The paper by Dom Bede Griffiths on 'The Meeting of East and West' gives the most profound and also the most hopeful approach to the East that we have met so far. Unlike Fr van Straelen the author seems to have penetrated into the Hindu Scriptures and found much gold, even though he detects the same differences from Christianity. To Fr Bede they are not insuperable, possibly because, living as he

⁵*Light of Revelation and Non-Christians* ed. Christopher Derrick Herder Book Co. Ltd. 32/–.

does under the severe discipline of a Hindu ascetic, he is able to be aware of the interior life of the Hindu, and knows that in his search for the perfection of holiness he is seeking Christ. Fr Bede recognises that holiness does exist already in the real Hindu mystic. There are plenty of fakes, but, as Pope Paul said on his return from India, quoting St Augustine 'One must not doubt that the Gentiles also have their prophets.'

Both the Benedictines plead for depth. 'If we could enter into the symbolism of the Mass' writes Dom Bede 'we should understand how Christ is present in the whole order of nature, drawing the universe into himself, "filling all things with his presence", as St Paul says'. After tracing the movement of the Church which is visible in history, he adds 'But there is also a hidden movement of the Church; this takes place in the hearts of men from the beginning, drawing men to Christ without their knowing it, in Hinduism, in Buddhism, in Islam, even in agnosticism and unbelief'. (Here again are Rahner's 'anonymous Christians'). Dom Bede calls us to co-operate with this mystery of grace, the full significance of which will only be revealed at the last day. If we do so 'we shall often find that we have more to learn than to teach, and that Christ has gone before us in the hearts of our brothers in religion.'

Dom Damasus cites Pope John as a living example of the simplicity and depth that we need. He says the condition of extension must always be interiority. 'We must enter into our own depths in order to be able to expand in the wide world, to meet and to share.' This is 'something very different from the middle sphere, the world of compromise and opportunism and action, the sphere – not wholly deep, not wholly superficial – where cultures and civilisations rise to their fullness. In that sphere the busy clever people can act; but it cannot last, it comes to nothing.' He says there is a growing realisation that the West has turned away from its own inwardness and depth, and is trying to purge its guilt by offering material play-things to the people it has betrayed. And so the old pattern, often recorded in Scripture, is repeated. Man increases and multiplies and loses his depth and inwardness. To him the whole message of the Old Testament amounts to a warning against this 'middle sphere', and its works are well described by Jeremias (Ch. 10): 'Every man has become a fool without knowledge, every artist is confounded of his graven idols: for what he hath cast is false, and there is no spirit in them. They are vain things and they are a ridiculous work: and in the time of their visitation they shall perish.'

But if we avoid the 'middle sphere' with its 'ridiculous works' it is possible to live in the realisation of the beginning and end of all things. 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth' and in the end 'all things will be re-established in Christ.'