

**THE LIVING CHRIST: 'IN CHRIST' THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND LITURGY** by J.D. Crichton. *Collins*. 1988. £2.50. Pp. 113.

This is that rare thing—a book based on years of detailed and rich theological scholarship that is also short, unpretentious and inexpensive. In eleven short chapters Crichton reflects on the theme of what it means to live 'in Christ'. Each chapter takes an aspect of Christ's life from birth to Pentecost, and there are chapters on the prayer and the healing work of Jesus. The reflections draw on Old and New Testament writings, on the liturgy, on the life of the Early Church, and on the writings of the Fathers. The theme has been in Fr. Crichton's mind throughout years of study and writing, and here he has gathered together the insights, discoveries, and understandings that have come to him while he has been working on other projects. Like a distillation it is concise and powerful. In the preface he points to Aquinas as his original inspiration. 'For me it was a section of part III of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologica, De Vita Christi*, which sums up so much of the patristic tradition, that years ago prompted me to look into the matter further. It showed me that certain great events of Christ's life, his baptism, his temptation, his transfiguration, his prayer and the rest were not just events that concerned him but that in them is a vital force that comes to us through the Church, through the liturgy, and through our private prayer. As St. Leo said, the events were not just 'examples' but sources of life that are still available to us. When they are celebrated as liturgical feasts that life is being communicated to us if we will approach Christ with open hearts in faith and love.' (p.viii–ix)

I would gladly subscribe to a fund to send a copy of this book to all clergy. I'd like to think there would be fewer sermons gloomily deploring the decay of family life or the decline in church attendance; that we would less often leave church with a burden of anxiety and guilt, but rather would be encouraged and attracted by the hope and joy and love that is the gospel message. We find in this book an example of the humanity that characterizes all that is best in modern Catholic thought. The emphasis is not on scrupulous anxiety with its attendant fear of failure, but starts from a recognition of failure and stresses our dependence on grace to enable us to respond to our calling to share in the joy of the Trinity. However difficult everything seems, however blind, dull, bored, or confused we may feel, yet the seed of eternal life has been implanted in us. It is the energizing of the Risen Christ who has already initiated the process whereby we can enter into the glory of the children of God.

As Fr. Crichton says in the preface, his intention is to go deeper beyond superficial externalist interpretations of 'the imitation of Christ', and to concentrate on our inner knowledge that Christ lives in us and that we live in Him. But in doing this he has risked losing sight of the external dimension of life in Christ. For each of us, to respond to Christ means something particular. Indeed it means many particular thoughts, feelings, and actions, and no aspect our life is unaffected. I assume that Fr. Crichton takes this for granted, but it would have helped if he had given us an idea of how he personally sees the relationship between inner knowledge and the rest of one's life. He does not do this and his writing includes no illustrations from contemporary life nor the personal comments which would give one a sense of his presence. He is such a self-effacing writer that he feels somehow invisible.

This book is not difficult to read, but it is, and should be, a demanding book. We need to take these rich and many-layered meditations and to use them as raw materials for our own critical and creative thought. Only we ourselves can learn to see our own lives in their light, and to make the connection between these truths and the immorality of our present political climate. But I wish that the demands made on us had been spelt out more clearly. Growing in awareness of Christ living in ourselves and in our communal life has to lead to discovering the truth about ourselves and about our society. Meditating on the Scriptures and on Christ's life is half of the work—and Crichton's book is invaluable for this—but if we do not struggle to free ourselves from blindness and fantasies about who we are and the world we live in, then we are using the Scriptures and the liturgy as an escape to comfort us in our delusions.

MARY NEAVE  
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