

REVIEWS

CATHOLIC THOUGHT AND ACTION

THE CATHOLIC CENTRE. By E. I. Watkin. (Sheed and Ward; 7s. 6d.)

Everything that Mr. Watkin writes is interesting and worth reading. This book far from being an exception will probably find a wider public than any of his previous works. Around the one central theme that Catholicism ideally contains all that is true, good and beautiful, he weaves a great number of controversial subjects as illustrations, all of them of vital interest for any thoughtful Christian. No one will agree with all his criticisms of the actual Catholic doctrine and practice in their failure to express the complete perfection of the ideal centre, nor with his equally outspoken attacks on the two opposing extremes that lie on either side of the centre. But his words are not written lightly and they provide stimulating shocks for the minds of all those interested in Catholic truth.

Mr. Watkin insists that all the thought and practice separated from the Catholic centre contain 'germs of truth which are to be found in the ideal centre, but which are often undeveloped in practice, largely owing to the Catholic opposition to those other forms. The moral is that these scraps of truth should be allowed to develop within the Church and that converts should be allowed to bring with them the morsel of sound principle upon which they had been reared. The realization of a popular liturgy in the Anglican Church should not be stifled in Anglican converts to the Catholic Church. This theme is set forth in the first essay under the title of 'The Liturgy, the Expression of the Catholic Centre,' and the reader will be excused if he thinks he recognizes in it a suggestion of that eclecticism which has marked some of the author's other writings. The familiar development of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, which is here traced round the Catholic centre, suggests the piecing together of facets of truth in a subjectively satisfying pattern, which the individual might call *his* Catholic centre. Why, for instance, should not the convert from 'chapel' bring with him into the

Church his contribution of vociferous vernacular hymn-singing? One is tempted to think that it is because the author cannot fit it into his pattern and so excludes it from *his* Catholic centre. The reader is, however, reassured by a subsequent essay, in which Mr. Watkin emphasizes the objective and organic nature of Catholic truth and the necessity for understanding it from within. We must lay hold of the unique source and principle of that truth in order to see it as a whole, as a vital unity. We are urged to leave the surface of Catholic doctrines and devotions which seem there to be a mass of unrelated truths and practices; we must leave the external multiplicity for the internal unity. 'Because creatures are limited, many creatures are required, as St. Thomas points out, to reflect and express as far as possible the infinite riches of the One Who is the Whole, containing and uniting in Himself the manifold of creatures. The many truths of faith are seen from within as parts of one body of truth, revelations of *one truth*' (p. 56). This approach cannot be too often underlined in these days when the constant growth of the Church's doctrine and practice has led to a multiplicity apt to be confusing without the key of a true Catholic synthesis. And Mr. Watkin does not leave the principle in the abstract, but applies it with effect to the question of modern Catholic education.

This conspectus of a vast number of different facets of truth to be found in complete reality only in the Catholic centre is brought to a masterly conclusion in the final essay on Adoration. Adoration, the essential attitude of the creature to its Creator, expresses the whole synthesis because it is wholly occupied with the One. Yet when we come to examine the scheme in detail we are forced to the conclusion that the author himself at times fails to reach the centre and is distracted by the multiplicity on the surface. Without going into his personal philosophy, which is beyond the scope of this review, we may take as an example his view of the liturgy, as that expresses the synthesis of truths whether philosophical or theological. We ought to find the centre of liturgical practice ultimately in the sacrifice of Calvary, for the Mass is the reproduction of that sacrifice, so that all may take their part in it. Not so for Mr. Watkin, who seems to be distracted by the forty days of Paschal time as contrasted with the fortnight of Passiontide (omitting

to mention the seventy days of Septuagesimal penance). For him the centre of the liturgy is the Resurrection. For him the liturgy takes the sting out of the Cross; it concentrates on glory rather than suffering, on health rather than sickness. Those who have found the centre of their lives here on earth in a joint suffering with Christ on the Cross as expressed in the supreme oblation of Calvary and the Mass will be bewildered unless they realize that the centre he happens to be describing is not of this life, but of the next, where the liturgy will have given place to a unique act of adoration. Such blemishes, however, do not detract from the importance and interest of the book, which should be read by every thoughtful Catholic.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

THE MASS AND THE LIFE OF PRAYER. By Anthony Thorold. (Sheed and Ward; 3s. 6d.)

THE SPLENDOUR OF THE LITURGY. By Maurice Zundel. (Sheed and Ward; 7s. 6d.)

Sheed & Ward are to be congratulated on providing the liturgical movement with two such fundamental works on the spirit of the Mass. Not only liturgical enthusiasts, but also those who distrust the emphasis on externals in the movement, should read these books, for between them they penetrate to the depths of the mystery that constitutes the central act of the liturgy. At the same time they are designed to give practical help in praying the Mass. Fr. Thorold's little book should be read first, as he intentionally avoids the different views of theologians in order to teach the ordinary Catholic what the Mass is for him and what it demands of him. The act of offering lies at the heart of the whole liturgy, and every Catholic shares in the priesthood of Christ that he may offer those gifts of food and drink that become the Victim of Calvary. The Mass, therefore, is a time for actively offering the sacrifice in its social context rather than for private and individualistic adoration. Fr. Thorold has some excellent things to say about praying the Mass as a preparation for Communion. Perhaps we ought to feel it presumption to communicate outside Mass without necessity, for we thus dispense with the basic preparation instituted by Christ Himself when he gave us our spiritual food in the framework of a sacrificial banquet. Again the author's remarks about the