

convent's most serious rival previously. Developments (or lack of them) at Durham followed much the same pattern as those at other wealthy Benedictine houses in England. Dobson brings out some interesting shades of difference. The prior of St Cuthbert's kept in closer touch with his spiritual sons and was less of an autocrat than heads of houses elsewhere. John Wessington, prior 1416-1446, was an able, amiable character, whose long tenure of office justified his unanimous election in chapter.

The most distinctive trait of St Cuthbert's was its close link with Oxford University through its cell, Durham College. This was founded and endowed as a house of study where a significant proportion of monks could follow courses in theology and proceed to degrees in some cases. Secular clerks also had rooms there; so the monk students mixed with their fellows. Perhaps their very remoteness caused the prior and chapter to prize the connection highly: Durham College was by far the most flourishing of the monastic houses of study at Oxford. Most of the monk scholars returned to fill administrative posts at home, just as Prior Wessington himself did. He showed his care for learning by rebuilding, restocking and recataloguing the Durham library. The author leans over backwards in his effort not to overrate the intellectual achievements of Durham at this time. His claims are

really too modest. Absence of originality at of personal contribution to learning is a feature of Oxford in the early fifteenth century: monastic scholars resembled friars and seculars in producing no men of outstanding merit. Conservatism in choice of books for the library, shown in a preference for the Latin Fathers, paradoxically put Durham monks the *avant garde*. 'Back to the Fathers in the originals' was the rallying cry of reformist academics in the fifteenth century. Wessington's own books on the history of Durham and on Black Monk foundations in England and his dossier on the priory's business interests and claims are vast, almost wholly derivative compilations; but they mark him out as a forerunner of the itinerant antiquaries of the late medieval and Tudor period.

Morally and religiously the Durham monks kept up a high standard of respectability. Their historian begs us not to judge the lapses too harshly. Readers living in a permissive and violent age might be trusted to take the odd knifing and irregularity for granted. It is strange that writers on ecclesiastical history should persist in measuring conduct by their grandparents' norms of behaviour. However, Dobson brings his elusive characters to life, and not least the unskilful bursar who contemplated suicide on being summoned to present his accounts. The book is enjoyably diversified. BERYL SMALLEY

YOUTHQUAKE: The growth of a counter-culture through two decades, by Kenneth Leech. *Sheldrake Press*, London, 1973. 246 pp. £3.50.

It is very easy to mistake the aim of this book. The lavish publicity given it by SPCK, its publishers, and the ugly but arresting title only help to convey the feeling that here we have a book rather crudely designed to be an instant money-spinner, compulsory reading for vaguely liberal headmasters of uncertain age. And at first glance it certainly looks as if what Kenneth Leech has basically done is string together all the startling headlines youth and youth's manipulators have helped to make in the last twenty years. The blurb says that we have here a 'definitive chronicle of the many movements and trends that together make up the whole youth revolution', and although only a blurb would call a book 'definitive' that attempts to say something about almost everything from Teddy Boys to Transcendental Meditation, certainly Leech has skilfully assembled an enormous amount of data into a small space. He has much more ample and direct knowledge of the 1960s than of the 1950s, there are surprising omissions, and *Youthquake* lacks the grit and virility and brightness of Christopher Booker's review of the same two decades from a slightly

different angle, *The Neophiliacs*. Leech cannot capture moods in ink. But by and large the account we have here is balanced, accurate and clear, which Booker's account was not.

All the same, anybody who thinks that this book might be a key to 'understanding modern youth' will be disappointed, for Leech is so busy describing the clothes donned by youth that he has little time to describe the wearer. And anybody who already knows a lot about youth and wants to learn more about the background of youth's raves and yearning will be frustrated by Leech's brevity. He does not attempt even to make clear how varied in extent are the impacts of the different 'movements and trends' he describes, and he does not explore their origins and interrelationships.

To whom, then, is he speaking? First and foremost, to the churches. He says himself that he is trying to describe primarily one facet of the current youth scene: 'its search for spirituality'—a search which almost totally bypasses the main Christian denominations. Why does youth find the vibes in the churches so bad? Are the vibes likely to improve

These are the questions Leech is grappling with the last part of his book.

Even so, the answers he gives add little of real importance to what he has already said before elsewhere. This is not surprising. After all, his basic presuppositions have not changed, and it is some of these—not the data here—that are challengeable.

For a start, plenty of evidence exists to confirm his conclusion that two differing interpretations of Christianity are going to dominate the West, one 'mystical' and one 'political', and that the conflict between them 'will form the most important division between the Christians of the future'. What he calls 'the signs of hope' in the churches—in other words, the areas of activity—have largely involved the middle-aged middle class. They have not touched the counter-culture . . . with one possible exception. The exception is, of course, the boom in pentecostalism, the one worship-form which it seems can at the moment give Christians outside the Catholic tradition easy if very limited access to the 'mystical'. But pentecostalism is something Leech distrusts. He sees it as leading to bogus other-worldliness and a swing away from social and political commitment.

Now, he has good reasons for distrusting any aspects of pentecostalism and he is justifiably alarmed by the right-wing attitudes of

many young practising Christians, but clearly he is unaware of the complex hidden links existing even between this bogey, pentecostalism, and some of the developments of which he does approve. He tells us that 'there is no authentic left-wing movement of any significance in Britain which derives its inspiration from Christian theology', but this is by no means certain—unless by 'movement' he means something structured. Surely what *is* certain, though, is that no such movement could possibly have a great future unless it were as much 'mystical' as it was 'political'.

We are being pushed on to question an even more basic presupposition of Leech's. He has some good things to say—about the role of the clergy in the future, for instance—but what is his prime concern? To try to present orthodox Christianity in a way that will attract a particular cultural group? Yet is this, in all seriousness, possible or even desirable? Doesn't it assume that, starting from the secular, we can move to the transcendent? Doesn't it assume, in other words, that God's nature is very different from that of the God of Christian revelation, Kenneth Leech's God?

All the experience and researching that has obviously gone into *Youthquake* will only be justified if this book gets people asking these fundamental questions.

JOHN ORME MILLS, O.P.

THE DESERT IS FERTILE, by Helder Camara. *Sheed and Ward*, London, 1974. 61 pp. £1.85.

This book of prose and poems by Archbishop Helder Camara consciously has a minority appeal; it is a 'very personal plea' from the author to the minority seeking to build a really just and more human society. In a world where '20 per cent of mankind owns more than 80 per cent of the resources and 80 per cent has only 20 per cent of the world's resources on which to live' (p. 30) there is a minority of men and women who are ready for any sacrifice in the service of their fellows. It is to these people that Camara's plea is addressed, whether they be Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Islamic or atheist Humanist—indeed, people in the latter category have a vital role to play for the atheist 'can find in his very atheism reasons to convince himself and others why they should become involved in the struggle against injustice, marginalisation and slavery' (p. 55).

The substance of the Archbishop's plea is that those who thirst for justice, all those not sold to avarice, ambition and selfishness' (p. 11) should seek one another out and work together in non-violent action groups against all forms of oppression, exploitation and slavery. He describes these non-violent action groups

as 'Abrahamic minorities'—'Abrahamic' because they are pregnant with the possibility of a renewed humanity and because the members of these minorities will, like the Patriarch, have to make 'the blind leap/letting God take over' (p. 9). For the unbeliever the leap is from a myopic, uncaring individualism; for the believer it is from the comfortable illusion of a cosy and often luxurious temple religion. For both believer and unbeliever the goal of the leap, the purpose of the Abrahamic minority, 'is not superficial reform but the transformation of inhuman structures' (p. 47).

One may want to question Camara's absolute prohibition of armed violence, one may feel that his reluctance to countenance the word 'enemy' (see p. 11) smacks of eirenicism, but one cannot ignore the fact that this book is vibrant with love, with passion and compassion.

It is a disturbing little book; it will challenge those who have eyes to see and ears to hear the truth, but 'Do not fear the truth/hard as it may appear/grievously as it may hurt/it is still right/and you were born for it' (p. 22).

ROGER CLARKE, O.P.