

version *from* but conversion *to*.' And so Dom Hubert goes on to show us how penance weaves itself into the very fabric of Christian life. It is not an optional extra, but a thing without which it is impossible to practise any Christian virtue. 'The spiritual life does not require us to become cringing, obsequious, diffident. It requires us to become thoughtful for others, as selfless as possible in our desires and decisions, dependent always upon the grace of God.' There is the heart of penance.

Prayer too is no matter of special techniques and mystical states. It is the climate in which a man's life is lived and the thing which makes a Christian's life fertile and lively. So there is neither good nor bad prayer, there is just prayer. 'The devil alone is incapable of prayer', says St Francis of Sales, 'because he alone is unable to love.' And so prayer is for everyone; it is wrong to imagine that it is only meant for those who have 'advanced' (whatever that may mean) in the spiritual life. It is a condition of living any spiritual life at all.

It is difficult to write briefly of Dom Hubert's work because on every page there is a gem to be quoted. There is also a danger in his work. Both what he says and his way of saying it are so charming and felicitous that it is possible to imagine he is trying to eat his cake and have it, trying to get the best of both worlds. But of course the Christian is the only man who can do that in any true sense. Dom Hubert does give us the best of both worlds, but he never soft-pedals the hardships, difficulties and frustrations. They are all faced in both these books, but because they are faced with courage, we too grow brave and embrace them as a constructive part of the Christian life. These books should be treasured by everyone who wants to enrich his Christian life.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

THE GREAT SOCIETY. By Paul Foster, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications; 6s.)

Father Foster's writing has some of the qualities of cinerama; it assaults the reader from all sides. This is more than a trick to lull us into listening; it is the form appropriate to the matter he is discussing. Catholicism, *The Great Society*, invests the whole of our personalities, and our lives are not divided into sacred and profane compartments. Still, we have been told that often enough and are ceasing to listen. So instead of saying it Father Foster does it; he shows us the Church in a dozen places and postures, likely and unlikely. His book begins with four Dominicans eating hors d'oeuvres in a plane over the Alps and ends with a mid-day meal, again eaten by Dominicans, at the Priory of San Clemente in Rome. This is symbolic not only because you see a family, even the family that is the Church, at its truest at a meal, but because you find the Church displaying one after another of her innumerable charismata; modern and medieval, temporal and eternal, in the world and above it, and still for all her changes unchanged. If

at the end of the book we are back where we began it is because the author is using not a wide screen, but a circular one, an ideal medium to preach the perfect society which is Christ.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

THE SACRED SHRINE: A STUDY OF THE POETRY AND ART OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. By Yrjö Hirn. (Faber; 42s.)

In this book, originally published before the first World War, Mr Hirn presents a very personal examination of the art of the Catholic Church. He is not himself a Catholic so his book is happily free from the prejudices, false arguments and sentimentality that frequently accompany Catholic criticism of Catholic art. If the subject is orthodox, then the treatment must be sound—that is the fallacy so often to be found today in any approach to Catholic aesthetics. There are exceptions, of course, and I shall refer to them later.

Mr Hirn states his own approach in his Introduction. 'The Catholic Church', he says, 'is a Middle Age which has survived into the twentieth century.' This is a dangerous statement since it evades the fact of religious art developing from one period to another while, at the same time, maintaining the continuity of tradition. This is a subject which Mr T. S. Eliot has dealt with, in its secular connotation, in his essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*; his theories might well be applied to Mr Hirn's inquiry. However, in his first chapter, Mr Hirn gives a more profound definition of his attitude towards religion and art when he says, 'The ideas of divinity which lie at the foundation of the rich religious art of primitive and barbaric man, are not sufficiently lofty to give this art a specifically religious character; the ideas, on the other hand, which lie at the foundation of the most intellectual Christianity, are too lofty to allow of their being united with the sensuous element in aesthetic production.' He finds that Catholic Christianity, with its emphasis on the Incarnation and its eschewing of Manicheism and Puritanism, provides the perfect soil for the growth of religious art. From these generalizations, he proceeds to examine those instruments and dogmas of the Church which most easily lend themselves to artistic treatment. He gives much space to the study of relics and reliquaries and speaks, surely a little misguidedly, of 'saint-worship' in the Early Church. He rightly gives a central place to the altar (though he does call the Mass a sacrament) and explains clearly that the Mass is not simply a memorial supper or love-feast but a re-enactment of Calvary itself. He goes on to describe the shape and significance of the host, the purpose of the tabernacle, and finally examines the doctrines specifically concerned with our Lord's coming and the place of our Lady in Catholic teaching.

All this is interesting, honest and serious; yet something is missing.