

DAS SAKRAMENT *and* ABENDMAHL UND MESSE. Both by Hans Asmussen. (Evangelisches Verlagswerk, Stuttgart.)  
 ERLÖSTE MENSCHLICHKEIT. By Dr Marianus Vetter, O.P. (Herder, Vienna.)

Amongst the many pernicious habits which we Catholics are inclined to fall into (and which constitute no mean part of Dr Asmussen's difficulties with Rome) one frequently notices the failure to realise that grace is *gratis*. One can scarcely imagine a more effective way of overcoming the habit than to read these two books by Asmussen. Not that he has much to say specifically on the subject of grace; it is simply that one cannot avoid asking oneself after reading them, why is it that some of us who show so little conformity to Christ have been given the Faith whilst Asmussen remains a Lutheran, in spite of his reverence and his scrupulous fairness towards Rome? For there can have been few Lutheran publications so tactful and understanding in their treatment of Rome, and few in which the reader retains such an attractive impression of the author's personality. The opening section on 'the Sacrament as a sign' has certainly helped one Catholic to see the implications of 'the Sacrament as a sign' in a fresh light. But the whole of this pamphlet on what a sacrament *does* is extremely valuable and will act as a powerful incentive to Christ-like relationships between ourselves and our separated brethren, not least because Asmussen insists strongly that it is his deep attachment to his own church, and not despair of it, which causes him to look towards Catholics for their co-operation.

His second pamphlet consists of a commentary upon the Encyclical, *Mediator Dei*, and follows upon the same lines as the first; the difficulties are not slurred over, but, in comparison with the area of agreement, they are made to appear by no means insuperable. Incidentally the remarks on pp. 32 and 35 seem to indicate that the Karl Barth season is drawing to its close with prospects of that minor prophet being relegated to the Minor League; nowadays one cannot help thinking that he is threatening the fish with a flood, especially since he cannot even see the flood when it only encompasses a Hungarian Cardinal.

If there is any criticism to be made about the general lines of Asmussen's pamphlets it is that he treats attitudes as dogmas and vice-versa. (Taking a leaf out of the Asmussen book we should say that this is a Protestant habit and one which has become familiar to English Catholicism in the phrase, 'We *must* take existentialism [or Lubac, or Sartre, etc.] *seriously*'. This phrase is, of course, an imperative; one cannot argue about imperatives; one simply obeys or disobeys, and there is nothing more to it.) The criticism is relevant because Asmussen points to differences in their attitudes towards the Mass on the part of Bartmann and Schmaus as if these differences displayed a rift in Catholic teaching. But it is precisely the fact that

such differences can be tolerated within sternly defined limits; and that they are patiently thrashed out during the course of centuries by theologians who are striving to think with the mind of the Church, which marks off Catholicism from Protestantism. To find how Catholicism and Protestantism differ in this way without delving into dogmatics (in other words, to appreciate the two atmospheres) one need only turn to Father Vetter's meditations upon how the Spirit renews the face of the earth. 'Love', 'Peace', 'Joy', 'Patience', etc., these are Father Vetter's themes. They are not new themes, nor do they lead to any great, critical, and original, standpoints. Occasionally a chapter brings home to the reader some aspect of our life in the Spirit which previously he had failed to appreciate—perhaps, for instance, the chapter on God's patience in dealing with us—but on the whole these meditations contain nothing startling, or nothing more startling than the source whence they are drawn, God's Word. That is why they make excellent spiritual reading for those who, first shocked by their own sinfulness on Good Friday and then divinely surprised on Easter Sunday, find it difficult to be startled at this late hour by the pronouncements of crisis theology. Catholics and Lutherans do breathe different atmospheres at present, but not, one prays, for always.

DONALD NICHOLL.

JACOB BOEHME (1575-1624). *Studies in his Life and Teaching*. By Hans L. Martensen (1808-1884), Primate Bishop of Denmark. Translated from the Danish by T. Rhys Evans. New revised edition. With notes and appendices by Stephen Hobhouse, M.A. Foreword by Canon Peter Green, D.D. (Rockliffe; 21s.)

If the many books now being published on the Gnostic heresies, the 'devil' literature and the best-selling novels on the problem of sin and evil are indicative of public taste, this fresh appearance of an old account of their origins should find a ready public. Although Boehme's unique and colourful theories are quite unacceptable to Catholics they seem to arouse interest in other quarters. Berdyaev, who considered Boehme to be 'the greatest mystic of all times', was of late years greatly influenced by his thought. Mr Hobhouse, himself a Quaker, testifies to Anglican and Quaker interest in him.

Boehme, whose system is complex beyond belief, was himself a simple soul. He was a Silesian cobbler, a Lutheran, peaceful, pious, a great reader of the Bible. In 1600, fascinated by sunlight falling on a pewter dish, he fell into some sort of religious rapture or trance, from which he recovered saying that he had seen things too wonderful to relate. Some years later, after a similar experience, came the urge to write down what he had seen. Hence came the *Aurora* or *Morning Redness* and later with outside help several weighty tomes which were published despite persecution from religious and civil authorities.