

Reviews

MODELS OF THE CHURCH, by Avery Dulles. *Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1976. £2.96.*

THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH TO COME, by Karl Rahner. *SPCK, London 1974. 136 pp. £2.25.*

At present there seems to be no tidy way to deal with the notion of Church. To speak of Church entails, quite simply, talking about what Christians say and do (or at least purport to say and do). When Christians have been saying and doing as much as they have in the last two decades, one feels torn between an urgent need to make some sense out of it all and despairing of the hybris of ecclesiology altogether.

Now these feelings about describing the Church are fairly new in the emotional registers of most Roman Catholics. Time was when an official ecclesiology of the Church as the 'perfect society' (to use the formulation of Vatican I) made no room for such muddled and dangerous emotions. We knew who we were and what we were to do. Even when this conception crumbled, the 'People of God' ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* and its more activist counterpart in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World seemed to generate enough euphoria to carry us forward into a new, if somewhat less perfect, society in the Church.

The years since have changed a lot of this. Things did not change fast enough for some and the aberrations of experimentation could not end soon enough for others. Roman Catholics found themselves confronted with a pluriform existence, and not knowing entirely what to do with it.

Both Avery Dulles and Karl Rahner address this problem of pluralism in the Church. Both are committed to maintaining it; and each makes a contribution to understanding and coming to terms with it.

Dulles has written a sort of guide of the perplexed. He elicits five basic approaches or models found in recent Roman Catholic and Protestant literature on the Church. (He uses models here in a general sense of a heuristic framework for talking about a phenomenon, in the manner of I T Ramsey). The frameworks are based on particular images that have attracted different groups of Christians. He is quick to point out that there are more than five models, but these five recur again and again and as such merit closer examination.

The five that he describes in the first part of his book are the Church as Institution (essentially the neo-Scholastic 'perfect society' model); the Church as Mystical Communion (with its use of the Mystical Body and People of God imagery); the Church as Sacrament (which tries to combine the first two in a liturgical and sacramental framework); the Church as Herald (drawing upon Protestant notions of the prophetic and Word-centred understanding of Church); and the Church as Servant (developing out of the dialogue with secularity and social issues). Dulles gives a brief description of each and tries to locate them within the larger tradition.

He then provides a useful section showing how these different models of Church result in different responses to key issues in ecclesiology: the relation of the Church to the Kingdom of God, what constitutes the True Church, the relation of the churches to the One Church, ministry and office in the Church, and approaches to revelation and teaching authority. If nothing else, this section of Dulles' book can help people find a way between a genuine pluralism of innerly consistent approaches to the Church and a mere muddle

of ideas.

But Dulles seems to stop here, going no further, really, than taxonomy. He acknowledges the strong and the weak points of each of the models and the need to draw upon each for a balanced ecclesiology reflecting all facets of Christian communal existence. But how do these models begin to speak to each other and to interact? How does one sort out unacceptable models from acceptable ones? Dulles' criteria of some biblical and traditional foundation, inspirational value, and theological fruitfulness allow all but the most bizarre approaches their place in the sun. Dulles describes well the pluralist situation in ecclesiology. This is a great service in itself and will remain the value of his book. But he does not really move from description to living and working with that pluralism.

Rahner's book takes a different approach, asking what a pluralist existence for the Church might look like. The book grew out of a meeting of the German National Synod and is addressed to the situation within the German Church. Despite this, what he has to say will apply generally to most Western societies. He begins with an assessment of the current situation, moves to the tasks this assessment would call for, and then reflects on what this would mean for the Church in the long term. He is very cautious about such analysis and projections, but feels it would be irresponsible not to address ourselves to our future.

The Church Rahner sees will be very much that of a 'little flock'—drastically smaller than our current one. People will choose to be members rather than simply be born into it; and they will choose for

different and mutually irreducible reasons. This factor alone will be enough to demand our thinking about the Church pluralistically.

The Church of the future will have to be a very open and loose organisation. It will continue to have a core of committed Christians, but these will not be able to arrogate to themselves a position of superiority nor retreat into sectarian purity. Hard decisions will have to be made: whether to neglect two nominal Christians for the sake of gaining one more committed one (Rahner would favour this). Those who collectively call themselves Christians will find different common bonds than those they now have—they will have to be sought in a deep spirituality, a sense of moral imperative without a moralising based on institutional legitimisation by sets of rules, a willingness to compromise and gather behind concrete directives reached through consensus. Orthodoxy and authority will show themselves in service rather than formulae to be adhered to. The Church will have to respect its grassroots, allow for a variety of communal forms, be finely attuned to social issues and matters of justice.

Rahner does not presume this will all happen, of course. He is too cautious to become a Utopian and too realistic not to recognise the forces of re-entrenchment. But the future of the Church, he maintains, is pluralist and will probably have to take on these forms to survive. Old loyalties will mean less than new demands; we will need the courage to face these and the imagination to start thinking of how they will take shape. And as an exercise in that imagination, this book about a future, pluralist church is highly recommended.

ROBERT SCHREITER

LIBERALISM AND TRADITION: Aspects of Catholic Thought in Nineteenth-Century France, by Bernard Reardon, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1975, 297 pp + index. £8.50.

In his preface Bernard Reardon compares the nineteenth century in France with the seventeenth, "great alike in philosophy and in poetry; and perhaps for this very reason, in religion also, in the sense that religious questions were seen by both as of chief importance and by both searchingly explored from every angle." Remark- ing on the individual efforts for a new

Catholic apologetic and the reactions of authority he says: "It has been my aim in the present volume to trace the course of this tension between liberalism and tradi- tion, taking as it does a variety of shapes, political and social, philosophical and bib- lical." But, realising that a general survey cannot study the phases in depth, he then somewhat narrows the focus "to offer a