

REVIEWS

THE PROTESTANT TRADITION—AN ESSAY IN INTERPRETATION. By J. S. Whale, D.D. (Cambridge University Press; 21s.)

DU PROTESTANTISME À L'EGLISE. By Louis Bouyer. (Editions du Cerf.)

These two books, studied concurrently, will provide admirable material for ecumenical analysis. Père Bouyer, the Oratorian convert, served for a time in the pastorate of French Evangelical Protestantism, having been brought up from childhood in its tradition. Dr Whale writes, of course, with intimate inside knowledge of English Free Churchmanship. Both are biblical scholars of eminence, but Père Bouyer has the additional advantage of a scholastic training, a knowledge of Thomist philosophy and a consequent ability to interpret St Thomas' theology in its truly biblical setting. The main theme of both books is the insights into the biblical revelation of the two great reformers Luther and Calvin. Dr Whale develops his exposition of these by placing them in strong contrast with his view of the Catholic tradition. Père Bouyer, whose exposition of the same theme is equally personal and even more penetrating, demonstrates how the Catholic tradition brings completion and fulfilment to all the positive elements in these insights, showing, at the same time, that what they are made to deny reveals gaps in their own coherence, and is far from enhancing their correspondence with the biblical data.

Dr Whale draws attention in his second chapter to the astonishing contrariety of informed and scholarly judgment upon Luther, ranging from extravagant hero-worship on the part of Protestants to passionate hatred on that of Catholics. He cites the judgment of three eminent scholars, Janssens, Döllinger and Denifle, as respectively, 'an unambiguously evil man', 'a godless criminal lusting to destroy' and 'the pretentious degenerate whose real trouble was ignorance and sensuality'. In Père Bouyer no such extravagance will be found; indeed his estimate of both Calvin's and Luther's insight into biblical truth hardly falls short of Dr Whale's, though he sees also the defects and oneness of that insight. The decrees of the Council of Orange (529) and of Trent in the sixteenth century show that the traditional teaching of the Church is that salvation is a pure gift of God, which no human effort can attain; that the initiative of grace is wholly divine, preceding and accompanying human action at every step from first to last.

Luther, as both Karl Adam and Père Bouyer confirm, began by a revolt against the contemporary presentation of the Church's teaching, which, under nominalist influence, particularly that of Occam and Gabriel Biel, was dangerously near the boundary line of sheer Pelagian-

ism. Luther's Scotism taught him, it would seem, that God was in no sense 'substance' but 'personal will'. This combined with his dislike of metaphysical thinking applied to the biblical concept of God negated his ability to see in finite and fallen man any kind of survival of the image of God in which he had been created. Luther was thus forced into holding that grace saved man without in any way touching him; the doctrine of justification by faith and *gratia sola*. It is at this point that we could wish to see Père Bouyer and Dr Whale in eirenic discussion at a conference table; engaged upon sorting out Dr Whale's assertion of Luther's conviction that God is not 'absolute substance' but 'supreme personal will'; for this, it would seem, is the point at which Dr Whale's understanding of the whole Catholic tradition begins its passage to failure.

When he does pass on to consideration of the 'Roman Church' Dr Whale's criticism becomes disappointingly superficial. He is evidently unacquainted with Catholic theology at its best and shows no knowledge of St Thomas or other classical theologians. No Catholic work appears in his bibliography but von Hügel's *Essays and Addresses*. In the section on 'the Roman Church and Toleration' this complex and difficult subject is treated so much on the surface and so little in the region of principle that liberty of conscience in history and in present circumstances is made to appear altogether too simple and unproblematical. All organized communities accept the principle that action which, for them, proceeds from error or sin has no rights, but may in particular circumstances be tolerated. Within certain limits the legislator may not interfere in internal matters; only when thought issues in action, and public order is thereby threatened, may such interference be justifiable. This last principle would seem to be in operation in contemporary Spain, but whether its mode of application is all that it should be is another question.

In the section on 'Dogma as History', the often quoted passage of Manning is repeated in which he speaks of the appeal to antiquity as both a treason and a heresy. Dr Whale makes no attempt at an understanding of the Catholic view of the relation of scientific history to divinely revealed truth, and in consequence no attempt to adjust Manning's saying to the presuppositions involved in this view. In the same paragraph, as if to confirm this misunderstanding, he classifies Acton with Mommsen and Bury as belonging to the historical tradition as opposed to the dogmatic tradition of the Church represented by Pius IX and Manning. But Acton was a Catholic, and on this point he was in agreement with Pius IX and Manning and not with Mommsen and Bury. Evidence of this will be found in the passage of Cardinal Vaughan's Life (Vol. II, page 297), concerning Acton's acceptance of

the Vatican decrees, and in particular in his famous letter to *The Times*, November 24, 1874, there quoted. Acton expresses in this letter the same meaning as the quotation from Manning, but his words are those of the sober historian and not, as Manning's were, a preacher's rhetoric.

Singularly little tolerance is accorded by Dr Whale to the consciences of Catholics in their belief that there is, and can be, only one Church on earth, through which Christ our Lord effects the salvation of mankind. He dubs it 'an exclusive claim repeated year by year and century by century with the monotonous repetition of a gramophone'. This is only one of many instances where loaded language is made to do duty for language that will appeal to reasoned thought. What would be Dr Whale's judgment of a rationalist who stigmatized his own preaching of the Gospel in these terms? It is a pity, from an eirenic viewpoint, that Dr Whale's book, which reaches a high standard in his estimate of Luther's and Calvin's positive contribution to the Protestant Tradition, should fall below that standard in his estimate of the Catholic Tradition with which he sets his chosen subject in contrast.

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

THE MEANING OF THE MONASTIC LIFE. By Louis Bouyer, tr. by Kathleen Pond. (Burns & Oates; 21s.)

This is a disturbing book—disturbing in a good sense; it should play havoc with the reader's self-complacency, whether he is a monk or other religious, priest or layman. The author is quite uncompromising in his statement of the end and the means, the purpose and the obligations of the monk's profession, which he does not regard as a special vocation, but as the ordinary vocation of the baptized person 'carried to the furthest limits of its irresistible demands'.

But the reader is also likely to find this book disturbing in a more regrettable fashion. There is throughout an undeniable flavour of fanaticism. This finds expression in the uncalled-for polemical tone against 'modern Christians' and 'sham monks'; and when these are mentioned, you can almost hear the aside, 'like many I could name'. The author seems temperamentally incapable of qualifying his more 'out-and-out' remarks. This, for example: 'for the monk there is no middle way between sacrilege and sanctity'. He does not mean, one may hope, that every monk who is not a saint is a sacrilegious fraud; but one is left hoping, because he does not say so.

In the first chapter his patristic and biblical learning gives promise of a very refreshing treatment of spiritual things. But the freshness is turned sour and fizzy by a certain intemperate harshness of tone. He launches out, in the second chapter on 'the angelic life', into a heady