

REVIEWS

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

THE CHURCH AND THE CATHOLIC together with THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY. By Romano Guardini. Translated by Ada Lane. (Sheed & Ward; 5/-.)

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE. By Dom Anscar Vonier, O.S.B. Burns Oates; 6/-.)

The first of these books contains a translation of *Vom Sinn der Kirche*, as well as of *Vom Geist der Liturgie* which had already been published. A useful outline of Guardini's thought appeared in the January BLACKFRIARS. His central thesis that human personality and liberty find their fulfilment in the measure in which man "lives, not within the narrow confinement of his purely individual and separate existence, but in the fullness and integrity of the Church" finds its best expression in *The Church and the Catholic*. His treatment tends to be abstract and "Teutonic"; but if the reading of him is sometimes rather heavy going it always more than repays the effort.

Abbot Vonier's more concrete approach to the doctrine of the Church and the place of the individual in it is likely to make a greater appeal to the average reader. He arouses interest at once by his forceful statement of a very real everyday problem felt acutely in one form or another by every sincere Catholic, if not always made articulate—the problem of the "Burden of the Church." He does not disguise the gravity of the problem which the very idea, let alone the reality, of a visible organized institutional Church presents. Disregarding academic statements of the case against institutionalism, he shows it as a very commonplace, but none the less agonizing, difficulty which faces us at every turn—the very immensity and seeming arrogance of the claims of the visible Church which constantly invite criticism and hostility; the failure of its members to live up to those claims; the follies, deficiencies, sins of its officials; above all the fact that the very perfection of its corporate organization, with its highly complex dogmatic and juridical system, seems constantly to militate against and quench the Spirit it professes to subserve.

This book has been written because the Abbot "has noticed with a feeling of pain how several recent books by Catholic writers of fame make a distinction that is a surrender to protestant feeling between the ideal Church and the real Church. Being themselves very orthodox Catholics the writers in question abound, of course, in encomiums of the beauty of the Church conceived ideally. But after that they seem to gloat on the Church's human infirmities,

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piling it on and letting the protestant have it his own way with his century-old fault-finding." Abbot Vonier answers by piling it on on the other side. He bids us, in effect, disregard the burden of the Church and the human infirmities that stare us in the face. We must see the Church with the eyes of Faith: the Spirit of God dwelling in Christ's Bride; the Holy Ghost as "the unceasing power of compensation inside the Church equalizing all the inequalities of individual Christian lives." The beauty of the King's daughter is within; and the Abbot's book will be of great help in revealing that inward beauty to us, as well as some of its outward manifestations.

But does it answer the problem? The burden of the Church remains, and although her inward splendour compensates for it, it does not explain it. And, indeed, after his first chapter, the Abbot almost totally disregards it. It is here that Guardini's fine chapter on *The Way to become Human* should be consulted. Following a line of thought worked out with even greater clearness in Dr. Carl Feckes' *Das Mysterium der heiligen Kirche*, he shows that the constant tension between the Divine and the Human in the Church, between *Liebeskirche* and *Rechtsskirche*, Spirit and Authority, Liberty and Order, Life and Law, is of the very essence of the Church here below and the condition of her life and vitality. "Tragedy is an integral part of the Church's nature, rooted in her very essence, because 'the Church' means that God has entered human history; that Christ in His nature, power and truth continues to live in a mystical life. It will cease only in Heaven, when the Church militant has become the Church glorified. . . . To be a Catholic is to accept the Church as she is, together with her tragedy. . . . Paradoxical as it may seem, imperfection belongs to the very essence of the Church on earth. And we may not appeal from the visible Church to the ideal of the Church."

Abbot Vonier seems to have missed this; and it is significant that he quotes texts of Scripture which plainly refer to the Church Triumphant as though they were to be applied to the Church here below. The *pathos* of the image of the Bride, still withheld from the consummation of union with her Spouse, her poignant appeal "Come, Lord Jesus," seem to have escaped him; and with them, we think, her real, *tragic* beauty. The Spirit is still burdened by a Body which is subject to the laws of mundane existence, and cries to be delivered from the Body of this death. The burden of the Church, the infirmities of the Body, are not to be disregarded; they must be accepted and embraced. We do not depreciate the real value of Abbot Vonier's book and the courage with which he faces a real problem when we say he has missed an opportunity. He has written a theological rhapsody where he might have written the great theological tragedy—the Gethsemane of the mystical Christ.

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