

REVIEWS

MIDNIGHT HOUR. By Nicodemus. (Faber; 8s. 6d.)

This remarkable book embodies the tale of an intense spiritual experience, and therefore necessarily sets the reviewer at once a difficult and an uncongenial task. His task is difficult, for, in commenting on so individual a record, it is hard to be confident one has grasped the private significance of the terms the author uses to expound his struggles; it is uncongenial, for, to the writer, the ground on which the reviewer must set his shoe is unquestionably holy.

Yet the author does give a general import to his personal experience, that necessarily brings his record within the orbit of critical analysis. In the concluding section of his book, pp. 161 ff., he interprets the spiritual plight of western society in the light of his own interior conflict, and proposes, from the lessons he has learnt, a cure for its disease. He sees the compulsion under which he laboured to choose between 'life' and 'death' as a veritable microcosmic presentation of the issue fronting western man to-day. He interprets Nazism primarily therefore in psychological terms. It is as the overt expression of the victory of 'death' over 'spirit' that we are to understand the significance of the totalitarian hordes. Again and again he affirms the fundamental unity of the sociological drive to mass integration, and the introspectively discoverable nisus to death and nothingness in the individual. The disease, of which Nazism is the definitive symptom, can only be healed in and through an interior, spiritual rebirth.

All this has, of course, been said before; it will be familiar, for instance, to all readers of Mr. Christopher Dawson's latest book. In Nicodemus' record we have the moving account of the manner in which he, as an individual, achieved the renewal he sought, or rather of the mode in which God wrought that renewal in him. The influence of Sören Kierkegaard is strong in his exposition of the way in which, for him, the *theologia crucis* found existential affirmation. Indeed, at times, he passes over, by way of the most Kierkegaardian aspects of Karl Barth, to a radical solifidianism. His book has indeed been dismissed by some readers on the ground of its Calvinistic pessimism, and its frequent seeming endorsement of a view of grace as *contra naturam*.

Yet there is another strand in his thought, which is strangely contrary to the tendencies just noted. He will not go the whole way with Barth in denying any *Anknüpfungspunkt* between God and man, apart from supernatural faith. Indeed, he seems at times to affirm the reality of just such a link in poetic experience, and in man's response to certain of the phenomena of nature. Much of his journal was written amid the tranquil beauty of the Wiltshire downs, and one notes, with surprise, a curiously undisciplined romanticism

in his appreciation of the scenes there presented to him. A great deal, in his record, in fact, is in keeping with what one may perhaps not unfairly term the 'new Christian romanticism.' He accepts quite uncritically the religious superiority of rural over urban life. He seems, in his concluding comments to despair of any genuine *redemptio proletarianorum*. The rootless suburban in the cinema-queue remains outside the covenant of grace; his judgments, shaped as they are by the 'operational thinking' characteristic of modern science and technology, are pathologically irreligious, and of the disease there is apparently no cure.

There is a great gulf between the genuine insight of the author's presentation of the mystery of the Cross, and this modish neo-romanticism, the mood of which one may not unfairly describe as at once sub-Christian and escapist. It is hard not to be outraged by a style leading to the astounding statement on p. 86: 'Christianity came from the soil, and must return to the soil for renaissance.' That is not merely rubbish; it is surely also heretical, and unhistorical, in as much as Christianity conquered Europe as the religion of the internal proletariat of the Roman Empire.

These comments may sound uncharitable and unfair. The record is so intensely personal that they are almost certainly the latter. Yet the task of genuine Christian renewal in this present is one of such overwhelming difficulty, that one dare not fail to protest against escapism and simplism in those who seek to show us the way to it. The author is most emphatically right in seeing our central problem as one of spirituality. It is the clarity of his recognition of that fact which justifies amply the publication of his record. Moreover, in much that he says concerning the mystery of the Cross, he is genuinely illuminating. For that reason one would shirk one's task as a reviewer if one failed to call attention to the naturalistic traditionalism which seems to mar at once his spiritual and theological perceptions, and his value as a guide to others in the impasse of the present.

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FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION. By Vincent Taylor, D.D. (Macmillan; 10s. 6d.)

'In sending forth this book,' writes Dr. Taylor, 'I do so with the prayer that it may be of some service to many within the Church of Christ who desire to understand their faith better, and to commend it more adequately to others.' A true understanding of the Christian faith must be based on three things: The writings of the Old and New Testaments, which are the inspired word of God; the constant tradition and teaching of the Church; and the response of love on the part of the theologian. None of these can be neglected without making theology either weak, or untrue, or dead. Acting in these beliefs, Dr. Taylor has written three books on the central