

OF CHARITY IN JUDGMENT

ST CYPRIAN

An extract from Epistle LV of St Cyprian to Antonianus on the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, translated by J. F. T. PRINCE

DEAREST brother: it is not ours to anticipate the Assize of him who will come to judge all men according to their true merit, but ours rather the surety that if he shall find repentance full, and of an honest heart, he will ratify that which has been discerned by us. But if we should be deluded by hypocrisy, God (who is not mocked) will judge those that he hath seen through and will correct the easy sentence of his servants. For it behoveth us to remember the scripture declaring that a brother who helpeth a brother shall be exalted. So too, we must remember that the Apostle admonisheth us: *Lest ye, too, be tempted, bear ye one another's burthens: so ye shall fulfil the law of Christ.* And rebuking the arrogant and breaking up their pride: *Let him that thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall, and who art thou that judgeth another man's servant?* To his own master he standeth and falleth; yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to raise him and comfort him. John, moreover, proveth that Christ the Lord is the advocate and the propitiator:

My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, JESUS CHRIST the just: And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

And yet again, Paul the apostle declareth that

the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us. For why did Christ, when as yet we were weak, according to the time, die for the ungodly? For scarce for a just man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some one would dare to die. But God commendeth his charity towards us: because whereas yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us: much more therefore being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him.

Considering, then, the pity and clemency of the Lord Jesus, we

must restrain our severity and hardness and be not at all pitiless in dealing with the brethren. Rather should we mourn with them that mourn and weep with them that weep, raising also them that have fallen by the way with the solace of our love and (as far as is in us) the strength of our aid. This, too, must we have in mind: that while mercilessness is not of true justice (the justice of God), neither is mere laxness of true mercy. But behold one of the brethren prostrate and wounded by the way, maimed by the adversary in the battle of life. See the devil who standeth by to finish his evil work and destroy that which he hath wounded. Behold, there standeth by, also, the Lord and he exhorteth with the prayer of Calvary that he whom he hath redeemed be not permitted to perish. On whose side do we stand? With the demon that he may kill his prey: with the priest and the Levite who look the other way as in the gospel? Nay, rather with him who is our brother, even as he is our creator; our advocate, even as he is our judge.



REVIEWS

ÉTUDES SUR LES PROPHETES D'ISRAËL. By Béguerie, Leclercq, and Steinmann. (Cerf, Collection 'Lectio Divina' No. 14; 480 fr.)

ST MATTHEW AND ST MARK. By A. Farrer. (Dacre Press; 25s.)

The title of the collection to which the first of these two books belongs is a portent of the wave of *ressourcement* which is passing through the Church in our time: the 'spiritual reading' of the individual era is yielding before a re-emergence of the ancient *lectio divina*. The basis of this more traditional reading is the Bible, first of all the text itself, and then commentary on the text. It is natural, then, that the modern awakening of interest among Catholics in the Bible should be accompanied by a parallel interest in the biblical commentaries of the Fathers. It would, however, be false to the spirit of patristic exegesis for a modern reader to limit himself to the commentaries of an Augustine and a Gregory and ignore the results of modern scholarship—false, because at one time Augustine and Gregory were themselves the *dernier cri*. At the same time it must be admitted that not all modern work on the Bible immediately lends itself to 'devout' reading. Too often such