

LOVE AND INSPIRATION by Josef Pieper; *Faber, 21s.*

There are two attitudes, neither of them entirely right, to the study of Greek philosophy. One attitude finds in the Greek philosophers the first expression of questions of eternal interest, the first roughing-out of positions that are of perennial importance. The second is reluctant to abstract the questions of Greek philosophy from their historical context, reluctant to deal with anything more than the historical facts, so far as we can discover them, of who said what, and when. Dr Pieper's study of the *Phaedrus* falls into the first category. Plato is made to present us with the choice between lust and *agape*, between sophistication that is ultimately careless of truth and the inspiration that draws its truth from humble acceptance of the touch of god.

After the first fascination that Dr Pieper's writings always hold for me, I confess that I find this approach to Plato somewhat limp. There is eternal truth in the pages of Plato. Human love does open the soul to god. But I cannot lull myself into the simplicity that is content with approaching Plato's statement of that truth as primarily a piece of literature. For that is really what Dr Pieper gives us: the literary Plato. That in its way is worth having: and if you want to read Plato as literature you may perhaps need the kind of introduction that Dr Pieper has provided, a description of the contemporary scene at Athens in modern terms, comments on Socratic irony, and so forth. But if we read Plato in this way in order to concentrate, as Dr Pieper encourages us to do, on the direct relevance of these truths today, we quickly find ourselves in a world with little sight or sound of Plato. What place has the eroticism that Plato describes outside the Christian sacrament of marriage – or inside marriage?

What kind of relationship does vowed celibacy entail? Does it preclude this kind of eroticism, or on the contrary does it demand it as its essential fulfilment? Can I – must I – have this kind of relationship with an incarnate god? If our concern is directly and simply to discover the true nature of human love, these are perhaps some of the questions we ask ourselves. But we do not find the answers in Plato – although we may find a number of illuminating points in Dr Pieper's comments on Plato.

Does this mean that Dr Pieper should have written either a work of Platonic scholarship, in the restricted sense in which Dr Pieper seems to understand that term, or his own account of human love, apart from what Plato says? No. Plato *is* relevant, but not directly so. There is something between 'mere' scholarship and truth, direct and simple. It is between these two that the genius of the history of philosophy learns to grow its wings. It is from the flight between the two – forgive this parody of the *Phaedrus* myth – that the scholar can bring back not a mere catalogue of opinions, in the manner of the Hellenist doxographers, and not truth pure and simple (though we may properly go on to discover that), but something else: an understanding of how in history the mind becomes aware of truth, of how the mind depends upon and is conditioned by environment and language, and conversely of how truth is embedded in history, in one sense dependent upon individual thinkers for its discovery and transmission, and yet curiously resilient as a tradition. Scholarship is essential to this historical insight. True scholarship does not deaden Plato, as Dr Pieper occasionally seems to fear. It is scholarship that alone brings Plato to life.

Take one example. Plato in the *Phaedrus* argues that the soul is unborn, *agenetos*. This, Dr Pieper tells us, is the same as the later notion that a spiritual being is created immediately. This later notion, Dr Pieper tells us, p. 74: 'is not merely similar to Plato's; it is exactly the same'. Here the attempt to make Plato of constant and direct contemporary relevance appears at its most unlikable. Plato's understanding of the soul is entirely rooted in the history of fifth and fourth century thought. The soul of the *Phaedrus* is entirely different from a being which is 'created' by anything else; it is therefore still further removed from any notion of immediate creation. The situation is in fact considerably complex. Very briefly the point is that Plato's unborn soul is as much god as soul. Soul, it is true, is inferior to the Forms and therefore soul is not god in the sense of occupying the highest place in Plato's ontology. God, Aristotle's god and Plotinus' One, is in part

the result of a fusion of Plato's highest Forms, liberated from their function as concepts, and Plato's soul, liberated from performing the function of Aristotle's power of natural motion. Plato's soul is as much god as soul. It is as much creator as created.

Perhaps this is too elliptical even to begin to be illuminating. I make no apology. It does comparatively little good – I do not say it does no good at all – to read Plato in order to be reminded of a few eternal themes. Such an exercise carries the danger that we shall not think the problems out either in our own terms or in Plato's. We must approach Plato initially not with our own problems but with his. Not, it is true, that we should stop there. Familiarity with Plato's mind – a real, a *scholarly* familiarity – will help us in answering those further problems which Plato's own achievements have brought us to the verge of.

Denis O'Brien

MARY'S PLACE IN THE CHURCH by René Laurentin, translated by I. G. Pidoux. Foreword by Hilda Graef. *Burns and Oates, 12s 6d.*

During the last few years a number of books on the Blessed Virgin Mary by continental Catholic writers have appeared in English translations; Fr Louis Bouyer's *Woman and Man with God*, Fr Yves Congar's *Christ, our Lady and the Church*, Fr Karl Rahner's *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, Fr Hugo Rahner's *Our Lady and the Church*, Fr Otto Semmelroth's *Mary, Archetype of the Church* and Fr E. H. Schillebeeckx's *Mary, Mother of the Redemption* are among the most notable of these. In spite of their differences of approach all these authors have one thing in common; they are determined that mariology shall not be sealed off from other branches of theology in an impermeable capsule but shall be seen as an integral part of the great corpus of Christian doctrine, related to and interpenetrating all its main divisions. Abbé Laurentin's book is of a different type from these; they are works of mariology, his is a work about mariology. More precisely it is an account of the various trends in contemporary mariological thought and practice and an assessment of their

nature and significance.

Starting from the overwhelming mass of books, articles, conferences, societies and pious associations, many of them of very dubious or mediocre quality, concerned with the increase of devotion to our Lady and the expansion of Marian theology, Abbé Laurentin frankly voices his 'grounds for disquiet', a disquiet which is mainly due to the narrow specialization of marian studies and cultus and their lack of organic relationship to the thought and life of the Church as a whole. Noting that the marian movement has undergone its extraordinary efflorescence in a polemical and even political setting, he points to the odd fact that those who are most enthusiastic for evolution and development in mariology are frequently conservative or even reactionary in their attitude to dogma as a whole. Seeking the golden mean between 'maximizing' and 'minimizing' (concepts whose propriety in theology he questions in any case, since theology should be concerned simply with the truth) he sees the key to lie in placing our