

system. If we were indeed aware of the nature of the Kingdom of God, which must be realized through us in the world, then we would have a perspective and motivation capable of

renewing and transforming the educational process, and of liberating the powers required to change the world.

P. W. SINGLETON

THE STRUGGLE FOR RACIAL EQUALITY, by Julius Lewin. *Longmans, London, 1967.* 187 pp. 21s.

Professor Lewin's little book adds little that is new to the study of race-relations. As a collection of thirty-two passages of writings on the subject it does, however, make easily available one or two statements hitherto rather inaccessible.

As a South African, Professor Lewin is at pains to emphasize that his country is not the only place in the world to face the problems presented by different racial groups living within one country. There are many statements of the obvious here, and also not a little moralizing and defensiveness. There is also an element, common in South Africa still, of the colonial mentality, in which Britain is rather curiously regarded as the power-centre, the example, the setter of standards.

Professor Lewin's initial idea appears to have been to make a collection of documents concerning apartheid in South Africa; its origins, legal enactments, and the forces which now maintain it. Other passages have been added concerning Britain's attitudes to colour, and the position of negroes in America. There are some topics which appear a little out of place in this book such as 'Universal traits of colonialism' (do they exist?) and 'The British in India'. The Introduction has a certain naivety.

It is only in the last three pages of the book that one perceives real wisdom in the short passages given from Ruth Benedict's book *Race and Racism*. This was written in 1942, at a time when racial persecution in Britain was seen in the context of Nazi Germany and Japan. It is a sad reflection on much that has

been written about race-relations since, that Ruth Benedict still provides us with the starting point for any examination of the subject with her famous dictum:

'to understand race conflict we need fundamentally to understand conflict and not race.' Persecution of minorities was an old, old story long before racism was ever thought of. 'In-groups' are consistently unwilling to give status and to share prerogatives with the outsider. Groups may be set apart by any number of things besides race, and an aversion to inter-marriage usually accompanies any conflict between two groups, however the groups may be defined. The patricians of Rome recoiled from marriage with plebeians; Catholics of France from marriage with Huguenots. Even today, a pamphlet in the Church of England entitled 'Mixed Marriages' is more likely to be concerned with the problems of marriage between Anglicans and Roman Catholics than between members of different races and cultures (which two are not to be confused).

When people talk about 'race-relations' they are talking about conflict. If only the self-righteous and the morally outraged would begin from this *general* basis of what they are talking about, the discussion concerning race-relations might achieve something less emotional and more substantial. A good starting point is the writing of those, like Jacques Barzun and Ruth Benedict, who, in the different context of the 1930's, thought more deeply about these issues than many are doing today.

IAIN R. SMITH

EARLY CHRISTIAN ART, by F. van der Meer. *Faber & Faber, London, 1967.* 149 pp. 50s.

Archaeologists have been plying us with the details of early Christian art since the first half of the nineteenth century; but as Macaulay once remarked, 'facts are the mere dross of history'. The artistic remains have need of interpretation. For individual works and for certain categories this has been done, but not for early Christian art as a whole. There have been numerous books on the evolution of form, but form was not of prime importance to the early Christians. There have been several able

studies on early Christian basilicas, on painting, on sarcophagi; but there has been little in the way of a comprehensive synthesis which relates architecture, painting and sculpture and puts them firmly in their historical and liturgical context. This is what Professor van der Meer has done, and he is a person well suited to have done it. He has provided us with a portrait which, after two introductory chapters on the growth of an interest in early Christian art and on the visible remains, goes on to deal with the

various categories of monuments in turn and concludes with two admirable chapters, the most valuable in the book, on the stylistic context and an interpretation of its character and function. It is an essay without references or bibliography, and with a carefully selected number of plates which are strictly related to the text.

Like any portrait it must be judged on its general effect, and perhaps it is unfair to look too closely. There is one major omission: there has been no attempt to deal with the important subject of the birth of Christian art. It is something which did not exist in the first two centuries of the Church's existence but which was to become for Christianity a by-product of the first importance. Besides this, there are some statements one could question, or at least wish the author to qualify. The form of Christian basilicas and churches is stated to have had no symbolic significance. It may be that contemporary writers were reading into the buildings more than the builders and patrons intended, when they spoke of the choir standing for the intelligible heavens and the nave for the earth. But Eusebius was recording something more intentionally symbolic when he wrote of the church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem: 'the crowning part of the whole was the hemisphere which rose to the very summit of the church. This was encircled by twelve columns (according to the number of the apostles of Our Saviour) . . .' (*Life of Constantine, III: 28*). In his treatment of the baptistry, which he shows was symbolic, he oversimplifies. There were several forms other than the octagonal bath. The quadrilateral baptistry, symbolizing the tomb, was perhaps the commonest type early on. The hexagonal type, symbolizing Christ's death on the sixth day, frequently occurs. Perhaps the author underestimates the decorative aspect of early Christian art. Eusebius, once again, is full of evidence for the existence of an aesthetic function. The church of the Holy Sepulchre was to be 'a house of prayer *worthy* of the worship of God, . . . on a scale of rich and royal greatness . . . and of noble and ample magnificence . . . [which would] surpass all others in beauty' (*Life of Constantine, III: 29, 31*). The walls were to be 'ornamented with gold' and 'the most splendid decorations of every kind' (*op. cit. III: 32, 34*). It would have been remarkable if the decorative element had been ruled out, because Roman art was principally a decorative art. Again, Professor van der Meer

suggests that the more abstract forms of early Christian art, as compared with classical Roman art, are due merely to the mellowing effect of Christianity. Certainly this was one factor, perhaps the predominant one, but this was happening anyway to pagan Roman art which was witnessing a provincialization at the hands of craftsmen with simple, less sophisticated tastes. No doubt it was part of a much wider manifestation of dissatisfaction with the old pattern of Roman civilized life which was experienced by cultivated men in the late Empire. The Roman toga was going out of use, and the deserts were sought instead of the cities. It seems more than a mere coincidence that Plotinus's writings were read widely by both Christians and pagans. Lastly, the author suggests that Hagia Sophia was a culmination of late antique architecture owing nothing to the East. The pendulum of opinion seems to have swung too far from the more oriental interpretation of Charles Diehl and the earlier Byzantinists. If the teachings of Mani and various gnostic sects found such a warm welcome in the West, it would seem unlikely that the visual arts would be untouched by a more acutely spiritual climate from the East.

In spite of these criticisms the main lines of the portrait presented must be welcomed as being both balanced and illuminating. In an art in which the content was of prime importance, the works themselves should be put firmly in their liturgical setting, and this has been done quite admirably. Professor van der Meer's interpretation of the influence of meaning on style is sensitive and penetrating. The profound humanity of the gospels suffused early Christian art with an all-pervading mellowness. For whereas the ancient Greeks saw man as the measure of all things, as an aristocratic being with a heroic tenor of life, the Christians saw him as a sinner who looked for the love of God. This new attitude brought with it 'an opening up of the heart to that part of humanity, and to those dark corners of human nature, which until then, had been neglected and as good as forgotten'. In art 'the change that took place was not only in the themes, but in the ability of men to feel'. The Christian artists of the third to the sixth centuries did for art what the Fathers, in particular St Augustine, did for learning: they gave the classical forms an inspired objective and so saved them from extinction. Alessandro della Seta in that remarkable book, *Religion and Art*, put the point nicely. The ancient gods

had become men, and 'for a religious art nothing remains after the humanization of the gods but decadence and death'. Classical artists 'had aimed at beauty of form and the form had destroyed the content'. The Christian artist invoked a transcendental world, but in doing so he used the instruments of this world. Already in the Theodosian period a more lavish art is discernible, but a long time was to elapse before form won the upper hand. In the meantime man had been toppled from his

pedestal. Even in the Christian commemorative (largely funerary) art the emphasis was not on the glorification of man in the past, but on man suppliant and trustful of the future. Art had recovered its true function as an intermediary between man and God. Modern liturgists would be well advised to consider the art of the early Christians, and they could not find a better guide than Professor van der Meer.

EDWARD CORBOULD, O.S.B.

SACRED ART IN EAST AND WEST, by Titus Burkhardt, translated by Lord Northbourne. *Perennial Books*, London, 1967. 160 pp. 35s.

THE DESECRATION OF CHRIST, by Richard Egenter, with an epilogue by Nicolette Gray. *Compass Books, Burns & Oates*, London, 1967. 154 pp. 18s.

To some extent these two books are complementary. One describes the basis of religious architectural expression through the East and West, and the other describes and decries the last stage of popular Catholic devotional art. It is almost as if, when one goes away from the principles involved in the first book, one lands in the degradation denounced by the second.

Titus Burkhardt's book is well worth reading. Some parts of it are very sensitively written, particularly the chapter on the Islamic ideal in art, which might be new ground for those who have hitherto only been concerned with Christianity. Islamic art might be the condition towards which all sacred art and architecture is moving. At the same time, there is an implication of syncretism in the book which I think is untenable. After all it is not only a question of religious thought, but of whole systems of civilization that arose in places far apart, under quite different circumstances, and these cannot, obviously, be reconciled beyond a certain extent. The most serious reservation regarding the book is whether one can in fact apply its learning to the present day. Mr Burkhardt may be himself wondering the same thing judging from the unsatisfactory last chapter. In this sense the book, though highly informative and stimulating, remains academic. The fact Mr Burkhardt has not faced squarely is that all the higher religions are in the same position, i.e. of having outlived their own cultural expression—this, at any rate, they have in common. One might say that we are not so much Christians living in a post-Christian civilization (shades of self-pity and inverted Triumphalism) as, ourselves, post-civilized Christians. This is quite a new phenomenon.

In the growth of religious culture and art it

seems to be necessary for someone at the centre of power to make, or make use of, an important secular discovery, which is both valid in itself and analogous to a spiritual truth. The implementation of such a discovery for religious reasons feeds back to the religious stimulus, vindicating it, and giving it a mandate and authority. Of course, it all depends on the 'secular' efficiency of the action, but when effective one might describe the whole process as working out in practice of a secular sacrament on a widespread social level. I realize that I have over-simplified to a ludicrous extent, but I am convinced that without a complicated and subtle interaction between material progress and spiritual analogy, the conditions do not exist for a religious culture to arise at all. This explains why primitive cultures are religious and 'late' cultures tend not to be; in the latter case, not only the credibility-gap but the communication-gap and the implementation-gap become too wide to be straddled. By way of example, the first historical movements of this sort might be those connected to astronomy and irrigation all over the world, but possibly the last discovery that had a decisive influence on a major cultural pattern was the new-found ability to concentrate and discipline certain mental faculties which enabled the Jesuits to dominate the educational system of Europe for two hundred years. I do not see movements of this sort today. Certainly attention to sacred geometry in the construction of churches seems remote and beside the point—one simply could not reassemble the combination of seriousness and delicacy, awe and discovery, that gave these measures psychological and spiritual validity. This is not to say that such do not exist, but nowadays I am inclined to think they