

## REVIEWS\*

THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church. By Charles Williams. (Longmans; 7s. 6d.)

Some years ago in his book *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*, Charles Williams said that if the Incarnation had never happened some poet would have had to invent it. That was about the time of his editing of the Hopkins poems, and the connection with Hopkins is significant, since in Hopkins some of the consequences of the Scotist view of the Incarnation are apparent in great poetry.

The consequences of the Incarnation in the Church and in Christendom are the theme of the present book: in the Church which is 'on its own showing the exhibition and the correction of all causes,' which 'began its career by arguing about its own cause—in such time as it had to spare from its even greater business of coming into existence': and in Christendom, 'because if Christendom is what it says it is—for example in the New Testament—then it is a Nature in which we choose to believe, as against the personal righteousness, the social order, the cultural speculation.'

This nature in which we choose to believe is defined in terms of co-inherence: the co-inherence of matter in deity—of the 'holy and glorious flesh' in God; and of God in the blessed flesh—the co-inherence of deity in matter: but also, and in consequence of this, the co-inherence of Christ in redeemed mankind and of redeemed mankind in Christ.

Charles Williams speaks of our own generation as having 'too much separated our own physical nature from Christ's'—a stricture which has been ratified by poets and theologians—and he quotes the contrary sense of two martyrs of the second and third centuries: of St. Ignatius whose cry 'My Eros is crucified' he examines in the tremendous depth and intimacy of its meaning, and of St. Felicity who summed up in a phrase what the author means by the mystery of the co-inherence, '. . . then another will be in me who will suffer for me as I shall suffer for him.'

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\* It may be necessary to remark that, while BLACKFRIARS deems it to be part of its function to review important books by other than Catholic authors, it is to be understood that expressions of approval or recommendation are offered subject to the restrictions imposed by the ordinary laws of the Church relative to the reading of such works.—EDITOR.

The development of this central reality through Christian history is rendered in terms of the two great ways of the Affirmation and the Negation of Images: among the masters of the first, Athanasius, Aquinas, Dante; of the second, the pseudo-Dionysius, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, St. John of the Cross; and the author well observes that neither of these great ways finds its own authentic expression in Christendom without some courtesy to the other. In fact, they mutually co-inhere and mutually presuppose each other, since they are both in Christ, and 'the ordinary daylight is as much He as the extraordinary night.' And in case such a statement should imply too compromising an immanence, he encloses the whole in this further epigram of the co-inherence. 'This also is Thou; neither is this Thou.'

There can be no doubt whatever of the brilliance of the book, or of the fine quality of its epigrammatic, but not on that account discontinuous, style. And it would be boorish indeed not to acknowledge the many gracious insights it gives into 'the Thing which, after Pentecost, rose out of the existence of Christ'; insights which attain also to the underlying spiritual movements of Christian romantic poetry.

Nevertheless, in reading it one is haunted by that phrase from an earlier book. 'If the Incarnation had never happened, some poet would have had to invent it.' In such a way a poetically conceived thesis is *parallel* with reality. Truly the idea and the fact of co-inherence is a golden thread in Christian doctrine and Christian history, but at the last resort it is possible for the poet to dispense with the reality of the fact upon which it is founded, for the sake of the poetic necessity of the fact. It is still the same fact, but the two aspects of it are separated by walls of glass. And precisely because the barrier is so lucid, because the *poetic* consequences of the fact may remain identical, it is extraordinarily difficult for the poet to approach and attain the fact as real. The *via negativa* may appear to help, but we are still, at the end of it, on the same side of the lucid walls. We are on the same side of them when it is suggested that Christ was born of a Virgin, as much because the Church would believe it as for any other reason. We are on the same side of them in the very beginning of the book, where Christ is spoken of as 'a certain being . . . in the form of a man' and thereafter referred to by the pronoun 'It': a manner of speech acceptable to Gnostic rather than Christian thought; for it was otherwise they referred to Him who 'ate and drank with him after he rose again from the dead.'

Coinherence is indeed a golden thread in the closely woven Christian reality. But coinherence is a relationship. In some sense it says much more (at least to ears dulled by the repetition of words) than does communion. But communion is closer to substance, and on that account closer to reality *as* reality. It is poetically thrilling to find everywhere, as a consequence of the Incarnation, the coinherence of matter and deity. In the Eucharist, however, ambiguities are involved, and if it is possible to say that ' consubstantiality is doubtfully orthodox,' this can only be if substance no longer has any meaning to the modern mind. If substance is a reality and, under God, the reality in which all others—action, relation, presence, and the rest—are founded, then we must listen attentively to St. Thomas when he concludes (III<sup>a</sup> pars. Q LXXV Art. 2) ' haec positio vitanda est tanquam hæretica.'

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PLURALISM AND THE LAW. By Miriam Theresa Rooney. (Reprinted from *The New Scholasticism*, XIII, October 4th, 1939.)

The present essay, reprinted from *The New Scholasticism*, is a forceful and enlightened criticism of Mr. Harold Laski's Pluralism, particularly as affecting Law. It may be taken as supplementary to a former work by the same writer, *Law, Lawlessness and Sanction*. The application indeed of the doctrine of Pluralism to Sociological Jurisprudence inevitably makes force the sanction of a lawlessness as a source of social chaos. It is here shown that Laski's Pluralism is the logical outcome of James's Pragmatism under other combined influences chiefly of Holmes, Pound and Duguit.

Pragmatism as a system relies on trial and error as the test of goodness and truth, and is a type of applied Utilitarianism making that which works the criterion of truth and morality. Pluralism is a vague term suggestive of a tendency rather than an achievement, and perhaps for that reason a proper definition of it as a system is not found in this paper. However, a little more explicit elaboration of its meaning would have prepared the reader for the sufficiently difficult pages which follow.

The Laski political theory is a species of socialistic determinism hardly consistent within itself. There is no room for the individual man except to function in a pluralistic world and within a society essentially federalized. The legalizing of social function must be achieved by a socializing of the law. Law is