

THE RIVER WITHIN: THE SEARCH FOR GOD IN DEPTH by Christopher Bryant
SSJE. Darton, Longman & Todd. 1978. pp. 152 £2.95.

This book hopes to be a contribution to a spirituality for the late twentieth century. Its author, a Cowley Father with a long-standing interest in psychology, writes in the belief that a knowledge of modern psychology is essential to any contemporary Christian's understanding of his own life, and the book is an attempt to supply that knowledge and show how it illuminates traditional Christian thinking.

In one sense it is difficult to quarrel with Bryant's high estimate of the importance of psychology for Christian spirituality. Spirituality is, in large measure, about how a Christian copes with life, and some of the most important things he has to cope with in life are people, and in particular himself. His ability to do this will be greatly enhanced by a practical knowledge of how people work. Any empirical discoveries of modern psychology that help to make us more sensitive to people's needs and to demands that others, and we ourselves, make upon us should be gratefully appropriated. Unfortunately, Bryant gives us little help in this direction. Out of what is in any case a short book only three very brief chapters are devoted to anything resembling a discussion of people's needs, problems and motivations (pp. 30-76). The psychological problems and tasks of adolescence and adulthood are dismissed in fifteen pages each; childhood gets more extended treatment—sixteen pages. Bryant can do no more in such a short space than give vague and unhelpful generalisations like this: 'Depression ... is caused by a deprivation of love ... By the age of six months an immensely powerful emotional bond is normally formed attaching the baby to its mother. If after the formation of this bond the infant is deprived for long of his mother's presence, he becomes anxious, sorrowful, angry and finally lapses into despair. (The depressive) craves the love which having once experienced he cannot do without. He is afraid of other people ... because he dreads the loss of their approval. He is inhibited by fear from expressing the anger that sometimes wells up in him, and if this should explode he blames himself with bitter self

reproach' (p. 37). A paragraph like that might make sense and even seem true in the context of a book on depression, but it represents Bryant's entire discussion of the subject. Much the same is true of the whole of these three central chapters; what he says becomes intelligible and plausible only if one has already studied some psychology, and then it is superfluous.

A deeper problem is Bryant's reliance on some speculative ideas of depth psychology. He claims that the psychology of the older spiritual writers is out of date, and that 'to talk of human personality and experience in a manner that makes sense to the typical man or woman of the twentieth century it is necessary to go to school with Freud, Jung and many others, to learn their language and to ponder their insights into the dynamics of personality' (Preface). One may sympathise with the view that traditional Christian ways of talking are no longer convincing and yet wonder whether the language of Freud and Jung is any more intelligible or their theories any more credible. Bryant speaks of the Self, 'the total personality or its centre', as 'a sign of God's presence, as that through which God makes his presence known to the conscious personality' (p. 13). The 'centre' is 'the symbol through which "the inexhaustible fund of invention and contrivance" (i.e. God) signals his presence' (ibid.). A person needs to 'actualise his essential being' (p. 16). Is this kind of thing more readily comprehensible than traditional ways of speaking? It is hard to tell, partly because Bryant is unforthcoming about which traditional expressions these are meant to illuminate or improve upon. One example he does give is the traditional doctrine that all men seek God: '... if we understand the desire for God as the desire to be at one with our true centre, then this ancient doctrine is infused with new and exciting meaning. The desire to rest in God will be seen as a desire to live from our centre, to express our own truth, to be centred, integrated, a city at unity in itself' (p. 17). It appears to me rather to be infused with

obscurity, and Bryant does nothing to show that we are justified in so understanding (if that is the right word) the traditional doctrine. One feels that there may be something in what he says, but

here, as throughout the book, he explains too little and moves too quickly over too wide a field. It would have been a better book had it been more careful and less ambitious.

GARETH MOORE O.P.

LETTERS FROM A PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE by Carlos Christo. *Lutterworth Press*. 1978. pp. 241 £3.95.

In November 1969 a group of Brazilian Dominicans were arrested on charges of subversion, as part of a campaign against the Dominicans in Brazil by that country's political police. In *New Blackfriars* July 1970, one of that group, Tito de Alencar Lima O.P. described in chilling detail his own agony from torture inflicted by the brutal Department of Political and Social Order (D.O.P.S.): "electric shocks, kicks in the genital organs and in the stomach were repeated. I was beaten with small planks of wood, cigarette butts were snuffed out on my body. For five hours I was subjected to this dog treatment ... I was assured that this was just a sample of what would happen to the Dominicans". He tried unsuccessfully to end this horror by slashing arteries and veins in his wrists. Eventually he was released and lived for a while in the Dominican priory of St Jacques in Paris, but the torture had brutally wrecked both mind and body, and he finally broke down and killed himself.

Sharing a prison cell with Tito was one of his brethren, Carlos Christo, (Betto), and this book is a collection and translation of his letters over a period of four prison years to his family, Dominican brothers, and friends. Anyone who wants to get under the skin of Latin American Liberation Theology to understand what it is *really* about, (as opposed to the comfortable, flabby criticism of it in the 1978 Reith Lectures), please read these letters.

Betto was born in 1944 into a middle-class traditional family in a part of Brazil known for its social and political conservatism. After secondary school he moved to Rio de Janeiro, worked with the Young Christian Students, and started journalistic studies at the university. He left university in 1965 to join the Dominican Order, and after making solemn profession embarked on his theological studies in Sao

Leopoldo Seminary. It was there in 1969 that he was arrested in the anti-Dominican purge, on charges of subversion against the military government. He was in prison for twenty-two months without trial before being sentenced to four years imprisonment. He was released in October 1973.

The letters collected here were written over the period from his arrest in 1969 to Jan. 1973 and cover a fairly wide spectrum of topics, observations and feelings, including family gossip, prison life, capitalism, corrupt government, ("what phonies and liars people in power are"), torture, ("torturers fear a smile, even a weak one"), spirituality, biblical criticism, faith and politics. The editor has kindly provided a helpful subject-index.

One of the fascinating things is to watch his spiritual progress in prison. His early letters suggest a youthful, heady zest for the ordeal, confident and even thankful that he has been chosen to be a dramatic witness to the Gospel. "We are well in the profound joy of the Spirit. We are grateful to be allowed to re-enact in our own lives Jesus' way to redemption. He was persecuted, imprisoned and condemned.... I have not felt one moment of discouragement in prison. In fact I find it a truly enriching experience!" But it later becomes clear that that 'enriching experience' is by no means inevitable, ("prison can humanise a person or turn him into a brute"), but is grimly gained through suffering and darkness. "At dawn this prison is the image of hell. Banging and shouting and songs of desperation reverberate through the cell block, exploding from hearts steeped in bitterness.... I make every attempt to put this period of seclusion to good use. It is cruel but it is not in vain. Many things will be born in this darkness." But through the darkness he has to go, including the darkness of a sense