

## Reviews

CULTURE AND LITURGY, by Brian Wicker; Sheed and Ward, 11s. 6d.

This is a profoundly important book that every Catholic concerned with the development of a Christian Church within contemporary industrial society should study carefully. All those Catholics who experience the cultural thinking of the New Left and have felt the 'literature of protest' to be reasonably within our literary tradition will welcome this book as a vital attempt to provide a synthesis of our cultural and religious experience. Catholics who work and think within the tradition of the Left are confronted by an acute sense of divorce between two apparently distinct and opposite statements about the condition of man and society, both seemingly relevant and sensible; the idea of the common culture worked for within the literary consciousness of socialists and the idea of a universal Christian society and culture worked for through the religious life of the Church. The importance of Mr Wicker's book is that he maintains very forcefully that the two streams of thought and attitude are reconcilable and must come together since they are complimentary and essential parts of one central theme about the nature of man and society.

The great tragedy of our times is in fact the loss of a common culture, especially so in England. The loss to Catholicism in England has been precisely its separation from the very Englishness of English culture, without which no church in England can hope to communicate with, or sensitize its people. Mr Wicker's concern with the peculiarly English aspect of the problem of a common culture is in tune with the growing awareness in the Second Vatican Council of the necessity for distinct national expressions of the one Christian Church.

Catholics are not alone in failing to understand this problem, for our society is not itself clear or agreed about what our cultural tradition exactly amounts to. We are in fact involved in a great debate about whether a common culture is possible or even desirable. It is with this last aspect that the argument becomes political and the exciting thing about Mr Wicker's method is that his vision of a Christian community is dependent upon the considerable extent to which moral, social, political and cultural issues mediate the biblical and spiritual aspects of the question. This overall view of man's social experience inevitably roots Mr Wicker's argument within the traditions of the New Left. Indeed the strength of the book is that it itself contributes to the debate and is not simply an interpretation of the debate to Catholic readers.

I believe this last to be the best thing that can be said, and something it should always be possible to say, about the thinking, work and writing of any Christian; for a Christian should see his contribution as specifically to the development of his whole society and not just to the peculiarly religious life of his own minority. A Christian's statement should make sense within the terms of the society to

which he is speaking and a Christian should always be speaking to all men of his time, otherwise he is not being a missionary. Catholicism tends to be self-enclosed within its own interpretations. Since the Church is of this world it must use the normal criteria by which the world interprets and understands itself. This implies that the Church will not of itself recreate society, but in order to do so, must work within the traditions of the social culture. The significance of *Culture and Liturgy* is that its style of theology comprehends the full cultural thinking world in England so that all its pages would for instance be quite recognisable to readers of *Scrutiny*. The agnostic men of the Left and the new missionary Christians are on fundamental common ground.

Much of this common ground has been reached by both sides through the best contemporary work on the nature and development of language. Its discoveries and disciplines have already determined the success of the new biblical scholarship, the fruits of which Mr Wicker makes the fullest use. He contends that Catholic thinking since the Middle Ages has suffered from a static view of history which has always enabled theologians to prejudge their own times, misunderstanding the idea of the development of Christian doctrine. Further, it has led Catholics to favour a return to former practices and lost experiences, a return to a consciousness of nature and its symbolism, which tends to make the writings of so many Catholics, within the Belloc, Gill and Gerald Vann tradition, fall short of the needs of our contemporary industrial society. It is indeed part of the same overdeveloped romanticism that D. H. Lawrence fell for, and which when reforming the liturgy, tends to create something more esoteric and dependent upon a certain cultural sensitivity that will never be available to all people.

A theology based upon the scriptures must make us constantly aware of the one central theme, the idea of salvation history, and of our role as contemporary Christians within it. Mr Wicker argues how this will keep our thinking linked with tradition in the proper sense and must always be forward-looking, providing each generation with its own solutions, for it must force us to accept that an urban industrial community will have its own potential for salvation. The key to this realisation of a new living Christianity will depend upon the extent to which each person can respond to the texture and language of the Bible. It is with this argument that *Culture and Liturgy* strikes implicitly at our system of education and will make new and convincing demands upon our teaching of language and literature. It is at this point especially that our theological life links up with the secular work for a common culture. The inevitable development of this view finds its logical outcome in two admirable appendices to the book, one giving guidance on the immediate practical problem of part-time higher education and the other giving a booklist of the most essential works within the debate of the common culture.

If theology fails to regard the directions and material that this book indicates, it will cut itself off from a main stream of human activity whose ultimate potential few of us as yet fully comprehend. The implications of the book are

many and need to be quickly taken up; the educative role and work of the parish, the need for a proper parish library and for evening classes, the extension of theology into new creative centres, a fresh look at the structure and nature of secondary education, a thorough scientific analysis of the nature of religious language, and an intelligent Christian contribution to the development of the cultural debate itself. But perhaps the ecumenical implications of this book are the most far-reaching of all, for while it seriously questions the whole structure and activity of Roman Catholicism in England, it equally shatters the concept of an Established Church. While the Christian Churches in England remain linked with class structures, the realisation of a common culture will never be possible. It is ultimately only through a common culture that Christian unity can happen.

SIMON CLEMENTS

ROMAN CATHOLICISM, by Sebastian Bullough, O.P.; A Penguin Original, 4s. 6d.

Continual practice in the instruction of converts plays an important part in the life of a priest and gives shape and point to his presentation of the faith. It is a useful preparation for writing a book about the Church and her teaching such as Fr Bullough has done, since teaching to be effective must be attuned to the intelligence, the social background and habitual attitudes of mind of the learner. The constant study and reflection which is necessary to do so has the effect of sharpening the skill of the teacher if what he communicates is to have pith and edge. It is not uncommon for priests who spend much time in the instruction of converts to write books which in fact represent their individual manner of communicating the Church's teaching; over the past forty years we have had three outstanding works of this kind from Fr Martindale, from Monsignor Knox, and, more recently, the too-little known work of Fr Ernest Simmons, *Kingdom Come*, a masterpiece of this kind of literature. The odd thing about presentations of the faith intended by their authors to speak to the contemporary world is that they tend to date as nothing else but the daily newspaper does. Now Fr Sebastian Bullough enters the lists, writing for readers from the upper strata of the educated public.

The characteristic of his work which is most immediately obvious is its dependence upon Thomistic philosophy and theology. Is your reviewer the odd man out in finding this rather petrifying? No one can, in these days, call in question the depth and universality of St Thomas' thought or the penetration of his analysis of doctrine, but is one alone in the feeling that the total effect is that of a marvellous and integrated system of ideas which obscures rather than elucidates the revelation upon which it is constructed? It is recorded that Thomas himself at the end of his life set aside the *Summa* with a feeling of dissatisfaction, and I hope that I am not being unjust to Fr Bullough in saying that I began to understand what Thomas felt as I reached the last page of *Roman Catholicism*. The clarity, the succinctness, the depth, the universality of view are all there,