

ment Sunday was the only day one could visit one's relations and have any recreation.

The complexity of the religious situation is best seen in the variegated pattern of religious practice outlined in the second chapter, a statistical analysis of religious practice among Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Free Churchmen today. Much of the material of this chapter has been covered by other works, but the author's conclusions are sanguine and sometimes surprising. In particular, he shows how we must balance the evidence from censuses of attendance on a particular Sunday with the more significant evidence obtainable today from social surveys and opinion polls. When we do this, we note the striking resilience of the churches under unique pressures, and 'the massive fact remains that with every incentive to spend time in an alternative manner, one quarter of the population is in church at least once a month'. The last sentence of the chapter is even more surprising. 'Let it be said quite simply that in the course of a year nearly one out of every two Britons will have entered a church, not for an event in the life cycle or for a special personal or civic occasion, but for a service within the ordinary pattern of institutional religion.'

What has been the impact of science on our attitudes, beliefs and opinions? The author answers this question first at a general level and then by distinguishing certain large scale sub-systems of belief. At the general level, the difficulties of precise definition are made clear, the illogicalities of many of the responses make one wonder how reliable is the public opinion index for measuring in depth, when for instance over a quarter of the agnostics and atheists in the London Borough pray to the God whose existence they doubt. One of the most interesting sections in the book deals with five basic

sub-systems of belief illustrative of typical attitudes to religious experience in contemporary England. Two of the labels are attached to status groups, the upper and working classes, and three to ideological types, the Catholic, Evangelical and progressive, but these latter have specific locations in the country. Significant continuities are observable between the Evangelical and the progressive types, and between the upper and working classes. The author's attempt to define the Catholic type is possibly less successful. The emphasis on institutional religion rather than the Bible, the visual symbol rather than the verbal, the emphasis on dogma, the idealization of Merrie England, opposition to the egoism of capitalism and the enthusiasm for the organic community all this seems rather a description of the Catholicism of the 30s than of today. What would be interesting to know would be the continuities between middle-class and working-class Catholicism today, and what are the differences in attitude between first and second generation immigrants from Ireland and Poland? These are matters which we know very little about, and without them it is difficult to be certain that there is one Catholic sub-culture.

The last chapters of the book attempt to look forward. The fifth chapter suggests the most useful sociological models to understand the complicated patterns before us, and a final chapter suggests perspective for research, suggesting the need for accurate historical knowledge, the need for studies on the role of women in the church, and the influence of the young, the need also for studies on the local church comparable with Fichter's work in America, and studies of the wider processes in the administrative machinery of the Church.

DANIEL WOOLGAR, O.P.

THE DIRECTION OF CONSCIENCE, by Jean Laplace. *Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1967. 192 pp. 25s.*

There was an old Dominican priest (he is still alive) who had given up reading everything except the Bible and *The Times* and who sat in his room most of the day listening to people. His place has now been taken by a new generation of polo-necked swinging types busily identifying with misfits. They do marvellous work in a restricted field. Meanwhile one still meets unexpected people from every field and denomination of the city who attribute a turning point in their life to a conversation with the old priest. The point of this story is not

to compare the new generation unfavourably with the old. The point is that if we knew more we would, I am sure, discover that the people the guru influenced *most* were the active types who work with the misfits. Spiritual direction is not an inward-looking cultivation of leisurely 'souls' with time for spirituality (though every spiritual director gathers such barnacles in his work with whom he should deal kindly but firmly), but the help and guidance given by one committed Christian to another. The direction of the help given is towards more

commitment, not escape. Fr Laplace in his excellent book makes this point from the beginning. He is at pains to stress the 'concern for realism' which true spirituality has. There will be a growing need in the future for such realistic help from spiritual guides as the springs of initiative in Christian living become interiorized, passing from external structures to the individual conscience.

There are two excellent analyses of the spiritual dialogue in Fr Laplace's book, one of its growth from shy and often inhibited beginnings to free and easy mutual trust, the other of the qualities the guide should bring to it. Fr Laplace draws on truths about counselling which are accepted in current social thinking—though he is careful to distinguish his field from others and warns us not to play the psychologist. A good point that emerges from the book is the stress on freedom, not only in the sense that freedom must be the *atmosphere* of spiritual help but also that it is the goal—the director is a liberating agent; he sets free forces which

enable the person to become the man he is meant to be. Freedom is the dynamic of the process, not just its background.

Fr Laplace recognizes the value of group counselling and the 'révision de vie' in the process of Christian growth but rightly says that individual counselling is still necessary. Many will want to see the connection between the two brought out more plainly. The author leaves the impression that the two coexist alongside each other and that he is interested in individual direction only. In some communities, circumstances make it possible for the spiritual guide to encourage the two to interact, so that the group meeting and the individual interview are made to help each other. When this is so, spiritual formation is enhanced and enriched, and it is no longer possible to speak only of individual direction.

There is a welcome note of concerned but dispassionate tranquillity throughout the book, which shows that Fr Laplace has well learnt the lessons he is teaching. JOHN DALRYMPLE

THE DIARY OF A RUSSIAN PRIEST, by Alexander Elchaninov. Translated by Helen Iswolsky. *Faber & Faber, London, 1967. 255 pp. 45s.*

The last few years have seen the publication of numerous volumes that make available to the Western reader some riches from the treasury of Russian spirituality. These volumes have proved a real source of inspiration and new life to the Western reader through their capacity for setting him in a mystical world without any of that contrived and tortured effort that seems inseparable from mystical vision in the tradition of the Latin church. It must also be conceded that this availability of a rather exotic tradition has in some cases led to an unhealthy *Schwärmerei* on the part of certain westerners—as if everything coming out of the Russian church were worthy of veneration and preservation even when it smacks of superstition and obscurantism. It is not a beard and a pair of piercing eyes that make the *starets*—for, as Fr Elchaninov says in this book (p. 206)—'I do not feel called to the role of a *starets* and I recognize my profound unworthiness to be such. In general *starchestvo* and "obedience" imply too great a responsibility and are far too difficult for both parties, to be undertaken on an impulse.'

Nevertheless it is clear both from Professor Obolensky's foreword, and from the introduction by Father Elchaninov's widow, that Fr Elchaninov possessed rare gifts as a

spiritual director. So it was perhaps natural that these fragments from his diary should be published along with various smaller pieces such as extracts from his letters to young people, especially those to young priests, as well as *A Talk before Confession* and *A Retreat in a Monastery*. These writings have been available in Russian for over thirty years and some of them were published in English by Fedotov in 1950, but the present book is the first full English version.

Perhaps the editors might have taken more to heart St Seraphim's saying, 'No one has ever yet repented of silence', because it is not always easy to see from the extracts published here why Fr Elchaninov was such an outstanding spiritual director. Certainly there are many penetrating and helpful observations to be found in these writings, but there is also a number that strike strained and jarring notes (notes that would doubtless have sounded quite harmonious when heard face to face from the lips of a revered priest). And one feels that many talented and devout Christians must keep diaries which display very much the same insights and blind spots as do Fr Elchaninov's. This feeling is strengthened when one comes across quotations from the great in the diary which by contrast make the diarist's own