

REVIEWS

AM ZIEL DER ZEITEN. By Karl Thieme. (Otto Müller, Salzburg; R.M. 4.50.)

Karl Thieme views the present catastrophic times of humanity from his peaceful abode in Switzerland in this book: 'Is this the end of times?' (*Am Ziele der Zeiten*). Since his conversion he has given German speaking Catholics in Switzerland and Central Europe a great deal to think about. Coming from Lutheranism and its traditional attitude towards the Bible he does not surprise us in his constant endeavour to give us, his fellow Catholics, a new and deeper appreciation of the written Word of God. His association with the German Youth Movement, his constant struggle with Barthianism and his tremendous wealth of background make him a voice to be listened to.

His message is a new one, although it appears to be old. St. Gregory the Great did not doubt that Christ's 'parousia' was at hand and went to great pains in proving it: wars, earthquakes, signs in sun and moon and other frightening tokens of Christ's second arrival.

Thieme has a new approach. These outward signs seem to be too vague. They are always with us and give no special indication for the exact moment. Thieme's criteria are based on an almost biological notion of the growth and the ages of Christ's mystical body. For him the age of fulness of the Church has come. He sees it in the fact that apparently only now Christians have found the last implications of Christ's commandment of charity. Its first dawn was visible in the social teaching of the Pre- and Post-Tridentine scholastics. But it took men like von Ketteler, Cardinals Manning and Mermilod, Bishop Bagshawe and Leo XIII to make the body Christian conscious of the greater extent and the more profound implication of the virtues of justice and charity. While Christ himself was the perfect 'New Man' or 'New Adam' he himself wanted to go through the humble stages of infancy, childhood and adolescence and to depart when he acquired the mature age of thirty-three. He did not come like one of those mythical 'Soteres' of the Orient or Greece as a full grown man, or youth. But according to Thieme's interesting theory he not only started but pre-figured the ages of the 'New Man' (the Church) whose members or cells we are.

When Christ's life became 'public' he was only given three short years before his historical career ended in the apparent

failure of crucifixion and his supra-historical career began in resurrection.

Thieme traces the history of the Church through 1,900 years under this aspect. It is still a bit hazy and here and there one might wonder, if not a bit arbitrary in the selection and rejection of factual evidence. But the brilliance of this thought and its originality must make a writer feel like a Columbus in unfathomed oceans. His book had two editions in two months. The language is difficult as Thieme belongs to that neo-classic school of writers whose leading representatives are Karl Krauss and Theodor Haecker. It is a nervous, breath-taking thing to follow him through the highly tense and complex construction of his sentences, clutching every idea to your bosom with a haunted fear that at the end of this adventure you may find nothing in your hands but loose and disconnected ends. An Anglo-Saxon mind might regret that there is nothing of that beloved lucidity and placid humour which makes English so dear to us. A Frenchman will throw such a book away—except perhaps Maritain, who writes like a German—because it irritates him. But Thieme, who worships language and who constantly lies in labor with crushing visions and ideas, probably has to write and speak this almost stilted and pompous German. After all, if the judgment day *is* near and if the mystical Body of Christ is now a ferment of the 'public' sphere, leavening *not only* the soul and its narrower surroundings: body, family, parish and monastery, *but* politics, economics, hygiene and social life, then this is no time for classical calm.

I think there is something to it. I am less convinced by his second argument: the growing persecution of the Jews all over the world by non-Christians and the fact that the Jews will now see that Christianity really has grown to a total fulfilment of Christ's doctrine will bring them finally into Christ's fold. Then the end of the world has come. Here Thieme is prophecy-ing. For that he is not yet accredited.

The most serious indication, however, that the end of times has come, Thieme sees in some really disturbing facts: 'the disbelief of educated Christians in any eschatology.' Thus Christ's words come true that he will come like a thief at night: unexpected. The alleged pretence that the Gospel has been brought to all the world. 'Thus there is no nation left which does not have to make its decision for or against the Messiah.' The most crushing verdict is the last one: 'The cooling off of love within the churches: We Christians of the twentieth century are in deeper guilt than former Christian generations. They

sinned through passions and often unholy fanaticism. But never had they sinned through the icy cold and lethal lovelessness which characterizes the so-called Christian of our days.'

There is a Kierkegaardian and Barthian mood in Thieme's book. Not only his language and the dialogue form reminds us of these great Protestants. What Heiler has called 'prophetic' Christianity is here. Fr. Johannes Pinski's book on the role of the Germans in the Body of the Church comes back to my mind too. I think this book is worth translating.

We Catholics are inclined to regard an examination of our consciences as an affair of a dark confessional shrouded by the sacramental seal of our priests and in our constant 'state of siege' we feel such open words as illoyal and against our esprit de corps. But esprit de corps breeds hypocrites. Most of us need awakening before the bridegroom comes. This is a stern voice. But is it not better to be awakened this way than through the roaring flames of burning churches and the rifle volleys in political police cellars or worse than that: the disappointed and suffering features of the Judge?

H. A. REINHOLD.

LA SOUFFRANCE. (Reflexions d'un chrétien). Par M. Nédoncelle. (Bloud and Gay; 5 frs.)

The Abbé Maurice Nédoncelle is already well known to many English readers, Catholic and Protestant, for his studies on English religious life during the nineteenth century and for his essay on Baron Frederic von Hügel. We trust that he may soon be appreciated by them and many more of them through the translation of his recent small, but deep and intense, work on Suffering, a topic of permanent and now especially keenly felt actuality. As the title of the book announces, we are invited to consider not the problem of evil, but that, in itself sufficiently grave and challenging, of suffering and of the Christian attitude to it. The first chapter states the problem by discriminating first of all among the different kinds of pains: (a) the comparatively light ones, which are among the very conditions of normal life and essential to its strengthening; (b) the average ones, physical and moral, which are the occasions of growth in magnanimity of soul and generous loving; and (c) the most intense ones. In regard to those, our author frankly condemns the tendency of many to speak of pain as good in itself or as sent by God, and takes up the attitude that

¹ *Christianity and Race*, Sheed and Ward, 1937.