

Todd as its historian. He has not only produced a very readable account of the Society's work, mainly on the West Coast of Africa, since its formation in 1856, but he has given us a general review of missionary problems and procedures which makes this the best book on the missions which the present reviewer has encountered.

The author considers, for instance, the divergence between the enlightened policies of the Holy See and Propaganda, on the one hand, and, on the other, those of missionary congregations which operate very far from Rome with strong views of their own. He indicates the tensions that may arise between a Superior at headquarters and an Ordinary, with full apostolic powers, in the field. He has wise things to say about the overwhelmingly European image which the missions have hitherto presented and about the vital importance of a deep study of indigenous customs before judgment is passed upon them. In this connection he has some fascinating quotations from the writings of Fr Aupiais, of the Society, concerning aspects of African culture and custom, especially the dance, a sympathetic consideration of which might yet save the missions in other parts of Africa.

The Society of African Missions was founded by Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac in 1856 with two directives, the establishment of an indigenous clergy and the retention of all possible African customs. In the event, despite a very general fidelity to the founder's ideas, the Society only ordained its first African priest in 1920, while it is interesting to find one of its bishops postulating in 1926 that 'our mission men begin to learn what they were never taught . . . I mean missiology'.

Apart from the evidence in this book that the Society has never lost sight of its aims, its pupils, now to be encountered with some frequency in this country, attest its kindly and practical outlook (a point emphasized by Archbishop David Mathew in his preface). About the courage of missionaries in general there can be no question, but it is worth recording that not only Bishop Brésillac, but every one of his companions, died of disease within a few weeks after their African arrival in 1859, while for a long period one out of four missionaries died each year. Such persistence and stark heroism should surely earn for the Society the ultimate realization of the ideals of its founder.

PAUL FOSTER, O.P.

IN MY DISC OF GOLD, *The Itinerary to Christ of William Congdon*; Reynal and Company; New York; \$10.00

In My Disc of Gold is an important book on three counts. It is the first publication in book form of paintings by William Congdon, one of the foremost American painters of today. It contains stimulating studies by Jacques Maritain, Martin D'Arcy and Thomas Merton relating to Mr Congdon's life and work. And it is the artist's own account of his recent conversion to the Catholic

Church and of his outlook on the painter's responsibility.

It is possible that this is too much for one volume, which must needs be large to give adequate space for good reproductions and yet should be small to balance the true modesty disclosing the artist's surrender to God. This observer at least would have preferred a book of reproductions with text about the work and perhaps, in an appendix, the history of his conversion and his intimate and moving confession. This hesitancy once stated, the book is most welcome on all three counts.

William Congdon is a highly sensitive artist, so his account of his search for God, his denial—almost to his utter destruction—and his acceptance, with so great a sense of coming home at last, is in itself a work of art. Thus: 'It was becoming ever clearer to me that it was not the pictorial image I was seeking, but a home for my restless and rebellious soul'. Again, 'Each painting was a re-enactment of a life-and-death struggle in the arena of myself'. 'I wanted only to be absorbed into the love of Christ and of his Church; to be nourished by its sacraments, and to grow to the fulness of life in the grace of God'. Finally, 'To the degree that Christ had saved my life from shipwreck and was now my truth, his figure began to prevail over every other source of inspiration; and to become all the landscapes and the temples of other faiths that I had painted, and the inevitable means of proclaiming my reconquered liberty and my salvation'.

The book is divided into two parts: pre-conversion and post-conversion. There are twenty-eight illustrations in the first part and eighteen in the second, all the latter being in colour and of religious subjects. It took William Congdon over a year from his conversion to return to paint, and the change has not only been one of subject matter; his palette is more colourful, his style more fluid. We have the interesting experience, so rare in these days, of seeing a distinguished painter turning to religious subjects because he has become a religious man, so that he is not using the divine incident to parade his human ingenuity, but is proclaiming, as Fra Angelico did before him the spiritual nature of man. Sometimes the power of the painter to state a truth is most telling. There is a painting of Christ on the Lake of Galilee, and where the biblical text makes the reader wonder if the multitudes could hear him, forgetting the power of God, here, in the painting, there is no doubt: the whole world could hear his word.

Mr Congdon has quite naturally and simply found many new pictorial inventions so that his twentieth century work makes manifest the immediacy of Christian truth. Some of the rich quality of his earlier paintings is perhaps lost in this new work, but it will surely return as he enters more deeply into his religious experience, and then Christianity may well again have paintings of profound value.

All the contributors to this book stress the deep need of inner force if a painting is to have spiritual reality. 'The true painter has not painted with his outer, his natural and passive eye', remarks Mr Congdon. 'The subject which he has seen has been transformed into image by his inner, his spiritual and active eye.'

And he paints for no other reason than to discover this image imprinted on his soul'. To the suggestion that an artist who puts religion first will produce impure art, Father D'Arcy replies: 'Art may just be waiting for the positive inspiration of religion to give it depth as well as force'. M. Maritain, in writing of the ordeals and dark nights which must beset the painter, notes that 'he has to look for a new contact with that inexhaustible sense—reality, swarming with hidden meanings, which God has made, and for a deeper vision which is rendered possible to the "inner eye" by the transparency of tears'.

As for Father Merton, he sees 'abstract expressionism as the most natural locus for twentieth century religious concern', and that it is the inner truth of this abstract expressionism which has led William Congdon to his religious liberation. 'Here we see a rare instance in which the latest spiritual *logos* of abstract art has been completely set free. . . . Other great artists have achieved this quality of innocence without any Christian influence. Congdon achieved it through the Crucifixion'.

H. S. EDE.

Notices

BAROQUE CHURCHES OF CENTRAL EUROPE (Faber, 45s.) is a revised and enlarged edition of John Bourke's admirable guide to the exuberant churches of Southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Magnificent photographs by Thomas Finkenstaedt add to the usefulness of a scholarly and readable book.

THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION (Dent, 45s.) is the fifth volume in Daniel-Rops' 'History of the Church of Christ'. It provides once more the evidence of his skill in marshalling the work of other scholars to provide a clear and objective narrative, this time covering the Church's response to the Protestant Reformation and the emergence of her new spirit after the Council of Trent.

MYSTICS OF OUR TIMES (Burns and Oztes, 25s.) is a collection of ten studies, by Hilda Graef, of men and women who have lived within the last century and have already acquired fame for their holiness. They include such diverse people as Isaac Hecker, Charles de Foucauld, Edell Quinn and Teilhard de Chardin; and 'mystic' is perhaps too specific a label for so varied a band, who, in one way or another, brought their faith to bear on the problems of their times.

THE LIFE OF ST TERESA OF AVILA (Burns and Oates, 30s.) is a new edition, in the 'Orchard Books' series of the celebrated autobiography in David Lewis's