

IN PURSUIT OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, by William Kuhns. *Burns and Oates*, London, 1967. 314 pp. 60s.

Mr Kuhns has done a thorough job. His description of Bonhoeffer's theological development is conducted in harness with a biographical account which makes it possible to comprehend how Bonhoeffer came to his conception of the Christian life. Mr Kuhns' method makes it possible, also, to understand why this notorious propounder of a religionless Christianity should be so much read by Roman Catholics. His experiences of the Lutheran and Confessing Churches, his involvement with Bishop Bell in the oecumenical movement, and his commitment to political opposition in Nazi Germany, determined the progress of his theologizing. He did his thinking 'in the round'.

Bonhoeffer was impatient with the monumental Hellenistic effort to take account of person and nature, of divine and human, not simply because of its metaphysical character but because it took no note of the New Testament proclamation of God as man. From this there grew his ecclesiology.

For Bonhoeffer there was but One Church. The Church is the world acknowledging the call of Christ to share his service, and through this response coming to its proper maturity and universality. Those men who are now called 'the Church' have to be the growing point of the world and demonstrate this life of service:

The Church is her true self only when she exists for humanity. As a fresh start she should give away all her endowments to the poor and needy. . . . She must take her part in the social life of the world, not lording it over men, but helping and serving them. She must tell men, whatever their calling, what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.

Recent Popes have made much of similar themes of services, but Bonhoeffer was not suggesting an institutional service, for this would almost necessarily be based on Christian answers to the world's questions and Christ's work, Bonhoeffer was sure, is 'not a solution but a redemption'. Christ was not interested in

'the universally valid' but rather in 'that which is of help to the real and concrete human being', and now the Church must step into history up to its neck.

A concern for the concrete must, Bonhoeffer thought, characterize the authority of the Church. He thought it impossible for any Christian to 'have' authority, but the Church could act 'under authority' if it first took pains to appreciate the realities of a particular situation and responded with 'a command which speaks in terms of that situation'. If the command were not for the situation then there could be no authority. Mr Kuhns comments on this notion of authority in the Church: 'Catholics, especially recently, can sense the critical discrepancy between a pope's command and the relevance of that command to present needs', and this discrepancy raises 'questions of a similar nature to those which Bonhoeffer was raising'. There is something in this. The great Bishop Bekkers of 'sHertogenbosch remarked at the end of his life:

I reproach our Church with something and I don't know whether this reproach holds good, although it still seems justified at present. It is that there is still an official teaching, based on the past and with hardly any changes; and yet we tell people: if, in conscience, you decide you may do otherwise, God will understand. We have, therefore, an official doctrine of principles and a practical rule for people who cannot apply them and who would be simply irresponsible if they did apply them. And when they do not apply those official principles but act according to their good intentions God will obviously understand and be merciful. Thus you get a double morality, and I believe that we must never accept that.

These are difficult matters but such questioning is evidently relevant to our concrete situation.

HAMISH F. G. SWANSTON

ON THE BOUNDARY, by Paul Tillich. *Collins*, London, 1967. 98 pp. 18s.
PERSPECTIVES ON NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY PROTESTANT THEOLOGY, by Paul Tillich. *SCM Press*, London, 1967. 252 pp. 35s.

Both these books, each in its own way, are autobiographical in the best sense of the word. *On the Boundary* is an autobiographical sketch which originally appeared as the first part of Tillich's *Interpretation of History*. In this sketch the late Prof. Tillich gives a most lucid and

moving expression of the dialectic of his existence. Written as he was approaching fifty and in the early days of his exile in the United States, it has added poignancy today after his death as his own evaluation of his life and thought. As he himself puts it in the last words