

## REVIEWS

DIVINE JUDGMENT IN HUMAN HISTORY. By D. R. Davies (Christian News-Letter Books; The Sheldon Press; 1s. 6d.)

After apt and pungent criticisms of some contemporary 'Christian social endeavour,' Mr. Davies recalls the late Dick Sheppard's gibe at the Church Assembly which, he said, reminded him of certain Oriental vendors of vegetable matter. They walk up and down, shouting out: 'In the name of Allah—Figs.' And Mr. Davies comments: 'Figs, by all means, but why in the name of Allah?' But the reader of this and other of Mr. Davies's works may be inclined to ask the same question. His figs are often very luscious and nutritious—if sometimes somewhat less than mature—but why in the name of Allah? His judgments on human history and contemporary events (in other words) are often very shrewd and very sound, timely and profitable. But why *Divine* judgment?

Here, precisely, Mr. Davies can give no clear account of himself as an accredited prophet; and it is his credentials we must require of him if he would be accepted as a witness to Divine judgment, and therefore as something more than just one more diagnostician of our times. And if we cannot be assured of authentic prophetic inspiration, at least we must ascertain the soundness of his theological standards of judgment and appraisal.

Here, again, he fails us badly. In this book the 'neo-orthodoxy' of radical dialectical theology turns full circle and comes to rest in a naturalistic, acosmic dualism akin to the crudest and most extremist interpretations of the Vedanta and of pessimistic Buddhism. 'The Gospel is . . . the proclamation of God's love for man through his redemption by Jesus Christ. Through his *redemption*. Not through his reformation, or his social renewal.' The unscriptural and uncatholic antithesis (unscriptural and uncatholic, because Redemption works Reformation and Renewal, and Reformation and Renewal are wrought through Redemption) leaves us with history as nothing but an accumulation of *karma* which summons the elect to an exclusively transcendent and meta-historical liberation. Indeed we are told that, 'History itself is an impossible experiment . . . Final judgment . . . will be the realisation by man of the futility of history itself, the compulsory realisation through the sledge-hammer of event.' History, in short, is *Maya*, and all action is *karma*, and all *karma* is bad *karma*; nothing but an occasion to summon us to repentance and liberation from the weary wheel of *Samsara*.

We did not need the Incarnation of God to teach us that. It must be boldly but regretfully stated that, stripped of its trappings of

Biblical language, the underlying doctrine of this Christian News-Letter booklet is pre-Christian and sub-Christian. Such indeed is the ineluctable nemesis of the Protestant neo-orthodoxy which proclaims the imperviousness of nature to Grace. This 'theology of Reformation' is compelled to slay itself in the denial of the very possibility and principle of reformation. This 'dialectical theology' by-passes the intrinsic human contradiction on the horizontal, historical plane, thereby ignoring the inherent tragedy of the human situation and the cosmic conflict within history itself, and rests in a crude and irreducible vertical dualism. This 'theology of the Word of God' ends in making the incarnate Word of God a meta-historical *avatar*, and the words of God a mere vehicle for Shankara, Plotinus or Schopenhauer. Even the Moslem merchant would, we fancy, in his bewilderment retort, 'If not in the name of Allah—why figs?' And what ground, we must ask Mr. Davies, for his 'progressive' views on social reformation if not in the name of God and his Christ?

Happily enough, Mr. Davies is not always quite consistent with his premisses, though perhaps he is more successful than some of his more academic colleagues in revealing the abyss to which they lead. But he puts the right questions, and it may be hoped that the very inadequacy and (sometimes) incoherence of his reply may challenge a deeper and clearer presentation of the answers.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE MARKET-PLACE. By Michael de la Bedoyere. (Dakers; 6s.)

Startling in title and challenging in content, this book deals with the most important issue of the hour: the inception of a social order *in which Christianity means something* or, conversely, failure to realise such an order. I can find in the whole book none of the silky circumlocution and brave platitudes which seem to pack so many books on the subject. Nor is the author given to the facile analysis. He is not out to make our flesh creep with cheap apocalyptics, but he gives us a book which will neither increase our tranquillity nor induce wishful thinking. Indeed, we are warned (p. 92) that 'readers, especially Catholic readers, will be aghast' at the suggestion that we are faced with the 'triumph, unless indeed we revert to a new dark age, of everything which they and I consider most abhorrent.' But the book is far from depressing, and the most phlegmatic of readers can scarcely escape being stirred by it. The author reminds us that Catholics can never hope to avoid the central issue—that of conversion, and that the world must regain its faith if Christian salvation is to *shed its indirect blessings upon it*. Nevertheless, to the question, 'How can the abyss between the world and the Church be crossed?' the author gives a reply that is, inspiring as well as soberly practical. This book may not be liked by the *punaises*