

There are eleven short articles in this book and the aim has been to draw contributions from different theological traditions; they come from five different countries. It is worth noting that some are also drawn from different times: Professor von Allmen's contribution, for example, was published 10 years ago. The editors have not done much to draw the con-

tributions together, nor have they stated the contemporary issues with any clarity.

The book has been set up in three distinct types of print, explained—in my opinion inadequately—as being due to the fact that some contributions were set up earlier than others.

JOAN BROTHERS

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ENGLAND AND WALES: a short history, by E. E. Reynolds. Anthony Clarke Books, Wheathampstead, 1973. 376 pp. £3.50.

This book, always reliable in its data, often heroic in its dullness, is worthy of notice as an object-lesson in how difficult it is, even with a wide competence in at least the secondary materials, to write a living Christian history. The author, best known as a biographer of Thomas More, rightly discerns a need for a continuous history of the Catholic community in England (Welsh Christianity should be allowed its proper autonomy, not made an appanage of English—and especially not dismissed in eight scattered references occupying less than four pages of text); but this need, if it is more than an unpleasing lacuna in a bookseller's catalogue, can only be met by an historical statement of a Catholic *tradition*, a particular stream of confluent meanings that men found in the events and movements that shaped their consciousness. It is on this level, the level of significance for the church's life, that Catholics today 'are' their history. Mr. Reynolds has given us, rather, an administrator's narrative, relieved occasionally by flickering shots of individual figures.

The temptation of a history of this sort is to accelerate into a breathless recitation of names and dates free-floating from the contexts where they are intelligible. Mr. Reynolds does not always resist the allure. The opening chapters on the Anglo-Saxon Church, for instance, do not exhibit clearly in their materials that varied contact, resistance and fusion of cultures without which the data, say Bede's account of the synod of Whitby, are quite opaque. The larger perspectives on the doings of earthly kings and bishops are feebly etched: no sense reaches us of that peculiar coherence of decorative art, poetry and historiography which justifies us in speaking of an 'interpretatio anglo-celtica' of the gospel in the constantly recurring notes of dominion over cosmic powers and destiny they display. The outstanding theological mind (and heart) of Bede is not evaluated, even though the *Historia Ecclesiastica* is permeated with the same concerns as Bede's scriptural commentaries, the urgency of preaching and establishing God's priestly service in view of the coming parousia. Aldhelm's work in laying the foundations of a written culture to support biblical

theology (in accordance with Augustine's programme in the *De Doctrina Christiana*) is passed over in silence. Figures like Cuthbert and Guthlac remain unintelligible without some sense of the meaning of the monk in the polis (or, rather, on its borderland with chaos) as classically set out in Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*, a mediaeval best-seller. And, in general, the influence of Eastern monastic christianity on the Irish and English churches stays decently obscure.

A sound, straightforward account of the struggle between regnum and sacerdotium in the high mediaeval church in England follows on; but again, there is the same curious indifference to the element of self-reflection by a community on its faith and experience. The crucial shift of feeling between Lanfranc, a typical Cluniac reformer in Charlemagne's succession, and Anselm, with his revolutionary Hildebrandine vision of things, could usefully be more explicit. Quite ignored are Anselm's role as a recaster of Christian devotion in a fresh mould of loving attention to the humanity of Christ and his significant passion for the rational organizing of theology. Aelred of Rievaulx, our supreme monastic theologian, receives a single, derisibly inadequate mention à propos of the disputed election of an archbishop of York. No sense of the twelfth century renaissance of theandric humanism, to which Aelred belongs, comes across at all. A rather uninspired use of literary sources (mainly Chaucer and Langland) and mere registration of suggestive artefacts like the Wilton Diptych (Richard II's badge on the angels' robes is instructive for the changing fortunes of a sacramental view of kingship) give the text at times the ploddingly pedestrian quality of a museum catalogue. The problems of due demarcation from 'secular' history resolve themselves, in these chapters, into an alarming cursoriness about complex social facts: such notions as the feudal 'system', the rise of the commons, the new monarchy (Henry VII? or is he including, as he should, Edward IV?—there is some highly inconsequential writing here) are bandied about like counters.

Discussion of the Reformation period pro-

ceeds almost wholly in abstraction from its chief theological controversies—Erasmian humanism and Luther's doctrines are nowhere so much as outlined. A proposition of disconcertingly determinist tendency about Luther—if he had not channelled the 'spirit of inquiry and curiosity' abroad at the time someone else would—illustrates the vagaries of an uncertain historical method. It is both an affront to Luther's original genius and a serious misreading of the sense in which he expresses the 'openness' of the Renaissance world; in many ways the fear of that openness underlay his responses—as the Erasmians saw just in time. Mr. Reynolds is at his best, as we should expect, in handling the biographical remains of the recusant church. The lives and testimonia of the martyrs have a habit of speaking for themselves.

The last major section of the book—on the nineteenth century Catholic revival—is disappointing; it minimalises, in a slightly patronising tone of voice, the effects of the Irish immigration; reduces some haunting figures to cardboard; and is excessively free of that ferment of religious ideas which characterizes the period. The phenomenon of the English converts springs forth fully grown—we hear nothing of its roots in the Romantic movement or in the search for a new organic vision in a crumbling, economically and intellectually subverted ancien régime England. The distinctive achievement of Newman in theology is not alluded to: Modernism is mentioned but not explained.

The church's critique of the surrounding social economy (better evidenced historically than some critics of the 'Constantinian' epoch would have us believe; Milvian Bridge to

Vatican II—can we really accept that schematization?) gets short shrift from Mr. Reynolds—no more than a passing mention of the anti-capitalist polemics blazing from the batteries of the hierarchical universe men, Pio Nono and the splendid authoritarian radical Henry Edward Manning; and not even a reference to the distributist economics of Chesterbelloc. No joy either for the Catholic New Left, that flawed but fertile movement of the 1960's.

The book is, in its own way, an adequate rebuttal of the claim, originated by Newman and endorsed in its pages, that the 1840's saw a 'second spring' of Catholicism in England. Was it rather a mid-winter spring? The concern with the fabric of institutional life, expressed in this history's manifest disproportion of content, reflects with an unhappy clarity something of the church-life to which its author belongs. It betrays a community which cannot duly form its own chroniclers because it is not evidently and publicly listening for the Spirit in order to be led into the possession of truth. A believing history of this kind should be, while working on materials acquired with scrupulous fidelity to the canons of academic excellence, a continuation of the *Acts of the Apostles* as fifth gospel, the gospel of the Holy Spirit. The self-interpretation of the Christian community can also be seen as its fluctuating perception of the effects of Grace—so François Mauriac provided a model for a believing evocation of life with full artistic integrity in his *Le noeud des vipères*. Perhaps an historian must learn from a novelist the texture of graced human life before we can have a genuinely ecclesial (not just ecclesiastical) history.

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