

**DEATH AND ITS MYSTERIES**, by Ignace Lepp. *Burns & Oates*, London, 1969. 194 pp. 42s.  
**THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE**, by Ignace Lepp. *Alba House, Society of St Paul, Staten Island, N.Y.* 1969. 210 pp. \$4.95.

I am grateful that, before *The Challenges of Life* came into my hands, I was able to read *Death and Its Mysteries* at leisure. It gave me a profound sense of the wide and compassionate experience which Fr Lepp, as a Christian psychologist had, in society in general and with individuals, of those for whom the pressures of contemporary living have proved too great—or almost too great. Yet it is as a direct result of these experiences that he was moved to the creative expression of an unshakable faith. It transfuses *The Challenge of Life*, which he regarded as his most important work. Fr Lepp believes in his fellow human beings; he believes in life. In both books he recognizes and analyses the social conditions which increasingly prevent the individual from achieving his wholeness. But he also reveals that impulse of aspiration which is an integral part of man's nature. It is always present though many people now no longer have access to it. Fr Lepp treats of the great problem of industrialization, with its consequent herding of masses of people into vast, impersonal conurbations, and deplors the way in which the individual is stifled. He also writes of the police state and its even more suffocating impact. Of this he had full experience during the years when, as a convinced communist, he was a professor in the Russian university of Tiflis. Under circumstances so adverse man is too often completely unable to find himself as a person, and to realize that he should be capable of ruling and directing both his rich inner world and the world outside him. Moreover, the materialism of the natural sciences has cut many off from the mystical and religious intuitions which formerly gave them value in their own eyes. The results of such deprivations are to make a large number of people throughout the world feel, at best, a sense of loneliness in a meaningless existence, at worst despair. Therefore, so unsuited to life, contemporary man has come, especially in the socially more advanced countries, to shudder away from the thought of his own inevitable death. It is an obscene terror which he tries to forget in materialism, selfishness and hedonism. Fr Lepp sees this to arise from the fact that the rationalistic approach has opened up an almost unbridgeable split between the limited thinking mind and the spirit which, down the ages and universally, has in some shape cherished the hope of immortality. He outlines varying

attitudes to the mystery of death, covering the centuries and quoting from the spokesmen of many cultures. Amongst the latter is Freud, whose pessimistic view was that an unconscious 'death wish' is man's first and essential instinct. Fr Lepp roundly demolishes this contention. He presents a number of case histories with skill and compassion. In no instance, however depressed or inadequate the individual might be, does he find evidence of a primary death wish. On the contrary, the trouble is seen to arise from circumstances which are paralysing powerful instincts whose orientation is entirely in the service of life. It is not out of place to recall that Jung has said that the psyche seems to know nothing of death as being total extinction; symbolically, for those who dream about it, it is no more than a prelude to rebirth. This he found was equally true for the mentally sick and for those who were managing their lives adequately. Writing of death, Fr Lepp discusses suicide, the *crime passionnel*, 'romantic death', death for love of a secular cause, voluntary death and martyrdom. It is in the attitude of those who have suffered Christian martyrdom that he begins to find an answer to the fear of death. They died for love of God; they died loving and praying for those who slew them, because they earnestly desired that their persecutors should come to share the happiness of heaven. As Christians they recognized the transcendental relationship between love and death which was made manifest at the Crucifixion. Fr Lepp stresses the Christian conviction that faith in the reality of this relationship cannot but lead to a creative love of life. Indeed, living becomes a compelling challenge; responding to it man sets out to prepare himself to the full, during his temporal existence, for eternal life.

The opening chapter of *The Challenges of Life* is entitled 'The Magnificent Adventure'; and the whole book is a call that man should commit himself with fervour to the task of facing and overcoming every hazard that he may encounter along the road. This he can do because he is a superior being. To prove this Fr Lepp examines the theories of many natural scientists and philosophers as to the nature of man. He gives due credit to the findings of rationalistic biologists, anthropologists, sociologists and historians. But he asserts that, on the whole, they have limited their researches. Trying

to unveil the mystery of man they concentrate almost entirely upon the qualities that he shares with the animals, instead of giving primary attention to that aspect of his nature which is totally different from them. This true and unmistakable distinguishing mark is the spirit. It is the transcendental principle in man, and most definitely it is not of natural origin. In his long development of this belief one sees how greatly Fr Lepp was influenced by the work of Teilhard de Chardin, which chimes with his own conviction that man—and man alone—was created to fulfil a high purpose. In pursuit of this purpose man has a double vocation. As an individual he must find out for himself what this purpose may be. This is the transcendental aspect of his vocation. As his temporal vocation he must make use of every means at his disposal to achieve the purpose

ordained for him. The problems occasioned in such a pursuit are not minimized. The perplexities of making a correct choice in life, of taking on one's freedom, the sin, fear, unrest and anxiety to which being adventurous will give rise are all considered. In these connexions the sections on commitment and loyalty provoke deep thought.

Some readers may consider both books over-idealistic, even, at moments, just a little sentimental. But there is no mistaking the inspiration and passionate sincerity with which they were written. A minor criticism must be made. In two books where reference is made to so many sources of information and thought, it is most frustrating that neither has either a bibliography or an index.

EVE LEWIS

**THE LETTERS AND DIARIES OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, VOL. XIX: Consulting the Laity, January 1859 to June 1861.** Edited at the Birmingham Oratory by Charles Stephen Dessain of the same Oratory. *Nelson*, 1969. 594 pp. £6 6s.

As was said of the previous volume, the editing is 'impeccable'. Following the tradition of Fr J. Bacchus and Fr H. Tristram, Fr Dessain could not be more generous in meeting the tastes and needs of Newman lovers on a great variety of topics, apart from the main theme. Newman showed foresight when he wrote to W. G. Ward: 'I begin to think that I may have opened a vein of metal which others may work out after me when I am gone.' As book after book appears, Newman's prediction has become a fact, to judge by such fine work as D. A. Pailin's study of *The Grammar of Assent* and the essays of Professor Cameron and John Coulson in the symposium *The Rediscovery of Newman*. One of the great charms of the new volume is to see the seeds of great ideas which came to fruition in books which have become classics and provided the basis for further development.

Newman was an original and lonely thinker. This had advantages, though not all his associates were as tractable or submissive as in the light of history they might have been. For all that he could be gay and light-hearted, and possessed a fine humour, possibly too subtle for many, these qualities did not appear when the issues were serious. He was particularly shrewd in his judgment of the competence and motives of Capes, Simpson and Acton when his editorship of *The Rambler* was rudely terminated. His whole attitude in the sad affair recalls his views about authority and

conscience in *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, as when he writes to Simpson: 'I think your plan for the Rambler is very plausible. Whether I could ever help in it, is an enormous difficulty for this reason—that I don't like to employ my time on anything that is not connected with religion, and the Bishop's wish about my giving up the R would interfere with my taking part in such religious matters as it might introduce.'

Newman has been vindicated and proved prophetic in the light of Vatican II about consulting the laity in matters of doctrine and education in schools and seminaries. He was acutely aware of the 'miserable deficiencies' of his fellow Catholics. He might well have blamed those who prevented him defending himself when he was delated to Rome, and who objected to the word 'consult' and references to Nicean orthodoxy maintained against an Arian episcopate by the laity, which Newman was at pains to stress had some rights in the matter of the education of their children.

For all that he suffered, the contention of his associates that they were free to discuss anything that had not been defined did not deceive Newman. His respect for authority, even when tyrannically exercised, was the occasion of his final break with Acton, who as a younger man 'never had the faculty of discipleship'. For all his learning, Acton's prose must have irked Newman's fastidious taste, while only too obviously betraying an education along Ger-