

they form a valuable monograph. Besides there are three essays of unequal value; an interesting reconsideration of the Council of Florence, a balanced survey on the relation of Church and State in Byzantium and an account of Byzantine influences in the West which is stimulating but

inadequate. Influences on science, fiction, philosophy and theology seem oddly underestimated. At least no Thomist should forget the impact of patristic and philosophic texts that came north west from Byzantium.

GERVASE MATHEW O.P.

LIVING PRAYER by Archbishop Anthony Bloom: *Darton, Longman and Todd (Libra Books)*. 8s. 6d.

It is refreshing to read a book on prayer that relates it to ordinary living, and avoids any temptation to present it as a practice mainly for the 'professional' contemplative. In a straightforward and simple way, Archbishop Anthony stresses that prayer is a personal relationship with God, not based on the desire to acquire esoteric mystical knowledge, nor on the wish to attain certain emotional states but founded on a mutual trust and love and a mutual recognition of freedom and autonomy. In the development of this, as in any other relationship, we must engage in a continual struggle against the tendency to remain static and rigid, bound by fixed attitudes and formulae. This 'rejection of images' as traditional orthodox theology calls it, demands the acceptance of risk, as well as a continuing faithful, attentive openness towards the Other.

In one of the most satisfying chapters in the book, the Lord's Prayer is shown as an ikon of, and a way towards, the achievement of this relationship. At the same time, Archbishop Anthony explains how it is a fulfillment and deepening of the experience of the people of God in Exodus – 'Thy will be done' is not a submissive readiness to bear God's will, as we often take it to be. It is the positive attitude of those who have gone through the wilderness, who have entered the promised land and who set out to make the will of God present and real on earth, as it is in heaven' – Man's attitude to God is not one of passive obedience but of active

co-operation in a given task, within a given situation. This is the practical application of the concept 'synergy' – 'working together' – a concept central to Orthodoxy – which has been so misunderstood by western theologians.

Archbishop Anthony belongs, of course, to the Russian Orthodox community, and parts of his book are devoted to the 'prayer of silence' – *Hesychia*. This is commonly supposed to be practised only by a few monks. The author points out that on the contrary, fruitful silence is a prerequisite of all relationships and not only that of prayer – 'We all know in human relationships that love and friendship are deep when we can be silent with someone. As long as we need to talk in order to keep in touch, we can safely and sadly assume the relationship is still superficial, and so, if we want to worship God we must first learn to feel happy, being silent together with him. This is an easier thing than one might think at first.'

There is also a short, but useful chapter on 'The Jesus Prayer' but disappointingly little on liturgical prayer. However, this may, in fact, be useful, as many non-orthodox tend to regard the eastern tradition as solely liturgical. This little book may help to redress the balance.

Although the cover of the book is rather unfortunate, the price is very reasonable and we can be grateful to the publishers for producing a book which will be extremely valuable both for personal reading and of use in the ecumenical dialogue.

IRENE BRENNAN

THE CHURCH IN THE THOUGHT OF BISHOP JOHN ROBINSON by Richard P. McBrien. Pp. xvi + 160: *S.C.M. Press*. 30s.

It is a sign of these ecumenical times that this book is based on a doctoral dissertation which was presented at the Gregorian University in Rome, and that the subject is handled in an extremely sympathetic manner.

By way of introduction, Fr McBrien supplies some biographical information about Bishop Robinson, showing the influences to which he

has been exposed and the context of his various publications. The bulk of the book is in two parts. Part I deals with the Bishop's teaching about the Nature of the Church (the body of Christ, the eschatological community, and its ministry and liturgy); Part II with the Mission of the Church (as a secular and a missionary community). There is a useful bibliography of

Dr Robinson's publications, including articles and book reviews, which Fr McBrien has manifestly studied with much care.

The Bishop of Woolwich is quite rightly regarded as a grave divine, not as an *enfant terrible*. Although he is not, and would not claim to be, a dogmatic or systematic theologian, he is a serious and significant writer on ecclesiology. An original feature of the book is that it brings out, as has not hitherto been done, the connexion between Dr Robinson's earlier essays in biblical and liturgical theology and his more recent and widely read monographs, viz. *Honest to God* and *The New Reformation?* In a foreword, the Bishop expresses his appreciation of Fr McBrien's fairness and accuracy. He is indeed fortunate to have had such an interpreter.

Fr McBrien considers Dr Robinson's teaching about the Church to be representative of

promising trends in current theology, and he relates it to that of some prominent Catholic and Protestant authors and, in particular, to that of Vatican II. Many readers will be surprised at the affinity he discovers with the latter. Although naturally he notes some basic differences, he is content to remark that there are 'certain weaknesses – or, perhaps better, certain *underdeveloped* areas – in the argumentation of Bishop Robinson' (p. 128). Could the case be more charitably stated? Fr McBrien's charitableness is in fact evident throughout. While such an amiable disposition is to be warmly welcomed, it is to be hoped that, as ecumenicity matures, charity will be found to be consistent with a keen astringency. As it is, this book is stronger in exposition than in criticism.

ALEC VIDLER

A MOTHER IN HISTORY by Jean Stafford: *Chatto & Windus*. 12s. 6d.

'Lee Harvey a failure? I am smiling. I think it took courage for a young boy to go to Russia at twenty, for whatever reason he went. I find this a very intelligent boy, and I think he's coming out in history as a very fine person.'

'President Kennedy was a dying man. So I say it is possible that my son was chosen to shoot him in a mercy killing for the security of the country. And if this is true it was a fine thing to do and my son is a hero.'

'I'm gonna say that . . . at age sixteen Lee Harvey Oswald was being trained as a government agent.'

'When I find out who framed my son, then we can find out who killed President Kennedy.'

And so on, and on, a jumbled mass of ugly nonsense. Oswald's mother talked a great deal to the Warren Commission, and to the newspapers; presumably its all down in the archives for posterity. So why this book? Because, says the novelist Jean Stafford who went to Texas to interview the lady for the illustrated magazine *McCalls*, Mrs Oswald is 'inherent to the evolution of the reasons' for the Dallas killings; 'we need to know the influences and antipathies and idiosyncrasies that were the ingredients making up the final compound.'

That sounds impressive (sort of), but do we in fact 'need to know' all this? It's at least doubtful whether the deluded ramblings here presented teach us anything really new about Oswald's dreary and admittedly puzzling life.

And anyhow emphases are disturbingly

misplaced. Mrs Oswald, whose voice dominates the book, is seen convincingly as a brightly-dressed, 'tubular, well-corseted' matron in full control of her surroundings. What does not get firmly enough emphasized is that not only is she stupid and ignorant, but also deeply vulnerable. Particularly to Miss Stafford's sophisticated pen. To score off this depressing figure seems tasteless, but Miss Stafford, also very much present in the book, does not hesitate to do so. For example: one of Mrs Oswald's delusions is that her Russian daughter-in-law Marina is somehow secretly French. Miss Stafford comments: 'I recalled that when I had seen the first photographs of Marina . . . no face had looked to me more Chekhovian or Dostoevskian or Pushkinesque – she could have been Lisa in *Pique Dame*, destined to hurl herself into the Neva as the sad snow fell around her, or Masha, of all the three sisters the one most given to tears. Mrs Oswald, however, stated unequivocally, "She looks French," and that was that.' All this literary 'fine writing' only emphasises the snobbish bear-baiting that is going on.

The book is offered as a 'memorable encounter'. But clearly no real encounter takes place between them at all. Mrs Oswald addresses a permanent public meeting, and, as Miss Stafford rather frequently and testily interluctress, she shows no interest in her interlocutress. Perhaps Miss Stafford was overwhelmed by Mrs Oswald's grotesque presence – certainly the brittle, even fun-poking hostility that results