

LETTERS FROM PARIS 1912-1914, by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, with Introduction by Henri de Lubac, S.J., translated by Michael Mazzaresse. *Herder and Herder, New York; Burns and Oates, London, 1967.* 157 pp. 30s.

CORRESPONDENCE, by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Maurice Blondel, with Notes and Commentary by Henri de Lubac, S.J., translated by William Whitman. *Herder and Herder, New York; Burns and Oates, London, 1967.* 174 pp. 40s.

These two further additions to the translated Teilhardiana are very different in both style and content. The first can be dealt with briefly. It consists of the second part of what was originally published as letters from Hastings and Paris 1908-1914. A Hastings volume is still presumably to come in English. The letters were written to his parents, and like the earlier ones from Egypt they show keen powers of observation and expression, great good humour and filial piety and affection. It is clearly important that they should be made available to the reading public. But some of the letters consist of no more than a few conventional words of greeting, which in this edition are surrounded by oceans of blank page. The book was printed in America, and its price is outrageous.

The second work is extremely important, for all that the original material is also very brief. During the single month of December 1919 Auguste Valensin, close friend and counsellor of Teilhard within the Jesuit Order, and former pupil of the distinguished philosopher Blondel, acted as a channel of communication between them. Blondel had been sent some of Teilhard's essays by Valensin, and we are here given in translation a series of two papers and their accompanying letters from Blondel, together with two replies by Teilhard and one letter. These seven documents together occupy just over thirty pages of the volume. The rest is mainly de Lubac: a preface, two excellent commentaries in article form, and, for every item listed, a set of detailed notes and abundant cross-references produced by an acknowledged master of the art of scholarship. The book concludes with a gracious, if slightly flowery, homily preached by Père André Ravier on the tenth anniversary of Teilhard's death.

There are those who say that inadequacies in Teilhard's grounding in formal philosophy

and theology, coupled with his devotion to natural science, led him to take up unacceptable positions in the former. The publication of this courteous exchange of profound and hard thinking should alone prove enough to satisfy the doubters as to Teilhard's competence to discuss fundamentals. The correspondence is analysed and annotated throughout with meticulous care by one of the foremost philosopher-theologians of our time. The exchange was typical of the method Teilhard constantly used to correct and modify his hypotheses and conclusions: it is a myth that he worked wholly *in vacuo* without the benefit of informed criticism.

A remarkable degree of agreement emerges between these two fine thinkers, particularly, on the significance of Christ, the Cosmic-Christ of St Paul. Both saw the need to reformulate St Paul's teaching in terms of the cosmogenesis that modern knowledge has substituted for the static cosmology of former ages. Blondel tends naturally always to emphasize God's transcendence, and Teilhard, to whose thought the Incarnation was central, characteristically His immanence. But each is careful to allow the importance of the other's emphases. de Lubac's essay on 'Ascent and Descent' is a brilliant analysis of these different ways of looking at God's dealings with His people.

Teilhard concluded the exchange with: 'Goodbye—do convey my deep thanks to Maurice Blondel for trying to help me see my way through these problems. Tell him too that I am grateful for the salutary influence which his particular approach (more traditional and "orthodox", finally, than mine) may have on my thoughts in the future.'

This is essential reading for anyone who wishes to discuss Teilhard at a serious level.

BERNARD TOWERS

SEX AS GIFT, by Ian Fraser. *S.C.M. Press, 1967.* 5s.

This book is by way of being an exploratory comment on the work of the Scottish Church Commission on sex. The main idea behind it seems to be to acquaint people with the work of the Commission and to present adults with their duty to 'arm young people with knowledge

and stand by their side'. The work of the Commission is indeed very important and the more people who know about it the better. The duty of adults could, however, be better expressed (to do Mr Fraser justice the phrase is not his but that of the Schofield report). It is quite true

that young people need to be armed with knowledge but they want their parents and teachers behind them giving genuine but unobtrusive support or before them to provide a conveniently near, reasonable and, in the last analysis, indestructible opposition. And in the section dealing with young people's armour I presume that Mr Fraser is referring to the post-sex-instruction age when he says: 'The basic foundation must be laid at school . . . the school is both the natural and the proper place to lay such a foundation.' The 'basic facts' should surely be provided at home where a surrounding of love gives the best background to learning about this outstanding manifestation of human love. The school has its place to fill out inadequate or muddled knowledge obtained from home, and as a miniature of 'society', teaching people unconnected by natural love to form a bond of love with one another. The 'basic foundation' is in fact not so much the information as the behaviour pattern arising from the information and the attitude fostered by it. The school, as this miniature society, is concerned with the behaviour pattern and the manifestations of the attitude rather than with the attitude itself. Whether this is a good thing or not is a point for consideration elsewhere.

Apart from this, however, some of the points made are good and valid: ideas on how to help with worries on sex and morality are charitable and sensible; the point that 'the example of many adults . . . offers no high example for young people to follow. Their refusal to conform provides a note of hope.' So does his acknowledgement of it. Various chapters considering the lack of accurate information among young people and their elders, the unwillingness of adults to discuss and share with their charges—whether children or pupils—in any meaningful way, and so on, are useful in their way. For factual information on sexual practices among the average British 'teenager' this book is admirable. It has mostly been said before but it is still valuable and pertinent information. In those chapters, however, which deal with the problem as a whole—'Sexuality as a gift', 'Wanted, a code?', 'Context of belief'—the author appears to be struggling with ideas he cannot put across. (It is also a pity that the footnotes have been put at the end of each chapter—it is infuriating to have to

search for the end of the chapter and then for the relevant number, in the middle of a sentence.)

Mr Fraser's book, therefore, is a worthwhile one: yet it does not quite come off. The reasons for this are twofold. In the first place the tone is that of an adult speaking to adults, and the book therefore seems to be intended for intelligent educated adults who are interested in and like young people. And this tone will deter any but the most mature and determined 'teenager' from taking much interest in it. And these are the people who least need to be made aware of what the book says. As a 'young person' myself, I felt almost continuously that I was intruding, albeit with encouragement, on territory intended for grown-ups. Mr Fraser occasionally gives 'advice' which is excellent in itself but which one is disinclined to take because it appears to be offered as a sop to one's immaturity. 'Teenagers' are notoriously touchy on the subject of their age and anything that feels like condescension puts them off at once.

In the second place, this indecision of tone is only a symptom of the failure of the book to tackle the root of the problem; the question why a large number of us have already opted out to embrace a cult of 'love' and pacifism, which, although it has got its values slightly muddled, is readily understandable by anyone of the same age. A natural accompaniment to this cult is the freer sexual behaviour of young people who have not bothered to work out a new code as a substitute for the old one they rejected along with the social one. The examination of why young people feel a need to reject a whole way of life should surely follow a very extensive and informative survey of their opinions and customs. Much of what is said in this booklet is known to the people who are likely to read it. The conclusions that could be drawn from the facts are not drawn and indeed it would take another pamphlet to do so. It seems to me that this failure to find out why people are behaving like this, and what, if anything, should be done about it is unfortunately fairly general among books of this type.

This, then, is a book full of accurate information and some sound advice. It is therefore all the more of a pity that Mr Fraser has been unable to formulate any possible new ideas or to find a language in which to do so.

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