

CHRIST THE REPRESENTATIVE, by Dorothée Sölle. S.C.M. Press. 25s.

This book is an 'essay in theology after the Death of God'. Though she complains of nineteenth-century theologians who, like the priests in the Jerusalem temple, put back into circulation for religious purposes a sacred coinage long discarded, Dr Sölle herself is not often able to achieve that clarity of language demanded for an intelligible argument, but she seems to be saying something like this: (a) 'Modern Man' is on a quest for 'personal identity'. His initial question is 'Who am I?'. (b) This identity is threatened today by complete interchangeability or substitution. The whole world seems to have learnt David's trick of numbering the people, and few understand how deadly sinful this is. We too often think that one human being can be substituted for another. (c) At the same time we know that we are not in our past or in our present yet 'ourselves', we look for ourselves in the future. In order that we shall not be judged as we are now, and in order that we shall have a view of what we are to be to which we can work, we need a 'representative' in whom 'the kingdom of identity' is present now. (d) This is all the more the case in our time than in any time else. For the most obvious of our experiences is that of insecurity and uncertainty. These cannot be reconciled with either theism or atheism because 'these two positions alike betray a naive, undisturbed ideological confidence'. This is the 'Death of God' for us. (e) The fact that Christ identified himself with God is the only possible ground for believing in God today. Christ is God's 'representative' among us, and our 'representative' before God. While we cannot demonstrate that it is the experience of Christ which enables us to achieve identity, we can certainly reflect upon this claim. Theology will then be a reflective description of certain experiences. (f) How then are we to talk of Christ? Certainly we do not want a substitute who replaces us once for all. We need a representative who sets up a continuing relation between us and God. (g) This tension between 'irreplaceable' and 'representable' is indicated

in the New Testament by the preposition of representation: Christ is the new Adam who in his person, and therefore in his actions, represents us before God (cf. Rom. 5: 12ff and II Cor. 5: 15). (h) The various certainties of the past were expressed in steady state soteriologies. For example, St Anselm employed the feudal structure of *aut poena aut satisfactio* in defence of the honour of God, and saw the work of Christ as reparation for *lèse-majesté*. Luther, however, saw that an anthropology and a soteriology based upon the concept of *nature* would not do. He proposed the thesis of *imputatio* as a way of describing the new *relationship* of man and God — man *is* as God *sees*. (i) Christ, therefore, is not to be thought of as the one who puts us in our *place* in a fixed system, but as the one who gains *time* for us to find ourselves. (This central idea of Sölle seems to have much in common with Schleiermacher's doctrine of reconciliation: 'Christ's highest achievement consists in this, that he so animates us that we ourselves are led to an ever more perfect fulfilment of the divine will'; cf. John 15: 2-11. Certainly it has nothing in common with the crude substitutionist theory of Barth in which Jesus seems to have died 'for Barabbas' but not for the thieves crucified with him.) (j) Christ is therefore the great Teacher, not in the sense of an authoritarian dispenser of facts and whacks, but in the sense of one who by his personal commitment to the process of growing-up enables others to mature into his friends and colleagues. From this it follows that a new understanding of punishment is to be employed in Christian discourse. Adapting Makarenko's thesis that to be effective educationally a punishment of the pupil must 'cost' the teacher something (to make a child 'stay in' is to make the teacher lose the hour also), Sölle suggests that Christ, who is born under the law (Gal. 4: 4), punishes us in such a way that he suffers himself. In this way some of the modern difficulties about hell are avoided. (k) *We* have to work out our salvation with diligence because God in Christ has committed himself wholly to the human

condition, and thus committed himself to our helplessness. It would seem that Sölle here has the beginnings of a thesis which would set the Death of God into perspective with previous theologies: the Incarnation is the first moment in the revelation, continued in the words about 'the least of these my brethren', that we are no longer to seek God in the transcendent, and the realization of this is forwarded by the discarding of 'the God up there' by theologians brought up sharp by Bonhoeffer. She does not, however, develop this idea. (l) The primary interest of Bonhoeffer was in an ethics of responsibility but this is not enough to secure the integrity of identity. We must introduce the notion of *provisionality*. In the end we must each one abdicate our responsibility for each other. The eschatological moment is the coming to maturity. Otherwise the Church, for example, will be betrayed into proclaiming itself a servant in order always to be a nurse. (m) The emphasis on time and the provisional character of all representation, even that of Christ, entails an unfashionable emphasis on the Crucifixion rather than on the Resurrection of Christ as the paradigm of our life. Though this allows Sölle to speak interestingly of the problem of evil (which is the starting point of most modern theology), this does seem retrograde. She has not come further than Pascal's famous remark: 'Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world; we must not sleep during that time', or Bonhoeffer's description of the Christians whose only life is 'their participation in the sufferings of God in Christ'. (n) Yet, because of the representative and the time there remains hope. 'Heaven or being with God is a naive, mythical form of what we call in secular language the longing for happiness.' The inner-worldly happiness we seek, and the 'eternal vision' men have sought in the past, are equally related in indirect fashion to 'salvation'. We have somehow to work while Christ hangs on the cross for us and accept no escape until God is realized in this world and we are at last 'ourselves'.

If this be Dr Sölle's thesis then it obviously has relations with divers dogmatic matters other than the strictly soteriological, for example the Pauline doctrine of the Body of Christ, the patristic discussion of Patripassionism, and the Tridentine formulation of Original Sin. It touches also on the principles of interpreting Scripture. She writes of some ways of doing these things: 'The irreplaceable individual became a mere pawn in God's chess game, and

temporality (the basis of the hope of the represented) was ignored in the interests of a supra-temporal and timeless salvation mechanism, which lost none of its patent artificiality by being labelled *salvation history*.' A palpable hit.

Although this analysis occupies no more than the space of an *obiter dictum* in this work, and while other readers would have much to discuss in the main line of the argument I have outlined, it seems to me that in her remark about 'salvation history' there is a way into discovery of Dr Sölle's main assumptions. Her criticism is, of course, intelligent and useful. It often appears that salvation-history interpretations, and not only those designed for 'popular' audiences, cannot encompass the original immediacy of the Hebrews' response to the God among them. Commentary becomes a matter of placing certain moments in a pattern. It is not simply that Prophets and Kings have to be carefully marshalled if they are to take their places in the procession, but even the Exodus event has to be handled in ways which lessen our appreciation of its *actual significance* to the successive generations of Hebrews. The liturgical review *Worship* has lately been making efforts to rescue 'salvation history' from dead historicist hands, notably by employing the obvious example of the Council as the continuing history of the Spirit now. But I do not think that anyone has cleared 'salvation history' of Dr Sölle's charge. Nor do I think that it is possible for anyone so to do.

At the same time Dr Sölle has adopted too narrow a method of criticism. Like others writing after the Death of God she has too much concentrated on the predicament of the individual present to himself in a world of evil and too little on the community of men present to God in the world of liturgy. What is needed, by both the salvation historians and Dr Sölle, is an understanding of the Old and New Testaments as 'salvation liturgy'. For the Israelite it was not the events of the past but the celebration of those events in the Temple, and the meaningful tradition of those events created by the recitation of the liturgical accounts, which made him alive to the living God. For the Israelite all history aspired to the condition of liturgy. This is true not only of public events like the redemption of the Exodus, but of private events like those described in Ps. 66 and Hosea. The liturgy made the redemptive work of God present, and therefore meaningful and 'identifying' for the member of the worshipping community. We can

see the same attitudes at play in the creation of the New Testament, which derives from the Christians' participation in the Lord at the Eucharist. Someone has misled Dr Sölle on the doctrine of the Eucharist, which she takes to be a static substitutional sacrifice, rather than the dynamic 'kingdom of identity' in which we find ourselves in finding each other before God. However we explain Transubstantiation we must at least emphasize the relational character of Communion. It is a mark of Dr Sölle's worth that she prompts a search along the bookshelves (unrequited) for a theology of the sacraments after the Death of God.

Some of the footnotes are somewhat odd.

Those who do not have to look along their bookshelves to know they have neither the Weimar edition nor Strachey's translation deserve more than the volume and page number of those editions when Luther and Freud are cited, titles of commentaries and papers would have helped; a note that Hofmannsthal was an 'Austrian poet, 1874-1929' is either needless or useless, while one on the same page which informs us that Calderon wrote a play 'entitled *Das grosse Welttheater* (The Great World Theatre)' shows that the indefatigable Mr Lewis found translating Dr Sölle's prose more than usually tiring.

HAMISH SWANSTON

THE NUN: SACRAMENT OF GOD'S SAVING PRESENCE, by the Most Rev. Gabriel Garrone, translated by Paul D. Collins. *Alba House, New York*, 1967. 190 pp. \$3.95.

NUNS, COMMUNITY PRAYER AND CHANGE, by Sister Rosemarie Hudson, S.O.S. *Alba House, New York*, 1967. 183 pp. \$3.95.

THE LIFE OF A NUN, by Françoise Vandermeerch (Sister Marie-Edmund, H.S.H.), translated by Donald Attwater. *Geoffrey Chapman, London*, 1967. 142 pp. 25s.

The best thing about these three books is the dust-jacket of the first one—interesting title, interesting photograph of a medical sister and a couple of soldiers. The blurb tells us that the author, the Most Rev. Gabriel Garrone, previously Archbishop of Toulouse, was appointed Pro-Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities in February 1966—one of the 'new men' on the Curia. Yet the book itself, despite its title, is no more than a collection of unctuous *fevorinos* and entirely lacking in structure. The other two books are equally lame. Sister Rosemarie Hudson's is a messy book on liturgical *aggiornamento* and lacks orientation. Community prayer is not set within the context of public worship. There is no mention of the sisters joining in parish worship or even of praying with their pupils or patients. The book could be summed up in this quotation from page 67: 'Sisters in their semi-private chapels have a greater opportunity of carrying out these prescripts with loving forethought for variety, dignity and piety than do congregations of large churches.' Françoise Vandermeerch's book is puzzling as it is not clear for whom it is written. Aspirants? Religious themselves? Or 'the public'? The third part is the best, though even here the author touches many vital points but, finding them also painful points, skids off. The acute problem of conflicts arising from the clash between professional responsibilities and religious obedience is not even mentioned.

Yet these books are no worse—they may even be better—than the general run of books written specifically for nuns on the religious life. A glance at the publishers' lists show that we provide a good market for the Helpful Household Hints type of book (Six recipes for the Chapter of Faults). But this is not enough. It is too shallow. What I think we need are books that really probe the theological basis of our life: and these are not forthcoming. Why? It is difficult to offer more than a guess necessarily based on limited experience, but I would suggest that nuns are not in the habit of thinking deeply enough about the *theology* of the religious life. This may be the result of the whole noviciate system whereby novices are often given answers to questions which they had not yet formulated for themselves. Curiously enough this is particularly dangerous when the noviciate instructions are good, for the better the answers seem to fit, the more the system discourages deep questioning. Nuns are also hampered by inadequate theological education and some may be drugged with overwork. But worse than this is fear of asking questions that have no ready-made answers. We are much more housebound than our male counterparts both literally and metaphorically. A teaching sister's interests are much more concentrated on her school than are, for example, a Jesuit's or a Benedictine's. A contemplative nun enjoys (or suffers from) a far stricter enclosure than a contemplative monk.