

Who would have guessed that a fresh and interesting book would now appear on the Church since Vatican II? Not that the Church has been uninteresting, but surely everything has already been said. Peter Hebblethwaite, though, manages to be interesting even when he is not being new; partly because he writes lucidly, almost without jargon and with occasional sparkle — ‘Justice and Peace,’ which became the Catholic euphemism for politics,’ ‘The simplification of the liturgy turned out to be a complicated and laborious matter,’ and, (of the pre-conciliar consensus church), ‘the bland leading the bland.’ The book is as well-informed as you would expect from the best ecclesiastical journalist in England but what really makes it so attractive is that it can look at the Church and be neither frightened nor hectoring.

It is essentially a work of theology depicting a different kind of Church and a different kind of Christian: one whose ‘adhesion to the Church is a form of critical belonging’ and who sees this neither as a merely temporary condition nor as regrettable, who thinks of the Church as ‘humanity in so far as it recognises, however falteringly, its vocation in Christ’ and as ‘a permanent learning community in which all teach and all learn.’ None of this will be unfamiliar to readers of this journal, most of whom may be supposed to belong to this category that Hebblethwaite calls the ‘Fourth Man’—the other three are the Progressive, the Conservative and the man who, fed up with the squabble, simply drifts away. It is, however, new enough and important enough to deserve the elegant re-statement we have here.

The best chapter in the book is undoubtedly the fascinating saga of Archbishop Casaroli, the Vatican’s Kissinger, and his dealings with Russia and Eastern Europe (‘The Vatican’s *Ostpolitik*’). The account is carefully balanced and fair representation is given to most of the competing interests involved in this complex and delicate business. It would have

been valuable, though, to have heard not only about the reactions to Vatican diplomacy from the Socialist governments, the revanchist exiles and the traditionalist but pragmatically acquiescent Catholics at home, but also how it looked to, for example, those Polish Catholic Socialists who are critical of both Wysinski and Gierak—the ‘Fourth Men’ of both church and socialism.

There is, however, a good chapter about such people (‘Learning from Marxists’) which traces the erratic history of the Christian Marxist dialogue from Paulusgesellschaft to the Liberation Theology of Latin America—more is said that is relevant to this in the later chapter ‘Taking Politics Seriously’. It should be noted for future editions that Christians for Socialism has now reached England and the first number of its journal *Cross Left* has appeared. Incidentally, while we are setting the record straight, *New Blackfriars* is correctly quoted as saying that ‘Unless we recognise Christ in the tortured prisoners of Vietnam it is idle to pretend that we recognise him in the sacraments.’ ‘Not much familiarity with the literature,’ Hebblethwaite goes on, ‘was needed to know that it was not the American prisoners in North Vietnam whom Christians were being urged to identify with Christ. . . . This led to complaints on the right about ‘selective indignation. . . ’. He is, of course, quite right about the identity of the prisoners on that occasion, but more familiarity with the literature might have led the right to the editorial of May 1973 explicitly condemning the torture of the American prisoners.

It is an excellent book, vividly written (one final example, on the ‘bombshell’ of *Humanae Vitae*, ‘Everyone could remember exactly where they were and precisely what they were doing when the fall-out reached them’), and, despite its unpretentious claim to be simply a chronicle of a decade in the Church’s life, a useful contribution to the theology of the Church.

HERBERT MCCABE OP