

follow the women sent to report upon her virginity. The impression of indignity was absolute.

Bresson has used only the original words of the actual trial in his text, and they ring with an authenticity that conveys sanctity on the screen as one has seldom felt it before. When they ask Jeanne if she thinks herself to be in a state of grace, the reply, though one had read it before, cuts with a biting simplicity that makes one shiver: '*Si je ne suis, que Dieu m'y mette: si je suis, qu'Il m'y tienne*'. The archaic French in the assured young voice has a nobility that we find again in her description of herself as '*Jeanne la Pucelle fille de Dieu*', or in her cold accusation to Cauchon '*Evêque, je meurs par vous*'; every so often her rough tones drop to a defeated murmur, and one is moved again by the starkness of the verbal style so wonderfully paralleled by the austerity of the direction.

It is the trial alone with which Bresson is concerned, and the final tragedy is dealt with swiftly enough; great billows of smoke rise from the piled faggots, alternately masking and disclosing the cross held up by the two Dominicans, so that we are left with only the retinal image, as it were, of the thin figure chained and roped to the stake which we had seen before the blaze began. The film ends with an image of the charred stake and the chains hanging from it, and the same sound of drums with which it began. It only lasts sixty-five minutes, but one is drained of emotion by the end. Besson plays scrupulously fair with judges, jailers, soldiers and all, none are made ridiculous and it is easy to see why each acted as he did: but the indomitable fortitude of Jeanne is a remarkable achievement for both director and actress, Florence Carrez.

A comparison with Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc* is inevitable, but in my opinion, Bresson's film sustains the challenge unshaken.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

The Church and the Artist

VISUAL ARTS AT SPODE HOUSE

The annual visual arts week held at Spode House is small, badly attended, relatively amateurly run, and unsupported by public funds, and seemingly of very little consequence to the Church. It is thus important, if one judges the genesis of art movements in the last hundred years, or is at any rate in the right category to be considered so. Not that I am trying to establish a rule of importance being always inversely linked with ineffectiveness, but the conception behind the visual arts weeks has been sufficiently difficult and exhausting to put

off perhaps all but a small group of people who were willing to make the effort to grasp it.

Originally the idea was a study of specifically religious problems to do with the kind of art that is used in churches or should be used; it seemed mostly concerned with questions of propriety and utility rather than grappling with the problem as to why 'church' art always looks the odd man out and curiously effete beside the art of today in galleries, museums, and private houses. After all it is only when this problem is faced as, first, existing, and then as one to be solved in a practical and personal way that the weaknesses of church art take their place, gain context and orientation, and a hint of a solution is possible. Here I think the habit of thinking, rather vaguely of 'us' (the elect) and 'them' the rest (the outcast), a slovenly way of thought at the best of times, which was evident in the first weeks, tends to make most of us curiously naive towards the general world of art; matters which are revolved and talked about to excess within our circle lose their attractive power when seen from outside; questions of art in church never rise higher than the utilitarian; the question of loincloth and navel taking on more importance than the question of, say, why Picasso has been so successful in destroying the basis of visual representation. In short, what had to be decided at Spode was whether such a thing as 'Christian culture' exists, and whether this culture, if it existed, or in so far as it existed, had the recuperative power within it to tap the valid roots of myth and image. The last three weeks, in 1960, 1961 and 1962 have, if they have not given the complete answer to these questions, shown us where we stand.

The Church, by a cruel and particularly modern stroke of ill-luck has been placed in a position where it is practically impossible for her to make use of or even encourage art based on personal experience. But all the major achievements in the arts have been based on personal experience, and if art is so founded, how then to enlarge one's own experience as a layman, and thus develop the capacity to talk the same language as the artist? How to become so expert in this language that it will in the end be possible to differentiate the good from the bad within that particular sphere; so expert that one's voice will be heard and attended to? Only when this becomes second nature does any communication become possible and true exchange of ideas fruitful. But this must not be attained by sacrificing any of one's own belief, the fact that one talks the same language does not mean that one submerges one's belief in favour of the corpus of beliefs and experiences that have gone to make the artist the man he is. Here is the crux. Experiential art, because it takes its inspiration and point of departure from a culture totally unrecognizable as in any way the residue, even, of Christendom, of the Christocentric culture of the past two thousand years, seems to be directly at variance with any kind of art that the Church could use as a vehicle for her teaching and an expression of her life. It was to test the truth of this hypothesis, and expose the half-truth, that the weeks at Spode were reorientated to include exhibitions of painting and sculpture which were almost totally 'secular' in character so that a kind of dialectic between the art inside

the Church and the art outside the Church might spring up.

At the same time as the exhibitions and one or two lectures arising from them, there was a series of talks given by experts, usually Dominican or Carmelite, on the character of a church, together with a history of its origin, as far as form and function were concerned. All this took place against the background of the canonical hours recited in choir at Hawkesyard Priory next door. The aim of the weeks was to give a total experience of the world of art and the practice of religion, and observe if, by any chance, by a process of osmosis perhaps, the two worlds would be happy coinciding. This was of course a microcosm of what I felt to be the greater problem facing the Church throughout the world, a problem of civilization rather than spirituality.

There were many mistakes made, but I believe they were mainly ones of faulty administration, i.e., over-emphasis on talk to the detriment of visual impact, over-emphasis on painting one year, on architecture another; but these did not detract from the central idea, which was justified. The attempt was not to fuse art (modern art) and the Church together in some kind of marriage of convenience cemented by ingratiating smiles and good intentions, but an experiment conducted in time, with people and ideas; an experiment in civilization.

The major lesson learnt, apart from the rather obvious one of the Church not relying on its own energy entirely for inspiration and results in the visual arts, was the appreciation of the vital importance of the personal element in everything connected with the genesis of art; a problem which because of its inherent risks, and because the whole set of the mind of the church seems impersonal and disinclined to compromise itself by getting involved with personalities or personal issues, has not been given nearly the amount of emphasis and study it deserves. This is particularly true of this country, where the Church is not *au fait* with the cultural milieu of England, and therefore finds it sometimes ludicrously difficult to avoid seeming totally alien. (In the nineteenth century this was, to a large extent inevitable, and it was right to produce buildings pragmatically foreign such as the Oratory and Westminster Cathedral, the emphasis being that the Catholic Church, so long exiled from a full participation in the life of the country, was a stranger returned to his own, but inevitably clothed with the cultural garments, the outer visible form, of other lands. But I believe this phase of the Church's life in England to be quite irrevocably over, and experience gained at Spode backs this up). The Church must find out in the most professional manner possible what is going on in England and make use of it. The clue to this problem is contained in the real cultivation of personal knowledge and taste, in the art and architecture of the present time.

With this idea clearly in mind it is easy to see that the importation of foreign artefacts and the use of materials which are not found in this country, are a regressive step, an imposition on the life of the general public. No amount of Italian art will help to commend the Church's universality to the public outside the Church. It will remain the alien thing it is, a product of the lack of con-

fidence, taste, and knowledge of what is worthy of appreciation in England. Owing to this unawareness of the importance of personal relations and personal contact, there is more and more a tendency to rely on two things; one, the concentration on richness of material, and intrinsic value, to the disregard of strength of image or originality of intention, a question of elevating secondary considerations above primary ones; two, the feeling of satisfaction obtained when the artefact is 'finished' in a highly wrought or polished or tightly defined way. Both these tendencies are not new in the Church, witness the cosmatesque tomb of the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, and the elaborate altarpieces of the school of Mabuse and the later Flemish painters, but they are degenerate tendencies lacking in courage. It is a mark against the Church that they seem to flourish so vigorously here today.

At the same time the danger of subjecting the Church to a tyranny from a wholly fictitious *Zeitgeist* is only avoided if certain members of the Church are prepared to take the whole art world seriously, so as to build up their critical faculty. Far from subjecting the Church to any form of *Zeitgeist*, the weeks at Spode were devoted to finding out if such an entity existed at all. The results, modest as they were, by their emphasising the fact that all achievement in art is predominantly a personal achievement, seemed to indicate that the progressive 'spirit of the age' was a fiction which did not correspond to the actual situation at all, but was made use of, either as a stimulant, or a justification, by individual artists and architects to aid their own powers of expression. This complicates the situation, if anything, because it means that each question has to be settled on its own merits, within its own terms, which presupposes a high degree of knowledge, trust, and diplomacy on the part of those who are trying to effect something. There is no evidence that these qualities exist very widely in the Catholic Church in matters of art patronage.

It is impossible to create, pragmatically, an atmosphere in which church art will flourish, because this largely depends on factors outside the Church's control. Only in a culture so immersed in a taken-for-granted Christianity can those works of art be produced where the element of striving and *tour-de-force* is non-existent. If that atmosphere is lacking, the effort of trying to do without it and the agony of creating in the desert, is bound to have a bad effect on the ideas and the form of the art patronized. Serenity vanishes, the tortured form becoming indicative, nowadays, of the 'religious' painter or sculptor; one feels that apart from the totally effete (the Majority) the concentration on agony and shock is really an externalization of the mental agony of the artist faced with an impossible situation; he has been asked to build an *impressive edifice* of witness out of his own resources, by clients who do not understand the terrible nature of the task they are imposing. Hence the dangerous and wrong tendency to equate religious feelings and tortured forms, even on the part of the artist himself, who cannot produce the recuperative well-knit art that in times of better integration was the hall-mark of good Church art.

In face of the seemingly impossible situation the only thing that can be done,

and which to a certain extent was done at Spode, is to build up a disinterested appreciation of the art and architecture of the day, a full knowledge and a personal regard for the difficulty of the creative artist. Finally, to make some kind of unconditional gesture of encouragement, as the moving of the Spode exhibition to London was intended to be. On the judicious extending of encouragement and the generous taking of interest in the actual world of artistic achievement in England today will be built any kind of artistically valid contribution to the life of the Church.

PATRICK REYNTIENS

Reviews

ANCIENT ISRAEL: Its Life and Institutions, by Roland de Vaux, translated by John McHugh; Darton, Longman and Todd; 55s.

Father de Vaux, head of the Dominican École Biblique at Jerusalem, has the advantage in writing a book of this kind of being in the first rank as an exegetical scholar of the Old Testament, as well as being a field archaeologist and a distinguished teacher and graceful writer.

The present handsome volume is an excellent translation made by Father John McHugh, of the two volumes (here presented in one), *Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, published in 1958 and 1960. 'Institutions are the various forms in which the social life of a people finds expression' (Preface), and here the whole social background of the Old Testament is presented in the light both of the Old Testament text itself, of literary evidence from surrounding peoples, and from archaeological discoveries, many of very recent date. This is where Fr de Vaux's twin skills as scholar and archaeologist are so valuable. The whole matter is displayed on a magnificent organic plan—with analytical divisions and subdivisions which not only make it easy to look for things, but also make each section short and readable. The analytical construction is as grand as that of the Code of Canon Law, and Fr McHugh's new index, prepared for this edition, is of the quality of the index to that Code.

An introductory section is called 'Nomadism and its survival' and is an examination of tribal organization and customs that remained in Israel (including a good section on the *Rekabites*). Part I is 'Family Institutions, including, e.g., Marriage (good on the *go'el* and the levirate), Children (excellent on education), Adoption, Inheritance, and Funerals. Part II is on 'Civil Institutions' including the population (good section on 'rich and poor' with evidence of class-distinctions), the *ger*, slavery, and several valuable sections on the idea of kingship,