

UNDECEPTIONS. Essays on Theology and Ethics, by C. S. Lewis. Edited by Walter Hooper. *Geoffrey Bles*, 1971. £2.25.

To review a book of previously unpublished snippets and articles by C. S. Lewis is a peculiar task. The fact that such bits and pieces are thought worth publishing is an indication of the importance of a man's contribution to Christian thinking. It is also likely to show up his weaknesses, since what one says in a radio discussion, or a polemic review, is not necessarily what one wants posterity to remember. And the weaknesses are certainly there—the romantic anti-feminism, which is so unassailable because it thinks it isn't anti-feminine; the fascination with violence which much more obviously mars the 'Narnia' books; above all, the bland certainty of rightness which is most evident in the careful humility of replies to hecklers, live or in print. He's always saying, 'I don't know enough to be sure', or 'I may well be wrong', but these (perfectly sincere) admissions grow out of an assured, reasoned belief so profound and immovable that it becomes almost impossible for him not to feel a certain compassionate contempt for those who can't understand. Hence the constant guard against any appearance of arrogance or dismissiveness. The book's title indicates one important aspect of this attitude: the desire to unuddle the muddled people, to undeceive the wilfully deceived, was a strong compulsion with Lewis.

This type of Christian is at present out of fashion, though he was once admired and valued. Perhaps we are wrong to withdraw our admiration. The arrogance of people whose soap-box is the utter obviousness of their faith is real, but it can give way to sanctity, just as the doubt-ridden-but-struggling-on type can also come to sanctity. At the moment we tend to admire and understand the latter and regard the former with suspicion. We need both, and both need *real* humility if they are to fulfil their faith. Lewis's ability to argue the Christian case with clarity and bite in terms of his philosophy is off-putting to people who have been put

through the existentialist and/or phenomenological mangle and emerged with their intellectual processes rather felt, but it often appeals to the young, who have a craving for certainty, even at second hand.

It seems to me that we have reached a stage where this kind of book must be a salutary experience. The combination of openness and curiosity with an incisive common-sense, a refusal to be intimidated by other people's aggressive doubts, is stimulating, and provokes a useful searching of the contemporary Christian heart. The 'occasionalness' of the book becomes its special virtue, because it shows a man, deeply and fervently Christian, coping with questions and contemporary topics, as they arose. His weaknesses are exposed, but so is the way his faith was far more important than these.

This is clear, for instance, in a sermon printed later in *The Guardian* (in 1945) called 'The Grand Miracle'. It is characteristic and, I think, excellent. In it Lewis compares the attempt to judge the 'probability' of Christianity with the attempt to decide whether a newly discovered part of a symphony, or a novel, really can be the essential missing section which was needed to make sense of all the rest. Such a judgment cannot be purely rational, it depends on a sensibility to the meaning and quality of the whole work. It requires knowledge of its history and form but also a sort of passion for the discovery of truth—not just intellectual truth, nor merely personal truthfulness-to-self, but the deep integrity of life itself, human and non-human. Lewis himself sometimes failed to have this breadth of awareness, but he knew it was necessary. And he did not make the mistake of supposing that fear of using the wrong language and of looking foolish is the same thing as the necessary humility which is an awareness of human inadequacy before great mystery.

ROSEMARY HAUGHTON

SHADOWS OF HEAVEN, by Gunnar Urang. *SCM*, 1971. 184 pp. £2.25.

Subtitled 'religion and fantasy in the fiction of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien', this is a critical and, to some extent, theological study of the three myth-

makers of our generation. Professor Urang brings out well that what all three are engaged in is a kind of natural theology of the imagination. They are using what they believe to be a

basically reliable natural faculty in man to lead him, in spite of himself, towards a rudimentary belief in the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Whereas classical natural theology used man's reason to this end, the three writers under consideration use his imagination. This is not because they do not believe in human reason, but because the imagination seems to be, currently, a better way of access to modern men and women, who (as Lewis complains) no longer take reason seriously as a motive for action or even belief.

The theology implicit in the work of all three writers is, as Urang points out, that of traditional Catholicism. Unfortunately, Urang himself is unsympathetic towards it, and ill-informed about it (his chief source being, apparently, Leslie Dewart).

'When the fantasy leaves us incredulous', concludes Urang, 'we discover that what we have found unbelievable is not the other world of Perelandra or that of Middle-earth . . . but what has now become for us the other world of the *Consolation of Philosophy* or the *Summa*.' I must confess that before Urang's account of scholastic beliefs I, too, remain incredulous. I find his 'other world' (that of Dewart and de Chardin) considerably more alien and 'irrelevant' (blessed word!) than that of St Thomas. His 'myth' of science and the splendour of human autonomy, dressed up (and surely it is a threadbare garment by now?) in the old antithesis between 'Greek' thought-patterns (boo) and those of the Bible (hurrah), leaves me unconvinced. And the mind simply boggles at the suggestion that our hope for the future lies with 'liberal Roman Catholics like Karl Rahner and Leslie Dewart' (*sic!*).

'A man who would be true to himself must come to terms in some manner with his culture.' True. But surely one such manner is to reject it. The indisputable success of Lewis and Tolkien is, in part, due to the fact that a significant number of people are sufficiently alienated by the modern world, with all its sciences and sociologies, to feel the twentieth century itself to be an 'other world'. Myths such as those of Lewis and Tolkien can provide a rich, imaginative and even conceptual basis for viewing the world this way, without immediately feeling guilty. If this may be escapism, it may also be the matrix of revolutionary vision.

And it can only be really successful in so far as it does contain metaphysical, if not theological, presuppositions. The Weltanschauung of the kind of Catholicism that Urang dis-

approves of can provide a kind of Archimedean spot outside the world, from which, if not to move it, at least to *see* it. The traditional view, so abhorrent to Urang, which treats man as being part of a cosmic whole, subject to the gracious and almighty purpose of the Creator, is, in different forms, reappearing in many of our modern revolutionaries. It is perhaps significant that modern theologians, who have left their ivory towers and actually met people, have shown an increasing tendency to return to a kind of neo-orthodoxy. Freaks and elderly clergymen can agree happily on the merits of St Thomas and transcendental eschatology, if on nothing else.

From a merely literary point of view, there are obvious deficiencies in all our three writers, and Urang is good and interesting on these. But I think he underestimates the extent to which, at least, Lewis and Tolkien have succeeded in creating a mythical cosmos beyond their own grasp, beyond their own limitations. It is as if their worlds have a life of their own, and the authors have been caught up into this.

The question we must ask, I think, is whether this dynamic really pictures a true dynamic in our own world, our own history? Urang is simply mistaken when he accuses their eschatology of being too tied to a 'Greek' (boo) world-view. It was not the Greeks who gave us the idea of an End coming *to*, but not *from within*, the world; it was the Bible that gave us this idea. And Lewis and Tolkien are profoundly true to this, I think. To say that they are 'unhistorical' is just absurd. Perhaps the primary thing that they offer us is an interpretation of history. Through myth (and how else can one interpret history?) they offer us both a picture of the shape of history, and an attempted discernment of the times and seasons. We are living near the end of a world-age, near the crisis, they tell us, and they warn us of the signs, the dangers, and the required tactics. They are, in fact, offering us a prophetic picture. This is a dimension that Urang does not mention, and it is a pity. For this is the most important question of all. Is this prophetic picture true? Is this what is going on in the world? If it is, it is all important, and academic snugness is not going to save us, at least, not unless a faithful few somewhere are faithful to the bitter end.

In the course of the book, there are many interesting and helpful insights into the writings of the three authors. But, ultimately, I think

Urang is too concerned to be (in an old-fashioned sort of way) 'modern' to have really grasped the point they were trying to make (always with the exception of Williams, who

probably was not trying to make much of a point anyway).

SIMON TUGWELL, O.P.

RETHINKING THE CHURCH, ed. by M. Cuminetti and F. V. Joannes, translated by E. Burke, C.P. *Gill and Macmillan*, Dublin, 1970. 193 pp. £1.

RETHINKING THE PRIESTHOOD, ed. by F. V. Joannes, translated by Elizabeth Lovatt-Dolan. *Gill and Macmillan*, Dublin, 1970. 162 pp. £1.

The economics of religious publishing continue to mystify me. In the halcyon days during and immediately after the Council, the number of new titles which a publisher could advertise each month seemed to be taken as some indication of his standing. Then escalating overheads and decreasing liquidity put an end to a number of worthy houses and the flow diminished, but can one discern, even now, any criteria for publishing a theological work? Outstanding originality coupled with unshakable orthodoxy must be a useful recommendation; or the simple clarity of the guide who sets out the complex thought of others in ways that even I can understand. But the rest, the majority, how do they get through?

One wonders even more when it comes to collections of essays. Where these arise naturally out of a symposium with a single theme, and are carefully edited and modified in the light of discussion and criticism, the result is often excellent. But where this is not the case, and especially where translation has intervened, success is more elusive. The books under review fall into this category. Their titles describe their scope: examples of the type of study deemed necessary to carry forward the continual renewal of the Church. They are not original, except perhaps parts of 'The Priest Today', by Piet Fransen (and this has been published before), and must therefore justify themselves in terms of their exposition of the complex thought of others. So, are the essays clear and readable, is the result of the process of simplification worth the effort?

The first problem is the translation. The essays were originally published in Italian in association with IDOC in 1968, but the authors are obviously not all Italian. One gets a very distinct impression in places that a double process of translation has taken place. French to Italian to English; unfortunately it is not only nuance and style that have been abandoned.

The prize must go to an essay in *Rethinking the Church*, by Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., with the title of 'Public Opinion in the Church'.

It seems to be about the formation of public opinion in the Church, the structures of communication necessary for it and the responsibilities of the communications media towards it, but it is hard to be sure as it is very nearly incomprehensible. Really to appreciate it, it must be read in full, but the following example should establish the flavour. 'They (events, facts) must therefore be gathered in all their freshness, in the very moment of their appearance. They must be captured on the instant to seize the attention of the crowd, which is ready to devour not only the sensational but the unusual. Briefly, events are meaningful facts. In the technical jargon of the journalist, they are news. . . . Judgement fulfils its duty from the beginning of the fact and follows it through to its full development according to an immanent law of the process. Authority has no rights over news; it cannot manipulate it according to its will and pleasure.' The brief lapse into lucidity in the last sentence seems to reveal a naïveté that is truly breathtaking. But does it? Perhaps the author originally said 'should not manipulate' rather than 'cannot'—we shall never know.

The 'Priesthood as a Profession', by Emile Pin, is more easily assimilated, as indeed are most of the essays in *Rethinking the Priesthood*. By profession, the author means an occupation from which the priest earns his living as well as something to which he dedicates his life. He argues that a priest who gets his living from the parish offering or from services to individuals, e.g. mass offerings, is as open to pressures on his ministry as one who is sponsored by a wealthy patron. These pressures could especially restrict his freedom to exercise his prophetic role. A diocesan fund to which all contributions would go and from which all priests would be paid is dismissed as impracticable for some reason and the suggestion is made that if the priest were to make his living in the 'world' he would be released to exercise his true ministry and preach the real gospel. There are, of course, non-financial pressures that can be applied to any priest who