

THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE. By the Abbot of Downside. (Helicon Press; 8s. 6d.)

This short book contains three lectures given by Abbot Butler at the Lauriston Hall in 1958. The idea behind the Lauriston lectures has been thus far to provide a Catholic 'shop window' in Edinburgh. The lectures of several other well-known personalities will also appear in print in due course, so that a wider audience may have the benefit of these statements of the Catholic position in various fields. One can judge, on the strength of these three talks of Abbot Butler, that the audience at Lauriston was expected to contain a good number of non-Catholics, although this is more apparent in the subjects chosen than in the manner in which they are put across. The tone of the lectures is preponderantly that of someone who is more used to thinking in terms of how the insider, rather than the outsider, will think and react. But it is of course the impressions of the non-Catholic reviewers that will really help to assess how much the lectures make their point in print. One feels at least that the lecturer has got the wavelength right for Edinburgh when, in his introductory talk ('A View from Outside'), he presents our Lord in a positively reforming light. And the point about the gospel being written for the benefit of a Church already in existence, rather than a Church founded four-square on the good book, seems absolutely right in the vicinity of St Giles'. The second lecture, on inspiration and criticism, deals with the problems of finding the meaning of scripture through the literary genres and conventions that the sacred authors use. The third, entitled 'The Bible and Christ', is possibly the best of the three, and is certainly one that will be of the greatest value to Catholics. So often one finds, inside the fold, an absolute lack of any sort of interest (even a positive anticipation of boredom) in the old testament, and that over-familiarity with stock quotations from our Lord's words that virtually robs them of meaning. As Abbot Butler demonstrates, it is precisely through discovering the Jewishness of our Lord's message, the terms in which he presented himself, the types in which he saw himself, that we find the whole of the old testament summed up in the person of Christ, and therefore of extreme importance.

GEOFFREY WEBB

SEEKING GOD. By Bruno S. James. (Darton, Longman and Todd; 6s.)

In reviewing this little volume of Fr Bruno's, I feel somewhat nervous, because it would seem to be directed at me. In his Preface, he says: 'It has been written especially for those monks and nuns and men and women of almost every country of Europe who have at one time or another come to the author for advice and help on matters of

which he herein treats'. I am such a one; and in the past, I have derived a great deal of help from reading his previous booklet *The One Thing Necessary*, to say nothing of the value gained from listening to him talk on many subjects; from the Greek and Latin Classics, through his close knowledge of the Fathers, to the last of these great men, St Bernard, he has held me enthralled. His knowledge of these writings is profound, and his love of them deep. He combines the two to give an enthusiasm which is catching in the young man; so that I well remember going off to seek out and read Cassian at his advice, and from there building upon very much the list of recommended reading which appears at the end of his present work.

Therefore, it is with diffidence that I have to write of a considerable disappointment in reading *Seeking God*. True, I have heard it from his own lips before, and therefore it does not come fresh to me. But the disappointment lies in the fact that I believe I have heard it much better expressed, and I do not think he has done justice to himself, and therefore failed to do justice to his theme.

The pattern is very simple, indeed in the great tradition of the Fathers and classical writers on the spiritual life. He draws on the gospels, and he points constantly to the *unum necessarium*. The seeking of God, through prayer, is indeed a seeking through the whole of life, because holiness is wholeness. For this reason, he does not despise the body, but gives it its due place, urging some mortification as a necessary conditioner for a deeper prayer life, but disagreeing with the excessive mortification and bodily penance sometimes practised in the past. While keeping the mind of the reader upon God, he goes through various facets of life, from the lay state to the monk's way, pointing the difference of vocation.

Wherein, then, is the failure in expression? Frankly, it is in this being a completely breathless book. This is explained, to some extent, by his own description of writing it between confessions in a crowded and noisy room in Naples. But the result is a lack of calmness and peace, which should somehow have been transmitted through the noise. Perhaps the greatest single factor which induces this atmosphere is the most peculiar, and often non-existent, punctuation, which for me ruined an experience to which I was looking forward.

MICHAEL HOLLINGS

WE DIE UNTO THE LORD. By Pierre Herbin. Translated by Dom Aldhelm Dean, O.S.B. (Challoner Publications; 8s. 6d.)

The subtitle, *Sickness and Death of the Christian*, is a better indication of the scope of this small book, and as it was the French title it is hard to see why it should have been subordinated to an allusion to