

HISTORY AND FAITH IN THE THOUGHT OF ALAN RICHARDSON by John Navone S.J. SCM Press. London 1966. pp. 161. 30s.

The ultimate theological problem of the nineteenth-century Church, Catholic or Protestant, was that of the relation between Christian certainty and the inevitable failure of historical inquiry ever to produce results which are more than probable. The very nature of the problem ensured that in future years an understanding of history and the historical would influence or determine the attitude adopted towards the nature of Christianity. Any discussion on this subject is of immediate interest to all Christians. Consequently this sympathetic and understanding study by an American Jesuit of the work of Professor Richardson must be welcomed.

Navone begins with an outline of the theological context of Richardson's writings and also briefly mentions some of the historians who have influenced him. The central discussion, of course, is concerned with Richardson's concept of historical thinking and his apologetic use of history in favour of biblical revelation. The author concludes with his own critique of this apologetic approach.

The understanding of historical evidence constitutes the essence of history for Richardson. The historical signs of Christ cannot be recognised without faith but cannot be denied to be historical in the way that any interpretation of historical evidence is historical. History cannot compel us to believe that Christ is God but does compel us to believe that it is credible. The existing Church is the primary historical evidence; the visible, credible, historical sign of a rational motive for belief in the resurrection. As Navone points out, Richardson therefore obscures his thought by claiming that an interpretation of the evidence in favour of the

resurrection on a strictly critical basis, would lead to the conclusion that the Church came into existence 'historically speaking' as a result of Christ's resurrection.

But Navone does not go far enough. Christians have traditionally been concerned with the objective reality of certain 'supernatural' or unique but historical facts, and not with the subjective attitude adopted towards them as a result of an historical understanding of the existing evidence. Although history could 'disprove' Christianity in the sense that it could show, at least in theory, that certain events did not happen, history itself could not attain *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, in this case, the theological-historical facts which are the basis of faith.

The difficulty is to decide what reason prescribes and what faith might legitimately endorse. Can faith confirm the historically doubtful or finally settle the historicity of a particular event? Faith can raise the degree of probability or make an act of belief possible, but this is not equivalent to conclusive proof and goes beyond the factual evidence. Faith makes miracles credible, for example, without removing the doubt which remains after historical research, an element of uncertainty which is personal as history is personal.

Although no substitute for Richardson's own writings, Navone does provide a useful summary. He does not, however, furnish the truly critical assessment which might be expected. One might also ask if it was really necessary to use the same author, to make the same point, in practically the same words, on two successive pages, (pp. 29 and 30).

J. DEREK HOLMES

LA VIERGE AU CONCILE by René Laurentin. Paris. P. Lethielleux, 13,90 F.

In expounding the teaching of Vatican II on the blessed Virgin, Canon Laurentin succeeds in telling us a great deal about the nature of the church as well. This is the importance of the introductory chapter with which he prefaces his explicitly theological commentary on the final chapter of *De Ecclesia*. We are told, with some amusing details, of the heated argument which the marian debate aroused. But this is much more than an addition to the kremlinology of Vatican II. Laurentin takes us beyond personalities and commonplaces about mediterranean temperaments to see the different theological tendencies which confronted each other in the

debate on whether the council's teaching on our Lady should be included in the constitution on the church, and whether or not there should be a new dogmatic definition about the blessed Virgin.

The first heated debate showed the bishops almost evenly divided on the first question, and the resulting text is something of a compromise. It was a great improvement on the text originally submitted to the council, which Laurentin describes as 'un simple effort de collation des encycliques', and so far one might be justified in talking of a victory for the progressives. But it explicitly refrains from pronouncing on dis-