

BOOK REVIEWS

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE CHURCH TODAY: A REPLY TO CHARLES DAVIS. By Gregory Baum. New York: Herder and Herder, 1968. 222 pp. \$ 4.95.

The January 12, 1967 issue of the *National Catholic Reporter* provided interesting reading; it contained a reprint of Charles' Davis' statement explaining his leaving the Church and, right beside it, a reply by Gregory Baum. Since then both articles have expanded and blossomed into two outstanding books: Davis' *A Question of Conscience* and Baum's *The Credibility of the Church Today*.

The book by theologian Gregory Baum is less a reply to Charles Davis than an occasion to present a contemporary picture of ecclesiology. What is presented is Baum's viewpoint of the Church and the major changes of focus that he sees has been brought about, at least in germ, by Vatican II. The conciliatory tone of the book betrays the extent to which Baum is steeped in ecumenical work.

The opening pages draw the boundaries for the sketching of the vast landscape of his appealing ecclesiology, or, more accurately, remove the idea of boundaries, since Baum's picture is a panorama of an "Open Church"; "Church has become a divine message revealing what happens wherever people live in community" (p. 54). The documents of Vatican II provide the foundation of his ideas on the inclusive nature of the Church; indeed he says categorically, "The crucial difference between Davis and myself lies in the evaluation of Vatican II". (p. 12). He traces the word Church through the conciliar documents and presents six different senses in which the word is used and its six acceptations as pertaining to: the Catholic Church, the local congregation, the community of all the baptized, the people of Israel, the community of all mankind, and finally the family or "any small unity where people become friends." Baum looks upon the Church, therefore, as one of two aspects of the reality of the human situation; the negative aspect being original sin, "the inevitably sinful situation in which man is born and in which he cannot grow up without being profoundly marked by it" (p. 28), and the positive aspect being the Church, "God's redemptive involvement in human life" (p. 53).

Before settling down to the task of reconciling his universalist view of the Church with the unique claim of the Roman Catholic confession, the author introduces a chapter in what he calls "social pathology" to situate his

very ready agreement with analysis of the New Testament conflict between Christ and the Scribes and Pharisees, Baum, relying heavily on Congar, points out that the conflict presents, not a historical description of particular sects, but a warning to the early Christian community and to the Church in all ages of the danger of smug complacency and hardness of heart that so easily plagues all institutionalized structures.

The defense proper of the credibility of the Church consists in a rather dim view of time-honored arguments, "We conclude that the traditional arguments . . . attempting to prove the credibility of the Catholic Church are inadequate" (p. 120) and a positive presentation upholding the Church's unique claim as based on its growth and balance by maintaining a health tension between local and universal unity, and between past and present. This tension is maintained at great odds even in this period of the Church's transition when she is in the process of refocussing the Gospel entrusted to her and somewhat heterogenously adjusting other aspects of herself according to this new transference of the center of her message for modern ecumenical man.

The final section of the book is a projection into the future, in which the Church is seen to be not so much a definite iron-clad organization but an entity based upon the sociological model of a movement (such as a political party), where membership boundaries are nebulous and where it is the spirit of the individuals and not the state of the institution that matters.

The author's contagiously expansive and hopeful outlook on the Church is somehow communicated as the reader goes through the book. And yet someone familiar with Davis' way of thought will understand why Davis remains unmoved and shows concern for Baum's "carelessness of method that plays fast and loose with data." (*National Catholic Reporter*, June 26, 1968). Baum's inclusive and conciliatory view of the Church does seem to put him a few steps ahead of the Council, in spite of his contention that it is the Council that is pulling him forward. His analysis of the Council's understanding of the Church, for example, turns out to be less a study of the documents' basic ideas than a use of the documents' words to project an ecclesiology that Baum hopes will be.

Thus, evaluated as "a reply to Charles Davis," the remark Davis himself makes is very much to the point: "What I consider the deepest difference between us . . . is the differing stress each of us places upon the need for rigorous method and objective criteria in discerning truth." Baum's is an expansive and loving approach, Davis' is a disciplined and ordered reasoning, and if Davis is to be properly answered, he should be met on his grounds. But a point-by-point refutation is the farthest thing from Baum's mind; indeed, he sometimes gives the impression of giving away more territory than he

should to ensure his stand on the Church's unique claim: he elaborates and sustains Davis' criticism of ecclesial corruption, he dismisses the traditional arguments a little too peremptorily, he seems unsure of his moorings with the tradition that he boasts the Church has, and he avoids confronting the issue of authority and hierarchy in the Church.

But, evaluated as a work on "the Church today," the book is a treasure-house of ideas worthy of note, insights into the ecumenical movement, original sin, social pathology in the Church, the healthy tensions that bring the Church to growth and maturity. The picture of the future of the Church is a refreshing one, and one that even Davis accepts and commends.

The Credibility of the Church, therefore, is far from putting a definitive end to the flurry of commentary on the Davis affair; for after all, one's evaluation of the Church ultimately depends on one's faith and personal experience as well as on reason. In the last analysis Davis sees the Church as intrinsically obsolete even if several of its members are good, while Baum sees the Church as intrinsically good even if several of its members are obsolete. The book, though, is a valuable addition to Davis commentaries in so far as it provides one with a more expansive, hopeful view of the Church and its possibilities than one might originally have had.

● BRO. VICTOR ORDOÑEZ, F.S.C.

THE WORLD OF PERSONS by Charles Winkelmanns de Cléty S.J.
London: Burns & Oates, 1967. 441 pages.

Father de Cléty is a Belgian Jesuit who is now a missionary in Calcutta where he is assigned pastor. Intimately forged with his missionary spirit which motivated his religious vocation is an intense philosophical spirit of independent thinking and synthesis, which culminated in a tremendous book in 1966. This same work was presented by the author to fulfill the PHD requirements at the University of Poona.

The book as the author himself describes is an examination of "the discovery in one's own experience of the universe as a system of inter-related persons progressing towards an end"; or "a detailed analysis of our integral experience." A philosophy of a *personal* world-vision, the author uses to a great extent, the phenomenological method in an attempt to harmonize the past and the contemporary-philosophies extracting therefrom his own viewpoints and criticism, and coining terms which he believes would be more adaptable and alive to the problems and aspirations of the contemporary man. He is of the firm belief that the schoolmen's well entrenched philosophy is overly polluted with inflexible conceptualism and obsolete categories which has made its assimilation a great obstacle.

Father de Cléty's work concurs with the timeless philosophies in its "exemplary methodological rigour and on its conception of philosophy which makes of thinking an action and of speculative research a progress of the soul towards its own kingdom." Understandably, the refinements and intricacies of a thesis work are put to a big advantage in revealing the process of the person's journey towards the Creative Presence as the apex of an authentic self-discovery in a world of persons.

What results is a vigorous elaboration of a prismatic interpretation of human existence. An interpretation which is logical, comprehensive and exegetical. And this certainly does not make this book an easy reading as missionary duties does not always make fine company with philosophical travelogues. When the reader however has gotten into his contentions, they result in an experience which is both enriching and insightful, a happy finish line after a sustained and prolonged reflection. He may not however agree with the Fathers all throughout, but only a philosopher worth his salt establishes his conclusions after the reciprocal reverential exposition has been made, a rigid objective effort has been employed and the method of the author always at the fore of the reader.

The title could very well be misinterpreted. But for a serious work which has been tried and fired for 18 years, *The World of Persons* accomplishes a feat which will never be confused with another commonplace philosophy which has undergone a personalistic retouch by an overnight philosopher. His incisive incursions into the human nature, temporality and the life-act communicates a "measure of intrepidity" which refreshes the mind from the severe regimentation of the obvious and the positive. Stimulating, here's a rare book out to challenge any reader with a knack for serious matters.

● NORBERTO CASTILLO, O.P.

CHRIST AND CRISIS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. Edited by Gerald H. Anderson, New York: Friendship Press, 1968. pp. 167, \$ 1.75.

As we read on the inside of the front cover, "this book gives the kind of up-to-date report on the present state of the churches in Southeast Asia that cannot be found in any other book in any language. Seven Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars, all with long missionary experience in the area, give first-hand reports on the current situation of the churches in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines."

The authors have added to their painstaking research in gathering an impressive wealth of material scattered in many books and magazines, their

invaluable personal experience obtained in many years of missionary work in their respective mission field. This explains well the fact why they have been able often to enrich their work with a first hand information, numerous well established facts and a wealth of statistics, which fill the 167 pages of the book. For this reason, this work will undoubtedly prove of great help to the general reader who wishes to inform himself of the religious affairs of this part of the world, and most specially to the professor of the Southeast Asia ecclesiastical History. Without a shadow of a doubt, we may dare affirm that the need for this book has been keenly felt in Christian schools and seminaries in the Philippines. Now it comes to fill a gap.

However, speaking in matters pertaining to the Philippines we cannot but disagree with some statements concerning the Religious orders and their facts, which in our opinion need a more detailed explanation, if they are to be fair and in total harmony with historical truth. These statements are found in pages 138 and 139, and they seem to be a reflection of the well-known Propaganda movement, unleashed during the last two decades of the XIX Century and the first of the XX, against four Monastic Orders, which, on account of their religious, social, and to-some-degree-political influence over the minds and hearts of the Filipinos, and come to be the mainstay of the Spanish dominion in the Islands.

● FR. PABLO FERNANDEZ, O.P.