

REVIEWS

ONE NUN TO ANOTHER. By Sister Mary Laurence, O.P. (Blackfriars; 12s. 6d.)

This is the religious life in a nutshell, applicable to active and contemplative nuns without causing hackles to rise in either. Though the author does not set out to do so specially, she convinces the reader not so much of the comparative value of active and contemplative lives to the mystical body, but of their fusion. As in the eternal argument concerning the superiority of male over female we finally reach the conclusion that men and women are complementary to each other, so it is with the active life and the contemplative.

It is easier to say or to write than to 'do' every time, but Sister Mary Laurence writes with a conviction and a luminous sincerity which is clearly the fruit of much 'doing'. She knows nuns inside out, but she has the gift of revealing foibles and failings and their proper remedies so felicitously that one is impelled to go on reading for sheer pleasure.

If proof is needed that a consecrated virgin is not a sanctimonious Lady of Shalott gazing into the mirror of her own perfection, this book has it all. Yet the danger exists, and in almost every chapter Sister Mary Laurence is quick to point out antidotes which will infallibly crack the mirror from side to side. This is a little book with a big message, a book that can be picked up for a few minutes during a busy day and give new impetus to the life of any nun, from the brash young novice to the aged veteran. It could easily be called *Any Nun to Any Other Nun*, so happily does it weld us all together, active and contemplative, as brides of Christ and mothers of souls.

P.C.C.

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM. By Louis Bouyer. Tr. by A. V. Littledale. (Geoffrey Chapman; 12s. 6d.)

In a world which believes itself to be 'in full career to the final conquest of matter' (p. 98), man may seem to be driven to choose between being fully human or fully Christian. Fr Bouyer is uneasy, alarmed even, lest in the face of this dilemma Christians should adopt an attitude of compromise on the one hand or intransigence on the other, either of which could precipitate a resurgence of the modernist crisis. 'Orthodoxy does not consist in refusing to accept facts or to think. To be modern does not imply a blind following of fashion. Nor does truth lie in holding mutually incompatible positions, but in seeing deeper than the verbalism of ready-made solutions of whatever kind' (p. 8). The paradox of the transcendent being who is yet God

With Us: creation and the cross: dependence and freedom: intellect and faith: tradition and renewal: action and contemplation—(the atom bomb appears here)—these are the points of conflict upon which Fr Bouyer brings to bear his deep understanding of the travail of the contemporary mind and his fund of scriptural and patristic scholarship.

He admits that there is no simple solution, and his final chapter on self-development and asceticism shows that there is no solution at all save through the cross. Christianity did not create suffering and death, as admirers of paganism would have us believe: it found them there, the result of sin. But Christianity alone has 'dared to persuade man to look his destiny in the face without fear, because it has placed in his hands the means to master it' (p. 104). Through the cross, suffering and death which are the inevitable consequence of sin become the object of free and deliberate consent, 'the act of a love abandoning itself wholly in response to the act of divine love giving itself without reserve' (p. 105). Like Christ we must be 'conditioned for the cross' and our life will be a succession of renunciations which are the only real fulfilments.

But in the last resort there is no real dilemma. There is only one choice—self or God. To opt for self, given this fallen world, involves man ultimately in frustration, disintegration and slavery to the devil. To opt for God is to will to be made anew to the image of God and to reach the fulfilment of that abundant, endless life for which man was created. It is to accept the 'mystery of the cross which baffles the intellect to restore it in the end, as it afflicts mankind to bring it healing and salvation' (p. 82). This is the stark choice before each one of us: there is no middle way. And in the words of Cardinal Suhard which Fr Bouyer may well have had in mind when writing this book: 'the stakes are both the everlastingness of Christianity and the survival of civilization'.

S. M. ALBERT, O.P.

... BUT NOT CONQUERED. Edited by Bernard T. Smith. (Browne and Nolan Ltd, Dublin; 1955.)

This book comprises the accounts, by four priests of the Society of St Columban, of the last years they spent in China before their expulsion in 1953. They are simple and objective accounts; factual and informative about conditions under the communists. Because their authors have been content to recount only what is known to them through personal experience or contact and to do so with as little embellishment of the facts as possible their stories are both convincing and moving. They are also terrifying. It is hard to imagine anything more appalling than the picture that emerges of communist methods