

EDITORIAL

TWO books have recently appeared that help to focus the aims of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, and in a manner to justify them. The first is a volume of essays collected from various contemporary reviews, some of them translated, and published by Sheed and Ward under the title *Selection I*.¹ The editors in their introduction point to the contemporary desire for unification, mentioned in our last editorial; but they stress also the disruptive effect of modern specialisation. The universities were founded in the conviction that man lives as part of the whole universe. 'It is to the Middle Ages that we owe the very idea of a university . . . the reason why medieval men had a university was because they lived in a uni-verse. The word "universitas" was used not only to describe the corporate body of students and masters, but also meant that unified body of learning through which the universe could be appreciated, tasted and known.' And all was understood as held in one under the one God, creator of heaven and earth. St Albert, Dante and later Kepler, therefore, had 'a spiritual impulse urging them on to probe deeper into the mysteries of the universe'. But though the impulse still remains it has been directed into disruptive channels by the individualistic craze for specialisation where each man's subject is his own universe. A modern psycho-analyst 'has shown how specialisation in modern industry inevitably leads to the build-up in its victims (the human beings involved) of an aggressive, primitive, dictatorial super-ego. This dictatorial super-ego has found expression with a vengeance in the industrialised totalitarian régimes which have been devastating and destroying the earth. . . . Nor will the devastation and destruction cease until man recovers his true status and fulfils his specifically human calling, to know the universe as a whole and as harmonious.'

The *Selection*, therefore, includes a zoologist's account of

¹ *Selection I. A Yearbook of Contemporary Thought*. Edited by Cecily Hastings and Donald Nicholl (Sheed and Ward; 15s.). A yearly selection is promised by this the first of a series.

the latest findings regarding the first human inhabitants of the earth, an anthropologist's description of the fundamentally true beliefs of a primitive African tribe as well as several specifically Scriptural articles. And it should not surprise readers to find two items selected from the pages of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*—Fr Victor White's *The Scandal of the Assumption* (November, 1950) and S.M.A.'s *God is our Mother* (May, 1945). For the two poles round which the axis of the universe turns are the spirit of man and the Triune God. In preserving the direct relationship between these two in the full context of all reality the universe is held together. It is, of course, held in being as one by the power of God; but if the spirit of man continues to try to put asunder what God has joined together under the supremacy of the head of creation, the natural rhythm of the universe will be interrupted. If, then, *THE LIFE* is a specialist review among an army of other such, it holds a key position and must not be allowed to ignore the findings of zoology, anthropology, psychology and all the other scientific specialisations nor the wider fields of Scripture and theology. A considerable degree of the present disruption has been due to the exclusive specialisation of 'spirituality' which has treated man as an individual, praying 'soul' or even as a praying machine, working independently of the miracle of the seasons and the movement of the heavens, repudiating the dark impulses of primitive man, crushing the passions, ignoring the breadth of human culture which begins with agri-culture and ends with the cultus of the Trinity.

It would of course be ludicrous for any review to attempt to cover the whole of the vast field of reality, because that field is infinite in that created reality rests within the increate, all proceeding from the Word of God. But the spirit of man must ever be considered in its true setting. Von Balthasar's article in *Selection I* on the Word of God brings out the fullness of this integrating view of reality, for the Word of God is the revelation of the Trinity, is the perfection of man in the Incarnation, is the manifestation of the meaning of the world—'God has grounded the meaning of the world in the Son and will not have us seek it anywhere

else'. The life of the Spirit is the life of the Incarnate Word of God, living in the whole universe.

A striking example of the co-ordination of all these various aspects of reality within the spirit is given, almost by accident, by Professor Charles W. Kennedy's edition of *Early English Christian Poetry*.² Some may criticise his attempt to capture something of the strange rhythm and alliteration of the Anglo-Saxon poetry by the turning of it into alliterative English verse with the characteristic pause in the middle of each line and without rhyme. But he seems to have made a workmanlike job of his translation and the result reads aloud not unpleasingly and without tedium which is a good test. That however is not our concern here. What is for our purpose noteworthy about this 'vernacular poetry written in England between the seventh century and the Norman conquest', is that it represents a whole Christian culture instinct with the natural life of the people, often peasants like Caedmon, able apparently almost universally to sing their own verse to their own accompaniment on the harp. The sea and the fishing boats of these islanders, the flocks and herds and harvests of these farmers, the whole universe as seen from English soil—all play their part in these spiritual songs about God's work in the world from Adam until their own day.

It is meet and right that the race of men
 Bless the Lord for all the abundance
 Which early and late He prepared for us all
 Through the great mystery of His manifold might.
 He assigns us food and bounty of substance,
 Wealth in wide lands, and kindly weather
 Under sheltering skies. The sun and moon
 Candles of heaven, most stately of stars,
 Shine unto all men throughout the earth.
 Dew falls and rain bringing forth plenty
 To sustain the lives of the sons of men.

Professor Kennedy shows how the whole of Christian tradition is caught by the inspiration of these poets. The old

² *Early English Christian Poetry*. Translated into alliterative verse by Charles W. Kennedy. With Critical Commentary (Hollis and Carter 21s.)

themes and histories are studied, not as interesting facts or fancies of the past, but as fashioning the life of these harpists and their companions. The Scriptures, too, come to them daily in the liturgy of the Church and flood out from the altar as a living stream. He has discovered that the passages of the Old Testament which these men knew were those in particular which were read to them on Easter Eve. It was not until Wycliff that the Bible was put into English as a whole. But from the time of Bede men were translating those parts, such as the Psalter, and the Gospels, that formed their daily sustenance in the prayer of the Church. Perhaps they missed a great deal of the sacred text in this manner. But as soon as the Bible is taken as a single book it easily becomes the object of the specialist and may be used by him for his own disruptive purposes. The other method preserves the living Word in its context of the living prayer of the Church. Liturgy and Scripture continue hand in hand, as the Incarnate Word had joined them. The Book is not something other than the Church, as Balthasar shows in *Selection I*.

Professor Kennedy also shows that these poems are for the most part constructed in the general forms of the Creed, beginning with the Creator of heaven and earth and concluding with the resurrection of the body. The living faith of the Church, not a dead formula of dogmatic enunciations, provides the inspiration with the Scriptures and the liturgy. And pagan myth, too, is brought in as part of the whole. Perhaps the most satisfying of all this anthology is the long poem on the Phoenix as the type of the re-birth of the Christian in Christ. Surely this must have been the soil for a true university, a plenary culture made a single whole by the life of the spirit, the spirit of God dwelling in the midst of all reality and giving it life—'the Lord, dear Warden of life'.