

temptations to the christian conscience in our time. Not the least value of this book, for instance, at a time when many christians are tempted to express the eternal christian challenge to the world in existentialist terms, is how it shows up the Sartrean doctrine of choice for the fundamentally mean and tawdry thing it really is.

Written primarily for philosophers, this book does not at first sight have the usual appearance of 'spiritual reading'. Yet it is precisely as such that it may confidently be recommended to all at least who read modern books and listen to wireless talks. There can be no truly contemplative life without *ascesis*. And if theology be the proper mental nourishment of christian contemplation, this book shows how philosophy, acting as the handmaid of theology, may very effectively work a purification of the christian mind from the seductions of contemporary thought and thus render the whole man more prompt and single-minded in his response to the saving truths of the Faith.

R.T.

LIVING THE CREED. By Carroll E. Simcox. (Dacre Press; 10s. 6d.)

THE TRIPTYCH OF THE KINGDOM. By N. G. M. Van Doornik, Rev. S. Jelsma, and Rev. A. van de Lisdonk. (Sands; 15s.)

These two books have one attribute in common: they affirm that a christian believes in a Person before a code; Christ is prior to the Creed. After that they differ widely. Dr Simcox, an Episcopal pastor in New England, writes a very lively and practical exposition of the Creed to illustrate his belief that we may know it as we know a house, from the outside and from the inside. The best knowledge comes from living inside where we get to know Christ as a person. However, Dr Simcox is eager to offend no one, and when he comes to a disputed point of dogma he seeks, and admits it, to evade the issue. To defend the evasion he uses his house simile: 'We are trying in this book to take as much for granted as possible the outside of the house, the dogmas, while we explore the treasure within'. So he regrets that 'we Christians have done our best, or our worst, to defile it [the dogma of the virgin birth] with ugly controversy'. But if dogmas really are the walls of our house and we neglect to point them, the house will fall down. A responsible householder will inspect the fabric of his building and if he is wise he will consult an architect from time to time. Moreover, Christ has left us an architect to maintain the Church's house: 'Thou art Peter . . . he who heareth you heareth me'. To base the christian life on the Creed

alone is like building a house and expecting it to maintain itself. The Word of God speaks not only through creeds but through the authoritative voice of the successor of St Peter. Perhaps that sounds unkindly and intransigent, but when the principle of living authority is abandoned the alternative is a benevolent agnosticism which has not strength to provide a rule of life. Hence we find conclusions such as, 'This belief [the perpetual virginity of our Lady] too we are not concerned now to affirm or to deny'. The trumpet gives an uncertain sound and we are left to flounder for an interpretation of its summons. This is a great pity in such a stimulating book. But for all its vagueness and lack of authoritative statement I think informed Catholics, once warned of the odd dogmatic lapses, could gain much from reading it, because of its sharp sense of reality and the religious needs of modern life and above all because of its reverence for the mysteries of religion and deep sense of the importance of Christ himself.

*The Triptych of the Kingdom* is a very different work. Written by three Dutch priests, it is the fruit of their work in *Una Sancta House*, an establishment in The Hague devoted to the instruction of converts. These writers speak with the authority of experience because for some time *Una Sancta* has instructed and received about 250 converts a year, not to mention enquirers who did not complete the course. The course is comprised here in just under five hundred pages and works from the notion of God through the story of the Chosen People and the foundation of the Church; the structure and teaching of the Church; life in the Church seen in the liturgy, the moral law and prayer; to the four last things, ending appropriately with the resurrection of the body. It is rounded off with a neat thirty-page summary which will provide invaluable notes for priests giving instructions. The book, however, should be welcomed not only by those dealing with converts but by all Catholics interested in their religion seriously. The fundamental truths are made real in plain language with a complete absence of clichés and scarcely any technical jargon. One may turn up any page in the book and find a lucid explanation that makes contact with modern life without ever leaving basic principles; instance the brief but thorough treatment of Confession. In a similar fashion the early history of the Church comes to life with many a piquant touch. Thus after the death of St Peter we read, 'It is not to be expected that a college of cardinals was immediately found to elect a successor'. From evidence of this sort one can only conclude that the translation from the Dutch must be first-rate. Finally—a comment it is rarely possible to make these days—the book is inexpensive, and very well got up, too.