

BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY. By Thomas Gilby. (Longmans; 25s.)

SOCIETY AND SANITY. By F. J. Sheed. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

'All this accords with the Platonists writing in a more elegant style than Aristoteleans usually command, and revealing more beauty in their shadows than any others can in their present substances.' In quoting these words of Fr Gilby at the beginning of the review of his own book and Mr Sheed's I do not wish to imply either that Fr Gilby's elegant book does point the difficulty of reviewing Mr Sheed's book: there is so little to say about substance. It is rather like bread, as opposed to wine; you can live on bread but not on wine. As bread is simply to be eaten, so Mr Sheed's book is simply to be read; and both are nourishing if properly digested.

Intended as a kind of companion volume to *Theology and Sanity*, this new book deals with human relationships in terms of what man *is*. After a section on man's nature there is a second section on Marriage and the Family, and a final section on Society and the State. The predominant note is one of Aristotelean sanity. This sanity is particularly welcome in regard to Marriage and the Family, a subject which has recently occasioned much shrill romanticism amongst Catholics; nothing that I have read on the subject has been so helpful as these pages of *Society and Sanity*.

But the full life does include such bouts of divine madness as occasionally burst forth in Fr Gilby's book. Almost always they leave the reader full of sober joy over some fresh, brilliant insight, though sometimes they may just leave him puzzled: 'It is arguable that the Church has been better served by good bad Popes than by bad good Popes' (p. 82); on page 308 we read, 'While noblest regarding its object, religious faith is still the meanest act of mind by its mode'; this statement is footnoted with a reference to the *Summa*, but I cannot find anything corresponding to it in the articles referred to.

The trouble with such light-hearted paradoxes is that they may give the impression that Fr Gilby's work is light-weight, which it quite certainly is not. In fact it is a fascinating and convincing display of how human relations, arising from the interaction of biological facts, spiral upwards through the human mass, community, society and political order into the company of the blessed in heaven. With such a broad sweep it is scarcely surprising that the author's digressions are almost as rewarding as his main theme; for instance, in the middle of an illuminating discussion of whole-part relationships he writes: 'These truths . . . descend into questions of causality, where two total and principal causes may conspire in the same effect: thus what the good man does of his own free will is entirely his and entirely God's.' (p. 65.) Again there are a few pages on original sin worth more than many whole treatises on the subject. (pp. 129-134.)

In some ways the book's deepest interest for *THE LIFE* is to see how its movement follows the movement of St Thomas's own thought—he 'set out to find grace and wisdom, and rediscovered nature and science' (xiv)—because *THE LIFE* (once, of the Spirit) seems to have followed a similar pattern. And an excellent pattern it is, for many people find more edification in works on biology than in the general run of spiritual literature—and even more would do so if the drama of life were always presented with the poetic skill of Fr Gilby: 'How evocative the scientific study of any one civilisation needs to be. Select which you may, and beneath the surface on which the invaders build their towns and leave their ruins, flows a racial life, dark and silent, deeper than civilisation and the institutions of religion, through the world of matter which bears men and sustains them for a time, and to which they all return in death.'

The contrast between Fr Gilby's approach and Mr Sheed's has, I think, been illustrated. In view of the contrast it is heartening to discover them so much at one over an issue which has often left Catholics on the opposite side from the angels: the essential dignity of human freedom. Here is what Mr Sheed says: 'It is part of man's likeness to God that he has intellect by which he can see reality and utter reality as he sees it. To force a man to say what he does not see is the grossest irreverence to man and to God. It blunts man's sense of the value of truth, it twists from its proper use his power of utterance. To prevent a man from saying what he believes is a mild interference, a whole world apart from making him what he does not believe. It is no service to a doctrine, true or false, to force a man to utter it against his will. You only dishonour the doctrine. When the doctrine is a religious doctrine, it is a way of taking the name of God in vain.'

This danger of religious authoritarianism is described by Fr Gilby as follows: 'Instead of a living and growing welcome to a mystery, welling up from grace and operating like the virtues, congenial to man as his own activity, men are drilled to strike a succession of fixed attitudes that have come to be considered appropriate; authority hardens into a legal office . . . the effect is that of business organisation rather than of companionship, the emphasis falls on correctitude rather than virtue, the atmosphere is one of strain rather than of ease, and the first words heard by those who approach it from without are a demand for their submission, not an invitation for their company. All this is overstated, but that is commonly the way with dangers.'

DONALD NICHOLL

RETURN TO CHRISTIANITY. By Sels F. S. Ferré. (S.C.M. Press; 5s.)

There is much talk nowadays about the failure of Christianity. The author of this little book, previously published in America, is much concerned about this 'failure', and yet he calls for a 'Return to Christianity'.