

fact that he was both God and man, and his whole book is a demonstration of the illuminating power of that central truth.

'Since Christ all history is basically "sacred", not least because of the Church's presence and testimony within one all-inclusive world history.' (*T.R.*, p. 138). Here is another significant difference between von Balthasar and Richardson. The Dean of York has little to say on this theme; but it must be tackled, for post-resurrection history is the history of the Church, the bearer of the resurrection message and the active community of the risen Christ.

'Christian worship is the response of man in thanksgiving to the disclosure of God's mercy in the history of the world, which is known to Christian faith.' (*H.S.P.*, p. 264). 'When, in the Mass, the Church is granted a true, bodily contemporaneity with her Head in his sacrifice, something takes place not only from the Church's point of view but from Christ's'. (*T.H.*, p. 94). Are the two theologians in conflict at this point? Or may we see here an opening for fruitful discussion? Fr von Balthasar is analysing the objective basis of Christian faith and experience; the theology of the Dean of York does not take him so deeply into the heart of the mystery, but that does not mean that he positively excludes its real existence.

A Theology of History has nothing to do with defending a party line. It is simply an example of that kind of genuine theological statement which we need 'to meet the preoccupations of existential philosophy' (p. 20), revealing to us both the meaning of our faith and the demands it makes upon us. 'For the business of theology is not to keep one eye on philosophy, but, with its gaze obediently turned towards Jesus Christ, simply and directly to describe how he stands in time and in history as the heart and norm of all that is historical.' (p. 20). Reassured by that remark, the Dean of York should read von Balthasar and write another book. Let him, like von Balthasar, keep the quotations biblical. For to say that 'the ideal university would be one in which every member of the staff in every department read with intelligence and interest the *Journal of the History of Ideas*', (*H.S.P.*, p. 11), sounds, from the lips of a Christian theologian, like a confession of failure.

MICHAEL RICHARDS

A NATION SO CONCEIVED, by Reinhold Niebuhr and Alan Heimert; with a preface by Marcus Cunliffe; Faber and Faber; 21s.

PERSPECTIVES IN AMERICAN CATHOLICISM, by John Tracy Ellis, with a foreword by Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan; Helicon; 25s.

The 'reflections on the history of America from its early visions to its present power' of Professors Niebuhr and Heimert were originally prepared for the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, which, from its privileged ramparts in Santa Barbara, has done much to instruct the American conscience,

if sometimes in generalities so opaque as only to confirm a national passion for categories and constitutions. And when expressed in language that echoes in almost a farcical way the 'tendency' talk of American academics, the English reader at least is likely to be discouraged. What is he to make of such a sentence as this: 'It was in such a context that both North and South predictably drifted toward polarized and sectionally homogeneous self-images'?

He is likely to wonder yet again at the apparent inability of even the most learned and lively of American sociologists and political philosophers to write a plain prose that avoids the flaccid rhetoric of universal explanations. But this is an unfair judgment to make on a book of remarkable perception: honest in intention and impressive in achievement. One only wishes that what one has to criticize in American writing of this sort is not what is intended or achieved—so admirably as it nearly always is—but rather the *means* of its achievement, which can so easily prejudice the reader who happens to believe that language is first of all concerned with as accurate and—in this context—as *incarnational* a communication of ideas as discipline and imagination can induce.

The title of the book, of course, comes from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: 'Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure'. In his preface, Professor Cunliffe conveniently spares the reviewer the duty of summarizing the book's argument. 'In brief, it is that the United States began with a strong sense of national purpose, based on a commitment to democracy and on assurances of providential guidance in extending the frontiers of democracy everywhere; that these and other elements enabled the Americans to establish a robust civilization in which various tendencies were more or less successfully held in balance; but that, domestically and internationally, the present-day United States suffers from complacency, sentimentality, utopianism and parochialism'. Professor Cunliffe is right to insist on the generously open quality of the book's approach: it is in fact 'metahistorical' writing. The conventional frontiers recognized by the historian have been widened, and the influence of social studies and psychology, of religion and the role of status in American society, is seen to have an importance as crucial as that of political manoeuvre, though at the cost, as has been suggested, of some precision.

The three main themes of the book—the search for national identity, the emergence of a complex industrial society which still retains nostalgic longings for the primitive simplicity of its past, the contradiction between the innocent dream and the brutal facts of present power and responsibilities—are well stated, though they telescope historical processes in a way that may confuse those unfamiliar with American history (and the book, after all, was written for Americans: it is a sort of secular examination of conscience put out for their benefit). Professor Niebuhr's share in the enterprise is a guarantee that moral judgments, when needed, are not lacking, and nothing is more engaging in this

book than the simplicity with which it acknowledges defects as well as virtues. 'We really ought not to be so sure of the uniqueness of our virtue', the authors remark towards the end, and there can be no doubt of the truth of the conclusion that so many of America's difficulties arise from 'our frantic and nostalgic yearning after the original simplicities, for the sake of fleeing or avoiding present complexities'.

Mgr Tracy Ellis has a task that is at once more simple and more difficult than that of the Santa Barbara mandarins. The collection of his essays, addresses, sermons and reviews on American Catholic history is a suitable recognition of his pre-eminence as a historian. But it reflects the difficulty of avoiding the extremes of parochialism and universalism. The religious historian may content himself with recounting the domesticities of his Church. Or, at another level, he may too easily survey the whole world from the confident presuppositions of his own faith, on the assumption that there is no aspect of the human situation which cannot find its true setting in the history of salvation itself. He can lack the capacity to be surprised.

Mgr Ellis is far too good a historian to confuse the functions. He has over the years gathered a formidable amount of material on American Church history, and such heroic figures as John Carroll, John Ireland and James Gibbons, thanks to his biographies and lesser studies, have emerged in their true stature. But what is most notable about Mgr Ellis as a historian is his sense of responsibility. He has never been content simply to chronicle events, or even to interpret them as simply the proprietary affair of the Church. He has a deep sense of the specific contribution of Catholics to American life, and his candour in acknowledging their defects—especially in the field of intellectual seriousness—is typical of his forthright but always informed conscience as a historian who sees the past as at every point the providential interpreter of the future.

The 'Perspectives' include essays on Church and State (and on such an issue Mgr Ellis has no difficulty in tracing an essential consistency in responsible American Catholic opinion), on specific issues and personalities in American Catholic history (with such unexpected details as Archbishop Carroll's vigorous plea for a vernacular liturgy, and that in 1787!), a section of quite special importance on Catholics and Education (in which the essay called 'No Complacency' faces squarely the whole dilemma of the American Catholic achievement, so that Mgr Ellis can ask: 'Have we the fortitude to apply the axe where the accumulated undergrowth in Catholic higher education threatens to choke and smother every prospect for the achievement of high quality? If we have not, then mediocrity will continue to be our portion.'), and a final section of 'Benedictina', appropriate in a volume that appears under the auspices of the American Benedictine Academy.

The place of American Catholics, not only within the structure of the United States but within the context of the Church at large, has become a crucial one. Nowhere, one may believe, has the Second Vatican Council evoked so enthusiastic and understanding a response. The work of a great scholar such as

Mgr Tracy Ellis, not only in illuminating the course of the past but in indicating what must be the challenge of the future, is indispensable to the development of an adult and informed Catholic conscience among Americans. That is the importance of his book and of his long years of labour. He complements the generalities—perceptive and important as they are—of Niebuhr and Heimert with the reminder that, if Catholics are to take their proper place in the life of the community at large, they must begin with some understanding of their own history and of its legacy—and of the hope it essentially holds.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

VIRGIL, a Study in Civilized Poetry, by Brooks Otis; O.U.P.; 45s.

Professor Otis of Stanford University, California, addresses himself in this book to one central problem: how could Virgil, who grew to maturity in the circle of 'the new poets' and adhered to Callimachus in the rejection of Apollonius' would-be Homeric epic, later himself conceive the 'preposterous ambition' of breathing life into an art-form, obsolete for seven hundred years, and of being at once 'heroic and civilized, both remote and contemporary, both Homeric and Augustan'? Professor Otis finds a new answer to this paradox because he sees the whole of Virgil's work, from *Eclogues* to *Aeneid*, as the development of a single Augustan ideology or symbol-complex, and Virgil's great achievement as the perfection of a new dramatic 'empathetic' style. This 'subjective style' (doubly so because Virgil not only narrates from the point of view of his characters and their emotions, but 'editorially' comments on them—or inextricably blends the two) already existed to some extent in Ennius, Lucretius and Catullus more than in any Greek, but Virgil even in his earliest *Eclogue*, II Corydon, exhibits it in a far more fully developed form. This style governs every detail of his verse, the choice of tenses and of emotive words, syntax, metre and sound effects. In a series of brilliant detailed analyses of texts Professor Otis anatomizes Virgil's novel art, in *Eclogue*, VIII, in *Georgics* IV (Aristaeus and Orpheus), in a comparison of Virgil's games with Homer's, and of Virgil's Dido with Appolius' Medea. This may seem familiar since Heinze's time (1915), but Professor Otis enriches and deepens previous analyses.

Already in the *Eclogues*, at least when taken as a whole in their carefully planned sequence and pattern, he finds Virgil's central idea of the 'divine man' on whom the world depends, attached to Julius Caesar in *Eclogue* V Daphnis, and to Octavian in *Eclogue* I. Not only the first but the second of these attachments seems to me doubtful; the *Eclogues* are all under Pollio's patronage, and Pollio was an adherent of Antony, and certainly *not* a member of Maecenas' circle. Professor Otis' chronology (especially p. 135) is very questionable, and he makes Virgil's development difficult to conceive by accepting uncritically the statement in the ancient *Lives* that Virgil contemplated a Roman historical epic before he began the *Eclogues*. I prefer to see in *Eclogue* IV the dawn of Virgil's idea of himself as an epic poet.