

at the end of the book we are back where we began it is because the author is using not a wide screen, but a circular one, an ideal medium to preach the perfect society which is Christ.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

THE SACRED SHRINE: A STUDY OF THE POETRY AND ART OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. By Yrjö Hirn. (Faber; 42s.)

In this book, originally published before the first World War, Mr Hirn presents a very personal examination of the art of the Catholic Church. He is not himself a Catholic so his book is happily free from the prejudices, false arguments and sentimentality that frequently accompany Catholic criticism of Catholic art. If the subject is orthodox, then the treatment must be sound—that is the fallacy so often to be found today in any approach to Catholic aesthetics. There are exceptions, of course, and I shall refer to them later.

Mr Hirn states his own approach in his Introduction. 'The Catholic Church', he says, 'is a Middle Age which has survived into the twentieth century.' This is a dangerous statement since it evades the fact of religious art developing from one period to another while, at the same time, maintaining the continuity of tradition. This is a subject which Mr T. S. Eliot has dealt with, in its secular connotation, in his essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*; his theories might well be applied to Mr Hirn's inquiry. However, in his first chapter, Mr Hirn gives a more profound definition of his attitude towards religion and art when he says, 'The ideas of divinity which lie at the foundation of the rich religious art of primitive and barbaric man, are not sufficiently lofty to give this art a specifically religious character; the ideas, on the other hand, which lie at the foundation of the most intellectual Christianity, are too lofty to allow of their being united with the sensuous element in aesthetic production.' He finds that Catholic Christianity, with its emphasis on the Incarnation and its eschewing of Manicheism and Puritanism, provides the perfect soil for the growth of religious art. From these generalizations, he proceeds to examine those instruments and dogmas of the Church which most easily lend themselves to artistic treatment. He gives much space to the study of relics and reliquaries and speaks, surely a little misguidedly, of 'saint-worship' in the Early Church. He rightly gives a central place to the altar (though he does call the Mass a sacrament) and explains clearly that the Mass is not simply a memorial supper or love-feast but a re-enactment of Calvary itself. He goes on to describe the shape and significance of the host, the purpose of the tabernacle, and finally examines the doctrines specifically concerned with our Lord's coming and the place of our Lady in Catholic teaching.

All this is interesting, honest and serious; yet something is missing.

In so carefully categorizing his subject, Mr Hirn seems to me to have lost sight of the one really important aspect of art, whether secular or religious. He has forgotten that man is a *maker*, that whether he is writing a poem, carving a statue, painting a picture or practising any craft *whatsoever*, he is doing something profoundly important and unique, and therefore something deeply religious. In this sense, *all* art is religious, a participation, however small or remote, in the act of creation itself, and so Rembrandt's self-portraits or Shakespeare's last plays are as much religious art as Rouault's *Miserere* or Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Only David Jones, I think, among modern British Catholic poets and painters, has really managed to express this truth with any clarity. In a brilliant essay called *Art and Sacrament* he says, 'We are committed to body and by the same token we are committed to Ars, so to sign and sacrament', and 'For the painter may say to himself: "This is not a representation of a mountain, it is 'mountain' under the form of paint." Indeed, unless he says this unconsciously or consciously he will not be a painter worth a candle.'

Art, then, is not a means but an end. It is not the embellishment of something already sanctified and accepted; it is at the centre of religion not on the circumference. Mr Hirn, it is true, is concerned with one religion and its artistic manifestations, but his thesis is too narrow to contain the wide and terrifying truth that even where creeds are forgotten, art continues. And, to go beyond the purpose of his book, if there is something wrong with the art we find in so many modern Catholic churches it is because Catholics themselves have tried to make 'religious art' cosy, confined and, consequently, lifeless. Perhaps the answer to this problem is that we have tended to forget precisely what the Incarnation signifies. We have ignored the fact that it is dynamic, devastating, timeless, and demands suffering as well as devotion.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

POETS' GRAMMAR: PERSON, TIME AND MOOD IN POETRY. By Francis Berry. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 21s.)

Stylistics, which especially since the war has received increasing attention on the continent and in the United States, has so far made little progress in Britain, where its very name still excites a certain hostility. Our best scholars in the field (such as Ullmann and Sayce) have in any case directed their energies to a linguistic interpretation of foreign literatures. Apart from one or two rather unsystematic studies of imagery, and the work of Professor Empson (whose essay on the use of the word *honest* in *Othello* recalls the methods of Leo Spitzer), little attempt has been made here to apply current linguistic methods of description and analysis to English texts.

While Mr Berry's book, at first sight, seems to strike a new note