

REVIEWS

BOOKS ON THE CHURCH

ECUMENISM AND CATHOLICITY. By William Nichols. (S.C.M. Press; 12s. 6d.)

'In teaching this subject, I have deliberately confined myself to examining the implications of the ecumenical movement itself, without entering into any discussion of other manifestations of concern for the unity of the Church which can be observed at the present time.' (p. 11.) Indeed, what is the outstanding characteristic and the originality of this work is that it forms, in the strict sense, a *theological* essay on the ecumenical movement. Theology, of course, is the reflection of the Christian intellect on the datum of its faith. In this case the datum is provided by the ecumenical movement, or more exactly by divided Christianity's seeking its unity through this movement. Mr Nichols's basic assumption is that divided Christianity represents Christianity itself, and that as a whole it has the task of rediscovering the fullness of the *Una Sancta*. In pages which of themselves would be enough to put the author in the category of minds best qualified for the work of theology, he has defined the Catholic position exactly, and he concludes intrepidly in opposition to the general opinion of 'high-church minded theologians': 'If we say that Christ is not divided, we must say that the unity of the Church has not been lost. If we say that the unity of the Church has not been lost, we must say either that it has been preserved in the Roman Church, or that the New Testament is mistaken in its stress on visible unity' (p. 80). Mr Nichols rejects the option because the two solutions 'are rationalistic solutions' (*ibid.*). Now there is an element in the life of the Church which cannot be reduced to reason: 'the wholly irrational effects of sin in the Church' (*ibid.*). That is the key to Mr Nichols's theological option. 'The Church can lose its historical unity because its members are sinners' (p. 82). Consequently the fact of division does not imply, for one of the divided branches, inevitable segregation from the *Una Sancta*. Doubtless the branch is not in possession of the fullness, but so long as it maintains certain basic assertions, it always has the right to consider itself as one of the legitimate members of the body of Christ, and no other community can deny it this quality. But if that is so, what has become of the Church's unity willed by Christ and professed by the Doctors of Christian antiquity? Mr Nichols is too well informed to deny purely and simply the historical character of the unity, but this is secondary by comparison with its eschatological character: unity's eschatological completion will not be sufficient, but in the whole of the

historical order sin is sufficiently prevalent to prevent unity being realised. Consequently it is admitted that all the visible churches are today more or less in a state of sin, in a state against unity—unity which is not only necessary to its well-being (*ad bene esse*) but to its being (*ad esse*). The result of this is that we do bear in its fullness Christ's message, yet we do not gather all its fruits. Approaching this unity as best may be is the *raison d'être* of the ecumenical movement, whose members must accept the postulates set out in this book if they would really attain their goal. Mr Nichols is consistent in regarding this goal as something to be hoped for: 'If all historical Catholicity is but a fore-taste of the fullness of Catholicity of the glorified Church, it is always insecure in history, something which can never be taken for granted but must always be striven for by men and received from God by grace. Our unity in history is never secure, for where sin is, unity can be lost' (p. 105).

This is a brilliant exposition, vibrating with love for Christianity and fervour for the ecumenical movement, but to this one must apply the saying: '*Quod gratis assentitur, gratis negatur*'—'Where you can say yes, you can say no'. Now however skilful the author's presentation is, one cannot but be astonished that a theological work of such importance does not even make an attempt to base its presuppositions either on Scripture or on the teaching of Christian antiquity. The fact of division is there: therefore one cannot hold that historical unity was something capable of being realised. That practically is the position of Mr Nichols. He tries hard to trace as far back as possible the fact of the division among people who were genuine Christians to his way of thinking. An interpretation which is at the very best a bold one of the divisions of the Church of Corinth, an erroneous assertion of the so-called novelty of sacraments conferred outside the Church (do we need to recall the third-century disputes between Rome and Carthage on this subject?), then an inference drawn from the life and activity of schismatic communities of the East, are arguments of little weight. Then come the great events: the Schism of the East and the Reformation. Those are the facts stated by the author, but notice that he has not also mentioned the very lively awareness amongst the whole of Christian antiquity of the existence of the 'Great Church', of a unique and visible depository of truth in face of schisms and heresies. What has become of the indefectibility promised the Church by Christ, of the continued assistance of the Holy Ghost, of the power of binding and loosing supremely? When one re-reads the *Adversus Haereses* of Irenaeus after reading Mr Nichols, a greater contrast cannot be imagined. There is no doubt that Mr Nichols's thesis has its origin in a view inspired by love, respect and humility; but however hard it may seem to recall the

fact to him, it takes no account of the prophetic appeals of Paul and the view of the Church which they suppose: 'Keep watch, then, over yourselves and over God's Church, in which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops; you are to be the shepherds of that flock which he won for himself at the price of his own blood. I know well that ravening wolves will come among you when I am gone, and will not spare the flock; there will be men among your own number who will come forward with a false message, and find disciples to follow them' (Acts 20, 28-30).

HENRI DE RIEDMATTEN, O.P.

L'EVEQUE DANS LES COMMUNAUTES PRIMITIVES: Tradition paulinienne et tradition johannique de l'Episcopat des Origines à saint Irenée. By Jean Colson. (Coll. 'Unam Sanctam' nu. 27.) (Edition du Cerf, Blackfriars; n.p.)

This is an original work, well constructed, clear and logical: too logical perhaps, for the texts seem to be less explicit than the thesis drawn from them. The author's task is the difficult problem of the origins of the episcopate. He has seen very clearly the meaning of the various tasks of the New Testament in this respect: the already clearly defined pattern of the monarchic constitution at Jerusalem under James the brother of the Lord, the condition of tutelage of the communities founded by Paul in so far as he was there to ensure the overall direction, the progressive establishment of a definitive hierarchy in view of what seems to have been the Apostles' disposition. M. Colson's originality consists in reconciling the apparent divergencies of the very explicit texts of Ignatius of Antioch referring to the bishop and the silence of Clement of Rome or the Pastor of Hermas, and he does so on the supposition that these are two complementary aspects. With Paul and the tradition which he dominated, the community is in the foreground, so that there is no mention of the bishop even when he speaks in his name; with John and his school, the bishop recapitulates and personifies the community. This view is rich in possibilities: it accounts well for certain phenomena, and even if one does not agree with all M. Colson's suggestions, the book does credit to the author's critical and historical sense.

HENRI DE RIEDMATTEN, O.P.

ECCLESIA-MARIA: Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche. By Alois Müller. Paradosis V (Paulusverlag: Freiburg in der Schweiz; n.p.)

Here we have a theme which is capital in patristic thought: Mary as type of the Church, the Church as type of Mary. It is the author's opinion that by drawing these two closely together it is possible to construct a positive and patristic form of Mariology. This inquiry is conducted with the exactness and scrupulous care which are so characteristic of the researches of Professor Perler who has directed Herr Müller's labours. Here one may find all, or at any rate most of the