

REVIEWS

THE CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO THE BIBLE. By Dom Celestin Charlier.

Translated from the French by Hubert J. Richards and Brendan Peters. (Sands & Co., Ltd.; 18s.)

There is a real sense in which a spiritual life not nourished upon the Bible is subsisting on a diet of substitutes. Many nowadays use their missals. Those parts of the missal which are not drawn directly from Holy Scripture are so closely in accord with the mind of the Church and so impregnated with scriptural ideas that diligent users of it may feel satisfied that their spiritual life is duly nourished directly by God's Word written. But many more do not use the missal, and many too, while making the rosary the back bone of their life of prayer, very seldom turn to the Gospels to fill out their meditation by dwelling upon the actual passages which recount the mysteries of our redemption. They may use prayer books and read books about prayer; but these, though doubtless good in themselves, are none the less God's word only at second hand. Those who use nothing else are feeding their souls on substitutes; better than nothing, but not the best.

There is a movement in progress within the Church to spread the practice of Bible reading amongst the faithful and to inculcate it in our schools. This movement, however, is much hindered by two things. The majority of Catholics are very hazy about what they may believe about the Bible, about the garden of Eden and the Serpent; about the creation stories; about the age of Mathusala and other Old Testament worthies; about the factual accuracy of the historical portions of Scripture and about what portions *are* historical; about the obvious contradictions that lie even on the surface of many incidents recounted in the lives of the Patriarchs. There is also the question of the morality of the Old Testament; what of the sacrifice of Isaac and Jacob's lies? So puzzling are all these problems, so dangerous does the tackling of them appear, that it seems to many better to leave the Bible severely alone, and more especially the Old Testament books.

Another thing that hinders the systematic reading of Scripture by Catholics, and this of course is not confined to Catholics, is the vagueness of their ideas about what the Bible is, what it contains and what its purpose and place is in the economy of redemption. The consequence is that they find it difficult to set about the task of reading the Bible, difficult to know where to begin and how to continue.

For these reasons the recent translation of Dom Celestin Charlier's

La Lecture Chrétienne de la Bible is a great boon to those who feel the need of answers to these questions and others like them. Here we have a safe guide to what the Bible is, how it was written and what its purpose is. We are shown how it is God's Word in its entirety and yet, quite genuinely the word of the men who wrote it or compiled it. We are introduced to the nature of the sacred history of God's chosen people and his dealings with them in the course of that history, which is the history of the coming of Salvation to men. We are initiated into the meaning of divine inspiration and its corollary absence of error. Many will read the following words with considerable surprise:

When we say, therefore, that the Bible contains no error, we use the word in its human sense and not with any metaphysical or divine connotation. Absolutely, error is the affirmation of something which does not conform to reality as it exists, independent of perception. If this is our definition of error, then the Bible bristles with errors. It states that the sun rises, and means this literally as everyone did before Galileo. It imagines the sky to be a solid, fixed vault. It allows only five thousand years to elapse between the creation and the Incarnation; it divides the work of creation into seven days; it extends the flood to cover the whole earth. There is not a page and hardly a verse which could not be pulled to pieces by philologists, philosophers, theologians and scholars of every kind. (page 216.)

This quotation illustrates how Dom Charlier deals with the question of error in the biblical narratives while faithfully following the traditional teaching of the Church, as interpreted by the most recent Papal pronouncements, and in particular by the encyclical of the present Pope *Divino afflante Spiritu*. His main concern in this book is with showing how the Bible has its centre in Christ the Redeemer, the Old Testament foreshadowing and leading up to him, the New Testament pointing to the work he came to do for our salvation.

The Christian Approach to the Bible will prove an invaluable handbook and companion to all who are ambitious to make Holy Scripture the source of their spiritual nourishment. It is to be hoped that those whose duty and privilege to teach the young will acquire it and make good use of it. These who recite the Divine Office will find it a means of enlightenment in studying and meditating on the material of their prayers. The clergy will find it of great use both for themselves and in preaching to their people on the Bible and its place in the Christian life.

The translation is an excellent piece of work. It has been done by Fr Hubert Richards, of St Edmund's, Ware, in collaboration with Fr Brendan Peters. Readers of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* will find, in this number, an article under the title *The Word of God Incarnate* by Fr Richards. This article will whet their appetite for the further knowledge

of the Bible (what it is, how it came to be written, what demands it makes on us and how we must read it) which this excellent book will give them.

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

LES PSAUMES. Commentés par La Bible. Psalms 1-50. Par Pierre Guichou. (Editions du Cerf.)

The Church is Christ's body, its members are the completion of its head (Eph. i, 23). The Church is Christ in the world, and in its members it continues through the centuries Christ's prayer. When the members adore, praise and thank the Father it is still Christ praying to the Father in them. In this way, as in all its work, it builds up Christ's body till he be filled 'all in all'. The purpose of this book is to equip Christ's members for this prayer-life in union with their head.

The author begins with the postulate that the Church should use the formulae consecrated by Christ himself, namely the Psalms. His idea is to extract the prayer-element in its Old Testament context and then to re-think and to re-pray it in New Testament terms and in New Testament relationship with God. In this way he makes of the New Testament a commentary upon the Old Testament. How thoroughly this is done is clear, for instance, from the fact that he uses more than twenty quotations (including citations from all four Gospels, Acts and several Epistles) to develop the thought of the short Psalm 6. There is nothing far-fetched or forced, ideas are developed naturally in the fuller light of the New Testament. The Old Testament plant produces the New Testament flower.

The book is not intended to take the place of a commentary. Introductory matter is kept to a minimum and the reader who wishes for more is referred to the standard commentaries. For the text of the Psalms (which is not printed out in the book) the reader is referred to the French of the Jerusalem Bible, but any translation will serve the purpose.

The method of exposition is uniform: first of all a literal explanation of the Psalm in its original setting, and then, under separate headings and in separate sections, the Psalm is given its New Testament application. For instance, in Psalm 3 the faith of the persecuted psalmist is triumphant over temptation coming from faint-hearted friends to lose trust in God. The author gives three further applications: the psalm is first made a prayer for the victims of modern social injustice, it is then applied to the sufferers from either persecution from without or spiritual anguish from within.