

THE MARY DIMENSION by Rita Crowley Turner. *Sheed and Ward, 1986. £6.50.*

Rita Crowley Turner remarks in *The Mary Dimension*, 'The popular male opinion that women lack logic may well be a result of their not having not been taught any'. (p. 8) This could well apply to Mrs. Turner's book, for it embodies a most peculiar analysis of feminism, tied to a Christian feminist history of the church and an evaluation of the Marian tradition so basic, so general and so unoriginal that one wonders why she bothered to write it at all. It is part of unspoken feminist etiquette that one goes cautiously in attacking one's sisters in a public space; but with this book Mrs. Turner has cut herself off from such courtesies.

The book's nine chapters and epilogue divide roughly into three sections; an analysis of feminism; a treatment of women and the church; and 'the Mary dimension', suggestions as to how feminists and the church might come to agreement on some of the issues that divide them through a realisation of the theological significance of Mary. Her first section, analysing feminism, is an absolute travesty. She charges that feminism has become so radical that it is polarising women. Her evidence for this consists in part of contrasting two meetings, of the Wages for Housework Campaign and the Catholic Women's League, and wondering 'if I was the only one to move between the two'. (p. 2) In fact the groups have many overlapping members.

As the above example shows, Mrs. Turner really bases her judgement of polarisation on a peculiar monolithic notion of feminism, as if it were a vast organisation with rules, a constitution and membership cards. Thus she is able to confuse people like the Wages for Housework campaigners with the commercial exploitation of feminism by advertising executives and pornography queens, treating feminism like a side-kick of sexual liberation instead of the reaction to it which it is: 'Therefore, women should no longer primp and paint to be acceptable to men.... Later came the idea that they should indulge their idea to appear attractive ... the net result, baffling to those who believed that women were capable of more ... is more sexploitation ... Carte-blanche for nasty men, handed to them by feminists'. (pp. 27–28) This is simply silly; and what is worse, ignorant. It conflates the views of completely opposed people and it entirely ignores many developments in feminism in the last 20 years. For instance, Mrs. Turner rightly deplores the tendency of one view of feminism to encourage women to turn their backs on traditional feminist values and become quasi-men; but this second stage in feminism was reached and written about at least 15 years ago. The fact that certain commercial enterprises have found it expedient to continue exploiting this outmoded attitude should not be laid at the door of feminism.

In surprising contrast, the analysis of women and church and her consideration of Mary is perfectly reasonable, though highly ameliorative. Unfortunately, it has been done better elsewhere many times, and Mrs. Turner's bibliography does not indicate that she is at all aware of the enormous amount of literature on the subject. She has some very cogent remarks to make on divorce, contraception, abortion and especially on priesthood which are well-expressed; unfortunately these only occupy some 16 pages, and do nothing to excuse or make up for her bizarre assumptions about feminism which underline the entire book.

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