

THE RED BOOK OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH. By Albert Galter.
(H. M. Gill and Sons, Dublin; 30s.)

'The aim of this book is to give a summary but well-documented account of the persecution of the Catholic Church by the Communist Governments . . .'. The publication, which has set itself this task, has accomplished it; in this sense it is a success. It is to be read not only as a 'successful' book in the sense indicated, but also because the bishops of this country, at the request of the highest authorities in the Church, have encouraged their children in faith to read it. When reading it, however, the readers will do well to bear in mind what the book is not trying to do. It is not trying to draw attention to the fundamental issues, to the spiritual conflict between good and evil, the struggle of the 'father of lies' against the God who is Truth. Hence its inevitable limitations: it could give the impression that the persecution of the Church is just the persecution of one social organism by another, and that the members of the persecuted body are painfully surprised at this lack of toleration. The statistical and historical approach may still further enforce this impression, which can be at most only a part of the whole story. For each Christian by becoming a disciple of his crucified master accepts his words: 'Blessed are those who suffer persecution in the cause of right; the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are you when men revile you and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, because of me.' This does not mean that the persecuted Church should not defend itself by trying to enlist the support of all who are interested in the defence of the liberties of man. What it means is rather that it is the persecution of the Church which is a normal condition of our beatitude, not its absence. Therefore in drawing attention to persecution, it would be only fitting to place it in a theological as well as in a social and political setting, and only right to make sure that mere interpretations of events are not presented as incontrovertible facts. Some of the minor theses are not incontrovertible: for instance, not all Czech and Slovak Catholics will accept the view that the Catholic Church in their country before the *coup d'état* enjoyed only 'a certain liberty in the exercise of the sacred ministry'. It is true that some of the measures of the coalition Government before 1948 were not designed to promote religious well-being, but the religious blindness of liberal politicians should not be put together with the deliberately anti-religious hatred of the Communists. One correction is also needed in the discussion of the situation in Slovakia between 1944-48; the situation then was not so black-and-white as the book suggests, and in some ways it was very grey indeed. How far similar corrections are called for in the case of other countries whose sad plight is discussed here depends on intimate knowledge of local

conditions. Yet despite the corrections one would like to see made, one feels that the members of the still vocal Church ought to read and to ponder this report about the silent Church.

C.V.

MASTERY AND MERCY: A Study of Two Religious Poems. By Philip M. Martin. (Oxford University Press; 15s.)

Canon Martin's study of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and *Ash Wednesday* is written for people 'without specialist knowledge', for Christians chiefly who might not normally read these poems—or possibly any poems—at all. 'My aim was not only to open to people the pure enjoyment of the poetry itself, but also that the deep Christian truths expressed imaginatively by the two poets might be allowed to strike deep into souls.' Literary criticism, he would claim, is largely concerned with pure enjoyment and is suspicious of a 'committed' standpoint; but though these are both 'committed' poems (i.e. written 'from within the Church'), it seems to me that they lose almost as much by being considered, as here, simply from the religious point of view without much reference to their life as poems: criticism of this kind is bound to be rather one-dimensional. *Ash Wednesday*, in particular, suffers from being over-simplified in terms of a rather narrow orthodoxy: it is a far more ambiguous poem, and meant to be, than Canon Martin's rather bowdlerized version would allow. And is it telling us much to say, for instance, that Hopkins 'must have lain and looked with love at the breaking waves'?

But probably Canon Martin would agree with all this; after all, it is only to say that any poem analysed down into prose gets desiccated in the process. What matters about this book is that it really does help us to understand these poems, and poetry, as the author so rightly insists, is important for the Christian as a means of bringing truth to his imagination and affections as well as to his mind. If the best thing to do after reading this charmingly humble book is to forget about it and go and read the poems again, Canon Martin will surely feel that this is what he wanted.

H.O'D.

A PATH THROUGH GENESIS. By Bruce Vawter, C.M. (Sheed and Ward; 18s.)

The proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof. It has been the reviewer's good fortune to be able to study the impact of this book on two educated laymen. Both were captivated by it, and neither was willing to drop it before getting to the end; which is more than can be said of most non-fictional writing.