

## REVIEWS

ART SACRE AU XXE SIECLE? par P.-R. Régamey, o.p. (Editions du Cerf, frs. 1,200; obtainable from Blackfriars Publications.)

Of art, as of so much else besides, each generation may be said to get what it deserves. And this is especially true of art that is sacred, set aside, that is to say, for the service of the worship of God. The unity of a culture in which religion is an integral and not an accidental part has for centuries been lost and nowhere are the consequences of that divorce more apparent than in the plastic forms in which the Church's worship is enshrined. The sad prospect of the churches we know, their subjection to the least common denominator of 'respectable' taste, their invasion by a multiplication of stereotyped statuary (condemned so firmly in the recent Instruction of the Holy Office on sacred art); all this is familiar and too often regretted as inevitable. But not by Père Régamey. As editor of *Art Sacré* (with his fellow Dominican Père Couturier), he has since before the war worked with unflagging zeal and with a mastery of the tactics of controversy for the re-establishment of the serious artist in the service of the Church. Nothing is more striking in the history of the last two centuries than the virtual absence of the artist from the sanctuary. The Church seems alien to the greatest inspiration of the artist, whose services indeed have been ignored: and the artist for his part is of all men the one most usually cut off from the community of the faithful.

During the last few years Père Régamey and his collaborators have achieved a remarkable change—at least in France, a change that is important so far for its inspiration rather than for its extent. Three churches in France are by now concrete evidence of the attempt to restore to the artist his highest function, namely to partake in that mediation of the things of God to men which the Church exists to provide. For the artist in making something sacred (and by definition that implies subordination to the Church, not as a matter of aesthetic style but as one of function) may be truly said to participate in the liturgical work, the work of Christ which his Mystical Body perpetuates.

At Assy, Vence and Audincourt, the most celebrated of contemporary artists have been invited to collaborate in this work. The discussions, not to say quarrels, which have arisen in consequence form the background of Père Régamey's book. But it would be a mistake to think of this magisterial work as a polemical essay. It is in fact a book whose importance can scarcely be exaggerated. Firmly rooted in a profound theological understanding, enlightened by a conscientious pastoral concern, it removes the debate altogether from the tedious level of passing taste and temporary disagreement. Père Régamey realises that the dilemma of the religious artist cannot be separated from the dilemmas of the society in which he lives,

and it would be idle to think that mere patronage of the artist is going to transform a situation which is tragic in its complexity.

Two main questions seem to emerge from the recent controversies, and to some extent they have been resolved by last year's Instruction. The first is the possibility of 'modern' art (often implying a non-figurative and abstract style) in the service of the liturgical mystery, which the sacred artist must respect. And it is important to remember the distinction between 'tradition' and 'traditionalism'. The Christian tradition underlies such diverse aesthetic styles as those of Ravenna, Winchester cathedral, the Gesù and Venice; whereas 'traditionalism' is so often the nostalgic appeal to one style, usually the Gothic, as though it were commensurate with the sacred. The second question relates to the artist himself: can an unbeliever be expected or encouraged to create a work which attempts to re-present a mystery in which he does not explicitly believe? The recent Instruction, despite premature cries of victory on the part of the traditionalists, leaves the question of non-figurative art fully open. It is not the Church's business to impose an aesthetic style. All that the Church requires (and which the existing discipline of Canon Law demands) is a respect for liturgical law and the right of the Ordinary in individual cases to be satisfied that works of art do in fact correspond to the truth they claim to honour and do not needlessly offend the piety of the faithful. Thus Matisse's masterpiece, the Dominican chapel at Venice, is fully conformed to what ecclesiastical law requires, but the style in which it is achieved (non-figurative, simple, reduced to the barest essentials and yet most eloquent) is very different from what is regarded as ecclesiastically usual. And who, for that matter, would adjudicate between Matisse's Stations of the Cross and some Ravenna mosaics, or to quote from the decorations at Assy, who would say that Bazaine's windows are any less 'traditional' than the astonishing eleventh-century head of Christ included in the exhibition of French stained glass at present showing in Paris?

As to the artist's faith, the question is by no means as simple as the apologist may assume. Ideally there should be no cleavage here, but few are the artists (Eric Gill was one and Rouault is another) in whom integrity of faith was allied to integrity as an artist. But the fact that, shall we say, Fernand Léger or Bracque is asked to co-operate in the decoration at Assy means to begin with an acceptance of the Church's right to ensure fidelity to the liturgical norms which in the realm of the sacred art are imperative. And the artist's own sense of the Christian mystery, implicit though it be, has, as a matter of evidence, produced work that is an eloquent and contemporary testimony to divine truth.

These are some of the considerations in the practical order which give point to Père Régamey's book. It is impossible here to do more than hint at the sustained argument which these five hundred pages provide. Père

Régamey is himself one of the most distinguished of French art historians and his criticism, unsparing and severe as it often is, springs from a total sense of the truth and of the real dimensions of charity. For an English reader he may seem over-concerned with French problems, but it must be acknowledged that it is in France alone that the question has been seriously posed. It is indeed a natural and necessary complement to the liturgical movement which has done so much to revivify the religious life of France. Père Régamey brings the precision of a theologian and the sensibility of an artist to the presentation of a debate that is always subtle and not easy to resolve. He has at least provided the evidence, and if his interpretation of the Roman Instruction be true, as we are firmly convinced it is, there should be hope for the future so that the artist may be given once again that respect and dignity which properly belong to his vocation, supremely achieved as it is in giving glory to God.

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

THE EUROPEAN MIND (1680-1715). By Paul Hazard. Translated from the French by J. Lewis May. (Hollis and Carter; 35s.)

The publishers must be congratulated upon bringing out this excellent English translation of the late Paul Hazard's famous book *La Crise de la Conscience Européenne*. True, to scholars of the period the original work has been familiar ever since it was published in Paris eighteen years ago, but now this most remarkable work of synthesis has at last become available to the cultured English reader who, in the hurly-burly of modern life, often lacks that extra portion of time or energy that is required for the study of books written in a foreign tongue.

Hazard's historical method consists in describing the complex climate of opinion and sentiment of an age rich in contrast and change. Thus we are presented with *Geistesgeschichte* in the highest sense of that much misused term. Since 'the history of ideas undermines national treatment' (Acton), Hazard has painted for us a wide European panorama with due emphasis on France, England, Italy, Spain, Germany and Holland.

How is it that the great scholar did not get lost in the maze of contemporary books, pamphlets and letters which he used for his material? The answer is: he retained an unerring sense of proportion that helped him to select truly illuminating features, as well as to arrange them in their proper order of significance.

It was Goethe who recognised that 'the deepest theme of world history, to which all others are subordinated, is the conflict between unbelief and belief'. This is also the central theme of Hazard's book. All the principal attacks, direct or indirect, which as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century served to sap the foundations of the faith in Christ, are subjected to a profound analysis. Due weight is given to the insistence on earthly