

BLACKFRIARS

condite points unnecessary in an introduction. But though this may limit the range of the book's appeal, it increases its value for the clergy, since here are discussed many practical details not found in other liturgical works. In the final chapter some may quarrel with the author for relating liturgical science to Canon Law rather than to Theology, for as a result the method of study advised appears to lay over-emphasis on rubrics; a method which differs from that implied and encouraged throughout the rest of the book. This third edition has been thoroughly revised so as to include reference to the most recent liturgical books.

C.P.

THE LITURGICAL ALTAR. By Geoffrey Webb. (Washbourne & Bogan; 5/-.)

DIRECTIONS FOR THE USE OF ALTAR SOCIETIES AND ARCHITECTS. New edition (Fourth) revised and enlarged. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 2/6.)

Mr. Geoffrey Webb's book on the Liturgical Altar, though in many ways an admirable and artistic production, cannot be unreservedly recommended. Its main purpose is, I take it, to give in a simple form a reliable statement of the liturgical laws relating to the construction and adornment of the altar. But this it fails to do. The book contains many inaccuracies. The author lays great stress on canons 1197 and 1198 which deal with the structure of the altar. On page 38 canon 1197 is wrongly translated (though in justice one must say that later on page 43, he gives a more accurate version). The interpretation of this canon is misleading. In passing one might suggest that the title of the book is not altogether satisfactory, since every construction which is an altar must of necessity be liturgical, *i.e.*, it must have the essential properties laid down by liturgical law. I wonder if Mr. Webb is clear about what is essential and what is non-essential to an altar? One has the impression that he would make a matter of law what is really a question of taste. Perhaps his dogmatism gives one that impression. But on purely artistic grounds I agree entirely with him. Again, the translation of canon 1198, page 38, is quite wrong. The author translates 'Both in the fixed altar and also in the consecrated stone there should be a sepulchre . . . containing the relics of saints, enclosed in the stone. This should read ' . . . sealed with a stone.' The *lapide* in the text is not the same as the *sacra petra*. Further, I cannot agree with what Mr. Webb says about the decrees of the Congregation of Rites. The obvious inference from his remarks on page 36 is that *all* these decrees deal with local abuses which have grown up at different times and are therefore 'corrective rather than

REVIEWS

creative.' Surely a decree may be an approval of a custom which if contrary to the law cannot possibly be 'read in the light of the original rubric to which it refers!' Yet Mr. Webb makes that the general norm of interpretation of these decrees. On this question he is far too dogmatic. If rubrics may sometimes be changed or moderated, so, too, decrees may lose their binding force by non-observance. Let me take an example, one which is actually referred to in the book. Candles placed on the altar for Mass may, says Mr. Webb, be of equal height. Now the *original* rubric in the *Ceremoniale Episcoporum* laid down that candles should be of unequal height. A question was sent to the congregation whether, since in Brittany the candles were all of the same height, the rule of the *Ceremoniale* ought to be observed. The reply was that 'the reason given excuses from the precept given by the ceremonial.' This answer is illuminating, for the reason which excuses from the law is that *de facto* they are not all equal. In view of Mr. Webb's insistence on reading all decrees 'in the light of original rubrics' one is tempted to ask him how it is that he can allow the candles to be of equal height? The Congregation has the right to modify any liturgical law which is of ecclesiastical origin and when it does so it is not for the private individual to go back to the original rubric. I think it would be truer to say that the rubrics must be read in the light of the authentic decrees, just as the Codex must be read in the light of an authentic interpretation.

The Directions for Altar Societies and Architects is, as its name implies, a book similar to the one reviewed above. It is perhaps more lenient and conservative and certainly less absolute and dogmatic. The ruling on antependia for example is milder than Mr. Webb's and is an indication of the complexity of the liturgical law. The book is an enlarged and completely revised edition of some instructions issued by Cardinal Vaughan. It gives a concise statement of the liturgical law: for churches that follow the Roman Rite on the construction and ornamentation of altars, chapels, the baptistry and mortuary chapel; the making of sacred vessels and vestments. The reviser in his very modest preface hopes that the book will be of use to all who have the care of the church and be a guide to architects and others engaged in the production of what is needed for divine worship. I am sure it will be.

K. W. -G.

IDA ELISABETH. By Sigrid Undset. Translated from the Norwegian by Arthur G. Chater. (Cassell; 8/6.)

The scene is Norway of the present day, but the woman might be anywhere. She is a universal, by great art embodied in an individual. Hence both the philosophy of the