

Reviews

**PETER AND THE SINGLE CHURCH, by John de Satgé,
SPCK, £4.95.**

I wish that Mr John de Satgé's new book had been available for our consideration during the last meeting of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (3 September 1981). It is the fruit of years of study and reflection. It understands and adopts the prerequisites of ecumenical dialogue, summed up in the word "empathy": "understanding not merely what those from whom we differ believe, but why they believe it; what it means to them; what the fact that we do not believe it means to them . . . we have to suspend our own disbelief for a moment, seeing to the limit of possibility the matter as it appears to their eyes". It comes to a conclusion which is not merely theoretical but requires action of a surprising kind. And the surprise can only be heightened when it is recognised that its author "starts from an Evangelical base within Anglicanism".

Empathy with Catholics must be peculiarly difficult for Anglican Evangelicals. They have, on the whole, had a simple creed. Their authority has been *sola scriptura*, their dogma, justification by faith. They have looked with unsympathetic eyes on sacerdotalism. They have been more concerned with orthopraxis than with academic theological disputation. They have felt no attraction for the "ritualism", the "juridicism", the "institutionalism" of the Catholic Church as it appeared in their eyes when they were forced to bestow on it some passing attention. And they have been markedly "English"; many of them would have echoed a remark made to me by a public school head master over fifty years ago: "I have a high regard for Roman Catholics, Butler, but they are not English".

Much has changed in the last half century, and this book may remind us that our view of Evangelicalism is today too simplistic. For here is a book which is of high scholarly quality, remarkably free from polemics and prejudice, deeply concerned for the visible unity of the Church, respectful of the Bible but not fundamentalist – and concluding that, since the Petrine claims made for the bishop of Rome seem inherently likely, "full communion with the see of Rome becomes urgent". In fact Mr de Satgé, from whose closing pages I have just quoted, is even more definite in his Preface: "I believe that the time is now ripe for entering into full communion with Rome as she stands".

The book is compact, rich and extensive in content, but written with great lucidity by a mind with which it is easy to "empathise". In its first (short) chapter it affirms that the Second Vatican Council "reopened for discussion fundamental questions that had been closed for four centuries. In doing so it has shaken, if not undermined, the foundations of separate Protestant existence". But it also maintains that the papacy, as Vatican II enters more and more into the life of the Catholic Church, will be "more, not less, central" in that life. The ensuing chapters examine Peter in the New Testament documents (Mr de Satgé accepts the methods and presuppositions of modern biblical scholarship), review the history of the papacy in post-biblical times, examine the data thus assembled from an ecumenical (that is to say universal and "empathetic") standpoint, and set out some reasons for holding not only that the "Petrine office" (to use the jargon of the ecumenists) is a permanent feature of the Church as God

wills the Church to be, but that it is made concrete at present in the primacy of the bishop of Rome,

Probably the reaction of Anglicans to this book will be more worthy of attention than those of a Catholic reviewer. I confine myself to pointing out that there are a few misprints in the book (including “not” for “now” on page 108), and to some personally chosen remarks.

Mr de Satgé is prepared to accept the common modern view that the “Tu es Petrus” verses in Mt 16 are an addition to the Markan account of Simon Peter’s confession of faith. I still hold, as I argued in *The Originality of St Matthew* over thirty years ago, that the Markan account is manifestly something left over when the “Tu es Petrus” passage was discarded; in other words, the “Tu es Petrus” material was part of the source-material lying *behind* St Mark’s Gospel. (The reader may well ask why St Mark, traditionally supposed to be relaying Peter’s own oral teaching, deliberately omitted something so redounding to Peter’s prestige. I personally think that this “bias” against Peter pervades St Mark’s Gospel, and that it reflects not so much the author’s view of the first of the apos-

cles, but Peter’s own instinct of modesty – and perhaps repentance. The great Anglican scholar C H Turner, more than fifty years ago, saw in this cool attitude to Peter an evidence confirming the tradition that Mark depended on Peter’s oral teaching.)

Mr de Satgé is well aware that much papal (not to say episcopal) teaching is “official” and yet not “infallibly” defined. This enables him to deal very fairly and very sympathetically with the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, with the teaching of which he does not necessarily disagree, though he thinks it may be susceptible of further development and refinement. I should like to recommend to him a trio of important articles by Fr John McHugh in *The Clergy Review* of 1969, in which a careful theologian, on the basis that there is certainly no new *ex cathedra* teaching in the encyclical in question, makes very clear (as does Karl Rahner) what is the proper and licit attitude of Catholics to such undefined teaching.

It remains to observe that this book is the third of what its publishers call “a notable ecumenical trilogy”. I much regret that I have not read its two predecessors.

B C BUTLER

GOD OR CHRIST? by Jean Millet, SCM Press, pp 261 £5.95.

The Abbé Millet stands in need of a severe English editor who would excise a quantity of lapel-holding remarks like ‘Do I have to recall?’ (p 4 *et al. pl.*), ‘I almost said’, (p 11 *et al. pl.*), and ‘I was going to say’, (p 27 *et al. pl.*), correct importantly misleading misprints, (pp 111 and 122, for examples), and tidy away some oddities like ‘as is generally known’, Jéus ‘presented himself as the very manifestation of God, as God himself’, (p 9), and the reference to the Apostles’ Creed as one of ‘the first doctrinal formulations’, (p 11), though he might, perhaps, spare the account of that time when ‘shrouds were miraculously discovered’, (p 33). The Abbé stands in this need because such things may prevent decent readers discovering the real excitements of his book. And there are many.

The Abbé’s main theme, rather too often repeated in simple terms, is that his

sociological study of the Catholic Church reveals it to be a bi-polar institution. ‘All the elements of the religious life which inspire it are ordered around two poles of attraction: belief in God and belief in Christ’, (p 1). Belief in God is belief in order, explanation and purpose. It is transcendental. Belief in Christ is belief in events, processes, and futures. It is historical. To reduce, attenuate or alter in any way, ‘and here I am still using the language of social psychology’ the attraction exercised by one or other of these two poles is to change ‘the very essence’ of Christianity: ‘in sociological terms, it is to substitute another religion for it’, (p 2). The Abbé is dealing with the fundamentals of Catholicism. And he is greatly worried. At least, he is worried as a Catholic by what he observes as a social scientist. In the present time the structures expressive of this bi-polarity are subject to a great