

The author sets out to examine the probable nature of the 'sexual ideology' of the future by interrogating the past; more specifically, to show 'not only that Christianity did achieve what was demanded of it by humanity [in this respect], but that, if the new tasks are to be accomplished, it may again be by means of Christianity'. With certain reservations the first part of this aim may be said to have been successfully carried out; in the course of his argument the author shows very clearly both that Christianity is not life-hating (though there have been Christian life-haters) and that it was not Christianity which 'introduced the concept of sin into the world, and the concept that sexuality is sin'. But his success with the second part of his aim is more dubious. He makes a clear and useful distinction between the sexual (procreative), the I-Thou love-relationship, and the lustful (animality); but he seems to suggest that these three should be not merely distinct but separate and subject to the sanctions of different authorities—State, religion and 'good taste': it is surely very odd to suppose that Christianity could ever acquiesce in the separation of the first two as an ideal, or resign its responsibility with regard to the third. Quite apart from this, however, the book is marred by its frequent inaccuracies and occasional howlers. It is just untrue to say that according to Catholic moral theology 'foreplay' in marriage is 'inadvisable' (p. 83); the laws regarding 'spiritual relationship' as impediment to marriage are grossly misunderstood (*ibid*); Christian idealism does not see the love of woman as a 'misplaced' attempt to love God (p. 242), still less does it seek to 'denude sexuality of all connection with any myth of love whatsoever' (p. 138); the common Catholic teaching concerning masturbation has not been understood accurately (p. 312); to say, for the sake of a slick antithesis, that 'the Age of Faith offered us love without, or in place of, knowledge' (p. 338) is fantastic, and to say that no 'special mental state' is required in confession because the sacrament works *ex opere operato* is monstrous.

St Dominic, it may be added, is described (p. 193) as 'one of the less attractive of the great saints'.

GERALD VANN, O.P.

EARLY CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF HISTORY. By R. L. P. Milburn.
(Adam and Charles Black; 18s.)

In this course of his Bampton Lectures Mr Milburn gives a survey of the first five Christian centuries' thought on the subject of history. It is a subject which has been the central pre-occupation of a great deal of the best theological work of our time, as well as one whose importance to early Christian thinking is becoming increasingly recognized in the

field of patristic studies. These lectures do not, however, aim to give us either theological reflection on history as the medium of God's revelation and of his saving work, nor do they attempt to summarize the results of scholarship in a field where its bulk is continually growing. What the author offers his readers is, in the best sense of the French term, a work of *vulgarisation*.

In an introductory lecture concerned with the perennial topic of all discussions about historiography, Mr Milburn tries to balance against each other the rival claims of 'interpretation' and of 'chronicle'. The question is, of course, of vital importance to his study: for the 'Christian history' recorded in the New Testament is written as a 'chronicle' of the central events composing it, interpreted in terms of fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and promise. In an outstanding chapter Mr Milburn shows how this view of the New Testament history grew into an awareness in the second-century Christian writers of a 'theology of history', in which the Old Testament record of God's dealings with his people reaches its final and definitive consummation in Christ, the mid-point of the redemption-history. For the Fathers in the central tradition of Christian thinking, all history leads up to this event, and is to be judged in relation to it. In its light, the Old Testament types prefigure the redemption wrought in Christ; and in its light, too, Augustine discerns the careers of the two cities inextricably interwoven in the history of nations and of the Church. And yet, Mr Milburn's scholarly reserve need look no further than St Augustine for its model: 'I do not', St Augustine writes (and Mr Milburn quotes with evident approval), 'blame those who have succeeded in extracting a spiritual, allegorical meaning from some narrative of Scripture, provided that, in the first place, its truth as history remains unimpaired.' The study of history—especially of redemptive history—imposes on the Christian scholar the tension between the faith that God has revealed himself in *this* history, and scepticism about what the evidence entitles us to believe really has happened, and about the meaning it can bear in the pattern of revelation.

The author's discrimination is, perhaps, not quite sharp enough between writers, on the one hand, like Justin and Irenaeus, with their insistence on the historical continuity of God's revelation, and writers, on the other hand, like 'Barnabas' with their non-historical allegorizing to bring the teaching of the Old and the New Testaments into line. Likewise, his chapter on 'Allegory and Mystery' in Origen stops short of a judgment on his 'spiritual' method of exegesis. But here, as in the remaining lectures, Mr Milburn assembles material and hints on its bearings which not only scholars and theologians (they, perhaps, least of all) will find fruitful.

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