

IS IT THE SAME CHURCH? by F. J. Sheed. *Sheed and Ward*, London and Sydney, 1968. 236 pp. 32s. 6d.

Today many thinking Catholics are troubled by the question which Frank Sheed studies in this book with his customary lucidity and a breadth of vision, based not only on his knowledge of theology and Church history but also on his experience as a much-heckled speaker in places as varied as Hyde Park Corner and Times Square. The book is a timely publication, dealing with changes that seem to affect the very essence of the Church, as well as with the atmosphere of unrest characteristic of the years following the Second Vatican Council. Two points become abundantly clear in the reading. On the one hand it is widespread ignorance of the real nature of the *magisterium*, and of the old theology, that has made it especially difficult for the ordinary believer to follow and face the challenge of recent developments in the Church, on the other it depends to a great extent on this 'ordinary believer' whether what we are witnessing today means sunrise or sunset. Both the introduction and the last chapter bear this title. From the very beginning the author does not mince matters. 'How much margin for change *has** an infallible teacher?' (p. XV) he asks and then proceeds to study the complex subjects of Authority and Change and Authority and Morals on the answer to which the solution of the delicate question of contraception depends. Here the reader gains an insight into the development of Church doctrine and the problems raised before an infallible pronouncement can be made. Basic to the whole argument is the fact that Christ founded the Church as a society of men committed to bring his truth and sacramental life to all nations, to every creature until the end of time. Even on the level of common sense alone it is obvious that such a society stands in need of an authority to make laws. This lies in the Pope and the hierarchy. It is true that a distinction must be made between laws within the area of infalli-

*Author's italics.

bility and those outside, which are patient of change. However, as long as they are not repealed, the attitude of the faithful to all laws must be one of obedience. In this the Christian only follows his master: 'Although Christ was Son, he learnt obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him' (Hebrews 5, 8-9). Authority is necessary to safeguard divine revelation and protect the great mass of truth already developed, from which advance can most surely be made. It follows that the Church has the right to demand the obedience of the Catholic in the field of morality, precisely because morals come within the teaching commission given by Christ to his Church. It is only from God that the rules for right living can emanate. 'How well or ill-equipped is a man for the stage of life he is entering at death? That is the ultimate test of what is best for man, and it is not made under our gaze' (p. 35).

In the chapter on contraception the author draws attention to the uniqueness of the act of procreation—in reality deputy creation—which leads to something which will endure everlastingly. It involves God in a special way, and the Church has always taken for granted that if the act takes place it must take place in its integrity, complete and un mutilated. However, in the field of morals we do not possess infallible definitions as in the field of dogma, largely because there has hitherto been no necessity for them. Nor do we possess a formal statement of the deposit of revelation by which it can be decided that a given moral or doctrinal matter is not in it. Certainly in Christ's command: 'Going, teach all nations, baptising them—teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you', the 'whatsoever' is not clearly defined nor confined to the scriptures, which were written for those Christians who had already received oral teaching from the Apostles.

In order to shed as much light as possible on the issue of contraception the author distinguishes three levels of the Church's responsibility for what is to be taught. The highest is an infallible definition. The lowest is the responsibility for leaving erroneous views held by Catholics uncorrected, as e.g. the view that all pagans are damned. The moment teaching on this point was given, the Church taught differently. 'At this first level of responsibility the Church has always taught that artificial contraception was gravely sinful' (p. 55). The second level involves more active engagement, as e.g. the law of celibacy or the declaration of bigamy, calumny, adultery as gravely sinful. Here situations may not have been fully explored, and Dr Sheed quotes several interesting repeals of previous legislation. However, it seems right to conclude that a constant repetition of a command or prohibition without contrary legislation points to a high level of Church commitment. Here the Church has always insisted on the integrity of the marriage act. Already a new view of marriage is emerging as not primarily—as is sex—concerned with child-bearing. 'Within Marriage the Church teaches . . . that sex need not "intend" procreation' (p. 64). This is evident in Pius XII's approval of the rhythm method. Dr Sheed is only too well aware that a crisis of faith or a crisis of obedience must in the present circumstances follow any infallible pronouncement on contraception, both being exacerbated by

the ignorance of most Catholics about the meaning of Infallibility and the process by which an infallible pronouncement is arrived at. This ignorance of the scriptures, of the nature of the Mass and Eucharist, of the position of Our Lady, even of Christ himself is not only an impediment to fuller understanding of the *aggiornamento* but also a stumbling block to Ecumenism. Everyone should heed the words of warning: 'My present concern is with the view that Ecumenism is best served by postponing the evil day when the differences must be brought out into the open. At present, they say, it is "inopportune". That, to me, is *the* temptation which the splendid upsurge of Ecumenism has brought with it' (p. 137). Even more serious is the author's warning to teachers: 'Christ's presence in the Eucharist is cast in doubt by his absence from the classroom' (p. 203).

In the final chapter the layman is called upon to take his new importance seriously, not to expect from the clergy who give us the revelation and the sacraments, any advice on the running of the social order, to soak himself in the scriptures, to avoid the mental habit of saying either/or when we should say both, and, finally to live as his messengers the message Christ has entrusted to his Church. This is a book that clarifies, stimulates and instructs, thus proving an invaluable guide through the maze of contemporary un- and re-thinking.

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SECULARIZATION THEOLOGY, by Robert L. Richard, S.J. *Burns and Oates*, London, 1967. 189 pp. 30s.

Father Richard, of Boston College in the United States, means by 'secularization theology' Paul van Buren, Bishop Robinson, and Harvey Cox—all seen as heirs of Bonhoeffer. He groups these three together as representatives of a theology which gives the cultural phenomenon of secularization a positive value.

As Martin Marty says in a foreword, the book can be read either as an introduction to the theologians discussed, or as an example of one way in which Roman Catholic theology might appropriate the theme of secularization. Read in the first way, it should function well. If I am to annotate, I will say that the analysis of Van Buren is very helpful indeed; that of Bishop Robinson gives him perhaps more credit for original reflection than he deserves; and the analysis of Cox is very good except for one vital point to which I will come in a minute.

There is a section on the historical background; it is a bit superficial and is inferior to the rest of the book.

I wish, however, to spend most of this review considering Fr Richard's analysis in Marty's second way. 'Secularization' theology is, he says, the necessary attempt to deal with a fundamental, and basically religious but heretofore theologically neglected, cultural movement. Negatively, it is a relatively justified protest against a false 'other-worldliness' of Christianity. Positively, it has two great insights; the need to begin theological reflection with the man Jesus as 'the man for others' (Robinson); and the correspondence of the movement of human history, as a movement toward human responsibility and freedom from intervening deities, with the movement of the gospel revelation (Cox).