

his effects as he goes along. Some come off wonderfully well; others are less happy, but the miracle of Sophocles carries the whole thing through to one's sigh of release as Creon stumbles through the Lion Gate for the last time, indescribably alone.

Phaedra, directed by Jules Dassin, could hardly be more unlike these two films in its approach to Greek tragic themes and yet, in spite of the febrility and indeed the vulgarity of the treatment, it is fascinating to see how in the end the intrinsic nobility of the story triumphs over all the chi-chi of the translation into terms of the Mediterranean millionaire set and we are left, almost unwillingly, with the feeling once again that 'nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail'. Melina Mercouri as a Dior-clad Phaedra who not only loves but seduces the pseudo-Hippolytus stepson played by Anthony Perkins, gives a bravura performance whose outsize emotions somehow do not offend, even when they should. Raf Vallone as the shipping magnate husband is both credible and sympathetic – what a good actor he has grown into – and Dassin's evident infatuation with his locations mean that we benefit by the loving emphasis given to the incomparable landscape with and without figures.

The treatment of chorus here, necessarily complicated by the modern transposition, is interesting and often quite successful, as in the scene on the quay when the news of the shipwreck comes through. But the dialogue on the whole is unconvincing and nobody could call this a really good film: it is a picture in poor taste with some admirable things in it, and well worth seeing if you are collecting an anthology of Greek myth on film, to collate with your anthology of Cocteau and Anouilh on stage. But the over-riding conclusion with which one is left is that it is almost impossible to erode the seriousness or attenuate the nobility of a Greek story.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

IMAGES FOR THE CHURCH

Having recently encountered the scorched and blackened 'Assemblages' of the American artist John Latham there, I nowadays approach the Bear Lane Gallery, in Oxford, with a certain caution. One can never be quite sure what is going to happen next. This month's exhibition, *Modern Art and the Church*, sounded like another challenge. On the earlier occasion, a few people were, I believe, rather indignant when they discovered what Mr Latham had been up to, with all that old gas-piping and burned secondhand books. But no one had to be carried out kicking and screaming as once they might have been. By now most of us have made our peace with Modern Art and the Modern Artist. But when one puts Modern Art and the Church together in the same room, one becomes aware how uneasy their alliance has always appeared. The problem is to see why this should be so. It is not that there is anything in the present exhibition which would *upset* one. One almost wishes there were. But problem

there is, and it is made all the more difficult by the fact that nearly all the exhibits are meant to be seen in quite another context, as parts of a larger complex of architecture, or as things used and worn. It is not, however, just that stained glass is best judged when seen in the situation for which it was designed rather than when displayed under artificial light, even when this is done as effectively as it is in the depths of the Bear Lane. Most people are capable of making the required imaginative adjustment and allowing for the necessary restrictions imposed by a gallery. No. The sense of confusion has, I always feel where this matter is concerned, a deeper source and one more difficult to get at. It may perhaps be worthwhile attempting to say something about it, if this review is to be more than a mere elaboration of the catalogue, a list of 'what I liked and what I didn't like'.

Much about what was on view was familiar enough. That, indeed, was part of the trouble. Sooner or later someone will have to try to do something more radical about the relationship between contemporary art forms and the Church's need for images. The present exhibition does not attempt to solve that sort of problem. But it does serve as an occasion for asking: What can the Church and Modern Art offer each other? It is becoming widely accepted nowadays that the Church is at last keeping up with what the modern artist is doing and taking her place again as an important patron of the arts. The example of Coventry Cathedral is there to prove it. Yet personally I do not feel that the difficulties end there.

Whether we like it or not, the Church is no longer the principal patron of the arts. She is now only one among many. But she remains a patron capable of making an almost unique demand on the artist. Other public bodies can afford to allow the artist a much greater freedom than the Church. It is true that there will always be some kind of limitation upon a commissioned work, no matter what its purpose. But when the artist is making something for the local school or a new block of flats he is not burdened with an awareness of the kind of thing which has been done before, the themes which have been used and the way they have been treated, in a word with that body of *tradition* which one cannot escape when thinking in terms of a sacred image. Indeed, to ignore the presence of such a deeply rooted tradition would be folly and might well jeopardize the validity of the image in the eyes of the people for whom it was made. With whatever measure of justice, people will expect a new image to witness in some way to that body of tradition. They will look for a certain familiarity based on a continuity with what has gone before. The temptation is to try to satisfy the Church's present need for images with the forms which met that need, say, in the Middle Ages or at the time of the Counter-Reformation, while at the same time giving them an up-to-the-minute flavour. Hence we have the luminous Madonna and so forth. But if the Church's images are to figure her experience they must in doing so keep pace with the constant growth of that experience and not lag centuries behind. This will mean that anyone attempting to make sacred images today must seek to have a wide appreciation

of traditional forms in relation to their period, while at the same time remaining fully aware of the problems which his contemporaries are tackling and the kind of solutions they are finding. Christian artists of every age have had to do the same. But today a synthesis is peculiarly difficult to reach. For the contemporary artist's most important inheritance from the modern movement in art is perhaps that freedom, that hard-won liberty, achieved by breaking not only with traditional forms but also with the traditional plastic language itself. This is where the tension arises, for it would seem that it is this very liberty which has so often to be sacrificed if the specific demands involved in the making of a sacred image are to be met.

It was of this tension one was aware in so many works in the Bear Lane exhibition, the tension between an attempt to remain loyal to the traditional imagery of the Church, while retaining sufficient freedom to make new formal advances. I felt that many of the artists were having to fight on two fronts at once. Take, for example, Keith New's *Enclosed Garden*. This very beautiful glass mosaic in soft greens and blues showed something of the influence of contemporary painting, both in the unexpected freedom and variety of its composition and in the way some of the glass was stained by spattering. As a piece of modern glass it was wholly successful. But the catalogue reminds us that the image of an enclosed garden is a symbol of the Virgin, and the reminder is a necessary one for, although the artist may have had this theme in view in making the glass, there is little in the finished work to suggest this to the uninstructed viewer. Perhaps I am being too reactionary and unimaginative about it all, but I still cling to the notion that it should be possible to grasp the significance of a well-made image without having to be discreetly informed about it by a note in a catalogue. In contrast, it was interesting to notice that Patrick Reyntiens had called his compositions simply No. 1 and No. 2, which was really all that was needed, faced with these large unhampered areas of cloudy blue glass. They allowed one to come to rest which was enough.

The meaning of Willi Soukops' *Madonna and Child* was abundantly clear to anyone. This was, I felt, by far the most successful piece in the whole exhibition, a significant conclusion. For while the artist has cast a sidelong glance at both Moore and Epstein, he has not allowed himself to be drawn too far away from the traditional representations of the Madonna. The seated figure is draped in the customary manner and the Child is held in his mother's lap in a way clearly suggesting her maternity, being almost contained within her body. The whole is thus enriched by a delicate allusion to those icons which show the Virgin with the child framed in her womb. This was for me at least an authentic image, and one was grateful for the sense of stillness and inner silence it conveyed.

John Hoskin's altar piece, a set of two candlesticks and a crucifix, made up of short wire strips welded one upon another, set against a severe reredos, an unadorned welded steel triptych, made a very different impression. Here again, I felt, was an artist who had really tried to come to grips with contemporary

sculpture, while at the same time trying to hold on to the accepted form of an altar piece. Given the austerity of the group as a whole, the crucifix might have been expected to act as a climax of visual and plastic interest. But this it somehow failed to do. Perhaps Mr Hoskin's courage deserted him in the end. For, while presenting us with what looks like a very challenging piece of contemporary work, he has led us to expect from the arresting texture of his image a more complete assimilation of the traditional form than he has actually achieved. But this is possibly asking too much. The whole group is undoubtedly one of the most imaginative efforts to be seen in the exhibition and if it falls short of complete success, it demonstrates what can be done in the way of rethinking a tradition.

It is rare enough these days to find a painter brave enough to tackle the interpretation of the Christian message. It was all the more interesting to see how R. J. Hitchcock approached the problem. Using a technique reminiscent of the later work of Jackson Pollock, though possibly richer in colour and more highly finished, Hitchcock's Crucifixion was visually very rewarding. The variety of textures enhanced by the burnished surface helped the play of red and gold to suggest rather than define the presence of the figure. The same painter's *Gaderene Man* was less successful. Again one had to fall back on the catalogue. Once the image has been allowed to retreat too far into the paint it cannot be rescued by a title, no matter how suggestive it be.

ALBERIC FORBES, O.P.

Letters to the Editor

SIR,

The Regius Professor, we are told, is watching Catholic historians, and Mr McGrath, it seems, is watching the Regius Professor. Yet, lest it should be supposed that Father Philip Hughes has contrived – or would ‘conspired’ be a better word? – to write three volumes on the Reformation in England without ‘explicitly’ mentioning the Marian martyrs, the following references may be to the point: *The Reformation in England*, Vol. II, pp. 254–304, together with Appendix I, pp. 331–46, and Appendix III, pp. 349–53. It is improbable that any Catholic could read these pages without embarrassment and even contrition.

As an exercise, it is interesting to compare the treatment of the Marian persecution in Father Philip Hughes' *A Popular History of the Reformation* with that in Sir Maurice Powicke's *The Reformation in England*. Father Philip Hughes is considerably more ‘explicit’.

I am Sir,

Your obedient servant,

T. CHARLES EDWARDS