

BOOK REVIEWS

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, by Charles Coüsanon, O.P., tr. J.-P. B. and C. Ross. The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1972 (London, 1974). £3.00.

This useful book summarizes current knowledge about the structure of the Rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Though short, it is packed with information and no aspect of the building history of the church is ignored. The major stages in its development are chronicled in separate chapters and illumined not only by ground plans and photographs but also by isometric drawings of beautiful clarity and finish. These illustrate the very different roles which the church played throughout its history. Père Coüsanon is a born archaeologist. His approach is admirably methodical; he states the problems before trying to solve them, advances step by step in argument, is not afraid to admit ignorance, and offers no premature solutions where the evidence does not warrant them. He avoids polemic. His approach is sober and factual, but his gift for imaginative reconstruction is evinced when the cornice height of the Rotunda is convincingly extrapolated from the dimensions of two broken columns. The cornerstone of his method is a painstaking descriptive technique, itself correlated to an unobtrusive mastery of the literary sources which ensures that no event of importance to the Rotunda is omitted. Again and again, archaeological and literary evidence manifestly coincide.

Père Coüsanon produces convincing arguments to support his contention that the present site of the building may well be the authentic spot where Christ was buried, and his masterly summary of the diverse theories and of the evidence on which they rest shows the difficulties of espousing the claims of any other site. From the very first the site was designed to incorporate complementary buildings, and the complexity of the ensemble at various stages of its history daunts the imagination. The most impressive of the adjacent structures was certainly Constantine's basilica, completed in 335. The Rotunda itself, built of the rock laboriously levelled around it, was ready by the end of the fourth century, and was flanked by uneven courtyards containing monastic cells, with subsidiary chapels nearby commemorating Adam's tomb and the site of Calvary. The Persians burned the Rotunda in 614 and the restored building was in turn largely destroyed by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim in 1009. The spectacular rebuilding under Constantine Monomachos in 1048 introduced a new rhythm of arcuated supports which was modified by

substantial Crusader additions in the twelfth century. Happily these were the last important transformations which the building was to undergo, though there have been numerous minor repairs since that time. The building is thus a palimpsest not only in a chronological sense but also in that it alone incorporated three distinct traditions of Christian architecture—Syrian, Byzantine and Romanesque.

Père Couâsnon does not always follow up the implications of his meticulously documented conclusions. Indeed, his account of the building is in general too restricted in scope and does not tackle the wider problems raised by this unique church, in particularly its influence on subsequent architecture. Thus he does not comment on the fact that, despite its potentially impressive exterior, the building seemingly never made its full impact as an effective elevation. Possibly this was due to the restricted site or to the associated structures which hemmed it in. Whatever the reason, it is noteworthy that the Muslims, in building the Dome of the Rock, a memorial structure modelled most carefully on the Anastasis Rotunda and intended to outdo it, deliberately isolated it in a vast esplanade. They even repeated the axial relationship between the Rotunda and the basilica in their alignment of the Dome of the Rock to the Aqsa mosque, while the Dome of the Chain may have been intended as a reminiscence of the chapels beside the Rotunda. Nor was the influence of the church limited to the Near East; as Krautheimer has shown, it can also be detected in medieval European architecture, where the Rotunda became the acknowledged type for centralized buildings. The antecedents of the Rotunda in classical mausolea and heroa are treated with tantalizing brevity.

The author notes that the fourth-century ensemble consisted of four separate parts, but does not dwell on their disposition, which was apparently designed to create an atmosphere of mounting anticipation for which the Rotunda itself was the climax. The technique of disposing and separating the various elements of a building to secure effects of waiting and climax recurs in the similarly extended fourth-century plan of St. Peter's at Rome. In the later history of the Rotunda, the outstanding curiosity is the 1048 rebuilding by Constantine Monomachos, which resulted in a structure unconnected with contemporary Byzantine architecture, and which illustrates not only the originality of the Byzantine architect but also his capacity to harmonize his design with the existing structure and indeed to work creatively in the idiom of five centuries previously. Hence, perhaps, the affinities of the building with such churches as San Vitale and SS. Sergius and Bacchus. The lack of surviving decoration is perhaps a blessing in disguise, for it allows a more harmonious blend of Herodian, Roman, early Christian, Umayyad, middle Byzantine and Crusader architecture than one would otherwise have dared to hope.

Throughout the book it is, therefore, the archaeologist rather than the architectural historian who dominates; but such is the authority and integrity of Père Coüsanon's account of this central church of Christianity that it would be churlish to demand more. This book will deservedly remain the standard work on the Holy Sepulchre for many years to come.

ROBERT HILLENBRAND, Edinburgh

Prayer, Praise & Politics, by Edmund Hill, O.P. (London: Sheed and Ward; 1973). £4.00.

Prayer, Praise & Politics presents a series of reflections on thirty-two psalms which originally appeared in a Roman Catholic weekly newspaper in Southern Africa. Though still retaining numerous references to their African origin, the reflections have since been modified to take into account a far wider public.

The book in short will be a very valuable volume for anyone seeking new meaning in personal and public meditation. Father Hill supplies fresh translations and ideas which make many of the all too familiar psalms come alive with contemporary and striking significance. Particularly admirable is his effort to base the reflections upon the body of modern biblical scholarship available on the psalms. He expresses critical ideas honestly and clearly and on occasion is not afraid to differ with the 'experts'. The author also sheds light on many of the psalms by placing them within the liturgical traditions of the Church. Passages from a variety of literary works are drawn upon to illumine further the message of the psalmist. Biblical criticism, ecclesiastical tradition and literature are thus combined with the homiletic style of the author to 'sell the Psalms to the ordinary Christian man and woman'.

Each selection in the book begins with Father Hill's own translation of a psalm. Though I am not a Hebrew scholar, I found his deviations from standard translations well-grounded and his choice of words and structure thought-provoking. The author follows each translation with three to four pages of commentary on the passage. His first concern is to assign a probable date to the psalm and to set out with considerable clarity and detail the historical situation out of which the psalm most likely grew. Particularly words or phrases which need comment as well the construction of the psalm are then considered. Father Hill comments upon the relevance of the psalm to the people of God in ancient Israel and uses it as a point of entry into the rest of the Bible, especially the New Testament. Foremost,

however, in the comments of Father Hill is his concern to 'transpose the sentiments of the psalm into the Christian key' thereby making the passage relevant to the people of God in the twentieth century.

The author has a certain flair for upsetting preconceived notions which lends a freshness to the book. One of his more unexpected attitudes is his defence of Christian otherworldliness, out of fashion for those who wish to be 'relevant' in any sense of the word. What Father Hill defends, however, is not a kind of nostalgia or ineffective moaning for an idealized past, but rather an energetic looking to the future. True Christian otherworldliness for the author is eschatological, aimed at a life to come which can only be reached by a critical and positive reconstruction of the present. Unusually striking also is his comment, 'Thank God for death!', an expression of Father Hill's gratefulness for the sure release which God provides for the wretched of the earth.

Above all *Prayer, Praise & Politics* is an intensely practical book which focuses attention upon the justice demanded by a righteous God from his people. Justice is seen in the reflections as the establishment of a fair and equal order among men and between God and man. It has been and continues to be that which is supremely required by God from his people, especially as they find themselves in situations of acute conflict. In this respect Father Hill makes continuous reference to the strife in Africa, Northern Ireland and the Middle East.

The book while valuable is not without its difficulties. There is a distressing tendency throughout the meditations to idealize poverty. Though Father Hill specifically states that he has no such intention, a romantic aura is still given to the poor who are identified with God's righteous and favoured people. Those psalms which have traditionally presented problems for Christians are also less than adequately dealt with by Father Hill.

These are times when Christian men and women are struggling to find a sense of meaning in tried and tested forms. *Prayer, Praise & Politics* speaks to this struggle and will undoubtedly help many people to sing a new song unto the Lord.

BARBARA MACHAFFIE, Edinburgh

Mysticism and Modern Man, edited by Catherine Hughes (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973). £1.75 each.

Mysticism and Modern Man is a series of four books in which editor Catherine Hughes presents brief extracts from the works of William Blake, St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and a variety of

Russian mystics. All of the extracts are accompanied by striking and often very sensitive photographs. At the conclusion of each book is a brief but valuable biographical sketch of each of the great mystics.

The series provides an opportunity for a refreshing experience of meditation as one contemplates word and image simultaneously. The message of little known as well as great spiritual leaders, normally the diet of only a few individuals, is presented so as to attract and hold many more readers. The theme of death is given an important place in the series and is dealt with in an especially perceptive manner. There is, however, an unfortunate tendency to concentrate on the despair and ugliness of life at the expense of the moments of human joy and the power of natural beauty, not so rare as one may think after reading this particular series. There are also instances in which the reader has to strain to see the relationship between photograph and extract.

The series is valuable as an interesting variation in the word-dominated arena of private meditation. The books will indeed speak to men and women today as they join the thoughts of the past to a whole framework of images drawn from everyday experience.

BARBARA MACHAFFIE, Edinburgh