

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Theology of the Church: What is the Church?

Review Article: C. G. Arevalo, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 10, no. 4 (1962): 708—711

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

will welcome it since they will not be any longer responsible for every word uttered in the programs. But, by all means, the television writer should speak up and assume the role of leadership in his medium. "New worlds lie open to the coming dramatist," Mr. Barnouw concludes, "but he should also know that he may have to struggle for the right to explore these worlds."

No doubt considerable discussion will arise from Mr. Barnouw's suggestions. There will still be advertisers who will insist on buying time only for programs which draw the largest audiences, and this will mean a continuation of the same variations and formulae. And these questions will always persist: Is "better" television necessarily the more "popular"? Is the public interest served by offering more of the "better" television programs and less of the more "popular" programs during the prime viewing hours? Is a network justified in serving what it judges as the public "good" rather than the public "want"? The television writer, while being guided in his work by the techniques and procedures of the trade (Part Two), and in his business relationships by his industrial environment (Part Three), will do well to seek the answers to these questions.

LUPITA AQUINO-CONCIO

THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? By André de Bovis, S.J. Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism, 48. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961. 157 pp.

P. André de Bovis' **WHAT IS THE CHURCH** is not meant to be a complete treatise on the Church. The author tells us that he has "preferred to concentrate attention on one [point] alone, the mystery of the Church as she is in herself" (p. 10).

The Church is the assembly of those who are baptized and inspired by supernatural faith in Jesus Christ. They recognize the authority of Peter, of the Apostles and their successors. And, *at the same time*, the Church is the instrument by means of which God in his mercy provides for the salvation of the whole human race. The mystery is the union of these two points of view. On the one hand, it is a human society, and on the other, it prolongs the existence of Christ. (p. 13)

What P. de Bovis gives us is, then, a properly *theological* study of some aspects of the Church as the primordial sacrament of the Incarnate Word.

The work treats successively of the Church as the object of divine predestination and prophecy before her visible coming-to-being in the

New Testament; of the foundation of the Church as a sacramental mystery; of the Church's nature as the Body of Christ; of authority in the Church (the ruling and teaching office); of the mystery of sin and sanctity within the Church. This mere enumeration of chapter-headings gives no real indication of the good things that these chapters contain: theological exposition of uniformly high quality; an excellent blending of what the older manuals give us, and what more recent theological writing has contributed to contemporary ecclesiology. An excellent blending: this is not another sample of the sort of patchwork which one runs into so frequently in the hastily-composed books which are now coming in floods from publishers. If the writing is not particularly distinguished (the original was not available to this reviewer, but the translation—by R. F. Trevett—seems to be a faithful one), it is obviously the fruit of wide reading and reflection and, most likely, years of teaching. P. de Bovis' writing betrays the fact that he is a scholasticate professor (no title of dishonor, surely), but this apparent shortcoming will probably recommend his book to priests who were brought up on the seminary manuals, and who might be looking for a classroom text in which the landmarks of their own Latin textbooks are still visible, but have been incorporated into a more synthetic approach, and set within wider perspectives. P. de Bovis manages to do this rather successfully: his pages are a happy combination of the 'classical' and new, and thus may well prove most useful as *basis* for a college text on the theology of the Church. One must at once add that a really complete course on the Church will have to include elements which P. de Bovis does not treat; hence this book will have to be filled out (if one wishes to 'touch all the bases') by other works in the *Faith and Fact* series: by Canon Cristiani's *WHY WE BELIEVE*, perhaps, for the apologetics of the Church, by other titles from Parts 8 and 9 of the same collection (those dealing with membership in the Church and the related problem of salvation for non-members of the Church, the layman in the Church, the mission of the Church in the world, the Church's missionary apostolate, relations between Church and State, etc.).

To return to the book's content: to get an idea of P. de Bovis' approach, one might first read through the second chapter which details the various steps in Our Lord's founding of the Church; this chapter is especially successful. The foundation of the Church is itself seen as a mystery: it is both an historically verifiable act of *institution*, an act which gives the Church her visible and juridical aspects, and a *supernatural event*, invisible, charismatic, transcending history, knowable to faith alone. (1) With regard to the ante-resurrection period: the act of foundation is skillfully linked with the words and actions of the Last Supper seen—against the background of the notion of the Kingdom of God—as summative of previous 'foundational

moments'; the supernatural event is seen in the mystery of the Cross-and-resurrection of Christ. (2) In the second, post-resurrection period of foundation: the appearances of the risen Lord are considered as confirmatory of the institution; Pentecost is the 'grace-event'. (3) In a sense, "the mystery of the Church's foundation reaches and includes all generations, one after the other." Unbelief and sin, through the ages, threaten the survival of the Church. This survival is only possible if Christ continues to build his Church every day. Christ does just this, in the eucharistic mystery wherein his saving deed is daily renewed, his new people gathered about him, his Spirit unceasingly sent into their hearts and minds.

The second chapter best illustrates what has been said about the happy blending of *nova et vetera* in these pages, but at least parts of other chapters are equally good. The third chapter, on the nature of the Church, while holding on to the precision of concept found in *Mystici Corporis*, makes extensive use of results of recent work on St. Paul's theology of the Church (e.g. Cerfaux, Malevez, Benoit, Robinson on the notion of the Body of Christ). Authority in the Church (Chapter IV) is seen as a sign of Christ's presence. The last two chapters are competent and clear, but the exposition is often rather static and perhaps unnecessarily reminiscent of the terminology of the Latin manuals.

It has been pointed out that P. de Bovis' focal concept of the Church is a 'sacramental' one: the Church is the sacrament of Christ.

Not only is the central chapter of his book devoted to an exposition of "the Church as the Sacrament of Christ", but this idea appears again and again throughout the whole work. Thus, the foundation of the Church by Christ is described as a "sacramental mystery"; the exercise not only of the sacerdotal ministry, but of the magisterial and jurisdictional as well, is presented as sacramental, in varying degrees; likewise the sanctity of the Church is sacramental. De Bovis not only insists throughout his book on the central role of the sacraments, and especially of the Eucharist, in the life of the Church, but he sees the function of the Church best illustrated by the analogy between the several sacraments and the Church itself as the 'sacramental community', the "original sacrament". He sees the whole Church as an efficacious sign of grace; the whole visible community of the baptized faithful as the sensible sign through whose instrumental activity Christ is imparting to mankind his own divine life. (F. A. Sullivan, *GREGORIANUM*, 43/1962, 180)

This concept has been studied in much contemporary writing, and goes back—in the last century—to Moehler and Scheeben, who have well-developed ideas in this direction, but it is good to find it handled so well in a book meant for the educated laity.

While recalling what has been said above regarding the self-imposed—and other—limitations of this book, one can warmly recommend it. There will be need of some editing for class use, but any good teacher does some editing, anyway, with any book he handles. *WHAT IS THE CHURCH?* should 'grow' on a teacher as, in the course of his own further reading and reflection, he sees more and more of what is implicit

in these deceptively simple pages. As we said in the beginning of this review, the work is not a complete treatise. It is, most probably, not exactly and *in omnibus* what 'the doctor would prescribe' for our local college theology classes, but among recent books on the Church which may be able to render service to teachers of these classes, it is surely one of the best and most useful.

C. G. ARÉVALO, S.J.

BIBLICAL GUIDES

MEET THE BIBLE! (1); MEET THE BIBLE! (2) THE OLD TESTAMENT. By John J. Castelot, S. S. Baltimore: Helicon, 1960, 1961. xiv-144, viii-176 pp. \$2.95, \$3.95.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE. By Ignatius Hunt, O.S.B. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962. xvi-207 pp. \$3.95.

The numerous brightly jacketed volumes and pamphlets in book-shops illustrate the current popular enthusiasm for things biblical. These attempts at popularization of the new scholarship, appearing in ever increasing numbers, tend to embarrass both readers and reviewers alike by their quantity, quality and variety. To date, however, there has not yet been written in English a thoroughly modern and technical "Introduction." Such a work should discuss the general questions of biblical inspiration, inerrancy, the canon and versions; it should cover the geography and history of the Bible lands, as well as the science of archaeology, the methods of textual criticism, and the principles of interpretation (exegesis), especially that of literary forms. The bulk of the "Introduction" should be devoted to a description of each of the 73 books in the Old and New Testaments: its origin, author, outline, literary and historical characteristics, doctrinal content, while detailed study of specific problems is left for the commentaries. All of these items are to be treated in an orderly manner and with a relative completeness.

The only Catholic work of this nature in English is *Guide to the Bible* (2nd edition; New York, Desclée, 1960, 1962) in two volumes, a translation from the French *Initiation Biblique* by A. Robert and A. Tricot. The two titles under review are *not* "Introductions." This is said not by way of criticism, but in the interests of clarity, and precision. What they set out to do in a popular and informal fashion, they do excellently. They touch upon most of the above topics some-