The book is well printed on durable white paper. There is a typographical error on page 116.

Francis E. Reilly, S.J.

DIVERSITY IN FAITH, UNITY IN CHRIST. By Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr.

What does it mean to be a Christian? Guthrie proposes that there are four types of Christianity, each with its own presuppositions, its emphases and attitudes, and its characteristic approach to controversial and ethical issues such as nuclear armament, capital punishment, homosexuality.

Part I of the book ("Some Old Songs") presents the four types of Christianity and introduces each chapter with a well-known Christian song that serves to characterize the type proposed. Chapter 1: Christian Orthodoxy, which emphasizes the correct content of Christian faith and defines Christianity in terms of what Christians believe, is introduced by the hymn "Faith of Our Fathers." Chapter 2: Liberal Moralism, which defines Christianity in terms of personal morality, is introduced by "They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love." Chapter 3: Liberal Social Activism, which emphasizes Christian social activism and judges one's Christianity by one's commitment to the political and economic justice of God's Kingdom, is introduced by "Rise Up, Men of God." Chapter 4: Pietism, which stresses one's personal experience of the grace of God in Jesus, is introduced by "Amazing Grace."

Each chapter describes the type and then goes through a Defense (three to six points) and finally a Criticism (three to five points) of each type. This first part rambles on with a very balanced, orderly and objective presentation, but the general statements leave this reviewer vaguely dissatisfied. I would have appreciated a more detailed and documented description and critique in the main text. There are a few footnotes that help one who would pursue the question further; but more concrete details could have served to make the main text more interesting reading. Still the first part does present a good framework for distinguishing the various Christian attitudes and emphases; and the apologia and criticism of each type can serve as a good examination of conscience for all of us.

The Second Part ("Learning To Sing A New Song") proposes a type that would combine the strengths and avoid the weaknesses of the types previously evaluated. There is no hymn to introduce this part; but the synthesis revolves around the key word "Witness." A witness that is proclaimed not only by words and inner attitudes, but also by actions and social involvement. Christians are called upon to witness to Jesus Christ (chap. 5), to the Suffering Love of God (chap. 6), and to the Liberating Power of God (chap. 7). Again
the style is quite general, and one easily succumbs to the temptation to skim over the book. I kept my eyes open for some striking insights, and I noticed only two, both of them in the final chapter.

In witnessing to the liberating power of God, Guthrie reminds us (pp. 105-7), we must avoid two mistakes. First, to think that after Easter we can simply forget about the Passion; as if Christ’s victory had simply erased all sinfulness in the world. Secondly, to act as if Easter never happened at all; as if the invincible power of sin cannot be conquered by God’s redeeming power through the ministry of Christians even before “the next life” (pp. 105-7).

Worthy of note too are the eight guidelines Guthrie proposes in the Christian’s work for social justice (pp. 130-33). The eighth guideline in particular rejects a kind of perfectionism that demands and supports only perfect and final solutions to oppression, or that demands only perfectly “moral” or “Christian” means to the end (pp. 130-33). The accompanying footnote asks but does not answer “Is it ever legitimate for Christians to resort to violence in order to achieve justice and freedom?”

A final impression: The first part of the book attempts a synthesis similar to that of Avery Dulles in his Models of the Church (New York, 1974); and the second part reminds us of Dulles’ follow-up article in his book A Church To Believe In (New York, 1982), proposing the Discipleship Model, which would “retrieve” the good points of the other models and avoid their undesirable emphases.

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