

Book Review

THE GRAVE OF GOD

By Robert Adolfs, O.S.A. (Trans. N. D. Smith)
(Burns and Oates. Compass Books. 13s. 6d.)

Review by L. Lang-Sims

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The title of this book (like that extraordinary slogan "the Death of God" on which the "new theology" seems positively to pride itself) is significant. In reading these "progressive" theologians, whether Catholic or Protestant, one has difficulty in discovering whether they themselves have retained any sort of faith or whether they are so lost in subjectivism that they really suppose God to be dead because He no longer receives a majority vote. Fr. Adolfs, Prior of an Augustinian Community in his native Holland, has some critical comments on the "Death of God" school of theology but remains essentially in sympathy with it and convinced of its positive importance. His book should be read as a mild, and therefore fair, example of the travesties of Catholic teaching at present invading the Church. Fr. Adolf has sought and obtained the *Imprimatur* for his book. A few years ago the possibility of granting this "declaration that a book or pamphlet is considered to be free from doctrinal or moral error" to a work such as this would have been regarded as preposterous.

Has the Church a Future? is the sub-title chosen by Fr. Adolf, who declares on page 94 that "In its deepest essence Christianity is the choice of a future for man and the world" (echoes of Teilhard scarcely need to be pointed out). It is his opinion that "the Church's teaching is out of tune with the modern age" (we agree) and should be so re-formed as to achieve what he calls "relevance" to all the typical phenomena of modern life. Any suggestion that the proper "relevance" of the Catholic Church to "the really dynamic spheres of central importance in modern society" (which are "science, politics, economics, business life, trade, technology and the social services") might consist in holding up the mirror of truth and judgement and where necessary uttering condemnations of the most uncompromising sort, would be foreign to the spirit of this book—which is an explicit plea to the Church to accept the secularization of mankind and assist in the development of a world government "in the service of human progress." Fr. Adolfs only complaint against secularization is that having "liberated us from the mythical, metaphysical and religious explanation of the world" it is now imposing on us a new ideology which "aims to deaden our deepest restlessness" by directing our attention to "questions of superficial and day-to-day interest" while preventing us from asking "the most profound question of all—the question about the very meaning of it all." So concludes this author, the Church must set herself up as a kind of "zone of truth" and leaven of brotherly love (if this metaphor seems a trifle mixed this may be an effect of reading the book) to counteract the more displeasing tendencies of our brave new world. And how shall the Church thus re-establish herself? Fr. Adolfs proclaims the necessity of a new Way of the Cross and the Church's vocation as the Suffering Servant. Unfortunately, however, he sees this vocation as involving a false humility stripped of all those claims which are proper to the Church as the Representative on

earth of the holiness and the power of Christ. In fact the Church which exists in the dreams of this Catholic priest is a thousand times more protestant than the protestants. Sans symbols, sans doctrine, sans rites, sans "myths"—sans everything and anything that might enable us to recognise it, this Church would concentrate exclusively on "service to the world" and on the historical person of Jesus during the brief span of his earthly life. Perhaps if Fr. Adolfs attached more importance to contemplative prayer (he advocates the active involvement in worldly affairs of those in Religious Orders, allowing for a certain withdrawal to enable them "to reflect about the deeper movement of life in our world") he might begin to comprehend the magnitude of his own mistakes. It is scarcely necessary to add that the word "existential," occurring on almost every page, is used throughout as if it denoted the presence of some modern substitute for supernatural grace. It is all exceedingly strange : but stranger and more horrifying by far than anything else from beginning to end of this *by no means exceptional* book are those three words which stand at its commencement: *Imprimatur. Nihil Obstat.*