

REVIEWS

GRIECHISCHE MYTHEN IN CHRISTLICHER DEUTUNG, Gesammelte Aufsätze von Hugo Rahner. (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag; 22.50 Swiss Frs.)

'Come, I will show you the Word and the mysteries of the Word, and I will describe them to you in the images which you yourselves have inherited'. Thus Clement of Alexandria invited his pagan contemporaries to hear and understand the Gospel through the medium of their own Greek myths and Hellenist mysteries; thus likewise did many a Christian preacher and teacher, not only in Patristic times, but also far into the Middle Ages. Fr Hugo Rahner, S.J., takes Clement's words as his own text and *leitmotiv* in this learned, fascinating and eminently readable book on *Greek Myths in Christian Interpretation*.

'This book', he explains in a stimulating preface, 'leads from the noisy streets of our day into the still court of the Temple where Hellas and the Church once met. . . . What is here written is offered to those who believe that our Western world is crashing in order to be reborn. . . . We have become Barbarians, and long to become Greeks again. . . . Many are occupied with this return to our cultural home. . . . It is no academic whim, but a stern obligation in these days for scholarly minds . . . to devote themselves to uncovering again the buried sources of true humanism. But in that search they are divided. Some, Stoic-like, strive for the heights, but their number is few. . . . Others are delving into the depths of the abyss of the soul, these are more numerous . . . and who will deny that a deeper understanding has been given to them of the dark mysteries of the *psyche* than to either ancient or modern Stoics? Must all of them seek for *Man*, and all believe that a renewed understanding of Greek antiquity—whether above in the still heights of Olympus, or below among the riverside reeds where dwell the Cabiri—will assist in re-discovering the Whole Man, the *homo humanus*?' We Christians 'seek signposts to a "Christian humanism", to the immense possibilities of that "New Man" of whom Paul wrote to Colossus, in whom Barbarian and Greek are made one in Christ, the God made man who is All in all'. Fr Rahner, however, does not join the numerous writers who during the past two decades have essayed to formulate the principles of a Christian humanism; instead he has brought his vast scholarship and deep understanding to set before us the work already done, but too long forgotten, by our early fathers in the faith.

He is no less widely read in modern than in ancient literature, and an opening section gives us a valuable critical survey of the various theories which have been attempted to solve the problem of the relationship between Christianity and the pagan myths and mysteries of the Graeco-Roman world. He disposes, briefly but definitively, both of the facile 'syncretism' which would make Christianity essentially dependent on the Hellenistic mystery-cults and of the pseudo-orthodoxy which denies any positive relationship between the

seed of the Word and the fertile soil in which it was sown. He proposes a method of approach which respects at once the historic facts of development both in Hellenism and in the Church, the role of 'archetypal' patterns from below, and the divine designs for a *prae-paratio evangelica* from above.

The value of this comprehensive and yet scientific approach is best appreciated when Fr Rahner puts it to the test in actual application, and shows, largely in their own words, how certain specified symbols, myths and rites of paganism were understood, interpreted and utilised by ancient Christian writers, artists and liturgies themselves. 'Christian Mystery and Pagan Mysteries', 'The Mystery of the Cross', 'The Mystery of Baptism', 'The Christian Mystery of Sun and Moon'—these are the main headings of Fr Rahner's exposition of the fashion in which Christ was seen to 'recapitulate' pagan myths and mysteries, rites and symbols. A second section treats of 'Soul-Healing' in early Christianity under the Homeric headings of 'The Moly, the Soul-healing Herb of Hermes' and 'The Mandrake, the Eternal Root of Man'. The third and last section carries the intriguing title of '*heiliger Homer*' ('Saint Homer') and deals in turn with Christian interpretations of the Willow-Branch (*Odysseus*. X) and of Odysseus at the Mast (*Odysseus*. XII), and incidentally of many other favoured re-readings of the *Odyssey* as a Pilgrim's Progress.

It is possible to disagree with Fr Rahner at times; for instance his anxious dissociation of the *Benedictio Pontis* from phallic symbolism seems to be contradicted by the plain language of the *Benedictio* itself. But we can only be grateful for this illuminating, timely and refreshing book, and hope that the author will pursue his inquiries into the Christian catalysis of other myths and symbols (those of Orpheus, for instance). Meanwhile it may be hoped that this book will speedily find a worthy translator, who will also enrich an English edition with the index which the original—finely printed and designed though it is—somewhat inconveniently lacks.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

THE GREEK WAY. An Anthology by Kathleen Freeman. (MacDonald; 15s.)

We all know the *Week-End Book*; and many of us were aware that in Greek similar material was abundant; but the two notions were in different parts of the mind, and we have had to wait for Miss Freeman to bring the two together and to produce this very successful 'Week-End Book' from the Greek, in translation. The fact that the Greeks 'had a word for it' means, of course, that they had the thing itself; and it is the greatest of all compliments to our own age that we can parallel in our day so much that can be found earlier only among the Greeks. In these pages can be found the earliest appearance of our old friend 'Pop', scripts for Miss Ruth Draper, fragments on the bringing up of children that remind us of nothing so much as Bertrand Russell's little work on the same sub-