

REVIEWS

glamour. The fact, too, that such Saints as St. Martin of Tours and St. Ambrose strove their utmost to stave off his dreadful fate lends additional interest to his story. Until 1885 Sulpicius Severus was practically our sole authority for the events of the trial. But in that year a number of documents were discovered which were supposed to be Priscillian's own defence against his accusers at the Council of Saragossa; they are now known to have been written by Instantius, one of Priscillian's supporters who had in some way secured for him the Bishopric of Avila.

Of more importance than the history of this wretched affair is the doctrinal position of Priscillian and his followers. St. Jerome seems to have known little about it, and when Orosius wrote to ask St. Augustine for information the latter then knew little more than that they held that it was not always wrong to lie, and he quotes their slogan: "Jura, perjura; secretum prodere noli." But as time went on Augustine, with his insatiable desire to know all that false teachers were saying, learned more and more about that strange mysticism which was "Priscillianism."¹ Amongst other weird notions they held that true doctrine was only to be found in the apocryphal writings. It sounds well nigh incredible but when we read that at the Last Supper Our Lord and the Apostles went out "Hymno dicto" these cranks pinned their faith to that Hymn which they found ready to their hands in the spurious *Acts of St. John* written some two hundred years earlier. They had strange views too on the origin of the soul and on the nature of the Angels.

Fr. D. Alès' study affords us an insight into the strange mystical tendencies which seem to have pervaded Spain in the fourth century and which centre round the name of Priscillian.

HUGH POPE, O.P.

APOLOGETICS

THE DIVINE CHRIST. By A. E. Baker. (Centenary Press, 8/6.)

As an accumulation of evidence this book is convincing. As a theoretical analysis of the meaning of that evidence it is pathetically disappointing. That is to say, the positive material is excellent but the metaphysical fragments as they stand could well have been cut right out. For unless the inter-articulated framework of Christian evidences is to be traced right back to the first principles of being and human knowledge, then the apologetic treatment must surely be confined to the massing up of historic data; in which case the unconscious ingenuity of inquisitive human minds may be trusted to ferret out the intricate network of major premisses, resolvable to first principles, on its

¹ See his *Contra Mendacium* and Epp. clxix, 13, ccii, 8, ccxxxvii, 3ff.

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own. A metaphysical evaluation of evidence is impossible, just as any genuinely intellectualist approach to a given subject is impossible, unless some attempt is made to render that network explicit. This attempt remains unsuccessful until every link of the rational chain has been explicitly treated so that we can rapidly reconstruct the entire logical sequence, ending with our *secus ens esset non ens*. Affective jumping of gaps is pointless in pedestrian speculation, and is against the rules of the game.

Catholic apologetics claims to be able to make that difficult analysis of Christian evidences by showing how these rest upon an articulated organism of metaphysical first principles. The definitive utterances of the Church, concerning the certitude with which we can know God's existence from creatures and the fact of His revelation from miracles, are no oracular proclamations sprung as bombshells on a sceptical world, but conclusions presupposing the whole complex structure of that traditional approach, and intended as a sympathetic aid to reason in an age of doubt.

It is not therefore the fault of the Roman Church if inquisitive minds are turned back from further enquiry, as is often the case, in face of these unsympathetic-seeming decrees. An impression of reactionary harshness can only arise from a total ignorance of the vast architectural vault of Christian rationalism upon which they rest as proved conclusions. But, although it cannot be the fault of the Roman Church, it may indeed be the fault of some of her apologists. For such decrees are only too frequently quoted glibly and without sensibility to the difficulties of non-Catholics in their regard or a shred of clear indication of the rational principles on which they stand. One can only recommend Mr. Baker to go to our sources.

NORBERT DREWITT, O.P.

CHRISTENDOM AND ISLAM: Their Contacts and Cultures down the Centuries. By W. Wilson Cash, D.S.O., D.D. (S.C.M. Press; 5/-.)

Dr. Cash tells us in his preface how his experience of missionary life in Moslem countries convinced him of the uselessness of controversy as a method of approach to Mahometans. He saw the need of some common ground and decided that this was to be found in mystical doctrine. His interest in this problem led to his being invited to give the Haskell Lectures in 1936 at Oberlin, Ohio. The book under review is composed of these lectures.

He has given us a stimulating and, for general students, in many ways an enlightening survey of some of the points of contact between Islam and Christianity. He has consulted a number