

## REVIEWS

### THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

ASCETICAE ET MYSTICAE SUMMA. By R. P. Chrysogonus a Iesu Sacramentato, Disc. Carm. (Marietti, Turin; 10 lire.)

Recent legislation has given to the methodical study of mystical theology a definite place in ecclesiastical training, and since this has chanced to synchronize with the present vogue of text-book education it has led to the demand for some comprehensive manual. It is lamentably probable that the demand will be fully satisfied by the *Asceticae et Mysticae Summa*. It is said that one of the most distinguished of Dominican lecturers in mystical theology wept when he first read this volume. Other Thomists will sympathize with his emotion even if they cannot share in the form of its expression.

The manual contains not only a theological treatise but a neat *Compendium Historicum* in which mystics are arranged and summarized. It is likely that this last feature will have wide appeal, for the summaries are always succinct and the occasional inaccuracies are formulated with a quiet assurance. One entry may be quoted for its naïve charm: *Eckhart—illius scripta destructa fuerunt poene ex toto et vix illius doctrinam cognoscimus nisi per damnatas propositiones*. The vernacular of Eckhart has caused the nineteenth century to regard him as the Father of German Prose, and his Latin treatises now give employment to two rival editorial committees. The *Compendium* is preceded by an *Ascetica* and a *Mystica*. The *Ascetica* combines much sound moral exhortation with a slightly fantastic theory of the operation of the Gifts. In the *Mystica*, forms of mystical prayer are carefully ranged in strata while their appropriate physical concomitants are sedulously discussed. Throughout it seems that the *Ascetica* is considered as the normal road to Christian perfection and the *Mystica* as an oddity.

The conception of the mystic as spiritually odd, the emphasis on phenomena and the iron subdivisions may be contrary to the freedom and the race-wide vision of the Dominican mystical school. But there is place for it within Catholicism. The author could have claimed known names in his support: P. Scaramelli, even to some extent P. Poulain. It is regrettable that instead he should have claimed that of *Divus Thomas*. And we regret that he should be so sure that St. Thomas was misinterpreted by P. Garrigou-Lagrange. As in some *trecento* Epiphany the great Orders of the Church have each brought their offerings to the mystical Body of Christ; the Dominicans their *Summa*, the

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Fathers of the Society their *Exercises*, the Carmelites their *Dark Night of the Soul*. We recognize that it would be a temerarious Dominican who would contradict the Discalced Carmelites upon the *Night* or pose as an official interpreter of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Perhaps such reticence may yet become reciprocal.

GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

THE STRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. By John Macmurray. (Faber & Faber; 3/6.)

“Organized religion, on the defensive, tends to range itself . . . with the conservatives and the reactionaries. But the tide of social evolution cannot for ever be dammed by the dykes of vested interest.” That religion in the persons of its exponents has been identified with capitalism and militarism is the reason why, in the Pope’s words, the Church has lost the working classes; there is another way in which religion and reaction may coincide—in the sphere of thought. “The progressive attitude of mind is frankly empirical, while the religious temper remains traditional and dogmatic.” So men have “pinned their faith to science, unaware that science cannot save the world, since it must serve and cannot lead.” If religion could “abandon its traditional dogmatism and become itself empirically minded, it could lead the progressive movement with science as its technical adviser”; if this is impossible it is doomed; it must “either transform itself or fade away.”

Professor Macmurray discusses, in these three significant lectures, how this transformation might be achieved. He begins by arguing that, while science and art are two partial empiricisms which if left unsynthesized lead to chaos, religion, by providing the necessary synthesis, can achieve the “salvation of the world.” “To say that religion belongs to the early stages of human life and is destined to be superseded as human development goes on is to talk foolishness”; for “the field of religious experience is the whole field of common experience organized in relation to the central fact of human relationship . . . its problem is the problem of communion or community”; and the analysis of common human relationships brings out just those terms and forms which are found in religion; the conviction in a community that religion is a childish superstition, “though it is no evidence against the rationality of religion, is the strongest evidence that the personal relationships of its members are irrational and that the community is in process of dissolution.”

In the third of these lectures Professor Macmurray goes on to discuss, in a searching analysis, how religion has in fact become entrenched and remote from daily experience: instead of being