

THE FAITH AND MODERN MAN. By Romano Guardini. (Burns Oates; 15s.)

For one who enjoys such a major reputation among contemporary Catholic thinkers in Europe, Romano Guardini has been somewhat sparingly translated into English. Indeed, of his more than sixty books scarcely more than a handful are available for English readers. Moreover, most of these date from as long ago as the thirties, and consequently are rather hard to come by. Hence this present version of *Glaubens-erkenntnis* is extremely welcome as giving us an example of Guardini's mature thought and method.

Nothing in fact could more clearly reveal Guardini's power than to read this book bearing in mind its origin (as disclosed by the author in a special preface to this English edition) in a series of semi-clandestine pamphlets and sermons preached in a Berlin church during the second world war, against the background of the Gestapo and the allied bombing. The note of urgency thereby generated is certainly present, but it is also revealing to note how this urgency transcends the particular exigencies of the immediate audience and is related to the needs of modern man in general. There is no trace of feverishness, bitterness, or even resignation here. Rather the fundamental theme of the book is a profoundly calm and integrated adherence of the whole human personality to a divine and personal Truth in the face of all the incantations of emotion or of modern 'scientific' reason.

A first glance at the chapter headings might disappoint a prospective reader. 'Adoration', 'God's Patience', 'God's Dominion and Man's Freedom', 'Providence', 'Faith and Doubt in the Stages of Life', 'Dogma'—these titles, it is true, suggests a somewhat cold and austere, and even exterior and old-fashioned approach, in an age in which Catholics rightly rejoice in the apparently newly-recovered faculty of finding in direct attention to the supernatural mysteries of the faith a liberating and life-giving contemplation. But once one begins reading the book, these misgivings fall away. For although Guardini refuses to soft-pedal the austerity of the obedience to God speaking which is the basis in faith, he develops with a compensating depth and warmth the notion of a 'new creation' which that response involves. Nor does he attempt to treat the subjects of his chapters from the viewpoint of natural reason. Rather his whole approach (as the German title of this book suggests) is in terms of a total knowing which both is shot through and through with faith and yet faces with unaverted eyes certain recurrent situations in human experience which, if not attended to in this way, act as solvents on faith. The astringent quality of this book arises from the fact that the author thus warns us of that worst debasement of the highest good latent in direct contemplation of the

mysteries of the Faith, which would consist in using them as a drug—an ‘opium of the people’—to obliterate the bitterness of experience. It is significant that Guardini long ago adopted as a motto the words of Pascal: ‘Dogma is like the sun. One should not talk too much about it, but see things in the light of it.’

A special word of praise is due for the outstanding excellence of this translation, which was made by Miss Charlotte E. Forsyth of the Catholic University, Washington.

RONALD TORBET, O.P.

THE FREEDOM OF DOUBT. Reflections of a Natural Sceptic. By E.-A. Preyre. (Harvill Press; 18s.)

Mr Aldous Huxley has already familiarized us with the quest of the ‘highest common factor’ of mysticism of all sorts. We are now to learn, apparently, that even he failed to appreciate the whole range of the universality of his *philosophia perennis*. An entry dated 1941 provides a good clue both to the procedure and to the content of this ‘spiritual diary’ extending over the years 1918-1953. Under the heading ‘Meetings’, it consists of a list which includes: Montaigne, Kwang-Tze, The Greek Sceptics: Pyrrho, Saint John of the Cross, *The Thousand and One Nights*, The Bible, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Chinese painting. Perhaps, to be fair to M. Preyre’s scope, we should add the names of Descartes and Spinoza on the one hand, and those of the pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart on the other. (St Thomas Aquinas is, somewhat reluctantly, excluded because he thought that God was bound by the laws of logic.) These are some of the most frequently recurrent sources from which M. Preyre quotes brief extracts and offers equally brief, often aphoristic, comment. Material of such catholic range is adduced to describe the author’s journey from faith to doubt, and, ‘when doubt had shown itself to be arbitrary, from doubt to indetermination, that end where remains no mark of distinction. Indetermination, which, though it is the ultimate of scepticism, has found its most exact expression, not among the sceptical philosophers, but in those texts in which the mystics describe one of the final stages of their experience.’ To be sure, M. Preyre disowns any intention to represent the meaning attached by their authors to the formulae he utilizes for his own purposes; ‘there is no intention of affirming anything’, we are repeatedly warned. Nor, unfortunately, is there any attempt to examine whether expressions of such diverse sorts can be treated as obeying the same logic. The logical equivalence of the mystic’s and the sceptic’s language is established within the first twenty pages, marking the reflection of the years 1918-1921. The remaining pages (and years) are devoted to multiplying the evidence