

## REVIEWS

### THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

**KATHOLISCHE DOGMATIK.** Von Michael Schmaus. Erster Band: Einleitung—Gott der Eine und der Dreieinige. (München: Max Hüber; brosch. RM. 5.50., geb. RM. 7.30.)

The beneficent publisher who would meet our need for a worthy handbook of dogmatic theology in our own tongue could not do better than consider a translation of this. That he has as yet left this gap unfilled is due perhaps no less to his wise beneficence than to his fear of a commercial "flop." The average current manual is little fitted for translation, and translated would bring little light to the believer, and bewilderment or derision rather than edification to the unbeliever. The conventional scholastic manuals have, indeed, venerable antecedents, however corrupt may be their following of the tradition which begot them, and they certainly have their uses. But they lay themselves open too readily to misunderstanding and abuse. Their slick oversimplifications and schematisations of the ineffable mysteries of the faith; their seeming inversion of legitimate theological method by employing—or exploiting—isolated passages of scripture, patristic writings or conciliar decrees to "prove" their authors' "theses"; their preoccupation with esoteric and obsolete problems and their disregard of living ones; their facile, question-begging "refutations"; their presupposition of an often non-existent understanding of archaic philosophical terminology; above all, their tacit relativist probabilism which makes the "sacra doctrina" appear as little else than a catalogue of the conflicting "opinions" of theologians—all these characteristics may be considered, with greater or less justice, to make it desirable that they be left in the decent obscurity of dead or foreign languages.

Timeless and epoch-making as is the *Summa* of St. Thomas, it is not without peril that we allow ourselves to forget that, in its manner of presentation of the "sacred doctrine," it is itself the product of a particular epoch in the history of theology: the epoch of the triumphant vindication of the rights of *ratio* (as distinguished from *auctoritas*) in theological inquiry. It was an epoch in which the Queen of sciences was impelled, with incalculable benefit to posterity, to tax to the utmost the co-operation of her principal *ancilla*, philosophy. But it was also an epoch in which the primacy of the distinctive sources of theology, the *auctoritas* of Scripture and tradition, was still fully understood. St. Thomas could presuppose in his hearers and readers a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and the patristic *florilegia*, and

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in his *Summa* could for brevity's sake reduce the *Sed contra* to little more than a conventional survival. Such times have long passed; but the scholastic manual is still commonly apt to leave the impression that theology, so far from being an elaboration and penetration of the data of the sources, merely utilises a judicious selection of passages from them, often torn mercilessly from their contexts, to give dubious support to a preconceived structure.

German Catholics are happy in the inheritance of another current of theological development; that inspired especially by Möhler with his emphasis on the indwelling Spirit in the Church and the divinity of the living and dynamic ecclesiastical Tradition, and his consequent preoccupation with the sources that have moulded the Catholic consciousness. It is a current that has already produced or profoundly influenced a number of vernacular theological manuals. That of Pohle, in the English edition of Preuss, has long been familiar in America and England, but its prevailing Molinism precludes its unqualified recommendation. But there are also the manuals of Bartmann, Krebs, Schell<sup>1</sup> and, best of all, Scheeben (of the last edition of which Dr. Schmaus was a co-editor.) That of Diekamp (done into Latin by Fr. Adolf Hoffmann, O.P.) is more avowedly scholastic in method and approach, but its characteristic awareness of the primacy of the sources makes it unique among manuals of that type.

Professor Schmaus, generously acknowledging his debt to these, has not sought to supersede or improve upon them. But he has sought to emphasise, without the adventitious decoration of exhortation or sacrifice of scientific accuracy, the relevance of dogma to life; that relevance which the best of manuals often neglect, and the worst too often obscure. He has made it his particular task to "facilitate the way from theology to life," to present Catholic dogmatic theology as the elucidation of the word of salvation. Yet it is essentially a work of scientific theology and not of edification: the relevance of dogma to life and worship is seen to be inherent in the doctrines themselves and not due to any "morals" which may be drawn from them.

This special object apart, the merits of this work are many and various. Dr. Schmaus never theologises about theologians: he theologises about God, and every page is instinct with the sense of His presence and the power of His word. He never "uses" the Scriptures, Fathers or Councils to prove a point: theology is shown to be precisely the elaboration of those sources. He has

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<sup>1</sup> His peculiar views on certain matters, however, caused his work to be put on the Index.

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a rare aptitude for quotation which displays a wide knowledge of the great Fathers and divines. He makes full use of the heritage of the speculation of the great schoolmen, and especially of St. Thomas, but (as befits a manual of exposition) he never allows the machinery that created it to become obtrusive. He is well acquainted with the work of more recent theologians inside and outside of the scholastic tradition (especially Newman), and he makes good use of them. Though his treatment of various questions is inevitably often summary, he seldom or never shirks the real problems that they raise. He writes with refreshing simplicity and directness, an enviable economy of words, and whenever possible he lets the "authorities" speak for themselves. While avoiding facile "refutations," and never allowing his positive exposition to degenerate into polemic, his criticisms of unorthodox theologies and religious philosophies are trenchant and to the point.

Such a work as this is no substitute for nor imitation of the cold, non-affective approach to divine realities of the purely speculative and constructive theologian. But a manual will necessarily fail of its own purpose in the measure that it aspires to be such. Without endorsing every view it expresses, we may welcome this book as one which will nevertheless be of immense help to professional theologian and layman alike.

It is to be completed in three volumes. It is characteristic that this first volume departs from the custom of devoting separate treatises to the *Deus unus* attainable through reason and the *Deus trinus* known only from revelation. The custom is a sound one, both logically and pedagogically; but it may too easily suggest an unsynthesised dichotomy of the "God of reason" and the "God of faith." Dr. Schmaus will never let us forget that the *primum movens immobile* and *actus purus* of the philosophers is identical with the Living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who is Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

We await the remaining volumes with eagerness, and a translation of the whole, which we trust will be done with the same loving care as that with which the original is written.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

UNION OF CHRISTENDOM. Edited by Kenneth Mackenzie.  
(S.P.C.K.; 8s. 6d.)

This most recent and significant effort in the things that are towards religious peace cannot help being of great interest to BLACKFRIARS. It is a series of Essays published for the International Committee of the Church Union in view of the International Convention of 1940.

Some thirty writers, cleric and lay, (indeed male and female),