

REVIEWS

THE FLIGHT FROM GOD. By Max Picard. Translated by Marianne Kuschnitzky and J. M. Cameron, with a Preface by Gabriel Marcel. (The Harvill Press; 12s. 6d.)

This is another book about the modern world. Its value will be better perceived if the reader accepts it as 'another book'. Here are the recorded intuitions of a man of great insight and penetration, moved by contemporary events. But M. Picard's contemplative penetration does not stop short at a temporary situation; reaching the ground of that situation, it passes from the temporary to the temporal. It views time itself. He begins by saying: 'In every age man has been in flight from God'. That is the temporal condition of man. M. Picard calls it Flight; M. Gabriel Marcel, in his preface, says he prefers to call it Perdition. But the thing has been revealed once and for all for us in the Gospels, and there it is called the World, the kingdom of the World which is at strife with the kingdom of God. Quite rightly, however, a new word is found for it because this is a new vision of it. Indeed, every time it is seen again it will be a new vision. Without seeing it as a new discovery the most we could do would be to pay lip-service to it, and as Mr Cameron says in his introduction, we should be '... drifting towards catastrophe with the formula of salvation on our lips'.

The vision must be new, and contemporary. It is here expressed in terms of factories and the economics of the factory, of communism, of modern urban life, of the cinema, of Hegel (whose enormous influence on the modern mind is here, anonymously, pinned down), of language and of the significance of words, of the human face. The book is written backwards, but that is a statement of fact and not of criticism. The latter part of the book lights up the first part. It must be left to the poet to present in his own way the imaginative record of his intuitions. It is the perceived wholeness that counts.

Gabriel Marcel's preface anticipates the inevitable itch we should have had to label the book 'existentialist'. But this is not an unmixed blessing. Marcel's deep suspicion of systematic philosophy is well-known. He says here: 'Max Picard is a "sage"'. He is not at all a philosopher if by philosopher we mean a professor of philosophy. But then perhaps Nietzsche showed prophetic insight above all professors of philosophy after Schopenhauer. Perhaps it is true that it is less and less possible for philosophy to be taught from a rostrum.' What makes this an important book is that it supplies the great need of the day, that men should be given a glimpse of the vision. The vision of the truth is a compelling thing, it moves the will. The Gospel is the *good news*.

To see its simple stark truth is to be *converted*, like Paul on the road to Damascus. The 'professor of philosophy', as such, will never convert anyone. Perhaps Marcel means that. But if he does it is stupid to go on to imply that the philosopher has had his day. His day has not yet come. It is a long way from John the Baptist to Thomas Aquinas, but the ground covered between them manifests the necessary phases and methods of the traditional classical apostolate. It begins with: 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand'. It begins with conversion, and conversion is the birth of a new life. After that comes the need to preserve the life and to nourish it. This is done by contemplation. It is short-sighted to be concerned only with communicating the vision, with conversion, and to deny any place to the subsequent necessary contemplative development of it. It is to deny the nature of truth itself, and of the mind. Without such contemplative development a man would be left a prey again to the kingdom of the World. It is blind praise to say of Picard that he is a 'sage', and that the world needs him because the philosophers have failed. The vision must be seen, communicated and nourished. It is the highest praise to say of this book that it may be the means of communicating the vision. It is no disrespect to it to say that it offers very little to nourish the vision. We may be given light on the economics of the factory, but that light needs stabilising, focussing, relating. Contemplation should eventually provide questions to be answered. To take a random example: Is it natural for man to possess external goods? To consider that kind of question is not to desert the vision and descend to a common-place world of dull instruction. It is the vision, and just as exciting as the first glimpse of it.

The translation is beautifully done, and gives the impression that the original thought is accurately transcribed.

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TWO TYPES OF FAITH. By Martin Buber. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 12s. 6d.)

WAITING ON GOD. By Simone Weil. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 12s. 6d.)

Dr Buber disclaims any intention of making a pro-Jewish apologetic in his contrast of the typically Jewish and Christian conceptions of faith. His aim is rather to show that 'an Israel striving after the renewal of its faith through the rebirth of the person and a Christianity striving for the renewal of its faith through the rebirth of nations would have something as yet unsaid to say to each other and a help to give to one another—hardly to be conceived at the present time'. The antithesis indicated is displayed in the Jewish Emunah ('originated in the actual