

THE MEANING OF LOVE. By Vladimir Solovyev. (Geoffrey Bles; 5s.).

It is strange that this important work of one of the most important of 19th century Russian thinkers should have remained so long unavailable to English readers. And yet its appearance now in these days is perhaps particularly appropriate, when the problem of transcending individuality, while at the same time avoiding the emptiness of collectivism, is exercising so many minds. Solovyev argues that *Eros*, the love of man and woman, is precisely the supreme way to that transcendence, since it is this above all that can conquer egoism. This love, he contends, is not just an event that comes, and goes, beyond man's control: it is something that arises independently of us, but that has to be directed: the will is involved, a question of "moral achievement". Understood thus, as a materialistic society cannot understand it, it becomes the way to the fullness of the "absolute personality"; the very idealizations which characterize it at the beginning are seen to be, not mere pointless illusions which time will shatter, but—provided, as Solovyev stresses, we have *faith* and creative energy—an exemplar into the likeness of which the phenomena of the material world are to be transformed. This work demands faith: "I can only acknowledge the unconditional significance of a given person, or believe in him (without which true love is impossible), by affirming him in God, and therefore by belief in God Himself, and in myself as possessing in God the centre and root of my own existence". Moreover, the evil which opposes love, the evil of separateness and impermeability, is something which affects the whole world; and if the process of integration is to be complete, the two individuals in their unity must not remain in isolation from the rest of the world but must on the contrary find their way to unity with it: with mankind, and with Nature as a whole. Only then is man fully freed from the isolation of egoism, and given the fullness of his destined life.

There are passages where the author's meaning is difficult to seize, as where he treats of the relation of love to immortality. There are passages which are definitely unsatisfactory: the treatment of mystical love, for instance, where Solovyev seems wholly to neglect the supremely powerful and intimate oneness with mankind and with Nature which Christian mysticism produces, and which therefore provides his main theme with its most perfect fulfilment. It is strange, moreover, that he should have neglected the predatoriness and possessiveness which can so easily characterize sex-love, thus throwing man back into the egoism from which it should be rescuing him—a danger from which mystical love is free—though there is a valuable section on the idea of merely sexual passion as a perversion. One wonders whether the translation might not have been made simpler and clearer in some places; certainly there are times when the punctuation is extremely awkward and misleading; and since the term used by Solovyev for *eros* is

translated as "sex-love" it is a pity that the necessary explanatory footnote should have been deferred to p. 30.

These are minor criticisms which do not touch the substantial value of a work of great importance. Solovyev shows how love is meant to be the driving force which alone can produce that *unity* which was his greatest vision and aspiration: no need to stress the relevance of that vision, and the urgency of that aspiration, for the world of to-day.

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MODERN CHRISTIAN REVOLUTIONARIES: (2) REINHOLD NIEBUHR: Prophet from America. By D. R. Davies. (5) NICHOLAS BERDYAEV AND THE NEW MIDDLE AGES. By Evgueny Lampert. (James Clarke & Co.; 4s. 6d.).

Theology's most urgent need, vis-à-vis the world of to-day, is to show that it is indeed possessed of, and built upon, the "tragic sense of life", and the ultimate uniqueness of every personality and every event, and that its application through moral principles, to the world and its problems is based upon that awareness. Without that, the cleavage between Church and the world, and indeed between *docens* and *discens* can only grow wider. That is one of the reasons why thinkers like Berdyaev and Niebuhr are of such importance.

In many ways they are alike. The sense of the tragic destiny of man lies deep in both of them; both are 'dialectical' and 'prophetic' thinkers; both are fighters for human personality against the evils of the machine age; both are deeply concerned with the problem of evil; both have succeeded in making theology significant to the secular reader. In many ways, of course, they differ profoundly: Niebuhr the American, of German origin and Evangelical background, led, as Mr. Davies puts it, to the left in politics, to the right in theology, by his first-hand experience of the Ford Age in Detroit; Berdyaev the Russian, influenced alike by marxism, the Slavophiles and Solovyev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. In many ways they differ in their approach, their preoccupations, their conclusions. But in the last resort the differences are less striking than the resemblances.

These two books are eminently successful in that they not only give a clear account of their subjects but also inspire the reader with the desire to know them better at first hand. Mr. Davies's is the more purely biographical and expository; one's main regret is that space is sometimes used in repetition which could very usefully have been devoted to a fuller discussion of one of the main difficulties in reading Niebuhr, his theory of the precise relevance of Christianity to existing society. With Dr. Lampert's study it is principally the treatment of existentialism generally that one feels to be inadequate in view of the purpose of the book; there are statements, moreover, especially about existentialism itself and about reason, which call for discussion; incidentally, St. Thomas finds himself placed in queer company. And since the book is an