

INTERPRETING THEOLOGY, 1918-1952. By Daniel Day Williams. (S.C.M.; 10s. 6d.)

This book was originally published in America as a guide for laymen to important present-day theology. It appears in England with a more modest claim as an interpretation. Actually, it is the interpretation of a Protestant of the Paul Tillich school; or, at least, that is the strong impression one receives on reading it.

Most theologians of this school indulge in jargon. I mean this sort of thing: 'Faith, then, points to the essential integrity with which Jesus disclosed the ultimate judgment and mercy which lie beyond history'. That is doubtless intelligible enough to the layman; but can the layman really appreciate the following objection to the Catholic 'natural law' ethics? 'It puts a legalistic restriction upon the freedom of the Christian conscience in dealing with the unpredictable and always problematical stuff of actual social existence.' It is a very nebulous and mystifying way of saying that Catholic Ethics is too rigid to be applied to the problems of real human life.

Again, like the theologians of his school, the writer is a thorough-going relativist. Nothing is absolute except God; and God is incapable of expressing absolute truth in human language, or of being absolutely incarnate in human nature, or of conveying his grace through any limited instrument. Consequently, in his statement of the Christian faith, the writer dare not assert that God became man, or indeed the equivalent in unequivocal terms. Christianity, the author thinks, can be expressed in three affirmations. There is only one God, and he alone is holy. Man is made for God, but can despoil his destiny. God makes possible a new life for sinful men. One wonders how a follower of Paul Tillich is able to make such definite statements. Is he not 'absolutising verbal formulas', to use his own phrase, if he states that all these three statements are absolutely true? I suppose he would answer: 'I never said they were *absolutely* true, but they do represent the conviction upon which theological work depends'.

The Catholic reader will find, if he reads this book, that dogmas are always 'legalistic', that dogmatism is always 'intolerable', that ecclesiastical statements are 'oracular', and that orthodoxy is 'petrified'. He will expect that, no doubt. But he will fairly rock when he reads of the 'Thomist theory of grace as the substance into which the bread and wine are transformed', and when he reads further that many Catholic liturgists prefer 'the Augustinian conception of grace as spirit infused into nature'. He will also be shaken, I should think, when he discovers that there is a danger of a Christian paying such reverence to our Lord's humanity as to amount to 'Jesusology' (*sic*)!

There is an interesting account of various Protestant theories of Christian Social Ethics. Mr Williams contrasts especially two approaches, one which

sets out from the notion of love as essentially sacrificial, and the other which defines love as the spirit which seeks the community of all. He seems to show a preference for the latter view as more soundly based and defensible. This latter view seems very near to our own Thomist view of the proper relation between love and social justice. The author, however, is not very convincing when he tries to distinguish between 'a rational system of principles' and 'the ordered will of God' as a basis of justice. If God's will is 'ordered', how is it other than 'in accordance with reason'? Theologians of this school are so existentialist in their ethics that they seem terrified of admitting that there are any absolute norms of conduct, and especially that, if any be found, they be called 'rational'.

I do not really think this volume will be very helpful to the average layman to get a fair view of theological thought; though it may be useful for a Protestant of the Tillich school as fit glasses through which to see 'Christianity' where all Christian dogma has been excluded.

H. FRANCIS DAVIS

## NOTICES

**THE INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE** of St Francis de Sales appears in a convenient pocket edition, translated by Mgr John K. Ryan (Longmans, 7s. 6d.). The version is based on the traditional translations of John Yaworth and the English priests of Tournai, and as such must be regarded as a compromise between the antique and the colloquial. But it is valuable to have this perennial classic available in so convenient a form.

**THE MEDITATIONS AND DEVOTIONS** of Cardinal Newman have also been republished by Longmans in the same format and at the same price. Father Henry Tristram has written an introduction for this edition and he does well to emphasise the 'great simplicity and naturalness' of the 'Meditations' which have too long been out of the reach of a new generation, for whom Newman's generosity of mind and strength of style will make a living appeal.

**ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM** (Sheed and Ward, 12s. 6d.) is a translation of Père de Lubac's introduction to Buddhist spirituality, of which an extended review, by Fr Victor White, O.P., appeared in these columns in December, 1951.

**THE CATHOLIC DIGEST OMNIBUS** (W. H. Allen, 17s. 6d.) contains a representative selection from the popular American magazine over the last fifteen years. The authors range from Bernanos to Thomas Merton, and to those who like their intellectual diet to be pre-digested it should be acceptable.