

REVIEWS

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THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

VOM SINN UND ZWECK DER EHE von Dr. Herbert Doms (Ostdeutsche Verlagsanstalt, Breslau; RM. 4.80.)

DU SENS ET DE LA FIN DU MARIAGE, par Dr. Herbert Doms, traduit de l'allemand. (Desclée, de Brouwer; 21 frs.)

Dr. Doms detects in Christian tradition the interplay of two distinct views of wedlock which might seem, at first sight, to be mutually exclusive and even contradictory. The one would seem so to stress the conviction that the primary purpose (*Zweck*) of marriage is the procreation and upbringing of offspring as to neglect its intrinsic meaning (*Sinn*) even to the point of regarding the marriage state as nothing more than a utility for that purpose. To the other, the essential meaning and value of marriage is represented as lying in the common life itself of man and wife—the “one flesh” of the Scriptures; a view which unduly exaggerated would tend to regard offspring as a mere secondary excrescence—a luxury or a nuisance, according to taste.

The author's object has been to purge and synthesise these seemingly conflicting views. This he might have achieved by analysis of the generic concept of *societas*, resolving the problem briefly by showing the necessary interrelation of the intrinsic nature of *any* community with its determining purpose, and applying these general concepts to the particular case of the nature and purpose of marriage.

We may be thankful that he has neglected this facile *a priori* approach, and has preferred to consider directly the particularities of the problem, beginning from an analysis of the distinctive biological, psychological and “metaphysical” characteristics of human sexuality, and concluding to a profound theological analysis of the data of Revelation regarding this “great mystery.” He disclaims having written an exhaustive treatise; but his work has been justly recognised on the Continent, even by those who have been unable to accept all his conclusions without qualification, as one of the most constructive, courageous and penetrating treatments of a difficult and urgent problem.

Only a fanatical and quite unthomistically-minded partisanship will object to the spirit of his criticisms of St. Thomas (we recall that so staunch a thomist as P. Webert, O.P., has been no less critical of the limitations of St. Thomas's treatment of the same subject); but we cannot but feel that the author has attributed too much importance to the *Supplementum* of the *Summa*, which is, after all, but a compilation from the juvenile *Commentary on*

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the Sentences, and at least as much a reflection of current assumptions as of the saint's own and original thought.

This is a book which provides plenty of meat for the thought and discussions of theologians, and account must be taken of it by any who would henceforth write on the theory or morals of marriage and sex. It will no longer be possible to give to the augustinian-thomist *finis primarius* so naïve an interpretation as has hitherto been common.

But the chief value of the book will be for the thoughtful layman who is determined to take his vocation to marriage seriously and to plumb all its depths and meaning. He will indeed find here no practical "marriage manual," nor a code of moral laws governing marital relationships. Instead he will find that right thinking which must be presupposed to right living, and without which Christian moral teaching must remain largely unintelligible. He will be enabled to see in its true light much that seems to him obscure and unreasonable in that moral teaching, and learn to appreciate from the book's sober reasoning far more of the loftiness and responsibilities of the vocation to marriage and the turpitude of sexual sin than from any amount of moral exhortation. Never, for instance, have we seen the truth of the doctrine of the intrinsic heinousness of an extramarital sex-functioning (*mortale ex toto genere*) made so luminously apparent.

Those who have no German may welcome the literal—sometimes painfully literal—French translation; but they may prefer to await an English version which is in active preparation.

VICTOR WHITE, O.P.

PRESENCE MARIALE. François Charmot, S.J. (Editions Spes; 12
12 frs.)

This book tackles an important question. In the new spirit of Catholic Action where is the place of the Mother of God? Already some are beginning to lose sight of an essential side of Catholic spirituality. Devotion to Mary, in a wealth of spiritual ideas and organisations and tactics:—"Incorporation," "The Mystical Body," "Militancy," "Action," "Christianisation of the Milieu." Where does the Mother of God come in? There are not lacking young Catholics who are, in their hurry, bored with the Rosary and solemn old-fashioned statues of Our Lady. And to place her again in their lives a mere appeal is not sufficient. It wants a real theological instruction to her position. But it wants theological instruction that is not abstract and dry but real as is their experience of the power of militant Christianity.