

Reviews

THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY, by Charles Davis; Sheed and Ward, 30s.

In the introduction to this book Father Davis apologizes for publishing a set of disconnected essays. 'There is such a dearth of theology written in English,' he says, 'and the time available for writing is so restricted that a theologian must be excused if he tries to make the best possible use of his occasional writings.' It does not take the reader long to discover that the book deserves not our pardon but our gratitude. The essays concern matters from almost every branch of theology, and they are here ordered in the traditional manner of the seminary treatises, starting from *De Revelatione* and ending with *De Novissimis*. Taken together, they do not quite add up to a complete course of theology; but they do constitute a very useful guide to those areas where theologians have been thinking afresh in recent years.

The first essay, entitled *Introducing the Theme*, speaks of the three aspects of the contemporary renewal of theology: the return to the sources, the reappraisal of the liturgy, and the rethinking of catechetics. The second, *The Danger of Irrelevance*, is an excellent appraisal of the degree to which Catholic beliefs and concepts are alien to the culture in which we live. The third describes and attempts to justify the surrender of the mind which is involved in the acceptance of a supernatural revelation. The fourth sketches the theology of preaching as an exercise of the power of order, stressing that the priesthood is a ministry of the word as well as a ministry of the sacraments.

The next four essays concern topics of ecumenical interest. Essay Five, which is one of the most successful of the collection, is entitled *Faith and Dissident Christians*. We speak of Anglicans who become Roman Catholics as 'coming to the Faith'; yet we believe that non-Catholics can be in a state of charity, and it is impossible to possess charity without possessing faith. Starting from this problem, the essay discusses the nature and limitations of the supernatural faith possessed by those outside the visible Church. The sixth essay, *The Church and Unity* is a review of Dr Mascall's book *The Recovery of Unity*. The seventh, *The Living Word*, deals with the relationship between the Bible and Tradition - the topic which provoked such vigorous disagreement in the first session of the Second Vatican Council. The eighth is a short and not wholly convincing piece on the theme *Can Unbelievers be Saved?*

An essay on *The Christian Mystery and the Trinity* places the mystery of the Trinity in the centre of Christianity. The divine life communicated to men is the life not of a solitary God, but of the Trinity: the Christian, the author argues, has a distinct relation to each of the divine persons as well as his relationship to the undivided and creating Trinity.

There follow three essays on the topic of original sin, which is explained after

the manner of Cardinal Billot. Essay XIII, *The Place of Christ*, is partly concerned with the theological implications of the possibility of rational life on other planets. Essay XIV traces the history of Messianism from the prophets to the apocalypses, and Essay XV is concerned with the quest for the historical Jesus. The essay on the Resurrection and the Atonement is a reprint of the author's introduction to Père Durrwell's book *The Resurrection*. The essay entitled *The Starting Point of Mariology* returns to the problem of the development of tradition, with particular reference to the three Marian dogmas.

Sacramental theology is represented by three essays. One deals with the mass as the assembly of Christians, a topic crucial to an understanding of the liturgical movement. The other two concern the recent rediscovery by theologians that extreme unction is the sacrament of the sick and not of the dying.

The book ends appropriately with two essays on the Last Things. Both of them are refreshing because they state squarely the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body instead of presenting it in the etiolated 'spiritualized' form that is sometimes heard today. The solutions here presented to the difficulties in this doctrine are not wholly satisfactory: but at least the problems are taken with the seriousness they deserve.

Fr Davis's book is pleasant to read, being written throughout in lucid, sober and unpretentious prose. The theses which it presents are not, in general, original, but have been current for some years on the continent. But there are many theological theories current abroad of very unequal value, and those who are familiar with the continental literature will admire the discretion with which the author has selected, as well as the clarity with which he has presented, the ideas which he has chosen to import. Those, on the other hand, who are meeting the new theology for the first time, could hardly find a better introduction to its major themes.

One or two criticisms could be made. Fr Davis, while stressing that theology is nowadays returning to its scriptural sources, does not himself make very frequent use of scripture in his presentation of doctrine. Perhaps also he gives the reader insufficient help to distinguish what in his text is revealed doctrine, what is common ground among theologians, and what is more or less hardy speculation.

In his essay *The Danger of Irrelevance* Fr Davis shows himself well aware of the difficulties of expressing theology in language which will be intelligible to the average reader, say, of *The Listener*. Yet he does not always live up to the high standards of lucidity which he sets himself. Consider the following quotation from his essay on faith :

Faith is essentially a *knowledge* in *obscurity* and its *motive*, the *First Truth*, remains unseen . . . God does not become present to us in faith by showing himself to our *intellect*. But how then? By arousing in us an *inclination* towards himself. It is the Supreme Truth that we encounter, but as an object of desire, not of *vision*.

I think that it is fair to say that all the words I have italicized find a place in this

passage solely because they are the reach-me-down translations of the Latin words which a theologian would use in this context: *cognitio, obscuritas, motivum, Prima Veritas, intellectus, inclinatio, visio*. Not one of them is the natural English word to express the author's meaning; and several of them are actually misleading. It is an odd use of the English word 'motive' according to which the sight of the cat on the mat is my motive for thinking 'the cat is on the mat'. These defects are not simply defects in style: if the passage were rewritten in genuine English it would become clear that on the view here adopted by the author it is difficult to distinguish between faith and wishful thinking. But it is unfair to blame Fr Davis for something which is the result of a whole system of teaching and learning theology. None the less, it gives an interesting insight into that system to observe its effects on the writing even of a man who is particularly sensitive to the difficulties of translation and unusually concerned to render his thought accessible to the general reader.

Despite these reservations, *The Study of Theology* must be recommended to every English reader who is interested in serious thought about religion. Most of all, perhaps, it will be useful to priests who have been ordained for more than ten years and who wish to know in what ways theology has developed since they left the seminary. Finally, the book most certainly deserves an index.

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A CATHOLIC DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY, Volume One: Abandonment to Casuistry; Edited by Mgr H. Francis Davis, Abbot Aidan Williams, Fr Ivo Thomas, O.P. and Fr Joseph Crehan, S.J.; Nelson, 42s.

This Dictionary of Theology is less ambitious and more austere than the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*. The reader will look in vain for biographies of Beethoven and Belisarius, or photogravure plates of Aachen and Alaska. But before he has read a word he will notice that he has received a very substantial bulk of letter-press for his money. And if he is dispirited to see how little of the alphabet is covered by the first volume, he will be reassured to read in the preface that three more volumes will suffice to bring him to Zwingly.

The first volume contains 121 articles by 51 contributors which add up to a total of 664 columns. An article of average length, as the reader will by now have calculated, contains about five and a half columns. The longest article is that on *Augustine* by Fr Trapp (26 columns); the next longest is Miss Toynbee's on *Art and the Church* to c. 500 (23 columns and four plates). After these, in length, is an article by Mgr Davis on *The Mystical Body* (21 columns). For fourth place, by my reckoning, there is a tie between three articles of 20 columns by Fr Crehan: *Baptism, Analogy of Being* and *Bishops*. The shortest article too is by Fr Crehan: 300 words on *The Chalice of Antioch*.

Indeed the whole volume is in a special way the fruit of Fr Crehan's labour. He is not only the secretary of the editorial board: he has also contributed articles