

The author did not intend this to be a complete treatise, but one dealing only with the more important points of the subject, and those meriting fuller treatment than they usually receive. But his refusal to dwell on questions, strictly belonging to dogmatic and moral theology, enables him to cover considerable ground, and makes this a true manual of Spiritual Theology. One does not expect originality in a work of this kind, but the treatment of spiritual direction, and mental prayer, is particularly valuable. In controversial matters, such as acquired contemplation, he is prudent, patient and precise. In short, we have here an authoritative, theological, logical and practical treatise, calculated to interest, instruct and inspire.

THE POETIC DRAMA OF PAUL CLAUDEL. By Joseph Chiari. (Harvill Press; 15s.)

Much of this interesting book is for readers who know their Claudel well and like to hear other people's views about him. It is not for those who need assistance in making their way through his works, still less an introduction to it. Dr Chiari knows much of Claudel thoroughly and has reflected on the poet's work, and his judgments on most of the plays are sound. He enlivens his study of each drama with general considerations and never loses sight of the broader background.

He calls Claudel's vision the fresh and natural way of looking at things which belongs to primal man or to childhood;

'he sees things in images, and he sees things as they are, without any intellectual sophistication, and as part of the immutable ways of Nature'.

Instead of describing or analysing he aims at

'making us share with him the coming to consciousness of certain emotions and ideas'.

Dr Chiari calls him 'an uncouth primal being' (one thinks of Gide's comparison of his physical appearance to a sledge-hammer) and likens him, in his capacity for awe-inspiring grandeur and appalling platitudes, to Victor Hugo, with whom he shares also 'an exuberance of language and a visionary power unsurpassed in French literature'. It is indeed true that sometimes, like Hugo, he

'floats in the limbo world which lies between the abstract concept and the concrete sensuous realization of the creatures of the mind', but it is no reproach to say that his symbolism is 'imprecise'. A play is not a didactic allegory and our inability to be sure of the exact interpretation of all his symbols does not invalidate them or make them 'woolly'. Rhetoric is strong in both writers and Dr Chiari has a good page (p. 37) on the difference, for dramatic purposes, between good and bad rhetoric.

In speaking of *L'Échange*, he says that Claudel's theme is 'that God's ways are inscrutable'. This is true, but elsewhere he implies that the playwright forgets the inscrutability and sets himself to explain them too completely, thus landing himself in difficulties. It may be true that here and there Claudel claims to know too much and to forget that even for him God's ways still hold mysteries, but the sense of the inscrutable, even of the absurd, is strong in his drama, and Dr Chiari dwells too heavily on his didactic-explanatory side. In speaking of his didacticism, he is right in saying that, unlike a Shaw or a Sartre,

'he is not concerned with the propagation of certain philosophical and moral beliefs and ideas in terms of human psychology and behaviour; he is a poet, and as such he is concerned with expressing and conveying to man the truth which lies at the centre of his whole being, in terms of symbols, metaphors, analogies and images'.

Such an attitude is scarcely deserving of the (in this context) pejorative word 'didactic'.

It is generally admitted that Claudel improved and enriched *La Jeune Fille Violaine* when he rewrote the play for the third time and published it in 1912 under the title of *L'Annonce faite à Marie*. Practically all the changes he then made in substance, structure and detail were for the better. Dr Chiari stands out, among students of our poet, in that he considers that *L'Annonce* marks the spoiling of a first-rate peasant tragedy. It would take too long to examine all the reasons he gives for this unusual opinion, but they show him to be insensitive to the heightening of lyrical and dramatic power in the new version, and the chapter devoted to this part of Claudel's work is the weakest in an interesting book.

CUTHBERT GIRDLESTONE

THE THREEFOLD GIFT OF CHRIST. By Brother Bernard. Edited and translated by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (Mowbrays; 2s. 6d.)

This small work was erroneously attributed to St Bernard because its author bears his name. But this Brother Bernard, though he has obviously read the sermons of his great predecessor, writes in a very different style and his thought, which is centred on the Blessed Sacrament, is clearly later.

Brother Bernard tells us in his introduction that he is writing at the request of a priest, but his work can be read with profit by layman and priest alike. This priest wants to know 'from sound authorities and with relevant quotations' how Christ when veiled in the Blessed Sacrament at the same time abides in glory. Bernard, having emphasized that this is a mystery, which cannot be fully understood on earth, goes on to say that, nevertheless, by considering the matter in relation to the whole