

Reviews

THE MODERN THEOLOGY OF TRADITION, by J. P. Mackey; Darton, Longman and Todd; 30s.

I am grateful indeed that this work came my way to review. Otherwise – such is life – one might easily have missed it. Frankly that would have been tragic. May I go on to perform a clear duty to readers who are also Fathers of the Second Vatican Council and warn them not to miss it at their peril. The revised schema on divine revelation will shortly be circulated for their comments. Here is an excellent basis for reflection on one of the main issues.

It would be no surprise if despite the claims of other work and notwithstanding the familiarity already acquired with the present theme, this study got a second and a third reading. I recommend that it should. The author deserves it and the reader stands to gain considerably.

Not that the argument is hard to follow even for the non-episcopal or non-theological reader. I can imagine many who are both being fascinated by it. The English is clear and, as far as possible, untechnical; of Latin there is little. The approach is serene, searching and down to earth: it tracks down the real issues.

For instance, though only one of the six chapters is on non-Catholic theology and that is kept modestly within the writer's declared limits, it touches the nerve of such contributions as Professors Schlink, Cullman and Skydsgaard have made to Lutheran thought; or Prestige and Mascall to Anglican. But the point where we need further light from them in the inter-confessional encounter is sympathetically indicated. With Lutherans it is the question of reaching agreement on an adequate authority for Tradition. With Anglicans, what quality in the teaching authority of the Church guarantees it as the bearer of genuine Tradition. With the Orthodox (for whom Arseniev, Florovski and others speak) the question is simply which magisterium. The answer of course lies outside the present work.

What is of comfort is that all parties are agreed on the importance of Tradition, even the Lutherans. 'The Bible and the Bible only' never put the whole position. From the beginning they had a place for Tradition 'understood on their own terms', as the author remarks. Today the place is larger and the efforts at genuine understanding are impressive.

Clearly the mainline dialogue must pass through Tradition; perhaps stop there some considerable time:

'The point at issue between Catholics and Neo-Protestants therefore, is not whether there be a Tradition-principle in the make-up of Christianity or not but rather the way in which this principle is to be described and evaluated. In fact, it is on its attempt to defend its own description and evaluation of the

Tradition within it that a sect's claim to represent true Christianity must stand or fall. We all possess substantially the same Scriptures. It is our Traditions that differ.' (p. 174.)

Apart from that unfortunate word 'sect' it is a fair statement of the duty mutually owed in the dialogue.

He goes on (p. 175): 'In the Catholic concept of Tradition we found guarantees belonging to that part of Tradition called magisterium by reason of the office of those who exercised magisterium, and guarantees belonging to other parts of Tradition which derived to a great extent from magisterium. These were infallibility and derived infallibility. When we now ask non-Catholics for their guarantees, we question them about Church authority; in fact, about Church Tradition.'

The bulk of the work is devoted to building up that Catholic concept of Tradition from the ninety years of theological writing between the two Vatican Councils. Patient analysis leading to a realistic synthesis, the eye constantly moving from theory to historical reality.

Briefly, the author's achievement is to have amplified the concept formed by Franzelin and perfected by Billot which held the ground in the earlier part of the period under review. It is the more generous suggestions of Scheeben which under careful scrutiny prove equal to the complexities of Tradition.

Guarantees for the truths handed down from the beginning — where are they? There can be no question of Tradition where they do not exist, for Tradition is precisely that essential service by which we are assured of the truth received from the beginning. Only the teaching of the successors of the Apostles has the necessary guarantees, was the classical answer. Magisterium alone is Tradition. But what about the Fathers and theologians outside of the official magisterium? What about the faithful? Surely in history and in actual fact we can see the truth being securely passed on in the insights, practice and devotion of the thinkers and believers in the Church? It is true that only the magisterium has the authority of a divine appointment to teach along with the direct gift of infallibility to guard the teaching from error. But is such an appointment and such an immediate possession of infallibility necessary for every level at which truth is securely transmitted? Obviously both are necessary for the explicit authentication of truths passed on. But the authentication is not exactly the passing-on. Other organs can be active in that. If their activity springs from their life as members of the Church, they too have guarantees. Not through the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit; but through being in vital contact with those that have that direct influence. The organic unity of the Church ensures them a share in the security of the faith they express and hand on by living in sensitive union with authority.

It is to commend this wider concept which finds room for other organs of transmission along with the Magisterium that this book has been written. But the conclusion is honestly reasoned from the theological data under review.

There are other questions of urgent interest at this moment, e.g. does Tradi-

tion differ from Scripture not only in the way it passes on truth but in the area of truth it covers? Are they two distinct sources of revelation, separate and parallel? Should they be called sources in the strict sense?

These and many other questions find some answer here but are not treated as burning issues. So far as it goes, the chapter on the relation between Scripture and Tradition would, I think, be acceptable to members of the Secretariate of Christian Unity.

Are there no blemishes? It is perhaps as well there is little Latin in the text. What there is is typographically very shaky. One could have wished Newman to make more than one appearance; likewise Lennertz.

I sincerely hope the author will extend his studies in the non-Catholic theology of Tradition. One would welcome more of his acute analyses in that field; Barth, for instance? His ability for patient honest synthesis over a wide area could also put us all in debt in view of the oncoming dialogue.

One last word. This book is important and not only because it is topical. The Catholic faith is a religion of Tradition, not accidentally, or just for this or that period of its growth, but essentially and permanently. Our Lord has made it live that way. To indicate adequately how this vital function takes place is to reveal a great deal about the Faith.

✠ THOMAS HOLLAND

FREEDOM AND THE WILL, edited by D. F. Pears; Macmillan; 16s.

This book is a collection of solos and ensembles by well-known philosophical virtuosos on this aged and intractable problem. B. A. O. Williams' introduction and final summing-up are perhaps particularly masterly, but there is no single page in the book that does not repay careful attention.

'The definition of determinism; the search for general conditions of responsibility; the nature of the will and its connection with what we call efforts of will; the scope and implication of different kinds of psychological explanation' (p. 12) constitute the nest of problems round which the discussion hovers. We are reminded that we exercise freedom in choosing, trying, making acts of will, and suchlike, and that it is thus misleading to treat the expression 'will' as though it were more than a vague pointer to these various activities. Two kinds of determinism are distinguished, physical and psychological; and we are taken some of the way towards seeing what it would be for either of them to be true, and of what difference knowledge of this would make to our ordinary ways of thinking and acting. It is tentatively suggested that even if we knew ourselves to be prisoners of physical laws, it might still be impossible to regard ourselves from within, as it were, as being constrained in all our actions, however willing we might be, and in fact are, to admit constraint in special circumstances. Our attention is also drawn, very properly, to the way in which a fairly definite