

hindered research by those most interested and concerned. But, even forty years ago, there were a few with knowledge and detachment sufficient to state the conclusion which a documented account will, they believe, establish.

The following is a review in *The Times Literary Supplement* as far back as April 6th, 1911. I have taken it from a work still in manuscript which gives no more than the text. The reviewer is, in the tradition of that periodical, anonymous; it is not of course the purpose or effect of such anonymity to exempt him from justifying his statements:

“The progress of the Church of Rome has more than once been impeded by selfish partisans within her gates. . . . China might have been hers if she had only given heed to the Emperor Kang Tsi. [This on the question of *fact* as to Chinese intentions in “ancestor-worship”.] With unprecedented condescension to “foreign devils”, the Son of Heaven deigned personally to assure Roman Catholics that certain social customs were purely civil and had no connection whatever with idolatry and superstition. But Rome would listen to no one except those who grudged the Peking missionaries the position they had acquired at the Chinese court, and she thus brought upon herself the wrath of the Monarch and the consequent persecution of the Christians.

‘India might have been hers if she had allowed De Nobili to continue the conversion of the Brahmins; yet here again she had no ear save for the calumnies of an envious rival, in consequence of which she issued a set of rules, some of them suicidal, formed in ignorance of local conditions.’

THOMAS ROBERTS, S.J.

THE REIGN OF QUANTITY AND THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES. By René Guénon (Luzac; 25s.)

THE TRANSCENDENT UNITY OF RELIGIONS. By Frithjof Schuon (Faber; 21s.)

René Guénon, who died in 1951, left behind him a body of writing, which Père Daniélou, in his *Essai sur le Mystère de l'Histoire*, has characterized as one of the most singular of our time. He made himself the exponent of what he called the ‘metaphysical tradition’, which he held was the unifying principle of all the great religions of east and west, and from this point of view he proceeded to make a devastating attack on all modern thought and modern civilization as a prolonged process of ‘deviation’ from the truth. Though the tone and method of his attack was extremely uncompromising, there is much in it with which a Catholic can agree. He himself regarded medieval Catholicism as one of the principal expressions in the west of the metaphysical tradition,

and in many respects he was simply recalling some of the fundamental positions of Thomist philosophy. But at the same time his real position is deeply opposed to Catholicism. He believed that the 'metaphysical tradition' is an esoteric form of truth, of which the great religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Catholicism are different esoteric expressions adapted to popular needs. Religion is for him always an inferior form of truth which the philosopher has to transcend in order that he may be initiated into the higher wisdom of 'metaphysic'.

It can easily be seen how this theory, which is simply a form of modern gnosticism, lends itself to intellectual pride, and it must be confessed that the tone of conscious superiority which he habitually adopts tends to grow wearisome. This is especially so in the present work, but at the same time his criticism of modern civilization is extraordinarily penetrating. His thesis is that the modern world, that is to say Europe since the Renaissance, has tended to the gradual elimination of quality from life in the favour of quantity. This is seen in the whole method of modern science which aims at the reduction of everything to quantity, and is shown in the practical sphere in modern industrialism which tends to eliminate all the individual quality of craftsmanship, and in the political order where the individual person tends to be reduced to a unit in a mass. The result is that mechanism and materialism become the accepted order of life, and man feels himself to be enclosed in a rigidly determined system of blind force. But it is an interesting feature of the present work that Guénon considers that this materialistic phase has already passed its peak period, and we are now entering on a new phase, which may be called that of 'spiritualism'. This is no less pernicious in his eyes than the former phase, and marks indeed the nadir of human evolution. It means in fact that while the way of the spirit has become increasingly blocked to all higher influences, the world is now being besieged by occult forces of a sub-human order, which are preparing the way for its destruction. A great part of the book is taken up with what he calls the 'counter-tradition', which manifests itself in various forms of perverted spirituality. This 'counter-tradition' he sees in Christian terms as the work of 'anti-Christ', which heralds the 'end of the world', though it must be said that for him the end of the world is the end of a 'cycle' and not the final end of Christian expectation. In all this, though a Christian has to make continual reservations, there is revealed an astonishing insight and a vast erudition in the spiritual doctrine of east and west.

M. Frithjof Schuon, who is a Frenchman like René Guénon, and, if not actually a disciple, writes from precisely the same point of view, has a more attractive style of writing with particular reference to the Islamic tradition, whereas Guénon made himself the exponent princi-

pally of Hindu doctrine. His attempt to 'reconcile' Christianity and Islam, and to show that both are identical in their esoteric meaning, while adapted in their esoteric form to different people and different circumstances, is not very convincing. In particular, the argument that Christianity was originally an esoteric religion is quite untenable and is based on a misreading of the evidence. But at the same time the comparison brings out elements of extraordinary interest and his exposition of the 'metaphysical' doctrine of Islam and its relation to other forms of traditional wisdom reveals a depth and range of knowledge which is not inferior to that of Guénon. In all it must be said that though the point of view of this 'metaphysical tradition' is unacceptable to a Catholic, it nevertheless deserves our serious study and demands to be given its proper place in a Catholic philosophy of religion.

BEDE GRIFFITHS, O.S.B.

THE PRINCIPAL UPANISHADS. Edited with Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes by S. Radhakrishnan. (George Allen and Unwin; 50s. cloth; 35s. paper).

The 'principal' Upanishads in this volume are no less than eighteen. The Sanskrit text is transliterated, and followed, verse by verse, with a fairly literal but generally readable English translation. The distracting precedent has been followed of interspersing the notes in the text, instead of relegating them to footnotes or to a separate section. Indeed the difference between 11-point and 10-point is all that distinguishes text from notes, with the result (aided sometimes by inconsistent spacing and indenting) that the flow and continuity of the Upanishads themselves is even more effectively broken than in the editions of the Advaita Ashamra.

This is a small complaint to make about a truly great piece of work. The notes themselves are sometimes purely textual and philological, but are often profoundly illuminating. Both the notes and the introduction are scattered with parallels from Western, Moslem and Christian writers, among whom St Thomas Aquinas is frequently and intelligently quoted. Professor Radhakrishnan's breadth of reading is no less remarkable than his depth of understanding. But always his approach and treatment is that of the detached, conscientious scholar, never that of the salesman.

This spirit permeates his 120-page introduction. It should remove many misconceptions, and be read with particular interest by theologians—especially such as assume that the 'mysticism' and 'salvation' of Vedanta is purely 'natural' and disregards divine grace. Professor Radhakrishnan appears, however, to agree with those who find its beliefs about rebirth and transmigration irreconcilable with Christian