

—and his task is the more difficult. This version has frequently been praised as a translation, ‘in the best sense of the term’, that is as a work of literature in its own right, and this judgment is not to be questioned. The problem is: how far does the reading of Mackenna enable one to understand Plotinus? Very often, I fear, it enables one to misunderstand him. Where Plotinus is lofty, Mackenna’s renderings, though sometimes over-rhetorical, are probably the best that has been done for the *Enneads* by any translator. But in those passages—and they are frequent—where Plotinus is not soaring, but rather engaging in tough-minded and often rather arid examinations of the views of other philosophers, Mackenna still gives us the same lofty tone—which can be misleading in the extreme.

What is a translation? How far is it a paraphrase? Often Mackenna paraphrases the spirit of Plotinus so that one who is familiar with the original is compelled to wonder again and again: does Plotinus think this way? Mackenna’s translation is the only way open to most Englishmen who wish to read Plotinus. Plotinus is often associated with a rather vague mysticism among English readers. Is there any connection between these two facts? Very probably there is. Plotinus is certainly a mystic, though not in the way the ‘mystic East’ is supposed to be ‘mystic’. He is both mystic and rationalist. It is a pity that the more rounded picture of him cannot emerge from the only serious English translation. Mackenna is a splendid writer, but the impression of Plotinus that he produces can be misleading to one who is unable to study the original.

The present edition is much improved by a greatly enlarged introduction. Professor Henry has drawn on the latest work done on the sources of Plotinus to make this new part of his work an ideal introduction to the subject. To a modern reader, the mental world of Plotinus often seems strange and obscure and some of the problems look unfamiliar. Those who read the writings of metaphysicians tend to expect that they can enter the author’s world at once, and with little guidance on the road. With Plotinus this is hard, but there is no fault in that. No-one would expect to read the more advanced writings of Einstein on the basis of O-level Physics. Why then should they be disappointed if an extreme metaphysician proves difficult to those trained only in Brains Trust philosophy? Every reader of Plotinus needs as much help as he can get. The study of Professor Henry should provide much. For an historical account of the climate of thought in which Plotinus lived, Henry is ideal. I only regret that he has not given us more on strictly philosophical matters.

JOHN M. RIST

BLONDEL ET LE CHRISTIANISME, by Henri Bouillard; Editions du Seuil, Paris.

LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES DE MAURICE BLONDEL; Aubier; Paris.

Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) was a prominent figure in the modernist crisis at the turn of the century and in the debate on ‘christian’ philosophy in the early

thirties. These were two historically very distinct events but closely connected in the formation and expression of Blondel's thought. The modernist problem was the centuries old difficulty of reconciling a doctrine imposed *ab extra* with the freedom and creativity of the human mind; in the then technical language, how to accommodate transcendence (the supernatural) and immanence (the natural). Schelling's brand of German idealism and the contemporary French predilection for Spinoza's philosophy led to the modernist 'doctrine of immanence': the supernatural is meaningful and acceptable to the extent in which it can satisfy the subjective requirements of the human mind and heart. Blondel regarded this solution as 'the substitution of a naturalized supernatural for Christianity; the reduction of Christian faith to philosophy'. He therefore set about creating a new philosophy purporting to show the reasonableness of revealed religion by demonstrating that the 'logic of human action' demanded at least implicit acceptance of divinely revealed truth. Blondel was convinced that no such philosophy had yet been written. He claimed to be doing pioneer work for Catholicism similar to what German idealism had done for Protestant theology. Such a claim is surprising considering that the young Blondel's knowledge of St Thomas was minimal, and that even in his mature years Blondel's familiarity with Thomism was in the nature of a correspondence course. Perhaps Blondel meant simply that his own brand of 'Catholic metaphysics' was something original.

This closely written book by Père Bouillard gives a conspectus of Blondel's life and writing; an exhaustive analysis of *L'Action* and the *Lettre sur L'Apologétique* (Blondel's most controversial works); followed by a critique of Duméry's interpretation of Blondel and of the latter's views on the relationship between philosophy and theology. Blondel was like a man who issues a communiqué every Monday morning of his life explaining what he really meant the previous week and what he will mean by the communiqué to be issued on the following Monday. The need for such proliferation of communiqués can only be explained on the grounds that the man's language is ambiguous in the extreme and that he is desperately trying to defend himself against charges of unorthodoxy. That was precisely Blondel's predicament. To complicate matters, the themes which he discussed are now dead, or at least persist in a very different form. Being very much a period piece, a great deal of historical reconstruction is necessary for an understanding of Blondel's thought. The historian apart, anything of lasting value to be found in Blondel would generally be found more accessible elsewhere. Père Bouillard has discovered the most convincing approach yet for giving a benign interpretation to Blondel's enigmatic texts: criticising his critics and searching for Blondel's intentions in his published and unpublished letters.

Considering the legion of 'zealots of orthodoxy and lovers of anathemas' with whom he had to contend, Blondel's correspondence was understandably voluminous. A two volume work containing his correspondence with Valensin was published in 1957; the correspondence on modernism (Blondel, Bremond,

von Hügel, Loisy, etc.) appeared in 1960. The volume of letters under review contains Blondel's own hitherto unpublished philosophic letters written before 1914, dealing with *L'Action*, *La Lettre sur L'Apologétique*, the dimensions of philosophy, reason and Christian faith, immanence and transcendence. Blondel regarded traditional apologetics as too remote and too abstract, precisely in that it sought to justify revealed religion objectively: treating the object of faith as a *thing* whose motives of credibility could be clearly deciphered and justified. Since this approach has no appeal to the modern unbeliever it must be supplemented. This can be done only by the 'method of immanence': revealing the subjective inadequacy of human action and thus preparing the unbeliever for accepting supernatural revelation. Blondel insisted that this is the task of philosophy. On these grounds he constantly reiterated that his own efforts were purely philosophical. Perhaps this had something to do with the theologians' contention that Blondel destroyed the supernatural by saying it was a necessary complementation to nature. Indeed, it sounds philosophically odd to claim that the *vinculum substantiale* of Leibniz is the Incarnate Word; or that the correct synthesis of the Hegelian dialectic is Christ, the Emmanuel.

NICHOLAS FOLAN, O.P.

A PHILOSOPHY OF GOD, by Thomas Gornall, S.J.; Darton, Longman and Todd ; 21s.

The physical appearance of this book and the opening pages (a resumé of ancient and eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophies) create the illusion that this is going to be a work of vulgarization. It is nothing of the sort. Even as the book proceeds the impression lingers that it is philosophy for the millions, but that is an outcome of the clearness of thought and presentation throughout. A number of objections spring to the mind only to be disarmed. For instance, this professes to be a philosophical discourse, yet it is interspersed with facts of revelation. Again the book is ostensibly addressed to those leaving secondary schools, yet it is a serious piece of philosophical writing. The order of topics departs from the norm: a section on the attributes of God precedes a consideration of the proofs of God's existence. This is actually an economy and makes for clarity in dealing with the proofs. A foreword anticipates all these objections. Not the least pleasing feature is that controversies within the Thomist school are delicately avoided. The particular emphases which Fr. Gornall gives this classical Thomist Natural Theology are his analysis of the concept of infinite being in treating of the divine attributes, and his extended explanation of contingent being in the proof of God's existence. A comfort is provided for those who have difficulty in accepting St Thomas' proofs where Fr Gornall discusses how far the proofs are likely to carry conviction. Any student of Natural Theology will get more than his money's worth in buying this book.

STANISLAUS PARKER, O.P.