

REVIEWS

WAYS AND CROSSWAYS. By Paul Claudel. Translated by Fr. John O'Connor. Crown 8vo. Pp. 260. 7/6. (Sheed & Ward, London).

This volume is very happily dedicated 'To G. K. Chesterton in token of admiration.' Differing largely, as no doubt they should, in subject matter as well as in style, these essays exhibit nevertheless in a marked degree that same rare wisdom of metaphysical insight (that is to say, of sublime common sense) with which we are familiar in the writings of Mr. Chesterton.

Ways and Crossways indeed they are, but all of them leading the wayfarer who reads to Him Who called Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life. Judged materially such a variety of matter as is here collected together might seem to preclude any semblance of unity. But whether M. Claudel be writing a *Discourse to the Catholic Actors of New York*, a treatise on *The Physics of the Eucharist*, an *Essay on Art*, a mystical exposition *On the Presence of God*, sundry *Propositions on Justice*, or *Two Letters on St. Joseph* (these are some of the twenty titles), there is a common quality—uncommon, however, in its perfection—of perspicacity sharpened immeasurably by spiritual understanding, which imposes a unity of form far more real than a mere unity of matter.

While we do not concur with the publishers' opinion that 'there is nothing technical or recondite about them,' we do maintain nevertheless that what is technical and recondite has been made intelligible to the lay mind by the simple clarity of the author's mind, and perhaps not less by the happy choice of a translator. It is fortunate indeed that this difficult task was entrusted to such a master of English prose and of translation as Fr. John O'Connor. That it was in fact a difficult task is perhaps suggested definitely in, for instance, the fourth of *Five Unsuccessful Letters* which deals with the Incarnation, and especially in the curious rendering, necessary no doubt, of *Exod.* xxx, 13 in the second footnote. But even this is almost an attempt to find fault with the perfect.

H.J.C.

DE LA PHILOSOPHIE CHRÉTIENNE. Par Jacques Maritain. (Questions Disputées, Vol. IX.) (Desclée De Brouwer et Cie, Paris; 166 pp.; 10 frs.)

A valuable discussion of the notion of a 'Christian philosophy'; valuable not least because it is still sometimes thought

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that the philosophy of St. Thomas 'Christianizes Aristotle' in the sense that it sets out to make Aristotle consonant with Christian dogma, as, indeed, it is still sometimes thought that the entire work of St. Thomas was, in M. Gilson's phrase, *une vaste entreprise apologétique*. M. Maritain finds his answer in terms of a distinction between the *nature* of philosophy and the conditions of its actual existence in the human subject, its genesis and exercise. Philosophy as such is 'completely rational, no argument from faith penetrates its texture . . . it is dependent on the Christian faith neither in regard to its object nor in regard to its principles and methods.'

When, on the other hand, one views philosophy *dans son état dans le sujet humain* the case is different. There is, indeed, a danger of isolating philosophy, of separating it from the complete personality, of making the philosopher a mere hypostatized philosophy, for *s'il n'y a plus d'homme, il n'y a plus de philosophie*. The Thomist is urgent in asserting the 'vital solidarity' without which thought is weak and academic. The relation, therefore, of philosophy to theology and to the faith, whether by way of objective or of subjective assistance, is very close. (It is, of course, always assistance: philosophy is never curbed; on the contrary, it is spurred on to a greater activity in its own sphere.) And in this sense, the phrase 'Christian philosophy' is far from meaningless. But always the *nature* of philosophy remains unchanged, its exclusively rational character and its autonomy unchallenged.

There is an appendix on the special question of the nature of apologetic, and another on moral philosophy—the notion of a natural ethic and of moral philosophy *adéquatement prise*, i.e., concerning itself with man's last end and the way thereto as the faith and theology show them to be; a science, therefore, subordinated (subaltern, in the scholastic phrase) to theology, while remaining distinct from moral theology. This latter note, which occupies sixty pages of the book, is not easy reading, particularly for those unacquainted with Thomist phraseology, and might well have been more simply expressed, though it is only fair to add that it is addressed, with an apology for its technicality, to specialists.

The idea of a Christian philosophy has been recently the subject of vigorous debate in France, and M. Maritain's essay is an exposition of the Thomist point of view. But its importance is not confined to a particular discussion: the relation of philosophy to faith is a fundamental question upon which it is always too easy to take up a false position.

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