

REVIEWS

FAITH AND HISTORY, by Reinhold Niebuhr. (Nisbet; 16s.)

Dr Niebuhr's latest book develops the theme that Christ is the meaning of history. This demands an examination of the classical, the Biblical Christian, and the modern conceptions of history, and a contrasting of the ideas implicit in them. In the classical conception 'a rigorous effort is made to disassociate what is regarded as a timeless and divine element in human nature from the world of change and temporal flux'; history is thus conceived as a cyclical process, and is equated with nature, and the endless recurrence of all things. The modern idea sees progress as the 'redemptive' factor in human affairs; it is hermetically secularist, and fatally exaggerates the creative power of human freedom. Christian faith by contrast conceived history 'meaningfully as a drama and not as a pattern of necessary relationships which could be charted scientifically'. The clue to the meaning of the drama is Christ, in whom the divine power 'which includes the power of the divine love overcomes man's sin or rebellion against God'. The meaning of history thus lies beyond history; a mere philosophy of history is insufficient—a theology of history is needed to 'make sense' of the universal scheme of life and history.

It must be confessed that the foregoing synopsis gives no idea of the quality of the book, the interest and merit of which lies in the author's power of analysis and criticism. Dr Niebuhr's temper of mind is uncompromisingly Protestant, and Catholic doctrine is one of the main targets of his attack. That attack is here mainly levelled against Catholic moral teaching, and one must admit that many current expositions are unhappily rationalistic in tone, reducing questions to a discussion of primary and secondary precepts of the natural law, and ignoring the light which faith itself sheds on moral problems. There is certainly need for a more integral approach to moral philosophy, and Dr Niebuhr who quotes Maritain on the Natural Law might well consult him on the subject of a moral philosophy 'adequately considered' (cf. *Science and Wisdom*, pp. 174 *et. seq.*) His criticism of Catholic teaching on birth-control is a little difficult to understand, as when he writes, 'there are always historically contingent elements in the situation which natural law theories tend falsely to incorporate into the general norm, and there are new emergents in the human situation which natural law theories tend to discount, because their conception of an immutable human nature cannot make room for them'. But surely the practice of birth control is one of those 'historically contingent elements' which

Catholic moral teaching rejects, not merely because of a 'certain immutability in human nature', but because 'nature' constitutes an order divinely established with its own ends and purposes, of which man is not the unqualified master, but the servant and the instrument. The ends of nature are many, and unequal in value and importance, but it will be granted that the generation of human life is among the highest of nature's ends and purposes. When we shave our faces we act contrary to nature's purposes, but we do so without sinning because we act in pursuit of a higher end than nature's vegetative purposes. But the use of contraceptives is a sin against nature, and the natural law, because sexual intercourse has for its *dominant, natural and divine purpose* the procreation and conservation of the human species, and here man has only that limited mastery which the exercise of a *virtuous* free will gives him. The difficulty which the Church's teaching on this question presents to most modern parents is, it may be observed, just another of those 'historically contingent elements' which the Church refuses to 'incorporate into the general norm'. Dr Niebuhr makes the just and timely observation that there is a clear development in papal doctrine on the subject of private property, between the time of Leo XIII and Pius XI, the latter admitting the expedience of state ownership of certain forms of property, which the former had seemed to condemn outright. But it seems a little less than generous to blame Leo XIII for not foreseeing the rise and spread of Marxism, and the full development of the industrial revolution into the mass society of the 20th century. Not all encyclicals are creative documents and Popes are doubtless men of their time, taking many of its assumptions for granted. It is the papal function to record and give authority to a development in doctrine, which must establish itself to some extent in open debate. It is the lack of that debate among us at the present time which is to be so much deplored. A perpetual waiting on papal initiative is a sign of inferior Catholicism, as it would also be not to recognise in Dr Niebuhr's book the work of a profound mind and a deeply sincere Christian spirit.

R. VELARDE.

RITUAL MAGIC, by E. M. Butler. (Cambridge University Press; 25s.)

Dr Butler's latest work traces the history of ritual magic—by which is meant the attempt of men to impose their will on the spirit world through the medium of rituals. Dr Butler is not so much concerned with anthropological data and psychological theory, as with the interpretation of ritual texts. The great merit of her work is that from it an impartial reconstruction can be made of the functions and purpose of the magician, which are distinguished rather by their selfish folly, than