

REVIEWS

THE FAITH AND PRACTICE OF AL-GHAZALI. By W. Montgomery Watt. (Allen and Unwin; Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West; 9s. 6d.)

This volume consists of a translation from the original Arabic of two books of Al-Ghazali (the Algazel of the thirteenth-century Scholastics): an autobiography and a manual of practical worship and meditation. It is probably on this account that Dr Watt has chosen to call it, rather ambiguously, the Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali.

Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the greatest theologian of Islam, was well-known to the Latin scholastics, from Roger Bacon to St Thomas Aquinas, but only in his capacity as an expositor of Aristotle—a capacity from which, as his autobiography shows, he later recanted with extreme violence. The genuine Al-Ghazali of Islamic theology, in fact, resembles St Augustine rather than Aristotle to a striking degree, both in the intensity of his awareness of God and of man's powerlessness without him and in the circumstance that, like the Bishop of Hippo, he has recorded in an eloquent and moving manner the story of his religious life and of his conversion. But unlike the great Platonic Father, Al-Ghazali turned before long against philosophy in general and Hellenism in particular with such violence that this attack resulted in the dethronement of reason and the final overthrow of philosophy in the Muslim world.

A prolific author, Al-Ghazali has composed numerous works on a variety of subjects ranging from logic to mysticism. But of this vast output, perhaps the Confessions (which form the first part of the present volume) are the most beautiful and interesting for the student of religion in general and of the psychology of conversion in particular. For in it we are told, eloquently and sincerely, the story of the soul which is beset by doubt in its yearning for God and which finds its ultimate rest in the recovery of belief through the gracious outpouring of the divine light.

The first translation of these Confessions into a European language dates back to 1842. In that year a French Orientalist, A. Schmölders, produced on the basis of a very corrupt text a well-written and readable French version, which shows what a remarkable thing is the gift for intelligent translation. The first English translation, which dates back to 1909, is due to Claud Field; but the text of the work in question was not critically edited until 1939. Dr Watt's new translation is based on this edition and that is, perhaps, the main justification for undertaking it afresh.

From the general introduction and the translator's preface, it appears that the book is intended primarily for the general reader. Accordingly it is written in a readable idiom and is free from unnecessary glosses. There are however a number of cases where the idiom is peculiar, due

either to too close an adherence to the original or to a certain looseness in expression. Of the former type are such phrases as 'this argument turns back against yourself' (p. 50) and 'the glass of his naïve beliefs is broken' (p. 27) (which means that his original faith is shaken); and of the latter type are such expressions as 'authority-based opinions' (p. 21) and 'second-hand belief' (p. 19) and 'my ego hesitated a little about the reply' (p. 24). In a number of places the point of the Arabic is missed altogether; for example, 'da'wat' is rendered as 'claim' (p. 49) whereas this is the equivalent of a different word, a quasi-homonym 'da'wa'. 'Wusul' (arriving or attaining) is rendered as 'connection' (p. 61)—which corresponds to an entirely different word from the same root. Where the Arabic should read to mean 'actively obstructed my designs' the translator has misread it, owing to the normal absence of vowel-signs in Arabic texts, to mean: 'altered the aspect of my purpose', which is precluded altogether, in fact, by the use of the preposition. There are a few more such mistranslations, but it must be confessed in all fairness that they are very rare indeed.

The second part of the volume embodies a series of instructions on such matters of practical worship as the manner of entering a mosque, the way in which one should meditate at various times of the day, as well as a sort of litany. Here a truly Christian spirit is reflected, as illustrated in a section devoted to meditation on our sins and the examination of our conscience (p. 105), in a manner which is quite out of keeping with the official Islamic attitude to ritual. The last part of this tract which embodies a series of instructions on our dealings with our fellow men, our duties towards our parents and teachers, etc.—although it logically forms a complement to the former part which concerns our dealings with God—is omitted altogether on the ground that it 'is probably not authentic' (p. 152). The present reviewer confesses that he is not convinced by the arguments advanced by Dr Watt in a periodical article in support of this thesis.

MAJID FAKHRY

ANGLICAN PUBLIC WORSHIP. By Colin Dunlop, Dean of Lincoln.
(S.C.M. Press; 7s. 6d.)

Seeing and hearing the great Coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey will have been a revelation to many Catholics, not hitherto aware of the liturgical dignity of Anglican worship. The Book of Common Prayer and the Coronation rite, which in its present form follows a Prayer Book pattern, are both largely derived from Catholic sources, and they are un-Catholic, for the most part, only in a negative sense: in what is omitted from or expurgated in those sources. What they express positively relates them very distinctly to the family of traditional Catholic worship, so that what has been excluded is apt to pass unnoticed.