

REVIEWS

THE MEANING OF MASS : DOGMATIC AND DEVOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS UPON THE DIVINE LITURGY. By Bede Frost. (A. R. Mowbray; 3/6.)

This is a valuable addition to devotional works upon the Roman Mass by an Anglican religious who regards it as the most perfect liturgical expression of worship in Western Christendom. The Ordinary and Canon are treated of in a shrewd commentary, modern in idiom and illustration, which carries one forward over the familiar ground with a new sense of the immeasurable treasures that are to be found in it. From first to last the Christological note receives due emphasis, whilst St. Thomas's Eucharistic Treatise is used with the art that conveys real illumination. Here and there the lyric imagery of the style, which at times seems out of harmony with the sober splendour and concision of the Roman Liturgy, betrays the author into inaccuracies which can easily be remedied in another edition. The last Chapter treats of the Thomistic doctrine of substance, and should prove an adequate corrective to those whose notions of the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence are tinged with materialism.

A book so lively and captivating will help all who read it to discover in Holy Mass the true centre of their worship and prayer. The author's personal love for the Roman Liturgy clearly springs from a knowledge that is not altogether academic: his fine sense of delicacy has prompted him to omit letters designating a religious profession that might ruffle some of his Catholic readers.

AELWIN TINDAL-ATKINSON, O.P.

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

MEDIÆVAL RELIGION studied in Four Essays, followed by Essays on The Origin of the Romantic Tradition and The Vision of Piers Plowman. By Christopher Dawson. (Sheed & Ward; 6/-.)

The opinion that the middle ages represent a static period in European history was long ago rejected; but it is only just becoming understood, that they were a time of constant renovation and revision both for institutions and doctrines. Mr. Dawson rightly assumes that religion was the dominant concern of the human intelligence during these centuries. He seeks to discover how the Christian conscience, directed by the Church, reacted to the new modes of life and thought that were produced either by internal developments of Latin Christendom or more frequently by influences from without. We are compelled to a greater admiration of the so-called

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ages of faith when we see how perplexing they were in reality. Repeatedly confronted by novelties, philosophers and ecclesiastics displayed tenacity and boldness in clinging to theological tradition while exploiting the metaphysical and scientific possibilities of new theories. Viewed in this light, mediæval culture appears as a series of constantly renewed, but always uneasy, compromises. When the results of this synthesis are considered, it is striking how frequently the original and beautiful features can be traced to the action of the specifically Christian spirit. To what extent the refinement of philosophy and science were damaged by the intrusion of religion, and how much religion suffered by entering these spheres, are questions admitting varying answers. Supported by several convincing examples, Mr. Dawson argues that as far as literature was concerned, the art definitely benefitted by admitting the religious element, which raised it from the rude or sensuous to a new aesthetic plane : and he observes that the blending of Christian morality and literary genius seldom produced such good results after the reformation. Though the advantage to philosophy and science was dubious, the leavening of both by the Christian spirit saved the Middle Ages from the sterile and exhausting conflicts of religious sensibility with intellectual and scientific materialism.

Throughout the book the author reveals a remarkable knowledge of facts, which is sustained by a really profound scholarship. It is perhaps in the essay on the *Origins of the Romantic Tradition* that his talent for historical insight is best exhibited. This essay is a readable summary of recent theories concerning the civilization of Languedoc and its subsequent influence on the rest of Europe : Mr. Dawson judiciously accentuates the importance of Arabic and Mozarabic Spain as a source of much that we have come to regard as typical of Christian chivalry. The essay on the Vision of Piers Plowman is probably the least satisfactory. The work of Langland is treated in too great isolation without sufficient regard for the very general prevalence of the 'ploughman myth' in Europe, a subject dealt with by Konrad Burdach in his three volumes on the *Ackermann aus Boehmen*.

The impression made by this collection of essays, is that Mr. Dawson possesses a genius for happy generalizations, and can state with admirable clarity and charm, the opinions with which he may sympathize.

C. A. J. ARMSTRONG.