

REVIEWS

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

SUMMA THEOLOGIAE MORALIS. Vol. III. By B. H. Merkelbach, O.P. (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer ; pp. 960 ; Fr. 40.)

MANUALE THEOLOGIAE MORALIS. Vol. II. By L. Wouters, C.S.S.R. (Bruges : Beyaert ; pp. 842. With Vol. I, Belgian Fr. 195.)

ÉTUDES DE THÉOLOGIE MORALE. By T. Richard, O.P. 1—Le Plus Parfait. 2—De la Probabilité, à la Certitude Pratique. (Paris : Desclée de Brouwer ; pp. 354 ; Fr. 20.)

The two preceding volumes of Fr. Merkelbach's course of moral theology have already been praised in *Blackfriars* (July, 1932). This third volume on the sacraments seems, on a cursory inspection, to have the good qualities of its predecessors, both of which have stood the test of constant use by a lecturer in moral theology. The teaching is kept in close connection with philosophy and dogma ; practice is not separated from theory. The author writes from many years of pastoral experience and of teaching theology, at the Seminary of Liège, the Dominican Theological College at Louvain, the Angelico. He has already written a series of books dealing with special questions of pastoral theology, and now he has completed a text-book of moral theology in the best tradition, both as regards firmness of principle and accuracy of application. The temper is strict, but not narrow. It is not in the least one of those manuals which present moral theology as an organized body of prohibitions, which appear more interested in the vices than the virtues and chiefly concerned to extend permissions as far as they will go without sin, which, in short, produce an impression of something petty and mean-spirited.

Fr. Wouters's volume covers the same ground as Fr. Merkelbach's. His manner is brisker, his interests more positive and legal. The fact that he adds a special treatment on ecclesiastical penalties—the sanctions of the Christian life—is not without significance, for though he has the merit of relating morality to philosophy and dogma, his treatment is not so spacious, so metaphysical, so intrinsic to his subject as Fr. Merkelbach's. It is the difference, if you like, between St. Alphonsus and St. Thomas. Or the difference may be suggested by saying that Fr. Wouters is the handier for reference, Fr. Merkelbach the better worth study. The contrast must not be over-emphasized, but it is not unjust. It is natural for a Dominican to feel more at home with the latter, yet both works are warmly recommended.

BLACKFRIARS

Fr. Richard considers two special questions, the force of the counsels and the nature of practical moral truth. With the attraction of the more perfect not rarely comes the thought that it would be a sin to refuse it. This subject calls for clear decision, great delicacy and deep understanding, not the unexplained affirmations of some spiritual books. Fr. Richard's study should be of the greatest value for spiritual direction. He deals with the relations of precept and counsel; his conclusions avoid false heroism on the one hand and spiritual stodginess on the other.

The subject of the second study is more for the technical theologian. Concrete cases are often baffling to moral science, especially when the conscience is faced with a conflict of opinions on a particular point of action. Since the seventeenth century, the course of moral theology has been strewn with wreckage from various systems that set out to discover a way of solving moral doubt. Fr. Richard opens a way that is at once more direct and more closely developed from the natural dynamism of human action than is possible to a system of reflex and quasi-judicial principles.

T.G.

IN CHRIST. By Fr. Cuthbert, O.S.F.C. CHRISTIANUS. By Abbot Vonier, O.S.B. Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 5/- each.)

The chief merit of Fr. Cuthbert's book lies not, as the publishers suggest, in a 'notable addition to the theology' of the doctrine of Christ's Mystical Body (which is not justified, *cf.* Summa Theologica, 3a : III : 8) but in his insistence on the rôle of human free-will in the work of personal sanctity. He surely does not exaggerate when he says that the life of sanctity which is open to all, is entered upon only by the few. Progress in sanctity is measured by the willingness with which man gives himself to Christ and to the influence of grace in the Sacraments. Fr. Cuthbert describes the position which Christ occupies in relation to man's sanctification. He is at once the image of the perfect man and the source of grace which alone can restore that image in fallen humanity. The Christian life is a constant striving to reproduce the life of Christ in order to approach to that ideal which has the divine sanction. Fr. Cuthbert writes with simplicity and with a wealth of illustration from the Gospels and the epistles of St. Paul.

In *Christianus*, a study of the ideal Christian in practical life, Abbot Vonier displays that same theological accuracy and penetration of a problem that characterizes all his writings. A short essay on Discipleship gives the key-note for the seventeen essays that follow. The nature of Christian discipleship,