

THE INTERIOR CARMEL. By John C. H. Wu. (Sheed and Ward; 12s. 6d.)

East and West meet and blend in this book. It is an illustration of the universality of holiness. Dr Wu, a convert Chinese lawyer, diplomat, professor, 'made himself the pupil of some of the outstanding authorities on theology' in Rome, and in 1949 began to teach Chinese philosophy at the University of Hawaii, thus deepening his knowledge of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. These strongly reminded him of the three ways of Christian asceticism and mysticism. Thus when he came to teach mysticism and Thomistic philosophy at the School of Religion affiliated to the same University he was able to draw the impressive parallel between the way of perfection so persistently sought in the East and the way of perfection taught by Christ. This book incorporates the substance of these lectures. It must be unique among spiritual reading books.

Dr Wu has observed and collected, over many years, the sayings of saints and sages in East and West, has seen how they fit into his pattern of thought and holiness (for it is quite evident that he practises what he preaches) and here weaves them into a lecture pattern of which the three classic ways of the spiritual life are the basic design. The presentation is superficially academic but the author's style and manner convert the neatly divided treatise into a kind of long causerie. It is just a kind, gentle, quiet talk, from a learned, holy gentleman who is full of his subject. Of Chaucer it was written: '... his terms were not dark, but pleasant, easy and plain, no word he spoke in vain.' Dr Wu is rather like that, compared with some text-books.

There is always a faint suspicion, hovering in the mind, ready to pounce, when one reads an Eastern writer, that the spiritual life will be reduced to a psychological training, a super-asceticism, a mental technique. Dr Wu shows, though not of set purpose, how the Christian version of this is the science of the saints. The technique is but the craft of simplicity and suffering, the skill of those who have learnt to be children.

Quotations abound. Sometimes they seem almost naive—as when he quotes Evelyn Underhill on 'natural' and 'supernatural'; but one comes to see he that is merely picking up apt confirmations of his thought from every source that comes to hand, finding good in everything.

There is a very interesting analogy, taken from Dr Paul Sih, on page 244. 'A worthwhile and satisfactory painting job usually calls for three coats of paint, first sealing, then priming and finally finishing. The first coat which is usually done with shellac is to cover the scars and fill up the cracks and crevices of the surface. The second coat is to prime the surface with colour which is smooth and lovely but which gives no brightness. It is only the third coat that brings out the

beautiful undertones and gives a long-lasting bright finish. Although the effects of these three coats are quite different—the first is for orientation; the second fortification; the third, perfection—the need for covering the whole ground in each coating is the same and no single inch may be neglected. Of course the finishing touch is most difficult and calls for more time and skill. I wonder whether these three coats of paint may not be likened respectively to the purgative way, the illuminative way and the unitive way . . .'. Dr Wu's approving comments develop the thought and connect it with the cycle of the liturgical year, Advent to Epiphany, Septuagesima to Passiontide, Easter to Advent.

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THROUGH HIM AND WITH HIM AND IN HIM by Venantius Buessing, O.F.M.CAP. (J. F. Wagner, New York and B. Herder, London; 25s.)

'Father, we might have just as well stayed at home and read a book. If you ever will be appointed to give retreats, never read, but preach your retreat well-prepared, in plain and simple words, from the heart, and your words will reach the hearts of the hearers.'

The author of these retreat conferences—for such is this book—quotes this piece of advice given him by 'a very saintly and scholarly Capuchin' at the end of a retreat which had been read rather than preached to them. The old Capuchin had spoken wisely and to the point. There is more to a retreat than a series of well-prepared, coordinated lectures, delivered with perfect tone and emphasis, with just the correct word on every occasion to express the variants of meaning. There must be the personal contact with the man himself. He must, of course, speak the truth and offer solid food for thought; the appeal is to the mind and will, and not to the emotions only. Ultimately, it is his conviction of that truth, his evident love of it, and outward living of it, that will leave an impression and effect something worthwhile and lasting in his hearers.

These conferences are printed as they were preached; 'simple language on a subject most sublime'. Something of the author's intense love, and zeal, and sincerity comes through in these pages. And yet it is not true of Fr Venantius—unfortunately for this book of his conferences—that we would profit as much by reading him as by hearing him: the man himself is so evidently more effective and compelling than his words.

This book, then, will be of most value to those who have had the good fortune to have listened to a retreat by Fr Venantius. But it would be ungenerous to say that it will be of no profit to anyone else. The conferences make no claim to be a treatise on speculative theology.