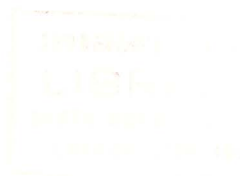


Volume VIII Number 2

Autumn 1985

KING'S

Theological Review



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KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

**The Journal of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies,
King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS.**

**Editorial Board: Colin Gunton
Brian Horne
Grace Jantzen
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Published twice yearly, spring and autumn.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES (including postage), 1985 and 1986

Individual subscribers	U.K.	£4.00	
	Overseas	£5.00	(\$11.00)
	Air Mail	£7.50	(\$18.00)
Institutional subscribers	U.K.	£6.00	
	Overseas	£8.00	(\$16.00)
	Air Mail	£10.00	(\$25.00)

Orders should be sent to The Business Manager, King's Theological Review, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS.

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KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW is indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, ATLA, Chicago and the indexing and abstracts are available online through BRS (Bibliographical Retrieval Services) of Latham, New York.

WHITHER OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY?

R. E. CLEMENTS

This year has witnessed the publication of two substantial volumes on the subject of the history of the discipline of Old Testament theology. The first, by John H. Hayes and F. C. Prussner,¹ deals with an outline history of the subject's development since the early 17th century and the second, by Henning Graf Reventlow,² concerns itself with 20th century developments only, but deals with issues more thematically. Together the volumes provide ample material for reflection and, in their separate ways, serve to reflect much of the variety of viewpoint and uncertainty that pervades the subject at the present time. They also alert the serious student of the subject to many of the great disparities and disagreements that have hovered over the subject, particularly in the present century. In fact, although Graf Reventlow's title points to the problems inherent in the subject, it is not altogether out of court to suggest that the subject itself has become something of a problem in its own right. Clearly it does exist as a subject, since so many have written in pursuit of it, but it still needs to be asked by what kind of academic authority it exists and what kind of aims it may be thought to serve. By starting so far back Hayes and Prussner intrude into a period of Christian theology when it has to be asked whether there really was any Old Testament theology at all within the confines that the subject may be thought to demand for the modern day student. Christian Protestant theology was required to be biblical in a sense that stretched across both Testaments and much that was really quite essential to the use and treatment of the Old Testament was necessarily linked to the question of the relationship between the two Testaments. In fact, until the impetus grew for a more rigidly historically controlled approach to biblical theology towards the close of the 18th century, the idea of producing an entirely separate and distinct Old Testament theology did not properly arise.³ It is also noteworthy that, when it did arise, it very quickly lost ground and support again during the 19th century in favour of critical attempts to reconstruct historically a history of ancient Israel's religion. No doubt it is true that, in their several ways, these histories made all kinds of theological assumptions, but they did set very clear and desirable goals. Nor can one fail to note, in researching through the relatively few volumes that appeared with the title "Theology of the Old Testament", that they reflected a rather conservative, and in some degree almost pietistic, approach to the material. Much of their *raison d'être* was undoubtedly provided by a deeply felt concern to achieve some sort of rapprochement between the critical approach to the literature of the Old Testament, which was powerfully compelling re-assessments of its historical and literary origins, and the older and more traditional religious concerns with the Bible and the theological expectations which it has aroused. To this extent it cannot be dismissed as too arbitrary and cavalier a suggestion to regard almost all the Old Testament theologies that appeared in the 19th century as rather cautious, and in varying degrees, conservative, attempts to bridge the older knowledge about the Old Testament with the new critical insights that represented the vanguard of serious research. There is much to favour giving most attention therefore to the issues raised by the search for an Old Testament theology in the 20th century, which is what Graf Reventlow offers to the reader.

It is noteworthy that this latter volume takes a moderately firm and positive approach to its subject, pointing to problems that have been thrown up from within the various theologies that have appeared and noting only the broader context of the fundamental assumptions that are raised by it. There are however certain very basic features that come to the fore in reflecting back over four centuries of use of the Old Testament in Christian theology in the manner that Hayes and Prussner do. Perhaps we may note here a very obvious point, which may nevertheless be so obvious as to be overlooked. This is that the very title "Old Testament" theology raises the issue of why this first part of the biblical canon can be described as "Old" and what precisely is meant by this. Clearly it is on the one hand a term of relationship, contrasting the first with the second division of the biblical canon. It is also an allusion to the supersession of the old Mosaic covenant, or testament, made on Mount Sinai, with the new covenant made possible for the Christian Church through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Lk.22:20). An emphasis upon the distinctness and separation of the theological content of the Old Testament from that of the New therefore contrasts very strongly with the earlier emphasis upon the unity of the Bible, which in many and varied ways formed so prominent a characteristic of both Catholic and Reformed assumptions in biblical interpretation. This is not merely being concerned with a verbal quibble, but does point to a number of in-built difficulties and tensions for the subject of an Old Testament theology right from the outset. How are the two Testaments related to each other and how are we to trace the ideational connections between them, as distinct from the purely historical conjunction? All along this has beset the would-be Old Testament theologian with a painful choice in the way in which he endeavours to fulfil his task.⁴ Either he, or she, can put the New Testament completely out of consideration and concentrate on the contents of the first part of the canon without reference to it, or, alternatively try to bring in some limited engagement with the themes and ideas of the New Testament without infringing a true awareness that these originated later, and in a new religious context. Either way the fact of the New Testament poses a dilemma for the Old Testament theologian because it is the existence of this later material which renders the Old Testament "Old" in the theological sense that categorises its contents. Nor can the fact of Judaism and the Jewish interest in this literature provide more than a limited assistance since here this literature does not form an Old Testament at all but rather remains the Hebrew Bible, the primary source documents of its faith which retains its authority and validity. In any case the particular form of an "Old Testament theology" has never approved itself to Jewish scholars and writers as a suitable way of interpreting the source documents of its faith.

The goal of raising these points is simply to try to highlight the fact that both from a religious and historical point of view it was the intense interest in the historical antiquity of the ideas and themes presented to us in the Old Testament which generated a new concern in a distinctive subject of an Old Testament theology. This awareness certainly retains its validity, but it needs now to be asked concerning the extent to which this sense of historical antiquity attaches to the Old Testament in a way, and to a degree, which cannot be said to be true of the New Testament. In a strictly historical sense this latter also belongs to a past era of human civilisation which was markedly different from our modern day world. Nor has this fact escaped the attention and concern of scholars to a

quite significant extent in current research. The view that gained much currency and popularity among theologians in the latter half of the 19th century – that the historical-critical approach to the Bible has weakened and undermined the sense of a divine revelation in the Old Testament, but has not affected the New Testament in the same way – must be regarded as a very doubtful assumption. In all essentials the historical-critical approach to the biblical sources affects both Testaments more or less equally. Even more emphatically we must insist that it is fundamental to the New Testament in all its writings to claim that the revelation of God which it presents is wholly continuous with, and foretold by, the revelation which God has given in the Old Testament.

This brings us back to certain convictions that I endeavoured to adumbrate earlier in my book *Old Testament Theology. A Fresh Approach*.⁵ These are that the various aspects of the question concerning the relationship of the New Testament to the Old belong very firmly within the subject of an Old Testament theology. Furthermore the awareness that Judaism as we know it historically, and Christianity as it emerged during the early centuries of our era, represent two different ways of responding to the ideas and expectations engendered by the Old Testament literature also deserves consideration in an Old Testament theology. We can proceed to note a further feature which also needs not to be overlooked if we are concerned about a future for the subject of Old Testament theology. This is that, just as there has emerged a kind of pause in the rush to produce further volumes of Old Testament theology, there has arisen a strengthened and intensified interest in the question of hermeneutics and the assumptions and principles by which the biblical material is to be interpreted for the modern reader.⁶ Part of this has been stimulated from circles of literary concern with the Bible, but part also has found support from the knowledge that, since the Bible continues to be read, it is important to show such readers how it can and should be interpreted.⁷ This too raises theological issues, and in practice it must be insisted that it is not truly practicable to divorce hermeneutical from theological questions. Although therefore there is a strong, and often thoroughly justifiable, contention on the part of overtly literary approaches to the Bible that these offer a “neutral” position so far as theological questions are concerned and that theological exegesis has frequently been guilty of lamentable failure to grasp the true nature of biblical texts, these points can only carry a modicum of weight. It can no more serve the needs of those who read the Bible to adopt an exclusively secular “literary” approach than for those whose interests are theological to ignore the literary nature of the texts in which they are looking for theology. The fact that in the past some false assumptions and crude misinterpretations have appeared does not invalidate the fact that both ways of approaching the material can usefully contribute to each other. The questions of hermeneutics and the questions of theology overlap with each other. Here too then is a further area of importance for the Old Testament theologian of the future to consider. The literary character of the Old Testament necessarily determines much of what it conveys by way of ideas about God, man, the world and the nature and possibilities of human destiny.

If we look back over approximately two centuries of attempts to produce a clear and consistent Old Testament theology therefore, since the time when J. S. Semler and J. P. Gabler pressed the claims for a sharper line of division

between the contents of the Bible and the use that is made of this in Christian theology, then certain prominent features can be discerned. The first of these is that there has been a sharp tendency to over-dramatise and over-value the purely historical dimension of research. This is wholly understandable when we look at the way in which the European Enlightenment initiated a whole new dimension of historical study. Good as this has been, one can clearly have too much of a good thing even in biblical studies. Other aspects of the biblical material deserve more consideration than they have, at times, been given. The second prominent feature is that, once historical research began to make a deep impression into a number of traditional assumptions about the Bible, Old Testament theology seemed to be one way of softening the impact of this. In consequence a strongly defensive and conservative trend has therefore consistently re-appeared in efforts to sustain interest in the Old Testament by presenting its contents as a theology. Whether this has been a good idea is questionable, and it is far from clear that Old Testament theologies have really represented the vanguard of Old Testament research. The third point has been that, since the Old Testament exists as a literature which retains, even in the present, a primary attraction for people on account of its religious interest and associations, we cannot properly ignore this religious commitment. How to read the Old Testament, when suggested as a guide for the well intentioned reader, requires something of a religious sensitivity and outlook since the documents that are to be found in it emanate from a culture which was through and through religious in its assumptions. If on the one hand we have been able to claim that Old Testament theologies have seldom represented the most significant and popularly engaging literature about the Old Testament, it is also true in the other direction that rather self-consciously secular and non-theological approaches to it have failed to grasp and convey its true meaning.

We may also, in looking back over approximately two centuries of attempts to write an Old Testament theology, feel that many of the most interesting insights into it have arisen from what theologians and philosophers who have not been specifically trying to write an Old Testament theology have had to say about it. In the 19th century, for example, the impact of F. D. E. Schleiermacher upon the understanding of this literature has been significant, even if largely negative. So also, in the 20th century, has been the influence of R. Bultmann.⁸ Nor does the catalogue of those who have aroused a considerable level of re-awakened concern with the Old Testament end at the frontiers of theology in the narrower sense. Here we should certainly draw attention to a feature that has all too frequently been overlooked in surveys of the changing fortunes of biblical theology during the present century. This rests on the awareness that theology, as an intellectual discipline, has necessarily changed very considerably in its underlying aims and assumptions from what it regarded as proper to its task a century ago. This rests in part on the relinquishing of certain of its claims, and on its much deeper involvement in its social and human awareness of the role of religion in human conditions. It is no longer strange to find such themes as “theology and culture”, “the significance of the history of religion for theology”, and the whole question of the role of religion throughout the entire history of human civilisation as primary subjects demanding theological explanation and attention.

It is in this area that the intending Old Testament

theologian can draw greatest confidence and stimulus for continuing at his task. The insights and disciplines of Social Anthropology, the study of the History of Religion in an all-encompassing range, and the role that may be assigned to each individual religious tradition in searching for an answer to the question "What is Man?" point us back more firmly than ever towards grappling with the way in which these issues are raised in the Old Testament. Is it really too venturesome to claim therefore that a surprising reversal of roles has taken place between what pertained in the 19th century and what is true today, so far as the study of the Old Testament is concerned. A century ago the Old Testament appeared to the more venturesome and *avant garde* theology to be an encumbrance, and even a liability, to the inheritance of the Christian Church. With little real interest in any meaningful dialogue between Christians and Jews, a sense that the discovery of the complex, and in many ways self-evidently human, origins of the biblical literature prejudiced popular commitment to its authority, it is not surprising that some theologians argued openly that the Old Testament could be left aside. It was never really important to the Christian faith, and it had, at best, provided a useful support for earlier generations. Very many others simply came to a point of paying less and less attention to the Old Testament, and were careful to avoid making more than a very occasional explicit appeal to its writings. Now a great change has taken place in which the more searching and profound questions of theology which face the Christian faith are demanding more and more attention to the Old Testament inheritance of the Christian church. Where did the Christian idea of God derive from? Where did the Christian understanding of Church and community take shape? How should Christians relate their understanding of God to that of other faiths? All of these issues point more and more firmly to a serious Christian re-engagement with features that emerge from the Old Testament. When we ask questions about how the earliest Christians thought of themselves, how they framed their position towards political society, how they brought together a distinctive range of ethical ideas and social values and how they framed images of the origin and destiny of the universe, we are forced inevitably back to look at what the Old Testament has to bring to our attention on these questions.

It may appear immediately that the need to formulate theological ideas and propositions in relation to a broad set of social, anthropological and cultural concerns could be regarded as representing only one particular segment of the theological spectrum. It is in many respects a segment which has appeared to be removed by some distance from those areas which have more traditionally belonged to biblical theology. Yet it must be argued that this is yet another indication of the extent to which theology has changed during the past two centuries and which make the older demarcations between a biblical and a dogmatic theology almost stultifying and moribund. Clearly the Bible, and with this the whole historical Christian revelation, originated in an intellectual and social context which was very different from our own. Ideas of the supernatural, of the power and efficacy of religious rites, of the pervasive impact of holiness, of contrasts between the spirit and the flesh, and of the psycho-physical nature of humankind make the assumptions present in the biblical world-view appear very different from our own. To what extent they really are different, and to what extent they represent more superficial distinctions which are not so deep-seated once the surface level of words and images has been penetrated, is

a matter for further discussion. No doubt much will continue to be written in relation to such themes. The point that needs to be made here is that, once biblical theology reached the stage where it became clear that simply collecting together the various words and ideas to be found in the Bible and fitting them into a scheme failed to penetrate to the heart of the content of this literature, the need for the Old Testament becomes all the stronger.

It could always be claimed that, from a strictly historical point of view, the religion and literature of the New Testament alone represents a strikingly narrow base from which to understand the Christian religion. Not only is this true in the narrow historical sense of a chain of events, but it is also true in the deeper cultural and anthropological sense that, without the Old Testament, it is next to impossible to uncover where the ideas, values and fundamental assumptions of the New Testament about the world and the place of humanity upon it derive from. The Old Testament provides the New Testament with a dimension of depth, and it can no longer be calmly assumed that students of the New Testament can take this element of depth for granted. Increasingly we find that the questions put to theology about what it is and what it aims to achieve are questions which probe into this dimension of depth. The existence of a supernatural dimension to life, the superiority of monotheism to polytheism, the ethical nature of religion are merely some of the areas where traditional Christian answers can no longer be taken as self-evidently right, but stand in need of rethinking and fresh definition. Without the basis of the Old Testament from which the Christian tradition drew these convictions and beliefs the biblical scholar would find his resources severely curtailed.

We may single out some of the features which suggest that the future lines of interest and research in Old Testament theology may show some significant departures from what has hitherto been the case. Very prominently here we may draw attention to a point already made. Theology and hermeneutics belong together since there are so many areas in which the assumptions and aims of the one overlap with those of the other. It has been objected at times that the kinds of Old Testament theologies to which we have become accustomed are themselves based upon very particular and distinctive hermeneutical aims. Nor are these objections altogether wide of the mark, since much of the debate, for instance, about where the "centre" of the Old Testament faith is to be located can be regarded as itself belonging within the area of hermeneutics. If the Old Testament faith does not display a formal and explicit centre of its own, then it must lie to some extent in the aim of the interpreter to formulate what such a centre should be. Nor can the would-be Old Testament theologian be as complacent as some of this recent predecessors have been in dismissing as of no great account the history of the way in which the Old Testament has been understood until the rise of the historical-critical movement. Vague and eccentric as much of this has been, many of the basic assumptions that have shaped it have not been hard to find. Furthermore it should be re-asserted with as much vigour as possible that the goal of handling the Old Testament from a theological point of view is that of enabling all men and women, whether they profess a religious faith or not, to understand and appreciate what is to be found in the Old Testament.

It may be appropriate at this point to question whether what we should call "Old Testament Theology" in the sense that has come to be attached to such a discipline is

really the right and best way of fulfilling such a task. The very element of isolation and self-containedness which is implicit in such a title poses restraints and problems of its own. As we have already pointed out, such a title is not without its ambiguities since it draws attention to the fact that this Testament is construed as "Old" in a theological sense which can only be resolved by reference to the second part of the biblical canon. Where the theological insights and resources of the Old Testament come most clearly to the fore is in relation to many of the most central ideas and themes of the New Testament, of the Christian faith more widely, and of Judaism which appears as a sister religion to Christianity based on its Old Testament inheritance. There are many ways therefore in which the Old Testament can be used and developed theologically besides that of presenting it within a separate subject discipline peculiar to itself. We have sought to claim that, even though it was devised as a bridge discipline between the modern critical view of the biblical literature and its earlier use in the formulation of Christian doctrine, Old Testament theology has tended not to do this. It has, instead, become isolated and separated from both, so that it has appeared as one of the most esoteric of Christian pursuits.

One title has emerged with great frequency and popularity among a large number of biblical interpreters in recent years which also needs to be noted. This is that of "narrative theology", which recognizes that a story, or even an extended epic narrative, has been constructed or adapted to illustrate a religious point. This fact draws attention to the considerable amount of narrative story-telling material in the Bible. Although this is not the only class of literature to be found in it, it is undoubtedly the most prominent and most important. The absence of what we should recognize in the modern world as formal theologizing, or the presentation of theological propositions, in the Bible highlights the significance of this narrative story-telling form. Those who read the Bible and acquire from it a set of religious ideas and attitudes do so in an oblique fashion from what they discern in individual stories and then from the larger way in which these stories are brought together into a whole. This is yet a further reason why any worthwhile "Theology of the Old Testament" ought not to depart too far from the form in which the literature now actually appears. Hermeneutics and theologising belong in close relationship to each other and this aspect of the need to learn how to read a story so as to discern the point that it is actually trying to make is of great importance. Failure to do this must certainly be regarded as the worst consequence of the over-emphasis upon history and the reality of historical events in modern critical research so far as the pursuit of an Old Testament theology is concerned. I am not here wanting to advocate a kind of radical "mythologising" or abandonment of belief in the historicity of much that is contained in the Old Testament. Far from it. The point is rather that, in learning to read a biblical narrative with a critical eye, the concern with its historical factuality may represent only a small part of the meaning that it is endeavouring to convey. This is clearly so in regard to the story of the exodus from Egypt where, in the 15 biblical chapters which deal with the event, most of the interest focuses upon the nature and sovereignty of the Lord, the God of Israel. What this means in regard to oppressive tyranny, rival religious claims and the place of freedom in human society are spelt out very clearly in such a way as to push the concern with providentially ordained events to the very edges of narrative significance. An effective Old Testament theology must surely be fully aware of the need

to focus attention upon the theological implications of the Old Testament as a book of stories in the popular sense. In fact it may be suggested that the extraordinary extent to which a number of Old Testament theologies in the past have ignored the actual literary form of the material they are concerned to interpret has reflected a measure of self-defeating over-confidence on their part. If we are in the present being compelled to rethink why we need to use and interpret the Old Testament theologically, then it is as well that we should avoid making too many assumptions about the place that others accord to the subject.

In another field also we may expect to find some very different assessments and alignments of material in future work from those that have prevailed in the past. Especially here it is to be hoped that the trend towards establishing a sharp line of division between creation and history and between historical order and natural order, which appeared at one time to be so assured, will be reversed. No overall portrayal of the relationship between the human and the divine worlds, between God and humanity, and of a divine providence controlling the origin and destiny of all things, can really tolerate a sharp distinction between history and the natural order. So too it is clear that in what it has to say about the creation of the world the Bible is as much telling us about the way things are as it is concerned to explain the way things were. In this respect it is striking that the justifiable scientific interest in the origin of the universe, which began to emerge with the new physics in the 17th century and reached a kind of high-point with the debates about evolution in the mid-19th century, imposed a level of false expectation upon the biblical material dealing with the relationship between God and the natural world. Happily, with the need for strongly defensive positions past, biblical interpretation has moved forward to open up some of the most interesting, discerning and original areas of research in its studies of what the Bible has to say about creation and a divinely ordained world order. Here too then is a further reason for expecting the directions of future work in Old Testament theology to be different from those that have prevailed hitherto.

Finally it may be urged that the growing interest in Religious Studies as a subject with a range of disciplines extending far beyond those traditionally associated with the pursuit of Christian theology draws all the greater attention to the significance of the Old Testament. For most modern readers, whether academically inclined or not, the encounter with the Old Testament is the most direct and immediate, if not the only, encounter with the world of ancient religion. The intricacies of polytheism, the complex rules of holiness, the interaction of health, prosperity, fertility and the mysterious force of life itself are to be found here in a very clear and striking fashion. Contrastingly the fear of death, demonic powers, and disease all show how vital and all-pervasive was the need to discern the good and bad features which confronted every human being. From this perspective too therefore, it may be argued that the Old Testament has an irreplaceable role to fulfil in answering the question of "Why theology?" and why the pursuit of theology remains a vitally interesting and constructive part of the humane disciplines of the modern world.

NOTES

1. J. H. Hayes & F. C. Prussner, *Old Testament Theology. Its History and Development*, London, 1985.

2. H. Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Eng. Tr. J. Bowden, London, 1985.
3. Cf. R. Morgan, *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series 25), London, 1973; O. Merk, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments in ihrer Anfangszeit* (Marburger theologische Studien 9), Marburg, 1972. G. Hornig, *Die Anfänge der historisch-kritischen Theologie* (Forschungen zur systematischen Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 8), Lund - Göttingen, 1961.
4. This point is made by D. L. Baker, *Two Testaments. One Bible*, Leicester, 1976.
5. R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology. A Fresh Approach*, London, 1978.
6. The importance for theology of hermeneutical issues is well demonstrated by A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Understanding the Old Testament*, Eng. Tr. J. Bowden, London, 1978; J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament. Method in Biblical Study*, London, 1984.
7. The wide interest in the volume by R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York, 1981, should be noted. This has significant theological implications, even though it sets out to hold clear of dealing with specific theological questions.
8. In this regard note must be taken of the very stimulating collection of essays *The Old Testament and Christian Faith. A Theological Discussion*, ed. B. W. Anderson, New York, 1969, which focussed upon an essay by R. Bultmann.

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THE PROBLEM OF CHOICE

PETER VARDY

1. INTRODUCTION

Increasingly secondary school children are moving away from the traditional idea of Christian education into either a religious studies course covering the main world religions or a humanities course dealing with matters of general social concern, ethics, peace, studies and perhaps, although not always, religion as a part of this.

Children are often, therefore, not being taught Christianity as truth but as one amongst a number of available world religious options. There can be little doubt that this increases awareness and tolerance of different traditions and in a multi-ethnic and religious society this must be a good thing. However it leaves both children and teachers as well as the Churches with a problem. The religions are taught objectively – lessons deal with beliefs, rituals, worship, festivals and the like, but the different traditions are all looked at from the outside. If understanding a religion requires belief (a point that is arguable but which I will not debate here), then they are being given knowledge without understanding.

Most children faced with a choice of different religious traditions and increasingly lying outside any of them, they will tend to ignore them all and to see the religious perspective on life as a curiosity but one with little relevance to day to day living; the many problems of adolescence or the later challenges of earning a living and making a way through life. Even if children or adults do take the religious dimension seriously, how are they to choose between Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism or Hinduism – to say nothing of Communism and Humanism (which I will ignore here as being outside the “religious” dimension, although this is a point that might be argued by some)? This is a modern problem – few people in the past did not grow up within an established tradition and fewer still had access to knowledge about all the world religions, with their often contradictory claims and counter-claims. It is not surprising that the problem of choice seems an impossible one to resolve rationally. Even the minority of committed Christian believers are unsettled by not being able to justify their religion against the “competition” on grounds other than upbringing or social background.

This situation leads, inevitably, to an increasing tendency towards “Universalism” and the idea that all religions are different expressions of the same underlying, transcendent reality expressed in different ways by different people in different societies. This, in turn, leads to a reluctance to press the Christian claim to Truth and a willingness to move from the accepted basics of Christianity into a wider interpretation on the lines of Don Cupitt’s *Taking leave of God* or Stewart Sutherland’s *God, Jesus and Belief*.

The aim of this paper is to consider what criteria could be applied to help in the choice between religions and to consider the implications for education.

2. SOME CANDIDATES FOR A SELECTION PROCEDURE

There are various prime facie procedures that could be used to help in the choice between religions. These include:

(a) Moral criteria

Stewart Sutherland argues at the beginning of his book *God, Jesus and Belief* that any religious demand that does not accord with our moral imperatives should be rejected. He sets forth five criteria of which the second is:-

“A religious belief which runs counter to our moral beliefs is to that extent unacceptable.”

In our society, although morality is developing there is nevertheless a reasonably clear, if very general “Western European/North American liberal ethic” – humane, urbane and considerate. A religion which conflicts with this or runs counter to Kant’s Categorical Imperative in one or other of its formulations might, therefore, be rejected as inadequate. Thus worship of a God who might require the sacrifice of human children could be rejected on moral grounds. To be sure, this is a somewhat blunt instrument as most religions call for ethical striving and it would be hard to argue for Christianity, for instance, against Judaism or Buddhism. However, even if this criterion was considered to be helpful, there are considerable problems:-

1. Morality varies between different cultures and it is in any case heavily influenced by religion. There is a two-way interchange. The accepted morality within a culture will tend to favour the predominant religion in that culture. It is not, therefore, suitable as a universal test.
2. Morality is evolving rapidly. In the last twenty years attitudes in the West to divorce, homosexuality, the tolerance of other races and creeds and many other issues have changed radically. A morality that develops in this way is hardly suitable as a litmus test of religion.
3. Morality looks, at least partially, to religion for inspiration and guidance. Plato’s Euthyphro dilemma is still unresolved and what God is held to will as the good is considered important.
4. Religion can claim to transcend morality. Thus Soren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* can talk of the “Teleological Suspension of the Ethical” and the Knight of Faith, on his own, outside the “Universal” (morality) unsupported over 70,000 fathoms in a position of direct relationship to God such as the paradigm of Abraham and Isaac. If this possibility is to be preserved, morality cannot be the judge of religion.

It might be held that morality could be used to reject the claims of a Jim Jones (of Guyana fame) or of a Peter Sutcliffe, however this is a judgement from within a religious and cultural tradition about a claim to a special God-relationship. This is a useful and valid exercise, but it does not help in the same way with a choice between different religious systems. Morality does not, therefore, provide a litmus test for religions.

(b) Rational argument

There is widespread acceptance of the view that the traditional arguments for the existence of God do not

“work” in that they do not demonstrate God’s existence to a non-believer. At most they reinforce the belief of an existing believer and confirm him in his view that his faith is rational. Even if they did work, however, they arrive at a “first cause”. Aquinas recognised this and after his famous “five ways” he says “This is what everyone recognises as God”. What is less clear is whether it is Allah, Jahweh, the Hindu Pantheon or Zeus!

There is no philosophic argument that I know of that will demonstrate the truth of one religion as against the others. It is difficult enough to make a case for theism that rests on more than general probability. Richard Swinburne’s book *The Existence of God* is a case in point, where he goes through the various approaches trying to assess probability and then, in the final chapter, changes his methodology and throws all the weight onto religious experience. In a similar way Basil Mitchell (*The Justification of Religious Belief*) argues for a “cumulative case” and Hick, Mitchell, Hare, Wisdom and others give examples which emphasise that much depends on the perspective of the observer rather than on additional evidence. As Wisdom says in his “Gods” article “The existence of God is not an experiential issue in the way it once was”. It is questionable, in fact, whether the balance of probability has anything to do with assessing religious belief and the appropriateness of commitment. Religious commitment should be wholehearted and not tentative. It is not a matter of weighing facts and then coming to an objective assessment but subjectively appropriating and living the religion concerned. The problem is – which religion does one appropriate and live?

(c) Religious experience

When philosophic arguments for the existence of God fail, revelation is seen to work only within religious belief rather than to act as its support, and rational grounds come to an end, the believer will often appeal to religious experience to justify his faith. Here again, however, we do not have a test which will help in the choice between religions for the following reasons:-

1. All religions claim religious experiences and choosing which to believe on objective grounds is impossible. As David Hume so clearly showed in *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, the grounds for choosing to believe one set of claims rather than another are flimsy at best and a suspension of belief in all of them can be the most appropriate reaction.
2. Religious experiences can best be understood as occurring within a particular belief system rather than outside it. It is, for instance, very uncommon for a Hindu (or, indeed, a Protestant) to have a vision of the Virgin Mary – such a vision is far more likely to come to a Roman Catholic. The individuals need to have the concepts before they can see what they are experiencing in the terms of a particular tradition. Paul on the Damascus road already had all the concepts to enable him to have his particular experience. He was a devout Jew and had been persecuting Christians so would have known all about their ideas.
3. Most religious experiences are not sudden and dramatic. They rather fall into two main categories:-
 - a) Experiences of public events (such as the sky at night, a natural scene or the sea) in which the believer “sees” God, or
 - b) Private experiences which are relatively difficult to communicate.

To “see” God in the first case requires one to be within a particular religious tradition. The experience might well best be described as “an awareness of the transcendent” which a Christian or a Muslim will interpret as an experience of Allah or Yahweh and a Hindu, possibly, in pantheistic terms. Similarly private experiences are often relatively a-conceptual and depend on the viewpoint and background of the person having the experience. Religious experiences thus tend to confirm people in their existing faith rather than to act as faith’s foundation.

4. Religious experiences rarely come to those who do not participate in religious belief at least in some way. They are not usually “granted to” a disinterested observer trying to decide between the traditions. In this sense, teaching religion objectively to children makes it difficult for them to participate in any one belief system and therefore is likely to cut them off from a subjective awareness of God.

Religious experience does not, therefore, provide a means of deciding between religions except, possibly, to the individual who has had such an experience and for whom it may have been so vivid that doubt is impossible. However most people could not claim to have had such an experience and must therefore look elsewhere.

3) THE PROBLEM

We are faced with the situation, therefore, that for the outsider to religion, the obvious methods of deciding between religions do not help a great deal and adherence to one belief system rather than another appears to be largely a matter of the community in which one is brought up and educated. If this is indeed the case, the truth claims of Christianity are considerably devalued, as it then becomes a religion that is “right” for Europe and wherever European influence has extended. If this is all that Christianity is, then the Universalists have won the day unless, on the other hand, one takes the position (with David Hume) that all religions are to be equally rejected by an intelligent man.

For children and educated and questioning young people, the problem is even more acute. They are growing up in a world that is increasingly seen as “one”. In their College or University holidays, they may visit the Middle East, India or the Far East and see very different religions practiced with a dedication and fervour that is rare “back home”. It is not, perhaps, surprising that some are attracted away from Christianity to other religions and sects while for others all religions prove little more than a curiosity. For those who are not already firmly rooted in the Christian tradition, there may seem no particular reason for adherence to it. What arguments, then, can Christian theologians, teachers or believers put forward that might influence them or help them in their search? This can be answered at two levels —on the one side a “practical” response from a committed Christian and on the other a response from a philosopher. It is the latter approach I am interested in here.

A related problem revolves round the way religious teaching tends to be conducted today in many (but not all) schools. Teachers feel a need to be impartial and to teach objectively about different religions from a position outside

all of them. The Churches too often seem to assume that Christian education is still taking place in schools in the manner envisaged by the 1944 Education Act. Kierkegaard recognised and signposted this position in his separation of “objective” and “subjective” truth. Kierkegaard wrote between 1840 and 1855 in a Denmark that was almost wholeheartedly Christian, but his complaint was that this was a nominal and “objective” Christianity: a Christianity of Church goers who have learned their religion by rote, who went to Church once a week but did not carry it over into their daily lives by subjectively appropriating it for themselves. The parallels in England today are many, although in this country there are far fewer in percentage terms who are even objectively Christians. Kierkegaard saw his problem as being to woo each individual from an objective acceptance of Christianity to subjective acceptance which would then change their lives.

The problem for the Churches today is the same as that facing committed Christian teachers dealing with young people — only it is more obvious. Young people are taught the basic objective facts of Christianity, but this does not make them Christians. This demands a further step — into persuading them to appropriate Christianity for themselves and to commit themselves to it. It is hard enough persuading many to accept any sort of transcendent perspective, but how does one help the rational and questioning individual to not only accept a transcendent perspective on his or her life but to accept Christianity (or any other religion) as “The Truth”. The choices seem to be between the following:-

1. To accept Universalism and to say that all major religions point more or less equally to the Truth. Each religion, in a different way, points to the same, underlying “Ultimate Reality”. This is an increasingly common view today even though the central claims of the world’s religions conflict and bringing them together is very difficult. If it is possible, it is likely to be at a highly abstract level,
2. To regard religious beliefs as culturally determined and to abandon Christian claims to Truth or to a predominance of Truth. This might permit religion to be seen as providing an altered perspective on this life, in the way that Stewart Sutherland suggests that life can be seen “sub specie aeternitatis”,
3. To avow that the individual has the truth from God and that is cannot be justified or defended. If one takes this view, one is ceasing to do philosophy,
4. To devise some rational argument or at least to sketch the grounds on which a debate might be held which can be understood by the non-religious person and which will make the choice rational and not just a matter of upbringing.

It might, of course, be argued that religion is irrelevant and therefore should not be taught in schools other than as history. However if the aim of liberal education is to teach the “whole man”, then to ignore the religious dimension of life is to deprive the child of an important and possibly vital facet of human experience.

4) THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Epistemology is the study of the sources and foundations of knowledge. G.E. Moore in “In Defence of Common Sense” held up a hand and a pen and identified other simple objects and said that there were things that it made no sense to doubt, such as:-

- “I am a human being”
- “There is a living human body which is my body”
- “I have never been to the moon”
- “That is a bookcase”

Moore’s address was important as it showed that it was a mistake to look for foundations of knowledge. We cannot begin with undoubted “first principles” like Descartes’ “Cogito” or Lockian “Sense Impressions” and then erect edifices of knowledge of these. We must accept that there is a difference between saying:-

- All chains of verification stop somewhere, and
- There is somewhere that all chains of verification stop.

The latter implies a single stopping point, the first maintains that chains of verification stop at certain things that cannot be doubted – like Moore’s hand. Moore showed that his type of simple statements stop the chain of justification. As Wittgenstein put it, there tends to be “agreement in judgement” in respect of these propositions. I want to draw a parallel between this approach and the ideas of a prominent 19th century theologian — Albrecht Ritschl.

Ritschl saw the role of religion as resolving the state of contradiction in which men existed as, firstly, a member of the natural order and, secondly, with a spiritual side. Only religion can resolve the tension. The Christian religion consisted of a series of “Value Judgements” in which the “moral example of Christ in the community” is placed at the centre of a man’s life. Ritschl rejected the idea that religion should be reduced to or depend on morality — although morality was vital to religion. Once the value judgement had been made, then the individual could have an insight or intuition into the nature of the truth which was not fallible and he could see, by reflection, what moral actions were required of him based on the picture of Jesus in the New Testament (which Ritschl considered was sufficiently accurate for this purpose).

Once a person has seen and understood the moral impact of Jesus in the community, then the reality of this, of the central tenets of the New Testament and of man’s relation to God as well as the Concept of God itself will no longer be in doubt. It is not a matter of believing or disbelieving in God based on a balance of probabilities, but of knowing in such a way that no evidence could count against this knowledge. So we have the idea of knowledge that cannot be proved in a similar way that statements such as “I am a human being” and the other G.E. Moore propositions cannot be proved. There is an obvious difference, of course, in that whilst no-one would doubt Moore’s propositions, many people might well doubt or fail to see the “moral impact of Jesus in the community”.

There is agreement in judgement at a fairly general level between the major Christian Churches, but thereafter views differ. This need not be too serious as, within the Christian faith, the Christian can claim to “know” the central tenets of his faith whilst he would restrict himself to “belief” in more peripheral areas (such as the Assumption of the B.V.M. or the Immaculate Conception). However this view does not seem to help at all in the choice between religions as there is no “agreement in judgement” between different religions as to the “moral impact of Jesus in the community”, still less is there any such agreement amongst all men. It is to look at where such “agreement in judgement” might be sought, that I now want to turn.

5) DECIDING BETWEEN DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

I want to suggest that a decision between different religions or a debate between them is going to start from certain restricted value judgements which we, as human beings, generally accept. This does not mean that they are immutable or that there will not be some few people who will reject them. It does mean, however, that there are some value judgements we cannot justify. In a similar way, if I were to deny that what I am sitting on is a chair then I would be a candidate for psychiatric treatment rather than for philosophic debate. These value judgements will be overarching and there probably cannot be a great deal of debate about them. They might include, for instance, the ideas of compassion, love and concern for others or at least the value of each individual and the Kantian demand that individuals should be treated always as ends and never as means. If someone does not accept these, there is probably little that can be done to convince them. In a similar way if someone does not accept that one should not kill or hurt others except in exceptional circumstances; if he is amoral, then rational debate is unlikely to change his mind.

Now I am aware that there have been regimes like Pol Pot’s in Cambodia where these ideas would be totally rejected, nevertheless I do suggest (and I hope that it is not just misplaced optimism) that in the absence of extreme indoctrination, there are basic value judgements which many human beings share. They are, in some way, part of what it is to be human.

Care is obviously needed not to put forward value judgements that are a product of our western background and this is difficult to avoid. One should obviously not “load the dice” against Eastern religions. What is needed is a series of questions or “test” for different religions that rest on broadly based human value judgements which may not themselves be able to be justified (although it may be possible to debate their consequences). Such a list might be on the following lines.

Does the religion or attitude or orientation to life that is proposed:

1. Enable the individual to transcend himself (which does not necessarily imply any transcendent “God” or heavenly realm),
2. Give meaning to life,
3. Have intellectual profundity,
4. Have as an aim the good of all mankind rather than a particular group,

5. Have an appeal across a wide range of cultures,
6. Have a value in improving morality,
7. Serve to transform men’s lives,
8. Provide a practical (albeit, perhaps, difficult) way of living life in the modern world?

These may, of course, be disputed, but at least debate about them between different religions is possible and if one religion rejects one of them or suggests another, this may help to tell the enquirer something about that religion. If these were to be acknowledged as resting on primary value judgements, then different religions could be seen in their light. The Christian might well consider that his religion has a unique contribution to make here in terms of the Resurrection of the God-man. This is a major difference from, say, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. Similarly Hinduism and Judaism might find it difficult to take on board the requirement for wide cultural appeal. If the Christian idea of the Resurrection is accepted and the possibility for every individual that is opened up by it is equally accepted, then the Christian might well feel that the over-riding value judgements are best expressed in his own religion and that others come a poor second. Perhaps believers in other religions would not accept this, but at least the grounds for a dialogue would have been established.

I do not claim that the list above is the correct one and suspect it may be too heavily influenced by my own, western Christian background. However the possibility of such value judgements at least opens up the grounds for a debate between religions and such a debate may itself help to point to where “The Truth” lies — if, indeed, it is considered that it lies anywhere and is other than purely relative. Even if it is relative (which I do not believe, although cannot argue against here) the basis for a discussion would have been established.

Universalism is an attractive picture, but the claim of christianity to be “The Truth” must not be lightly forsaken. The view that I have tried to suggest here shows one way in which the claim might be argued on rational grounds (as well as the necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, historical grounds) and can also, perhaps, help to justify the choice between different religions.

6) THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

The Church needs to recognise that schools, in teaching religion objectively, make it more difficult rather than less for the child to take a religious view on his life and a Christian view in particular. If religion or morality (and perhaps even love as a parallel) are examined and analysed, then there is a danger that subjective acceptance and awareness may tend to disappear. Once all religions are looked at from the outside, it is much easier to stay outside all of them. It is one thing to teach religion objectively and quite another to open up the individual’s subjective awareness of religion and its importance in human life. It is doubtful, indeed, whether one can open up such awareness except from within a particular religious tradition. Yet here the teacher has a major problem:-

1. In today’s multi-racial and multi-religious society it is not considered acceptable in most areas to inculcate children into a single tradition, and yet

2. Subjective awareness of religion (which is an important facet of the whole man that educators should be concerned with) can only be found within such a tradition.

In a sense, it may be better for a child to grow up belonging to and being part of any religious tradition rather than none — yet it is not the task of a non-denominational school to choose a religion.

The role of the teacher in this area should be to not only teach the history of religions but to show that there is more to life than may at first appear. Man has the ability to transcend his normal, everyday concerns. The individual needs to be encouraged (though I accept that it may not be easy) to recognise that religion provides a challenge to the normal order and that it is important for the individual to consider and evaluate this challenge. The teacher needs, I suggest, to try to get young people to ask the fundamental questions that religion addresses (such as how life can be given meaning and what is the purpose of an individual's life). These questions could include an examination of the fundamental value judgements that may be common to humanity. This is as far as schools can be expected to go. The Churches must recognise this and accept that it is their task and not that of the school to inculcate children into their traditions. With this recognition should come the necessary action which is to often missing today as it is expected that schools will do the Churches job for them. An individual does not "choose" a religion coldly and rationally — he or she will be influenced by the lives and example of people met in the ordinary course of life. Indeed "choice" may be, because of this, a poor title for this paper. Individuals will become Christians by seeing Christianity lived — this, in itself, places a very heavy responsibility on everyone who considers themselves a Christian.

7) SUMMARY

I have attempted to argue that:-

1. The apparently obvious means of justifying one religion rather than another do not succeed,
2. The religious dimension is important if education is to cater for the whole man,
3. Agreement should be sought on the fundamental Value Judgements which most individuals accept,
4. Schools cannot go beyond educating children in the history of religion and trying to challenge children with fundamental questions, and
5. Subjective awareness of religion can only come from within a particular religious tradition and inculcating a child into this must be the task of the parents and the Churches.
6. Each religion must show how it answers such Value Judgements or else:-
 1. Accept Universalism in some form, thus forsaking any singular claim to truth, or
 2. Affirm that insight into its religion is reserved for a "chosen group".

I am not suggesting that this paper provides answers — what I hope it has done is to raise the questions and by suggesting one possible way forward help the debate so that the "Choice" between religions becomes a choice of one rather than a slide into indifference. I would suggest that there are fertile grounds here for cultivation by and co-operation between Philosophers of Education and Philosophers of Religion and that the issues have so far been insufficiently tackled.

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LUTHER AND THE MYSTICS

GRACE JANTZEN

“Only dilettantes in the field of spiritual history can call Luther a mystic.”¹ Thus says Bornkamm, a major Luther scholar. In spite of the weight of his opinion, however, I propose that this *obiter dictum* should be probed. A great deal, of course, will depend on what one means by the notoriously difficult word “mystic”. If it were possible to give a straightforward definition of the term, with specifiable criteria, we could then comb Luther’s writings to see whether he measured up: it would be a long task, but not a particularly difficult one. But things are not that easy: “mysticism” has meant different things to different people, ranging from predilection for voices and visions, to unification with God and annihilation of the self, to experiential awareness of the compassionate Christ in particular circumstances of human need. Rather than resolve by fiat the many underlying disputes of which these different views indicate the tip of an iceberg, I propose to take three people from within the Christian tradition who were mystics if anyone was: Meister Eckhart, Mother Julian of Norwich, and St. John of the Cross, and compare some of their views with those of Luther. If this does not result in a definitive verdict on whether or not Luther was a mystic, it should at least illuminate some significant strands of Christian mysticism and Luther’s attitudes toward them.

Let us begin with a major contention against the idea that Luther was in any sense a mystic. It is sometimes argued that Luther renounced mysticism in favour of the centrality of faith, seeing mysticism as a version of attempting salvation by works. Thus Walther Von-Loewenich, in his important book *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* argues that the sort of faith that was central to Luther is a faith that always stands before the cross of Christ. The individual recognizes his or her guilt before the holy and infinite God, and looks by faith to the crucified Lord who offers the “life-creating word of forgiveness”². Mysticism, by contrast, Von-Loewenich asserts, does not stand in faith before the Divine Other but rather seeks for unification into One: The quest is not for fellowship but for absorption. There is no room for guilt: sin is creatureliness, not disobedience, and thus the notions of forgiveness and atonement have no real part to play. Thus Luther’s theology of the cross is in direct opposition to mysticism: “faith and mysticism stand in irreconcilable antithesis.”³ I will return later to Luther’s positive theology of the cross and the valuable discussion of it in Von-Loewenich. But for the moment I wish to challenge his account of mysticism: is it the quest for absorption which he describes, and does it really have as little room for divine grace, atonement and forgiveness as he asserts? Looking at the three mystics cited, I suggest, gives a rather different impression.

Eckhart, it is true, is often taken as a paradigm case of medieval absorption mysticism. A favourite ploy of popular writers on mysticism (and even some serious ones, like W.T. Stace and Rudolf Otto⁴) is to show how similar some of his statements are to the monistic mysticism of Sankara for whom “Brahman and Atman are One.” Without doubt, some of Eckhart’s utterances do sound monistic. For example, he says:

Where two are to become one, one of them must lose its being. So it is: and if God and your soul are to become one, your soul must lose her being and her life. As far as anything remained, they would indeed be *united*, but for them to become *one*, the one must lose her identity and the other must keep her identity: then they are one.⁵

And again,

Where I am, there God is; and then I am in God, and where God is, there I am.

And

Why did God become man? That I might be born God himself.

Further similar examples, which sound as though collapse into non-differentiation is the ideal, can easily be found.

The problem, however, is that Eckhart explicitly denies such monism. He says, for example, that although God has impressed his image on every soul, Eckhart cannot go further than this in ascribing identity, because

to ascribe more to it would make it God himself, which is not the case.⁶

Was Eckhart simply being inconsistent, trying to get away with saying whatever he liked? I think a much more plausible account can be given. Eckhart relied on the traditional distinction between the essence of God and his manifestations, and applied the same thing to the human soul. The essence of the soul, he says, is uniquely suited to receive the essence of God (not merely a manifestation) because it is akin to God *in the sense* that the ground of the soul and the ground of God are understood in similar ways as the simple and incommunicable essence prior to manifestations. Thus although God can “enter the soul” and do so with all his fulness, this does not obliterate the ontological difference between God and the soul, Creator and created. The following passage offers a key:

I take a bowl of water and put a mirror in it and set it under the disc of the sun. Then the sun sends forth its light-rays both from the disc and from the sun’s depth... The reflection of the mirror in the sun is the sun, and yet it is what it is. So it is with God. God is in the soul with his nature, with his being, and with his Godhead, and yet he is not the soul. The reflection of the soul in God is God, and yet she is what she is.⁷

This passage and others employing the mirror metaphor must surely be decisive against interpretations of Eckhart which see him as denying ontological distinction between God and the soul, and show us the sense in which his more startling comments should be taken. Eckhart points out that any image that is *in* the mirror is not an image of the mirror; the mirror can image anything except itself. In *this* sense the mirror has no being of its own: it takes on the being of whatever it reflects. Similarly if the soul is focussed on God it will not retain a reflection of itself but will be one with God — and yet “it is what it is”. Eckhart is finding fresh ways of expressing the concept and experience of the transformation of the self in the presence of God, using the metaphor of the mirror which has a long history in writings on spirituality and finds a source in the writings of St. Paul himself: “We all reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the

Lord; thus we are transformed into his likeness, from splendour to splendour; such is the influence of the Lord who is the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:18). Anyone who is tempted to label Eckhart a monist preaching absorption mysticism will have to ask himself whether St. Paul should not be similarly branded.

If Von-Loewenich's account of mysticism as absorption does not fit the case of Eckhart, it is even less applicable to Mother Julian. Her book recounts the revelations of the love of God mediated to her by visions of the crucified Christ. She is deeply aware of God's compassion and forgiveness, but there is no hint of absorption in her writings. She only rarely speaks even of union, and when she does, it is clear that she does not mean annihilation of the self, but rather such close communion that for the time language is both inadequate and unnecessary. Thus for instance she speaks of God drawing us to himself in prayer

so powerfully that it surpasses all our imagining and everything that we can understand or think. And then we can do no more than contemplate him and rejoice, with a great and compelling desire to be wholly united to him...¹⁰

and when this desire is completely fulfilled (which will not be in this life)

we shall see God face to face, familiarly and wholly. The creature which is made will see and endlessly contemplate God who is the maker...¹¹

Heaven itself is not thought of monistically; the distinction between Creator and creature is retained even there. So Mother Julian's comments about the inadequacy of language do not indicate absorption. Difficulties with language, after all, are not the sole prerogative of mystics: they are a common feature of intense personal relationships which could with more justification be said to fulfil than to annihilate the self.

There is no denying that St. John of the Cross uses the language of absorption when he speaks of union with God, however. In the *Spiritual Canticle* he uses the metaphor of the flame to speak of the love of God which, he says, burns to

consume and transform the soul in God... as is the burning coal with the fire... until it arrives at such a degree of perfection of love that the fire of love, fully and completely, possesses it... and has changed it into God, wherein its movements and actions are now divine...¹²

In his book *The Living Flame of Love* he changes the picture a little, speaking of the soul as

like to the log of wood that is continually assailed by the fire; and the acts of this soul are the flame that arises from the fire of love: the more intense is the fire of union, the more vehemently does its flame issue forth. In the which flame the acts of the will are united and rise upward, being carried away and absorbed in the flame of the Holy Spirit...¹³

And in another place he speaks of

total possession... wherein the soul is made Divine and becomes God by participation...¹⁴

I suggest, however, that what these passages illustrate is not a mysticism of annihilation incompatible with standing in faith as a creature before the cross of Christ; they illustrate rather the traps that lie in wait for those who extract juicy passages from mystical writers without careful attention to the context and overall thought of the author. For example, in the quotation about the soul "becoming God by participation", the setting is St. John's commentary on the Song of Songs, and the immediate context is his description of the consummation of the spiritual marriage. The transformation of the soul is its fulfilment as a human creature made in the image of God and now restored to his likeness. St. John of the Cross explicitly quotes Paul: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And lest there be any doubt, St. John spells out his meaning

in the consummation of this most happy estate of marriage with Him... is effected such union of the two natures and such communication of the Divine nature to the human, that, while neither of them changes its being, each of them appears to be God¹⁵.

Brenan in his book on St. John of the Cross suggests that St. John takes up and elaborates the mirror metaphor that we already found in Eckhart, speaking of the two lovers as two mirrors, each reflecting the beauty of the other:

So I shall see thee in thy beauty, and thou me in thy beauty, and thou shalt see thyself in me in thy beauty and I shall see myself in thee in thy beauty and thou shalt appear to be me in thy beauty and my beauty will be thy beauty and thy beauty my beauty; and I shall be thee in thy beauty and thou shalt be me in my beauty because thine own beauty will be my beauty.¹⁶

It is true that difficulties arise in a mysticism of spiritual marriage, but the annihilation of self and a collapse into undifferentiate monism is not one of them. The love of God purifies and illuminates the human personality, but does not eradicate it. Another metaphor St. John uses makes this point clearly. He likens the soul to a lamp,

like the crystal that is clear and pure; the more degrees of light it receives, the greater concentration of light there is in it, and this enlightenment continues to such a degree that at last it attains a point at which the light is centered in it with such copiousness that it comes to appear to be wholly light, and cannot be distinguished from the light, for it is enlightened to the greatest possible extent and thus appears to be light itself.¹⁷

Nevertheless the ontological distinction remains.

If my interpretations have been correct, therefore, then at least in terms of these three mystics it would be a mistake to contrast Luther with mysticism on the grounds that the union with God that mystics seek involves the annihilation or absorption of the human personality to such an extent that the ontological divide between Creator and creature is broken down. In none of the three is human selfhood lost, even — or especially — in the most intense union with God. All three think of God as a lover seeking the purification and fulfillment, but never the abolition, of the beloved. The vocabulary of Luther and the tenor of his

thought is quite different from this, but the differences are much more subtle than are suggested by a stark opposition of a Lutheran theology of the cross to a mystical ideal of absorption.

A further reason for supposing that Luther was opposed to mysticism is his attitude to those who claimed special visions or revelations from God. Not the least of the thorns in his flesh after 1520 was the contention with those he came to call the *Schwaermerei*, visionaries like Muentzer and Luther's old colleague Karlstadt who said they received direct spiritual illumination. According to Luther, these men set aside the proper use of Scripture and sacrament, and kept saying "The Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit..."¹⁸ In his 1524 tract against them, scathingly entitled "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments" Luther appealed directly to Karlstadt:

Dear Peter, I beg you put your glasses on your nose, or blow your nose a bit, to make your head lighter and the brain clearer.¹⁹

He called them a sect of Satan, and blamed the local uprisings partly on them.²⁰

Already in 1521 while Luther was hiding in the Wartburg he had written to Melancthon in response to his queries about visionaries who had visited Wittenberg. If all their experiences were sweetness and light, Luther declared them to be frauds.

Do not listen if they speak of the glorified Jesus, unless you have first heard of the crucified Jesus... You should enquire whether they have suffered spiritual distress and the divine birth, death and hell.²¹

Unless the pattern of their lives was evidence that they had been called by God, their words should not be believed, nor should their appeal to spiritual experiences be taken seriously.

But this negative attitude to what might be called "mystical phenomena" — sweet experiences, voices, visions, special revelations — does not in fact set Luther in opposition to the three mystics we are considering: quite the reverse. All three of them would agree with him. Eckhart reserves his most scathing language for those who claim special visions and raptures:

Some people want to see God with their own eyes, as they see a cow, and they want to love God as they love a cow. You love a cow for her milk and her cheese and your own profit. That is what all those men do who love God for outward wealth or inward consolation — and they do not truly love God, they love their own profit.²²

God is to be sought for his own sake, not for pleasant religious experiences; the difference will be recognizable from the quality of life of the individual.

St. John of the Cross echoes this sentiment. He speaks of special religious experiences as "spiritual sweetmeats" — God gives them occasionally to the immature who can be lured forward by such trifles, but they are not proper food nor are they in the long run suitable for spiritual progress. The road of advance runs instead through purgation,

stripping down of desires not merely for physical and sensual things but also for "spiritual consolations" which too easily become a trap, a substitute for God. When one is drawn to a deeper spiritual life, St. John says, the soul must

at no time... desire to find help in spiritual sweetness and delight, but it must stand in complete detachment above all this and its spirit must be freed from it.²³

Physical asceticism is not a price to be paid in exchange for spiritual gluttony; it is rather the symbol of the more thoroughgoing asceticism, the asceticism of the spirit.

In illustration of this it is interesting to notice the attitude of St. John of the Cross to a particular woman, Sor Maria de la Visitacion, who was much given to raptures, levitations, and the like, even claiming to have received the stigmata. She was made much of in Spain; her confessor proclaimed her to be a saint, and when the Armada set off for England it sailed in line past her convent so that she might bless each ship. Even the priors of the Discalced Carmelites went to her and came back with relics — pieces of cloth stained with her blood. But St. John of the Cross refused with some asperity to be party to this. Not long afterwards a nun claimed to have discovered Sor Maria painting on her "wounds": the Inquisition began to investigate using the simple method of seeing what a bit of soap and water would do to the stigmata. They came off.²⁴ Luther would have loved it.

Mother Julian, on the other hand, is more tolerant of visions and mystical phenomena than her sceptical brethren; after all, it was by way of visions that she was shown the love of God. Yet she is in complete agreement with them that it is not the visions in themselves which are important, but the resultant lifestyle. She says,

I am not good because of the revelations, but only if I love God better; and inasmuch as you love God better, it is more to you than to me... For I am sure that there are many who never had revelations or visions, but only the common teaching of Holy Church, who love God better than I.²⁵

The things Mother Julian prays for — true contrition, loving compassion, and a longing of the will for God — are not substantiated by the revelations taken in themselves but by the compassion and integrity which she pursued in relation to God.

Yet while none of these mystics advocated mystical phenomena as having intrinsic value any more than Luther did, it is true that, though they de-emphasised experiences, they certainly did think the Christian life was a matter of continuing existential relationship with God: experience mattered, even if experiences did not. A dry intellectual assent to theological propositions was as inadequate as the idea that all had been accomplished because once upon a time one had received the sacrament of baptism. All of life, all of one's activity whether conventionally religious or not, was to be experienced in relation to God. In this sense, religious experience was profoundly important to each of the three mystics; but this should not be confused with preoccupation with mystical phenomena.

Some outstanding interpreters of Luther deny that he thought experience important even in this sense. Thus for

instance Missouri Synod Lutherans Franz Pieper and J.T. Mueller²⁶ argue that for Luther objective certainty of justification is given in the inerrant pronouncements of Scripture; to look for spiritual experience is to fall into a Schleiermacherian trap of making religion revolve around a subjective "I".

The transference of the gospel from word to man takes place on a purely dogmatic-rational level, as a reasoned acceptance of biblical formulations of truth.²⁷

The same sort of conceptualist analysis is put forward by Karl Holl in his emphasis on the Lutheran interpretation of the gospel as public rather than private. The inner life, the experiential domain, was, according to Holl, of no interest to the theologian. Luther was seen as rational and cognitive, guarding himself against feelings and intuitions. Illumination was conceptual, not emotional or psychological.²⁸ A more nuanced position is presented by Ebeling, who takes seriously the influence of Rhineland mysticism on Luther's early development; yet he too argues that in Luther's mature Reformation theology spiritual experience has no significance. Indeed he goes so far as to take Luther's words "sola experientia facit theologum" — "only experience makes a theologian" — as referring strictly to intellectual experience, not spiritual or psychological.²⁹

The argument which underlies this rejection of religious experience by all these interpreters of Luther is their concern with Luther's insistence on faith and a theology of the cross, contrasted with works and a theology of glory, to which religious experience is said to belong. And indeed we have seen this contrast already in Luther's response to Melancthon on the visionaries: "Do not listen if they speak of the glorified Jesus, unless you have first heard of the crucified Jesus." As early as his Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation of April 1518, Luther had made the cross the centre for theological understanding:

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.³⁰

The cross of Christ is the decisive revelatory event, and thus requires the transvaluation of all theological values. It shows that God is the hidden God, the God whom we cannot know in himself but only *sub specie crucis*.

To a God who has thus revealed himself, the only appropriate response is faith — an acceptance of the justification which he freely offers. This faith stands in sharp contrast to "works" — any effort on our part to earn God's favour. Such works would be utterly inadequate to justify ourselves, and would serve only to blind us to the fact that salvation is offered freely. If in spite of this we continue to try to save ourselves by our own efforts, this constitutes in effect a rebellion against God, since we are spurning his method and setting ourselves up as knowing better than he does. But if on the other hand we recognize his free gift for what it is, this provides us with enormous relief and liberation from the hopeless effort of trying to justify ourselves in the sight of God. The cross is the manifestation of the love of God, to which we respond in faith.

It is worth looking more closely at what Luther had in mind as the alternative to this response of faith: what did Luther mean by "works"? He did not mean simply "trying to be good", though of course he would insist that even high moral effort would not serve to set us right in the sight of God. "Works" for Luther had as one of its important meanings "techniques" — religious methods for the pursuit of holiness. As all the world knows, his 95 theses were triggered by his distress at the sale of indulgences by the Dominican monk Tetzl: indulgences were seen by the masses as a technique of avoiding divine retribution. And the further Luther probed, the more he came to see many of the rituals and activities of the Church as techniques, efforts at winning the favour of the Almighty or at least avoiding his wrath. The Mass had to be celebrated in a ritually flawless way, vestments and relics had enormous importance attached to them, monks and nuns were bound by rules and obligations which were in many cases wholly unsuitable to their needs but which they felt they had to keep on pain of encountering the wrath of God. All these things Luther came to see as "works", useless in themselves and actually standing in the way of accepting salvation as a free gift available to any who would simply accept it by faith. Thus in his famous treatise "The Freedom of the Christian" of 1520 Luther wrote,

It is evident that no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness and freedom... It does not help the soul if the body is adorned with the sacred robes of priests or dwells in sacred places or is occupied with sacred duties or prays, fasts, abstains from certain kinds of food, or does any work that can be done by the body and in the body... Such works produce nothing but hypocrites...³¹

All these techniques were external. Even more soul-destroying were what might be called internal techniques, efforts to achieve a relationship with God by self-purgation and lifting up the soul to God, as though such a thing were possible. Thus Luther continues in the same treatise,

even contemplation, meditation, and all that the soul can do, does not help.³²

The mystics whom Luther had read had talked about the soul entering into darkness; but while Luther well knew that darkness (I will have more to say about it below) he objects to a piety that turns the entrance into darkness into a technique, a self-chosen exercise. Thereby it is robbed of its ultimate seriousness. It is then man's work, and remains under the judgement of the cross.³³

As such it is the enemy of faith.

It is here, in this theology of the cross opposed to any theology of glory, faith opposed to any external or internal techniques, that one might look, as Van-Loewenich does, for a decisive contrast between Luther and the mystics. But does the contrast hold up? It would be obviously wrong-headed to lump all mystics together into a bundle as though they all taught the same thing; nor need we suppose that Luther was simply indulging in invective against straw men. No doubt the popular spirituality in the monasteries of his time furnished plenty of examples of such "mysticism by the boot-straps", just as much popular writing on mysticism still does today. But it is instructive to notice that the three mystics I have chosen for comparative purposes would all

agree with Luther in his rejection of techniques, external and internal, or of any efforts to earn salvation. And just before we look at their views, it is worth remembering that Luther's stance on this can be overstated: near the end of his life he composed a beautifully simple treatise on "How to Pray", offering a method of meditation and prayer: it would be a mistake to suppose that Luther considered any and every method to be a "technique" in the perjorative sense of a "work" set over against "faith". But let us turn to the mystics.

One of the things that got Eckhart into trouble with the ecclesiastical establishment was precisely his preaching against techniques. We have already noted his scathing remarks about those who seek visions of God. The same could be applied to any other sort of method to which one becomes unduly attached. Eckhart points out that

whoever seeks God by a special way gets the way and misses God³⁴

— and may not even notice it, so entrapped is he in the "religiousness" of it all. He says dramatically,

Indeed, if a man thinks he will get more of God by meditation, by devotion, by ecstasies, or by special infusion of grace than by the fireside or in the stable — that is nothing but taking God, wrapping a cloak around his head, and shoving him under the bench.³⁵

Eckhart has much to say about what can be dubbed a "merchant mentality" — the effort to bargain with God, doing good works or indulging in pious activities in order to get something out of it. One can easily develop such an attachment to religious exercises or even to the sacraments that they become a barrier to true communion with God, serving only our own fantasies while we suppose that we stand high in God's favour. Eckhart recognizes that if we see life in terms of this mentality of getting, it removes joy and freedom, and condemns one to endless calculation — a calculation which can in any case never come out right for us; we will always be on the infinite debit side. Eckhart is very far from disagreeing with Luther on the salvific inefficacy of "good works": indeed, Luther in all probability owed some of his insights here to Eckhart via Tauler.

In the case of Mother Julian we find less emphasis and less drama but the same point of view. She says that in one of the revelations

our habits of prayer were brought to my mind, how in our ignorance of love we are accustomed to employ many intermediaries. Then I saw truly that it is more honour to God and more delight if we faithfully pray to him for his goodness, and adhere to this by grace, with true understanding and steadfast belief, than if we employed all the intermediaries of which a heart may think. For if we employ all these intermediaries, this is too little and it is not complete honour to God; but this goodness is full and complete, and in it is nothing lacking.³⁶

There is nothing here with which Luther need disagree.

Julian, it is true, goes on to express her appreciation for intermediaries, especially for our Lady and the saints and "all the blessed company of heaven" so long as these are

seen not in and of themselves but as expressions of the grace of God "which comes to us to our humblest needs."³⁷ Perhaps because for her these have been a stimulus to faith rather than a barrier to it she does not need to reject them in such strong terms as Luther does. Yet even his rejection should not be overstated. He is indeed vehement against any of these things becoming "works", that is, a substitute for faith, but that does not mean that they can have no value whatsoever. Because of their personal and social history, some people need to dispense with them if they are to grow in faith; but Luther is opposed to legislation or any action which forcibly removes them from any person for whom they are an aid. If Christian freedom does not require all the trappings of traditional religion, neither does it require their abolition: Luther did not support the statue-bashing and binges of relic destruction which some of his followers undertook in his name.

An interesting addition to this theme is Mother Julian's comments on penance — just the sort of thing which might have been a prime target for an "anti-works campaign". Julian says that she received no special insight into the sort of penance which one adopts of one's own accord.

But what was revealed, specially and greatly and in a most loving manner, is that we ought meekly and patiently to bear and suffer the penance which God himself gives us, with recollection of his blessed Passion... And then you will see truly that all your life is a profitable penance. This place is prison, this life is penance, and he wants us to rejoice in the remedy. The remedy is that our Lord is with us, protecting us and leading us to fulness of joy...³⁷

We do not have here any self-chosen exercises or "boot-strap mysticism", but a trust in God in the situations in which we find ourselves. One would have to out-Luther Luther to object.

John of the Cross comes nearest, among the three mystics, to discussing what might seem like techniques of spiritual growth, and yet curiously he is in the end most like Luther in what he says. He does not make nearly such heavy weather of the rejection of external techniques — relics, rituals, and the like — as Luther does, but that is because in his situation he can take for granted that these things are at their best only aids to faith. This is not disagreement between them: because of the time and place and the people for whom he was writing, Luther has to make an issue of what John the Cross can assume. The same can be said up to a point about internal methods: St. John is at least as aware as Luther that devotions and meditations can easily degenerate into self-indulgence and become barriers instead of helps to encounter with God. Nevertheless in his books *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul* John gives what amounts to a pattern of ascent to union with God. At first sight one might think that offering such a pattern would be the antithesis to Luther: I shall suggest that it is not.

It is in the first place not accidental that when St. John joined the struggling band of Discalced Carmelites he took as his religious name "of the cross". For him, as for Luther, the cross was central, and revolutionized all one's preconceived theological ideas. The values of his society — the triumphalism of the Spain of the Inquisition and conquistadores, the Spain that had defeated the Turk and was

busy building the Armada, having purified itself of Moors, Jews, Lutherans and other undesirables — all these values of power and success are radically questioned by the crucified Christ. St. John of the Cross sees not triumph but suffering as the place of intimacy with God, because it was on the cross, in the midst of the most intense physical and mental suffering, that Jesus most fully manifested God even while feeling utterly deserted by him. And what was true for Jesus is also true of his followers: it is in suffering and in the cross that God is present and manifested, not in the sense that in these situations he provides comforts and consolations, for he very probably does not, but in the sense that in sharing the broken body of Christ, encounter with the ultimate reality can occur. What Van-Loewenich wrote about Luther's statement that God is to be found in the cross and in suffering could apply equally to John of the Cross:

“Cross” and “suffering” refer, in the first place, to Christ's suffering and cross. But Luther is thinking at the same time of the cross of the Christian... That is to say, the cross of the Christian corresponds to the cross of Christ. To know God “through suffering and the cross” means that the knowledge of God comes into being at the cross of Christ, the significance of which becomes evident only to one who himself stands in cross and suffering.³⁸

St. John of the Cross develops this theme in his teaching on the dark night. In his account as in Mother Julian's, afflictions are not courted, but when they come, they are deliberately accepted as from God, and thus as a means of identification with the suffering Christ who is in God's presence even while feeling most forsaken by him. It is worth remembering that John's account of the dark night is based on a poem he wrote while in prison undergoing the most appalling physical and psychological suffering inflicted upon him through no desire of his own. So the “dark night” is not just any sort of despondency or depression — though of course these, too, can become occasions for identifying with the suffering Christ, as Luther also discovered.

As John of the Cross describes it, the dark night can be divided into stages, though these should not necessarily be seen as chronologically successive. The first he calls “the dark night of the senses”. It begins from the basic presupposition that God is not the same as anything else. Therefore physical things, the things of creation, are at best pointers to God who created them, and at worst a distraction from God or a substitute for him if we become entangled with them. He is in agreement here with Luther and with Eckhart before him who sees God as the hidden God: the things of creation ought to point to their creator, and in a sense they do, but they can be properly understood only from the perspective of the cross. Beautiful as they are, they are indications of the absence of God, just as a letter from a loved one, welcome as it is, is a poignant reminder of his absence. Thus they generate a longing for God rather than for themselves, and in themselves cannot satisfy.

We have an inherent tendency to become entangled in these things in destructive ways: nature, art, possessions, and even human relationships can become disordered in our affections. The person who is serious about God, therefore, must allow his physical senses to be stripped down, not in the sense of despising or devaluing the things and relationships, but rather transcending them, finding inner

liberation from their entanglements so that love and appreciation for them may be rightly ordered and freely given without hidden self-referential motivation. What is essential in this “stripping” is not necessarily what we would choose, but rather the abandonment of what is secure and familiar as these things are required by God; hence this is a costly process, a dark night of the senses. Yet it is not a “technique”: it is rather a deliberate response to what, under severe guise, is in fact the liberating grace of God. Both John of the Cross and Luther knew it well: one need only remember John's suffering in prison, and Luther's traumatic detachment from all that was familiar in his enforced retreat in the Wartburg.

Yet the physical aspect of all this is in a sense the least of it. Not only the senses, but also knowledge, is inadequate to the things of God. Thus the stripping down process involves the intellect as well, which must be relieved of the smugness of having all the answers, knowing our theology and not having intellectual problems. John speaks as though at least sometimes this “dark night” of the intellect involves total intellectual and even moral bewilderment, where all certainties are gone and God himself seems absent. John is again speaking from his own experience in prison, where the psychological sufferings and moral bafflement he endured through finding himself at variance with the senior members of his own order were by his own confession a far worse ordeal than all the physical afflictions he had to undergo, awful though they were. Luther likewise knew the pain of intellectual and moral suffering: the theological securities and monastic stability of a loyal son of the Roman Church were one by one stripped away as Luther had to confront one thing after another with the implications of the cross of Christ. From being forced by his own principles into recognition of the uprightness of John Huss, to his repudiation of the authority of the papacy, to coming to terms with his own sexuality, and at many points in between, Luther was abandoning erstwhile certainties and probing the unknown. It is true that both for John of the Cross and for Luther these successive strippings were also liberations, but it would be superficial to see these as freedoms lightly won: they cost everything. This I believe provides part of the context in which Luther's sometimes disparaging remarks about philosophy and reason should be understood: the cross of Christ opposes natural understanding and indeed is an offence to it; its smugness and its certainties are radically called into question by the scandal of the cross.³⁹

And even this is not the end. As John of the Cross recognized, people might be willing to give up physical and intellectual pleasures, and even undergo considerable hardship, if in exchange they could be given spiritual pleasures and gratifications. But sometimes God in his severe mercy requires that even these things be given up, in what John calls the “dark night of the spirit”. As the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus on the cross had to give up even the sense of the presence of God, and in this way, in his forsakenness, God is truly manifest in him. Similarly, if we are to know God in Christ, and not just be preoccupied with our own pleasures (even if they be rarified spiritual pleasures) we must give up all illusions of spiritual grandeur and the spiritual satisfactions of sensing God or his consolations when these are taken from us.

The parallel to Luther is quite striking. Luther speaks in his *Explanation of the 95 Theses* of the greatest trial a person

can be called upon to undergo, the trial of seeming forsaken and abandoned by God.⁴⁰ All that remains at such a time is faith, clinging to God in God-forsakenness.⁴¹ One cannot even blame the intensity of this abandonment on the devil, for the devil is only an instrument of God himself, who, ultimately, is attacking the individual in these trials. God seems to be playing games with the individual and making up the rules as he goes along; and only he knows the point of the game anyway.⁴² Thus the struggle of faith at this time is, in Luther's words, "nothing less than a struggle with God against God..."⁴³

Luther's term for all this is *Anfechtung*, the dereliction of the absence of God which for the Christian is the ultimate hell. Yet the Christian is upheld in this suffering by the identification with Christ who himself felt utterly abandoned by God and so "descended into hell". Rowan Williams put it well:

In Christ we see holiness fully present in the most extreme *Anfechtung*: the fact of Christ's perfect oneness with the Father is not touched by his *experienced* agony. Christ's cross is, from one point of view, the supreme demonstration that holiness has nothing to do with mere states of mind.⁴⁴

And it is this, surely, which underlies Luther's comment to Melancthon that he should pay no attention to people who spoke of the glorified Jesus unless they had first spoken of the crucified Jesus. Dramatic spiritual experiences are no indications whatsoever of the holiness of the person — not even if those experiences are sensations of union with God. This merely trivializes the cross of Christ and with it the cross of the Christian.

In this sense, Luther is certainly not a mystic — but then, in this sense, neither are Eckhart, Julian or Norwich, or John of the Cross. Nor should the teaching of the latter on the dark night of the soul be seen as a technique for self-manufactured holiness in the sense that Luther disparaged. John does, to be sure, counsel deliberate acceptance of the various stages of suffering, rather than either railing against them or seeking to escape from them by distractions or false comforts and consolations. But he emphasizes that this is not a matter of effort on our part, "boot-strap mysticism", or what Luther would call "good works" but a response to the painful grace of God. And in the end, even the response is seen as a divine gift.

But what is the purpose of all this suffering? The answer for Luther as for the three mystics is already implicit in their recognition that suffering is (or at least can be) identification with the cross of Christ, "being crucified with Christ". In his *Meditations on Christ's Passion* of 1519 Luther said,

The real and true work of Christ's passion is to make man conformable to Christ, so that man's conscience is tormented in like measure as Christ was pitifully tormented in body and soul by our sins... for it is inevitable, whether in this life or in hell, that you will have to become conformable to Christ's image and suffering.⁴⁵

And this for Luther was surely experiential, existential — not in the sense of having nice experiences or warm spiritual sensations, but in the sense that the conformity to Christ through suffering must take place at the core of one's

being and from there permeate the whole of one's existence. Here is true conversion, genuine shedding of the defences and solaces of the self, and turning in faith to God: it is a conversation which begins

in each person's private hell, in the meeting with God the crucifier and the crucified in the depths of the heart.⁴⁶

This also sheds light on Luther's understanding of faith. It is not a bare, intellectual holding to doctrinal propositions about justification, without existential dimensions. Faith is rather a clinging to the grace of God, even while feeling bereft of him.⁴⁷ In Luther's words it is the ability to hear "the deep, secret yea beneath and above the nay."⁴⁸ And again the parallel to St. John of the Cross is strong. In his poem on which the teaching of the dark night is based, he speaks of a "secret ladder" and explains,

The "secret ladder" represents faith, because all rungs or articles of faith are secret to and hidden from both the senses and the intellect, and went out beyond every natural and rational boundary to climb the divine ladder of faith that leads up to and penetrates the deep things of God.⁴⁹

And the allusion is to I Cor. 2:10, where the "deep things of God" are spoken of precisely in the context of St. Paul's determination to know nothing "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." St. John of the Cross says in one of his *Maxims on Love*, "He who seeks not the cross of Christ seeks not the glory of Christ."⁵⁰ It could have been Luther saying that.

This conversion, turning to God from one's deepest centre, is however not simply a private matter. The daily dying in identification with Christ in his suffering is at the same time identification with his compassion: Christ after all did not die for the private benefit of his own soul! Luther therefore recognizes that the internal liberation of the *Anfechtung* sets one free from the compulsive demands of the ego in order that one may be sensitive to the needs of others.

The self that is killed by God in order to be made alive must experience this death in the social, the public world at the hands of other human beings. The daily dying, daily taking of the cross, is precisely this exposure of the self to the devouring needs of others... The cross is borne internally in *Anfechtung*, externally in enduring whatever may be attendant on the state of life in which we find ourselves.⁵¹

Luther rejected the idea that certain forms of life or causes required self-emptying and identification with Christ while others did not; compassionate giving of oneself to one's neighbour is important no matter what the societal context. The Christian calling or vocation is not so much to one particular form of service, like priesthood or monasticism, as it is a vocation to be *Christian* whatever the actual worldly conditions. Thus it is not a question of certain vows or rituals making one holy in the presence of God but the identification in faith with the crucified Christ and his compassion for humankind: here also is the basis for the doctrine of the priesthood of the believers. The priest — the believer — is the one who finds in his own private hell that the message of the Gospel is true, and thereby finds the right

and the possibility of communicating that Gospel to others in their own sufferings. Thus in the 1539 Introduction to the collected edition of his works, Luther wrote of *Anfechtung* as the real touchstone. These desolations, he says,

teach you... to experience how right... God's word is wisdom beyond all wisdom. As soon as God's Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will hurry you and by his attacks will teach you to seek and to love God's Word.⁵²

The three mystics we have been considering are in very different social contexts from that of Luther and therefore express the public implications of the private experience of God very differently. Yet difference, as we have seen, is not incompatibility; each of them in their lives and in their writings demonstrate the costly nature of the freedom and compassion of God and the way in which this is translated in their own public contexts. Luther shared many of their views, learned in the same hard school of experience and prayer; and joins them in the company of those whom, as he put it, experience has made into theologians.

1. H. Bornkamm *Luthers Geistige Welt* (Heiland Verlag, Lüneburg, 1947) p. 264.
2. Walther Von-Loewenich *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (E.T.H.A. Bowman, Christian Journals Ltd., Belfast, 1976) p. 150.
3. *Ibid.* p. 166
4. cf. Walter Terence Stace *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Macmillan, London, 1961); Rudolf Otto *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, New York, 1932).
5. Meister Eckhart *Sermons and Treatises* Vols. I and II (Translated and edited by M. O'C. Walshe (Watkins, London, 1979)) Vol. I p. 52, cf. p. 140 (Quint Sermons 5 and 28).
6. *Ibid.*, p. 51 (Quint 5).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 138 (Quint 29).
8. *Ibid.*, p. 125 (Quint 16b).
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. II p. 81 (Quint 1955 26).
10. Julian of Norwich *Shewings* L.T. 43 (Eds. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, New York with S.P.C.K., London, 1978) p. 255.
11. *Ibid.*
12. St. John of the Cross *Spiritual Canticle* XXXVIII.2 (E.T. Allison Peers *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross* Vols. I-III, Burn Oates & Washbourne Ltd., London, 1953) Vol. II pp. 172-3.
13. *Living Flame of Love* I.4; in Peers Vol. III p. 18.
14. *Spiritual Canticle* XXVII.2; in Peers Vol. II p. 133.
15. *Ibid.*, XXVII.3; p. 134.
16. *Spiritual Canticle* XXXV.3 as translated by Gerald Brenan *St. John of the Cross* (Cambridge University Press, 1973) p. 137.
17. *Living Flame of Love* I.12; in Peers Vol. III p. 23.
18. Quoted by John M. Todd in *Luther: A Life* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1982) p. 253.
19. *Ibid.* pp. 255-6.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
22. Meister Eckhart in Walshe Vol. I p. 127 (Quint 16b).
23. St. John of the Cross *Living Flame of Love* III.33; in Peers Vol. III p. 71.
24. Brenan, pp. 61-2.
25. Julian of Norwich L.T. 9; in Colledge and Walsh p. 191.
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THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS JUSTICE AND PEACE

PAUL BALLARD

The message of the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983 not surprisingly included a strong commitment to justice and peace in the face of injustice, poverty, economic exploitation, racism, war and ecological disaster. It was summed up in the sentence: "The tree of peace has justice for its roots."¹ Such a commitment, in one way, merely continues a major ecumenical tradition going back before the Council to the "Life and Work" Movement, and indeed is rooted in the whole history of the Church. Recent decades, however, have witnessed a new dimension to this theme from the growing influence of the Churches of the Third World, not least the Liberation theologies of Latin America. Emerging clearly at the crucial Geneva 1966 conference, there has been a shift from a theology of cooperation and development to the more radical analyses of the world economic structures and revolutionary theologies of the Southern world. There has been a growing acceptance of Marxist forms of social analysis that argues that poverty is endemic in the present economic system and can only be changed by radical action that breaks the mould and builds again. There has, also, and not always so closely connected as in Liberation Theology, been a widespread recognition that Christian believing is a radical commitment to "the struggle for justice" expressed in an "option for the poor". Mission, indeed, is as much about seeking a new society as the call to discipleship.²

No-one wants to underestimate the importance of such insights, nor deny a welcome to the transformation of the Christian perspective on the world in the face of such massive problems. Yet that key sentence would seem to betray a kind of "orthodoxy", a fundamental assumption that may not be wholly defensible. Priority is clearly given to the need for justice. Peace grows from suitably prepared soil and properly nurtured seeds. Peace is consequent on justice — so the first task is to wage war on all that oppresses man, for only when the victory is won is peace assured. It has, of course, to be recognised that there is a whole spectrum of interpretation and preception encapsulated in what is after all an almost sloganistic phrase. Yet it is surely not foolish to see in it a marker of a set of widely accepted attitudes of which Liberation theologies are leading exponents.

Perhaps the issue can be further clarified by brief references to two recent publications.

In *The Power of the Poor in History* Gustavo Gutierrez gives two index references to peace, of which the more important contains the following:

"Perhaps what most shocks the Christian seeking to take sides frankly and decisively with the poor and exploited is the conflictual nature of praxis in this context.

Politics today involves confrontation... Being an "artisan for peace" not only does not dispense from presence in all these conflicts, it demands that one take part in them... There is no peace without justice... In Christian circles, of course, we are not very much accustomed to thinking in conflictual, concrete terms. Instead of

antagonism we prefer an eirenic (sic. peaceful) spirit of reconciliation... We have to learn to live peace, and think peace, in the midst of conflict."³

With most of what is hinted at here one can only concur. To take sides with the poor does bring one up sharp against the realities of power, vested interest, inertia, cruelty and indifference. Human sin is entrenched in both the hearts of people and the structures of class, order, law and property. Nor can we escape these harsh realities. Conflict is real and there is no sitting on the fence. Consequences have to be accepted. God is indeed on the side of the poor, the outcast, the disadvantaged. At the same time only too frequently the resolution of conflict has merely been the imposition of a new injustice or at best a poor compromise that in fact resolves nothing. The search for peace can so easily be a "cop out" for the already compromised.

All that, and more, can and must be taken with all seriousness. But in fact Gutierrez is saying more than that in a polarised world we are inevitably caught up in conflict in which we must actively engage; that Christians must be counted by their commitment. By introducing the word "praxis" he is actually saying that the conflictual model is a correct analysis not only of how the world is but of how it has to be changed. In other words, the evangelical call for justice and the commitment to it has to become, by definition, aligned with this kind of conflictual praxis. As a result the emphasis is placed on the "struggle for justice" and only minimally on the grudgingly acknowledged call to be peacemakers, "artisans for peace". Indeed, there is a suspicion that "the spirit of conciliation" is a betrayal of the commitment to justice and that peace making is compromise. Such a feeling is also found in World Council Assembly documentation. The nuclear issue is clearly of permanent importance but some from the Third World are, surely rightly, anxious that preoccupation with "the bomb" may detract from what is seen to be the more fundamental needs of justice in the economic world order. So when Gutierrez says, "We have to learn to live in peace, and think peace, in the midst of conflict" he is probably not saying that we have to hold on to being peaceable when all around in conflict but that we enter into conflict because it is the way to peace.

A similar point is made by Jose Miguez Bonino in *Towards a Christian Political Ethics*. He states, categorically, "the fixed point is justice, the right of the poor. This is the theological premise from which we cannot depart". That does not mean that order is unimportant or that conflict is always wise. "In fact the biblical concept of peace (shalom) includes well-ordered relationships... which make human life possible in society."⁴ However, what Miguez Bonino is anxious to establish is the contrast between a theology that starts from injustice and the analysis of its causes and remedies and a theology that starts from the assumption that conflict is destructive and that order takes priority over justice and change. This is a contrast, he argues, between the optimistic prophetic faith of the Bible and the western Augustinianism of the catholic-protestant tradition which holds the world to be always a conflict between order and chaos without hope of much improvement. If, this argument claims, the precarious equilibrium is upset by too much violence or change, that ordering by which God sustains human existence will break down entirely, leaving us in hell. While there is always a commitment to justice,

order is paramount. "Peace, therefore, understood as order, is the basic direction, the ultimate ethical key".⁵ This Augustinian stance, is set aside by the Liberation Theologian for the "call to radical transformation inspired by the prophetic-messianic focus on the justice and peace of the Kingdom of God."⁶ Once again peace has been subsumed under justice for peace is only the completion of a state of justice.

II

The question is whether the claim of the liberation tradition is biblically justified or not. In a short paper it is not possible to address more than one issue and that in a limited way. Here, however, appears to lie one of the theological foundations of liberation theology. But is it sufficient to understand peace as primarily a consequence of justice? Is peace to be regarded as an eschatological or future state while justice, while also a goal, is to be the means and immediate task? Do we struggle for justice so that peace may come? Do the oft quoted words of Isaiah (32.17) adequately sum up the position?

"The effect of righteousness will be peace, And the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever."

It is clear from the biblical evidence that the concepts of justice and peace are indeed closely intertwined. They are so, however, as ideas within a whole range of concepts that can be brought together under the heading of salvation or the Kingdom of God. That is, in the eschatological consummation, all the various qualities that will characterise the fulfilment of God's purposes will reinforce each other. So, for instance, Psalm 85.9-13 can envisage a time when the fortunes of Israel will be restored and the promises of God are manifest:

"Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that glory may dwell in your land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet, righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. Yea, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and make his footsteps a road".

Here is summed up the hope of Israel, indeed the yearning of all mankind and creation itself: that is a world in prosperity and security in which relationships are those of fairness and trust, a world made and sustained by God on the basis of his covenant love.

This vision of hope is founded on God's liberating action in the saving events of the Exodus and the covenant promises that follow Israel through history. For Christian faith these are both confirmed and sustained in the cross and resurrection which fulfil and enlarge the earlier experience of Israel. At the same time it is possible to point to the sustaining power of God who has not abandoned Israel but upholds her in adversity and apostasy, in powerfulness and weakness. The point is that it is not only the eschatological promise that is God's gift. God is also the source of all true justice and peace, however fragmented, found in the vicissitudes of history. The eschatological reality is pressing in on us in the here and now.

The eschatological hope is also, however, a calling and a

command. Even with inadequate tools and in mankind's sinfulness the challenge is to witness to the justice and peace of the Kingdom. There is judgement on human failure, personal and social. Yet it is possible to recognise something of this reality in how private and public affairs are conducted. It is legitimate to try to build refuges, alternatives, signs of the Kingdom in the midst of the world. So we are called to enter into the struggle for justice and peace at every level and in whatever way is given to us. This struggle does not create the Kingdom but participation in it is preparation and witness. But in relation to our central enquiry the Kingdom is not divided. There is no priority of justice over peace just as there is no priority of suffering over joy or patience over love. The attributes of the Kingdom are parts of a harmonious whole analogous to the relation between omnipotence and love or mercy and judgement in God.

III

Yet it is important to draw out the different emphases between justice and peace. In the limitations of the historical they can be set against each other and, as we have seen, given priority over each other.

Justice, or righteousness, is rooted in the justice of God shown forth in his covenant love by which he called Israel into being. In this justice there are three closely interwoven strands. In the first instance there is the recognition that God acts out of his mercy so that the "no-people" are made a "people" from a bunch of refugee slaves. This carries the implication that for Israel righteousness is care for the poor, the stranger, the orphan and the widow. "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt" (Deut. 24.17). Secondly, God acts justly, that is without fear or favour. This is the obligation to be honest and impartial in upholding the rights of citizenship, in the execution of justice and the running of the economy. Yet thirdly, and perhaps decisively, God's justice is his fidelity. Even when Israel has abandoned him, even through exile and death, God is steadfast. So for Israel, loyalty to God and man even in adversity is the final word of justice.

Within the history of Israel it is possible to see that the different aspects of justice are severally emphasized according to circumstances, though none are lost and all are always present. In the Torah and for the pre-exilic prophets it is the nation in its political, commercial and social life that is the focus of attention. So the prophets thunder against the injustice and oppression.

"Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream". (Amos 5.24).

Later, in dispersion and under threat of dissolution by alien cultures it is faithfulness that is at the centre of attention. Obedience to the Law becomes the saving mark of Jewishness that preserves the community as well as marking it off with its own inherent quality.

The New Testament reflects this change of circumstances but points more directly to the faithfulness of God in his act of salvation in Christ. In a sense it is a matter of starting again with the foundation of a new community. Yet the other aspects of righteousness are not forgotten. Luke draws attention to a theme that clearly goes back to Jesus, the Gospel to the poor, the weak, the women, the outcast

and sinner. He continues this in Acts where the Church is taken from the poor and lowly and persecuted. But he, with Paul and the other witnesses, struggles with the need for the qualities of biblical justice within the new community not least as a sign in the world. But above all in the New Testament it is the saving righteousness of God, his steadfast love that has broken through to open up new possibilities, overcoming the barriers between Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female (Gal. 3.28). It is indeed the love for the weak and broken for all have sinned (Rom.3.23).

All this surely means that the righteousness of the Kingdom has to find its expression and struggle to come into existence at any and every level. It will be expressed in and through the quality of life in the Church and by those prophetic figures who live heroically on the Church's behalf. It will be demanded through every means possible for expression in the laws of every land and in the lives of the people. But it will also be found in the patient justice of those under oppression or persecution who echo the longsuffering of God. And none of these can be forgotten for it is too easy to corrupt even the justice done in God's name if care is not taken to keep it whole.

IV

Peace, shalom, does indeed link in with the idea of justice. It stresses the notions of prosperity, security, freedom, lack of fear. "In that day, says the Lord of Hosts, everyone of you will invite his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree" (Zech. 3.10). There is a freedom to get on with living because one can rely on the orderliness and stability of society.

Once more we find some movement in the Biblical material. Peace for Israel means, externally, harmonious relationships with neighbouring states so that trade and industry may prosper, or sufficient security and strength to provide stability. Internally it meant order on the basis of fair administration, equitable justice and love for neighbour, rich and poor. Jeremiah (6.14) complains bitterly about reliance on false security: "They cry peace, peace, when there is no peace." But the King is in duty bound to secure the peace of his people, by war if necessary. The constant prayer of the people is for peace (Psalm 122), and the blessing of God is peace (Num. 6.26).

It becomes noticeable that under the series of imperial conquests Israel suffered, peace becomes increasingly part of eschatological hope. Israel has no chance for peace because she has no place in the world.

In the New Testament peace and reconciliation become the central note of the Gospel. Christ is the bringer of peace (though he may equally bring conflict for peace is not bland compromise). Through him peace is made between God and man (Rom. 5.1-10). But it is a peace that is secured through long suffering, overcoming enmity with love. This means that the ministry of the Church is primarily the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5.22). The fellowship of the Church is founded on peace (Eph. 4.3). Indeed the cross is the overcoming of the barriers that have rent humanity assunder (Eph. 2.14-17). Christians are bidden to be peacemakers (Matt. 5.9; 43-48) and are commanded to live in peace and to bring peace to a world that is torn and broken (Rom. 12.18; Heb. 12.14; 1 Cor. 7.15). Twice we are told to "seek peace and ensue it" (1 Pet. 3.11; Rom.

14.19 from Ps. 34.12-16). James (3.18) indeed goes so far as to reverse the Isaiah quotation given at the beginning: "The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace".

It would begin to appear, therefore, that far from justice being the foundation of peace, in the New Testament peace is the foundation of justice. At least the eschatological expectation of peace in the Kingdom is seen to have its own imperative in living out the Gospel. God is the God of peace both in the sense that he overcomes chaos with order and in the sense that he acts in reconciliation to bring peace into being. So, too, those who live for the Kingdom will value order over chaos (though order can and is frequently imposed or arbitrary and unjust) and will see the way towards peace through acts of reconciliation (though peace making can turn out to be a struggle for a fragment of truth and love). Within the limitations of the historical this will at best be only a glimpse of true peace and perhaps a step in the right direction in a fragile balance. Nevertheless, all expressions of true peace in the world or the Church participate in the anticipation of the Kingdom, a Kingdom that will be inclusive even of those that seem to be, indeed are, enemies.

The object of this enquiry is not to set peace over against justice for clearly they are, at least eschatologically, totally interdependent. Rather it is to indicate that a proper awareness of the Biblical material, especially of peace as God's gift and as God's command has to be taken as seriously as the concept of justice. Indeed it may be that more care should be taken that they inform one another, especially in relation to Christian living within the world.

V

Briefly, in a final section, it may be possible to indicate three areas in which these considerations may be found to have practical importance. Perhaps an important implication is that much more attention needs to be given to the theology of peace. All that can be done here is to offer a few brief, programmatic remarks indicating some of the issues that may well be worked on further.

Peace and peace-making are part of the way of the cross. There is no easy solution or simple compromise to the deep-seated fears and conflicts of humanity. There can only be constant patience and energy directed by the belief that peace is desirable and possible. In the gospel this means holding at the centre of all endeavour love for the enemy who is both part of the problem and part of the solution. Those who engage in radical peace building, whether from within the conflict or as outsiders, are totally exposed to rejection and are essentially vulnerable from all sides. There is need to explore theologically the nature and methods of peacemaking and to provide a strong theological basis for the practice of peaceful living. To some extent the concern over nuclear weapons has begun to uncover some pointers in a limited way. Importantly, within this there is a need to develop a strong pastoral theology that can provide adequate support for those engaged in peacemaking. It demands living at the raw edge of existence, often very lonely, always open to rejection, walking a tight rope.

Following on from the specifically theological task are questions raised in relation to political philosophy and

theories of social action. The Gospel of peace must place a query against any absolute commitment to the inevitability let alone the desirability of violence and conflict or of exclusivist claims for any group or ideology. Yet at the same time this is not to admit an unprincipled pragmatism or unqualified endorsement of strong arm tactics in enforcing law and order. But there is implied a recognition that order, security, control of conflict, etc. is an important element in and for human development. As has been said: "Jaw, jaw is better than war, war." Such a perspective must have considerable significance for situations like Southern Africa, Northern Ireland, Lebanon or Central America in which endemic conflict seems incapable of resolution. But the answer cannot simply be found in heightened conflict any more than in a false peace but through sacrificial patience and fundamental will.

In recent decades, not least under the stimulation of Liberation Theology, we have learnt to recognise the importance of "contextualisation", that different circumstances call forth different responses to the Gospel challenge. This is surely welcome as a way of escaping from the tyranny of Western theological imperialism. However, the time may be right to ask: What is the European imperative under the Gospel? Europe is the theatre of the major conflict of ideology in the modern world. An Iron Curtain runs down the centre of the continent. It is under constant threat of nuclear war. The birth place of so much that makes the modern world is rent by national and cultural rivalries. The great need, indeed our responsibility for the whole world, is to find ways of confidence building across the great divide. This is not to deny the reality of conflict or the complexity of the situation. Surely, however, the European Council of Churches and its member churches are right to see peacemaking as their central task, to ask for and take initiatives in relation to the Helsinki Accord. Does this not suggest that the European theological task is to

develop a theology of peace not tied to a narrow activist programme but undergirding a commitment to be engaged in the search for peace by whatever means are to hand. The Vancouver statement on Peace and Justice said: "Our approaches to justice and peace often differ... due to the wide diversity of our histories, tradition and contexts in which we live and witness". In Europe this has meant five hundred years of conflict and war between nation states and indeed between the Churches who claim to serve the Prince of Peace. It is not accidental that in our time, too, Europe has been the home of the ecumenical search for peace and unity.

St. Paul in the passage from which the title of this paper is taken describes the Kingdom of God as justice, peace and joy in the Spirit. That is the nature of God's rule over his world to which we are committed as his servants. It so happens that he goes on: "those who thus serve Christ are acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace". (Rom. 14.17-19).

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CANON AND CRITICISM: A RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR CHILDS

FRANCIS WATSON

It is somewhat surprising to find that a major new introduction to the New Testament has been written by a scholar who has made his reputation in the field of Old Testament study.¹ But Professor Childs explains that his earlier work, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, seemed “incomplete and vulnerable without attention to the remaining part of the Christian Scriptures” (xv); and so, he goes on, “For over five years my primary research energy has gone into New Testament studies” (xvi). His book bears witness to the enormous amount of material that he has read and absorbed in that time. But, as the title (*An Introduction to the New Testament as Canon*) suggests, this is not an ordinary introduction, concentrating on questions of authorship, dating, historical background and the like. Professor Childs’ thesis is that New Testament scholars’ preoccupation with such matters and with the so-called historical-critical method in general has led to a serious misunderstanding of the New Testament. In this review-article, I wish to offer a response to Childs’ attack on historical criticism as it has traditionally been practised. Childs is by no means alone in his disillusionment with historical criticism, which is shared by many theological conservatives, structuralists, feminists, and exponents of “narrative theology”. The present article therefore addresses itself not simply to Childs’ book but to the broader question of the value and significance of historical criticism as a way of studying the New Testament.

What does Childs mean when he calls his book an introduction to the New Testament *as Canon*? One might expect that a book with such a title would pay much greater attention than usual to the process by which the early church came to accept the New Testament texts as canonical; and this is indeed the case. But what is at the heart of Childs’ “canonical approach” is the belief that the New Testament is the book under which the Christian church has always stood and still stands, and that interpretation must feel the full impact of that fact. The function of the New Testament is to be “authoritative, canonical literature of both an historical and a contemporary Christian community of faith and practice” (36), and this “calls for a theological description of its shape and function” (36) which acknowledges that “the sacred scriptures provide a true and faithful vehicle for understanding the will of God” (37). Childs is thus asserting “the integrity of a special reading which interprets the Bible within an established theological context and towards a particular end, namely discerning the will of God” (37). Aware of “the promise that God continues to reveal his will through this vehicle (i.e. the canon), earth-bound and fragile in its very nature” (44), the interpreter must approach Scripture with “an expectation of understanding through the promise of the Spirit to the believer” (40); he must see it as his task to extend “the kerygmatic testimony of the New Testament into an encounter with the modern reader” (40).

One might suppose that all this is simply another attempt to bridge the gap between historical criticism and the church’s use of the Bible, a problem which has been

tackled many times before but which to a large extent still remains unresolved. But Childs’ argument is more radical than that. He asserts that the assumption that “the sharper the historical focus, the better the interpretation” has the effect of silencing “the true theological witness of the text” (51). In other words, the attempt to understand a text in the light of the historical circumstances from which it derives is a hindrance and not a help to a genuinely theological interpretation. The gap between the historical and the theological approach remains as wide as ever, but the former is dismissed as of only peripheral significance, legitimate “only within a certain context” (387), by comparison with the latter, the all-important theological task. Indeed, historical criticism is in the last resort unnecessary, since “theologically the community of faith confesses that it has already been provided with a sufficient guide” for the interpretation of Scripture (395)²

This, then, is Childs’ ambitious programme: to turn away from preoccupation with a text’s particularity and time-conditioned character, and to regard it instead as an abiding witness to God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ through which he still makes himself known to the church. One catches here echoes of past theological controversies about biblical interpretation: Is learning and intellectual ability a sufficient qualification for interpretation, or must the interpreter first be enlightened by the Holy Spirit? Traditional biblical criticism is a modern representative of the former view, Childs of the latter. No doubt this programme will sound attractive to many — and not only to theological conservatives, with whom Childs is in many ways not particularly happy to identify himself.

But does this programme actually succeed in its aim of shedding new light on the biblical texts, rescuing them from the limbo of time-conditioned particularity to which a misguided historical criticism had consigned them? New hermeneutical methods are to be assessed not by the claims which their advocates make for them, but by whether or not they work in practice — by whether or not they lead to a profounder insight into the true meaning of the text. It is here that, in my opinion, Childs is often disappointing. Take, for example, some comments on the Epistle to the Romans that are typical of the tone of much of the book:

The canonical shape of Romans lies in the book’s potential to transcend the original concrete historical setting. When treasured and read as scripture by a community of faith the nature of Paul’s witness to God’s eschatological intervention in Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world establishes a new context and unleashes a continuing power by which to address each new generation of Christians with the implications of the gospel. (263)

I do not find these comments particularly illuminating, for two main reasons. The first is that, despite the claim that the “canonical approach” is new, this passage merely repeats a view of Romans that has been set forth again and again by most of the best-known Pauline interpreters over the past sixty years or so. Examples could be multiplied from the writings of Bultmann, Kasemann, Bornkamm and many others, which indicate that the view that Romans “transcends the original concrete historical setting” has been the dominant one. Childs does scant justice to the

passionate concern of such scholars as these that the message of Romans should not be consigned to the past but should address our own generation. (In this connection, it seems strange that Kasemann's commentary on Romans, which — however much one may disagree with it — is one of the unquestionably great modern New Testament commentaries, can be so cursorily dismissed as “tedious and difficult to use” (550).) This is one example of a problem which recurs throughout the book: what is supposed to be a new and significant alternative to traditional exegesis often turns out to be remarkably similar to the exegesis which it is intended to replace.

My second complaint about the passage quoted above concerns the way in which the New Testament has been translated directly into contemporary theological affirmations; in summarizing the theological content of Romans, Childs is at the same time making his own confession of faith. I do not wish to claim that it is impossible to make the proclamation of Romans or of any other New Testament book one's own; but what does seem illegitimate is the short-cut straight from the text to one's own credo without a thorough discussion of the meaning of the language one is using — a discussion which belongs to the province of the systematic theologian. Phrases like “God's eschatological intervention in Jesus Christ” and “the redemption of the world” are all very well as part of the peculiar language-game played by theologians, but they are mere rhetoric with no significant content if their meaning is not explained. I would not be surprised if many members even of “the community of faith” had very little idea of what an “eschatological intervention” might be. The use of such language in itself does little or nothing to clarify the meaning of the biblical texts.

But more important than the question of whether or not Childs has succeeded in providing a significant new approach to the biblical texts is the question he raises about the validity of the historical critical approach to the New Testament. As we have seen, Childs concedes to historical criticism a limited validity within a certain (unspecified) area, but holds that it is often a hindrance to interpretation and in the last resort unnecessary. At one point, he describes the standpoint he is opposing as follows: “The critic presumes to stand above the text, outside the circle of tradition, and from this detached vantage point adjudicate the truth or error of the New Testament's time-conditionality” (51). This sentence deserves careful exegesis. To begin with, the critic is accused of “presumption”, the *hybris* which theologians tell us is the essence of sin. Those who try to free themselves from inherited pre-suppositions and prejudices, and who make their goal the objectivity pursued by all true scientific and historical work, are simply guilty of “presumption”, and should instead submit themselves to the authority of “tradition”. The critic's sin is blamed on his “detached vantage point”, his “standing above the text”, and his “adjudicating its truth or error”. But the attitude of detachment should not be seen in this negative light. Detachment means respect for the integrity of the text, the desire to let it be itself without arbitrarily trying to force it to address one's own concerns. Detachment means rejecting the narcissistic approach which asks only, “What can get out of the text?” In this respect, the attitude of the biblical scholar is the same as that of the anthropologist studying the culture of a little-known tribe: he must respect the integrity of the object of study, and not try to use it as a means of furthering his own ends. In

the last resort, detachment should be associated with humility and not with *hybris*, and so should be regarded as an intellectual virtue.

But to describe the work of the biblical scholar solely in terms of “detachment” would be seriously misleading. In addition to detachment, historical study demands a passionate commitment to recreating the past and to making it live again. Its aim is not to ignore what is of central importance and to concern itself only with what is peripheral, but to bring to life texts which are otherwise to a large extent obscure by showing that they are written by and for real people with real human needs and concerns. It calls for the exercise of sympathy and imagination as well as learning, and to that extent is far removed from the coldly calculating attitude which the word “detachment” might suggest. This answers the complaint that biblical criticism is not “existential”, that it does not involve or affect the interpreter's subjectivity. It is true that biblical criticism is not “existential” in the sense that, unlike “canonical criticism”, it does not claim to be able to mediate “encounter with God”; it has no such theurgical pretensions. But it is “existential” in the sense that becoming acquainted with another country and culture may be an occasion not just for an increase in knowledge but for enrichment, insight and the broadening of one's mental horizons.

Admittedly, New Testament scholarship does not always live up to these high ideals, and one suspects that much of the modern dissatisfaction with it derives from encounters with some of its duller manifestations. One thinks for example of books devoted to the exegesis of single verses, which, having laboriously worked through all the multitude of scholarly opinions on the subject, conclude that the verse in question is hopelessly obscure and will probably never be really understood. One thinks too of more speculative books which attempt to prove highly dubious hypotheses with still more dubious arguments, which convince no-one but their authors, and which merely succeed in exasperating their readers. But such works as these are not the heart of the problem, which is the fact that entering the world of the New Testament is a demanding and complex matter, calling for patience and persistence. There are no short-cuts to insight. It is wrong to dismiss the careful, methodical investigation of comparatively minor points as irrelevant to the true purpose of the New Testament, since it is often through such attention to detail that the broader picture begins to emerge. The patience which this requires is again in the last resort an ethical quality.

Childs' main complaint about historical criticism is that it is irrelevant to the church. This complaint may be answered in various ways. First, historical criticism is relevant to the church because the desire for understanding is an integral part of being human. This desire for understanding is not such an urgent human need as the basic needs for food, shelter, community and so forth, but it is significant nonetheless. We find ourselves in a world which is in many respects puzzling, but we also find that we have a capacity for understanding which enables us in a limited but important way to come to terms with the world. It is this real need, and not mere idle curiosity, which motivates both the child's persistent questioning and the historian's attempts to understand the past from which we have come. The members of “the community of faith” are normal

human beings with human needs, and in their case the question about the past from which we have come will take the specific form of a question about the nature of Christian origins. For such people, the insight into Christian origins which historical study can provide is or ought to be not only interesting but also important. On Childs' view, this ought not to be so; such people should presumably be dissuaded from historical investigation, since the community of faith has *already* been provided with a sufficient guide for the interpretation of Scripture (395). But whoever these Gnostics may be who claim to possess the fulness of knowledge and insight by virtue of their membership of the church, many Christians will persist in asserting that they do *not* understand Scripture as fully as they would like, and so will continue to regard historical study as important.

A second answer to the complaint that historical criticism is irrelevant to the church is to point to its importance in achieving freedom from theological and ecclesiastical absolutism. The continuing influence of the various forms of fundamentalism (and not only Protestant ones) is obvious, not least in Professor Childs' native land. Although some may find in them a way to a satisfying and meaningful life, they are ultimately to be judged as morally as well as intellectually inadequate, since they do so much to foster a world-view which sees fellow human beings solely in terms of their religious commitment. The divisiveness of such a world-view is clear: those who share the ideology of the fundamentalist group are the righteous, and the majority of the human race which does not share it is simply written off. The sectarian stance of the New Testament offers abundant justification for this outlook, and it is therefore important for the church as well as for society that there are institutions in which a different approach to the New Testament is taught — one which emphasizes its variety and time-conditioned nature. By contrast, Childs' approach seems to provide no way of countering theological absolutism, even though that is not something which he personally would favour. It is not the case that the freedom from such absolutism which historical criticism helps to provide is necessarily the freedom of secular irreligion. Proof of that is the fact that most of the best-known theologians of this century (Karl Barth is perhaps an exception) have been able to make use of its findings in their own work of theological construction.

Historical criticism is thus relevant for the church: it enables its members to understand where they have come from, and it provides an effective counter to a misuse of the New Testament which has damaging social consequences. On the other hand, it is important to assert the freedom of historical criticism from church control; it has its own logic, autonomy and integrity, and the church may not impose restrictions on it. But it seems that Childs does wish to impose restrictions on it in the name of the church. On the *a priori* grounds that a particular writing is in the canon, he claims to be able to know that certain interpretative possibilities are correct and that alternative views are erroneous. Here are some examples of this:

- i) Since the Gospel of Matthew is canonical, it *cannot* teach that salvation is dependent in part on human moral effort (75).
- ii) Since the Pastoral Epistles were accepted into the canon as Pauline, the (probably correct) theory that they are in fact pseudepigraphal should not

determine the way in which they are interpreted (382ff).

- iii) The Epistle to the Hebrews was linked by the early church to the apostle Paul, and so is not to be interpreted as post-apostolic (418).
- iv) As a canonical book, Acts provides hermeneutical guidelines for the interpretation of Paul's letters (240).

What is at issue here is not whether the individual opinions are correct in themselves; it is the claim to be able to establish particular views not by means of generally-accepted methods of exegesis, but on the *a priori* grounds that the text is canonical. It is nowhere explained precisely *why* modern interpreters should have their freedom curtailed by the decisions taken in the first few centuries of the church's existence about the contents of the canon. It is simply assumed that loyalty to the contemporary community of faith *must* involve acceptance of the canon as one's chief hermeneutical principle. One must stand unquestioning within "the circle of tradition"; one must submit to the authority of the past. Wherever this attitude belongs, it is not in the modern university, and one doubts if it is really what the modern church needs either.

Childs' argument is complex and hedged about with qualifications. He is not simply a conservative who wishes to re-establish an old-fashioned view of Scripture. Instead, he wishes to assert both that historical criticism is correct in many of its conclusions, and that this should have no real impact on the church's use of the Bible. It is a curious balancing act, and one cannot feel that it succeeds in its aim of pointing the way to a new and more satisfactory form of biblical interpretation. It is apparently motivated by nostalgia — nostalgia for a time before the advent of insistent historical questions, when the canon was regarded as a self-evident unity, when the identification of the contents of the Bible with the truth was unquestioned, and when the Bible served in an unproblematic way as food and drink for both soul and mind. But Paradise (if that is what this was) has been irretrievably lost, and the way back is barred. Whether one likes it or not, historical criticism is here to stay, since despite all its problems and ambiguities it does succeed again and again in illuminating texts which are otherwise obscure. There will no doubt continue to be tensions between historical criticism and a more church-oriented view of the New Testament, but tensions are not always a bad thing, and are in any case rarely resolved by simply denying the significance of one of the partners in the debate.

It may be worthwhile in conclusion to discuss this tension between the concerns of historical criticism and of the church in connection with the New Testament. To dismiss it as deriving from sheer obscurantism on the part of the church is too facile a solution, and it is regrettable that this patronizing attitude is so often taken. While spokesmen for the church may sometimes be guilty of obscurantism, the problem goes deeper than that. From Childs' standpoint, the problem may be summarized as follows: Whatever its value may be, historical criticism does not seem to speak adequately about the real subject of the New Testament, i.e. God as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Whatever one feels about Childs' methods and conclusions, one must respect the integrity of this point of view, which would be

shared by very many with some knowledge of an academic approach to the New Testament, but for whom the church and not the university is the natural context for New Testament interpretation. Let us therefore pose the question: In what sense, if any, does historical criticism further the enterprise of theology, rational discourse about God?

One type of answer to this question would be given by those New Testament scholars (probably a majority) who are committed both to a historical study of the New Testament and to the church's belief that the New Testament is the irreplaceable witness to a unique act of self-revelation by God. Such scholars would emphasize that revelation and the biblical testimony to it were given in a time-conditioned form; the treasure is to be found only in the earthen vessels of particular circumstances, persons and places. To deny this would be to reject the incarnation and to affirm docetism. Historical study of the New Testament is therefore indispensable for theology; it is not itself theology, but constitutes an essential prolegomenon for theology. Such an approach has its problems, but it is quite possible to pursue historical study of the New Testament with integrity and to regard it as ultimately ancillary to the still more important theological questions. This at least goes some way towards answering the complaint that historical criticism inevitably ignores the heart of the New Testament.

But historical study need not fulfil this purely ancillary role; it does not necessarily serve the explication of the church's faith in Jesus Christ, since in itself it is neutral and cannot presuppose a particular religious commitment. One may find oneself unable to accept the proposition that the New Testament is the authentic witness to a unique divine self-disclosure. If so, all that one will be able to see with the

aid of historical criticism will be purely human activity: the genesis of a new form of religion, sometimes moving and impressive, but no less a human artefact than any other form of religion, and so lacking the ultimate significance ascribed to it by Christian theology. But such a position is not necessarily as devoid of theological content as it might seem. In Christian tradition, the phrase *via negativa* refers to the denial that God is appropriately described in human language, a denial which is paradoxically a way to God, the mystery beyond language from which all existence derives. "God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few". Historical criticism, carried on in independence of Christian faith, may take a path which is both negative and genuinely religious. It may lead one to believe that the history reflected by the New Testament is in principle no different from any other history: the product of conflicting human intentions, compromises, misunderstandings, and all the other ambiguities of human life. One may therefore conclude that God is *not* in this place, that the key to the ultimate mysteries which we think that we dimly perceive is not to be found in the events underlying the New Testament. This discovery (if that is what it is) may paradoxically be itself a way to God, if with the *via negativa* one holds that this must be a way from what one thought one knew to what is unknowable, and from what one thought was clear to what is incomprehensible. Such an experience is perhaps at least distantly related to the encounter with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which, according to some, is what religion is really about.

NOTES:

1. B.S. Childs, *An Introduction to the New Testament as Canon*, SCM Press, London, 1984, pp. xxv + 572, price £15.
2. In its context, this statement is concerned only with the Pastoral Epistles. But it applies equally well to Childs' approach as a whole.

BOOK REVIEWS

Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study

John Barton, Longman and Todd, 1984. Pp. xv + 256. £7.95 (paperback).

The title of this book has been well chosen, for it is both a review of different ways of "reading the Old Testament" and, by implication, a plea that we should read it (and not ignore it, or simply seek to study, use or interpret it). In recent years the long-accepted historical and critical approach to the Old Testament (and the New) has had increasingly to compete with a renewed emphasis on the theological significance of the canon (particularly, but not only, in the writings of Professor Brevard Childs of Yale University) and with structuralist and other modern kinds of literary criticism. The book sets out to be a guide to these recent developments and a critique not only of them but also of some of the claims often made on behalf of historical criticism.

Dr. Barton suggests that the very varied aims and methods of these approaches, old and new, can best be comprehended by the idea of "literary competence", a term derived from structuralist writers but not used in any technical sense here. It is intended to convey a mastery of the conventions according to which the biblical writings are to be read, and it is taken to be equivalent to the ability to recognise different genres of literature. It is certainly reassuring to have an unfamiliar term equated with an activity which can be as simply identified as recognising the difference between apocalyptic and proverb literature. But the reassurance is deceptive, as becomes clearer when the equation leads to some rather far-fetched genre descriptions, such as composite narratives and canonical religious literature. Nor is it convincing to suggest that when early source-critics distinguished between the sources which we now call J and P in Genesis they were "really" trying to find a new way of defining the genre of that book, though it may well be true that they were proposing new conventions of competent Bible-reading. There is a danger of claiming too much for what is undoubtedly a vital part of our equipment in seeking to understand the Bible, but one that should be kept in its proper place, in the discussion of form-criticism. The vaguer term "literary competence", on the other hand, serves well to indicate the skill, variously defined, which all the various schools of interpretation are trying to inculcate.

It is not Dr. Barton's intention to drive a wedge between literary and historical-critical approaches to the text and to recommend the exclusive use of the former. His position is that all the different approaches have something to offer (though I think that he is, like Professor James Barr, unduly harsh on "canon criticism"), but that users of them should be more aware of their assumptions and their procedures – this is where the book's sub-title, "Method in Biblical Study" comes in. Even so, it needs to be recognised that definite limits to the discussion have been fixed from the start: "We shall be asking, in fact, how each of the methods familiar in modern study of the Bible is intended to help us in understanding the text, and we shall not spend any time on the uses that can be made of that understanding in writing about the theology of the Old Testament or the

history of Israel" (p. 11) It would be a pity (and as I have said contrary to the author's intention) if this book were, in a period when literary studies have become very influential in biblical scholarship, to give the impression that "reading the Old Testament" was the only or even the ultimate way of approaching it. It follows that the advocates of the continuing value of the historical-critical methods would be mistaken, in my view, to rest their case solely on the claim that these methods are after all more fruitful for reading the Old Testament than those drawn from the comparative study of literature. Whether they are or not, that is not their primary function. Their main contribution is to different kinds of *use* and *evaluation* of the Old Testament, two tasks which are very firmly and deservedly established in biblical study, both scholarly and popular. A complete analysis of method in biblical study would discuss reading the Old Testament not in isolation but in its relation to these other tasks, which are arguably more fundamentally appropriate to the character of Holy Scripture. The Bible is after all not primarily (or even entirely) a work of literature, but a means of religious instruction.

My raising of these questions – and I have others, for example about the remarkable suggestion that canon criticism, if it is to withstand the critique of Barr and others, needs to move towards structuralism – is not intended to detract from the considerable merits of this book. It is the most enjoyable book about the study of the Old Testament that I have read for a long time. It constantly retained my interest, cast new light on topics familiar and less familiar, and made me think out afresh what we are or may be doing in employing different approaches to the Bible. It is a book that I look forward to reading again. It will be of considerable use where it began (as a course of lectures), in the teaching of second-year students, and it will have a particular appeal to the growing number of those who study theology, whether at school or at university, alongside or after a course in English literature.

G. I. Davies

Introduction to the Old Testament

Werner H. Schmidt. S.C.M. Press, 1984. Pp. xii + 368. £10.50.

The species of book known as "Introduction to the Old (or New) Testament" is well-known, yet for the unwary it is a very misleading title. This is not "introduction" in the sense of making acquaintance for the first time. Rather, it implies a discussion of specific historical and source-critical problems relating to the Old Testament as a whole and to its individual books in particular. The possibility of confusion is increased by the fact that the English term is used to translate two different German words: *Einleitung* and *Einführung*. Insofar as they can be distinguished, the *Einleitung* is the more technical, and will involve detailed discussion of earlier scholarship; the *Einführung* is wider-ranging, and may include reference to the history of Israel and to theological issues.

Here under review is a translation, by M. J. O'Connell, of the second edition (1982) of Schmidt's *Einführung*, which was conceived as a successor to a well-known handbook of the same title by Meinhold, originally published in 1919. The translation is clear, and appears to be accurate.

In accordance with the requirements of the genre, Pt. I is largely given over to an overview of Israel's history, with a tabular outline which may be useful to students, though no very clear indication is given as to when we may regard the historical foundation as securely based. A valuable feature of the historical survey is a recognition that Israel's social structure must be taken into account if its history is to be grasped. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the people's nomadic, desert origins are taken for granted, without discussion of the views of Gottwald and others that Israel's emergence in Canaan followed internal revolt rather than immigration from the wilderness.

There follows a fairly standard introduction to the Pentateuch, the most helpful feature of which may be the exploration of the tensions involved in different methods of historical-critical study. Different types of narrative are analysed, though "myth" is given a very cursory treatment of little more than a page. The discussion of Deuteronomy leads into consideration of the Deuteronomistic History, seen as the product of a school rather than of a single author as proposed by Noth, and of the Chronicler's History, of which Ezra and Nehemiah are regarded as an integral part. The prophetic books occupy Part III; they are dealt with in assumed chronological order of the figures after whom they are named, with the usual exception being made for Isa. 40-66; no serious attention is paid to the issue of the relation between different parts of the book of Isaiah. Part IV is devoted to "Liturgical and Sapiential Poetry". A two-page epilogue can only skim the surface of the argument "For and Against the Old Testament". Bibliographies are appended, for which the claim is made that they have been expanded and up-dated for this English edition. But the problem of the most satisfactory way of providing bibliographical information in a translated text-book has not really been resolved, and since the bibliographies are separated from the sections to which they refer, this may be one of the less satisfactory aspects of the book. The whole is concluded with a brief index.

This outline survey has drawn attention to various points which might have been treated differently, but this should not lead to the overall verdict being too critical. This is a book which comes helpfully between the general first study guide and the more technical introductions. A good deal of detailed information is provided, with useful summaries of the contents of most of the biblical books, and references to the work of other scholars are adequate without resort to overwhelming detail. For better or worse, however, it remains a very German type of book in its concern for precise detail. Whether British students are to be praised for their refusal to be tied down in detailed analysis, or condemned for their lack of application, can only be a matter for debate; this book will serve as either a reproach or a warning – a characteristic German example of exact and specific analysis.

Richard Coggins

Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World

David E. Aune. Eerdmans, 1983. Pp. xii + 522. £24.20

This book is a major scholarly achievement. Its merits are many. To start at the bottom, it is admirably indexed and

footnoted, and an early misprint (on p. 4, Zech. 13:2-6) is emphatically not a sign of things to come. A wide range of learning, succinctly distilled, is applied to the whole field of prophecy in the Greco-Roman world, in the Old Testament and early Judaism, in the New Testament and in the church of the second century. The author is keenly aware that the phenomenon he examines is complex and multi-form, not always easy to define and liable to be misinterpreted through either too narrow or too broad an assessment of what is involved. Despite the complexity and the difficulty of definition, the book presents its material clearly, breaking it up into intelligible sections. Scrupulously fair to the proposals of other scholars, it avoids dogmatism and admits freely where more cannot safely be said. It has no theological axe to grind but is content to let the evidence, viewed historically, do just as much work as it can.

After a survey of current issues in the study of early Christian prophecy, the first major section is a presentation of the procedures and content of Greco-Roman prophecy. This is followed by an outline of basic features of Israelite prophecy, and then a full and positive account of prophecy in early Judaism. The falsity of the widely held belief (derived from a partial rabbinic standpoint), that prophecy was unknown at the turn of the eras, is amply demonstrated. The context for the prophetic aspects of Jesus' ministry is thus provided.

The centrepiece of the book is chapter eight, on the character of early Christian prophecy. Here there is a thorough analysis of the numerous strands that require notice under the heading of prophecy. But there is no ducking of the fact that they do not always have much in common. It is also clear that the persons in the early church who were engaged in what might be called prophetic activity were far from homogeneous, by no means all called "prophets", and related to other influential or authoritative figures in ways that were far from neat. Institutions and nomenclature varied greatly in early Christianity, even though certain recurring styles of life and work are not hard to identify.

The evidence that falls to be considered is, when compared with any other contemporary area of prophetic activity, rich in the extreme. It contains both accounts of people designated prophets (chiefly in Acts and the letters of Paul) and sayings or speeches which purport or may be thought to come from prophets. But the question of definition is inescapable. What sort of activity or speech may be considered prophetic? The basic feature is undoubtedly the claim or intention to speak on behalf of God or Jesus – to be the vehicle, in word or act, of an oracle. That said, however, the field must be left wide and cannot be tidily delimited. Words that emerge by this means are not to be distinguished in subject-matter from sayings that appear in other forms of writing. Prophecy may well contain apocalyptic statements, or else parenetic sayings, or bold judgements and assertions of authority; but all these may appear in quite other settings. In prophecy it is the source and the understanding that count: the Spirit is involved and, in early Christianity, the sense of the dawning presence of the new age.

Aune shows us the importance of prophecy in early Christianity not only within certain congregations (as in Paul's Corinth) but also in the vital business of linking congregations, providing external support and authority, by

dint of constant travelling. The prophets who appear in Acts and the seer of the Apocalypse of John come into view, as does Paul himself (though, like others who patently display marks of prophecy, he does not use the title). From a congregation's point of view, such persons required cautious handling, as the *Didache* makes plain, and there was need to have them under other kinds of authority. There was also the problem of discerning genuineness. It was a sign of danger when prophets set up in business independently, like others in the world of the time. Then the faithful had better steer clear.

A major issue is the degree to which the tradition of Jesus' teaching was affected, before the Gospels were written, by Christian prophets reckoning to speak in his name and so either inventing or developing sayings of Jesus. It is an easy subject for speculation, hard to provide concrete evidence. Aune is wisely cautious. It might have happened, it is virtually impossible to say where it did. He is able to show that the popularity of the idea in some quarters is not free of theological wish that fathers "fact".

J. L. Houlden

Origen. The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church

Joseph Wilson Trigg. S.C.M. Press, 1983. Pp. xv + 300. £9.50.

The first thing which has to be said about this book is that it is long overdue. Surprising as it may seem at first sight, there is no modern study in English, apart from this one, which attempts to paint a comprehensive portrait of Origen – by any account one of the leading figures of the Early Church. For that reason alone, the book will have a secure place in libraries and on many bookshelves, since it offers a full and highly readable account of the great man.

When we begin to read more closely though, we begin to appreciate why this book is alone in its field. In spite of Origen's great importance, not very much is known about him, not many of his works survive, and not a great deal can be reconstructed with certainty from the very diverse estimates of his achievement which have survived in other writers. To add to these difficulties, there was another Origen, contemporary with the theologian and sometimes confused with him, though Dr. Trigg distinguishes them carefully in an appendix to his book.

The result of all this uncertainty is that much of the book is not really about Origen at all, but is a fairly general reconstruction of life as it was in the Church and State of his day. Dr. Trigg is a reliable guide to the material which is available, but readers who are familiar with the period are likely to feel somewhat cheated. In a sense this is hardly the author's fault, since lack of information compels him to recreate probabilities where facts are lacking. On the other hand, we may legitimately wonder whether a biography based on chronology is really appropriate in the case of a man about whom so little is known.

These doubts become more serious when we realise that Dr. Trigg has sectioned off Origen's life thematically. Of the ten chapters, nine are concerned with different,

successive periods of his life, but they have titles like *The Church* (c. 185-201), *Grammar and Gnosis* (c. 201-211), *Platonism* (211-15), *Christian Scholarship* (215-22) and so on. No doubt Origen did develop a teaching ministry over a number of years, but it is going a bit far to slot exegesis and prayer into the years 234-38!

It is difficult not to think that the chronological scheme is unnecessary, and that the book would have been quite successful if only the thematic approach had been adopted. Dr. Trigg gives us a useful summary of Origen's extant works, backing up his remarks with frequent quotations. He also dramatises what is known of Origen's relationships with the Church of Alexandria, and he gives a good account of his Platonic background. At times he relies on speculation, but only when evidence is lacking, and his guesses are seldom implausible. Of special importance is the way in which Dr. Trigg shows that Origen combined religious fervour with intellectualism; indeed, the more intellectual Origen became, the more vibrant his faith was. As Dr. Trigg points out, this is not a combination which the modern world finds familiar or even congenial, and the message of Origen, even if it is dated in many ways, still has something important to say to our contemporaries today.

The bibliography and notes are useful and the index is well done, making it easy for the reader to find what he wants and to pursue his researches beyond the limits of this volume.

Gerald Bray

Music of the Middle Ages I

Giulio Cattin. Cambridge University Press, 1984. Pp. 246. £22.50.

The Italian series *Storia della musica* has rightly been judged a major contribution to the history of Italian musicology. Giulio Cattin's *Music of the Middle Ages I* is the first of two volumes covering the history of monophony and polyphony to the fifteenth century. Both volumes have been well received outside the Italian-speaking world and Steven Botterill's competent translation is, therefore, a significant addition to the Cambridge University Press music list. David Hiley (Royal Holloway College) and Keith Falconer (*Corpus Troporum*) have also appended impressive additional documentation in the form of footnotes and supplementary bibliography to each chapter. These accretions are up-to-date, concise, and greatly enhance the value of the work.

In around 200 pages, Cattin traces the development of monophonic music in Latin and vernacular languages up to c.1300, and discussion of Gregorian chant takes up nearly a third of the book. Problems of notation are critical here, but Cattin manages to present some rather dry tabular and prose explanation of neumes and their classification in a manner which in no way weakens the impetus of the previous two chapters; these had explained the elements of Jewish worship which find their way into the early Christian liturgy and the relationship they bear to pre-Gregorian Greco-Byzantine, Old-Roman, and Ambrosian chant.

The succinct definition of the contents of the earliest liturgical books is also extremely welcome, but unfortun-

ately, because the passage is included in a chapter on liturgy from the sixth to the ninth centuries, little indication is given of the musical contents of, for example, the various types of missal in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A further weakness is an opaque description of the mechanics of solmisation and mutation in the section entitled "From Oral Tradition to Neumatic Notation"; the table which accompanies Cattin's account of these techniques would leave the uninitiated reader no more enlightened. Nevertheless, the problems of time and rhythm in Gregorian chant receive an excellent and judicious treatment and Cattin, here at his most lucid, is an excellent guide to some treacherous terrain.

Scholars of sequence composition might be slightly dismayed by the sketchy nature of the section of the book devoted to liturgico-musical innovations of the ninth and tenth centuries. The explanation of Adam of St Victor's twelfth-century sequence text is perhaps helpful, but to follow this with an account of the sixteenth-century Council of Trent is a historical leap of faith which stretches the credibility too far. Tropes and ecclesiastical plays are also treated in a slightly terser manner than the scope of the opening chapters might suggest; contrarily, the metrical and dramatic offices are handled excellently as a preface to the discussion of liturgical drama.

A section on vernacular song precedes a discussion of musical instruments and a final chapter on the *ars musica*, which many will see as the best part of the book. Definitions of *musica*, *musicus*, and *cantor* are critical here and Gattin puts these explanations in a context of theory from Boethius to Guido d'Arezzo. Boethius' proposed division of *musica* into *mundana*, *humana*, and *instrumentalis* is examined in the light of the thirteenth-century scholasticism of Vincent of Beauvais, Roger Bacon, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, and Michael Scot. A distinction is drawn between these four "academics" and "theorists", and it is well demonstrated that, whilst thirteenth-century "theorists" might preface a discussion of mode, rhythm, and polyphony with a more-or-less elaborate discussion of patristic writings on music, their academic contemporaries are almost completely silent on what today might be viewed as "practical" matters. But Cattin shows, in his final paragraph, that by 1300 there had been a collision of two traditions, "academic" and "theoretical", in the work of the Parisian writer, Johannes de Grocheo.

The strengths of Cattin's approach are manifold. The discussion of every musico-liturgical issue begins from the standpoint of liturgy. This is perhaps not such a rarity in the accounts of Gregorian chant but, in such a concise exposition, it is valuable to have, for example, a comparative table of mass items in the Roman, Gallican, and Mozarabic rite and similar comparative explanation of the Roman and Ambrosian office. Cattin's view of liturgical priority permeates almost every word of the book and, indeed, may be responsible for the comparatively brief treatment of secular and paraliturgical genres.

Music of the Middle Ages I has to encompass fields of inquiry which have generated more controversy than many others in the history of music. It is the quality of Cattin's judgement, when faced with several conflicting points of view, which is so impressive. His chapter on Old-Roman chant begins with the contrasted views of, on the one hand, Stäblein and his followers and, on the other, Huglo and

Hücke. In the course of drawing up these two battle-lines, Cattin explains the tactics and the weapons in a way which results in a clear understanding of the relevant issues. He expresses appreciation of recent attempts to side-step "the sterile contrast of two contradictory opinions" and offers suggestions of profitable areas of research. A similar discriminating approach is taken to the problem of rhythm in the French secular song of the *troubadours* and *trouvères*. However, no attempt is made to explain the problems of the relationship of content to typology, particularly in the *trouvère* lyric. But Cattin's chapter on the Italian *lauda* is one of the best treatments of this genre in English.

Cambridge University Press have produced an attractive and useful book. As well as the added notes and bibliography, there are translations of selected passages from St. Augustine to Gill da Zamora and these make a welcome addition to the already-published readings in English of these authors. A glossary and an excellent index complete the volume. It is perhaps too patchy to use as an introductory textbook but the light it throws on some particularly dark corners warrants its place on any scholar's bookshelf alongside larger, blander, music histories.

Mark Everist

The Path to Perfection: an Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection

W. E. Sangster. Epworth Press, 1984. Pp. 211. £5.50.

Dr. Sangster died twenty-five years ago, and a recent lecture commemorating his life and ministry underlined his lifelong concern with the quest for sanctity. A convert to Methodism, he was fascinated with Wesley's teaching on holiness, Christian Perfection. This book, first published in 1943, is reprinted without alteration, and exemplifies Sangster's search. It was written, says the author, "during the period in which I forsook my home to share the life of bombed-out people in a public air-raid shelter", in wartime London. That fact, together with Sangster's pastoral concern, helps earth the study in the lives of men and women who know themselves "called to be saints". The style is orotund, for Sangster wrote as he preached, but he is seriously committed to what the Puritans called "practical and experimental divinity".

Not that the book lacks scholarship. Far from it; it was indeed the author's thesis for his London doctorate, and reveals a thorough knowledge of the primary source material. The key text is, of course, Wesley's *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, supplemented by this *Journal*, *Sermons*, and *Letters*; *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, and the *Arminian Magazine*. Somewhat surprisingly, Sangster nowhere draws on the voluminous *Christian Library*, whose fifty volumes give ample evidence of Wesley's theological predilections.

Wesley believed that the doctrine of Christian Perfection or Entire Sanctification was the "grand depositum" of Methodist faith and practice. He taught that, as justification was instantaneous, so was sanctification. In the first, a man knew himself cleansed from the guilt of sin; in the second, from its power. He urged his followers to seek the gift of entire sanctification, now in this life, so that they

might be able to love God with all their heart and soul and their neighbour as themselves, and confess, "I am freed from all sin".

This teaching was strong meat, and most Methodists, in Wesley's day and since, have found it hard to stomach. Dr. Sangster sees great virtue in Wesley's emphasis on pressing on to perfection, but is critical of his doctrinal formulation. He finds Wesley's definition of sin ("a voluntary transgression of a known law"), far too circumscribed, weak on sins of omission, and open to Pharisaism. He cannot accept Wesley's view of sin as a kind of rotten tooth, which can be extracted in one swift, decisive operation of divine grace.

Sangster also criticizes Wesley for using the term perfection for a state of grace belonging to this life. Perfection is an absolute or it is nothing. Yet Wesley, having used the term, qualifies it by disclaiming any "absolute and infallible perfection" and pleading that perfection be "not set too high"! He rejects the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance, and holds that "perfection" can be lost, and then recovered. All this was to invite confusion, and Sangster is surely right to argue that Wesley should have forsworn the term "perfection" and simply urged his followers on to growth in "perfect love".

On the positive side, Wesley's great strength is that for him the essence of Christian Perfection is *agape*, the Christ-like love extolled in 1 Corinthians 13. It is his great preservative against fanaticism and undue reliance on feelings. Sangster aptly cites Wesley's letter to a follower:

You never learned, either from my conversation or preaching or writings, that "holiness consisted in a flow of joy." I constantly told you quite the contrary: I told you it was love; the love of God and our neighbour; the image of God stamped on the heart; the life of God in the soul of man; the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ also walked.

He might have quoted, to even greater effect, a passage from the *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, which brings a salutary corrective to some modern holiness and charismatic movements.

It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this – the heaven of heavens is love. There is nothing higher in religion – there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, "Have you received this or that blessing?" if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent.

It is a striking fact that, though Wesley encouraged the Methodists to claim the gift of Christian Perfection, he never claimed to have received it himself. His practice was here surely sounder than his theory, if only because of the *unselfconscious* nature of true sanctity. The point has never been better made than by Bishop Edward King, speaking at a commemoration of St. Botolph in 1909:

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... surprise is the true motto of saints. Good people do not know what they are doing. Good people, as a rule, differ from us ordinary people. Most of us ordinary people know how to be a great deal better than we are, but really good people are generally a great deal better than they know how to be; they are not conscious at all of being what they are. They are simply what they are, good people, and so they are surprised when the result of their lives at all comes out into view.

Much work has been done on Wesley in the forty years since Dr. Sangster wrote. Yet it is good to have his thesis in print again, since it gives a useful critique of Wesley's teaching, and brings before us the thought of a Methodist preacher who notably exemplified that quest for holiness of heart and life which John Wesley urged upon all his followers.

John A. Newton

Faith and Ambiguity

Stewart R. Sutherland. S.C.M. Press, 1984. Pp. xii + 113. £5.95.

Professor Sutherland argues that too many theologians prefer to remain outside the central province of our intellectual environment, meaning by intellectual "a capacity and inclination to serious and critical reflection" on what one believes to be important. He himself chooses in this book to engage in a relocation exercise in the course of exploring the borderlands between belief and unbelief, taking five different philosophers and writers and seeing whether or not they can be fitted neatly into one or other of the two categories into which we habitually put them.

To take his first example, Dostoyevsky, Professor Sutherland writes of him that "his genius is the expression of the spiritual pain which comes from simultaneously inhabiting the worlds of belief and unbelief". The argument uses examples from three of Dostoyevsky's novels, not least *The Brothers Karamazov*, about which Professor Sutherland has written an independent and finely illuminating book. Unlike Myshkin of *The Idiot*, Alyosha is turned out of the monastery to the pressures of life outside it, where belief needs to survive and define itself if Ivan is to receive an adequate answer to his atheism. Yet Dostoyevsky's exploration of the possibility of a "resurrected life" remained incomplete, for his writings reject all mere theories of human nature and selfhood.

And Professor Sutherland's treatment of the mature Hume restores Hume's "borderlands sympathies" in his complex response to the question, "What is it to believe in God?" Belief is identified as "a thin verbal skin attached to experience of the world" and religious sentiments could be consigned to "the recreation ground of experience".

The chapter on Kierkegaard is perhaps the most distinguished in the book, because Professor Sutherland here offers his readers a masterly introduction to this very subtle thinker, whose position as "an outsider" is not at all uncongenial to Professor Sutherland himself, one suspects. Kierkegaard quite properly protests "at the mistaken applications of certain specific patterns of reason within the area of religion". Kierkegaard develops a whole style of

indirect communication to express the ultimate significance of religious belief for human decision and action *without* its being used as a foundation for morality. Picking his way through the Kierkegaardian minefield, Professor Sutherland presents Kierkegaard's intention to defend Christianity in its true form, independently of his own subjective relation to it. "Not only may the non-believer come to an understanding of what Christianity is, he can help others to do so as well". This coheres with the point that "since faith is a matter of an individual's inner life, the hiddenness of faith seems at times compatible with, and at other times almost to demand, an outer appearance not discriminately different from that of unbelief". Kierkegaard thinks of human life as a process of movement, having less than completion, fulfilment, eternal happiness, so that the *manner* in which the individual apprehends this truth is decisive, though "this does not rule out the possibility that in times different from his own, it might have to be stressed that the 'what' of belief is a *necessary* condition of faith correctly called Christian". This is important, given some twentieth century interpretations of Kierkegaard, who is dominated by the conception of a transcendent and sovereign God, though again, this needs qualifying by drawing attention to the sense in which ambiguity is of the essence of faith.

The final chapter takes Camus and Simone Weil together, since Camus had engaged in a dialogue with her posthumous writings, a dialogue which turned out to be "a model of intellectual and spiritual exploration". Professor Sutherland again displays his sympathies to us in his lively remark that "Even in the tight, clipped suspicious times of economic retrenchment Meursault can briefly re-ignite the soused embers of rebellion in the human spirit". Apart from showing us Camus' intellectual, moral and spiritual humility, Professor Sutherland rescues Simone Weil from the sugar of semi-secular hagiography not least by reminding us of her attack on the notion of a "personal Providence" in her effort to retain some of the language and thought forms of religion. She shifted her focus in an original and extremely painful way to make "cosmological considerations" central to her account of religious belief. Those who gag at her argument that fulfilment will be found in love of the order of the world may find themselves with Camus, speaking in the accents of protest and rebellion, or of course, dozing with many so-called theologians who engage with neither of them.

In his postscript, Professor Sutherland introduces his readers to the category of pilgrimage, the provisional and exploratory character of their styles of life which these five writers have in common despite their considerable differences. In his concluding remarks he lobbs a verbal grenade at his readers: "Perhaps the phenomena which we have been examining will appear excessively intellectual to those muscular souls for whom issues of belief or unbelief are clear and unambiguous. To these there is little else to say other than that thinking always includes the possibility of thinking again."

Enthusiasts for Professor Sutherland's work will now reach for his other published work to which this is in its way a succinct introduction. Those new to his writing will not find the pilgrimage easy, but it may kick them awake.

Ann Loades

The Nature of Doctrine

George A. Lindbeck. S.P.C.K., 1984. Pp. 142. £10.00.

This book is based on a threefold distinction between different ways of understanding doctrine. According to the first way, the cognitive, doctrines “function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities” (p. 16). According to the second, the “experiential-expressive” way doctrines are “non-informative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations” (ibid). The author, who here acknowledges the influence of Wittgenstein, supports the third, “cultural-linguistic” or “regulative” way, that rests on a comparison with languages and their correlative forms of life. “The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action” (p. 18). According to this view, the permanently valid core (or “categorical framework”) of Christianity consists, not in dogmas or experiences, but in “the biblical narratives interrelated in certain specified ways” (p. 80).

In chapter five Lindbeck applies his theory to christology, Marian dogmas and infallibility. Obviously the crucial case is the first. He maintains that Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations must be understood, not as first order statements about objective reality, but in terms of second order statements of rules for christological discourse. Thus the affirmation of the Son’s consubstantiality with the Father must be seen “in terms of the rule that whatever is said of the Father is said of the Son, except that the Son is not the Father” (p. 94). In the next paragraph Lindbeck states three regulative principles of a general kind that operated in the evolution of patristic christology. “First, there is the monotheistic principle: there is only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Joseph and Jesus. Second, there is the principle of historical specificity: the stories of Jesus refer to a genuine human being who was born, lived, and died in a particular time and place. Third, there is the principle of what may infelicitously be called christological maximalism: every possible importance is to be ascribed to Jesus that is not inconsistent with the first rules”.

Lindbeck is surely right in affirming that we must not regard doctrinal statements in isolation solely as affirmations of fact or expressions of attitude. We must place them in the total context of the Church’s life and worship. Nevertheless I am dissatisfied with his formulation of this truth (which has been widely held in other forms) for these closely connected reasons.

1. I am unconvinced by his reduction of Christian doctrines to linguistic rules. I can best illustrate this by his treatment of Nicene christology. It seems to me historically false to say (as Lindbeck says on p. 94) that Athanasius considered the affirmation of Christ’s deity to be, not a first order proposition with ontological reference, but a second order rule of speech; and that “it was only later, in medieval scholasticism, that the full metaphysical import of the doctrine was asserted”. In any case the question whether doctrinal statements can be (and, if they can be, must be) given a first order sense (that is, whether they can be and, if they can be, must be held to embody truth claims concerning God’s reality) remains. Lindbeck’s answer is unsatisfactory. On p. 66 he writes that “there seems to be no reason why cultural-linguistic theories of religion need

exclude, even though they do not imply, the modest cognitivism or propositionalism represented by at least some classical theists, of whom Aquinas is a good example”. Yet Lindbeck has imperilled cognitive objectivity on the previous page by writing that “a religious utterance acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence”. Moreover, on p. 106 he asserts that the affirmation of theistic (specifically trinitarian) truth claims is not “doctrinally necessary” and ought not to be made “communally normative for the way Christians live and think”.

2. Although it may be possible to construct second order rules governing the affirmation of first order truth claims in doctrinal thinking, I doubt whether Lindbeck’s three principles are christologically adequate. They could be taken to imply that Jesus was only a human creature standing in a special relation to the Creator. In fact in a note on p. 109 Lindbeck concedes that doubts may be expressed concerning the number and character of the principles he has described.

3. The status that Lindbeck assigns to biblical narratives as a “categorical framework”, a continuing basis for fluctuating doctrine, is questionable. What exactly are these narratives? Are they doctrinally sufficient? Lindbeck admits that “even those who doctrinally agree that the story of Jesus is the key to the understanding of reality are often in fundamental disagreement over what the story is really about” (p. 119). And so there is no universal agreement concerning either the story or its “grammar”.

H. P. Owen

The Moral Psychology of the Virtues

N. J. H. Dent. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy, CUP, 1984. Pp. ix + 223. £20.00.

This book is a detailed story of an area of philosophical enquiry that lies between ethics and the philosophy of mind. It seeks to describe and delineate those states of character (such as kindness and courage) we know as “the virtues” and to explain what the human self must be like if such states are to exist. Though it does touch in important ways upon questions relating to the nature and justification of morals, greater space is devoted to discussing questions in the philosophy of mind concerning the nature and varieties of desire and the function of reason in directing, quelling or initiating desire.

What is the interest of these technical, detailed analyses in the philosophy of mind to the student of theology or religion? The answer lies in the manner in which Dent focusses them upon a conception of human nature. This is one which accepts as possible, indeed recommends as the ideal of an achieved humanity, an integration of desire and reason, feeling and intellect, emotion and thought. The arguments for this conception are in turn directed towards showing the implausibility of the opposing dichotomous picture of man on which so much bad and harmful thinking about human nature is based. Theology, though it does have in figures like Aquinas representatives of the sounder view of the human person, has been as much bedevilled by the falsely divisive account of man Dent attacks as any other branch of Western thought.

The reason why Dent's target is as stated comes from his clear analysis of what a virtue, like kindness, consists in. The person who is kind helps others in need or distress neither because he merely takes pleasure in so doing, nor because he merely thinks it right to do so. In the first case his interest in others would be too accidental and impermanent to say he possessed the virtue of kindness; in the second case he would be doing outwardly kind deeds out of conscientiousness, not because he was genuinely kind. Rather, to possess such a trait of character is to achieve union of desire/feeling *and* the recognition of what is right and fitting: "... it is in a certain integration of these that the possession of such virtues consists" (25). Moreover, we see in Dent's illumination of the nature of virtue that this integration of desire and reason must be expressed *in action*. Thus another dichotomy comes under fire: that which separates reason from conduct. The work becomes an argument for the possibility of something we could genuinely call "practical reason" – reason which controls and is expressed in conduct.

In the detailed analyses of desire, passion, reason, etc., that support these general conclusions, Dent frequently seems to be calling in the old to defeat the modern. The targets of criticism are Hume (who thinks that reason is always the slave of the passions) and, less explicitly, Kant (who contends that reason expresses itself in conduct independently of all "inclinations"). The positive arguments are drawn from Plato and Aristotle (and to a much lesser extent Aquinas), who preserve an integrated account of virtue and of the human self. One wonders what philosophical/theological developments might be responsible for this apparently genuine historical fall from grace. Is it – as MacIntyre has suggested in various places – the re-emergence of Pauline-Augustinian doctrines of depravity in the Reformation?

The Moral Psychology of the Virtues is not an easy book to read; the philosophical ground it covers is too detailed and complex for that. And because it covers a wide range of questions to do with the nature of human desires, passions and emotions, readers are bound to find points of detail that they will wish to question. (For example: my first reading provoked me to object to the account of anger in Ch 6. Dent writes as if it is always a self-regarding passion, one that is unreasonable in nature because based upon too high a regard for one's self-esteem in the eyes of others. Whereas, anger is often other-regarding, and not to feel or display anger at some of the evils done to others would seem a kind of failing). There is, in addition, one important aspect of Dent's general conclusion that some will wish to question. The integration of sense-desire, passion and reason that Dent finds in a life that gives expression to the virtues is in the end achieved through the *dominance* of reason over the non-rational sources of affection and action. The influence of Plato's conception of the relation between desire, passion and reason is strong throughout, as Dent's definition of living according to the "true self" indicates: "... it is through ordering and shaping his life by his practically rational judgement that someone is his own master, possesses his own self and makes his life the active expression of that self" (p. 213). I find this kind of view of the importance of reason congenial, but one can imagine those who would favour an integrated account of the self which places greater emphasis than Dent's upon the sense-desires and particularly the passions as sources of valuation and stability in the self. They will wonder whether sense-desire and passion get a good enough run for their money in Dent's argument.

Despite these qualms, I hope to have indicated why the argument of this book is of interest to all students of human nature, and why all just reasoners on these matters should wish to join in defence of its general aim.

Peter Byrne

The Quest for Eternity. An Outline of the Philosophy of Religion

J. C. A. Gaskin. Penguin, 1984. Pp. 197. £3.50.

Undergraduates doing a course in the subject need short surveys of the current state of the philosophy of religion. There is also a need for books which will present this to the general reader (or to the person who is studying only theology). Anglo-Saxon philosophy as a whole has changed since the 1930s or 1950s. Philosophers now are inclined to see structures of metaphysical belief underlying ordinary practices, and there is room for arguments for and against these beliefs. Such arguments are bound to feel remote from the experience of carrying on the practice. The philosophy of religion has fallen into line: in the work of Swinburne (*The Existence of God*, 1979) and Mackie (*The Miracle of Theism*, 1982) arguments for and against the existence of a non-embodied mind which created and sustains all other things are back at the centre of the subject.

But general readers may wonder why they need to engage with arguments which are so distant from what religious believers, as such, think about and do. Theologically educated readers may take a lot of convincing. Professor Gaskin's first chapter aims at doing this, but it contains little more than the assertion that the content of some theological views is not how religious belief has traditionally been understood. This seems like an atheist philosopher's complaint that his target will not stand still while he shoots at it. Cupitt, in particular, should agree that he is not offering the product formerly sold under this label, but insist that the new product should be considered on its own merits, especially as (he would say) the traditional product is no longer available. We need a sympathetic explanation that, since "ultimate concern" presupposes that things are a certain way (on some accounts of how things are, it would not be appropriate to take anything that seriously), it cannot be *basic*, and of what is really wrong with Robinson's theological phenomenalism, and of the errors of Cupitt's moral psychology.

On the standard arguments, Gaskin does not consider whether the theist may liken the world's dependence on God to the relation of a mind to its contents. Thus, he sees great difficulties in creation (as opposed to making a thing out of pre-existing stuff). For the same reason, he finds no room for us to request an explanation of the existence of the universe with its persisting properties if it has existed for ever. At least, the theist is allowed to propose an explanation of the laws of nature. Surprisingly, Gaskin does not mention Mackie's argument that the atheist must concede a "basic law of emergence" which attaches consciousness to physical properties. Over religious experience, Gaskin is perhaps too brisk in assuming that there is a fully satisfying naturalistic explanation of the basic types of such experiences. He certainly would not sway someone who thought there was a serious point lurking within Swinburne's "Principle of Credulity".

Gaskin discusses these arguments within what seems in general a sane conception of the relation of conclusions to evidence and arguments. But one point in particular is difficult. He concedes that an atheist has fewer motives to the practice of morality, and inhabits a bleaker world. He also says that atheism has led to an impoverishment of the moral vocabulary. (We may question whether it is atheism that has led to this). He goes on to propose that, there being *some* ground for theistic belief, we may properly be led to choose it by its advantages for morality and comfort. But is it sane to suppose *so much* freedom in the conclusions one arrives at? And will not the theistic belief itself lead to a greater devotion to holding only true beliefs? The policy Gaskin would tolerate may not cohere with the world-view it would adopt.

Gaskin's chief contribution to the literature is in memorable examples and labels. (I particularly liked the example of the ghost in the garden (pp. 26-7), the use made of the common cold as an instance of trivial, pointless, misery (pp. 127-8) and the "social-democratic" view of freedom and foreknowledge (pp. 134-5).

His greatest defects are defects of style. Signposts to what is being said are provided: these are helpful to a lecture audience, but clear writing should mean that a reader does not need them. Names are dropped, in a way that cannot advance understanding. Points are arrayed in lists, and we lose the sense of how opposed positions develop by responding each to the other. And the book appears unfinished: it does not matter in itself, but seems significant, that in succeeding sections Gaskin says *both* that there is no difference between pantheism and classical atheism (p. 113) *and* that the pantheist has a meaningful (albeit outrageously speculative) proposition to advance (p. 116).

Robert Gay

Why Believe in God?

Michael Goulder & John Hick. S.C.M. Press, 1983. Pp. 117. £2.50.

It is good to find theologians who, with great energy, have prepared a thoroughly readable book for what is sometimes pejoratively referred to as "the popular market". Such books are important, for how else can the fruits of the theological endeavour be made available to a wider public? It could also be recommended as introductory reading for a course in Philosophy of Religion. It deals briefly with many of the central questions to be discussed in such a course: religious experience, epistemology, prayer, providence, miracles, the design argument, and so on. Hick and Goulder, both of whom contributed to *The Myth of God Incarnate*, here represent two sides of the religious divide. Goulder has come to see himself as an atheist, and in the first chapter he describes how he came to this position, and the resulting resignation of his orders as an Anglican priest. One has to admire the honesty with which he has set this out, as well as his obvious integrity. Hick represents liberal theology, "driven snow theology" as Goulder refers to it, seeking to preserve the notion of the reality of God in the face of modern scepticism. In the final chapter he makes it clear that this enterprise forms the basis of the Hick corpus, and cannot be explored fully in so small a book as this.

It is the second chapter which forms the basis of the discussion, and Hick's case finally comes to rest on his idea of the trustworthiness of religious experience. Obviously the discussion is not exhaustive, but two things need to be pointed out. First, Hick's view of religious experience is one not shared by many who are engaged in work on mysticism. It is based on the idea that religious experience is in some sense universally the same. Whilst it may be described differently in different cultures, it is grounded in the same fundamental experience of God, a view shared by authors such as W.T. Stace (*Mysticism and Philosophy*). Steven Katz (*Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*) has, to my mind, convincingly challenged this idea of a core religious experience independent of historical and religious context, and Goulder touches on it indirectly in his critique. Second, and this follows from the first point, one wonders to what extent, if at all, the great mystics such as John of the Cross or Meister Eckhart would be able to find much common ground with John Hick? John of the Cross seems to deny the validity of such experiences, and advises his disciples against seeking them. Hick has chosen to adopt a fairly stereotyped view of religious experience; by adopting this view, I wonder whether he is doing justice to "religious experience" in the sense that many of the mystics might have referred to it? Mysticism is in any case a very pluralistic phenomenon. Hick's view seems to concern itself with phenomena rather than what others have described as the "movement of the heart towards God". The result is that he has laid himself open to the accusation that his view of "religious experience" amounts to little more than the temporary suspension of the rational faculties. It seems to say there there is one world for the religious and quite another for the non-religious and no possibility of a meeting between the two.

Michael Goulder stands for the "common sense view", if I may put it that way, but this is a view which tends to see black and white perhaps *too* clearly in a grey world. For him experience of the sort described by Hick will not do, unless it can be "publicly observed". That is to say that he requires evidence and will not allow intensely personal experience to stand on its own. He also charges Hick with predestinarianism, a charge one feels he does not quite escape, despite a denial of it in Chapter 4. Hick's fundamental critique of Goulder, with which I am inclined to agree, is that he has rejected an over-simplified view of God and of Christian faith. Goulder may be right to reject "red-blooded theology", and there are certainly criticisms to be made of Hick's propositions, but it cannot be satisfactory simply to leave it at that; as it were, to pack up our books and go home.

In Chapter 4 we are presented with a concise view of Hick's eschatologically based theodicy. Readers of his other works will recognise this view of the world as a "creation/salvation" process, which goes on in worlds beyond this one – an almost never-ending "vale of soul-making". During this process we are free to make our response to God, Hick argues, but it is not made clear why the postulation of a God is necessary, other than for the reasons given elsewhere. Why cannot the world be internally coherent? How many explanations for this world are needed before we can be satisfied, and why do we need to explain this world always in terms of some other unknowable world? Perhaps Hick has concerned himself too much with a desire to preserve some of the traditional theology and not enough with our knowledge of the world we live in? This approach to theodicy I find unsatisfactory, partly because it seems to ride rough-shod over the sufferings of the present age, especially

those resulting from natural causes. The postulation of a supplementary existence beyond this one is fraught with problems, which presumably there was not the space to go into here, and which he deals with elsewhere.

The book is its own best criticism, for each chapter makes its assessment of what has gone before. It is very much an introductory work, giving one some insight into the problems which make theology and philosophy so difficult and so fascinating. In the final chapter Hick leads his reader into the wider God debate (which is wide indeed), by outlining the views of others who have taken up the challenge, such as Don Cupitt. His assertion throughout is that religious experience is the best basis for any postulation of God. This may well be so, but his own statement of it is for me inadequate, as it is for Michael Goulder. In the end we are left with the question whether the dismantling of Christian doctrine leads one to the rejection of God himself, a question which Goulder has answered in the affirmative. The results of such discussions as these may be painful to many, but we can ill afford to give them up.

Peter Wibroe

People of God. A Plea for the Church

Anton Houtepen. S.C.M. Press, 1984. Pp. 208. £7.95.

The year 1983 saw the publication of at least two important books on the Church by Roman Catholic authors: one, the massive *Codex Iuris Canonici*, the other, the much briefer volume under review here. Selective quotation from these two works could produce an almost comic divergence of tone and discrepancy of method. It would not be difficult to present the *Code* as the exact embodiment of what Dr Houtepen sees to be the peril of ecclesiology, presenting "the church" as something cut and dried, an object to be described, an independent entity or hypostasis". In that case the church is a "fossilized entity, overwhelming people, that even speaks to them as an authority" (p. 22). Perhaps it is unfair to press the comparison too far, for while canon law should indeed be informed by ecclesiology, and must constantly be subject to revision, its task still differs from what Dr Houtepen sets himself. His is a plea for the Church, the Church that is still to be; and to him, all present institutional forms of the Church are but preliminary schemes or sketches for such a body: "the Church is a provisional organization", he writes on p.26, "because it lives on longing". That longing, according to Dr Houtepen, "is the desire of those who seek the Kingdom of God"; and that is the definition of one of his chief concepts, "ecumene". "Ecumene" is both "the kingdom of God in the human world" (p. 35), and the desire that draws men and women into that kingdom. It is the longing that both brings the Church into being, and keeps it in an unfixd and unfinished condition.

It need scarcely be said that the subject of Dr Houtepen's essay is not simply the Roman Catholic Church; both the range of his knowledge of the contemporary Church and his treatment of the subject are impressively ecumenical. The middle part of his book is a wide-ranging and deeply scriptural reflection upon current ecumenical treatment of the doctrines of God and of Christ, of the use of the creeds and sacraments, of the Christian ethic and the

Christian ministry. He seeks to demonstrate that a proper consideration of each of these *must* be ecumenical. With regard to baptism, for example, he quotes the Dutch Council of Churches: "Reflection on the nature of baptism irrevocably forces us to the need to overcome the division in the churches" (p. 98). Of the eucharist, he concludes that "the very nature of eucharistic communion calls for the visible unity of the Church as a *communio* of sister churches" (p. 122).

There is nothing introverted about Dr Houtepen's "plea" for the Church: that, indeed, would be a denial of what he means by "ecumene". His plea is no plaintive attempt to patch up the sinking ship. From his opening chapter, a careful analysis of the decline (both real and apparent) of the Western Church, he combines a truly pastoral (and at times passionate) understanding of those whom the Church has failed or disappointed, with a joyful affirmation of what the Church can be. A richness of human sympathy, and a realism about the world, pervade this book; indeed, were it not for a density of theological technicalities, and an untidy style which at times approaches shorthand, it would be an admirable one to recommend to the general reader.

In his final chapter he sketches an ecumenical approach to the idea of a single, visible Church, in which his treatment of the papacy is even further removed from any trace of ultramontanist than the *Final Report* of ARCIC(I), or the work of J.R.M. Tillard, recently reviewed by Professor Hanson in this journal. This, however, is done without any attempt to grasp the nettle of infallibility: he offers the prospect of a universal primacy of the See of Rome, towards which the Churches might indeed have moved, had the First Vatican Council not taken place. One is tempted to feel that the only Church which would find difficulty in accepting Dr Houtepen's notion of papacy is the Church of Rome! For the main part of his book he quotes no Anglican theologian, and although in his final chapter he does consider the Lambeth Quadrilateral as representing one search for the basis of organic unity among the Churches, he does not apparently regard the Anglican experiment of a Communion of self-governing provinces as worth considering as an instance of his preferred model of unity, a fellowship of "sister churches".

These observations, however, do not touch the substance of his essay. A more fundamental defect, that flaws his otherwise impressive argument, is the way in which he does not articulate a notion of God as actively and providentially guiding the future of His Church. It is, admittedly, the attraction of his thesis that he refuses to identify too closely the existing institutions of the Church with the act and will of God. In Dr Houtepen's view, it seems to be enough to say that God first calls the Church into being, and is her destination in the end; but is it no longer possible to speak of God as presently shaping and shepherding his people? A great deal of liturgical speech, both ancient and modern, is apparently beyond the scope of Dr Houtepen's ecclesiology. No doubt this indicates rather the extreme difficulty of articulating any appropriate idea of divine activity in the Church, than a lack of ability on Dr Houtepen's part; but in an essay devoted to the *provisional* character of the Church under God, some such treatment is surely needed. A provisionality based upon human frailty rather than upon divine guidance will not be enough to deter those who would always seek to tidy up ecclesiology into canon law.

Peter Atkinson

Theology at 16+

Edited by James Barnett. Epworth Press, 1984. Pp. 181. £5.95.

Of the series of twelve papers from the eleventh Downside Symposium as compiled in this book, two have been selected here for review. The underlying unity of the various papers is best described in relation to the terms of reference of theology, and the way in which those terms of reference are understood by the contributors. But within this "unity" there is an apparent divergence of outlook.

For example, Bishop Christopher Butler, speaking on Doctrine and Theology, examines the relationship between theology and doctrine in the light of the teaching authority of the Church, a distinctly Roman Catholic position. He reviews the Education Act of 1944 which he says one may suspect can be held responsible, in its effort to work out an agreed religious syllabus for the teaching of religious doctrine in the schools, for the reductionism which turned religious instruction to scriptural exegesis rather than doctrinal information. He claims that the problem is even more acute today when the classrooms are filled with a mixture not only of different forms of Christianity but of a variety of different religions. Hence, he questions the tendency today to substitute for the old agreed syllabuses something which is hardly distinguishable from a watered-down and dangerously sketchy sort of "comparative religion". As a result, since each religion has its own identity, the Bishop is concerned that such so-called religious instruction will become not the presentation of the doctrinal content of a religion but a non-committed exercise in human history. He states that he would prefer that school children be given the opportunity of rejecting religion which they have been accurately and religiously taught at school than left to drift around in a morass of half-baked history of man's uncontrolled sallies into the alleged unknown. From this, Bishop Butler argues his theological point that since theology, as an exercise of understanding, depends upon the data that it proposes to understand, it is obvious that it cannot create its own data. If, therefore, it is to be Christian theology, as distinct from the sociology of religion, comparative religion, and religious philosophy, it can only accept data provided by the church; and if it rejects such data or any intrinsic element in such data, it ceases to be Christian theology.

Brenda Watson would endorse Christopher Butler's thesis, but as Director of the Farmington Institute for Christian Studies in Oxford, she is concerned with the need for properly trained teachers. In relation to this she questions the appropriateness of the present examination system, suggesting that the greater part of the lesson time available in school should be used in such a way as to make in-depth enquiry and investigation an integral part of the R.E. course. This she connects with consideration of the appropriateness of theology to the school. She points out that discrimination in the schools against R.E. as a subject has relegated it to a Cinderella status which has resulted not only in the lowering of standard in the training of religious education teachers but in the opting out of that area by a large percentage of trainees. She points out that recent government documents bemoan deficiencies in the sciences, modern languages and so forth, but express little concern for or understanding of religious education. Hence, even among those who advocate religious education vociferously

the case for the inclusion of theology has to be fought. She expresses the same concern as that of Bishop Butler when she points out the pitfall in the phenomenological approach, the result of a relativistic attitude towards Christian beliefs resulting from the acceptance of or the belief in the desirability of a pluralist society. In this, the *human* dimension is placed in the forefront, while any real engagement with the content of what people believe *for its own sake*, and serious questions as to its truth are evaded. The legacy for all this is the avoidance of theology even by sincere educationalists. Brenda Watson also points out that another stroke against taking theology seriously is that it does not comply with the required standard of "relevance". She offers a number of challenging suggestions in reference to the individual teacher with regard to A level examination work within the present system. She claims that a serious listening to the children's questions, a variety of teaching techniques, the willingness to develop topics in depth and, above all, the teacher's own continuing wrestling with theological problems, refusing to take refuge in theological jargon, can all contribute to overcoming obstacles to the promoting of theological thinking among the young.

In the Appendix to her paper, Brenda Watson explores the *Value of "Seen" Examinations* as a viable alternative to the present system, for she contends that if religion is controversial at its very roots, and if indoctrination is to be avoided on the one hand, and a watering-down which fails to give pupils any adequate awareness of religion, on the other hand, it is essential to enable candidates to enjoy, and to explore, the vital issues of interpretation and opinion, together with the possibility of serious commitment on their part. To fail to provide an arena for such responsible thinking cannot be termed educational.

In the final *An Appraisal*, Brenda Watson's observations of some of the views expressed in the various papers are incisive and thought-provoking. To conclude she challenges the view presented by two or three contributors that religion is itself peculiarly an adult activity. A book such as *Mister God, This is Anna* suggests it is possible to underestimate the capacities of children. Therefore, a case for the theology of 5+ (or 5-) is only to underline the necessity of it at 16+.

Donal O'Leary

Planetary Theology

Tissa Balasuriya. S.C.M. Press, 1984. Pp. 282. £6.95.

Tissa Balasuriya is Chaplain to the Asian Catholic Student Federation and Director of the Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo. In *Planetary Theology* he argues that over the past few centuries a world system of unjust relationships has been set up, to which the churches have contributed, not least as a result of some unexamined aspects of their theology. Many features of traditional theology prevent its helping Christianity to play a liberating role in modern human life. Traditional theology, according to Balasuriya, is culture-bound, church-centred, male and age dominated, pro-capitalist, anti-communist, over-theoretical and unrelated to the social contexts in which it is developed. In its place, Balasuriya sets forth the outline of a planetary theology which takes account of the spiritual and physical needs of the whole world, seen in terms of North

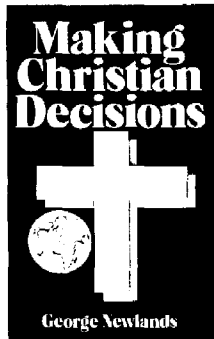
and South as well as East and West. He looks at the background to this theology particularly in his native Asia, and then outlines the "radical conversion" to which the churches are called in worship, teaching, mission and social action.

Because it is a *cri de coeur*, one should not look here for an impartial, objective analysis which carefully weighs up both sides of the argument. In the same vein as James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*, the provocative, polemical tone of *Planetary Theology* may lead some readers not to take Balasuriya's books seriously, and to see it as little more than an emotional outburst, dominated too much by a mood of profound dissatisfaction with the capitalist west, and riding too self-consciously on the crest of the liberation theology wave that seems to be sweeping all before it. But this would be to misunderstand profoundly the function and the power of such a book. Yes, it is heavily biased against the West; yes, it does contain some apparently absurd ideas, such as the suggestions that "all the whites in New Zealand should move to Australia over two decades, to allow New Zealand to be settled by Bengalis", and that "West Canadians could easily be settled in the US West so that the area from Alaska to Vancouver and east to Winnipeg could absorb millions of Chinese who would doubtless make better use of the land" (at this point I wrote in the margin of my review copy "this is madness!"). One does get tired of the seemingly endless list of complaints that a given system or approach is "ageist", "sexist", "castist", "classist", "racist", "tribalist" and "feudalist" (often all at the same time); not to mention a certain *naivete* regarding the world of *Realpolitik* and the

great difficulty encountered there daily by men and women of goodwill whose responsibilities force them to grapple with the complexities of a world system that is real and solid and will not go away just because we do not like it. Yet this is completely ignored in some of the questions Balasuriya asks (e.g. "How was it possible for an American Bishop to visit the US forces in Vietnam at Christmas and encourage them to fight the poor Vietnamese in the name of the Prince of Peace?"). Is this the language of propaganda – or of prophecy? If it is propaganda, then, as George Orwell reminded us, such sloppiness in the handling of words and arguments is the first step on the road to tyranny – religious and political. By over-simplifying their case and failing to recognise the intricate web of contributory causes, that go to make up any given political or religious situation, liberation theologians such as Balasuriya put at risk their right to be taken seriously as prophets.

There is, however, another sort of simplicity of style and clarity of message evident in *Planetary Theology* that has the hall-mark of genuine prophecy. That is why this is such an important, disturbing, uncomfortable and maddening book to read – much of what it says strikes home. We in the West do not like to be told by an Asian that "the prevailing world system cannot be understood in depth if the long history of the rape of the rest of the world by European peoples is ignored" (and he makes out a strong case for this). It is disturbing to be reminded that even in the political realm "the unique criterion of God's judgement is that of loving service to the neighbour in need", and that "the 'I was hungry and you gave me food...' passage from

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Matthew 25 is the criterion for judging every human being who has ever lived or will ever live on earth". Here are the same questions being asked, with equal effectiveness, by an Asian theologian as were recently being asked by Bob Geldof in connection with his Live Aid appeal. The political expediency of the usual answers provided by governments in the West are made to sound just as hollow by the direct approach both men.

Most challenging of all is Balasuriya's analysis of goals and methods towards a fundamental re-structuring of personal values and social structures, in order that a new world order based on a spirituality of justice may be established. He categorises the difficulties and risks to be faced at each stage of the process as: low risk/low yield; high risk/high yield; very high risk/uncertain yield; no risk/no yield. While many of us shy away from the third of these, "the do-or-die methods related to physical overthrow of an existing regime; systematic sabotage; insurrection" (although no doubt happy to have supported a war against someone like Hitler, thereby ensuring the overthrow of *his* regime), it is to our shame that we are still all too often unable to support even the high risk/high yield activity of the type popularised by Ghandi. Instead we prefer to remain firmly locked in the no risk/no yield syndrome of "indifferent social goals such as personality development, debating, novenas and pilgrimages". It will take the searing attack of a man like Balasuriya to awaken us out of our deep sleep of indifference.

Christopher Brice

Moderated Love. A Theology of Professional Care

Alastair V. Campbell. S.P.C.K., 1984. Pp. 160. £4.95.

An explanation of the meaning of the title of this book (originally the 1983 Edward Cadbury Lectures) may serve as the best way of introducing a discussion of its contents. Campbell's thesis is that those engaged in the professions of medicine, nursing and social work are, when being true to their profession, carrying out their calling in a way which manifests love (*agape*) and friendship (*philia*). This love is, however, moderated, first, in the sense of moderation or temperateness, implying that a subtle balance between involvement and detachment is maintained. Second, like the Presbyterian Moderator, professional helpers represent more than human attempts to care in that they symbolize the impossible ideal of *agape* which restores full value to every individual, however damaged. There is therefore a religious dimension to professional commitment, although the givers of moderated love need not necessarily see themselves as believers.

This being the theme of the book, Campbell examines the three professions chosen for scrutiny to try to identify those aspects of medicine, nursing and social work which are most characteristically loving. A chapter is devoted to each in which various popular stereotypes are demolished (generally "men of straw", tilting at which is a simple matter), and the loving core of each profession is identified. The love of the medical person consists in brotherliness which is an act of getting close to the individuality of the patient through an awareness of fellow humanity and mutual dependence. A nurse's love is identified as skilled companionship, which conveys notions of physical close-

ness, expresses mutuality and requires commitment within defined limits. The social worker's love is prophetic in that it sees a dimension of hope which transcends the despairing picture of what is visualised at present. Throughout these chapters, Campbell's analysis is stimulating, thought-provoking and clearly aware of current literature relating to the professions' development. He has succeeded in identifying a facet of *agape* in each profession which is truly characteristic of that calling (while not absent from other professions). Thus, although the hopeful dimension is present in nursing, it is more specifically to be found in social work; likewise social work involves companionship, but not to the same degree that nursing does. This is, then, a most perceptive description of the subtle qualities of caring love.

Since he uses the expression "love" frequently, Campbell attempts a discussion of precisely what, in theological and practical terms, he means by the word. He examines the ideas of Erich Fromm, Paul Tillich and Max Scheler; the former two have helpful insights, particularly Tillich's distinction between *epithymia*, *eros*, *philia* and *agape*, but it is in Scheler's description of love as the risking of self in order to enhance the value of another that Campbell finds the most adequate expression of the altruistic love shown by professional carers. The final three chapters are devoted to a working out in theological terms of the implications of the ideal that the carers' loving actions will enhance the value of others. The doctrines of creation, incarnation and resurrection are related to the risk-taking, limitation-acknowledging and yet hope-inspiring aspects of a professional's care. The sacramental nature of care as a tangible manifestation of love which points to transcendent realities is examined, and finally the political dimension of transforming love is explored as an aspect of the work of the body of Christ as an agent for structural change. Campbell's thinking here is at once profound and yet easy to follow. He expresses a fear in his "Preamble" that his tendency to "expropriate and reinterpret major theological themes with a minimum of scholarly justification" (pp. 2-3) may appear to systematic theologians to be "somewhat cavalier", but the skill with which he fills traditional doctrinal forms with ideas so directly relevant to those involved in the caring professions makes his fears groundless.

Particularly satisfying is his finding in the mundane physical necessities of care the "sacrament of the cup of cold water" (p. 99). To those who, in the nursing profession particularly, are regularly giving heavy, unpleasant, often distressing physical care, it is refreshing to discover that it is not only nurses who are conscious of the sacramental aspect of their labour. Less helpful is Campbell's tendency to undervalue the qualities specific to the gender of the giver of care. He speaks of the sensuousness involved in physical caring, but seems eager to disallow the entry of male or female characteristics into the caring relationship. To do this is to try to introduce an unnatural division of personality: as caring professionals, we care for people with our whole selves, and this includes channelling (perhaps by sublimation) our gender-specific attributes and energies into a therapeutic interaction.

The book is a fine work of practical theology, and as its author hopes, "opens some interesting new vistas on the transcendent character of human caring" (p. 3). Its scope is such that it will be of value not only to those, whether Christian or not, engaged in the caring professions, but also

to those whose religious work brings them into contact with those professions.

Nicolas Clough

BOOKS RECEIVED

- Allen, D. *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. S.C.M. Pp. vi +287. £9.50.
- Cranfield, C.E.B. *The Bible and Christian Life*. T. and T. Clark. Pp. vii +248. £6.45.
- Crawford, R.G. *The Saga of God Incarnate. UNISA* (available from T. and T. Clark). Pp. xii +106. £7.95.
- Gunton, C.E. *Enlightenment and Alienation. An Essay towards a Trinitarian Theology*, M.M.S. Pp. ix +166. £5.95.
- Harvey, A.E. (ed.) *Alternative Approaches to New Testament Study*. S.P.C.K. Pp. x +144. £4.95.
- Israel, M. *The Discipline of Love. The Ten Commandments for Today*. S.P.C.K. Pp. 107. £3.95.
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- Lewis, H.D. *Freedom and Alienation*. Scottish Academic Press. Pp. x +159. £10.50 (hb), £6.75 (pb).
- Lohfink, G. *Jesus and Community. The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*. S.P.C.K. Pp. xii +211. £4.95.
- Martin Soskice, J. *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Clarendon Press. Pp. x +191. £17.50.
- Mascall, E.L. *Jesus: Who He is – and how we know Him*. D.L.T. Pp. 64. £1.95.
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- Newlands, G. *Making Christian Decisions*. Mowbray. Pp. x +127. £4.50.
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- Vance, N. *The Sinews of the Spirit. The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought*. C.U.P. Pp. x +244. £22.50.
- Winstanley, M.T. *Come and See An Exploration into Christian Discipleship*. D.L.T. Pp. xi +148. £3.95.