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# KING'S

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**KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW**

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# PRESERVING GOD'S CREATION THREE LECTURES ON THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGY

JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS

Editorial Note

We publish here the second of Professor Zizoulas' lectures, given at King's College in January 1989, and repeat what we said of the first, that it is printed as delivered, and not in the final form in which its author may eventually wish to develop it.

## LECTURE TWO

### INTRODUCTION

In our previous lecture, we emphasized the seriousness of the situation with which humanity, and indeed our planet as a whole, are faced because of the ecological problem, and tried to look briefly at history in order to see to what extent (a) Christian theology could be regarded as responsible for the ecological crisis of our time, and (b) Christian tradition could be of help in our attempt to deal with this crisis. Our brief and inevitably generalized historical survey led us to the conclusion that the Christian Church and its theology have indeed been to a large extent responsible for the emergence of the ecological problem in our time, but that, in spite of that, they possess resources that can be of help to humanity in its present crisis. The ecological problem, therefore, although being a problem of science and to a large degree of ethics, education and state legislation, is also a theological problem. As it is evident that certain theological ideas have played an important role in the creation of the problem, so it must be the case too, that the theological ideas can influence the course of events in the reverse way.

Theology cannot and should not be irrelevant to the creation of culture. It is unfortunate that Christian theology has in our time very often taken a negative view of culture, science, etc., very much in contradiction to its fundamental claims and beliefs. And it is equally regrettable that owing to pressures from the Enlightenment, theology and the Church have been marginalized in our Western society and became incapable of doing harm as well as good to modern culture. One would suspect that, from the way things develop in our modern world, the absence of theology from our culture will be felt very deeply, as science, ethics, etc., appear increasingly unable to handle situations such as the one created by the ecological problem. For it is necessary to repeat the point I tried to underline in the previous lecture, namely that without a world-view that involves religious and what we may call *liturgical* attitudes to creation it will be impossible to reverse the alarming situation the world is facing today.

How does Christian theology view creation and man's place in it? This is the question to which we must now address ourselves. If Christian theology has somehow led the world to its present crisis, by what ideas can it now help the world to deal with it?

In order to answer this question, we propose to deal first with the way Christian tradition views the reality we normally call *creation*. This will be the task of tonight's lecture. Our next step in tomorrow's lecture will concern more specifically the role man is called to play in creation. It will then, we hope, be possible to draw some conclusions as to what Christian theology and the Church can offer to man in the difficult crisis he is faced with in our time.

### I. Doctrines of Creation in the First Centuries

"Creation" is a term which Christian theology found from the beginning to be convenient in order to express its world view. It is a term which indicates that the world as we know it is a work or a product of someone, the result of a certain personal cause. The normal Greek term corresponding to creation is *demiourgia*, although the Christian writers of the first centuries, for reasons to which we shall refer presently, prefer to use the term *ktisis* — a word that brings to mind images of craftsmanship, or rather of building and raising an edifice.

Now, the view of the world as a 'creation' by someone was by no means a Judeo-Christian invention. The idea was widespread at the time of the rise of Christianity that the world was created by some creator, and what the Church had to do was not so much to insist on this idea as to offer its own interpretation of it. True, there were still around some atheists in the first and second centuries A.D. who would either attribute the world to certain laws inherent in its nature and be happy with this explanation (such were the "physiologists" whom Plato had in mind in providing for them a stiff penalty, inscribed in his *Laws*; or who, like Epicureans, would attribute the world to pure chance. But all these were negligible, almost marginalized in the intellectual milieu in which the Early Church found itself, and it is for this reason that the Christian writers did not bother very much about them. The main views of creation that the Church had to face and from which it was seen to dissociate itself fell into two categories. One was the *Gnostic* interpretation of creation, and the other was what we may call *Platonic* or classical Greek philosophical view. To these two we shall briefly turn in order to see in what way the Christian concept of creation took its shape in this early period.

Gnosticism took the view that the world in which we live is so penetrated with evil, pain, suffering, etc., that it could not have been created by God, the Father whose goodness would never have allowed Him to create such a world. Thus, in order to keep God the Father free from any responsibility for the evil that permeates the world, Gnosticism attributed creation to the lowest of the intermediaries between the ineffable Father and the world. This it called *Demiourgos* (literally "Creator"), and made him responsible for creation. Gnosticism believed that creation is bad by definition and had no interest in saving it, particularly in its material form. Man was created (according to certain Gnostic myths) before the material world was made, and his present material state of existence constitutes his fall. Salvation is achieved through knowledge (*gnosis* — hence the name of this heresy), a secret knowledge of the truth taught by the teachers of

the Gnostic schools. It is through an escape from time and space that man can be saved. Caring for this material world is the most absurd and in fact sinful thing there is. The *sooner* you get away from the material world the better.

It is known to all of you that the Church took a very negative attitude towards Gnosticism. Great theologians of that time, in particular St Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon at the end of the 2nd century, wrote treatises against the Gnostics. The result of this anti-Gnostic polemic was to have a statement included in the early baptismal creeds of the local churches, which finally became part of Creed we all use in the liturgy, declaring that it is *God the Father* who made the material world ("I believe in God the Father maker of heaven and earth") and that consequently the material world ("all things visible and invisible") is good, since it was made by God the Father Himself. Evil is of course a problem. But this should not lead us to the conclusion that the world is bad by nature and that it is not God's creation. The Church had to find other ways of explaining the presence of evil without attributing it either to God or to the material world. On this matter we shall have an opportunity to say more later on.

So much for Gnosticism which introduced a gap between God and Creation. Platonism and the mainstream classical Greek thought took the extreme opposite position. For them not only was the gap between God and the world narrowed to the point of often disappearing altogether, but in fact the world was penetrated by divine presence in all its parts. "Everything is filled with gods" as the famous saying put it. Some identified the world with God to the extent of not needing a doctrine of creation at all. Others, like Plato, believed that the world was created by someone, whom Plato called Father, or Mind (*nous*) or Creator (*demiourgos*) and who made the best possible world — not absolutely perfect, to be sure — given the fact that it is a world made from matter and enclosed in space, which inevitably acted as limitations upon the creator. Thus the material world, in the Platonic view of things, is good and beautiful, yet only insofar as it partakes of the absolute goodness and beauty which is to be found outside this material world, in the world of ideas to which we can ascend through contemplation and intellectual *katharsis*, moving from the sensible to the spiritual, to the ideal world. Pure Platonism took a positive view of the material universe as a means providing us with a ladder to ascend higher; it was Neoplatonism a little later that showed a distrust for the material world, and regarded it negatively.

Now, the Church did not react to platonism in the same polemical way as it did to Gnosticism. She seemed to like the idea that the world was attributed to a "creator" (called even the Father-God by Plato) and some of her greatest theologians such as St Justin in the second century, came out strongly in favour of Plato on almost all counts, including creation. Yet it would be a mistake to regard the Church of the first centuries as having accepted the Platonic or the ancient Greek view of the world, for the differences were very deep, and relate directly to the subject we are discussing in this series of lectures. Let us consider them briefly.

## II. Creation with a "beginning"

If we look carefully into the issues that divided the Church from ancient Greek philosophy as a whole on the subject of creation, we can perhaps locate the heart of the problem and the crucial difference in the question of whether the world has had a *beginning* or not. This question, as we shall try to show in this lecture, has such far reaching implications, that it can be said to constitute one of the most important aspects of the relation between Christian theology and the ecological problem.

That the world had a beginning in any absolute sense of the world seemed to be utter nonsense and absurdity to all ancient Greek thinkers. As Professor Richard Sorabji (of this university) states in his well-known study *Time, Creation and the Continuum* the view that the universe has had a beginning "was denied by everybody in European antiquity outside the Judeo-Christian tradition" (p.193). For all ancient Greeks the world was eternal. One may argue that Plato in his *Timaeus* (the famous work that deals with creation) accepts the idea of beginning in creation, but the fact is that this beginning, as indeed all notions of beginning in ancient Greek thought, was not absolute, since it always presupposed something from which the world (or anything for that matter) was created. In the case of Plato's *Timaeus* this presupposed "something" which the creator used in order to create the world was *matter*, *ideas* and even *space* (*chora*), all of which acted as conditions limiting the creator's freedom. Creation was therefore beginningless, and the world, although particular beings in it could be said to have beginnings, the world taken as a whole had no beginning.

The Church and the Fathers reacted negatively to this view. They felt that it limited God's freedom in creating, since He had to work with pre-existing matter and other conditions. It also made God and the world somehow eternally co-existent. They had, therefore, to modify Platonism in this respect if they were to remain in some sense "Christian Platonists." Such a modification had already been made through what we call "Middle Platonism" (the Platonic Schools of the first two centuries AD before Neoplatonism appeared in the third century) and with the famous Jewish philosopher of Alexandria in the first century AD, Philo. The modification involved the rejection of the idea that matter was not created by God, and the suggestion that Plato's ideas on the basis of which God formed creation were thoughts in the mind of God. This modification removed to a large extent the crudest aspects of Plato's doctrine of creation, and those most provocative to the Christian mind, but still left enough to make Platonism unacceptable to the Church on this subject. Where did the problem lie?

The real problem became evident when Christian Platonists such as Origen in Alexandria (third century) put forth the view of an eternal creation on the basis of the belief mentioned above that the ideas or *logoi* with which the world was created were thoughts in the mind of God, and in order to answer the question "how could God be almighty eternally, if he had no world on which to exercise His power?" This not only led Origen to the view, officially condemned by the Church a few centuries later, that souls were eternally pre-existing, but it also

showed clearly the dangers involved in any doctrine of creation which does not presuppose a radical and absolute beginning. As the late Father G. Florovsky put it, Origen's doctrine of creation implied that besides God there was always, eternally, a non-ego, a non-God, which meant that God was a creator by necessity and not freely. Unless He created the world God would remain unfulfilled, He would not be God. The notion of God and the notion of creation thus overlap, and Paganism makes its appearance disguised under the form of Christian doctrine.

Thus, the idea that the world has had a beginning ought to be taken in an absolute sense. But how could this absolute sense be described? And how could it make "sense" and not lead to absurdity as the ancient Greeks thought? Above all how does such an idea of absolute beginning affect our existence in this world and eventually the world's fate? These are questions to which we shall now turn.

### III. Creation "out of nothing"

The idea that the world had an absolute beginning could only be expressed through the formula that the world was created "out of nothing," *ex nihilo*. But what does "nothing" mean in this case? Can there ever be something out of nothing? The ancient Greeks replied categorically in the negative. Christians had to find ways of making sense of this statement. Some of these ways did not always maintain the absolute character of nothingness, but succumbed indirectly to the logic of Greek thought which could not accept this idea and found it absurd. Such an understanding of "out of nothing" is to be found already in the Neoplatonists who understood it in the sense that a beginningless creation could be produced by God without its coming out of anything. Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages gave a meaning to "nothing" which amounted more or less to a source out of which creation came, while Karl Barth in our time, if studied carefully, seems to understand "nothing" as a sort of void which God *rejected* in opting for Christ pre-ternally as the one in whom and through whom He created the world. All these interpretations of "out of nothing" should not be confused with what St Irenaeus and other Church Fathers meant by it. The purpose of this expression for them was to indicate that nothing at all existed previously to creation, no factor whatsoever apart from God's free will was at work or contributed in any way towards the creation of the world.

In order to make sense of this understanding of "out of nothing" the ancient Christian theologians had to make one thing clear: time and space are categories which come into being *together with creation*. It is meaningless to ask "what did God do before creating," for there is no such thing as "before" and "after" until creation. Time and space are notions that have to do with beginning, and whatever had no beginning could not be measured with such categories. Thus, it seems that by accepting the view that the world had a beginning the Christians opted for a notion of time which: (a) is tied up with space organically — something that Platonism, for example, could not consider; and (b) characterises exclusively the created world — as space does too — and together with space affects the existence of the universe

throughout and decisively. There is no way, therefore, for the world to escape from space and time or from the pre-condition of beginning which lies behind its being. Created being by definition is subject to these conditions, which not only mark the difference between God and the world, created and uncreated being, but also determine the world existentially. It is to the existential conditions of being created out of nothing that we shall now turn our attention, for they have to do directly with our subject.

What does being created out of nothing imply existentially? How does the world "experience," so to say, the fact that it had a beginning? We can reply briefly to this question by making the following points:

- a) If we take the world as a "whole," as an entity in itself, which we *can* do if we regard it, as we do, as *finite* and as *other than God*, the fact that the world had a beginning forces us to put a line of demarcation, a point of departure, at least at its beginning. A classical logical axiom would oblige us to put a line of demarcation, a stopping point also at the end, for according to this axiom whatever has had a beginning will also have an end. But even leaving aside this axiom, the idea of *finitude* attached to that of creaturehood by definition implies that in the very concept of creaturehood there lies together with the idea of the beginning, also that of the end. All this means that creation *taken in itself* (this condition is of decisive importance for, as we shall see, things are different if creation is not taken "in itself") constitutes an entity surrounded and conditioned by *nothing*: It came from nothing and will return to nothing.

I have called this implication of creaturehood "existential" not because I have in mind certain modern philosophical schools that bear this name, but because there is in fact no other way for us to speak of the universe except by somehow personifying it and attributing to it categories stemming from our experience. We cannot, for example, avoid associating the disappearances of a certain thing with the experience of death, and vice-versa the experience of death with the disappearance, the extinction of something. If the universe is conceivable as a finite particular entity the very possibility of conceiving it in our minds implies putting lines of demarcation around it. But lines of demarcation allowing for the conception mentally, imply existentially the experience of a before and an after, the experience of the beginning and the end of the thing conceived, therefore something analogous to the experience of the birth as well as the death of something. In this way of speaking, therefore, that the world had an absolute beginning implies that taken in itself it hangs in a void, and cannot avoid the threat of death. The universe is not eternal either in terms of its beginning or in terms of its end; it is mortal, and mortality in this case is as absolute as the use of the term "nothing" — it signifies total extinction.

- b) If we do not take the world as a whole, as an entity in itself, but look instead at its interior, at what happens, so to say, inside it, we observe the same consequences of the fact that it has come into being out of nothing. Just as the world in its totality has had a beginning, so

also each particular being that makes it up is conditioned by a beginning which threatens it with extinction. The space-time structure of the universe is "experienced" by everything and everyone in the world as the means by which entities acquire their being and at the same time their non-being. My father was united with me through time, and through the same time he is divided from me by his death. The same space that unites me with you at this moment also separates me from you. Things are brought together and are separated by the same means. Space and time are the exclusive characteristics of creation, and this is expressed in every simple being that can be said to have an identity of its own. No individual thing can exist without space and time (cf. P.F. Strawson's *Individuals*), and this — unless space and time were always there, i.e. unless they were beginningless — proves them in the end to be non-entities.

One could say, therefore, that the nothingness out of which the world came into being permeates it and affects every single being within the universe. Death is experienced as return to nothingness, in spite of the fact that new entities may emerge out of the old ones that died. For neither can the fact that species procreate change the fact that a concrete progenitor A no longer exists after his death as a particular identity, nor, worse even, the can return of a corpse to the earth in order to become the basic natural elements for other forms of life be a consolation for the loss of a particular being. Death amounts to the extinction of particular beings precisely because the world having come out of nothing and being penetrated by it does not possess any means *in its nature* whereby to overcome nothingness. Plato had to make use of the idea of immortality as a *natural* characteristic of the soul in order to secure the overcoming of death in the universe, and Aristotle having at some point denied this belief of his master had to rely on the immortality of the species through pro-creation. In these ways the world as a whole would achieve immortality, yet at the expense of particular beings. But a Christian? What could a Christian do to secure the overcoming of death as extinction of the particular beings, given the fact that there was no eternal and immortal element in the nature of creation, all of them — including souls, species and matter — having had a beginning? It is tragic, but once we accept the doctrine of creation out of nothing we are unable to find anything in this world that is not subject to death, and — what is even more significant — we cannot understand death as anything less than total extinction. Here I find the words of Unamuno, quoted by Professor Sorabji in his book which I mentioned earlier, to be quite revealing:

"For myself I can say that as a youth and even as a child I remained unmoved when shown the most moving pictures of hell, for even then nothing appeared quite so horrible to me as nothingness."

These words may easily be taken as sheer psychologizing and therefore dismissed by hard thinking. But the psychological aspects of death — which may or may not play an important role depending on the particular individual and his mood at the time — is not all there is in the quotation. This quotation conveys faithfully the message of Christian theology that the world as a whole, like every part of it, exists under the threat of nothingness,

because it was created out of nothing in the absolute sense of the word. The world possesses no natural power in itself which would enable it to overcome this situation, for if it did it would have been immortal and eternal by nature; it would have had no beginning in the absolute sense as the ancient Greeks rightly observed. A Christian who wishes to have both his doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and a faith that the world possesses in its nature some kind of means for eternal survival is bound to be logically inconsistent. For what such a view would imply is that the eternal God created an eternal world, i.e. another God by nature, which amounts to the total denial of the doctrine of creation out of nothing and at the same time to the abolition of the distinction between created and uncreated being — a distinction on which the entire Patristic tradition insisted so much.

#### IV. Conclusion

Now, in saying all of this I can sense the reaction coming to the minds of some of you: if things are the way we have described them here, does this mean that the world was created by God in order to disappear one day? Was God so cruel as to bring about beings other than Himself without taking any measures to secure their survival? Do we not believe in a God who is "the God not of the dead but of the living" and who loves the world to the point of wanting it to share His own life and bliss?

Of course, all of this is true. But the question is *how* did God want the world to survive and share His own life? And, theologically speaking, the question is how to state all this in a way that does not involve logical contradictions or stumble on fundamental scientific facts, which would exclude theology from normal scientific or philosophical discourse. For it is easy for theology to speak its own language to its own people and thus form an esoteric ghetto of its own. But we have started here with the assumption that theology can offer something to man in his attempt to face a crisis created by culture, including science and philosophy. We intend to stick to this assumption in spite of the limitations to our dealing adequately with such a vast and difficult problem. We, therefore, wish to articulate Christian theology in a way that would be *faithful to the logical consequences of its own assumptions*, and not contradict them.

Thus, it is an assumption, a doctrine of the Church, that the world was created out of nothing in the absolute sense of the term, a doctrine that distinguished Christianity from ancient Pagan religions and philosophies. The fact that in our time natural science does not find it inconceivable that the world was created out of absolute nothing can be a positive factor in enabling theology to enter into constructive discourse with the scientist. But even if the scientist were to disagree about this doctrine, the Christian theologian having accepted it in the first instance, would have to be logically consistent with it. This consistency will have to be observed also in trying to answer the question: how did God envisage the survival of the world given the fact that He created it out of nothing?

We have already noted that it would be inconsistent to assume that God endowed the world with a natural capacity for survival, for such an assumption would imply

that between God and the world there is a natural affinity (a *syngeneia* as the ancient Greeks would say). Anything *naturally* common between God and Creation would make the two realities one in a substantial way. This is why the Fathers had to reject the Neoplatonic idea of emanations, the Platonic and Origenist idea of the eternity of souls, the Aristotelian view of the eternity of matter, etc. It is a matter of logical consistency to seek the survival of creation in ways other than these.

But if we exclude the assumption that the world possesses in its nature some factor securing its survival, and still want to secure this survival, we are left only with one solution: we must find a way of uniting the world with God, the only eternal and immortal being, other than a *natural* affinity. We must find a link between the two which would secure the communication of life between them without abolishing the natural otherness between God and Creation. Can such a link be found? And can such a linkage make any sense?

Christian doctrine offers as a solution to this problem the place of Man in creation. It is in the human being that we must seek the link between God and the world, and it is precisely this that makes Man responsible, in a sense the only being responsible for the fate of creation. What an awful responsibility and what a glorious mission at the same time! "Man is the glory of God" declares St Irenaeus, and with good reason. But why and how can Man be the solution to the problem of the survival of creation? What qualities does he possess enabling him to achieve this? And why has he failed in this mission? These are questions we shall attempt to discuss in our next lecture.

## ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE: THEISTIC DARWINIAN

J.M. ROSS

Alfred Russel Wallace and Charles Robert Darwin are generally regarded as the co-founders of the theory of evolution by natural selection. They make an interesting comparison. Darwin (b. 1809) came of a good family and had a first-class education at Shrewsbury, Edinburgh, and Cambridge, first in medicine and then in classics with a view to entering the Church. Wallace (b. 1823) had few such advantages. His unpractical father could not afford to give him as much schooling as he would have liked to. At 14, Wallace left school and assisted his elder brother William in surveying, which gave him an interest in geology; to this he added studies in astronomy, agriculture, and particularly botany. He also became an enthusiastic admirer of Robert Owen. In 1844 he became a master at the collegiate school at Leicester, where he read widely and investigated hypnotism and phrenology. Here also he made the acquaintance of the naturalist H.E. Bates, who interested him in entomology. In 1846, William died and Alfred took over his surveying business, which flourished in the railway boom and enabled him to save some money. In 1848 he set sail with Bates for an expedition up the Amazon, planning to defray the expenses by the sale of specimens on his return home. In 1852 he settled in London to work out and describe his collections and attend scientific meetings. In 1854 he set out by himself to study the zoology of the Malay archipelago, principally in the islands of Borneo and Sarawak.

In 1855, Wallace wrote his first article on the theory of evolution — an essay *On the Law which has regulated the Introduction of New Species* — in which he argued that every new species has come into existence by evolution out of a previous one, but without assigning any cause for this process. In 1858, during an attack of malaria in Sarawak, reflecting on the course of evolution in the light of Malthus's *Essay on Population* (which had much impressed him when he read it some thirteen years earlier), he hit on the explanation: the changes in species were due to the action of natural selection preserving those heritable variations which were advantageous to the species in the struggle for existence and weeding out the disadvantageous. He immediately wrote a paper setting out the case for this view and posted it to Darwin, asking him to consult the geologist Sir Charles Lyell with a view to its publication.

This put Darwin in a difficulty, because he had come to the identical conclusion many years before and had put down his thoughts in writing in 1842, but never submitted anything for publication. Perhaps he shrank from the odium of advocating a materialist and non-theistic view of creation, just as David Hume had shrank from publishing his sceptical *Dialogues on Natural Religion*.<sup>1</sup> If Wallace's paper were published, he would get the credit for discovering what Darwin had discovered long before. Darwin put the problem to Lyell and the botanist Hooker, and they agreed that the right course was for Darwin to write a parallel paper, to be presented simultaneously with Wallace's to the Linnaean Society. This was done in 1858. Little notice was taken of the new

theory until the following year when Darwin, yielding to the pressure of his friends, published what he regarded as a preliminary treatise *On the origin of species by means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

Wallace returned in 1862 and settled for a time in London. He devoted the rest of his long life (he survived until 1913) to the care or disposal of his huge collection of specimens, and to writing and lecturing. He married in 1866, and had a son and a daughter. He wrote various articles and books describing his zoological discoveries, of which the most important was a book published in 1869 under the title *The Malay Archipelago*. He also wrote on the theory of evolution, on astronomy, on social questions, and an autobiography. He was a convinced Spiritualist, an anti-vaccinationist, and in theory but not in practice a vegetarian. He was concerned over soil erosion, hated the rigid class structure of British society, and was an extreme advocate of land nationalization, becoming President of the newly-formed Land Nationalization Society in 1881.

There was never any animosity between Wallace and Darwin; they regarded each other as supporters, not rivals — but on some matters of theory they diverged. For instance, Wallace could not accept Darwin's view that the colour differences between the sexes in birds were the result of 'sexual selection,' because among birds the male usually selects the female, not vice-versa; he held that female birds are dull-coloured because it is they that sit on the eggs, and they have to be inconspicuous to avoid falling easy victims to predators.

Wallace's views on birds' nests were argued in detail in two articles published in 1867 and 1868 and reprinted in 1870 in a collection of essays entitled *Contributions to the theory of Natural Selection*. In one of these articles — his contribution to the Linnaean Society in 1858 — he repudiated Lamarck's theory of inheritance of acquired characters as not in accordance with the facts. Darwin on the other hand in *The Origin of Species* had thought it necessary to bring this in as a subsidiary cause of evolution because he did not think natural selection by itself was a sufficient explanation. Darwin's exact words<sup>2</sup> were:

I am convinced that natural selection has been the main but not exclusive means of modification.

And in a subsequent edition he gave his view that modification of species

had been effected chiefly through the natural selection of numerous successive, slight, favourable variations; aided in an important manner by the inherited effects of the use and disuse of parts, and in an unimportant manner, that is in relation to adaptive structures, whether past or present, by the direct action of external conditions, and by variations which seem to us in our ignorance to arise spontaneously.

In this same book Wallace included an article on the races of man, first published in 1864, in which he argued that human moral and intellectual progress could not be due to natural selection, because "it is the mediocre, if not the low, both as regards morality and intelligence,

who succeed best in life and multiply fastest." This position was amplified in a fresh chapter added in the second edition in 1871, in which he contended that while natural selection can explain everything in the vegetable and lower animal kingdoms, it cannot explain the development of the human race or the origin of sensation or consciousness. Neanderthal man had a far bigger cranium than he needed, for a brain only slightly larger than an ape's would have sufficed for his primitive mode of life; why was this development, unnecessary at that time, not weeded out by natural selection? Why did early man lose his hair, which was useful in keeping out the cold and throwing off the rain? Why did man lose his prehensile big toe, or develop a hand, with independent fingers, which was capable of much more than he needed it for at the early stages of his development? How could the human voice become capable of speech and musical singing long before these accomplishments became actual? How could man develop a capacity for abstract thought, which he did not at first need, or attach a feeling of sanctity to truthfulness? Just as edible grains and domestic animals could only be evolved not by unconscious natural selection but by deliberate human breeding, so the evolution of the human race could have been produced only by the working of a higher intelligence, whether we identify this with the supreme God or with some other controlling power.

It is the same with consciousness. Huxley had said that "our thoughts are the expressions of molecular changes in that matter of life which is the source of our other vital phenomena." But how can this be so? How can unconscious molecules, however complex their organisation, become conscious? "There is no escape from this dilemma — either all matter is conscious<sup>3</sup>, or consciousness is something distinct from matter, and in the latter case its presence in material forms is a proof of the existence of conscious beings, outside of, and independent of, what we term matter." This, contended Wallace, does not disprove Natural Selection: it only means that Natural Selection requires supplementation.

Wallace returned to this question in 1890 (Darwin had died in 1882) in a book entitled *Darwinism: an exposition of the theory of Natural Selection, with some of its applications*. This book is an able exposition of the Darwinian theory, with replies to objections that had been made to it in the thirty years since *The Origin of Species* first appeared. Wallace professes in this book to expound the pure Darwinism from which Darwin somewhat receded in later editions of his works, and the first fourteen chapters show no difference from Darwin, except on the question of sex-differences in birds. In the final and fifteenth chapter Wallace repeats his contention that Natural Selection cannot account for the evolution of man. As a fact, the human race must have evolved in the Miocene period out of primitive apes; but the facts do not sustain natural selection as the sole cause. Many human faculties, e.g. the mathematical and the artistic and musical, were of no use to primitive man and in their developed forms are still confined to a minority of the species. There are in fact "at least three stages in the development of the organic world when some new cause or power must necessarily have come into action" —

1 the change from inorganic to organic matter (mere

complexity of chemical composition cannot account for the new powers of the first vegetable cell);

2 "the introduction of sensation or consciousness, constituting the fundamental distinction between the animal and vegetable kingdoms" and

3 the existence in man of his noblest faculties. Therefore there must be an unseen universe — "a world of spirit, to which the world of matter is altogether subordinate." We reach this result by scientific reasoning: thus Darwinism "does not oppose, but lends support to, a belief in the spiritual nature of man."

In 1904 Wallace placed the coping-stone on these thoughts by a book entitled *Man's Place in the Universe*, an astronomical account of the universe, leading to the conclusion that our solar system is in the centre of the universe, and that it is extremely improbable that anywhere else could there be a coincidence of the conditions necessary to produce or sustain life, let alone evolve a race of intelligent creatures. It seems to follow therefore that the universe was created for the very purpose of producing the human race on the planet earth. If it be asked, then, why so many useless stars and nebulae and meteors were created, merely that one planet in one solar system should house our vegetable and animal kingdoms, it can be replied that this is nature's method. Our planet teems with quantities of species — there are at least 100,000 species of beetle — although only a few would have been necessary for the evolution of man. Many species produce vast quantities of seeds or eggs, few of which will ever germinate and contribute to the continuance of the species. So by analogy there is no reason why the whole universe should not have been designed for the purpose of producing the human race.

Had Wallace been a better theologian, it might have occurred to him that God could have had other purposes in the creation of the universe than the mere evolution of humanity; and he might have thought it odd that God should have left evolution to the sole influence of natural selection until he suddenly intervened to create man. Indeed if he had not been so determined to support Darwin in giving the maximum possible scope to natural selection, he might have applied to some of the earlier steps in the evolutionary process the considerations which led him to regard natural selection as an incomplete explanation of the evolution of humanity. He might have asked himself, for instance, how it was possible for the dolphin's dorsal fin to evolve through gradual enlargement over a long period of time, since in its early stages the incipient fin would have served no practical purpose and would have been weeded out by natural selection; to account for the survival of the fin on Darwinian principles it would be necessary to suppose that by a heritable mutation a large number of dolphins in the same area simultaneously grew a dorsal fin large enough to be of practical advantage. Similarly, the wing feathers of evolving birds would have been weeded out as useless until they were large and numerous enough to sustain flight. Some other factor would have been necessary to make flight possible.

This account may therefore properly conclude with a return to the comparison between Wallace and Dar-

win. Darwin, starting from a Christian base, was driven by the logic of his scientific theory to deny any kind of divine or supernatural action as a causative factor in evolution, even though he did not regard natural selection as a complete explanation. Wallace, starting from an irreligious background, was driven by his interpretation of the evidence to postulate supernatural interventions to account for life, consciousness and humanity, even though he regarded natural selection as a complete explanation of everything else. At this distance in time, ought we to regard Wallace as mistaken and dismiss his invocations of the supernatural along with his enthusiasms for phrenology, spiritualism, anti-vaccinationism and land nationalization? Or shall we allow that he had a wider grasp of the mystery of the universe than was attained by the limited mind of Darwin?

Wallace has been largely forgotten in the present century. Although he came to believe in God, the so-called Creationists have no use for him because he forcibly refuted the idea that new species did not evolve from old but were each specially created *de novo*. On the other hand, although he strongly supported most of Darwin's contentions, he is rejected by the neo-Darwinists because he could not explain the whole process by natural causes. If there is a third option between Darwinism and Creationism (which modern publicists seem unwilling to allow), perhaps Wallace's writings indicate some of the lines this could take, even if not all his particular arguments can command assent at the present day.

## Footnotes

1 Cf. Stephen Jay Gould, *Ever Since Darwin* (1978), pp.21-27.

2 *Origin of Species*, Chapter XV

3. This was the alternative chosen by Teilhard de Chardin.

## PROBLEMS WITH ECCLESIASTES...?

STEPHEN SIMS

Each week the preacher faces the task of interpretation, and one of the most difficult questions to be faced concerns the extent to which personal presuppositions are allowed to determine our understanding of the text. This is particularly the case when the passage under consideration comes from a book like Ecclesiastes, which poses uncomfortable questions for the community of faith. Indeed, the book of Ecclesiastes, or Qoheleth as it is named in Hebrew, has always proved something of an enigma to both Jewish and Christian scholars, and continues to present itself as such today. Its presence has always been an uncomfortable one, and consequently, many have preferred to ignore it, or dismiss it in a few sentences, rather than face some of the important questions that it raises for the community of faith. Of those who have been prepared to give the book more than a passing glance, many have endeavoured to make it more orthodox by means of their exegesis<sup>1</sup>—an approach that has resulted, more often than not, in a book that fits more easily into the Bible, but which does little justice to the perception of the original writer. This latter approach was that adopted by the writer of the Targum.

The Targum is an Aramaic version of the Hebrew scriptures, produced with two purposes in mind. Firstly, it was a translation, necessary because Aramaic had replaced Hebrew as the popular language; and secondly, it was expository, seeking to aid the people's understanding of the text. In effect, the Targum offers the traditional interpretation of the text so far as orthodox Rabbinic Judaism was concerned, and that makes Targum Qoheleth a valuable book for us, since it informs us of those areas of Qoheleth's work that came to be perceived as problematic.

By far the most significant of all the Targum's midrashim, both in number and effect, concern the subject of theodicy. Throughout the majority of the Old Testament period, the problems raised by the presence of evil and suffering had been dealt with by what is loosely described as the "doctrine of just reward and retribution". Von Rad<sup>2</sup> questions this description since talk of "reward and retribution" implies an outside agency who bestows good or evil accordingly; whereas in the majority of the Old Testament it is the deed itself that initiates the effects that the perpetrator eventually experiences—good resulting from good deeds, and evil from evil deeds. This was life as Yahweh, the Creator, had designed it and his direct intervention was necessary only to over-ride the process in response to the prayers of repentance of his people. Qoheleth, however, severs the link between deed and consequence. He observes cases where the scheme does not operate, and he concludes, as a result, that meaning cannot be found for life by means of this belief. The Targum, however, reasserts the traditional doctrine, but in a modified form in which it can be described accurately as a "doctrine of just reward and retribution", for Yahweh rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Some of Qoheleth's observations, however, are patently true, so the Targum responds by

introducing references to life beyond the grave. Thus, the Targum restores moral order to the world, gives meaning to life and protects the character of God from the effects of some of Qoheleth's harsher statements.

In 8: 14, Qoheleth lays out his observation that life contradicts traditional belief. The Targum repeats his observation, but then adds its own theological interpretation, by the authority of the Holy Spirit<sup>3</sup>:

There is a vanity which takes place on earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also vanity.

*(Qoheleth 8: 14).*

There is a vanity that is decreed to be done upon the face of the earth; there are righteous to whom evil happens as if they had done like the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked to whom it happens as if they had done like the deeds of the righteous. And I saw by the Holy Spirit that the evil which happens to the righteous in this world is not for their guilt, but to free them from a slight transgression, that their reward may be perfect in the world-to-come. And the good that comes to the sinners in this world is not for their merits, but to render them a reward for their small merit they have acquired, that they may eat their reward in this world, and to destroy their portion in the world-to-come. I said, by my word, this also is vanity.

*(Targum Qoheleth 8: 14).*

Thus the Targum justifies occasions when the moral world seems to break down, and people receive reward in place of retribution, and vice versa. However, the above scheme only deals with one particular presentation of the problem. What about those righteous who die early whilst some wicked prosper and live long lives? For Qoheleth, with no belief in an afterlife, this presented another perplexing observation:

In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil-doing.

*(Qoheleth 7: 15).*

All this I saw in the days of my vanity; from the Lord are decreed good and evil to be in the world, according to the planets under which the children of men are created. For there is a righteous man perishing in his righteousness in this world, and his merit is kept for him for the world to come. And there is a wicked man who prolongs

his days in his guilt, and the account of his evil doings is kept for him for the world to come, to be requited for it in the day of the great judgement.

*(Targum Qoheleth 7: 15).*

In the above two passages, then, Qoheleth's observations regarding those who receive good or evil unjustly and those whose end does not come according to the traditional understanding of the deed-consequence relation are acknowledged and given justification by means of reference to the afterlife and the judgement of God that will be apparent there. But this still left the question of why God should have delayed judgement so long. In order to deal with that question, the Targumist seized the opportunity afforded by the assertion of the orthodox position that is to be found in 8: 12:

Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him;

*(Qoheleth 8: 12).*

And when a sinner does evil a hundred years, and time is given him from the Lord that he may repent, it is nevertheless revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. And I know that it will be well in the world-to-come with those that fear the Lord, that fear before him, and do his will;

*(Targum Qoheleth 8: 12).*

So the Targum explains the delay in judgement in a way similar to the New Testament<sup>4</sup>, and further, reinforces that by inserting a number of appeals for repentance.

An important factor in the Targum's reassertion of the deed-consequence relation is its introduction of the concept of the afterlife, a notion that was still developing in Qoheleth's day, but which Qoheleth rejected. The Targum introduces frequent references to the afterlife, often in the context of reward and/or judgement. Furthermore, it seizes upon Qoheleth's phrase; "under the sun," which he uses throughout the book as a description of the sphere of man's existence and activity, to imply the existence of another life. This the Targum does by prefixing the phrase "under the sun" with the words "in this world". It then proceeds to draw out the implication of another world, not under the sun. Certainly, the presence of the concept of the afterlife in Targum Qoheleth testifies to the development of the belief in the intervening centuries after Qoheleth wrote. However, the fact that virtually all of the many references are in the context of setting right the injustices of this world by attributing reward or punishment accordingly, points to the problems created in this area by Qoheleth for orthodox Judaism.

The introduction of the concept of the afterlife by Targum Qoheleth to reassert the deed-consequence relation proved useful in other ways too. Not only did it enable the Targumist to cope with the injustices of this world on behalf of the community of faith, but it also

formed the basis upon which the Targum could exhort ethical actions such as good deeds and charity, for a clear ethical code appears to be lacking in the book of Qoheleth.

The original deed-consequence relation had not been limited to the individual, but had applied also to the life of the nation. Qoheleth had nothing to say on the subject of national suffering, but the Targum adapts one of his proverbial sayings in order to deal with this aspect of theodicy also:

If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edge, he must put forth more strength; but wisdom helps one to succeed.

*(Qoheleth 10: 10).*

And when the people of the house of Israel sin, and the heavens are made strong as iron to keep back the rain, and that generation does not pray before the Lord, all the world is afflicted with famine on their account. And when the multitude gather themselves together and overcome their evil spirit, and appoint their superiors to ask mercy from the Lord of heaven, there is acceptance for them, because of the abundance of their true wisdom.

*(Targum Qoheleth 10: 10).*

Behind many of the changes made under the broad heading of theodicy, there is an apparent concern to protect the character of God. The result of Qoheleth's severing of the deed-consequence relation was his conclusion that life was meaningless. This in turn raised serious questions about the Creator of such an aimless existence with all its attendant suffering. By re-establishing the link between deed and consequence, the Targum was able to see suffering and evil either as punishment (for the wicked) or as corrective and beneficial (for the righteous). Hence, the character of God was protected from the implications of Qoheleth's observations. But Qoheleth also had some harsh observations to make concerning the created world, such that on two occasions he refers to God having made things "crooked". It is at these points particularly that the Targum's concern to protect the character of God can be seen most clearly. On the first occasion (1: 15), reference to the created world is referred by the Targum to the perverted individual; and on the second, the Targum gives a different connotation to the term "crooked":

Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?

*(Qoheleth 7: 13).*

Consider the work of the Lord, and his strength, who made the blind, the hunchback, and the lame, to be wonders in the world. For who can make straight one of these, except the Lord of the world who made him crooked?

*(Targum Qoheleth 7: 13).*

In relation to Biblical interpretation, the Targum's treatment of Qoheleth's work raises the serious question as to what constitutes a valid approach to Scripture.

Childs' "Canonical Criticism"<sup>5</sup> is one of the more recent approaches of modern scholarship to the subject of exegesis and interpretation. Whilst Childs' approach cautions us against ignoring the fact that the text in its final form and in its present surroundings may have something to say to us, the work of the Targumist on Qoheleth points up very sharply the dangers of allowing the Canon in which a work is situated to be the criterion that above all others is allowed to determine the interpretation of that work. Part of the aim of the Targumist was that of ensuring that one part of Scripture did not contradict or raise questions about another part. All Scripture, being the Word of God, had the same basic message and it was clear from the traditions of Judaism what that message should be. The result, however, was that the distinctive contribution of a radical thinker like Qoheleth was lost. As John Barton remarks:

Qoheleth may well be gnashing the teeth he would not have expected to find in Sheol over the way his bitter words have lost their edge by being included in the orthodox framework of sacred Scripture<sup>6</sup>.

The book of Qoheleth raised many questions for orthodox Judaism, but perhaps the greatest were in relation to theodicy, not least because many of Qoheleth's observations were so patently true: life does not always suggest that there is a moral order in the world. Qoheleth severed the deed-consequence relation of traditional Old Testament belief, and so effectively that the Targumist had to labour hard and contrive at length in places to reassert it. In its way, the Targum was seeking to deal with the issues raised by Qoheleth on behalf of the community of faith, but we must question whether its efforts were likely to have been beneficial to Judaism or not. Levine concludes his study of Targum Qoheleth with the following remarks:

After reading the Targum Qohelet there is hardly any recourse from the conclusion that it is much less a book than Qohelet. For it is an apologetic, conventional, simplistic work. Unlike Qohelet, it is neither powerful nor challenging, nor even disturbing. On the other hand, it is a handbook of faith by which the masses could live — and, in fact, did live — for two millenia... There is no doubt that Targum Qohelet and not the Biblical Qohelet speaks for the theology, value-system and life-style of Judaism. It is the voice of "The True Believer" who despite the "evidence" sanctified the life cup he was given... In the final analysis one must ask whether Qohelet really does "suffer in translation"!<sup>7</sup>

Levine seems to make the assumption that the community of faith is stronger for being protected from the difficult questions that Qoheleth raises; if he is right, then the Targumist has performed a valuable service. I question the assumption, however, and suggest that a more vibrant faith might have resulted if people had been helped to face the questions and doubts raised by Qoheleth, many of which may well have occurred to them anyway, but found no form of expression. The Targumist covers up the difficulties; and whilst there must be a place for proclaiming the certainties of faith in the face of the uncertainties of life, to adopt uncritically the approach of the Targum must lead inevitably, I suggest,

to a colourless and restricted uniformity of belief, rather than a lively and life-giving community of faith that can enable the faith of the individual to develop and grow strong through the difficulties with which life presents the believer.

### Footnotes

- 1 For a recent example of this approach see M A Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, Tyndale Old Testament series, Leicester: IVP, 1983.
- 2 G Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol 1, London: SCM, 1975, pp 384-6.
- 3 All Biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible; all Targum quotations are based on the translation from the Aramaic by Etan Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Qohelet*, New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1978.
- 4 2 Peter 3: 8ff.
- 5 B S Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, London: SCM, 1979.
- 6 J Barton, *Reading the Old Testament. Method in Biblical Study*, London: Darton Longman and Todd; 1984, p 102f.
- 7 E Levine, op cit, p 83.

# INSPIRATION AND INCARNATION: JOHN OWEN AND THE COHERENCE OF CHRISTOLOGY

ALAN SPENCE

In 1647 a Mr John Biddle published in London a booklet entitled *XII Arguments Drawn our of the Scriptures wherein the commonly-received opinion touching the Deity of the Holy Spirit is clearly and fully refuted*. He was a brave man to do so, for in the time of the Commonwealth, a denial of the Trinity was a capital offence. Biddle was duly imprisoned and his works burnt by the hangman.

One of his arguments drew attention to the difficulties raised by the traditional interpretation of Christ as the incarnate Son of God.

What need was there that the Holy Spirit should be given unto Christ, to enable him to do miracles; and an Angel appear from heaven unto him to strengthen him; or why should he so earnestly expostulate with God for forsaking him, if Christ were he, by whom the First Creation was performed, had a Divine Nature and was God himself? ... would it be said of him that had the Divine Nature, that he did miracles, because God was with him, and not rather, because he was God? ... would not the Divine nature in Christ, at this rate, be in the mean time idle and useless?<sup>1</sup>

In short, why should the Son of God need the assistance and comfort of the Holy Spirit, could he not act in and through his own power? Should we not say of Jesus that God was with him, rather than claim that he, in his own person, was God?

Biddle's argument was by no means original. Adoptionist theories of this form and the far more subtle arguments of Arius had been debated at length in the Patristic Church. Yet, although the christological discussion developed in sophistication and a number of alternatives were recognised as inadequate, it would appear that the central problem of christology remained unresolved. The schools of Alexandria and Antioch represented two quite different ways of understanding the person of Christ, and the Council at Chalcedon was unable to resolve the conflict that had arisen between them. In fact the debate among the opposing groups dragged on well into the seventh century.

How are we to summarise the two main christological alternatives that continued to characterise the Church's interpretation of Christ? Norman Pittenger offers a useful outline of the contrasting types.

One group of Christians has tended to say that this person is God living and acting humanly. Another has tended to say that this person is the Man in whom God lives and acts.<sup>2</sup>

For a thousand years after Chalcedon one of these perspectives was to dominate at the expense of the other. Christ was widely interpreted as the incarnate son of God

and the Gospel witness to him as a man anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit was almost totally neglected. This is why Biddle's booklet is historically interesting. It heralded the introduction to England of Socinian ideas and in so doing drew attention to a quite different way of understanding the person of Christ, that is, as a man inspired by the Spirit. It was a perspective which was to influence the christology of the next two centuries, encouraging an interest in the details of the human life and teaching of Jesus as embodying the substance of the Christian faith, while promoting a general scepticism for the Church's historical dogmas.

The twentieth century, however, has witnessed a fairly widespread return to an interpretation of Christ resembling the incarnational christology of the historical tradition, but in which the idea of revelation rather than incarnation is used to conceptualise his divine status. The outcome is that the Christian community today, like the Early Church, continues to be faced with two rather different ways of understanding the person of Christ, that is, as the revelation of God in the form of a human, or as a man so totally open to God and continually empowered by his Spirit in his divine mission that it is appropriate to consider him as being one with God. Karl Rahner describes these different approaches to the interpretation of Christ as the metaphysical type, a christology developing downwards from above and the 'saving history' type, a christology viewed from below.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly it is possible to characterise these alternate christologies in a variety of ways. Some years ago, Professor C.F.D. Moule gave the title 'Inspiration and Incarnation' to one of the chapters of his book *The Holy Spirit*. In his discussion of the theme of prophetic inspiration he was concerned that some sort of distinction be maintained between a consideration of Christ as one who was fully inspired by the Spirit in the manner of the prophets and as God incarnate in an absolute and unique sense. Faced with the theological difficulties involved in explaining how these concepts could be coherently applied to the same person, he made the following comment:

... although it may be impossible to work these observations into a coherent system it is more realistic to hold them together in a paradoxical statement than to force sense upon them by overlooking some of the phenomena.<sup>4</sup>

Moule rightly recognises that an adequate christology must incorporate the perspective of both incarnation and inspiration, but the recourse to paradox is a heavy price to pay for the defence of his argument. It too easily closes out rational discussion and relinquishes the field to those who reckon the Christian faith to be intrinsically incoherent. If incarnation and inspiration do characterise two equally valid ways of understanding the person of Christ, does not our commitment to rationality compel us to carefully examine whether it is possible to integrate them theologically? I believe that it does and the aim of this paper is to suggest one way in which these concepts might be more coherently held together.

Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell and later Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, John Owen, as the leading Puritan

theologian of his time, was instructed by the Council of State to answer the arguments raised by Biddle and so defend the Christian faith. What is of particular interest to us is his affirmation of both an incarnational and an inspirational christology, to use Moule's terminology, in what appears to have been a remarkably consistent theological system.

What then were the salient features in Owen's exposition of Christ's person? The underlying framework of his whole interpretation was that of the incarnation of the Son of God. By this he did not mean the transformation of the eternal Son or Word into humanity, but rather the assumption by the Son of human nature into personal union with himself. With this careful use of words, Owen safeguarded the integrity of the divine nature, God in his being remains God. Nevertheless the person of the Son does not merely enter into a relationship with a human being, rather in taking to himself all the properties of human nature, it is proper to affirm that he, that is the person of the incarnate Son, is a true man.

Although the resulting union is a consequence of the Son's volition, in that he freely chose to take the form of a servant, it is nevertheless a natural rather than a voluntary union. The 'oneness' is a matter of essence or ontology rather of will or action. It is a hypostatic union because the person of Christ is one individuated or distinct entity, that is, one *hypostasis* or person.

So far, Owen has adhered fairly closely to the type of christology developed by Cyril of Alexandria. He differed, however, in the way he was to maintain the integrity of both Christ's humanity and his divinity. If his person is not to be considered as a mixed or hybrid being, part God and part man, then both his human and divine natures, although inseparable, need to be recognised as in some sense distinguishable, each operating in accordance with its own characteristic properties. The *communicatio idiomatum* is used by him merely as a linguistic tool to explain why one nature is referred to as one subject of the properties of the other, but it does not imply any actual transference of properties between the natures.

What then is the functional relation between the human and divine natures of Christ? Ontologically they are substantially united in one *hypostasis* or person, yet if they form two distinguishable principles of operation, how are we to understand their interaction? In short, how does the divine Word lead, guide or determine his own humanity without undermining its integrity and turning it into a mere, passive instrument of the divine subject?

Owen's deceptively simple answer was that it was by means of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> The significance of this idea both for christology in particular and for theology in general cannot be easily overestimated. It allowed him to conceive of the man Christ Jesus as one upon whom the Spirit was operative in every aspect of his life. The Holy Spirit formed his body; enabled him to advance in wisdom and grace; comforted him in trial; equipped him for his prophetic ministry; empowered him to perform wondrous deeds; sanctified his life; raised and glorified his body.<sup>6</sup> In close harmony with the Gospel record Owen could affirm all the elements of what we have described

as an inspirational christology, yet he was able to do so within the framework of an Alexandrian interpretation of Christ as the incarnation of the divine Word.

We might say incarnation and inspiration served as complementary accounts or interpretations of Christ's person. However, to speak simply of complementarity does not solve all our conceptual difficulties. Inspiration and incarnation suggest to our minds quite different ways of thinking about Christ and if we are intelligently to maintain both we need to be able to bring them into some sort of conceptual unity. To help clarify what we mean by that let us briefly consider the way these concepts function in Owen's christology.

His account of the Spirit's work in the new creation is in certain respects parallel to his outline of the Son's mission to the world. This story, as the other, has its starting point in the counsels of God and the sending act of the Father.

(W)hen God designed the great and glorious work of recovering fallen man and the saving of sinners, to the praise of the glory of his grace, he appointed in his infinite wisdom two means thereof. The one was the giving of his Son for them, and the other was the giving of his Spirit unto them.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas the Son was given by God that "all breaches and differences between them and us be removed, perfect peace and agreement made, and we rendered acceptable and well-pleasing in his sight,"<sup>8</sup> so the Spirit was sent that "we may be kept and preserved meet for communion with him as our God, and for the enjoyment of him as our reward."<sup>9</sup>

This parallelism is also apparent in his accounts of the Son and the Spirit's action with respect to the humanity of Christ. It was the Son who assumed human nature into subsistence with himself, yet it was the Spirit who formed, sanctified and energised that assumed nature. Now these respective narratives are in essence what we mean by the concepts of incarnation and inspiration. They are not just any two of a large number of stories that could be told of the person of Christ, rather they provide a suggestive or even determinative framework for all other accounts of Christ's person, we could say they function as 'master stories.'

This analysis would help us understand why the early church took just one biblical notion — the Word became flesh — from among the many possibilities, expounding and formalising it in the Creed of Nicea and using it as a test of christological orthodoxy. The narrative suggested by those few words operated as the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of all else that was said of Christ's person. On the other hand, one could argue that those who were dissatisfied with orthodox christology and developed an alternative along inspirational lines, were in fact implicitly operating with a quite different 'master-story' essentially of the form: 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.' It was the inherent difficulty in bringing these two stories together into one coherent account that led to most christologies having either an inspirational or incarnational form.

The significance of Owen's christology is that it makes possible the incorporation of these two master-stories into one narrative. The respective missions of the Son and the Spirit to the world, in particular as they are considered with respect to the human nature of Christ, were not perceived as mutually exclusive accounts but rather as complementing one another. They can therefore be woven into one story which we might summarise as, 'The Holy Spirit formed, sanctified and energised the human nature which the eternal Son had assumed into personal subsistence with himself.' The narrative of the incarnation is thus incomplete apart from the story of the Spirit's mission to renew the divine image in Christ as a prototype of what he would do in the Church.

If the step which Owen took so as to be able to affirm both an incarnational and an inspirational christology is comparatively straightforward, the question of whether he was justified in so doing is far from clear. A number of general difficulties arising from his exposition spring immediately to mind. First, there is the question as to whether a christology which affirms the distinct operation of Christ's two natures is able to maintain successfully the unity of his person as the one subject of his incarnate life.

Developing a conception common among the Latin Fathers, Owen's strategy was to identify the person or agency of the incarnate life with Christ in his office as Mediator, that is as the God-man. To do this he made a distinction between the person of the Son considered as incarnate, and considered absolutely, that is, as the second person of the Trinity. Such a distinction appears necessary if we are, in our explication of Christ, to be true to the Gospel account of his dependent and therefore subordinate relation to the Father as incarnate and yet also to maintain the ontological equivalence of status he has with respect to the Father in his divine being. Owen often described the incarnation as the event whereby the person of the Son, remaining what he was, became what he was not. In that there is no transformation of the divine nature, the Son remains what he is. But in assuming human nature to himself the person, as incarnate, becomes what he is not, that is one who is both God and man.

Conceiving of the person of Christ in this way does not imply that he is some form of *tertium quid* or divine-human amalgam, for his person is known always in two distinguishable natures. As to agency, Owen considered the person to be the original principle or agent of all that is done in the incarnate life; the natures are the two immediate principles by which and from which the agent works; the actions are the effectual operations of either nature; the *apotelesma* or effect of his actions with respect to God and men relates to the person, the Lord Christ, he who is both God and man.<sup>10</sup>

Owen's analysis here does present a problem with respect to the use of the word *person*. We now normally understand personal agency in light of a psychological model of a human person. But this model is clearly inadequate to express the agency of one who is God-man acting through his two natures, even though it might have value in clarifying what it means for that *person* to be and act as a human. The confusion arises because of the

development that has taken place in the meaning of the word *person*, a fact that needs continually to be borne in mind while reading classical christology.

A second difficulty which modern theology, in particular, has with Owen's christology is the use it makes of ontological categories in its interpretation of Christ. It is often held that nature language or the language of being is far too static to model the dynamic reality of Christ. Put in this form this was not a question which Owen was called to face directly. Nevertheless in his defence of the deity of Christ in the debate with the Socinians, the central issue concerned the nature of the Son's relation to the Father, a debate which I believe does have a direct bearing on the place of ontology in christology. The Socinian argument, in short, was that the relation must be understood in terms of Christ's mission or ministry, that is in functional categories only.

Owen, however, argued that the unique relation of the Son to the Father and the high status ascribed to him in the New Testament writing could not be adequately accounted for in terms of his mission alone. Treading a path similar to that taken by Athanasius in his debate with the Arians, who considered the relationship as being founded on God's will alone, Owen upheld the argument that the Son was of the Father's essence, as suggested by the model of natural generation. The life that is in God does not differ from his being and thus in communication his life to the Son there is an effective communication to him of the divine essence. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." (John 5v.26). God's essence is interpreted both dynamically and vitally, sharing in that essence means that Christ himself becomes the active giver of life.

Owen also sought to undermine the position of his opponents by showing that the efficacy of Christ's ministry is in fact dependent on the nature of his person or being. He draws heavily from the argument of the book of Hebrews whose principal aim, he argues, is to establish the superiority of Christ's person to the angels, to Moses and to the Levitical priesthood, along with his close alliance to mankind, as the basis for proving the greater efficacy of his priestly sacrifice to that of that of the Mosaic order. The person, therefore, cannot be interpreted wholly in terms of ministry or function, for the efficacy of that ministry is itself dependent on the nature of the person. There were, for example, others before Christ such as Moses who...

...had as much power, and as great a presence of God with him, as any mere man could be made partaker of; yet was he not in his ministry the saviour of the church — nor could he be so any otherwise than typically and temporally.<sup>11</sup>

Christ could effectively redeem the Church for, unlike Moses, he was in his person a son and not merely a servant, a sonship that consequently needs to be interpreted in ontological and not merely functional categories.

The third difficulty raised with respect to Owen's christology relates specifically to his central thesis — that,

other than in assuming it into substantial union with himself, the divine Son acts on his own human nature only indirectly and by means of the Spirit. Can such an argument be justified theologically? Owen defends it by demonstrating that the Gospels refer to the action of the Holy Spirit all aspects of divine empowering in Christ's human life and experience. He makes no attempt, however, to answer the opposing position, that is, that the divine Son does directly determine or operate on his own human nature.

In defence of Owen's thesis, however, it is worth considering some of the weaknesses that arise from this alternative position, that is, that the divine Son does act directly upon his own human nature. It is dependent on the idea that there is one immediate determining principle in the incarnate Christ and that that is the divine Son or Logos. Such a theory, it would appear, tends naturally to either Apollinarianism, the implicit denial of an active soul or ego in the humanity of Christ, or kenoticism, the transformation or limitation of the divine nature so that the humanity is not overwhelmed by its operation.

In either case, the integrity of Christ's active humanity appears to be threatened. The whole issue is thus transposed into a question concerning the reality of Christ's human experience. Did he stand as we do, a man before God, dependent on the divine Spirit for all aspects of his physical and spiritual being? Owen's soteriology, which recognises Christ's life to be a prototype of that of the Christian, requires that his experience of God be considered as wholly continuous with our own. The passion of Christ must also be interpreted in terms of his active humanity. The awful sense of spiritual desertion and separation from God known by him at Gethsemane and Golgotha cannot be glossed over and treated docetically. Full weight must rather be given to the fact that the cry of dereliction was that of man in deep spiritual darkness sensing that he had been abandoned by his God.

The theory that the divine Son acts directly on his human nature and is therefore the immediate subject of all Christ's human actions, simply does not accord with the Gospel witness to the reality of Christ's human experience. Far better, it seems to me, is to consider the subject of the passion to be the person of the mediator, the one who is both God and man, and who experienced all the darkness of spiritual dereliction in and through his human nature, a nature that always operated according to its own characteristic principles. But if this is correct, it would appear that Owen was justified in his thesis that other than in the personal assumption of human nature, the divine Son operated upon it only indirectly and by means of the Spirit. He has, therefore, established the link which holds together or integrates the two christological types which we have characterised by the concepts of incarnation and inspiration.

In defending the coherence of Owen's christology in the face of the three areas of difficulty outlined above, I am not arguing that he was wholly consistent, nor that the problem of Christology has finally been solved. Firstly, the ambiguous way in which he used the word person and his ambivalent approach to the indivisibility of trinitarian agency are but two important areas of his work that need further development. Secondly, Christ as

the object of our christological understanding must surely always remain a mystery which continues to defy adequate theological expression. Nevertheless, I believe the christology of John Owen does bring together these two distinctive ways of understanding the person of Christ in a manner which can bring greater coherence to the field of christological reflection.

## NOTES

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- 2 W. Norman Pittinger, *The Word Incarnate*, Harper (New York, 1959) pp.12-13, quoted by Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its basic Alexandrian character*, Mouton Publishers, 1984, p.21.
- 3 Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol.XIII, E.T. by David Bourke, Darton, Longman & Todd (London, 1975), pp.213ff
- 4 Moule, C.F.D., *The Holy Spirit*, Mowbrays (London & Oxford, 1978), p.59.
- 5 John Owen, *Pneumatologia: or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit*, Works 3, *The Works of John Owen*, 16 Volumes (vols I-XVI of 1850-53 edition), Ed by William H. Goold, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust (London, 1965-8), pp. 160ff.
- 6 *Works 3*, pp.163-182
- 7 *Works 3*, p.23.
- 8 Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, Works 11, p.232.
- 9 *Works 11*, p.232
- 10 John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity: as also of the Person and Satisfaction of Christ; accommodated to the capacity and use of such as may be in danger to be seduced; and the establishment of the truth*, Works 2, p.433.
- 11 John Owen, *Christologia: or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ*, Works 1, p.86.

# "CLASSICS OF WESTERN SPIRITUALITY", II: THREE MEDIEVAL WOMEN THEOLOGIANs AND THEIR BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>

NICHOLAS WATSON

A review article of: *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, by Caroline Walker Bynum. 444pp with 30 plates. The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics, ed. Stephen Greenblatt. University of California Press, 1987.

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## I

One major impulse behind the contemporary interest in medieval mysticism is feminist. For the last thirty years or so many intellectuals have been engaged in a quest to pinpoint distinctively female traditions of thought and writing, and to examine all aspects of Western culture from the viewpoint of women. But it is still only beginning to be understood that one of the largest and most absorbing bodies of evidence so far uncovered to assist in this quest is the mass of writings by, about, and for medieval religious women. Most of the research into these writings has been done by religious conservatives, working a good way from the worlds of theoretical feminism and the major academic and popular presses. In North America, the journals *Mystics Quarterly*, *Studia Mystica*, and *Vox Benedictina*, which are rallying points for much of this research, are published in Iowa, Sacramento and Saskatoon respectively, all by local presses — the last is also responsible for the *Matrologia* series of translations.<sup>2</sup> The closest European equivalents of these publications are the series *Analecta Cartusiana*, with spin-offs, published mostly in English from Salzburg, the IRIS colloquia run by Roland Maisonneuve (mostly in French) and the series of conferences on the English mystics held at Dartington Hall in Devon.<sup>3</sup> Only gradually have scholars and readers outside the small circle of participants in these projects become aware of the importance of the material with which they are concerned. Medievalists have recently had their horizons much expanded by the publication of Peter Dronke's study, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*.<sup>4</sup> In England, Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love* has increasingly been singled out for special

attention;<sup>5</sup> in Germany and Holland, the study of Hildegard of Bingen, the nuns of Hefta, and the beguines is now of established importance.<sup>6</sup> A glance along the shelves of recent publications concerned with religious and medieval studies seems to suggest that a small but important revolution is in progress.

This article is a discussion of four books that constitute a significant part of this "revolution". Three are translations of works by women writers, all of whom deserve to be read by those interested in Christian spirituality. They make a dramatic contrast to the male writers I discussed in an earlier article (see note 1), Eckart, Tauler and Ruusbroec — writers of sermons, commentaries and treatises, whose work has always, if sometimes uneasily, formed a part of the tradition of mystical theology; intellectuals and priests, whose preoccupations pulled them alternately towards the lofty abstractions of Christian Neoplatonism and towards the pastoral realities of the religious life. Hadewijch<sup>7</sup> and Julian have not until this century been widely recognized as parts of any tradition. Hadewijch's highly personal reflections on the passionate love of God, in the form of visions, poems and letter, were evidently written both as subjective effusion and as guidance for her younger contemporaries. She was persecuted in her lifetime and forgotten after her death; at one stage there were no less than 111 religious women called Hadewijch to choose from in establishing her identity, and all that is certain even now is that she lived during the thirteenth century, and that her works were known to Ruusbroec in the fourteenth century, before disappearing until their rediscovery in 1838. Julian's brilliant work of original theological speculation has no specific pastoral function. It seems to have been little read during the Middle Ages, was copied during the seventeenth century, perhaps by the English nuns at Cambrai and possibly with the encouragement of their director Augustine Baker, was published in Paris in 1670 by Baker's "disciple" Serenus Cressy, but has reached a substantial audience only since the publication of Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* in 1911. It survives in two versions, one of which is assumed to be a first draft; these give us most of the little information we have about Julian's life.<sup>8</sup>

Only Catherine's life and work — the latter consisting of the *Dialogue* and several hundred letters, some to friends, some to ecclesiastical and political figures — was widely appreciated during her lifetime and after her death in 1380. Memories of her hectic but disciplined devotion, of her naive support of the Papacy through the labyrinthine windings of Italian politics, and of her championship by powerful and educated Dominicans, such as her confessor and disciple Raymond of Capua and the English hermit William Flete, led to her canonization in 1461. She went on to be one of the main Counter-Reformation role models and the Siennese saint *par excellence*; in 1970 she was one of the first two women — the other was Teresa of Avila — to be declared Doctors of the Church, by Pope Paul VI.<sup>9</sup> Even if one does not get the impression that her writings have in truth been closely studied, Doctor or no, her success is nominally as great or greater than that of Eckhart *et al.*

And yet for her, as for Hadewijch and Julian, the fact that she wrote as a woman made obvious and radical differences to what and how she wrote. Not being a

priest, her authority to teach was confined to the world outside the pulpit and confessional, to general (even though often very pointed) didacticism, and to ecstatic utterance; if Julian was able to develop an original theology in similar circumstances, it was by dint of endowing her visions, as she expounded them, with the results of several decades of hard thought. Not having a formal Latin education, Catherine, Julian and Hadewijch all worked largely outside the abstract categories of Christian Neoplatonism, created their own literary forms, and lived and thought as much through metaphor and vision as through logic. We shall see, in short, that as writers and theologians these women experienced a set of constraints very different from — and surely more daunting than — those operating on their male “counterparts”, and consequently adopted different sorts of language and structures of ideas for their expositions of the life of perfection.

I have used the word “constraints” to describe these women writers’ lack of priestly authority and formal education. Yet it is the aim of the fourth book discussed here, Caroline Walker Bynum’s brilliant new study *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, to show that, far from always feeling constrained by their circumstances, medieval religious women occupied their own special ground and wielded their own authority in the Church. Bynum explores the sources and possibilities of this female religiosity through the lives and writings of dozens of thirteenth — and fourteenth — century “holy women”. At the heart of its distinctiveness she finds, time and again, ramifying into almost endless combinations and complexities, the symbolism of food: the acceptance and sharing of nourishment; the suspension and refusal of nourishment. Instead of a more obviously feminist focus on the ways women were circumscribed or marginalized by male structures of authority, Bynum insists on viewing female religiosity positively, expounding it in terms of its possibilities not its imposed limitations. As a result, we are presented with a view of late medieval western Christendom in which many of the old polarities — the institution versus private devotion; priestly authority versus lay ignorance; orthodox versus heretical — have suddenly disappeared, to be replaced by something more variegated, more shifting, and far less abstract.

Bynum’s argument is polemical, in the sense that it consciously stresses one, positive, viewpoint at the expense of others equally possible. It is also based on a far wider range of documents than she can hope to have understood with total clarity. There will therefore be disagreements both with the overall thesis of her book, and with some of its details. Nonetheless this is a work of the first importance to students of religion and medieval history, and equally to anyone concerned with the place of women within western society. More particularly for my present purposes, a brief outline of her book makes a fine introduction to the way Hadewijch’s, Catherine’s and Julian’s thought works, and enables us to generalize with a certain amount of confidence about writers in three languages whose lives spanned up to two centuries.

## II

A first look at the spirituality of late medieval women,

through Saints’ Lives (usually written by men) and through the writings of the women themselves, is likely to be startling and to attract dismissive charges of neurosis and hysteria. Astonishing and often distasteful stories and legends abound. Women fast for months or years until their bodies swell up, in memory of Christ’s passion and in expiation of the sins of the world (Catherine of Siena, like a more recent mystic, Simone Weil, literally starved to death). They take to their beds in a sensual ecstasy of longing for Christ, and are transported for days by a single sight or taste of his body in the Eucharist, so that they can absorb no other food. They have visions of drinking from the wounded side of Christ, of burrowing deep into Christ’s body to unite with his Sacred Heart; in literal antithesis and realization of this, they kiss and drink pus from the sores of beggars, while the saintly corpses of some lactate or exude fragrant oils. Virgins who imbibe Christ in the Eucharist see the host bleeding, turning into a beautiful young man, flying into their bodies across the church; they have visions of giving birth to Christ, of giving him suck, of marriage to Christ, of mystical and sensual union with him (some of Hadewijch’s accounts of visionary joinings with Christ seem to describe physical orgasm). Christ talks to women with an authoritative intimacy; women sometimes talk to Christ in the same tone, and extract remarkable promises of forgiveness and blessing. As well as being lover, ruler and child, Christ can himself be a woman, feeding humanity from the breast-like wound in his side with blood which is milk as well as wine; conversely the Virgin’s nursing of Christ, and mystically of the faithful, can be a Eucharistic image, and can be generalized so that holy women themselves are seen as nursing and feeding the Church. Christ is the Church; the Church is Ecclesia, a lovely virgin. Christ is the head, the Church the body, thus in one of Hildegard’s visions, *Woman is the body of Christ*. With all the rich confusion of Christian doctrine and metaphor to draw on, words can metamorphose into their opposites, categories grow, diversify and change in a profusion of ways: man can become woman, and woman Christ; eating be fasting, fasting bring repletion; spiritual fulfilment can coalesce with bodily deprivation, but also, and quite frankly, coincide with bodily and sexual fulfilment. As Bynum says, looking at how medieval women saw their own place in relation to the world and to God, we could often not be further from the patristic strictures against women and the misogyny of medieval anti-feminist satire — nor, at least on the face of it, could we be much further from the Neoplatonist abstractions of Eckhart.

The elucidation of this complex of behaviour, belief and symbol presents tremendous problems, even discounting those caused by the amount of material and its inaccessibility.<sup>10</sup> Much of the material is fanciful in nature, some of it clearly fictional; how is it to be treated? Bynum argues (p.8) that the question of its literal “truth” is a red herring, and that the stories point to medieval beliefs and practices whatever their roots in fact; but she also insists that with respect to these beliefs and practices it is facts, not fantasies, that are in question. Thus she comes to her texts with a combination of the attitudes of the historian, the sociologist and the literary critic. One can describe the aim of her study as the historical-social contextualization of a religious metaphor (this is the “New Historicism” espoused by the series to which her book is a contribution). But she also writes as a feminist

with a clear sense of the relationship between her scholarship and contemporary concerns, and with a conscious desire to put modern women in some sense "in touch" with their medieval forebears. The result is a book which breaks important new scholarly and methodological ground yet is intended for general readers as well as scholars, and so is written with a lively sense of narrative and an almost fussy concern with the reader's response.

The book is divided into three parts, respectively entitled "The Background", "The Evidence", and "The Explanation", with an introduction and epilogue which explain Bynum's working methods and try to assess the contemporary importance of her findings. The first part sketches the expansion of opportunities for the religious life available to women in the late Middle Ages, explores the patristic background to food symbolism and scepticism, and then describes how the meaning of food and of the refusal of food changed — with the development in the eleventh and twelfth centuries of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, with the parallel developments in the theology of the Passion, and with consequent shifts in the meaning of the Eucharist. The religiosity of the late Middle Ages was increasingly focussed on the humanity of Christ, and on the need for an individual, affective response to his life and Passion. It expressed these new concerns by laying great emphasis on the "real presence" of Christ in the sacrament, and on personal adoration of and meditation on Christ's life and death. His body and blood became the food and drink of salvation in a more tangible, literalistic way than ever before. (Here is the proximate source of many of the governing metaphors of post-Reformation pietism, as expressed in Bach's Passions, Victorian hymnody, and even, torn from its eucharistic context, in the modern evangelical emphasis on "a personal relationship with Christ"). Bynum argues that not only was this a distinctive and suitable spirituality for a newly-articulate laity, it was particularly championed by and associated with women.<sup>11</sup>

The second part shows in detail how food symbolism and eucharistic devotion were especially female concerns, first negatively by indicating the limits of male interest in these matters, and the positively through detailed accounts (80 pages of them) of the lives and writings of medieval women.<sup>12</sup> The pattern that emerges here — through instances derived from all over Europe and from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries — is of women abstaining from food or being unable to eat, while at the same time endowing the idea of food with a complex spiritual significance. Thus in a typical (albeit extreme) case, such as that of Catherine of Siena, there is an inversion of the dichotomy between flesh and spirit: the life of the flesh is spiritualized by near-total abstinence, while that of the spirit is lived in rich and sensual intimacy with carnal, incarnational and eucharistic language; indeed, in Catherine's life the dichotomy breaks down altogether. The results are sometimes beautiful, as when Catherine writes of God as a nursing mother (p.173), but often shocking, as when she "thrusts her mouth into the putrifying breast of a dying woman" (p.170). I particularly admire Bynum's handling of this material — how she allows it to speak for itself in all its deeply alienating oddity, while somehow also describing it with such sympathetic understanding that alienation

cannot turn into simplistic dismissal. It is quite clear, by the end of this part, that the cultural phenomenon she is describing is not an aberrant instance of a kind of mass perversion, but a spirituality requiring a sympathetic and respectful evaluation.

In the third part of her book, Bynum proceeds to this evaluation, by way of five chapters of "explanations". She begins with the simplest: female religious concern with food was related to the fact that food preparation was a female preserve — and so a matter with which women were naturally preoccupied and, more importantly, over which they had almost complete control. By refusing to eat (and by distributing food to others, as some insisted on doing even when they themselves were starving), women could exert maximum control over themselves and their environment, while their manipulation of both literal and symbolic foodstuffs provided them with their best opportunity for creating and exploring spiritual truths in their own lives. There is an obvious link here, discussed at length (pp. 194-207), with the condition modern medicine calls *anorexia nervosa*, and associated with the female adolescent's need for differentiation and self-determination. But Bynum rejects the easy, patronizing explanation, that this struggle for control was no more than a pathological response to institutionalized male supremacy and misogyny, self-hatred expressed as hatred of the flesh: "The extreme asceticism and literalism of women's spirituality were not, at the deepest level, masochism or dualism but, rather, efforts to gain power and to give meaning" (p.208). Women did refuse food as a way of making themselves sexually undesirable, of avoiding excretion and menstruation, and of giving their bodies pain; in a culture that always tended to think of asceticism as self-justifying, forcibly submitted married women to the sexual control of their husbands while simultaneously idealizing chastity, and denied the eucharist to menstruating women, this was inevitable. Yet the accounts such women give of their behaviour, in their own writings and through those of their male biographers, stress more value-bearing explanations which celebrate female physicality rather than denigrating it. Through a woman's body, God became incarnate and humanity was saved. By suffering deprivation, women attempted to continue God's redemptive work by identifying themselves with the suffering Christ — crucifying themselves on their own bodies, which were "eaten up" for the world's salvation. Hence many starving women received the stigmata and had visions of being literally united with Christ on the cross. The fact that the refusal of food was so often the means chosen for heightening pain made an even more physical kind of identification possible: "Closing herself off to ordinary food yet consuming God in the eucharist, the holy woman became God's body" (p.274), and thus a channel for divine power. However macabre such a self-transformation may seem, it involved a heroic act of choice, in which women wrenched themselves out of an environment in which they were subject to social and to ideological coercion by secular and religious authorities (such as husbands and priests), and asserted control over the meaning of their lives. And to a degree they did so successfully. Although there was debate in the late medieval church about the place of the holy woman, and some had to face tremendous external pressures, Bynum argues convincingly that they were a potent force, often

regarded with awe and adoration, and influencing the religious climate of their age in ways we have only begun to grasp. For many of their contemporaries they did indeed incarnate Christ.

In this short summary I have been able to convey scarcely any of the complexity of Bynum's argument, or of the rich theological elaborateness that underlies the medieval metaphors of food. I hope it is obvious by now that this is an important book, which challenges its readers in ways that scholarly works can rarely hope to do — if for no other reason, then because of the way the language of the body, of chewing and excreting and the body's fluids, flows through its pages with an intimacy that will alarm the squeamish. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* provides some of the palpability and sense of immediacy with the women it describes (strange though they are) that we expect of a historical novel. But it also gives access to a tradition of theological thinking that has real importance and vitality, and which is still little understood. It is time now to turn to three major representatives of that tradition.

### III

In this discussion of the imagery of food we have never been far from another way of talking about the religious life, the imagery of sex. The sensual language of eating, chewing and swallowing has tended to occur alongside references to touching, kissing, embracing, and penetration; indeed, many metaphors, such as those of desire and thirst, absorption and satisfaction, derive resonance from their applicability both to sex and to food. The strength of this combination becomes apparent when we look at the writings of Hadewijch, who must be accounted one of the great poets of love in European literature. By the time she completed her book (made up of four carefully-ordered groups of works: thirty-one letters, forty-five stanzaic poems, fourteen visions and sixteen poems in couplets), perhaps around 1240, Europe had been inundated for nearly two hundred years with lyrics, romances, sermons and treatises extolling personal passion directed at a lover or at God. The language of love, even when it was overtly sexual, had become formulaic and automatic, and could be used quite impersonally by a biblical exegete or a poetic technician. Yet in Hadewijch's writing love is a physical force, a pressure that compels response; her love of God is not a mere set of sentimental metaphors, but a fierce and (here is the food metaphor) hungry reality, which she recreates for the reader with an intimacy that is, and is supposed to be, highly disturbing. This sense of God's palpability is a direct consequence of the fact that, for Hadewijch, God is not only available to be embraced metaphorically, but can be touched, tasted and swallowed in carnal reality. In what we might call the "masculine" traditions of love-centred spirituality, there tends to be an emphasis on purity of feeling, so that the advanced contemplative loves God with the highest and most detached part of his soul, and the ascent to this love is represented as a progressive moving-away from the things of the world and the body. The emotional range of Hadewijch's relationship with God makes this sort of deliberate progress to ecstatic union seem abstract and

thin, an emptying, not a fulfilment, of the personality:

"Love is truly a chain, because she binds  
And grasps everything within her power...  
Her chains encircle within me so tightly  
That I think I shall die of pain;  
But her chains conjoin all things  
In a single fruition and a single delight.  
This is the chain that binds all in union  
So that each knows the other through and through  
In the anguish or the repose of the madness  
of Love,  
And eats his flesh and drinks his blood:  
The heart of each devours the other's heart,  
One soul assaults the other and invades  
it completely,  
As he who is Love itself showed us  
When he gave us himself to eat,  
Disconcerting all the thoughts of man."  
(pp.352-353)

The love that expresses itself in this image of two hearts eating one another is indeed "disconcerting"

If the image of eating love most naturally suggests a wondering satisfaction (as in George Herbert's lines, "You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat;/ So I did sit, and eat"), the contrary image, that of being eaten by love, suggests pain. Pain is a major theme in all medieval love-literature (think of Tristan and Isolde), which so often focuses on deprivation more than on fulfilment, and describes fulfilment itself in terms of pain; union with the beloved is always short-lived, and the pleasure it brings is suffused with remembered and anticipated suffering. The love of which Hadewijch writes is painful on many levels. First, it seems to have led directly to what she calls "persecution". Reading between the lines of her letters, it seems she was at one time leader of a group of beguines (see note 7), but was deposed and prevented from continuing to give spiritual direction — she may have been regarded as heterodox, or simply as too overpowering. In a letter she refers to her deposition as depriving her not only of human comfort, but also of a vital token of God's love, the opportunity to serve:

Alas, dear child! although I speak of excessive sweetness, it is in truth a thing I know nothing of, except in the wish of my heart — that suffering has become sweet to me for the sake of his love. But he has been more cruel to me than any devil ever was. For devils could not stop me from loving God or loving anyone he charged me to help forward; but this he himself has snatched from me... Now my lot is like his to whom something is offered in jest, and when he wishes to take it his hand is slapped, and he is told: "God's wrath on him who fancied it true!" And what he supposed he held is snatched from him. (p.48)

Here the human agents of her predicament are ignored in the complexity of her feelings about God. First she says, conventionally enough, that all she suffers is for love, and that this fact ought to make suffering sweet though I think the implication of "wish" must be that it is not yet so. Then she asserts startlingly that God has

behaved cruelly towards her and deprived her of the possibility of loving him. Yet this angry outcry is itself transformed by the end of the letter, where she has become the ruefully amused recipient of an unpleasant, even Chaplinesque, practical joke; she manages, that is, to treat her pain as *funny*, a feat for which I can think of hardly any parallels in mystical or profane love-literature (perhaps Herbert's "The Collar" is one). God has "disconcerted" her.

Some of Hadewijch's other variations on the theme of pain are equally startling. In another letter she writes of two painful but useful kinds of fear: the fear that we do not love God enough, which humbles us and spurs us on, but also the "fear that Love does not love us enough, because she binds us so painfully that we think Love continually oppresses us and helps us little, and all the love is on our side" (p.65). This second fear, which she calls "unfaith", is useful because it "greatly enlarges consciousness", for it "never allows desire any rest in fidelity but, in the fear of not being loved enough, continually distrusts desire". Here Hadewijch seems to treat God as a human lover, in relation to whom all emotions — including that of distrust — can be appropriate; an orthodox reader might argue that such an attitude is the reverse of the childlike confidence and patience that ought to characterize human approaches to God. But on a more careful reading, it becomes apparent that Hadewijch's real suspicions centre on herself, on the tendency of her "desire" to fantasize an anthropomorphic and limited God into existence, who will allow her to settle into an unworthy complacency. In order to deal with this temptation, she urges that we give rein to another kind of fantasy, that we are deserted by the one who ought to love us; this causes us to make greater and greater demands on Love, and to distrust superficial satisfactions. So doing, it is possible to come to a "perfect fidelity" (pp.65-66) which no longer needs to distrust because it is in contact with God himself, not with a mere projection of his love.

The soul who reaches "perfect fidelity" might be thought to attain the peace and joyful union that most mystics regard as the end of their journey. But there is little peace in Hadewijch. The faithful soul may at any time be called away from the enjoyment of love to minister to the needs of another, and dishonours love by refusing such a call (p.65). Moreover, for her love itself is far from restful:

For I am a free human creature... and I can will as highly as I wish, and seize and receive from God all that he is, without objection or anger on his part — what no saint can do. For the saints have their will perfectly according to their pleasure; and they can no longer will beyond what they have. I have hated a great many wonderful deeds and experiences, because I wished to belong to Love alone, and because I could not believe that any human creature loved him so passionately as I — although I know it is a fact and indubitable... But in striving for this I have never experienced Love in any sort of way as repose; on the contrary, I found Love a heavy burden and disgrace. For I was a human creature, and Love is terrible and implacable, devouring and burning without regard for anything. The soul is contained in one little

rivulet; her depth is quickly filled up; her dykes quickly burst. Thus with rapidity the Godhead has engulfed human nature wholly in itself... As for persons who failed God and were strangers to him, they weighed heavy on me. For I was so laden with his love and captivated by it that I could scarcely endure that anyone should love him less than I. And charity for others wounded me cruelly... I would gladly have purchased love for them by accepting that he should love them and hate me. (pp.291-292).

When Hadewijch wrote this Vision 11 (a kind of manifesto), she had since received a "consolation" which changed her state to one of reposeful union with the "abyss". But it is the frenzy preceding repose that dominates her writing, and that here she contrasts, seemingly favourably, with the repose of the saints. In this state, she cannot believe anyone loves so well as she; yet she also cannot bear that anyone should love less. The two feelings pervade her writing; most of her energy seems to go either into refusing anything less than everything for herself, or into demanding the same of others. This is an extraordinarily assertive and aggressive form of mysticism, which runs terrible risks to reach its goal (risks of persecution and charges of pride, but surely most seriously of psychic self-destruction), but which, by Hadewijch's account, is irresistibly successful in doing so. Not surprisingly, even God is impressed by her:

The Voice said to me: "O strongest of all warriors! You have conquered everything and opened the closed totality, which never was opened by creatures who did not know, with painfully won and distressed Love, how I am God and Man! O heroine, since you are so heroic, and since you never yield, you are called the greatest heroine! It is right, therefore, that you should know me perfectly." (p.305)

For many Christians then and now, anyone who can experience and record a vision in which she is praised as "the greatest heroine" must seem to totter on the brink of spiritual megalomania. But such extremism is a hallmark of medieval women's spirituality — and here it is coupled with a generosity, a breadth of feeling, and a humane intelligence that there can be no question of dismissing as mere self-obsession.

#### IV

Turning to Catherine of Siena we skip a century and the eight hundred miles between the Netherlands and Tuscany to find ourselves in a somewhat different theological world. Hadewijch, as a beguine, probably thought and taught in a mainly female and non-institutionalized environment. Catherine, a tertiary (i.e. lay sister) of the Dominican foundation that still dominates a quarter of Siena, who spent her life surrounded by learned and cosmopolitan priests, was naturally influenced by and involved with the ecclesiastical institution in a way Hadewijch was not. Where the motive force behind Hadewijch's letters was pastoral concern for her "younger sisters", the focus in Catherine's letters is often the grandly general theme of the state of the Church. Much of her life was occupied with Church politics — mediating between the Papacy and Florence (and being

humiliatingly manipulated by the latter), persuading the Pope to return from Avignon to Rome — and her death by starvation was very likely a direct response to the beginnings of the “Great Schism”. The source of much of the power she exercised over her contemporaries (and especially over men) is probably to be found in a felt link between her holiness and prophetic powers and the mystical figure of Ecclesia herself; she was thought of as embodying the Church, the vessel of God’s merciful wisdom (*sophia*, another feminine figure), in her own life and utterances. Working out her thought in this heady but intensely pressured environment, it is to be expected that Catherine should be more firmly centred in a particular (Dominican) tradition of theological thought, and display less theological and literary individuality than does Hadewijch.

But given the differences between the two women, the remarkable thing is how much they share. In Catherine’s writing we again encounter a theology of passionate love, of restless internal and external activity, and of pain; one of her chief preoccupations is with the power of tears. For her too God is not only to be obeyed, but to be questioned and even coerced — although it is characteristic of her writing that these truths emerge as abstract doctrinal statements, where for Hadewijch they were not primarily theological issues but part of the texture of experience. Both are spiritually ambitious, and see the religious life in thoroughly extremist terms; the *Dialogue*’s first section (pp.28ff.) begins by stating that an infinite God demands an infinitude of repentance and love before he can forgive even the smallest sin, so that humanity must suffer infinite sorrow and infinite desire to achieve forgiveness. (Again characteristically, Catherine then spends several pages putting this statement in a theological context that makes it apply to ordinary Christians as well as spiritual athletes like herself.) Both Catherine and Hadewijch, lastly, combine spiritual rapture with commitment to active charity; neither fits the stereotyped picture of the mystic cut off from all the pressures and concerns of the everyday world.

Catherine wrote the *Dialogue* in 1377–1378, a hectic period of her life by the end of which the consuming energy that was to kill her two years later, aged thirty-three, had clearly begun to take its toll. The method of its composition is interesting. It was dictated to secretaries whenever there was time to do so, with Catherine always remembering where she had left off, but apparently also being in a state of “ecstasy” (a sort of prophetic trance?) while uttering. Since God does almost all the talking in the work (the soul’s part in the “dialogue” is limited to a few questions and a number of passages of rapturous praise), it must have seemed to her secretaries, as they scrambled to get her words down, that God was actually speaking through her. This was her belief too. Yet there is evidence that after these sessions she did not regard her text as finished, but revised it extensively with her own hands. This suggests a complicated view of the relationship between the work’s divine and human authors; there is at once a remarkable intimacy between them (Catherine can edit God’s words) and a distance (she does not get them right straight away).<sup>13</sup> Probably Catherine’s thinking was pragmatic; written as a spontaneous effusion, her book was doubtless in a messy state, full of ambiguities and unclarity, in its first form.

The *Dialogue* is not, indeed, a model of clarity even in its final form. The prologue has the soul making four petitions, for herself, for the Church, for the world, for an unspecified individual; God’s responses to these take up chapters 3–25 of the work.<sup>14</sup> After this point, Catherine requests an expansion of an image God has produced earlier, of Christ as a bridge; God’s long answer (chapters 26–87) gives rise to a further question, and so it goes on. This rhapsodic structure makes for a good deal of repetition, so that the work’s dominant themes — the relationship of love and knowledge in the soul’s spiritual journey, the state of the Church, the centrality of obedience and holy tears to the spiritual life — are explored in all their aspects, as discussions weave in and out of one another. But it does not make for easy reading. As we will find again with Julian of Norwich’s *Revelation*, the work is full of expositions which seem to lead to summaries and definitive conclusions but which fail to stop there, sweeping on to new arguments which may themselves return to the original starting-point; structures of ideas continually present themselves, only to be snatched away at the last moment.<sup>15</sup>

Both the work’s mode of composition and Catherine’s lack of a formal education can be cited in explanation of this phenomenon. But there is also a less negative way of thinking about it. What we might call the outermost circle of ideas in the work concerns the way truth and love must interact — the former including self-knowledge, doctrinal and political knowledge, and all that pertains to the reason; the latter consisting of love for God, neighbour, Church and world. The truth about ourselves drives us to humility and passionate desire for pardon; the truth about God sweeps us up into exultant awe, and makes us love him; the truth about the Church and the world fills us with passionate desire to turn both back to God. Truth and love activate one another. Catherine’s focus on truth is part of her Dominican inheritance,<sup>16</sup> and is unusual among medieval women writers, who tend to subsume their doctrinal stances into expressions of passionate love, rather as Hadewijch does. Like them, Catherine also emphasized passionate love for God in her life and writing, as the *Dialogue* and contemporary biographies make clear; for her well-educated male disciples, her access to the inner world of uncontrolled feeling must have constituted a large part of her fascination and authority. This combined emphasis on the superabundance of passionate love with a rational sense of theological truth is above all what makes the *Dialogue* distinctive. But the combination does not only function as part of the argument of the *Dialogue*, it also determines its form; for in the demands it imposes on the reader, the work enacts the way knowledge and love must be joined together. On the one hand, to read the work carefully is to give assent to its emphasis on knowledge, as time after time the soul’s subjective rapture and concern for its own state turn into demands for knowledge of God, and for the truth about the world. Catherine’s relationship with God is a starting-point, not (as with Hadewijch) an end-point of her work; unlike Julian of Norwich’s constantly-anthologized *Revelation*, her book does not exude a warmth that makes her enjoyable to read thoughtlessly. Yet on the other hand we cannot read the work only for knowledge, for it does not present its doctrines in a way the closure-seeking logical mind can grasp, but in the dramatic and emotional

context of a conversation between the soul and God; any attempt to abstract one set of arguments from the work will involve damaging the tissue of inter-connections between them. A reading of the *Dialogue* must involve a difficult combination of rational and affective attention, a willingness to think of ideas in a dynamic rather than a closed way. Such a reading learns the same lesson from the example of the text as it does from its precepts. If Hadewijch writes disconcertingly about a disconcerting God, Catherine's writing is a portrayal of what she regards as the supreme quality of discernment, in which love is grounded in rational truth, and truth in love.

## V

If Catherine of Siena's emphasis on the reason makes her an exception among medieval women writers, then her contemporary Julian of Norwich must be regarded as another. The original impetus for Julian's *Revelation of Love* was the three requests she made for affective experience of Christ's suffering, and the visions she was given in answer to those requests (see note 8). These visions, many of which are of scenes from the Passion, have parallels in the writings of other women (such as Margery Kempe), who saw in ecstasy what they had already imagined in meditation. But the theological and literary structure that Julian builds on her visions has no such parallels, and develops far beyond the expression of personal devotion, into one of the finest explorations of God as love in religious literature. Julian treats the Passion not only as the suffering and death of the incarnate Christ, but as an expression of the nature of the whole Trinity, the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son and the love of the Holy Spirit; she responds to it with all the three powers of her soul, memory, reason and love, which constitute her creation in the likeness of God.<sup>17</sup> Her style and thought is insistently Trinitarian, to the extent that clauses and phrases tend to come in groups of three, so that there is a kind of triple rhythm to the whole work. Yet even more important for her is the fact that the Trinity are a unity, a single and self-consistent being. Her application of this fundamental theological truth to her visions of Christ's redemption of humanity leads her into a powerfully taut and difficult argument about the love of God, which runs great risks of incoherence and heterodoxy, but which, after a quarter of a century of work on her part, at least comes close to achieving its goal.

The goal is to show that the whole of Christian history from Creation to Fall to Judgement is an expression of God's love. God himself sums up the purposes of her revelation in the last chapter of the work:

What, do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. (p.342)

The incantatory quality of Julian's prose (which speaks, like Catherine's, to the rational and the emotional faculties at once) should not occlude the theological point: the three questions invoke each person of the Trinity in turn

(the revealer, the one revealed, and the quality that the one revealed reveals), and assert that the nature of each and the unity between them all is love. The other qualities that are ascribed to God, such as justice, might, wisdom, are subservient to this, and we cannot speak, for example, of God's judgement of sin at the Fall or on the Last Day unless we also speak of what occurs as expressions of his love. Thus in her visions, Julian saw the love of God but did not see sin or its punishment, or God's anger on account of sin.

Even while her visions were in progress, Julian was aware that their meaning was problematic, and responded with doubts and questions, which were incorporated into the revelation and influenced its direction, giving it something of the quality of a dialogue. It is her anguish at the harm that sin has done her and the whole world, expressed in the thought that without sin "all would have been well" (p.224), that evokes Christ's famous "Sin is necessary, but all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well" (p.225);<sup>18</sup> and she promptly challenges his misquotation of her words by using them again, with "Ah, good Lord, how could all things be well, because of the great harm which has come through sin to your creatures?" (p.227). After the revelation, she was still so puzzled that in the first version of her book she left out a number of important statements (including "all will be well") and one entire vision. The main problem, of course, is that the absence of any sense of the wrath of God and mention of damnation in her revelation is difficult to reconcile with traditional Christian teaching. Christ was insistent that she adhere to the Church's beliefs, and she knew she must take the revelation with full seriousness:

Our faith is founded on God's word, and it belongs to our faith that we believe that God's word will be preserved in all things. And one article of our faith is that many creatures will be damned... And all this being so, it seemed to me that it was impossible that every kind of thing should be well, as our Lord revealed at this time. And to this I had no other answer as a revelation from our Lord except this: What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. (p.234)

Julian's attempt to solve this crucial difficulty takes up much of the middle third of her book (chapters 27-51) and elides with the difficult last third, which develops the doctrine that Christ is our mother out of the preceding theological discussions. Part of her answer is a version of "wait and see." She receives a glimpse of a "great deed ordained by our Lord God from without beginning, treasured and hid in his blessed breast, known only to himself, through which he will make all things well" (pp.232-233). But she also argues some more specific points. First, "in every soul which will be saved there is a godly will which never assents to sin and never will" (pp.241-242); the Fall did not corrupt the essential goodness of the human will. Second, "Our Lord was never angry, and never will be" (p.259); humans merely project anger onto God out of self-disgust and despair. Third, God does not, therefore, forgive our sins, since in his unchangeable nature he is never angered by them (p.259), and in our unchangeable nature we remain essentially unfallen. Fourth, that sin is nothing: "I believe that it has no kind of substance, no share in being, nor can

it be recognise except by the pain caused by it" (p.225). These claims are summed up in the great vision of the Lord and the servant (the vision suppressed in Julian's first draft) in chapter 51, which sees Adam's fall and Christ's incarnation as expressions of the same love.

There will continue to be differences of opinion as to how impressive these arguments are; they are both more cogent and more problematic than I have had the space to show. Yet Julian does deserve to be regarded as a serious theologian, worth reading not merely for an occasional spiritual pick-me-up, but for her entire religious overview. Reading *A Revelation of Divine Love* is not easy. As with the *Dialogue* and indeed with the writings of Hadewijch, we encounter much that is alienating or frustrating: arguments that are half logic, half metaphor; assumptions about the nature of revelation and claims for personal revelation that are fascinating, yet fall outside contemporary categories; imagery that is bizarre and perhaps repellent. But if we can give these writings the proper kind of attention (and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* is full of graphic illustrations both of the difficulties and of the possibilities inherent in this task), much of value and interest comes into focus. All three of the writers I have discussed display a sharp religious intelligence, an ability to synthesize not only different traditions of thought, but different areas of human experience into a strong and individual theology. In some respects these women writers, with their compassion and their willingness to reinterpret old orthodoxies, are of more obvious interest than their male contemporaries. After hundreds of years of relative neglect, it is to be hoped that their hour has come.

## NOTES

- 1 This article is the second in a series of reviews of parts of the Classics of Western Spirituality series published by SPCK/Paulist press; the first, which was subtitled "Eckhart, Tauler and Ruusbroec," appeared in KTR, vol XI no 1 (Spring 1988). I would like to thank the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada for their financial support during the period in which I was working on both articles.
- 2 *Mystics Quarterly* is edited by Valerie Lagorio and Ritamary Bradley, and is run from the Department of English, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, USA. It carries some articles, but is mainly useful as a disseminator of information about work (in progress and published) or Christian mysticism, with a particular emphasis on women writers. *Studia Mystica* is edited by Mary Giles, Dept. of Humanities, California State University, Sacramento, California 95819, USA. It carries articles, reviews, poems and "appreciations," and is as much devotional as scholarly in intention. *Vox Benedictina* is edited by Margot King, 409 Garrison Crescent, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7H 2Z9, Canada — though a move to Toronto is contemplated. It carries more articles than reviews, but seems to be written very much for the inner circle. Of far greater importance is its spin-off, the *Matrologia Latina*, published by Peregrina Publishing Co. (same address), which consists of translations of medieval works by and about women. These are issued at cost price, are variable in quality but competent, and make available works of considerable interest and sometimes rarity; for example, the brilliant religious plays written by the ninth-century Ottonian nun Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, several of the lives of thirteenth-century women saints by Jacques de Vitry, and Heinrich Seuse's (Henry Suso's) *Little Book of Love*.
- 3 *Analecta Cartusiana* is, in effect, a multi-volume series of books and article-collections, founded, run and soon to be closed by the indefatigable James Hogg, of the Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, University of Salzburg, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria. Although many of the volumes investigate the specific matter of the history of the Carthusian Order, a number of them (and of another Salzburg series, the inappropriately-named Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies series) consist of studies and editions of mystical works, many written for or by women. A fatal

tolerance for indifferent and sometimes bad work has given Hogg's publications a mixed reputation, and driven him again and again to the brink of bankruptcy; but he has still not toppled, and many of the recent volumes have been indispensable. IRIS colloquia and publications, under the direction of Roland Maissoneuve (27 rue Laplanche, 01100 Oyonnax, France), explore the boundary between religion and science, and tend to the headily rhapsodic. The four Dartington symposia on the English mystics, run by Marion Glasscoe of the Dept. of English, University of Exeter, have generated much good work, which can be consulted in the Proceedings (entitled *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*), the first two volumes of which (1980, 1982) were published by the University of Exeter Press, the others (1984, 1987) by Boydell and Brewer.

- 4 Subtitled, *A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (+203) to Marguerite Porete (+1310)*, Cambridge 1984.
- 5 See e.g. *Love was his meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich*, by Brant Pelphrey, Salzburg Studies in English Literature (Salzburg 1982) and *Julian of Norwich, Mystic and Theologian*, by Grace Jantzen (London 1987). The form of Julian's title used in this article (*A Revelation of Love*) is the one she herself gives in the first sentence of the work ("This is a revelation of love..."), not the conventional *Revelations of Divine Love*, nor the title invented by Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*.
- 6 See e.g. *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter*, edited by Peter Dinzelbacher and D. Bauer (Ostfildern 1985) for bibliographical information. Hildegard is the most important of all medieval women theologians, and I hope to be able to give her special attention in a later article. A beguine is a religious woman living in informal association with others, sometimes under a written "rule," sometimes not. Large numbers of beguines, and a few beghards (male equivalents) formed an important part of the religious life of northern France, Belgium, Holland and Germany — they seem to have been unknown in England — in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Their existence is to be explained partly by the fact of what historians refer to as a contemporary "surplus of women," partly by the male religious orders' refusal to found enough houses for women, partly by a mass of female (and "feminist") enthusiasm for a certain style of religious devotion. Alternately praised, suspected, persecuted and condemned as heretical by the ecclesiastical and civic authorities, they were gone before the middle of the fifteenth century. A good brief introduction to their history is chapter 7 ("Fringe Orders and anti-Orders") of R. W. Southern's *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, vol.2 of the Pelican History of the Church (Harmondsworth 1970).
- 7 For convenience and modern accuracy, pronounce Had-e-vitch.
- 8 Both versions tell us that Julian had her visions on May 13th 1373, when she was thirty years old and seriously ill; she describes them as given in answer to three requests she made to God much earlier, for bodily sickness, for a true recollection of Christ's passion, and for three wounds, "the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion and the wound of longing with my will for God" (p.127). From details in the short text, it is clear that at the time of her visions she was a laywoman or a nun. We know from one of the manuscripts of her work, and from the evidence of several Norwich wills, that later on she became an anchoress (at which time she may well have taken the name "Julian" or "Jelyan"). Whether this was before or after writing her work is unclear, but the long text was still unfinished in 1393, twenty years after her vision; only then did she understand the most puzzling of the revelations she had received. She was certainly an anchoress when she was visited by a fellow-mystic, Margery Kempe, who recounts what Julian said on this occasion in her wonderful autobiography (*The Book of Margery Kempe*, recently published as a Penguin Classic). She was still alive in 1413.
- 9 A great deal is known about Catherine of Siena, from her own writing and the memoirs of her contemporaries. Most useful and accessible is Raymond of Capua's *Legenda Maior*, translated by George Lamb as *The Life of Catherine of Siena* (New York 1960) — a work that until recently did more to keep Catherine's memory alive than anything she wrote.
- 10 Bynum mostly avoids manuscript sources, but must still go far afield for her bibliography and work in half a dozen languages.
- 11 For this part of her exposition, Bynum is indebted to another fine book in the New Historicist vein, Brian Stock's *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton 1983), chapter three of which expounds the development of eucharistic theology. A major event at the end of this process of development was the institution, in 1264 — the result of a vision revealed to and tirelessly promoted by Juliana of Cornillon — of

the feast of Corpus Christi, in which the humanity of Christ was for the first time a specific object of liturgical devotion.

- 12 The first chapter of this part, "Food as a Female Concern," is the least satisfactory in the book. It does achieve its major purpose, to place some bounds on the subject by showing that food and women were more closely associated in the Middle Ages than food and men — so that, for example, eucharistic miracles generally happen to women, and warnings about the perils of "the flesh" usually refer to sexual temptations with a male audience but to food and drink with a female one. But men wrote the eucharistic hymns Bynum quotes in chapter 1, as well as much of the hagiographic material on which she bases her accounts of the lives of women; food symbolism must have mattered to them too, in ways the book seems to brush aside. Moreover, Bynum does not mention one major, and predominantly male, literary genre in which food symbolism plays a crucial role, non-liturgical religious poetry; John of Hoveden's *Philomela* and Langland's *Piers Plowman* are as concerned with the metaphors of food as any of the women she discusses.
- 13 The relationship is still more complicated if we suppose that her "secretaries" — who were probably also at once her confessors and her spiritual disciples — had some hand in the revision. This may not be so, and in any case everyone was in such awe of Catherine that she must usually have had the last word. But it seems likely that she solicited their opinions, as educated men, on doctrinal matters.
- 14 The chapter-divisions do not originate with Catherine and are sometimes misleading. This part of the *Dialogue* is more clearly structured than Noffke's introduction (p.16) makes out.
- 15 For this reason too, it is impossible to quote the *Dialogue* in practicable quantities. Catherine has none of Hadewijch's skill in making pregnant and pithy statements, but always thinks a thought over several pages.
- 16 Dominicans argued that the highest faculty of the human soul was the reason, and that God was therefore to be attained through passionate knowledge; Franciscans and other argued that only love was high enough to attain to God. (Much of the history of the two orders can be explained in relation to their positions on this issue.) But it was agreed on all sides that knowledge on its own (*scientia*) was useless or even harmful unless it was imbued with love (*caritas*), and so became wisdom (*sapientia*).
- 17 Augustine, in the *De Trinitate*, argues that the three parts or powers of the soul were created in the image of the persons of the Trinity — a doctrine that pervades subsequent theological thought in the West.
- 18 Julian's cause is not helped by her translators' refusal to use "shall" here. While not attaining to nearly the sublime banality of the Penguin Classics translation ("everything's going to be all right"), this does sound disconcertingly like "All wibbly-wobbly" etc.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **The Gospel according to Saint Matthew. Volume 1 (Introduction and Matthew 1-7)**

W.D.Davies & Dale C. Allison Jr. International Critical Commentary. T. & T. Clark, 1988. Pp.xlvii + 731

Recent commentaries on Matthew have tended to be 'unusual.' There is R.H.Gundry's *Commentary on Matthew's Literary and Theological Art* (1982), described by Davies & Allison as 'not a little idiosyncratic,' followed by Daniel Patte's structuralist *Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (1987), and F. Dale Bruner's *Christbook* (1987) and *Churchbook* (promised) offering a very personal 'theological exegesis' of Matthew. It is therefore reassuring for those who appreciate a good old-fashioned commentary to find that some things never change, and among them is the nature of an ICC.

It is intended as no reproach if I describe this massive volume as traditional and unsurprising, both in its style and in its contents. Anyone who has used ICCs in the past will know what to expect here, and will not be disappointed. The learning is impressive, the judgement cautious, and the presentation clear. It is all that an exegetical commentary on the Greek text should be.

But it is huge! Judging by this first volume, the complete commentary (in three volumes) will run to well over 2,000 pages. It is therefore a bit galling for one who has struggled to do justice to Matthew within the confines of a more limited commentary series to find the authors complaining of the restraints of space which have prevented 'more expansive treatments of many aspects of the text' and have forced them 'to prefer leanness to fullness.' They must be joking! What sort of commentary would they have written given a free hand? Those who need to count their pennies, and who can afford to contemplate buying even this 'lean' three-volume work, have cause to be grateful that the publishers were not more accommodating!

It is an indication of the recent explosive growth in Matthew studies that one reason for the size of this work is the sheer quantity of literature to which they feel it necessary to refer. The main bibliography fills 27 pages, and there are substantial bibliographies of more specific treatments for each section of the text. They have missed little, though it is an unfortunate result of the scale of the work that production has clearly taken at least three years, since no items since 1985 are cited, and even Carson's major commentary (1984) is not mentioned. By the time the trilogy is complete, the main bibliography will be badly out of date.

The introduction covers only the more basic higher-critical issues (discussion of Matthew's theology and of the place of the gospel in the development of early Christianity is postponed until vol.3). The higher-critical conclusions are very conventional. A 51-page discussion should put an end to any lingering doubts that the author was a Jew; but the authors show no further interest in who he was. They claim to have started with an open mind on the Synoptic Problem (is that really possible, I

wonder?) but to have come down firmly on the side of Streeterian orthodoxy as a result of detailed study of the text; pp. 97-127 must now rank as one of the most effective shorter defences of Marcan priority, though I did wonder whether the authors had given sufficient weight to the prior question, raised e.g. by John Robinson, of whether it is realistic to postulate a simple one-way dependence at all.

The one place where the introduction does try to break new ground (as opposed to presenting freshly-minted arguments for traditional views) is on the currently fashionable question of the gospel's structure. Building on Matthew's known liking for groups of three, they have produced analyses of the five main discourses in terms of triads, and have further observed that the narrative of chapters 1-12 can also be set out in three sections each containing three groups of three pericopes. It all looks too good to be true — 'the sight of perfect symmetry ought, we freely confess, to cause some uneasiness!' But it is encouraging that the authors have resisted the temptation to squeeze the rest of Matthew's narrative into the same mould; they found it would not fit, and concluded that from chapter 14 on Matthew simply followed Mark's structure. Matthew does offer good scope for triad-hunters, but whether he consciously planned his book (or rather half of it) triadically may be less easy to decide.

The commentary itself is above all *historical*, in that its concern is what the text *meant* much more than what it means. To this end, the authors offer an unrivalled collection of comparative material from literature of the period, Jewish and pagan; the rabbinic material adduced is, as might be expected from this partnership, full and fascinating, and is judiciously applied to a first century Christian text. For instance, 5:18 is well illuminated by a consideration of the rabbis' ability to hold a view of the permanent validity of the law together with a willingness to alter and reapply it to new situations. There is no attempt to 'modernise' Matthew. Thus the subtle hermeneutics which underlie a text such as the Hosea quotation in 2:15 are sympathetically analysed in relation to Matthew's own context, while the reader is left to draw his own hermeneutical conclusions.

Following the example of Cranfield's pilot volumes for the new generation of ICCs, the authors excel in setting out clearly the various exegetical options (no less than 16 are offered for the significance of the dove in 3:16), and then working through by process of elimination to their preferred interpretation. Quite often they are unable to decide, which may be frustrating for some readers, but shows a proper sensitivity to the complexity of the issues involved. You do not feel with this commentary, as with some, that you are being offered slick solutions on the basis of a partial presentation of the evidence.

I hope it goes without saying that this *must* be the standard technical commentary on Matthew for a good time to come.

Dick France

## The Pauline Churches. A socio-historical Study of Institutionalisation in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings

Margaret Y. MacDonald. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 60. Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp.xiii + 286.

The use of the social sciences in the analysis of the Bible is now making a major contribution to New Testament studies. As the preface to this book indicates, one key figure in the encouragement of this interaction of disciplines in this country is Robert Morgan, who supervised MacDonald's work at its Ph.D. stage in Oxford (as well as the innovative study of Luke-Acts by P. Esler). MacDonald's focus of interest is the process of institutionalisation, whereby a new movement solidifies its structures, and establishes its patterns of behaviour and belief. She argues that this process can be clearly traced in the development of the Pauline churches as we see them reflected in the relevant New Testament documents. Her work is based on the assumption that Colossians and Ephesians are pseudonymous and that the Pastorals come from a period as late as A.D. 100 - 140. Accordingly, it falls into three sections describing community-building (Paul), community-stabilising (Col and Eph) and community-protecting (Pastorals).

This project is especially fruitful in its capacity to balance the prevalent one-sidedness of Lutheran-dominated New Testament scholarship. This latter charts the development of the Pauline movement in purely theological terms (the fading of imminent eschatology and spontaneity; the imposition of rules and church offices; the threat of gnosticism etc.); and, out of devotion to the 'real' Paul, it cannot refrain from making derogatory remarks about the onset of 'early Catholicism.'

MacDonald rightly questions "whether cerebral activities are the only, or even the primary, factors determining development within the early church" (p.9). She insists on the significance of the social realities which influenced the Pauline communities and the dialectical relationship between these realities and the beliefs of the Pauline Christians (p.28). For instance, the social changes which come when a new movement stabilizes itself, passing on its traditions to a new generation, make some forms of initial originality no longer necessary and even no longer possible. She also emphasises that the developments were complex and gradual and had their roots within the lifetime and letters of Paul. There are the beginnings of love-patriarchalism and an institutional approach to church ministry even in the authentic letters of Paul so that "one is prevented from claiming complete discontinuity between the situation in Paul's churches and the situation of those who wrote in the Apostle's name after his death" (p.15).

Thus MacDonald makes some effective criticisms of von Campenhausen, Käsemann and others, whose sweeping generalisations lead to unsympathetic judgements on Deutero-Pauline Christianity. In her survey of Paul's letters (heavily dependent on Meeks and Theissen) there is a valuable emphasis on the tensions within a "conversionist sect" (Wilson), which has a "simultaneous interest in avoiding and evangelizing outsiders" (p.40). It would

have been helpful here to discuss the social precariousness of Paul's churches amongst the competing loyalties of first-century city life. In fact, in general, MacDonald seems more familiar with certain popular sociological theories (propounded by Weber, Troeltsch, Wilson, Berger and Luckmann) than with the social realities of life in the Graeco-Roman world. A comparison with other minority communities (e.g. synagogues) could have helped bring such realities to the fore, and an awareness of the sociological study of minority groups and their identity-maintenance might have helped to broaden the focus of this study. In particular, I suspect that the church-sect typology, embedded in the question whether the Deutero-Pauline communities are closer to the church-type or the sect-type (pp.200-1), is of limited value and potentially misleading.

On Colossians and Ephesians, MacDonald acknowledges our poverty of information about the social realities underlying these letters. She squeezes as much as she can out of them on the topics of ethics, ministry, ritual and belief (the main topics in each section of the book), but the results do not add a great deal to our understanding of these documents. Although she considers that the "rule-like statements" of the *Haustafeln* are "more conservative" than the Pauline letters, at several points she highlights the similarities with the authentic Paul — similarities which might cause her and others to reflect a little more on the authorship questions.

Probably the most valuable section of the book is that on the Pastorals. Here MacDonald introduces useful comparative material (Hermas; the Acts of Paul and Thecla) and develops a worthwhile thesis that the author is primarily combating ascetic women-teachers whose unmarried state and authoritative teaching challenge the patriarchal notions which were the bedrock of Graeco-Roman society. The author of the Pastorals, concerned to protect the respectable reputation of the church, reinforces the traditional value-system by silencing the women and linking church-leadership to patriarchal household-roles. While explaining the sociological causes of this stance, MacDonald understandably makes no secret of her disappointment with it!

Apart from this final section, however, the book suffers rather from a lack of fresh exegetical analysis and insight. Rather than cutting new paths of her own, MacDonald is mostly content to draw the map of where others have been. Although this indicates some interesting intersections, it also shows how much uncharted territory still remains. I hope the occasional verbosity of this work will not deter other New Testament scholars from pursuing this sort of enquiry in greater depth and with broader vision.

John Barclay

## One God One Lord. Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism

Larry W. Hurtado. SCM, 1988. Pp.xiv + 178. £8.50

The theme of the book, in the writer's own words is, "How did the early Jewish Christians accommodate the veneration of the exalted Jesus alongside God while continuing to see themselves as loyal to the fundamental emphasis of their ancestral tradition on one God, and without the benefit of the succeeding four centuries of Christian theological discussion which led to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity?" The answer is not to be found in a 'paganisation' of Christianity, the result of later contact with hellenistic religion in the first period of its expansion. Speaking of Jesus and God 'in the same breath' is seen as an unquestioned feature of the earliest stratum of Jewish Christianity, reaching back, even, into the Aramaic-speaking period. A high christology, variously expressed, based on the quasi-credal affirmation of the exaltation of Jesus as Lord is common, in some form or another, to most if not all strands of the New Testament.

If 'devotion to Jesus alongside God' is not to be explained in terms of direct hellenistic influence, might not the background to it be best sought in the Judaism of the post-exilic and inter-testamental periods? Later Judaism itself was not, of course, immune to contacts with hellenism. These have been supposed, by W. Bousset and others, to have given rise to a great deal of unhealthy interest at this period in angels, dualism, the divine hypostases of 'word' and 'wisdom' and the like. This preoccupation with divine agents, it is argued, served to compromise the older and purer forms of monotheism. From here it would be but a short step to the position that Christianity is a development of Jewish heresy.

Such a view is strongly contested by Hurtado. Evidence for the widespread existence of Jewish heterodoxy is lacking. Warnings against the teaching of 'two powers in heaven' do no more than show that people were alive to the possible dangers, not that the dangers themselves existed. Even Philo in his strenuous efforts to find a common ground with Greek philosophy remained true to the faith of his fathers. Indeed a closer examination of the treatment of the roles of the various divine agencies shows that this served to emphasise and strengthen monotheism rather than compromise it. However extravagant the language that is used of them, the divine agencies, be they angels, divine hypostases, or prophets and patriarchs who ascended or were 'assumed,' nevertheless remain most definitely subordinate to God himself. After all it is much easier to describe the glorification of a biblical figure or concept than to attempt the impossible by seeking to express the immeasurably greater glory and majesty of God in any kind of human language.

These categories of later Jewish speculation, it is argued, provide a plausible 'matrix' for New Testament development — "the Christian mutation." This occurred when the early Jewish Christians combined together all the various categories of the divine agencies in a variety of mixtures — these were the only theological categories available to them — and applied them to Jesus whom God had raised up and exalted to his right hand.

Obviously they were not able to fit Jesus neatly into any single category. 'Prophet' or 'angel' are hardly sufficient to describe him by themselves. Moreover, unlike their fellow Jews, the Jewish Christians were talking not of an angel or some legendary biblical personage, but of someone who had died in recent memory.

The argument is sustained persuasively and convincingly in broad terms with copious notes and references, but the fine print of evidence will need to be tested by the experts in various fields. In particular, the choice of the term 'mutation' is perhaps unfortunate, suggesting as it does a sudden and random shift. To what extent did the Jewish Christians realise consciously what they were doing? Furthermore, the evidence of the New Testament itself does not suggest that the process was quite so even or universal as we might otherwise have been led to believe. There are, for example, texts like 1 Corinthians 15:28 in which the Son is explicitly made subordinate to the Father, exactly as a classical Jewish orthodoxy would require.

The great question is not raised of how much of this 'mutation' might be ascribed to Jesus himself. It should not be thought unreasonable to raise the point. It is claimed that the subject is being treated historically, and in any historical study the historical Jesus must be part of the equation, however elusive a part. J. Jeremias may not have said the last word about *The Lord's Prayer* or *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, but his work illustrates the point at issue. Is it Jesus himself who is the watershed between Jewish and Christian prayer, or simply his first followers' appreciation of him?

Hugh Bates

## Women in the Earliest Churches

Ben Witherington III. SNTS Monograph Series 59. CUP, 1988. Pp.xiii + 300. £27.50(hb).

The intention of this timely monograph, methodologically speaking, is to provide a corrective to the kind of study done by 'able scholars who nonetheless come to the text with a specific agenda in mind, whether patriarchal or feminist' (p.1). Away with interpretations so loaded that they can use the same biblical material to draw diametrically opposite conclusions! Here is a brave attempt at *epoche*: at pushing aside the clamant demands of twentieth century presuppositions so that the text itself has the final say.

The problem is a familiar hermeneutical *crux*, given added point by the heat of contemporary controversy. If we grant that there is no escape from the hermeneutical circle, does this mean that interpreters inevitably recreate the text in their own image? 'No!' cries the exegete. The text may be a series of signs to be decoded and interpreted, but it is *these* signs and not other ones to which hermeneutical attention must be given. True, each interpreter has his/her own style and presuppositions, which may be more or less acceptable to other contemporaries or successors. Witherington's worthy aim is balance in interpretation combined with respect for the

integrity of the text in exegesis. But if his work is to be a corrective to contemporary interpretative *imbalance*, then surely it must be within dialogue distance of the modern writings he criticises. It is at this point that one begins to have doubts. I wonder whether cultural fragmentation is now so advanced that writers of different schools are no longer listening to one another. The present work is more of an exercise in the rigorous exegesis of passages which figure in modern theological discussion than an attempt to engage in the latter discourse. If the assumption is that one can suspend hermeneutical reflection in favour of straightforward exegesis, the approach — to a subject such as this! — is questionable, at least in this respect.

Nevertheless, the book presents a comprehensive thesis, *viz.*, that while the New Testament does not call for social revolution nor depart from patriarchy outside the Body of Christ, it implies a new freedom and new roles for women 'in Christ.' Within this general thesis, there are many more particular contentions. In relation to the physical family, Paul is neither male chauvinist nor feminist (such modern terms are revealing), but is simultaneously egalitarian and moderately patriarchal, enhancing 'marital communion' and thus improving woman's status in marriage. However, an important discussion of women in the life of the faith communities is deprived of a detailed examination of Gal.3:28 (a key text) on the grounds that the author has already published an article on the subject. One cannot help feeling that this was an unfortunate strategy to adopt: the removal of social, sexual and ethnic distinctions from the entrance qualifications for Church membership and the consequences of that stance for Christian ethics in general and the place of women in particular are sufficiently weighty to have justified the restatement of a fuller study. But this section contains a helpful discussion both of the requirement that women should have a head covering when participating in worship (1 Cor. 11: 2-16) and the vexed question of the silence Paul seems to impose on them in 1 Cor. 14: 33b-36. Attention is given to the place of women among Paul's co-workers, including (the present reviewer notes with quiet satisfaction) Rom. 16. Finally, a consideration of the Pastoral epistles includes a concise but helpful treatment of 'proto-gnostic problems' of Jewish provenance.

Luke stands with Paul in maintaining a tension between the reformation of traditional practice and the affirmation of the new Christian order. The relatively high profile he gives to women in his Gospel is well known. In Acts, however, women assume a variety of roles in the Christian community: John Mark's mother and Lydia 'mother' the young churches in Jerusalem and Philippi; Tabitha is the prototype of a deaconess; Philip's daughters who prophesy — a function of leadership — illustrate that 'roles other than the traditional ones of wife and mother were possible and appropriate for Christian women'; above all, Priscilla is prominent and proficient enough to give instruction in the understanding of baptism to an evangelist of the stature of Apollos. Witherington suggests that when Acts was written, resistance to the notion of women in leadership roles may have prompted Luke to document their historical contribution to the life of churches in some detail.

The monograph includes a chapter on the other three

evangelists who also employ male-female parallelism and role reversal and cite women both as exemplars of faith and as witnesses to Gospel events. Finally, trajectories beyond the New Testament era bring us to contemplate the consequences of Gnosticism and Montanism — together with growing asceticism and a deficient view of human sexuality — for the ministry of women. What we find, Witherington argues, is a regression towards cultural conformity and the acceptance of patriarchy on the model of the Old Testament rather than the New. He concludes with the thought that to pursue the direction which the New Testament indicates would eventually take the Church *beyond* patriarchy. This suggestion, however, the reader is simply left to ponder, for the author does not include this important limb of biblical interpretation within his remit. He is content to underline the groundwork of careful historical study and exegesis, which his own work has exemplified. Within its acknowledged limitations, this monograph makes a useful exegetical contribution to an area of biblical interpretation which needs balance and integrity in exegesis today.

J.I.H. McDonald

### Biblical Interpretation

Robert Morgan with John Barton. OUP, 1988. Pp.ix + 342. £8.95

It is difficult to review a book from which the reviewer has learned so much and about which he feels so enthusiastic. It is the kind of book which well repays a second reading and which repeatedly provokes further thought on a wide range of issues. I begin with a few preliminary observations.

First, the book helps fill a major gap in British biblical scholarship — or perhaps I should say several gaps. One of these is the history of biblical interpretation where, for so long, the staple diet has been Albert Schweitzer's *Quest*, W.G. Kümmel's *History*, and Stephen Neill's recently revised *Interpretation of the New Testament*. Another is hermeneutics, or models of interpretation. The dominance in Britain of the historical model of interpreting the Bible has tended to mean that hermeneutics *per se* has been pushed to the periphery of the scholarly agenda. This book is a welcome corrective, both helping to explain why the historical mode has been dominant and also giving an account of important alternatives.

Second, this is not a book for beginners, in spite of the fact that it is a contribution to 'The Oxford Bible Series' and the editors' preface says that the individual volumes are intended for a 'general readership' In my view, this is a work of mature reflection on the state of the art in contemporary biblical scholarship and its implications for the relationship between reason and faith. I would encourage bright undergraduates to read individual chapters, in order, for example, to find out about the new literary approaches to the Bible or interpretation from the viewpoint of the social sciences. In that sense, the book is an excellent study and teaching resource. Taken as a whole, however, it is a work which will prove of greatest benefit to theology graduates, especially perhaps

those brought up on a strong diet of historical-critical study of the Bible and who are wondering what all this has to do with theology today, the life of faith and the practice of religion.

A third preliminary point is that the book is selective, and necessarily so. Most attention is given to the interpretation of the New Testament, although excellent treatments (by John Barton) of Gunkel, Wellhausen and von Rad and others are woven skilfully into the discussion. But readers looking for a discussion of the distinctive approaches to the Bible taken by feminist theologians and other theologians of liberation will be disappointed, apart from the reference to the work of Gottwald, Belo, Fiorenza and Tribble, on pp. 152-159.

As I read it, the book has two main concerns. One is descriptive, the other is constructive. The descriptive concern is to tell the story of biblical interpretation in the West since the Enlightenment. Chapters 2,3 and 4 survey the growth of a biblical scholarship dominated by historical questions and developing the necessary historical-critical tools of interpretation. These chapters include excellent case-studies of major figures in the history of interpretation, from Reimarus in the eighteenth century to Bultmann and his heirs in the twentieth. The fifth chapter describes more recent developments in historical criticism, where an interdisciplinary, social scientific approach has become characteristic and the main centre of impetus has moved somewhat, away from Europe to North America. Chapter 7 is like chapter 5 in describing some of the most recent advances in interpretation, but the important difference is its delineation of a major shift from the historical paradigm to the study of the Bible as literature. Here, what is fundamental is the reading of the Bible as a literary text, not just as a historical source; and the appropriate methods are those of contemporary literary criticism.

But Morgan is not content just to describe what has happened in biblical interpretation over the past two hundred years. He has a constructive concern as well, which is woven into the discussion, in chapters 1,6 and 8. Observing that rational, scholarly criticism (both historical and literary) tends, for good and ill, to create a gulf between scholarship and faith, Morgan proposes a model of interpretation which bridges the gulf. Insisting upon the legitimacy and desirability of interpretation according to the canons of secular Western learning, Morgan wishes also to provide a theoretical basis for specifically theological interpretation of the Bible within communities of faith. For, he says, 'if "purely historical" scholarship was ever to become a substitute for theological reflection on the Bible, Christianity and Judaism would cease to exist as living faiths' (p.179).

The fundamental way of bridging the gap is, effectively, to deny that one exists; but, intellectually and sociologically, this solution involves retreating into a supernaturalist ghetto. The conservative solution is to try to bridge the gap by 'stretching historical methods to make them speak of God' (p.186); but this brings historical method into disrepute and, at the same time, makes the believer's truth claims alarmingly vulnerable to historical criticism. The liberal tendency, on the other hand, is to accentuate the gap by a rigorous respect for the

autonomy of rational criticism; but the effect of this is to drive a wedge between biblical interpretation and theology and seriously to reduce the direct religious appeal of the Bible.

What is needed, therefore, if full justice is to be done to both reason and faith in biblical interpretation, is a theory of 'pre-understanding' which sets the act of interpretation in a wider context. Living as we do in a secularized, pluralistic culture, the methods of interpretation we use and the theological meanings we establish need to be linked by a rationally defensible theory of religion and reality. Says Morgan, 'The middle term which here links reason (rational methods) and faith (religious understanding of the Bible) is a theory of religion which makes sense of the historian's empirical data without denying the truth of a religion's own claims' (p.187). Morgan himself does not develop such a theory of religion and reality. His more modest concern is to argue for its necessity if reason and faith are to be sustained in a life-enhancing relationship. As well, he shows that theoretical pre-understanding (sometimes theological, sometimes philosophical) have played a very significant part in the biblical interpretation of all the scholars whose work he describes. He also makes the important suggestion that the methods of interpretation most congenial to a theological appropriation of the Bible in Jewish and Christian faith communities are those based upon a literary paradigm rather than an historical one.

As one who for some time has struggled to overcome a kind of intellectual schizophrenia induced by the almost inevitable tensions between historical criticism of the Bible and the intuitions of Christian faith, I have found this book immensely helpful. It maps out a way towards the integration of biblical interpretation and Christian theology, and of reason and religion. It takes the phenomenology of religion seriously, in particular, the role and status of the Bible as scripture in Judaism and Christianity. It is irenic in tone, presenting in a nuanced way the strengths and weaknesses of both traditionalist and liberal approaches to interpretation. Its intention is constructive, calling for a flexibility of approach which allows the aims of interpretation to determine the appropriate method. Added to this, there are some nice touches of humour: for example, D.F.Strauss being compelled to take 'very early retirement' (p.42); and tradition-historical scholarship as 'a European butter-mountain of research out of all proportion to its religious usefulness' (p.117)!

Stephen C. Barton

### **People of the Book? The Authority of the Bible in Christianity**

John Barton. SPCK, 1988. Pp.xi + 96. £4.95

The general direction of John Barton's 1988 Bampton Lectures is clear from the question mark in the title. Are Christians really a 'people of the book,' in the way that biblicists claim? The question is raised in the name of those who are reluctant to accept such a claim, and the

lecture-series as a whole is intended to give intellectual substance to this perhaps intuitive ambivalence towards the Bible. The problem is identified with great clarity in the opening words of the book:

May Christians today have a bad conscience about the Bible. They hear it read in church, and described as 'the Word of the Lord'; they find some parts of it inspiring; but they cannot honestly say that it is the book they turn to first when they are perplexed, or the most important source of the hope that is in them. (ix)

How is the bad conscience of these unfortunate persons to be allayed? Salvation lies in biblical criticism, which makes the claims of biblicism and fundamentalism untenable. This theme runs right through the book, which closes appropriately with some words of Richard Hooker (judicious as ever), warning us to take heed

lest, in attributing unto scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which indeed it hath most abundantly, to be less reverently esteemed. (90)

Scripture is, broadly speaking, a good thing, but it needs to be kept rather firmly in its place: this is the position that must be maintained in opposition to its over-zealous advocates. The argument is directed not only against pre-critical 'fundamentalism' but also against post-critical trends such as canonical criticism, hermeneutics and literary approaches, which, Barton thinks, are implicitly biblicist in their anti-critical enthusiasm for the canon and the integrity of the text.

Rather than sketching out Barton's whole case, a fuller analysis of just one of his arguments may be more useful. In his opening pages, he alludes to the well-known conservative claim that the New Testament's attitude towards the Old must determine our view of the whole Bible. Along with other recent writers such as James Barr and J.D.G. Dunn, he is prepared to accept this claim in the belief that it actually leads to the opposite conclusion to the conservative one. Thus,

Paul felt no need to begin with Jewish Scripture, or even to bring Scripture in at a later stage. The Christian message was self-contained and had its own logic. (9)

In other words, Paul does not regard Scripture as an infallible authority which must be the touchstone of everything he says. His use of it is:

informal, and indicates that it was part of the air he breathed, rather than being cited as an 'authority'. Biblical texts often provide convenient tags, hallowed ways of expressing pithily something Paul wanted to say on other grounds. (18)

This relaxed approach is contrasted with the later attempt to baptize the whole Old Testament, setting it in the new and artificial context of the whole Christian Bible, with disastrous results for exegesis.

Yet it may be that the dichotomy assumed here between authority and informality, heteronomy and

autonomy, is inadequate both exegetically and hermeneutically. I would prefer to see the New Testament's use of the Old in more dialectical terms: present experience of Christ causes the sacred text to be read in a new way, but the sacred text simultaneously shapes the form that the experience takes. Text and experience illuminate each other, and it is as difficult to ascribe priority to one over the other as it is in the well-known case of the chicken and the egg. Using this exegetical conclusion for hermeneutical purposes, the old notion of an undifferentiated, tyrannical authority would indeed have to be abandoned. Yet it would be replaced not by a perhaps equally undifferentiated and tyrannical freedom, but by a dialectic in which both authority and freedom have their rightful place. The authority of the text is realized when it is not abandoned to its pastness and alienness but freely reappropriated in the light of the changed circumstances and insights of the present. The authoritative meaning lies not in the text in isolation, but in the free interaction between text and interpreter, past and present.

To make such statements is, of course, to use the language of hermeneutics, of which Barton is suspicious. He believes that communal continuity (Israel, the early church, the contemporary church) gives scripture an honoured place as the historical record of the church's origins, and that this situation not only necessitates historical critical evaluation of that record, but also excludes any other approach. That seems to be the implication of his dismissive comments about hermeneutics as a 'set of devices that would extract edifying meanings from an unedifying text' (65), as a desperate attempt to 'make something useful' out of what is perceived as 'antique rubbish' (66). The false assumption that critical study has alienated and distanced the Bible from us is, Barton thinks, the result of unrealistic (biblicist, Protestant) expectations about what it can be for us. It is impossible and unnecessary to go beyond historical criticism; what is required is to assimilate and continue the recent 'unprecedented flowering of historical study' (43), and this is one way in which we can 'use our commitment to Christ' to 'make the subordinate position of the Bible a reality' (83).

For one biblical interpreter, the spectre of authoritarianism is so alarming that the need to subordinate the Bible is paramount. For another, the restriction to purely historical questions comes to seem constricting and tyrannical, for all the undoubted achievements that this approach can claim. There is no neutral ground from which one might adjudicate the respective merits of these positions, and the well-meaning suggestion that the truth must lie somewhere in the middle is not necessarily very illuminating. One must wait to see which view prevails.

Francis Watson

## Institutes of the Christian Religion. 1536 Edition

John Calvin. Translated and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles. Collins, 1986. Pp. lix + 396. £17.95

It is always interesting to observe the development of a great thinker, and the reading of Calvin's 1536 *Institutes*, written when he was twenty-seven, provides no exception. The characteristic marks of the mind, clarity, intensity and brilliance, are all there. What is interesting about the book is to learn how little, in one sense, was changed in the later theology. Many of the sentences either survive intact in the final edition of the work, over twenty years later, or are very much the same.

What does this imply for our understanding of Calvin? That his thought, like that of another great theologian of our Western tradition, George Berkeley, sprang fully developed from his pen in early years, to change little in later times? There is much more to it than that. Calvin's later work was far more than simply a matter of additions, a kind of scissors and paste cumulation, but developed in breadth as well as depth as the context — and that meant both political and pastoral context — demanded. Moreover, the alterations in the order in which topics appear in later editions show the ceaseless thinking in which this man of affairs engaged.

What this book makes clear is the way in which the context provides the matrix for the theology. What would Irenaeus have been without the gnostics, Origen without the particular traditions of Alexandria? All thought is particular, and its greatness lies in what it makes of the demands of the time. In this case they were, as the introduction makes clear, both catechetical and apologetic. The people had to be instructed in the faith, while persecuting authorities, unable to distinguish between the classically catholic theology of Luther and Calvin and some of the excesses of the sects were to be informed, however fruitlessly.

There are five chapters in the work, covering just over two hundred pages, in contrast to the fifteen hundred in the final edition. The first begins with the famous description of the content of sacred doctrine, but in the context of an exposition of the law. Here Calvin signals both his differences from Luther, and his continuity with the Reformation concern to show that the gospel and its way of life is equally for all, clergy and laity. There are no counsels for monks only, but 'to be Christians under the law of grace does not mean to wander unbridled outside the law, but to be engrafted in Christ, by whose grace we are free of the curse of the law, and by whose Spirit we have the law engraved upon our hearts' (p.30).

The chapters which follow are on faith ('Containing an exposition of the creed'), prayer, the sacraments, the five false sacraments and, finally, Christian freedom, ecclesiastical power and political administration. They make clear how concerned Calvin's theology was with the life of faith and its embodiment in church and society. The teaching of the faith and its practice go hand in hand, in a way the modern world is in danger of forgetting. And as the above citation makes clear, the thoroughly trinitarian structure of the thought ensures a perhaps unrivalled

comprehensiveness in the way in which different dimensions of the Christian gospel are treated.

There is, then, much illumination and profit to be found in this volume, especially for those who would know something of the mind of this shaper of the modern world, but have neither the time nor the inclination to engage with the final edition. Other advantages are the introduction and the notes, which will ensure the scholarly usefulness of the edition for many years to come.

Colin Gunton

## Theological Investigations, Volume XXI: Science and Theology

Karl Rahner, translated by Hugh M. Riley. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988. Pp. vii + 279.

This collection of articles and lectures from 1979-1982 reverses Rahner's earlier decision to terminate *Theological Investigations* with Volume XX. It testifies to his continued mental vigour, but contains little which is essentially new. Its subtitle is misleading in that this theme takes up only one 30-page section in which he argues that there can be no basic conflict with natural science if theology bases itself on 'transcendental' reflection on the 'conditions of the possibility' of our 'knowledge and freedom' since this should lead (for reasons which Rahner does not pause to explain to any baffled first-time reader) to the affirmation of a 'one and absolute ground of all realities' which is itself 'incommensurable' with the 'manifold world' to which empirical science, which 'is and should be methodologically atheistic', is necessarily confined. So only the 'secondary conflicts' can arise and 'in principle ... a truce can regularly be achieved'. But more than that, a 'link' can be 'forged' between theology and 'an evolutionary "world view" because transcendental reflection should lead to the essentially Fichtean conclusion that to be a 'finite' spirit, whether human or angelic, is necessarily to exist in dialectical relationship with 'materiality' (which means 'finitude'), for it can only 'realize itself step by step' (i.e. *evolve*) by progressively climbing over its materiality in order to return to its source in the Infinite Spirit which is God.

Apart from several discussions of the current state of Catholic theology, which Rahner sees as declining from a creative peak in the immediately post-war decades and endangered by renewed authoritarian conservatism in Rome, the rest of the book concentrates on Christology, together with what can be regarded as a final presentation of Rahner's 'transcendental' argument for God. Here he stresses that the question of God, taken to be that of whether there is a 'total and definitive...all-embracing meaning of existence,' cannot by its very nature receive an answer 'pieced together from things which yield a partial fulfilment of meaning.' Therefore, if there is such an absolute meaning, it must remain inaccessible to normal experience and thinking. To raise the question is therefore to remain 'essentially and inexorably confronted with an unencompassable mystery' which it is 'possible' to decide is a 'void' of 'senselessness' since moral and physical evil seems to give every justification

for denying absolute and universal meaning ' It follows that we are left 'in freedom' either to interpret life as a 'desert journey passing through an oasis here and there' but ending with death in a 'desolate wasteland' or 'living on the basis of the hopeful conviction that there is an ultimate meaning,' which is 'identical' with belief in God. Yet this plea for existentialist fideism is inconsistently intermingled with a voice from Rahner's past, which is more consonant with Vatican I's decree that the existence of God can be known with certainty by the light of natural reason, which loads the dice in favour of the option of affirming absolute meaning, e.g.: 'the question about an absolute meaning, if it is really accepted... gives of itself the existence of absolute meaning' since insofar as sceptics sometimes 'are selfless contrary to all advantage and profit' they must 'affirm in the actual realisation of their existence absolute meaning contrary to the way they themselves interpret their life'.

The Christological discussions display no such inconsistency; Rahner repeatedly makes the bold claim that one can 'ascend' from consideration of the historical facts about Jesus alone (i.e. leaving aside 'transcendental' philosophical considerations) to an affirmation of the formula, which for Rahner attains virtually credal status, that 'Jesus is the unsurpassable word of God in his self-promise to mankind,' which is 'necessarily coterminous' and 'interchangeable' with 'the classical statements of Christology concerning the hypostatic union...the communication of properties, and so on'. There is space for only two comments. First, the credibility of this claim is greatly lessened by the virtual absence of any references to modern New Testament scholarship. Secondly, Rahner's formula is intelligible only granted a substantially German-Idealist, dialectical view of the God-world relationship that God 'has his own fate in and with this world' being 'not only himself the giver but the gift', so that Rahner's affirmation of the divinity of Jesus turns out to be (as in Hegel) the claim that the human species is the high point of the cosmic process and Jesus is its definitive realization. Since Rahner himself concedes that this view of God is 'totally different from what the average Christian perceives' it is surely misleading for him to claim that it 'shows us how and why an apparently simple relationship of trust in Jesus' which 'ordinary Christians who are not professional theologians can be expected to achieve...can contain within itself the whole of classical Christology.'

R.M. Burns

## **The Roots of Christian Freedom. The Theology of John A.T. Robinson**

Alistair Kee. SPCK, 1988. Pp.xvi + 190. £8.95

## **Where Three Ways Meet. Last Essays and Sermons**

John A.T. Robinson. SCM, 1988. Pp.xiii + 210. £8.95

John Robinson, most controversial of all Anglican bishops and theologians since the Second World War, died in 1983. Five years later saw the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of his best-seller *Honest to God*, an appropriate point at which to reflect on that book, its author and his theology as a whole, as well as providing just enough time for a whole view to be taken of his life and work. Alistair Kee provides the first full-length examination of Robinson's multi-textured thought, a notable counterpart therefore to the biography by Eric James which also marked the anniversary.

In his last months, Robinson had in fact left a number of guidelines for biographers and theological analysts, and Kee closely follows the pattern which, once seen, seems inevitable: the New Testament scholar, the theological explorer, and the social ethicist. A subject as wide-ranging as Robinson's mind and interests provides a stern challenge and Kee answers it masterfully. That is, his is not merely a descriptive account of the progression and levels of Robinson's theology, but conveys the liveliness and freshness of Robinson's own mind and style. Robinson, Kee never tires of reminding us, was so interesting because of his habit of querying assumptions — especially of his New Testament work — and 'liberal' no less than 'conservative' assumptions. He did this not because he wanted to swim against the stream as an end in itself, but because he genuinely wanted the documents and their histories to be taken seriously in their own right (as in the case of his argument for the priority of John) rather than be subjected to prevailing and customary assumptions, however academically respectable. Above all, as Kee is able to demonstrate clearly, the apparent contradiction between a mild-mannered bishop and an iconoclast stemmed from his deep rootedness in the Christian tradition and his identification with the heart of belief, enabling him to question with imperturbable honesty the things that could be shaken.

Kee's major interpretative thrust is that Robinson's Cambridge doctoral thesis (regrettably never published) on the personalist philosophy of Buber and others, was foundational for all else in his work, and that where he is inadequate (Kee is no hagiographer) it is usually because he has not been true to his own best insights. Thus when he wrote *Honest to God* in 1963 he was not a New Testament scholar straying into the foreign fields of systematics and philosophy of religion. Rather, he was a specialist returning to his primary theme, that of the doctrine of God which he wished to express in a personalist vein. I must confess myself still unpersuaded here. If anything, *Honest to God* appears even more problematic as the work of one who earlier had been so immersed in Buber, and whose work had been so highly

praised by no less an authority than John Baillie. Statements about God, says Robinson, are statements about the transcendent value of our personal relationships. That, on a number of grounds, can hardly be validated from Buber's *Eternal Thou* (which is not an example tied to human interpersonal relationships). The ambiguity of much of what Robinson wrote in *Honest to God* (and this is not to deny how vital and intriguing it was) is either a departure from that earlier personalism, or a disclosure of an inherently subjectivist trait in it. I am inclined to the former view, and feel that there is a more direct line from the personalist thesis to the later writings such as *Exploration into God* than through the headline hitting paperback of 1963. Above all — and my reading of Kee confirms me in this — as a theologian Robinson was at his best in christology, whether in *Honest to God* or *The Human Face of God*.

Creative theology makes an impact by style as much as by content. When recently researching into Robinson on my own account, I was startled on a number of occasions to discover that a particular way of putting a theological idea, or setting up a contrast, which had been with me from student days, was in fact owed to early readings in John Robinson. One hopes, for that reason alone, for a wide readership of *Where Three Ways Meet*, essays, lectures and sermons from his last years plus a complete bibliography. Here again is the theological explorer, the biblical scholar and the social theologian (especially now concerned with peace issues). 'In fact in everything I am a great both/and rather than either/or man,' he says towards the end of his final sermon in Trinity College Chapel, and so sums up his whole life's work. That did not mean being all things to all people, but the recognition that, in one of his other famous titles, 'Truth is two-eyed,' deeper than the simplistic alternatives we often opt for. Especially illuminating here is his dialogue with Don Cupitt whom he chides (with typical charity and humour) for polarizing questions of truth and meaning into unacceptable dichotomies. Not that Robinson wanted easy harmony: he wanted truth, and wanted it with passion.

Above all, he wanted other people to have it, or rather to enter into the quest for it. To that end he was prepared to be vulnerable. *Honest to God* was effective as a catalyst of theological liberation for so many people precisely because it validated their own need to ask the repressed questions about belief, ethics and spirituality. His final thoughts on honesty in the face of cancer, and his own testimony of belief in the God who is both in, yet greater than, the cancer may likewise bring a liberating courage to many. These papers are a fine and moving testament. In him the three ways meet, of theological explorer, New Testament scholar and social thinker. They meet as *pastoral theologian*, and there can be no higher title than that in Christian theology.

Keith Clements

## The New Christian Ethics

Don Cupitt. SCM, 1988. Pp 174. £6.95

The creation of the new Christianity proceeds apace, and the spooks are banished. But it will not be easy, for Mr Cupitt writes among the ruins of the old Western civilization. Did it fall because of the growth of critical thinking, or modern capitalism, or multiculturalism? There is no clear answer, but what is certain is that the road out of the ruins will be a dangerous journey to travel on. As values diminish, and the Christian tradition enters its last stage of corruption, a hundred flowers must bloom. 'I know that I am the first Christian' (p.143).

Mr Cupitt writes a manifesto for the new world, in which the valuing of the valueless is paramount. At the same time he explores the collapse of the old Christianity. By means of a series of thematic presentations, the repressions of St Paul are elucidated. On the one hand there was the cultivation of dependence, on the other the vigour and dynamism of a creative personality. This confusion was resolved disastrously by the monastic celebration of contemplation, in which the immediate knowledge of Absolute Being, *totum simul, actus purus*, is attained. And this cast a pall over the Christian church: 'even in ruins, the ideology remains potent' (p.20). Mr Cupitt dismisses the Victorian religious ethic of self-realization in Christ, with which some sought to replace it. The nineteenth century narratives of Providence and progress burnt their engines out pulling the Christian drama of salvation out of the metaphysical mire. There is no self, no soul: we die in our work, but the work is of value in and for itself.

But not because it reflects a timeless essence of value. If humanitarianism is to survive, and the homeless not to die in the streets, we must value our values by ourselves. Thus the great inspiration is Michel Foucault, and the great delusion is that offered by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was seduced by Pauline Master/slave psychology. (How Mr Cupitt has changed!) Private prayer produces self-deception, repression and alienation (p.91).

If there is no self, no inner conflict, no psychodrama of redemption, what will replace the world of sin and the old morality? In his final three chapters, Mr Cupitt turns to the 'remaking of Christian action' and the justification of a moral community seeking the way of virtue. Thus, like Alasdair MacIntyre, the identification of the problem reveals false prophets prowling amidst the ruins. Modern Western civilizations are swept by moral panics and waves of intense hatred (p.100). Yet civilization is all we have: post-structuralism demonstrates the cultural priority of emotions, the will to live, and nature itself. The way out is by seeing 'nature' as the accumulated cultural evaluation of life; 'grace' is the attempt to change culture and value the valueless. Religion holds the key, for it 'surrounds the moral life with a supportive symbolic and institutional context.' But the struggle is hardest inside the church, for it is also the most repressive element in culture.

Few would disagree with Mr Cupitt's brilliant attack on a stultifying metaphysic which degraded Christian ethics into a false cultivation of a perfection closer to classical culture than anything else. Equally impressive is

the author's awareness of the difficulty of remaking Christian ethics. The issue is whether 'the love of God who first loved us' must be expressed as simply metaphorical language, or whether a metaphysic of love can retain its coherence in the post-structuralist world — in a manner which the saints of old would have recognized. Trusting in the presence of the Lord does not sound the same as joining a discussion group about the environment. Perhaps I should give up reading Kierkegaard too.

Peter Sedgwick

### **Jesus, Man for God. Contemporary Issues in Theology**

John Toy. Mowbray's, 1988. Pp.viii + 144 £4.95

Jacob Epstein's glorious 'Majestas' in Llandaff Cathedral adorns the cover of this stimulating little book by John Toy, Chancellor of York Minster, and reveals at once its over-riding concern: the nature of the risen Christ and his significance for us today. The book falls neatly into three sections covering a vast amount of material overall. Questions relating to the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection lead us, via major Patristic and Modern christological issues on the one hand and the development of Christian credal formulae on the other, into an understanding of the nature and place of Christian confession today. The book is equipped with useful tables on 'The Evolution of the Creeds' along with notes and bibliography reflecting Toy's comprehensive concern with his subject matter.

Each section operates with a similar strategy: a consideration of the evidence followed by a discussion of modern problems and the implications of these for belief today. Toy kicks off, bravely, with the Virgin Birth noting its minor role in the New Testament texts. A discussion of the various relevant features of the Matthaean and Lukan infancy narratives leads into an exposition of some of the modern problems which arise. A human being born with only female genes, for example, would be female. Both parents are necessary to the full humanity of Jesus. Toy knows, however, that to concentrate on the biological aspects of this matter will ultimately be to miss the point, and concludes that "we cannot know" what the historical and biological truth concerning this really is. Likewise, the Resurrection cannot be reduced to an extra-special event and the empty tomb is not, in the New Testament or in faith, "of the essence" of the Resurrection itself.

A third section treats us to an illustration of the development of the Christian creeds. A glance at New Testament credal formulae invites us into a consideration of the emergence of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds, of the place of creeds in the theology and liturgy of East and West and of the development of the filioque clause. Then, by means of a look at issues arising out of the controversies surrounding the reformation, particularly those relating to the Thirty-Nine Articles, and through a brief re-telling of the tale of Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham earlier this century, Toy brings us full-circle

to his opening concerns with Virgin Birth and Resurrection.

Overall, the book should be commended for what is surely its central insight, that is, that 'doctrinal positivism' (not a phrase used by Toy) flies in the face of faith itself. Clinging to particular historical and doctrinal 'certainties' fundamentally contradicts the nature of Christian faith. Theology must be done with very great respect for the past and yet with a radical openness to the future. Ripples from recent 'Durham controversies' can be felt here as elsewhere in the book. Citing Tillich, whose christology he follows overall, Toy maintains that to assert or to deny the existence of God is to reduce him to the status of "being among other beings" (p.81). If Toy manages to communicate this truth through his writing, it will have been more than worthwhile.

The book culminates with an affirmation of *lex orandi* over *lex credendi* and with an underlining of Angela Tilby's view of Christian faith as pilgrimage and dance. Some reader may feel that there are far too many controversial issues raised here for comfort and that the result is a sort of intellectual indigestion. There is the feeling that Toy is far too optimistic where the relation between believing and worshipping is concerned. However, he has raised the issues which are most central to Christian believing today and in doing so has provided us with a valuable tool for use in Christian discussion groups. Interestingly, he has also brought York, Durham and Llandaff a step closer in the process.

Stephen W. Need

### **Lovers of Discord. Twentieth Century Theological Controversies in England**

Keith W. Clements. SPCK, 1988. Pp x + 261. £8.95

The author is about as successful as it is possible to be in aiming this book broadly both at students of modern Christian thought and at general readers whose interest has been aroused by recent controversies. He has also justified his theme with his observation that "one of the features of modern Christianity seems to be a scanty knowledge of events only just out of living memory" (p.ix).

The six chapters between the introduction and conclusion fall into three pairs. The outer pairs mirror each other: *The New Theology* of a pre-First World War 'bishop,' R.J. Campbell (for Congregationalism had an informal episcopacy), and the essay collection, *Foundations*, are complemented by the 1960s pairing of *Soundings* and John Robinson's *Honest to God*. Covering the intervening period of less sharply focused controversy are two chapters each with two themes: Hensley Henson and the 'Modern Churchmen' are followed by T.R. Glover and E.W. Barnes. The author was an undergraduate at King's College, Cambridge (*Soundings* editor Alec Vidler's college) in the early 1960s and it is not surprising that the discussion of context and the analyses are best developed in the chapters on this period.

Accuracy in language and detail is not all that it might be: thus the impression is unintentionally conveyed that Ripon was named after Ripon Hall (p.87), and the brief allusions to the Down Grade controversy of 1887-88 contain several inaccuracies. Clements tends toward tendentiousness in his judgements, for example in assessing Ramsey on Robinson on *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. 'From a later time, and from another tradition, an observer may perhaps be pardoned for wondering just what, on such a view, the nature of the episcopal office amounts to. The prime duty of the bishop, it appears, is not to upset the faithful. The chief criterion of what is to be taught is what the people already think they know they believe, in which case it would seem that a bishop, let alone one who is a former Cambridge don, is hardly necessary' (p.185). He is also not entirely immune from a failing he condemned in modernists, 'a whiff of intellectual superiority, with an implied dismissal of all lesser minds' (p.100).

Clements draws some thought-provoking conclusions. He offers a promising summary of the theological issues of the century as an irreconcilable tension between a liberal search for unity and a conservative insistence on the otherness of God. On a practical level, he goes beyond suggesting more systematic theology in theological education to call for a greater emphasis on teaching students to engage in creative doctrinal thinking in relation to their experience and discipleship. Believing that controversy is a permanent feature of Christianity, perhaps he should have suggested that it too should feature prominently in the curriculum?

The conclusions, however, have the limitation of seeing twentieth century controversy in static rather than dynamic terms. Here his failure to start the study half a century earlier may have been a handicap. He might then have observed more clearly how a pattern like a rising radical tide, each young generation going further than its predecessor, came to an end between the two World Wars, to be replaced during the greater part of this century by irregular eddies and cross-currents. One symptom of the change was the contrast between the compact peer groups responsible for *Lux Mundi* and *Foundations* and the greater spread and higher average age of contributors to *Soundings* and *The Myth of God Incarnate*. Clements quotes a significant comment about the 1950s made by Vidler: '...often during those years I used to say to my friends that I was disconcerted by the fact that theological students, the younger clergy and the like, when I conversed with them, never seemed to shock me by coming out with any startling novelties or disturbing thoughts: on the contrary. I could shock them by the things I said much more than they ever shocked me by anything they said. It should have been the other way on, as I was now a fuddy-duddy who should be allergic to new ideas.'

The book would have been even more useful if the theological analysis had been just a bit sharper, developed a little further, applied from a few more angles. Having noted the ethical revision and tentativeness that made the theology of the 1960s distinctive, Clements rightly opens his concluding survey of the last two decades with a sense of *déjà vu*. Casting around for a theme for the next major controversy, he ventures to prophesy that it might be in

the as yet under-explored field of political theology. While we wait and see we might take note of the two well-trodden modern routes to controversy — the provocative bishop and the essay collection by groups of academics — and speculate on the megacontroversy a handful of like-minded scholarly bishops might care to unleash

Mark Hopkins

## BOOKS RECEIVED

Paul Avis (ed.) *The Threshold of Theology*. Marshall Pickering. Pp.vii + 182. £12.95

Paul Avis *Anglicanism and the Christian Church. Theological Resources in Historical Perspective*. T. & T. Clark. Pp.xviii + 352. £19.95 (hb)

Nicholas Bradbury *City of God? Pastoral Care in the Inner City*. SPCK. Pp.x + 207. £6.95

Heinz W. Cassirer *Grace and Law. St Paul, Kant, and the Hebrew Prophets*. Handsel Press. Pp.xvi + 265. £9.95

Charles Lloyd Cohen *God's Caress. The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience*. Oxford. Pp.xiv + 310.

Don Cupitt *Radicals and the Future of the Church*. SCM Press. Pp.183. £6.95

Paul S. Fiddes *Past Event and Present Salvation. The Christian Idea of Atonement*. DLT. Pp.x + 243. £10.95

Colin E. Gunton *The Actuality of Atonement. A study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition*. T. & T. Clark. Pp.xiii + 222. £11.95

John Hadley *Bread of the World. Christ and the Eucharist Today*. DLT. Pp.xiii + 130. £6.95

Wentzel van Huyssteen *Theology and the Justification of Faith. Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology*. Eerdmans/Paternoster. Pp.xxi + 205. £14.95

Kenneth Hylson-Smith *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984*. T. & T. Clark. Pp.ix + 411. £19.95 (hb)

Eric James Judge *Not. A Selection of Sermons preached in Gray's Inn Chapel 1978-1988*. Christian Action. Pp.196. £4.95

Walter Kasper *Theology and Church*. SCM Press. Pp.xi + 231. £12.50

John Knox *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Revised edition). SCM Press. Pp.xxii + 137. £6.95

Gerd Lüdemann *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts. A Commentary*. SCM Press. Pp.ix + 277. £15.00

Hyam Maccoby *Judaism in the First Century*. Sheldon Press. Pp.136. £4.95

Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, Jean LecLercq (eds.) *Christian Spirituality. Origins to the Twelfth Century*. SCM Press. Pp.xxv + 502. £17.50

Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (eds.) *A Handbook of Christian Theologians*. Lutterworth Press. Pp.735. £9.95

Margaret R. Miles *The Image and Practice of Holiness. A Critique of the Classic Manuals of Devotion*. SCM Press. Pp.xi + 207. £10.50

Wolfhart Pannenberg *Christianity in a Secularized World*. SCM Press. Pp.ix + 62. £4.95

Michael Perham (ed.) *Towards Liturgy 2000. Preparing for the Revision of the Alternative Service Book*. SPCK/Alcuin Club. Pp.ix + 102. £4.95

E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*. SCM Press. Pp.ix + 374

Eduard Schweizer *Jesus Christ. The Man from Nazareth and the Exalted Lord*. SCM Press. Pp.96. £5.95

Russell Stannard *Grounds for Reasonable Belief*. Scottish Academic Press. Pp.xiv + 361. £12.50 (hb)

Graham N. Stanton *The Gospels and Jesus*. The Oxford Bible Series. Oxford. Pp.x + 296

Lynne Strachan *Out of Silence. A Study of a Religious Community for Women*. Oxford. Pp.307. £28.00 (hb)

Stewart R. Sutherland and T. A. Roberts (eds.) *Religion, Reason and the Self. Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis*. University of Wales Press. Pp.xiv + 173. £20.00 (hb)

Brian Wren *What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology*. SCM Press. Pp.xi + 264. £9.95

Hugh Wybrew *The Orthodox Liturgy. The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite*. SPCK. Pp.x + 189. £8.95

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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