

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL, by John Richards. *Darton Longman & Todd*, London, 1974. 242 pp. £2.85.

The product of many years' study and pastoral experience, this is the most serious and sensible modern publication on the demonic that I know. The author declares that in this particular area, uniquely, enthusiasm for the subject is actually a disqualification, and his book is insistently pastoral, giving only such anecdotes as may be useful guidance for pastors; in an age as fascinated by the occult as ours is, this is a healthy approach. All the same, the author is adamant that pastors, at least, must take the demonic seriously, and can do so with less fear of being considered antediluvian, now that both the legal and medical professions have given a lead.

Richards' study is helpful and thought-provoking, not least in situating the demonic problem within the much larger context of the church's healing ministry as a whole, and that in turn he interprets in an encouragingly wide way, mentioning the biblical idea of the 'healing of the nations', as well as healing of our wills and choices, physical healing being recognised as part, but not the most important part, of it. And there are serious warnings throughout the book that this ministry belongs to the church as a whole; free-lance 'charismatics' who are not firmly rooted in the church can be a menace. There is also a very right insistence that deliverance from demonic evil only makes sense in the context of conversion of life.

There are just a few points that, I think, remain to be developed more fully—and Richards nowhere claims to be either exhaustive or definitive. First, and more unfashionably even than to talk of devils at all, is the whole question of sound doctrine. Richards does just hint once that doctrinal error might be a form of demonic influence, but he makes nothing of it. Yet this is a very important part of the church's ancient tradition. Healing of men's minds by truth is an integral part of christian healing, and modern psychology should leave us in no doubt that men's beliefs are often not the result of free mental activity!

Not only is this important in itself; it also arises quite specifically in connection with the whole matter of the demonic. Richards takes his stand almost aggressively on experience rather than theology—and I think it is not unfair to ascribe this either/or to him. But surely theology does not *just* reflect on 'christian experience'. Who decides what experience is christian experience? Who provides the terms for us to articulate experience? After all, our expectations and concepts materially

affect—even effect, sometimes—what we experience. It is surely one task of theology to keep an eye on our expectations and concepts. It is interesting, not to say disturbing, how many different theories are 'proved right by experience'! Diagnosis, at least to some extent, is almost bound to be self-justifying, whether because, by a very natural process, practitioners of any kind of healing will tend to attract a particular kind of client, or because, in many cases, *any* remedy will work provided it is backed with enough confidence (the old story of the placebo).

In connection with the demonic, this arises most acutely in the area of the occult. Richards, in common with many writers, leaves out of account natural religion, so that all 'occult' practices are regarded as systematically liable to demonic infiltration—and this is justified, against the theologians, by 'pastoral experience'. But is this sufficient? If it was in order for the eleven apostles to cast lots, prayerfully, I cannot see why it should be in principle dangerous for people to throw yarrow-stalks, not in order to pry into the future but to get a bit of guidance. Maybe there can be a superstitious fear of superstition! After all, man naturally uses symbols and rites, and an eye for black cats may be far less contrary to faith than scrupulous hard-headedness.

In general, I am unhappy about Richards' use of the phrase 'pre-christian' to rule beliefs and practices out of court. I do not understand what he means by saying that he uses the term in a theological, rather than a historical sense. There is now a growing consensus that gnosticism is historically *not* a pre-christian phenomenon; and theologically it is surely useful to consider that what is aberrant in it is precisely that it is post-christian, a wrong reaction to the novelty of Christ. Grace always carries potential judgment with it; all kinds of attitudes lose their innocence if held pertinaciously *against* the gospel. Where occult practices do not, of themselves, entail trafficking with spirits (and there is a prima facie case that this will be true of astrology, I Ching, palmistry), the vital question is whether they are simply natural, not yet really confronted with Christ in such a way as to be superseded, or whether they involve a turning back from Christ.

Another point that needs development is the converse of this: just as natural religion is not necessarily anti-christian, so professedly christian acts are not necessarily on the side of Christ. This is hinted at, but is surely tre-

mendously important. The devil will not don his hooves and tail if he can get away with appearing as an angel of light. False christian spirituality needs a lot of attention as an area of demonic attack. And there is growing evidence that there can be a real enslaving of the mind here.

Finally, and here he departs from the Anglican report of 1972 on exorcism, Richards cites the present reviewer's citation of Prümmer to remind us that exorcising is not a clerical prerogative. But he slips up on a point of detail: the distinction between major and minor exorcism is thoroughly obscure (I am still in the dark, even after questioning several bishops), but both are official, formal acts, requiring episcopal authority; the distinction between formal and informal, official and lay exorcism is quite another matter. And I should have thought that here it would be useful to broaden the context once again, and see how it fits the christian life as a whole. The christian life as such involves a dimension

of spiritual warfare. Although this will generally not be adverted to, anyone living a christian life is an affront to the devil, a reminder and a celebration of the victory won by Christ, delivering us from the dominion of sin and death and darkness. And when we insist on this celebration against opposition, our attitude is already implicitly 'exorcistic', because we are maintaining the victory of Christ in a situation where it is called in question. Explicit exorcism only takes it one step further. It is therefore not just within every christian's competence but is an integral part of any attempt to persevere in faith to 'chuck out' devils, casting out darkness simply by being a child of light. I think it is in every way helpful to see, in this way, the continuity between the simplest act of faith and overt confrontation with the powers of darkness in the power of the risen Lord: it is the same basic stance that is involved, a stance of faith and celebration.

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THE NEW CONSCIOUSNESS IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION, by Harold K. Schilling. *SCM Press*, London, 1973. 288 pp. £1.75.

'This book is not a scholarly treatise', says Professor Schilling in his introduction: 'it is primarily a resource book', dealing 'not so much with its author's own ideas as with those he sees developing elsewhere'. Can we then write it off as just one more of those interminable Guides to the New Age, this week's Compendium of the New Consciousness? Not quite, I think. Its author brings to his wide reading of modern theology and his sincere concern to achieve a synthesis between science and religion a lifetime of experience and achievement as a physicist. This is a sphere of which he writes with unquestioned authority. The first, and, to my mind, the most valuable part of the book is in fact an exceptionally lucid survey of modern, or rather, to use Professor Schilling's term, 'post-modern' physics. The analytical approach is out; the hierarchical view alone can grasp the significance of that mysterious unity of nature, in which no number of additions to our knowledge can reduce the area of the unknown. He writes so well that even 'the general reader of modest competence' to whom he offers his book is left feeling that now he really understands the uncertainty principle of Heisenberg, the wave/particle paradox, or the momentous implications of the simple equation $E = hc/\lambda$. He conveys most convincingly the excitement of the scientist as 'en route towards greater depths' he encounters 'only increasing—not decreasing—strangeness'.

At this point, however, a certain euphoria

begins to creep in. He tends to see his own concern with 'ultimate questions' as inherent in the whole scientific quest. Nature becomes 'a source of insight for faith' (pp. 223 ff.); there are 'aspects of reality that are truly faith-generating'. We were of course warned from the start: 'The primary motivation' for writing the book, he tells us in the introduction (p. 11), 'has been to present . . . a more general message of hope for our time'. The evangelical note is unmistakable. The gospel is that of Teilhard de Chardin, to whom the professor pays due homage. He speaks of 'the mystery of the upward pressure of man's creative effluence' (p. 140). That this pressure may not always be so beneficent he recognises, but he has faith in man who 'has inserted calculated benevolence into nature-history, and observably strong countervailing remedial forces, designed to reduce now, and eventually to control, both calamitous misfortune and evil—and possibly even to eliminate the latter' (p. 162).

And God? Having committed himself to the view that 'matter-energy creates—de novo or ex nihilo' (p. 27), there does not seem much need for a creator. Rather He is to be regarded as 'relational', not absolute. Theism may, he says, well be inadequate for our time. God is 'the great participant', 'the principle of concretion'. 'If physical reality is creative, God is even more so' (p. 247). 'It is God's continuing activity that is the source of nature's existence and evolutionary development, and