

experience during the closing decades of the Victorian era when clergymen were sent to prison for defying canon law by introducing liturgical practices apparently subversive of Anglican faith. It is not clear that Canterbury has much to learn from Rome about how to put down heresy; it may even be the other way round. But it should be evident that the authors of *The Myth* do not speak for the Church of England.

The *Myth* people and their critics are divided, fairly explicitly although apparently insuperably, by presuppositions which have nothing directly to do with the Incarnation as such. One of the problems all along, for instance, is that, as Nicholas Lash insists here, the *Myth* people have no difficulty in understanding the early church's doctrine. On their own principles, the radical difference between our way of thinking today and any previous way of thinking might have made them puzzle more, but they seem satisfied that the early councils formally committed the Church to monophysite heresy. That the human nature of Jesus has no hypostasis other than the Word of God could only mean the total absorption, or indeed destruction, of the human nature by the divinity. But proximity to divinity does not necessarily involve diminution of humanity. The doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, or of John Damascene, on whom he depends so heavily, is rather that the human nature (which extends to what we nowadays ordinarily mean by person and personality), far from being diminished or oblit-

erated, is rather enhanced and fulfilled by dependence on the hypostasis of the Word. "Conjunction with something higher", as Thomas quaintly says, "does not weaken, but increases, power and dignity". The more intimate our union with God the more human we become; by a union which is hypostatic Jesus is only incomparably more human (free, loving, etc).

The other contestable presupposition relates to what a doctrine – any doctrine – is supposed to do for us anyway. As Professor Moule remarks here, the *Myth* people keep talking as though the language of the early councils was meant to explain something, whereas it was intended only (in his word) to 'peg' certain convictions about Christ. They were negative convictions at that, ruling out, as the New Testament itself already does (cf Graham Stanton's paper), the idea that Jesus was *simply* a prophet or that he was God in the shape of some gnostic revealer of heavenly truths. But blocking off these alternatives does not give us any insight into what it is like to be Jesus. People do expect doctrines about God to take us inside God, and they have constantly to be reminded that that is a misuse of doctrines. In the same way, the *Myth* people seem to want the doctrine of the Incarnation to let us into the secret of how the God-man functions. And such a procedure we should certainly repudiate. But it does not follow that we need settle for a version of Christianity without the Trinity or the Incarnation.

FERGUS KERR O. P.

ON THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY by Frederick Copleston, Search Press Ltd 1979
pp 160 £7.95

This book is a motley collection of essays only two of which have been previously published. And it must be said at once that, though there is nothing here to shock or stagger (apart from a horrendous misprint on p 102 and notification of Bertrand Russell's resurrection on p 118), we have in the text a useful and thoroughly readable volume marked by a sense of humour and by the balance and solidity for which Copleston is famous. The first two essays deal with problems involved

in writing about the history of philosophy. Chapter 3 is concerned with ethical and metaphysical views in East and West. Chapter 4 looks at some odds and ends in medieval philosophy. The remaining chapters are entitled 'Reflections on Analytic Philosophy', 'The nature of Metaphysics', 'Marx and History' and 'Peter Wust: Christian and Philosopher'. In all his comments Copleston, if not terribly exciting or original, is judicious, methodical and well worth reading. As one might

expect, the first two chapters are perhaps the weightiest; but I found the last essay on Peter Wust particularly interesting. It suggests that Wust, though on Copleston's account unlikely to 'go down in the history of philosophy as a great thinker' (p 157) is worth considering. I am struck by his similarity to Maurice Blondel whose chief value was that he was able, like Wust, to see that certain truths can be grasped in the way people live rather than in the argu-

mentative rigour looked for by many philosophers. One would like to see Copleston writing more on Wust. It would also be no bad thing if he turned in some detail to Blondel. There is a discussion of Blondel in Volume IX of Copleston's *History of Philosophy*; but, like so much on Blondel written in English, it gives us at best the tip of an iceberg.

BRIAN DAVIES O.P.

JESUS AND THE LIVING PAST by Michael Ramsey, Oxford, 1980 pp 90 £3.50

Lord Ramsey's writings are well known for their combination of theological and spiritual motifs. This book is no exception. Its central theme is the union of divine sovereignty and self-sacrifice. For that is 'the foundation of Christian theology', the way in which 'the deity of Jesus must needs be understood', 'the Christian message' (pp 38; 49; 76).

But Lord Ramsey's particular concern in this book is to show that this message is rooted in the history of Jesus and not undermined by contemporary historical questioning. He is aware that there is a problem to be faced by those seeking to claim firm knowledge about the history of Jesus, and he offers the kind of solution characteristic of conservative, critical scholars. Thus he rightly challenges the way in which the criterion of dissimilarity is sometimes used to deny authenticity to any saying of Jesus that can be paralleled in the teaching of the early Church or contemporary Judaism (p 35). But he seems to me to move rather too easily from that valid negative point and go on to ascribe to the history of Jesus those sayings in the tradition most significant for his theological thesis - i.e. those in which Jesus foresees his death as the inauguration of the Kingdom (pp 37-8).

More interesting, if inevitably less precise, are his reflections on the relation of the historical and the theological. He speaks of the Christian story as made up of the interweaving of two stories or modes of story, the one historical, the other going beyond historical categories which 'we can call symbolic or mythological if the terms be agreed'. To the former belong the statements 'that Jesus lived

and died and was alive again after death', to the latter the statements 'that Jesus came down from heaven ... or that in Jesus God was made man' (pp 11-13). I find the analysis highly congenial; I have indeed used very similar language in my own writing. But it has its problems. What, for example, does it do to the New Testament concept of resurrection, which finds itself very uncomfortably divided into two?

Moreover, if we accept such an analysis, how do we proceed from there? I want to suggest that there are two divergent, but not mutually exclusive, paths that we can follow. One is to reflect on the interwoven stories and draw out their theological and spiritual significance as a single story - and this is the sort of thing that Lord Ramsey does very well. The other is to puzzle away at the interface, at the question of how the relation between the two so different kinds of story is to be understood. Lord Ramsey is seeking in this book to contribute to this other style of theological elucidation as well, but on this issue I do not find him so helpful. He acknowledges that 'drama, symbol and poetry can be an inspired mode of revelation' as well as 'literal chronicle' (p. 82). Perhaps that insight needs the same kind of critical consideration that the historical mode now receives before much progress can be made. It is noticeable that although Lord Ramsey describes the statement that in Jesus God was made man as one that belongs to a story that can be called symbolic, he also cites with apparent approval Sir Will Spens' contention that Christian experience required as its creative cause 'the event of the Incarnation as Christian tradition had under-