

ists. The point of divergence, Professor Brown suggests, between the two contestants, was the salvific value of Jesus' career in the flesh. The secessionists contested his coming in the flesh because it was not essential to his being Christ, the Son of God. But in my view that neither goes far enough nor follows quite the right line. The secessionists had no doubt that Jesus had come in the flesh, but once they had received the Spirit and the consequent gift of prophecy they saw no further reason to be interested in Jesus. If by the Spirit they had direct access to the Father, why should they bother about the Son of the Father, for were they themselves not born of God? The epistolary writer has little interest in the Spirit; how could he have read the Gospel which speaks so powerfully about the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth?

And every reference to the Paraclete makes his arrival and function subordinate to Jesus the Son.

In many ways Professor Brown's case is worked out with much ingenuity. Logically it is not impossible, but to my mind it finally fails to carry conviction. It is like an old-fashioned detective story where a dramatic and complex theory is confidently put forward by the great authority – and turns out to be the wrong solution. If the writer of 1 John was not reviving archaic forms *after* the Gospel had appeared but was contributing to the growth of the Gospel tradition, a clearer and more probable solution is available.

But of course every library must buy this fine book, and every student must be storn-minded enough to consult it.

KENNETH GRAYSTON

THE VON BALTHASAR READER. Edited by Medard Kohl and Werner Löser. T. & T. Clark, 1983, pp xiv + 439. £14.95.

T. and T. Clark are beginning to do for Balthasar what they so famously did for Barth. This volume serves as an excellent point of orientation for anyone about to plunge into the thickets of *Herrlichkeit* in the translation (*The Glory of the Lord*) which the same publishers have sponsored, and whose first volume also appears this year. The selection of texts is admirable – predictably so, as it is made by two very considerable experts on Balthasar's work (Löser will be familiar to some as author of a major study of Balthasar's use of the Fathers): it originally included some texts from *Herrlichkeit*, but the translators have omitted these in view of the forthcoming English version. And it is good to have so much from the second great multi-volume work, *Theodramatik*, still in progress (vol. III has appeared since this collection was first assembled) and relatively unknown in this country.

Balthasar is a writer rich in allusions, and a volume which noted all of these would be twice the length of the present one. But one resonance which might be missed, and which is illuminating for grasp-

ing what he is generally trying to say, can be found on p 122. Christian eschatology cannot be a promise of 'explanation'; its purpose is to change the world from the starting point of a realization in concrete historical terms of the 'end' in our midst. Balthasar says of eschatology what Marx says of philosophy; and we shall not fully understand Balthasar if we fail to see how his work is conditioned by the same repudiation of 'absolute knowledge' as the ideal for humanity. The essence of faith for him is, indisputably, transforming action, and the 'text' on which theology reflects is the history of Christ and his saints as agents and generators of transformation. There are some striking pages here on the Christian's responsibility in the world, even on the spiritual/theological ambiguity of non-violence (pp 123, 368-75, etc.). If Balthasar has the reputation of being a sharp critic of political ideologies, it is not because his stance is in any way pietistic so much as because he is almost obsessed with the *irresoluble* nature of political conflict. The return, again and again, to the revealed *Gestalt* of Jesus is a way of saying that the

end of history insofar as we can speak of it is not a sweeping away either of intellectual or of moral and social finitude and vulnerability. We see it only in terms of that radical givenness to what forms and nurtures us that is enacted for us as Jesus' obedience to the Father in the midst of the finite order and its uncertainties. He is our only 'speech' for talking about hope.

Extract No 20 is a good place to start, a thumbnail sketch of Balthasar's programme. 23 and 27 fill out the essential Christological themes, 40-42 show how these move us in the direction of the Trinitarian confession. 67, 69 and 70 elaborate on how we can think of participating in the *Gestalt* of Jesus, 94 and 95 express this in terms of action in society. General presuppositions about the *humanum* are well illustrated in 4-7, 12, 13. 84, 85, 87 are key texts on the life of prayer, related in 91 to methods of theologizing. The tension in the Church's life between its foundational obedience and its empirical half-obedience and disobedience is explored in the pieces about Mary and Peter, 49, 51, 52, 65, 66. And there is a sequence of vignettes (98-105) of significant individual figures (including, naturally, Adrienne von Speyr) and contributing to Balthasar's whole vision of being in the Church.

It is a fine and pretty comprehensive selection. The harder polemical side of Balthasar is kept in the background (nothing from *Cordula!*), and the editors significantly say that admiring Balthasar is quite possible without endorsing all his positions and 'political' options in the post-conciliar church. But they also rightly challenge the propriety of simply labelling Balthasar a 'conservative', even in this restricted sense.

An impatience with liberal cliché and with the avoidance of conflict is the motive force of much of his polemic: it may give regrettable comfort to some reactionary forces (and what seems to have happened to *Communio* in the USA is sobering enough), but Balthasar's own stance is a more complex affair.

The standard of translation varies, but Balthasar is (*experto credo*) often appallingly difficult to render clearly. A couple of possible slips are visible (e.g. on p 105, should we not be considering Mounier's *personalist* – not 'personal' – manifestos?); and the sub-editor has not fully standardized the spelling of Soloviev's name (pp 67 and 117). Congratulations to the translators, though, for going *some* way towards avoiding the generic 'man' and 'he'. I am not quite sure what Balthasar would think of this . . .

On the bibliography: as already noted, vol III of *Theodramatik* is now published; Lochbrunner's thesis (as is actually mentioned on p 54, n. 98) is also now in print; and another very comprehensive catalogue of secondary literature can be found in Aldo Moda's monograph, *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Un' esposizione critica del suo pensiero* (specially good on review and review articles).

Altogether a welcome and important book – by modern standards not at all outrageously expensive for the considerable amount of material offered; but a paperback edition might be a good idea, for the sake of impecunious students (and parish clergy?).

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