

Reviews

RICHARD HOOKER AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION, edited by
W J Torrance Kirby, [Studies in Early Modern Religious Reforms vol.2],
Kluwer Academic Publishers BV, Dordrecht, 2003, Pp. xx + 339, £93.00 hbk.

This book is the fruit of three meetings of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference between 2000 and 2002, and the line-up of contributors very much reflects its North American origins. It is largely for the Hooker specialist, but the most important essays, on Hooker's theory of predestination, definitely merit a wider readership. This is especially true of W David Neelands's excellent essay on predestination, which adopts a rigorous and analytical approach essential for coming to grips with this complex topic. Examining a wide range of Hooker's writings, Neelands argues that Hooker had a consistent and well-developed account of unconditional election throughout his career, which was neither proto-Arminian nor that of the English Calvinists of the 1590s. A similar line is taken by Daniel Eppley in another interesting and probing study, but neither writer looks in detail at Hooker's views on the freedom of the will, which apparently sit awkwardly with his support for unconditional election. Further work needs to be done by these scholars in this area, and this would be well worth following.

Neelands has also written an important and thought-provoking essay on baptismal regeneration and election, and what for Hooker constitutes membership of the invisible church. He takes the controversial line that justification, as opposed to election, is the key to the invisible church for Hooker; faith, rather than perseverance in faith. Rudolph P Almasy and Lee W Gibbs provide two stimulating pieces, albeit for the specialist, arguing for and against whether the material on repentance in Book VI of the *Laws* was genuinely intended by Hooker to form part of his great work. I also enjoyed John K Stafford's article on Hooker's surviving funeral sermon, which makes good use of background material.

It is a pity that the essays on grace and on the sacraments are not of the same quality as the essays on predestination. They are in some instances marred by an unsupported assumption that Hooker was a Reformed theologian, with statements such as 'Certainly, Hooker is a Calvinist'. Although a significant number of scholars now hold this view, this is a position that still needs to be argued for, and one would have liked to have seen a detailed case made. Despite its title, this book does not focus in any especial way on Hooker's relation to the Reformation, and, predestination perhaps apart, the question of whether Hooker should be considered a Reformed theologian is not here materially advanced beyond the work of earlier studies.

NIGEL VOAK

MARY by Sarah Jane Boss, *New Century Theology*, Continuum, London, 2004, Pp. xi + 149, £14.99 hbk.

Dr Sarah Jane Boss established the *Centre for Marian Studies* more than a decade ago, to provide for 'a particular way of looking at theology' and this book is one

interesting product of that 'particular way'. It preaches an urgent and timely message: Pope John Paul II 'challenged us to find a new ecological awareness based on a loving appreciation of God's creation. . . . It is time to consider more prayerfully the connections between everything in creation' (CAFOD, *Side by Side*, summer 2004). Back in 1996 the Bishops of England and Wales asserted that 'those who feel moved to a loving care for the internal balances of nature are responding to a deep religious instinct planted in them by God' (*THE COMMON GOOD*).

Sarah Boss propounds the thesis that the whole cosmos is infused with the presence of God and so is, like Mary, God-bearing; it should therefore be regarded as essentially sacred in a manner analogous to our perception of Christ's mother. In consequence of this she explores various aspects of doctrine concerning the Blessed Virgin and the forms of devotion to which it has given rise, with the presumption that these can enlighten and instruct us on the most fundamental reason for what is commonly called nature conservation, and indicate the method and manner in which the rape not just of planet earth but of our cosmos should be halted and reversed.

The selection of topics for her nine chapters is to some extent predictable: Mother of God, All-holy One, Virginité, Wisdom and Immaculate Conception, but their treatment is not. They are moreover interspersed with more unexpected themes – the Lily Crucifix, Heaven on earth, the Sacred Vessel and Darkness before the Dawn; and in all cases the approach is unexpected and arresting, if not always convincing.

The lily crucifix serves to remind us that the lily is the symbol of both purity AND fertility, and it is noted that 25th March is not only the feast of the Annunciation but also the – legendary – date of both the crucifixion and the creation of the world: 'Mary stands at the Annunciation in the same relation to God as do the waters of creation at the beginning of the world' (p. 4). A major theme of the thesis is the unboundedness of God himself, expressed most strikingly in the Trinity of three persons, and so the absence or removal, or at least the permeableness in redeemed creation, of boundaries we now take for granted: between human nature and other created forms; between life and death, time and eternity; most of all between heaven and earth, God and humanity. This theme is most fully explored in the context of a somewhat convoluted discussion of the relation between a pregnant woman and her unborn child, which would seem to conclude that the significance of Mary's relation to the God she bore in her womb is, for us, prior to that of the hypostatic union of two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ.

Much of the author's argumentation comes from extensive knowledge of the scriptures meditatively studied for their deeper implications. These are found especially in the relevance of Old Testament *types*, notably with regard to the Visitation foreshadowed by David's reception of the ark into Jerusalem, and the personification of the figure of Wisdom. That section is incidentally helpful in its explanatory justification of the application of this *typos* to Mary as well as to Christ, originated it seems by John Scotus Eriugena and Alcuin of York in the Eighth Century.

Two further fascinating sources quarried are the recoverable history of the many shrines of the Virgin in Europe and elsewhere, and various early and mediaeval myths and legends about her patronage, including that concerning Richard II and the Wilton Diptych. Multiple references indicate the breadth of reading and research – illustrated by attractive etchings – which have gone into a work which must surely contribute to the cause of nature conservation and a more just and humble approach to the earth's resources.

The distribution of material in the book is curiously uneven: chapters vary in length from three to thirty-seven pages, and some deductions from acknowledged theological or historical truths severely strain credulity – for instance the implications of associating Mary with the month of May, or the assertion that creation is a reflection of Mary and NOT *vice versa!* Conversely some seemingly relevant topics like virginity or immaculate conception are relatively undeveloped and dismissed in

two or three pages. Discussion of 'the sacred' in chapter 3, though lengthy, is somewhat obscure and ambiguous though it is taken up again, perhaps more satisfactorily, in chapter 4.

While the book does not explicitly tackle the question of how a sense of the sacred can be revived in the context of irreversible cultural evolution through the industrial and technological revolutions with their concomitant utilitarian and materialistic mindset, it should be an inspiring and powerful stimulus to that revival. Perhaps its most telling insight is that, since it is by wisdom that God orders creation, wisdom is already an attribute of the natural order before it is a human, moral quality.

SR MARY CECILY BOULDING OP

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD by Richard Swinburne, *Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004 (revised edition)*. Pp. vi + 363, £17.99 hbk.

Swinburne regards *The Existence of God* as his central book. With it, he seeks to turn the tide of sceptical arguments against belief in God that have held sway since Hume and Kant. He adapts his approach to modern science in two respects: by providing *inductive* arguments for the existence of God, and by arguing for the *probability* (no more) of God's existence. Indeed he thinks that there are no good deductive arguments for the existence of God (p. 330), and that the Five Ways are one of Aquinas's 'least successful pieces of philosophy' (p. 136), forgetting that these arguments stood in a long tradition of Greek, Jewish and Arab philosophy preceding Aquinas. Swinburne dismisses the teleological argument of Aquinas quite briefly, without giving any good reasons (p. 155). In this new edition, Swinburne has especially revised the chapters on the teleological argument and consciousness. Let us look at these two areas:

Swinburne's starting point is anthropic: human beings exist with free will. He argues like this: If there is a God, it is more probable that he would make such creatures (p. 113). There are such creatures. So it is probable that God exists. Swinburne first thinks what God must be like (a man-made image) and then finds that this world is just the sort of world you would expect such a God to produce. Free human agents require a physical universe to provide the conditions for exercising their freedom within limits (we cannot all have unlimited freedom). He does not consider angels, who are free agents but do not have physical limitations. He thinks that the chance that God would create a physical universe is quite high, in fact about half (p. 151).

Swinburne appeals to the argument of simplicity: it is simpler to suppose the existence of God than of many universes in order to make the existence of this universe probable (pp. 165, 185). In Swinburne's view, God is 'one additional entity' to the universe. Indeed he thinks that there is no 'absolute explanation' of the universe (p. 148), just a more probable one. It is more probable that God explains the universe as it is with its laws. Nowhere does Swinburne explicitly make the point that laws presuppose a *mind*. He misses the point of Aquinas's argument, that there could not be a universe of any kind without God. Throughout he talks of 'explanations' rather than causes.

Swinburne's arguments from the human consciousness are not conclusive, because he does not have a sufficiently strict criterion of the immaterial. For Swinburne, mental events are immaterial because they are beyond scientific explanation. But images are purely mental events (p. 195), although we get images through the senses, and brain events cause beliefs. The arguments of John Haldane in *Atheism and Theism* (with J C Smart) are a much more sustained attempt at showing that human thought does not have a material explanation. Not everyone will