

rebirth, but we still need to bear this in mind: that we are helping our brothers to die. There is no instant managerial solution that we can produce to any serious question or challenge. We have come to this place to engage in an orgy of photocopying and discussion and writing and rewriting. But we must beware of the managerial fantasy of power, the seductive power of the word-processor. Management is not the answer if it is seen as an alternative to sacrifice. We are helping our brothers to die, to lay down their lives—one would hope creatively and fruitfully, but that is not guaranteed. We are not promised success. We are not even asked to be successful, as managers are. We are asked simply to be charitable and to remain faithful. The outcome of that is not in our hands.

- 1 Fergus Kerr OP, 25–6–95.
- 2 Remember that moving house is high on the list of psycho-pathogenic factors, along with bereavement and divorce.
- 3 Genesis 1:28.
- 4 R–18, p. 4. “It is particularly important (except where the Order is at the stage of *implantatio Ordinis*) to create the conditions for renouncing parishes and once the conditions are present to act on them.”
- 5 R–7, p. 3.
- 6 Letter to Oskar Pollak, 27 January 1904.

Reviews

CELTIC CHRISTIANITY AND NATURE: EARLY IRISH AND HEBRIDEAN TRADITIONS by Mary Low, *Edinburgh University Press*, 1996. Pp. xii + 232, £12.95.

CELTIC JOURNEYS IN SCOTLAND AND THE NORTH OF ENGLAND by Shirley Toulson, *Fount (Harper Collins)*, 1995. Pp. 149, £7.99.

Celtic Christianity, like all things Celtic these days, is a boom industry for publishers. The two books under review here represent opposite poles of this market. The reprint of Shirley Toulson's *Celtic Journeys* is an example of the worst of Celtic Christianity writing. Poorly researched and sloppily written, the only real value in this book are the tours which the author suggests around sites connected with various Scottish and Northern English saints. (Though even here the directions can be confusing, e.g., “To the north of Meigle is the model village of

undiscerningly side by side, absurd statements (“most of the stories that have come down to us are attributed to the legendary Ossian”; “it is surprising how often the traditional tales [about saints]... involved a beheading.” p. 3), and manifold inaccuracies. Like too many writers on things Celtic, Toulson seems to have privileged access to knowledge denied to even the most learned scholars, such as the names of 4th century northern British bishops (Nelior of Carlisle and Nicholas of “Penrhyn, near modern Glasgow”!, p. 4) or the pre-Columban history of Iona (“In the fifth century the Druids are supposed to have come here to escape the persecutions of Imperial Rome, and to have founded a library on the island”, p. 53). It is tragic to think of the unaware reading such complete fantasies and believing them, and retelling them. Unfortunately, the numbers of such books seem to swell daily.

Fortunately for gentle readers who care about the early Christianity of the Celtic peoples, there have been a spate of books in the last few years which seek to base their observations on sound knowledge of medieval sources, and to move away from generalisation to more careful syntheses. Mary Low’s *Celtic Christianity and Nature* is to be welcomed as one of the best of these. Concentrating on the place of nature within early medieval Gaelic texts (and some later Gaelic traditions also), Low manages to build an excellent framework for understanding the distinctiveness of the early Gaelic Christian tradition. She shies away from grand theories and concentrates on texts, the book in fact serving partly as an anthology of translated sources. In so doing it becomes clear even to the most cynical (which probably includes me) how much of the pre-Christian attitude towards nature was subsumed in Gaelic Christianity.

What makes her observations so convincing is that she suggests not that these attitudes are themselves distinctive, but can be found in primal religions elsewhere. This is amply illustrated in particular by examples from Hebraic sources, which show the abundance of primal religious responses to nature woven into the foundation texts of the monotheistic Judaeo-Christian tradition. In this she also implicitly provides a corrective to the over-enthusiastic arguments of a number of modern Celticists who, noting strong parallels between Gaelic texts and biblical ones, have sought to show that all or nearly all the “pagan past” of medieval Gaelic texts are in fact only intelligent adaptations of hints in the Bible. (Her implicit response to these scholars is, indeed, more successful than have been more explicit recent arguments against them.)

Much of the book consists of laying biblical and Gaelic traditions regarding, e.g., land, water, birds, etc. side by side, and from this procedure we begin to get glimpses both of how pre-Christian Celtic beliefs may have worked and of why it was both possible and necessary for an interface with Christianity to emerge. However, I found myself wanting a little more help from Low, a little more opinion about how, indeed, these beliefs could exist together, how much of the

found myself wanting a little more help from Low, a little more opinion about how, indeed, these beliefs could exist together, how much of the parallel traditions are simply coincidence and how much reinforced by the avid reading of the Bible by early Gaelic Christians. I missed any sense of the way in which the Bible was also mediated through some six and more centuries of Christian thinking; the early medieval climate of belief and scholarship is never really recreated for us. We are left a little too often to wonder what Gaelic Christians thought they were doing, exactly, going on about land goddesses and sacred hazelnuts.

There are a few other problems as well. The introduction never quite manages to explain why we should consider this thoroughly Gaelic study to be representative of any other Celtic tradition (and in general I would suggest that it is not). The emphasis on primal religion's place in the Gaelic Christian tradition leaves some unevenness, and some chapters seem to go a bit astray (in particular the one on "Fire", which contrasts with the careful and stimulating treatments of "Land" and "Trees"). In an otherwise almost flawless text (the one English error noted on an erratum slip), the Gaelic is in severe need of expert proof-reading, being presented in random orthographies, with numerous misspellings and the like. Most of these are likely to prove annoying distractions only to Celticists, but others are more serious. (For instance, *side* are not "fairies" or otherworldly beings (see, e.g., p. 45), but rather the mounds and locations where they were thought to dwell. So *side* should be rendered "otherworld dwellings, fairy mounds" throughout, while otherworld people should be *áes side*.)

Very occasionally also the tone of rapprochement between primal and Christian leads to some strange statements, such as the discussion on p. 184 of the "old gods and goddesses" slipping away after the arrival of belief in an overarching Creator, and reference to people "who regret their disappearance". Should we believe that these gods existed? Are we being invited to regret their passing also? And if so, how, really, should we reconcile such beliefs with our Christian faith—let alone our 20th century mindset? Even leaving this aside, I kept wishing for some sense of how, on a quite practical liturgical and theological level, the insights of "Celtic Christianity" regarding nature can be incorporated into a modern faith. The interface of primal beliefs and new religion worked in the medieval Gaelic world because it was part of a natural evolution, and because the signs and metaphors they used were culturally meaningful, but trying to recreate such beliefs in our own culture seems to me futile. (Would calling Christ "the salmon of the well of mercy" actually do anything now other than puzzle people who do not have the immense range of allusions this phrase would set off for medieval Gaelic Christians?) Surely rather than turn to a past we never had (here I mean lowland-dwelling Scots; English, Welsh and European Christians; and probably many modern Gaels), we need to work within our own culture and its own signs and metaphors, whether

rural or city-bound. (I think of my father's lines, "Our pastures, oh Lord, are the streets of the city: / what meaning have your words of sheep and of vine?"; Joseph P. Clancy, *The Significance of Flesh*.)

Mary Low's book stimulates such questions, and I have no doubt that studying the early Gaelic Christian tradition will help us understand our own culture. To this end, a book like Low's is a good guide to the past, since it does not try to create a facile "otherworld" of a pristine Christianity there. The above criticisms aside, this is an excellent book, full of good syntheses, perceptive explorations and original insights. It is the only serious consideration of the Celtic Christian attitude to nature, and it works closely and intelligently with the texts. It is a rare and valuable counterbalance to the woollier side of modern writings about Celtic Christianity.

THOMAS OWEN CLANCY

ARISTOTLE AND AUGUSTINE ON FREEDOM by T. D. J. Chappell
St Martin's Press, London, 1995, pp 213. No price given

Tim Chappell's book is an examination of Aristotle's and Augustine's views of voluntary action, freedom and practical rationality. Chappell argues that in general we describe free action in describing voluntary action (in fact 'the philosophical "problem of freedom" is no more and no less than a problem in the theory of action', p. 121), that this is what Aristotle and Augustine are up to in their accounts of voluntariness, and that they both believe voluntary acts are not only un-compelled and informed, but also rational. There is much of interest in this book, but these are the most significant—and the most controversial—claims.

Chappell's method is fairly rigorously analytical and the book is easy to read, a few cumbersome passages apart. It will appeal to those who enjoy a diet that blends classical texts and more modern metaphysics and philosophy of language (quotations on the title page are from Hume and Strawson). Some, however, may regret given its subject that the scope of the book does not include current revivalist accounts of ancient and mediæval theories of practical reason and freedom (e.g. Sherman, Nussbaum, Reeve, Stump, Finnis, Williams, MacIntyre ...).

Part 1 discusses Aristotle's explanation of voluntariness as lack of compulsion and ignorance and argues lack of irrationality must be considered a third condition. Chappell provides detailed and helpful discussion of self-initiated behaviour, practical knowledge, and rationality and deals with one serious difficulty for his interpretation: Aristotle's account of *akrasia*, apparently voluntary yet irrational action. The textual work on *akrasia* here is an original and important contribution and well worth close attention. Worthwhile connections are made with the contemporary debate (Hare, Davidson), though these could be a little more up to date (e.g. Mele, Heil, Pears..).

Augustine's very different concerns with voluntariness are