

**INTRODUCTION TO HERMENEUTICS**, by René Maré, S.J. *Burns and Oates*, London, 1967. 128 pp. 21s.

Hermeneutics means the science of interpretation. It is the name now given by the Germans to the attempt to define the inner meaning of the New Testament. Classical turn-of-the-century liberal theology proposed to evaluate the gospels by stripping away all the additions and penetrating to the basic sources behind them, which alone were to be accepted. Thus purely scientific techniques would establish what we ought to believe. This process could however yield only an external or objective meaning for the gospels.

Karl Barth in 1921 launched a massive reaction against such a secular approach to the Bible. Liberal theology, he said, only prepares the way for true theology: an *internal* understanding of Christ and his message is required. Until I have opened my life to him, he means nothing to me; until I have allowed my being to be challenged and renewed by him I have not heard his message. The objective meaning of a letter from a dear friend is something dead in itself: the voice and presence of the other which it carries are what make the message alive and heart-warming.

Such ideas harmonize perfectly with existential philosophy. In this language *existence* is the keyword. Aristotle could ascribe this to any type of body; in the new philosophy however it is strictly reserved for man, and man possesses it in the degree to which he lives *personally*. When a man opts to pursue his vision of truth, only then does he begin to have authentic existence. The decision to pursue his spiritual vision and to see things according to it is what marks man off from the beasts; he chooses his own world, and it may be said that thus he even brings it into being. Such a choice or decision underlies and indeed constitutes every non-corrupt individual. I realize my being, therefore, in a choice, but this choice is not so much a choice of something for myself: rather it is a choice of what self I shall be. My self, in fact, constitutes a particular seizure of the

world. Existence, says Gerhard Ebeling, is the vital totality at the centre of which is man's free decision.

Now Barth pictures man as stumbling about looking for existence, looking for the meaning or fulfilment of life, and this without even having a clear idea of what he is seeking. Then the Word of God speaks to us in the scriptures, challenges our empty concepts and shows us our nothingness. It deepens the sense of sin and awakens a thirst for Redemption, which at the same time it provides when the Word speaks to us in Jesus Christ. (Something like this does happen when one reads the Bible, or—it is the same—meditates on Jesus Christ.) Thus when revelation attains me it *creates* me as a man. My self becomes strong in it, I start to *exist*. As to critical questions about the reality of itinerant devils, miracles, and so forth, Barth stresses that we have no authority to question the text: the text questions *us*. (Elsewhere Barth departs from this attitude to uphold the historical miracles as signs of the presence of the Word.)

Rudolf Bultmann concurs with Barth in the need for an internal understanding of the New Testament, but he vigorously opens that door to critical questions which Barth had so firmly shut. Understanding which is significant is internal to me. But what me? Twentieth-century man, writes Bultmann, is indelibly stamped with the modern world view, and cannot accept spirits, devils, miracles, or the divine transcendence pictured as spatial remoteness instead of being presented as *within* the world. Science requires a coherent determinism, yet we are presented with prayer releasing non-material forces. Thus the external content of the New Testament is unacceptable. This is of no great importance, however, for the actual message the Word communicates to us now is a new understanding of our existence, and it has little to do with the form under which it has been handed on to us. Thus



group of problems, which provide particularly delicate work for a Catholic. What is at issue is nothing less than what it is to be a Christian.

It remains to lodge a protest against the translation. Neither of the translators appears to be English, whence incorrect usage occurs repeatedly. Long and obscure sentences occur very frequently, and they should have been divided. Indeed, the obscurity is such that it was not possible for the printers fully to rectify

an accident which seems to have happened to the type shortly before printing. Instead of pages 103 and 107, the first printing as circulated to reviewers contained two pages of an entirely different book, and had to be withdrawn. The printers deserve every sympathy: so obscure were the sentences leading across to the incorrect pages that even the serious reader could not at first be sure of the discontinuity! SWITHUN M'CLOUGHLIN, O.S.B.

**MODERN MAN AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**, by Max Thurian. *Lutterworth*, London, 1968. 80 pp. 5s.  
**THE JOURNEY INWARDS**, by F. C. Happold. *D.L.T.*, London, 1968. 12s. 6d.

Of the making of practical handbooks to Christian living there is no end. These two paperbacks are a further addition to the pile. Each is the work of an author, already distinguished for more weighty books, who now produces a popular version for practical living. Max Thurian, the monk, takes the general line that prayer is possible in the modern world only as an attitude in day-to-day living. F. C. Happold, the layman, encourages the reader to set time aside for prayer. Both are anxious to help 'modern man'. Neither, however, says anything new about the spiritual life.

Thurian has written what amounts to a competent survey of traditional themes of the Christian life—unity of man, simplicity in prayer, suffering, liturgy, community—in modern language and in an attractive way. Happold's book is a book on prayer. He knows a lot about it and is conversant with non-Christian approaches. It is useful to read his helpful short descriptions of non-Christian

techniques and aids. Some will criticize his book for being, in fact, insufficiently Christian, savouring rather of the 'perennial philosophy' standpoint. My own criticism would be that the author concentrates too much, for a short book, on techniques and not enough on God. This is always the danger with books on prayer—they tend to be about means and not about the end. Prayer is rather like riding a bicycle. You do it best when you don't go too much into how it's done. Happold has not entirely escaped this pitfall, and throughout gives the impression of a cultivated headmaster discussing with his sixth form the various experiences of prayer that men have had. The living God into whose hands it is dangerous to fall is not central to the book.

Readers of *New Blackfriars* will look in vain in either book for recognition of the socio-political commitment which is inherent in following Christ. This *genre* of book has not yet taken cognizance of that. JOHN DALRYMPLE

**FREEWILL AND DETERMINISM—A Study of Rival Concepts of Man**, by R. L. Franklin. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, London, 1968. 340 pp. 45s.

Professor Franklin has written an important book which clarifies the dispute between Libertarian and Determinist by means of a careful study of a wide range of relevant concepts, and suggests that it is based, in the last analysis, on fundamentally divergent concepts of man and his place in the universe.

The so-called problem of freewill arises from the apparent incompatibility of two commonly cherished beliefs: (1) that we can often decide freely, and that this is presupposed by moral praise or blame; (2) that there must be a sufficient reason why one event should occur rather than another. The Libertarian maintains that in the process of deliberation, decision, and consequent action, there is at least one point of time when the total situation

is not a sufficient condition for the immediately subsequent one. The Determinist maintains that every total situation is a sufficient condition for what follows it. The hard-line Determinist draws from the principle of Sufficient Reason the conclusion that we are not free to choose in any significant sense. The soft-line Determinist takes an intermediate position seeking to reconcile Libertarianism with Determinism by giving a Pickwickian sense to freedom of choice. The Dissolutionist stands apart, claiming that the whole dispute is a pseudo-problem resting on conceptual muddles.

The author examines these positions and shows that they may shade into one another. He rejects Dissolutionism. He considers the question whether Determinism and Libertarian