

- ch.16; see also Y. Congar, *The Wide World My Parish*, (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), pp.104–21.
- 9 See M Blondel, *Action (1893)*, (tran. O Blanchette) (Indiana, Notre Dame University Press, 1984).
- 10 See my criticism of Knitter and Hick on this point. Respectively: 'The Reign of God and a Trinitarian Ecclesiology: An Analysis of Soteriocentricism', in eds. P Mojzes & L Swidler, *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, (Lampeter, Edwin Mellin, 1990), pp.51–61; and 'Taking Other Religions Seriously: Some Ironies in the Current Debate on a Christian Theology of Religions', *The Thomist*, 54, 3, 1990, pp.519–29.
- 11 See G Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine in a Post-Liberal Age*, (London, SPCK, 1984), p.42.

Reviews

REVELATION: FROM METAPHOR TO ANALOGY, Richard Swinburne; Clarendon Press; Oxford, 1991; 236 pps.; Hardback £35; Paperback £12 . 95 .

In the second volume of his tetralogy on Christian Doctrine, Professor Swinburne sets out to analyse the notion of revelation with characteristic rigour, lucidity and forthrightness. After a first part setting out with great clarity his basic philosophical positions on metaphor, analogy and truth, the second part examines the notion of the evidence of revelation in general, and a third looks at Christian revelation in particular. He suggests that if there is a God, there is some reason to suppose that God will provide a propositional revelation which will tell us what we need to know to be saved. God will provide a church to interpret that revelation for subsequent generations. God will guarantee that its interpretation is basically correct. Therefore we can know that the propositions of the Bible are basically correct. Indeed, Swinburne argues that they are all true, when interpreted in their total context - which may often mean, metaphorically. He also argues that only the Christian faith is a serious candidate for having a body of doctrines which are to be believed on the basis that they are revealed; for only the Resurrection is a miracle authenticating its basic teachings, which is what one should expect of revelation. Swinburne says much else, all of it worth while; but this gives the flavour of a book which defends unfashionable beliefs in propositional revelation, the truth of every part of the Bible and the absolute uniqueness of Christian revelation. It does so with great force

and constitutes a major contribution to Christian doctrine, or to its necessary preamble, the notion of revelation.

In my view there are three major problems which the account raises, though it raises them in a way which is very productive. The first is the emphasis given to propositional revelation, when Jesus did not dictate a book, like Mohammed, and when the canon of Scripture came to be collected in such an apparently haphazard way. Christians do need an account, as clear and positive as the one Swinburne gives, of how God acts to ensure that knowledge of the Divine nature and purpose is communicated through Christ and the apostles. But does it fit the facts as we have them to think that God acts by directly causing true propositions to be written in so many diverse documents? Was the Divine action not in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, rather than primarily in propositions (after all, even the teachings of Jesus, which Swinburne regards as the 'original revelation', are known only in translation and within the editorial perspectives of the various gospels)? One would like to see more on this perplexing issue.

A second problem is the account of how God would provide a guaranteed interpreter of Scripture to preserve the original revelation; and yet Swinburne holds that the church has apparently split and is not functioning properly in any of its parts (p. 142). I find it hard to see how one can believe both of these propositions; the problem of how far and in what way the church is a guaranteed interpreter of Scripture is in need of much fuller treatment, if one is to avoid the odd belief that God will provide an infallible interpreter, and yet God has apparently allowed the chosen interpreter to divide, disagree and err in fairly large parts for quite long periods of time.

Thirdly, in a very important tenth chapter, Swinburne argues that the truth of Biblical assertions does not depend on what their author intended, or on taking a literal interpretation of them. Their meaning must be determined by their total context, which may force on them a meaning very different from anything their authors could have foreseen and change a literal to a metaphorical meaning. In this sense, all Biblical assertions can be said to be true, when seen in their final total context. Swinburne does not flinch from taking the hardest examples; and says that parts of Psalm 137 'cannot be regarded as inspired by the God of the Christians' (p. 184). However, Christians should take a metaphorical interpretation, that the children who are to be dashed against the stones are our sins, to be dashed against the Rock which is Christ. This is heroically done; but I find it uncomfortable to believe that for centuries this was read falsely, and therefore must have misled thousands, even though God caused it to be in Scripture so that very much later on a true interpretation would be found for it. Or did God not cause it to be in Scripture at all, though once it got there God caused it to be susceptible of a metaphorically true meaning? Either view seems strained. Even more problematically, I suspect that absolutely anything could be taken as true in this sense, given enough ingenuity. The problem here is one of

the limits of metaphorical interpretation, which I do not find satisfactorily resolved by saying that anything in the canon of Scripture must be true, *a priori*, and that is our only criterion.

Thus I find the thesis of the book deeply problematic and at odds with what most theologians say about revelation. Yet the problems are real ones to which few have suggested an answer anywhere near as clear as Swinburne's; and maybe most theologians need to look again at their presuppositions in view of this trenchant defence of propositional revelation. It should open up these fundamental issues to fuller debate at the level it sets so elegantly .

KEITH WARD

RETROSPECT by John Deedy. *The Mercier Press 1990 Pp.330 £9.99*

The changes which hit the Catholic Church subsequent to the Second Vatican Council were as unsettling for some as they were liberating for others. How could the Church which had seemed so stable, and had claimed to present an unchanging and enduring message, now change so radically ?

John Deedy aims to ease this trauma by showing the origins and evolution of various catholic beliefs and practices. The style is chatty and the order is unsystematic, a measure of catholic obsessions rather than a theological overview. So we start with (1) Mary, (2) The Mass, (3) Marriage, Divorce, Annulment, (4) the other six Sacraments, (5) Miracles, (6) Indulgences. The Bible for all it is "recovering its place of honor among catholics" is nevertheless squeezed in at chapter 14 between Angels and Canon law.

John Deedy we are told on the back cover is a "veteran Catholic journalist" and author of *The Catholic Fact Book*, among other things. This book is also a book of facts for catholics rather than a work of history or theology.

Sometimes alas the facts are slightly wrong. So he tells us for instance that "the Church holds a validly contracted marriage to be indissoluble by both church law and divine law". This is only true however of *sacramental* (that means *both* partners baptised), *consummated marriages*. A marriage may be valid though it is not a sacrament, or when not yet consummated. Given the emotive nature of marriage law accuracy here is very important.

There are also some doctrinal mistakes such as saying that the immaculate conception means "Mary was born free or original sin".

New and Old Catholic Encyclopedias are both much quoted, sometimes to give a contrast between pre and post Vatican II, sometimes criticised, sometimes cited as an authority.

For someone worried about changes in the Church this book may be helpful, but because of its unreliability and lack of theological perspective I would be loath to recommend it.

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