MERTON'S THEOLOGY OF PRAYER, by John J. Higgins, S.J. ***Cistercian Publications,*** **Massachusetts. 1971, 159 pp. $5.95.**

I don't think I'd go quite so far as to say that this book was written by the devil, but there can surely be few things so disedifying as true things stated in an utterly untrue way. And that, in a nutshell, is all that this book contains (except footnotes).

It is presented, quite unashamedly, as propaganda for Thomas Merton, as being the unique and original guru for our age, and the style, especially of the introduction, is appropriately bombastic and vague. Fr Higgins' purpose is to show how Merton's spiritual doctrine was essentially consistent throughout his life, and how it fits the needs of modern (American) man. In other words, growth and change is denied, a man of prayer is now on sale in neat little capsules to be taken (with water) after meals.

We are led through the teaching on contemplation, asceticism, solitude, self-transcendence, and so on, and many good texts from Merton are quoted (and sometimes one need look no further than the quotations to see just how Higgins is misrepresenting his hero). But the whole thing is reduced to a system which is impeccably sound and impeccably dull. The living voice of the man of prayer, which rings out so exhilaratingly in some of Merton's own writings, is quenched; we are to be fed on husks.

Not content with freezing the fountain of living water, Higgins also detaches Merton from his context in the whole Christian spiritual tradition. The mind boggles when we read of a kind of prayer which 'Merton calls' prayer of the heart. I dare say there was another kind of prayer which 'Merton called' the Mass (though it isn't mentioned, so far as I can remember—thank God, it is a singularly unmemorable book). Merton immersed himself ever more deeply into the living tradition of the church, and found there life and freedom, and in becoming more traditional, became also free to be far more adventurous—a natural consequence of being genuinely traditional. Higgins rather suggests, with his constant use of words like 'unique' and 'original', that Merton just dropped down from heaven into the lap of the twentieth century. I think it is no accident that the two things one looks for in vain in this book are a sense of the real, and a sense of tradition.

Merton wanted to lead us to God, and in at least some of his writings there is a ring of authenticity which clearly has spoken to our age. Higgins wants only to invite us to contemplate Merton, and, even if his account of his spiritual teaching is right in every detail (and it may be largely accurate), this fundamental betrayal vitiates the whole enterprise.

Don't read the book; look at the picture on the dust cover, which speaks far more eloquently and is far truer to the spirit of Thomas Merton. There is also a large bibliography of writings by and about Merton.

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ORTHODOXY AND HERESY IN EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY, by Walter Bauer. Translated from the second German edition by a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian origins. Edited by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel. ***S.C.M. Press.*** **£3.75.**

From its earliest days the Christian Church was faced with the problem of the false brother in its midst; but the problem of distinguishing an 'orthodoxy'—the teaching of the 'great Church'—from 'heresy'—the doctrines of the sects on the fringes of the 'great Church'—became serious in the course of the second century. It was then that a large number of groups all claimed to be the true representatives of the original teaching handed down from the apostles; often they claimed the support of secret apostolic traditions, sometimes the authority of writings which were becoming extruded from a canon of scripture which was slowly establishing itself in the 'great Church'.

Christian writers in the second and third centuries generally thought of 'orthodoxy' as the pure doctrine of the Gospel, subsequently corrupted by false teachers. Origen, alone, so far as I know, came near to seeing that disagreement among believers was as old as Christianity itself. The 'classic view', according to which 'orthodoxy' is primary and 'heresy' derivative, has held sway until very recent times. Though challenged occasionally (as by Gottfried Arnold, the German pietist historian at the end of the seventeenth century), the 'classic view' was not seriously called in question until Walter Bauer published his work in 1934. The English translation we are now given is welcome: it makes accessible a seminal work whose importance is far from exhausted.

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Bauer stood the 'classic view' on its head: examining the early traditions of ecclesiastical centres such as Edessa, Alexandria, Antioch and Asia Minor, Bauer thought he could discern traditions which, looked at from elsewhere, or later, would be labelled as 'heretical'. In the earliest age of the Church, he argued, there was no clear distinction between heresy and orthodoxy. 'Orthodoxy' emerged only gradually, and, when it did, it was the doctrine which triumphed over competing traditions only on account of the dominant influence of the group which held and propagated it. What emerged as 'orthodoxy' was, in fact, the doctrine of the leaders of the Roman Church, which came to define the meaning of 'orthodoxy' as a consequence of its wide and preponderant influence.

Much has happened in the study of Christian beginnings in the forty years since the first publication of Bauer's book. His account of early Christianity particularly in Edessa and Egypt has had a rough passage, and his interpretation of the evidence for the extension of Roman influence has found little favour, especially outside Roman Catholic circles. The present translation, from the second edition (1954) by George Strecker, includes a survey of the reception accorded to the book. It must be said, however, that these rather scrappy excerpts and summaries give little notion of the importance of the issues raised by Bauer, and of the fundamental discussions of their theological implications. The best easily available discussion is still the second of Professor H. E. W. Turner's Bampton lectures of 1954.

Turner rejected Bauer's total scepticism with regard to any 'fixed elements' in orthodoxy, and reaffirmed the inherent homogeneity of orthodoxy in the course of its historical development with the apostolic tradition. Whatever force his arguments have (and they seem to me to have a great deal) Bauer's scepticism has performed a positive service. It has enabled us to understand better not only the primitive development of Christian doctrine, but the permanently problematic character of orthodoxy. While we have learnt to recognize that a plurality of traditions is as old as Christianity itself and that, in a sense, the Church has always comprehended a variety of 'denominations', it is also clear (*pace* Bauer) that the line between heresy and orthodoxy is no mere accident of ecclesiastical or political power to win through. In the crisis of identity which Christianity underwent in the second century, orthodoxy came to differentiate itself from a large variety of gnostic, Jewish-Christian, Marcionite and other sects. The confrontation with heresy was not, however, a repudiation of something seen as a threat to a clearly recognized 'orthodoxy'. More often it was a moment in a crystallizing self-awareness. The emergence of the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy from a previously undifferentiated Christian self-awareness was the product of a real crisis of identity. It is the great and lasting merit of Bauer's analysis of this process that it serves as a warning to the Church historian against his besetting temptation: to take the identity of the Christian Church too much for granted; and to the Christian as a standing reminder that Christianity is always a process of self-discovery.

R. A. MARKUS

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF RIGHT AND WRONG, by Jonathan Harrison. ***George Allen and Unwin Ltd,*** **(Muirhead Library of Philosophy), London, 1971. 407 pp. £4 net.**

This book makes not a few good points, and offers not a few good arguments. Yet it is not, on balance, a good enough book for its length, its price or the importance of its subject.

The first part examines 'every possible account of the nature of moral judgments, and the manner in which we come to know them as true' and finds that every account 'has turned out to be a blind alley' (250). 'Moral judgments are not *a priori*, necessary, analytic and such that they can be seen to be true because to deny them would be contradictory . . .', yet 'though it follows from this that they are synthetic, it is implausible to claim that they are synthetic propositions which we are able just to see *a priori*, intuitively and without argument to be necessarily true. Attempts to show that they are synthetic, contingent and empirical judgments, known to be true by observation and experience, and about the natural world, also break down' (250). That shows both the drift and the limitations of the first part, for although moral sentiment theories generally are briefly treated under 'subjectivism', and although the ghost of emotivism in particular walks in more than one chapter, Professor Harrison does not entertain seriously enough (to refute it even)

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