

THEOLOGICAL SCIENCE, by Thomas F. Torrance. *Oxford University Press, 1969. 84s.*

Contemporary theological writers have tended to suffer from uncertainty as to what they were writing about; the abandonment of the medieval world of the cosmos as mirroring the divine ideas, and the development of the natural sciences has led to considerable confusion as to the nature of theological thought. Are we constructing a transcendental anthropology, using the language of inner experience or simply making sense, if any, of a quaint old-world dream? Lack of certainty has never been Professor Torrance's defect, and when one heard that he was producing a work on Theological Science one expected that he would present a clear and unambiguous statement of the Reformed position and that his well-known antipathy towards the *analogia entis* would play a large part in his exposition. It is true that in the present work he has some interpretations of St Thomas that might bear closer inspection, but it is also true that he recognizes that St Thomas' subtle use of analogy is very different from the neo-Scholastic doctrine. Again one cannot help but feel that the importance of Bacon is rather overstressed and that the story of the rise of the natural sciences, as at present understood, is rather oversimplified.

It would, however, be quite wrong to insist on these minor points for one has been given

THE QUESTION OF GOD, Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century, by Heinz Zahrnt. *Collins, London, 1969. 398 pp. 63s.*

Die Sache Mit Gott (The Question of God), of which R. A. Wilson has made an excellent English translation, became a best seller in Germany; 17,000 copies were sold in the year of publication alone (1966). And rightly so. The author, Heinz Zahrnt, is the theological editor of the *Hamburger Sontagsblatt*, and his journalistic experience, together with his understanding of the central problems of contemporary German theology, have enabled him to give a brilliant, short and comprehensible account of the theological discussions among the great German-speaking thinkers of the twentieth century.

He starts with the Liberal theologians (Schleiermacher, etc.). They had sought an impermissible synthesis between God and world, grace and nature, and threatened to efface completely the boundary between the two. Barth is the dominating figure in the renewed emphasis on the 'Protestant Principle',

what one did not expect: a major work of theological inquiry. It sets out a theology that rests on a basis wholly given and trans-subjective, which throws human thinking of God back upon him as its direct and proper object and which is consistently faithful to the concrete act of God in Jesus Christ. What, in other words, we reach by argument cannot be equated with the living God, so that natural theology cannot be a foundation on which positive theology can rest, as it can arise only when a person can see or hear the reality to which its existence statements claim to refer. Theology is submission or reasonable response to the primordial reality given in Christ, God's Word, and is Christological in that we look with Christ and by him are directed to the Father.

From beginning to end the thesis is sustained by strenuous and powerful argumentation, and it draws on a wide and deep philosophical reading. On almost every page there is something stimulating for the philosopher and the theologian, and each section calls for careful consideration and discussion. Without doubt this book is a must for anyone seriously interested in theological discussion, and one has the feeling that it may prove to be a classic.

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the principle of justification by God alone. The central theme of his Dialectic Theology is therefore the rediscovery of the deity of God. This implies a radical criticism of any form of religion as man's own attempt to bring God nearer to him. Barth's total rejection of Brunner's idea of the 'contact-point' shows, however, that he himself does not draw the conclusions from his own principles, inasmuch as his theology remains a form of supernatural positivism which in fact is another form of religion. And so we are led to appreciate the contribution of Gogarten and Bonhoeffer, namely that the rediscovery of God means the rediscovery of the world as secular. What then is the practical relevance of the Christian faith for secular (political) action? How far is the political action of Christians already determined by the laws of life in the Kingdom of God, and how far is it still bound by the structural laws of this world? This, says Zahrnt, is

the decisive point at issue in the violent theological disputes in the Protestant Church since the Second World War (cf. "The Transcendental or the Political Kingdom?", by Peter Mann, O.S.B., *New Blackfriars*, December 1969, January, 1970). The alternative is between compromise (Thielicke) and the over-emphasis of Christian eschatology which almost gives the impression that the future has taken the place formerly occupied by the Beyond (Moltmann). Hence the question: Where is God here and now?, which is the question of the historical Jesus. Bultmann, of course, is the central figure in the discussion of this problem, but with him, for instance, there is the danger that the transition of the historical Jesus to the kerygmatic Jesus results in the kerygma becoming a universal and timeless truth, and the appeal to history a mere formality. The concern of Protestant theology in the future must be to bring the reality of the world and history back into the reality of faith.

In this respect Paul Tillich has already taken a considerable step forward in the future. To him the last two chapters of this book are devoted.

The book is definitely more than a dry summing-up of the thoughts of some theologians. It is a lively story, not only of theologians against their historical background, but also of the origin and development of a central theological theme or idea, in which every theologian seems to play his predestined role. It is a story which could have been told by Hegel, which means that the author himself is engaged in it and naturally identifies himself with the last link in the chain: Tillich. This seemingly biased approach itself gives an accurate idea of the German theology of this century, for, in a sort of spontaneous belief in the Objective Spirit, German thinkers are usually very conscious of their place in history and concerned above all with the problem as it is left behind by their predecessors.

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MAN IN HISTORY, by Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Sheed & Ward*, London, 1968. 341 pp. 50s.
LOVE ALONE: THE WAY OF REVELATION, by Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Burns & Oates*, London, 1968. 125 pp. 14s.

Hans Urs von Balthasar is not widely known as a theologian. Most popular from his books on Prayer, and on Thérèse of Lisieux, he still awaits the translation of his major works into English. Even among those who are sensitive to modern theological currents, he is not widely acclaimed, and it is significant that he is one of Europe's major theologians who was *not* invited to the recent Vatican Council. There are many reasons for this. His wide reading both in the Fathers and of modern authors led one reviewer to accuse him of bewildering his public by a display of names. When one adds to this the inevitable problems caused by inexpert translation, then any reader of his books in English has to work hard to understand what Balthasar is trying to say.

Both books under review are subject to the above comments. They are difficult to follow and much of the author's peculiar rich style is mangled in translation. The content is, however, worth digging for. Both works are concerned with two problems, a critical analysis of modern philosophies—under which the author would group not a little modern Christianity—and an attempt to present the Gospel in terms which do not dilute or emasculate it. The criticism is exceedingly well done and covers much the same ground as that covered in his *Science, Religion and Christianity* (which is actually a study of modern atheism).

It shows the inadequacies of attempts to produce either a personalist version of Christianity or a Marxist one which ignore the central message of the Gospels: that it is a revelation of God, and is about a resurrection from the dead. *Man in History* especially is concerned to demonstrate the impossibility of reaching God from man, and the inherent contradictions involved in being a man in history, particularly the fact of death. In so doing he shows that neither the drop-out nor the authoritarian reduction (so popular in ecclesial circles) is adequate—both systems leading to a simple form of Christianity which lacks a religious dimension. It is only by holding together all the diverse aspects of human individual and social existence and viewing them in their concrete actuality that the question of human existence is posed in a form which requires some answer which is more than human.

The manner in which Balthasar tries to express the form of this answer is the least satisfactory part of both books. He tends to use romantic vocabulary which feels odd and one suspects is used at times to hinder clear thinking rather than aid it. However, no one will doubt after reading these works that the author has grasped the correct form of the Christian answer for our day.

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