

lucidity of the book in describing the impact of the temple's destruction on Jewish faith, and the consequent emergence of rabbinic Judaism proper.

The reservations I have expressed should not be taken as trenchant criticism. They are offered on the assumption the book will be used, not to recommend against reading it. There is room for improvement, and teachers will need to use the book carefully, but it is quite serviceable. My only serious complaint is that Neusner's advice for further reading at the close of the volume does not mention such works as those of John Bowker and Geza Vermes. Perhaps such omissions, and the flaws here mentioned, will be rectified in the future editions we shall no doubt see.

BRUCE CHILTON

**MOTHERHOOD AND GOD**, by Margaret Hebblethwaite. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1984. £3.95.

If theology can be defined as articulate reflection on humankind's experience of God in faith, Margaret Hebblethwaite's account of her adventures in motherhood constitutes a significant contribution not only to contemporary spirituality but to theology itself. As the young mother of two lively sons and a vivacious daughter, the wife of an eminent Catholic journalist and theologian, an author and scholar in her own right, having read theology and philosophy at Oxford and spirituality at the Gregorian University in Rome, Hebblethwaite was particularly well qualified to undertake such a richly interdisciplinary exploration of contemporary Christian experience. Reminiscent of Rosemary Haughton's theologies of experience, *Motherhood and God*, is less scholarly in tone and more directly concrete, written less for academic theological readership than for a more general audience attuned to the language of everyday life. The first and larger part of the book consists of thirteen chapters illustrating aspects of motherhood and family life from the viewpoint first of a mother and then of the theological and spiritual writer. The emphasis is primarily on experiences themselves—of pregnancy, birth, and childrearing, with their inevitable delights, crises and trials—interspersed with short reflections on related scriptural and spiritual themes. Hebblethwaite's treatment of homecoming and homemaking is particularly noteworthy. The second, shorter part contains four chapters which tug out the theological and spiritual implications of those experiences in a more systematic fashion, but without sacrificing their rich human color. Specific applications are made in regard to prayer, especially the home retreat, and the sacraments of baptism, eucharist and reconciliation. The final chapters reconsider the theological enterprise itself and the recovery of what can here most appropriately and concretely be called *tradition*—“handing on the faith”.

Overall, *Motherhood and God* contributes most valuably to the contemporary effort to think out the human encounter with God in inclusive terms, ultimately centering on the most basic of all human relations, those of mothers and children. As a motif, the maternity of God is less new than neglected, as Hebblethwaite acknowledges. (A bibliography of relevant material for further reading would have made a very useful appendix.) What is new today are the political, social and ecclesiastical ramifications of inclusive theology for both women and men.

Some readers may be unnecessarily put off by Hebblethwaite's consistent use of feminine pronouns in referring to God. But the corrective here is finally no more odious than the problem it addresses, if initially more jarring. For all God-language is ultimately inadequate. Some is simply more so than the rest, especially when custom endows it with spurious and injurious sacrosanctity.

A more serious problem is her descent to a kind of nursery catechesis, which for all its charm weakens the force of her effort to refresh both experience and meaning. Several meditations on life in heaven, the beatific vision, guardian angels, the “souls of infants”, and qualities of the risen body seem to harken back to a conventional and simplistic vision of Christian beliefs future generations could well do without and are

already increasingly alien to most family life throughout the world. Hebblethwaite's single collapse into jargon when referring to "sensing peoples' vibes" and, alas, God's vibes (p. 101), may be less forgivable but it is also less serious.

Some recent writing on God and motherhood has seemed abstract, remote and idealistic, as if being a mother was somehow less significant than the *idea* of maternity. This book on the other hand, is an enriching exploration in narrative and pastoral theology, a practical, warm, honest and sincerely human account of one woman's faith that surely speaks to almost anyone. Lay-centred and incarnational, it encourages us to reconceive of God in light of the noisy, smelly, often bloody, usually messy business of *being* that most exquisite of human beings—someone's mother.

RICHARD WOODS OP

**PLANETARY THEOLOGY** by Tissa Balasuriya *SCM Press, London 1984, pp. 282. £6.95.*

Tissa Balasuriya OMI, chaplain to the Asian Catholic Student Federation and Director of the Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, Sri Lanka, is already known to many in the West through his earlier study *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*. In that lively and original book Balasuriya claimed that the theology of the eucharist must now become 'planetary', so that not only the church but mankind 'may all be one'. This theme he now takes up and expands in his new book. In recent years there has been a flood of books from Latin America, but Balasuriya is one of the most significant contributors to that much smaller corpus which is emerging from Asia. He does not write, as did a previous generation, to show his competence in debates generated within Europe. Instead he writes as one born in Asia, whose home is in Asia, asking deeply challenging questions about the continuing influence of European assumptions on the Christianity of that continent.

Looked at in global perspective, a planetary view, European Christianity has advanced throughout the world in association with every kind of oppression: race, sex, class, economics and culture. As different groups challenge each of these associations, a new picture begins to emerge. Taken together they begin to form a planetary theology. The new Asia Christians are unwilling to be made aliens in their own lands in order to remain part of a tradition which in many fundamental respects is unheeding of the example and teaching of Christ.

In both this and his earlier book, Balasuriya advocates 'integral liberation', a conversion both personal and societal, both spiritual and political. He has penetrating insights into worship, liturgy, catechetics, ethics, the Ten Commandments, love and justice, the purpose of retreats. He has critical words for those who send evangelists from the West whose message is so one-sided (not integral) as to enjoin peace and resignation on the poor, without uttering a word of criticism on the rich and powerful. He is also critical of Europe for in effect giving Christianity a bad name throughout the world. Some of his suggestions have a disturbing logic: whether praying that our debts be forgiven as we forgive our debtors, might be applied to international trade, the terms of which are so unfair on the poor countries. No less disturbing is his call for an international income tax. Throughout the book he is critical of the effect of capitalism on the third world. Nor does he carefully balance his position between those deadly competitors, the USA and the USSR: from the perspective of the third world these two ideologies have too much in common. He takes it for granted that poor countries require some form of socialism, but he is critical not only of 'parlor socialism' which co-exists happily with capitalism, but also of actual Marxist regimes. 'Historical Marxism has not yet demonstrated a capacity to incorporate the value of democratic political processes within the framework of a viable socialism'.

The book is well written, very readable and full of stimulating insights. It contains no footnotes and its undogmatic style is complemented by a page setting which is not