

expect, the first two chapters are perhaps the weightiest; but I found the last essay on Peter Wust particularly interesting. It suggests that Wust, though on Copleston's account unlikely to 'go down in the history of philosophy as a great thinker' (p 157) is worth considering. I am struck by his similarity to Maurice Blondel whose chief value was that he was able, like Wust, to see that certain truths can be grasped in the way people live rather than in the argu-

mentative rigour looked for by many philosophers. One would like to see Copleston writing more on Wust. It would also be no bad thing if he turned in some detail to Blondel. There is a discussion of Blondel in Volume IX of Copleston's *History of Philosophy*; but, like so much on Blondel written in English, it gives us at best the tip of an iceberg.

BRIAN DAVIES O.P.

JESUS AND THE LIVING PAST by Michael Ramsey, Oxford, 1980 pp 90 £3.50

Lord Ramsey's writings are well known for their combination of theological and spiritual motifs. This book is no exception. Its central theme is the union of divine sovereignty and self-sacrifice. For that is 'the foundation of Christian theology', the way in which 'the deity of Jesus must needs be understood', 'the Christian message' (pp 38; 49; 76).

But Lord Ramsey's particular concern in this book is to show that this message is rooted in the history of Jesus and not undermined by contemporary historical questioning. He is aware that there is a problem to be faced by those seeking to claim firm knowledge about the history of Jesus, and he offers the kind of solution characteristic of conservative, critical scholars. Thus he rightly challenges the way in which the criterion of dissimilarity is sometimes used to deny authenticity to any saying of Jesus that can be paralleled in the teaching of the early Church or contemporary Judaism (p 35). But he seems to me to move rather too easily from that valid negative point and go on to ascribe to the history of Jesus those sayings in the tradition most significant for his theological thesis - i.e. those in which Jesus foresees his death as the inauguration of the Kingdom (pp 37-8).

More interesting, if inevitably less precise, are his reflections on the relation of the historical and the theological. He speaks of the Christian story as made up of the interweaving of two stories or modes of story, the one historical, the other going beyond historical categories which 'we can call symbolic or mythological if the terms be agreed'. To the former belong the statements 'that Jesus lived

and died and was alive again after death', to the latter the statements 'that Jesus came down from heaven ... or that in Jesus God was made man' (pp 11-13). I find the analysis highly congenial; I have indeed used very similar language in my own writing. But it has its problems. What, for example, does it do to the New Testament concept of resurrection, which finds itself very uncomfortably divided into two?

Moreover, if we accept such an analysis, how do we proceed from there? I want to suggest that there are two divergent, but not mutually exclusive, paths that we can follow. One is to reflect on the interwoven stories and draw out their theological and spiritual significance as a single story - and this is the sort of thing that Lord Ramsey does very well. The other is to puzzle away at the interface, at the question of how the relation between the two so different kinds of story is to be understood. Lord Ramsey is seeking in this book to contribute to this other style of theological elucidation as well, but on this issue I do not find him so helpful. He acknowledges that 'drama, symbol and poetry can be an inspired mode of revelation' as well as 'literal chronicle' (p. 82). Perhaps that insight needs the same kind of critical consideration that the historical mode now receives before much progress can be made. It is noticeable that although Lord Ramsey describes the statement that in Jesus God was made man as one that belongs to a story that can be called symbolic, he also cites with apparent approval Sir Will Spens' contention that Christian experience required as its creative cause 'the event of the Incarnation as Christian tradition had under-

stood it' and not 'a symbolic story of Incarnation' (p. 55).

In short the book constitutes a useful statement of a central theme of Christian faith which the critical theologian

ignores at his peril. It does not rule out the propriety of that critical theologian's work, but I do not find that it offers him much help along the road he is trying to pursue.

MAURICE WILES

MYTHS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT by Benedikt Otzen, Hans Gottlieb and Knud Jeppesen (trans) SCM Press, London 1980. pp xiv + 143, £4.95.

This translation from the second edition (1976) of *Myter i Det gamle Testamente*, first published in 1973, gives English readers the welcome opportunity to sample the work of three Danish scholars of the so-called Scandinavian school. First, Otzen examines the concept of myth which he defines as 'an event which occurs outside historical space and time' but which is 'bound to the cult'. Myth was the vehicle by which primitive man, who thought in religious terms, gave 'form to his understanding of the most elemental and profound problems of life'. The question which the Danish scholars then consider is whether in Israel men also resorted to myth in order to express themselves religiously.

Otzen agrees that the narratives in Gen. 1-11 do not have the character of real myths – though such myths do underlie them as traces of them are found elsewhere in the Old Testament. Further such myths must have held a central position in the Israelite New Year Festival for 'it was the task of the cult to reinforce the cosmos and combat the destructive forces which assail it'. But not only has the mythological heritage been entirely reworked; it has been accompanied by what Otzen calls the 'mythologizing of history', that is the introduction into the cult of the high points of Israel's history interpreted mythologically so that salvation becomes identical with creation.

Gottlieb examines the psalms which he holds reflect the Jerusalem New Year Festival in which the myth of creation was repeated in the triumph of Yahweh over all threatening powers and his subsequent enthronement, a festival in which the king played an important part. But while the psalms possess a cultic setting, none the less they served too as encouragement in the particular situation facing Israel at any given time which itself could be interpreted

in mythological terms – 'the mythologizing of reality'.

Finally Jeppesen considers the prophetic material and notes how the prophets use the available religious language of their day including mythological concepts. For them creation was not to be understood merely as a past event, but also a present reality. Consequently 'they frequently employ the creation myths in the context of a concrete historical situation'.

This is a stimulating study which has close affinities with the English myth and ritual school. It rests on the assumption that through the cult with its New Year Festival myth continued to play a dominant role into which Israel's experience of salvation-history has to be integrated – mythologized. But recent Old Testament study has cautioned against the too ready interpretation of Israel's religion from Mesopotamian and Canaanite forms for even if some dependence is shown, these forms may be very different when subjected to Israel's theological presuppositions. While a mythological heritage was certainly received by Israel, later to be much supplemented by sojourn in Babylon, the Biblical emphasis falls, as the Genesis narratives indicate, not on creation (whether or not a Jerusalem New Year Festival existed) but on Israel's election. It is this that the cult celebrates and the prophets threaten. Indeed it is not too much to say that Israel never had a doctrine of creation *per se*, but from earliest times saw creation as the first step in her election and salvation-history. Historical activities in which God revealed himself rather than myth governed her theology. As a result the mythological heritage was demythologized in the service of such theology.

ANTHONY PHILLIPS