

icularly, perhaps, through the many asides scattered in the book such as: 'Newman never believed in progress' (p 62) or 'Newman's illustrations are his worst enemies' (p 104). He shows convincingly that the *Essay* is remarkable precisely as a (complex and severely honest) apology, which makes Newman's stress on the force of historical evidence, on the role of the whole church in the 'reception' of

developments and on 'orthopraxis' all the more impressive. And at the same time Lash (and, through him, Newman) makes one think constantly of present day solutions for the problematic of christian identity, which is as urgent as ever. It is this kind of historical study which marks a real advance in theology.

MARK SCHOOF O.P.

**KARL BARTH, HIS LIFE FROM LETTERS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS, by Eberhard Busch. SCM Press, 1975. £10.00.**

This enthralling volume gives one a vivid idea of what made Barth Barth, of the formation of this great theologian and Christian. It is refreshingly free of that gossip which is the special pitfall of biography.

Barth's schooldays were apparently spent in getting involved in street-fights, writing poetry, and paying insufficient attention during periods of religious instruction. In his early manhood, as a pastor, Barth was a devotee of just that kind of liberal theology, inspired by Kant and still more by Schleiermacher, which he was soon so decisively to reject. Later he feared that much of what he said to his flock at the time might have scandalised them or led them astray. However, there are occasional broad hints of what was to come in the material which survives from this period, which stick out from their surroundings like erratic blocks. A crucial factor in the change was Barth's friendship with Thurneysen; 'we did not know what great changes were in store...; we only knew that we had to look for decisive, compelling words, more substantial than those which we heard around us' (73). The final straw for Barth was the fact that his revered teachers identified themselves with the war policy of the Kaiser; this moral failure seemed to demonstrate that all could not be well with the underlying exegetical and dogmatic presuppositions. It became more and more obvious to Barth that what was needed was 'something beyond all morality and politics and ethics. These are constantly forced into compromise with "reality" and therefore have no saving power in themselves' (84).

Reading this book, I was confirmed in my puzzlement that it was ever supposed that the so-called 'dialectical theologians' had much in common with one another, apart from their repudiation of

that liberal Protestantism, represented by men like Harnack, which had been in the ascendant for so long. As Barth saw it, there were three main tendencies which characterised the theology of the twenties; a continuation of the old liberalism, a return to the great Reformers, an existentialist tendency deriving from Kierkegaard. He himself was still searching for the basic direction which his theology ought to take. Particularly revealing, to my mind, are Barth's comments on his relationship with Gogarten. Gogarten's fundamental question to Barth was when would he get his presuppositions clear; Barth's to Gogarten, when would he get down to business. As one might expect from this, Gogarten was preoccupied with questions on the boundary of theology with philosophy and ethics; Barth, with the history of theology and dogmatics (192-3).

Barth's ultimate determination of what he was about, and the beginning of its implementation in the *Church Dogmatics*, coincided with the rise of National Socialism and the capitulation to its aims and ideals by many Christians. Barth saw this latter disaster as symptomatic of a process of corruption which had been going on in the Church for centuries. The main problem for theology at the time, as he saw it, was not so much to get rid of the 'German Christian' nonsense, as to form a front against the error which had devastated the Evangelical Church for so long. The same error was attributable also to the Roman Catholics and to the enthusiasts at the time of the Reformation—the assumption that man had a legitimate authority of his own over the message and the form of the Church (236).

After Barth returned to Basle, he remained a notable public enemy as far as the German authorities were concerned;

and the Nazi press were turning out vitriolic articles under such headings as 'Jews-Czechs-Karl Barth'. Nor did he prove a very comfortable presence for the Swiss churches; Barth felt that these showed notable solidity, but wished that they had a worthier cause to be solid about (275). In his attitude to the Munich agreement, even his friends were worried by his lack of 'realism'; but such 'realism', as he complained, amounted merely to recognition and acceptance of the facts created by Hitler (289). Years later, he was to make himself equally unpopular over his attitude to the Soviet invasion of Hungary. 'Why is Karl Barth silent about Hungary?'. He seems to have felt that the episode had been used too much as a pretext for self-righteousness by Western democrats in general, and by theologians in particular. He explained that Soviet communism 'had pronounced its own verdict on itself' in Hungary and that 'it did not need ours'. His reticence on the matter enabled

him to help some Hungarians in their own country by interceding with their government for them. (427).

I am sure that the health in the next few decades of Christian theology depends on its assimilation of what is to be learned from Barth's compelling genius, together with an avoidance of his mistakes. His principal mistake is surely his entirely hostile attitude to 'natural theology'. It seems to me clear that Christian intellectuals ought to engage both in dogmatic and in natural theology; the former that the implications of Christian faith for theory and practice should be clearly and consistently drawn out; the latter that good reason may be provided why anyone should believe it when he does not yet do so. Short of 'natural theology' in this sense, it is difficult to see Christian faith as essentially distinct from any obscurantism or fanaticism whatever.

HUGO MEYNELL

**THE VIRTUES** by P.T. Geach *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977. 173 pp. £4.95.*

I read Professor Geach's new book (part of his Stanton Lectures) straight through with only a short break for lunch. It is that kind of entertaining and constantly interesting book, though the suspicion does occasionally arise that it was written in much the same way as I read it, for there are a number of easily avoidable mistakes.

It is a popular essay in the altogether welcome new style of moral philosophy which instead of agonising about the 'meaning of ethical sentences' or the significance of 'right' or 'good' in general, analyses the particular virtues that men and women need: the four cardinal virtues that 'are needed for any large scale worthy enterprise' and the three theological virtues that are needed if we are to attain God, our final end. It seems to be the latter that interest Geach most, the only cardinal virtue that really gets him going is courage; temperance he finds frankly boring (since a large part of his treatment of it is devoted to disagreeing with St. Thomas's view that chastity is part of temperance, this is perhaps not altogether surprising) and a man who finds it doubtful whether one should preach rationality indiscriminately to the common herd (p 8)

may not be expected to be very eloquent about prudence. In fact most of the prudence chapter is taken up with an attack (a good attack) on consequentialism. Geach's materialism and his anti-liberal insistence on the corruption of present age should make him congenial reading to marxists but his chapter on justice shows no interest in a scientific analysis of society and in fact is largely taken up with his familiar hobbyhorse about lying. Incidentally he envisages at least the possibility of a state of society short of heaven in which 'though death, the last enemy, has not been overcome, sin lies crushed. In such a world where evil rulers and perverse laws and corrupting mass media and oppression of the poor had been done away for ever, nightmares of the past never to return and trouble men, those who grew up to mortal life would predominantly be saved' but now, 'the world lies in wickedness, and only those who deliberately swim against the current can hope to be saved' (p 95). Possibly a more promising starting point for a theology of liberation than some humanistic progressive Christian thinking.

Geach rejects (rightly, I think) an ethics based on a sense of duty or obliga-