

denominator approach to liturgical revision which compares unfavourably with that of churches with a less dispersed doctrinal basis. In the Episcopal Church of the USA, for instance, as indicated in Marion Hatchett's *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York 1980), a more coherent theological base, a more thorough scholarly preparation and a culture in which formal English is still valued resulted in a work of distinctively Anglican liturgy which, with certain specific exceptions, is far more satisfactory both in its theology and its prose than the ASB. The same could also be said of the Anglican South African Prayer Book which appeared in 1989, and indeed of other recent Anglican revisions.

The Church of England is now beginning to gear up for a revision of the Alternative Service Book itself: Dr Jasper's book will be invaluable not only to all those involved in this task, but also to anyone to whom the processes of liturgical reform and development are of importance and concern.

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**NATURAL RELIGION AND THE NATURE OF RELIGION, THE LEGACY OF DEISM, by Peter Byrne *Routledge, 1989, pp. 271.***

'Deism', that peculiarly British invention that the French borrowed and developed, is a colonizer's version of religion. It begins in an effort to read the cultures of the American Indian and the African Negro, to set them in comparison with the form of Judaeo-Christian tradition approved by decent middle-class folk. Prospero, an Italian nobleman with a liking for the superstitious arts and their attendant sprites, had had no time for Setebos; and servants, Stephano the butler and his like, had enslaved Caliban. But Toland and Tindal and the rest of the bourgeois deists listened to the stories of red and black Gods and learnt something of their own religion. They concluded that the differences between all existing religions and the range of stories of divinities were the results of peccative priestcraft. The one God had originally declared one 'natural' way of acknowledging and forwarding His divine order. Dr Byrne, in his most useful gloss on 'deism', is concerned not much with story-tellings, but rather with 'the emergence of a standpoint which offers on the one hand, a negative critique of claims for the uniqueness and divine character of any revealed religion (including Christianity), and, on the other, a positive affirmation that a religion founded on reason and nature is sufficient for salvation'.

Dr Byrne provides a helpful account of both historical criticism of actual religions and epistemological criticism of ideal religion. Employing these two instruments, Toland, who was said, by those who had no love for him or Rome, to be the illegitimate son of an Irish priest, got rid of 'mystery'. A reasonable man would find out the clarity of truth. Tindal found that truth by going behind to establish that sort of 'Christianity' which, being proffered to Adam, was 'as old as the Creation'. The more reductionist Morgan, opposing true, natural, religion to every revelation, was able to insist that each 'religion of the hierarchy' must be false. He was a rough enough debater for my not objecting to his death-date being the single mis-stated fact I noted in Dr Byrne's careful history of these people.

The argument about the religion of first times, about Eden, and then

about the Apostolic Era, and about degenerating priests, was, as Dr Byrne demonstrates at several moments of his historical analysis, an argument about the proper form of religion for decent eighteenth century persons. Hume was reconstructing the deist memory of a decent Eve and Adam so that an ethical monotheism was understood to be the hard-won achievement of self-disciplining and admirable philosophers. Middleton was getting rid of both the Christianity of the Patristic Age and that of modern Catholicism as he shewed how equally miracle-mongering they were.

And the orthodox apologists? What were they saying to all this? Dr Byrne has no reference to Bishop Butler in his Index, and only a passing reference to his *Analogy of Religion* in a paragraph about Hume. But if the reputation of Butler's 'probability' was a trifle exaggerated in his own time and in Gladstone's, there was some countering force in his maintaining how unsimple 'nature' is, or as the great Huxley paraphrased him, that 'there is no absurdity in theology so great that you cannot parallel it by a greater absurdity of Nature'. And, if not on account of the effectiveness of Butler's twin contentions that history is the record of nations going mad and nature the persuasive for 'redemption' as much as for 'creation', why did the deists fail to dislodge the received scriptural versions of Christianity in eighteenth century England? Handel's operas and oratorios brought back story-telling. Wesley's preaching revived that 'very horrid thing', a sense of the personal providence of God. Paley's evidences short-stopped several arguments. Each of these has been thought the effective defender of the faith. So, too, has Newman and his later effort to restore the reputation of the Fathers. But none of them is Dr Byrne's topic. He wants to get on to 'deism' after the deists.

His later chapters present nicely faced expositions of Herder and Schleiermacher, and a very interesting discussion of the complexities of Max Mueller's notions. Dr Byrne is, perhaps, about to attempt some restoration of Mueller's name, which has never been quite respectable since he was put on Jowett's shortlist for a contribution to *Essays and Reviews*. If so, then what Mueller says of religion somehow has to be preserved not only from what Hort termed 'the conspiracy of *clerus* and *populus* to destroy whatever threatens their repose', but the more scientific attack on his notion of 'myth'. He might find some use, in defending Mueller's references to myth as a 'disease' of language, in what Lonergan said about the relation of 'mystery' to 'myth'. Certainly there would be more help there than in the offerings of Stark and Bainbridge, or the Leland and Clarke revivalism of Abraham. But if, more generally, Dr Byrne is offering to stir up a conversation about 'our natural religiousness', then it might be better if he were to return to 'our hierarchy' as expounded by the Pseudo-Denys, or, if that seem too fanciful a project, then to examine again what is contained in Aquinas' sense of 'nature' as *gratiae capax*. He is, evidently, himself capable of making clear the relevance of any past theologian's work to our present concerns.

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