

Contemporary academic theology, in the opinion of Professor Mascall, is at once extremely confused and complacent; this has a dangerously demoralising effect on the life of the Church. Men in the pastoral ministry are faced with mountainous tasks, practical, intellectual, and spiritual; and are at best not helped, at worst grievously hindered by academic theology. This is not, as is often claimed, due to the laziness or timidity of the parochial clergy; it seems to Professor Mascall that the fault lies overwhelmingly on the academic side. Academic theologians, as he sees it, have gravely misunderstood the nature of their task, and performed it uncritically and inefficiently; they have been so keen to be accepted as intellectually respectable by their academic colleagues that they have taken for granted the de-supernaturalisation of Jesus; they have substituted the study of Christian psychology for that of divine revelation. Are they driven to this sell-out by the force of reasoning or the weight of the evidence? Not a bit of it, according to this author; their naturalistic explanations of the events which ground the history of the Church are by and large *less* coherent and plausible than the traditional supernaturalist ones. It is not the pressure of facts, but that of fashion, which has reduced theology to its present plight.

After his foreword, significantly entitled *Trahison des Clercs*, the author embarks on a discussion of the overall nature and tasks of theology; and outlines two constructive approaches, those of Torrance and Lonergan. Next he turns and rends the radical New Testament critics in the manner one has come to expect of him. He argues that New Testament criticism has got thoroughly out of step with literary criticism and historical scholarship in general; and comments caustically and at length on the view that the supernatural elements in the Gospels are to be attributed either to a myth-making faculty in the primitive Church, or to its propensity to find parallels between the deeds of Jesus and the stories of the Old Testament. He draws attention to Humphrey Palmer's unfortunately neglected work, on the patterns of reasoning

used, but not adverted to, by critics of the Gospels. He suggests that the assumption that the origins of Christianity are as the radical critics confidently maintain knocks the bottom out of Christianity for most people; and ministers of religion are driven either to an uncritical fundamentalism, or to a 'two truths' view with one picture-truth for the people and a very different esoteric truth for the clergy, or to an identity crisis instead of a faith for preaching and living. The third chapter is a survey of contemporary Christology, a high proportion of which is inspired, as the author sees it, 'by a mainly unconfessed and certainly uncritical mixture of unitarianism and adoptionism'. Authors of this school assume, rather than making any attempt to show, that belief in the real divinity of Christ is inconsistent with acknowledgement of his full humanity. Professor Mascall then turns 'with something of a feeling of relief' to the solid work on speculative Christology done by such theologians as Tresmontant, Bouyer and Galot, who all extend and build upon the traditional position, and exhibit 'no trace of Dr. Knox's extraordinary contention that it is impossible to have both the pre-existence and the humanity of Jesus.' There would of course be no point in defending the traditional formulations of the faith if they were really irrelevant, played out, and refuted by modern scholarship. But in fact, argues Professor Mascall, they are dynamic and flexible, and suggest all kinds of avenues of fruitful speculation by which they may be at once corroborated and brought up to date. If the Christology of Chalcedon is true, this does not mean that its mere re-assertion can solve all the Christological problems which trouble contemporary believers; but it does suggest that it would provide a useful starting-point for the solution of many of them. And that this is in fact so, the author argues with force, erudition, and clarity.

I do not expect many of Professor Mascall's opponents to come to agree with him. But I do believe that it is of some importance for the future of Christianity that they should take account of his arguments. Above all, they should attend to

the following questions: Apart from the case of a tiny minority of intellectuals, is Christian faith compatible with very radical scepticism about the historical accounts of the life of Jesus? Is such scepticism really the assured or the probable result of objective investigation of them? Is there perhaps a distinction between rejection as out-dated of what was meant by the ecumenical Councils of the Church,

and the re-expression of what they meant in terms which contemporary man can understand? Even if Professor Mascall were not right in many of his main contentions—and I am dreadfully afraid that he is—contemporary theology would be greatly indebted to him for his constant reminder that these questions are important.

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HUME'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION by J. C. A. Gaskin. *The Macmillan Press Ltd.* 1978 pp. x + 188 £10.00

John Hick's Library of Philosophy and Religion is notable for the high price of its issues. Are such expensive, though sometimes short, books really worth acquiring? Some of them are not, but Gaskin's is not among them. The print is minute and right-hand margins are unjustified, but the overall product is useful. A Dominican reviewer might be expected to relegate Hume to a footnote in the history of intellectual aberrations. But Hume is still, for better or worse and probably for worse rather than better, influential. Since he wrote a lot about religion this gives him a certain relevance to philosophical and non-philosophical theology. Unfortunately, however, many of his comments on religion are scattered. A complete picture depends on access to the *Dialogues*, *The Natural History of Religion*, the two *Enquiries*, the *History of England*, *A Treatise of Human Nature* and various letters and papers. Gaskin has examined all these and has provided a compact and coherent presentation of them insofar as they bear on religion. For this we owe him a debt of gratitude. The reader will wonder whether Gaskin has fairly represented Hume. As far as I can see he has. He has also improved on standard accounts of many of Hume's views by indicating their literary and historical context. In Chapter 7, for example, Hume's account of miracles is usefully situated against the eighteenth-century controversy about the miraculous, the work of Whiston, Collins, Woolston and Sherlock.

Many of the philosophical points made by Gaskin are cogent, if unoriginal (some, of course, derive from Hume). Others seem to me debatable, or at least in need of development. It is plainly wrong to deny that a conclusion has demonstrable

certainty if its denial is not self-contradictory (p. 83). That would mean that I cannot demonstrate that Socrates is mortal if he need not be. On p. 11 Gaskin says that "the teleological argument is vulnerable to any scientific advance (such as Darwin's theory of natural selection) which might show that the appearance of purpose in nature are explainable by reference to the operation of laws which have no foresight of the ends to be achieved." But the fact that I can explain fact A by fact B does not mean that I cannot explain both A and B with reference to some other fact. The fact that natural selection explains certain phenomena (if that is indeed true in the sense I take Gaskin to imply) does not mean that the data appealed to in supporting the theory of natural selection cannot or need not be explained by a theory favourable to a teleological argument or to something like one. Here it seems to me that Gaskin has gone wrong on questions of inference. And this is not the only place where this occurs. Gaskin agrees, for instance, that "Philo's conclusion that the original cause, *as inferred from the phenomena*, is non-moral (that is lacks any concern with or interest in the existence, let alone the happiness of men) is the correct inference from a non-selective and impartial view of the universe." (p. 44) Bearing in mind that this argument allows that there may be a designer of the universe, since men exist it is not an obvious inference that the designer lacks 'interest' in their existence. For if P is responsible for the existence of B by designing it, then it seems reasonable to believe that P has some 'interest' in the existence of B. And since men exist with the capacity for happiness it is not obviously best to infer that the designer is un-