

quote and the observer not having seen the pre-change state. However, this explanation falls within a wider explanation of 'science as gossip', so there seems to be a wider methodology involved.

As a general reader of a technical work agility of mind is called for in discerning various modes of talk; the sisters reporting in their own terms; the observer reporting the sisters in her terms; the observer talking to other observers; the observer talking to the general reader. A sisters' world, 'Canon.Law', becomes a surprisingly wide concept. An observer's word, 'magic', which I tend to interpret as 'vain signs' is defined here as 'ritual acts whose efficacy is unquestioningly believed by both actors and audience'. I do not understand how young sisters (p. 186) on this definition have belief in ritual symbols but not a magical belief in the efficacy of the sacraments. I feel the observer may have switched channels here. A quote speaks of the Eurcharist as 'dazzlingly magical'. In which frame of reference is this?

I felt the strongest part of the book was the comparison of the Teachers with the English and European background of their time. I would have liked to know why so many Irish girls joined such a congregation against such a background. The book leads to further questions, especially as the author had only limited access to information. The background of general social change is better portrayed than the background of general Church change.

The end of the analysis shows the problem of the initial presuppositions, especially the one that the startling difference between the congregations was the 'conservatism' of the Franciscans. They were shown to have flexible, problem-solving approaches to change. However, to say at the end that the two congregations have different forms but the same ideology goes beyond the evidence. The personal responses of the Franciscans were not so available as those of the Teachers. It is also difficult to assess what constitutes change of ideology, The book points to the subtlety of interplay between form and ideology; in that lies its value.

JONATHAN FLEETWOOD O. P.

**JESUS: AN EXPERIMENT IN CHRISTOLOGY** by Edward Schillebeeckx *Collins*, London, 1979 pp. 767 £9

Edward Schillebeeckx, with his (untranslated) study of St Thomas's theory of the sacraments, together with his books on marriage, on Christ as primordial sacrament, and on Our Lady, not to mention scores of essays on various subjects, is among the finest theologians, and certainly among the handful of important Catholic theologians, of our day. This book is the first volume of his attempt to rethink the main lines of classical Christology in the light of modern New Testament exegesis. It is, as he says, an "experiment", and it is not surprising that he sometimes falters. For that matter, as he also says (p. 34), "even failures – especially failures, perhaps – make one wiser". That the book has been delated to the Holy Office is a sad waste of his time and energy; but this will not stop his work from fertilising theological studies for many years to come. The Catholic Church shows a capacity to

tolerate almost any kind of craziness in the realms of devotion and spirituality, but attempts to translate doctrine into terms that might be intelligible to people who are still waiting to hear the Gospel are regularly greeted with suspicion. After all, St Thomas himself, posthumously, had propositions drawn from his works condemned by the Church on the grounds that he conceded too much to the philosophical fashion of his day. The missionary thrust of Schillebeeckx's book is very evident, and it has already proved capable of deepening many people's Christian faith. But it is hard going. In fact no one who could not make a discriminating judgment on the arguments would get past the first ten pages of the extremely dense and pretty jargon-ridden text. The sequel, which I have read in German, is even longer (890 pages!). It is required reading, for those who wish to follow Schillebeeckx's argu-

ment as a whole; and the second volume should set at rest the minds of those who have been made anxious about the author's Catholic orthodoxy.

Apart from a hundred pages of notes, indices, and valuable bibliographies, the book falls into four main sections. In the opening section, which runs to a hundred pages or so, Schillebeeckx surveys the problems the exegete faces in reconstructing the historical figure of Jesus. He intends the whole book, in effect, as a refutation of the Bultmannite thesis which makes the discontinuity between the so-called Jesus of history and the Christ of faith so radical that nothing certain can be discovered about the former at all – and this does not matter anyway or is even better so. Bultmann's Lutheran existentialist emphasis on the Christ of the kerygma is little different in effect from traditionally Roman Catholic monophysite tendencies to exalt the Christ of dogma. In both cases the historical Jesus disappears in a flight from the complex materiality of the New Testament text into the living voice either of the preacher or the Church. Against this Schillebeeckx insists on the possibility and the necessity of reconstructing the history of Jesus, to afford us the "norm and criterion" of all Christology.

The method which he adopts is to unravel the New Testament texts (in this volume confining himself mainly to Mark, Matthew and Luke), treating them as the multiple echo (to coin a phrase) of the historical Jesus. What kind of a man must Jesus have been and with what style of life and message, to produce precisely *those* effects: that is the general question. Thus, in the second section of the book, running to some three hundred pages, Schillebeeckx ransacks current exegesis in French, German and English as well as in Dutch, to recreate the history of Jesus from his baptism to the crucifixion. Against much Catholic as well as Protestant theology and piety, Schillebeeckx insists that a certain faith in Jesus had developed before his death, and that the disciples never completely lost faith in him. The decision for or against him was made definitively before his crucifixion, so that, in the case of the disciples, as they took to flight and betrayed him, they were only faltering in

the faith to which they were restored after his death. But neither he (against Bultmann) nor they could have been totally surprised by his death: at the Last Supper, even if they did not fully grasp it at the time, he communicated to them his understanding of his death as required by his mission (pp. 311-2).

The question of what happened after Jesus's death is the most controversial part of the book. As he insists later on (pp. 644 ff), Schillebeeckx totally rejects the view associated with Bultmann and Willi Marxsen according to which talk about the resurrection of Jesus refers to the restoration or even the creation of the Christian faith of the disciples. On the other hand, Schillebeeckx is just as opposed to the idea that the resurrection was simply the miraculous resuscitation of a corpse which should have been, and should be, equally acceptable to believer and unbeliever alike (p. 644). Following most scholars these days, he takes the empty tomb narratives first and, giving way to the fascination of an attractive but totally groundless theory, he interprets the story as the product of an annual pilgrimage by the Jerusalem church to the holy sepulchre (p. 336). He has two splendid pages on the profound symbolism of the opened tomb, which certainly mean no less on a more traditional interpretation of what happened. His presupposition is that the experience of the Easter event was prior to, and quite independent of, any visit to the tomb or any appearances such as Luke and John describe. In a brilliant comparison of the three versions of Paul's Damascus road experience (Acts 9, 22 and 26), Schillebeeckx argues that the original Easter experience of "seeing Jesus" was inseparably an experience of being forgiven which the disciples, and first of all Simon Peter, underwent – all along the lines of the "conversion" which Paul had. There is no question that, for Schillebeeckx, this Easter experience is to be regarded as an objective initiative by Jesus: "not a construct of men's minds, but revelation within a disclosure experience, in this case given verbal embodiment later on in the 'appearances' model" (p. 390). But that is surely the great question: "pure experiencing does not exist" (p. 392); but how can

we get at an experience which is so different from its apparently most central articulations? The dimension of forgiveness is certainly present in the resurrection scenes in Luke and John, and to highlight conversion and vocation in any account of them seems extremely important. It is all too easy to treat the resurrection of Jesus as a demonstration of supernatural biology quite independent of its ethical and eschatological context. But most readers will want to ask whether the disciples found themselves pardoned as they encountered the resurrected Jesus standing abruptly in front of them, or found the resurrected Jesus as they acknowledged themselves forgiven (p. 391). Professor Schillebeeckx recognizes that his hypothesis is a break with tradition (p. 710).

In the third section of the book (170 pages or so), Schillebeeckx sets about unravelling from the canonical gospels the various earlier attempts to articulate the significance of Jesus in the light of the Easter experience. One at once wants to say that he over-systematizes the in any case extremely fragile and arguable hypotheses of his favourite exegetes. But then if we were to wait for some cautious scholar to do better we should wait for ever. Either no one should attempt to organize the results of New Testament exegesis (which would be the majority view among liberal exegetes as well as neo-scholastics), or this is how it will be done, and Edward Schillebeeckx, as a preacher and an old-fashioned systematic theologian, is prepared to have a go. He thus lays himself open to objections from every quarter. By far the most vulnerable sections have to do with the exciting house of cards which he builds on the very hypothetical "Q" community and its evolving Christology. The distinctively Markan tradition, on the other hand, offers much more solid ground, and the possibility that there may have been a Christian community at the very beginning which remembered the historical Jesus and looked forward to his coming in glory but had no great interest in the soteriological significance of his death as such and no great interest in his resurrection appearances either (requiring correction in these matters) is very interesting from the point of view of the rare and

dying breed of the speculative theologian. A renewal of Christology might be possible, as Schillebeeckx says (p. 571), if we could retrieve the early Christological perspectives which were corrected or rejected – not to undo history but to quicken our sense of the options that have dominated since Nicaea.

In the fourth and final section (some hundred pages), Schillebeeckx criticizes much of the Christology that reflects the impact of the rationalism of the Enlightenment and then goes on to present faith in Jesus as the only way of making sense of suffering. He includes a lengthy meditation on the consciousness of Jesus as "Son", which turns into a fairly classical account of the theology of the Trinity. It is just as ridiculous to suspect his belief in the divinity of Christ as it is to suspect his faith in the objective reality of the Resurrection. Much of this section is philosophical: Strawson suddenly appears, in connection with the notion of 'person' (p. 662). There is a good deal of allusion to process theology. Incidentally, where did Wittgenstein make the remark ascribed to him (p. 581): "What were ducks before the revolution are rabbits afterwards"?

It seems to have been at a fairly late stage in the writing that a second instalment became inevitable (p. 669). The long chapters on John and Paul in the second volume would have been better placed before the concluding section of the first volume. This might have protected the author against the new wave of heresy hunters, and thus prevented his name from now being irretrievably smeared with suspicion in the minds of the many people who will never read his work. But his work is essentially incomplete, requiring re-reading and re-writing; its vulnerability, and the open invitation to collaborate in doing better, makes it a real experiment in thinking about Jesus. More than that, however, for one cannot but agree with Benoit Standaert when he writes, in rather lush French, at the end of a pretty severe review in the *Revue Biblique* (avril 1976), of this "great book": "vibrating from beginning to end with a faith fascinated by the person of Jesus, as confident in the efforts of critical reason as ready to worship God. More than for this or that particular state-

ment it is because of this powerful current running through it that the work deserves to be taken as seriously as it asks, and that

it will undoubtedly endure”.

FERGUS KERR O.P.

**BEYOND DEATH'S DOOR** by Maurice Rawlings. *Sheldon Press* 1979 pp. xiv + 172 £1.95

**TO DIE IS GAIN** by Johann Christoph Hampe. *Darton, Longman & Todd* 1979. pp. xiv + 145 £3.25

These books form part of the current wave of interest in the experiences of those who die and live to tell the tale. Not a few people, apparently, though they seem to be dead, later regain consciousness and recount strange experiences which, it seems reasonable to believe, they had during the time they were thought to be dead. It is held that such experiences are theologically interesting as giving evidence of the existence and nature of life after death. From the accounts given by Rawlings and Hampe, these experiences are, to those who have them, of profound significance, often changing the course of their lives and convincing them of life beyond the grave and of the truth of the religion of their childhood.

But to be convinced is not to be right, and it needs a great deal of investigation, empirical, conceptual and theological, to determine whether these experiences do in fact show what it is claimed they do. Dr Rawlings does not, it seems share this view. He is a doctor of medicine who spends much of his time resuscitating people whose hearts have stopped, and immediately asking them what they saw when they were dead. This he began to do after one patient, on reviving, cried in terror that he was in hell. After this 'I went home, dusted off the Bible and started reading it. I had to find out exactly what hell was supposed to be like . . . I was convinced there was something about this life after death business after all. . . . I was discovering that the Bible was not merely a history book. Every word was turning out to be true' (p.20). The doctor is easily convinced. I wish he had extended his sceptical attitude towards historians to the accounts he subsequently collected from many of his patients. He accepts enthusiastically and uncritically the most disparate accounts that

accord with his own version of Christianity (those that do not are, he suggests, probably the result of satanic deception). Doubters may at last rest assured, on the basis of the eyewitness testimonies here contained, that angels really do have wings (white ones) p. 97, and that hell really does contain a lake of fire and brimstone p. 107.

Hampe, a German Lutheran minister, has produced a much more serious book. He recognises some of the reasons why these reports of people 'back from the dead' must be treated with caution, and he does make an attempt at examining what they say critically, and from a theological standpoint. On the whole, though, he agrees that these experiences do indeed provide us with evidence of life after death. His book has its merits, including some interesting comments on contemporary attitudes to death. But it has serious weaknesses too. Hampe relies heavily on the experiences of those who believing themselves about to die, the 'my life passed before me in a flash' kind of experience associated with drowning or falling. Yet he fails to make clear how these can have any bearing at all on the question of life after death. Neither does he attempt to deal with what is the most obvious objection to the whole drift of what he and Rawlings have to say: the fact that the people of whom they write regained consciousness suggests that despite appearances they were not after all dead. It may be an interesting medical fact that people can remain alive for a time when their heart or even their brain has stopped working (though in many of the cases cited it is difficult to see how this latter could be established), but it is surely in this direction, if anywhere, that the evidence of these experiences points. Neither can we be impressed by the content of the experi-