

to creatures of any kind, whether human or non-human'. In effect, for Miller, as expounded by Brian Davies, Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity is so apophatic that it is indistinguishable from the negative theology of Maimonides that Aquinas rejected (q13, article 5).

However that may be, Barry Miller, speaking explicitly for 'classical theism' (page 160), has made out a good case for the viability of Aquinas's doctrine of God as *actus purus* — neither 'the alien void offered by negative theologians', nor 'the putatively perfect being that proves to be made in the image of man'. This 'most unlikely God', Miller insists, in his final challenging footnote, is certainly the God of the Bible — 'To the objection that the Bible not only makes no mention of his simplicity but speaks of him in a thoroughgoing anthropomorphic way, I reply that this is scarcely surprising, for the Bible is no more a philosophical treatise than it is a scientific one. We have no more right to expect it to describe God in philosophical terms than to describe the origin of the Universe in scientific terms'. Philosophical theology, as elegantly practised as it is in this slim book, cuts right to the centre of theology.

FERGUS KERR OP

FRANZ OVERBECK: THEOLOGIAN? RELIGION AND HISTORY IN THE THOUGHT OF FRANZ OVERBECK, by Martin Henry. *European University Studies, Series XXIII (Theology)*, vol. 536, Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Bern-New York-Paris-Vienna: *Peter Lang*, 1995. £36.

Franz Overbeck, professor of New Testament and Early Church History at Basel from 1870 until his early retirement in 1897, is not well-known, and even sometimes confused with Johann Friedrich Overbeck, the founder of the 'Nazarene' school of nineteenth-century German painters, as Martin Henry tartly points out in the very first footnote of this book (culprits include André Malraux and Hans Küng). It is Dr Henry's conviction—and that of David Tracy, in his justly warm endorsement of this book—that Overbeck deserves to be better known, indeed is an indispensable figure for our understanding of the plight of theology in the modern world. There are, however, formidable obstacles in the way of this deeper understanding. Although renowned for his learning, Overbeck published very little, and the selection from his *Nachlass*, published by his pupil and friend, C.A. Bernoulli, as *Christentum und Kultur*, is, as Henry demonstrates, inadequate and sometimes actually misrepresents Overbeck. Further, his thoughts are expressed in tortuous German. It is, in fact, easier to appreciate the historical significance of Overbeck, than to approach the man directly. While still a student, Overbeck experienced the dissolution of his Christian Protestant faith under the corrosive acids of modernity and modern critical scholarship. He never recovered his faith, and had nothing but contempt for liberal theology, which, in his view, failed to take the measure either of modernity or of the essentially ascetic nature of classical Christianity. In the case of Hamack, contempt turned to scorn for the self-important, and self-deceived, liberal *Hoftheologe*. This outright rejection of liberal theology was grist to Karl Barth's mill in his attack on liberal theology

that accompanied his embrace of the theology of crisis, although to speak of Overbeck's 'influence' on Barth is almost certainly mistaken. Overbeck's friendship with Nietzsche—though illuminating for his analysis of modernity—has not secured him from neglect.

In this book—based on his distinguished, and already much-cited, Oxford doctoral dissertation—Martin Henry essays an analysis and critique of Overbeck's contribution to theology and church history. To my mind, he makes out a first-rate case for seeing Overbeck as one in whom the problems of theology's confrontation with modernity (understood as the issue of the Enlightenment and Romanticism) can be perceived and understood with the utmost clarity. The case for Overbeck as intrinsically interesting seems to me less clear-cut. Martin Henry is an enormously talented cultural historian, or historian of ideas in their cultural context: his sense of the way in which the concerns of the Enlightenment and Romanticism played on the pulse of German thought and literature is exquisite, his citations from Goethe, Heine and others clearly the fruits of his own reading (not from the footnotes of others), and therefore fresh and to the point. This book (save for one reservation I shall come to later) constitutes an ideal exploration of the problems of nineteenth-century German culture and theology, approached through the example of the life and thought of Overbeck. Successive chapters deal with religion, 'Wissenschaft', history—both practice and process—, and finally theology. Each chapter presents a lucid analysis of the issue, and concludes with a critique of Overbeck's position. In particular, the contradictions and paradoxes involved in the commitment of the German academic, typified by Overbeck, to the rational analysis of the Enlightenment and the paramount value of experience for the Romantics are explored with clarity and insight. Henry's critique of Overbeck is restrained, though firm. It seems to me to be based on a kind of Rahneresque transcendentalism, the adequacy of which is not itself subjected to much probing. But there is an impressive consistency about what constitutes the nature of Christianity for Henry that, on some other occasion, begs to be explored for its own sake. One element in Henry's criticism of Overbeck seemed to me somewhat strained, and that is his objection that Overbeck's very obsession with the question of theology belies his conviction that theology was impossible in the modern world. It is not clear to me from what Henry says about Overbeck that this is altogether pertinent. Overbeck's sense of the prevailing determinism of history may have entailed that Overbeck himself had a role to play in the crisis for theology, predetermined by his academic role as a professor of theology. Certainly I sometimes felt I could hear in Overbeck's railing against the liberal theologians one who thought that his own integrity as an academic professor of theology was undermined by their triviality and superficiality: that fuelled his passion, rather than any underlying sense that theology itself is worth bothering about.

No one who can read this book will fail to be enlightened by pondering it. That statement, however, contains the reservation I referred to earlier. In revising his thesis, Martin Henry candidly confesses that he could not spare the time to translate the extensive quotations from Overbeck that

form a good part of the text (not just the footnotes, which add a great deal more) of this book. Given its tortuous nature, this renders his book more or less inaccessible to those who cannot cope with Overbeck's German: a considerable constituency. The lack of any index also makes less accessible than might be the most admirable aspect of this book: its insight into the theological and historical culture of late nineteenth-century Germany. I can think of no real excuse for the latter failing. The considerable chunks of untranslated German might, however, be justified on the grounds that no serious understanding of the crisis in German theology that Overbeck illustrates so well is possible without knowledge of the German tongue: a counsel of perfection that should not be forgotten.

ANDREW LOUTH

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX: BETWEEN CULT AND HISTORY by Adrian H. Bredero, Edinburgh: *T.&T. Clark*, 1996. xiv + 320 pp. £24.95.

This book does not seek to offer itself as a life of Bernard. Divided into an introduction and five subsequent chapters of very unequal length, it is concerned with three areas of enquiry, the not always apparent interconnections between which the author attempts to explain in the Introduction. The first, best and longest part deals with the earliest hagiographical evidence for Bernard's cult and the role this played in securing his canonisation. Three chapters on this are followed by an interesting, if somewhat tangential, study of historiographical views on Bernard, principally from the seventeenth century onwards. The final section, somewhat cryptically entitled 'Jerusalem Searched in the Light of Lamps: Bernard in his Monastic *Umwelt*' tries to suggest how he should be assessed in the context of his own times, in terms of both his contemplative and his active life. The book ends with two brief appendices, one providing a useful chronology of the period 1075 to 1174, and the other adding some further details on the textual arguments from the first section.

The word that comes to mind most frequently and most aptly in trying to describe this book is 'disconcerting'. At the simplest level such a feeling is engendered by the publishers' decision to print large sections throughout the book in a smaller font than that used for the rest of it. Does this imply that these paragraphs are of lesser importance or indeed may safely be skipped by readers in a hurry? Anyone experimenting with the latter would soon find out that this is not the case. No explanation is given, but it may be assumed that this represents an attempt to cram more words into fewer pages, which in the light of the reasonable price charged for the book may seem acceptable if eccentric. Rather more disconcerting than the constant change of font size is the language. The author's Dutch original of 1993 has here been translated into English by a non-native speaker, in a style that can be rather laborious and which can on occasion also be startlingly erroneous. Thus it is possible to find Pope Alexander III receiving 'the request of Bernard's canonisation' and subsequently finding that he 'had been discontent with' the role of abbot Pons of Clairvaux, while Bernard