

Reviews

CREATOR, CREATION AND FAITH. by Norman Young. *Collins, London, 1976.* 220 pp. £3.50.

This is a penetrating and stimulating book, by an Australian Methodist minister who has taught in the United States, Britain and New Zealand as well as in his own country. He is deeply convinced of the need of a theological concern with the created order if the Church is to speak prophetically to the contemporary world and if the unbridled exploitation of human creativity in a technological age is not to lead, first to man's enslavement by his own artefacts and then to their own self-destruction: "these creations of man that now threaten to enslave him also threaten the very existence of the world in which he is enslaved" (p 152).

The book falls into two main sections. In the first there is an exposition of the inter-related Biblical themes of Creation, Fall and New Creation. In the second the theological perspectives of four highly contrasted but equally influential modern writers are expounded and criticised: the transcendentalist Karl Barth, the ontological Paul Tillich, the existentialist Rudolf Bultmann and the eschatological Jurgen Moltmann. In this, the hard core of the book, the writer is working towards a position which will avoid both an extreme transcendentalist theology having no interest in human culture and society and an extreme immanentist theology which identifies God with Man's own aspirations and activities. In a brief concluding section, entitled "Living in the Created World", he lists the four options "as aliens", "in coalition", "as innovators", "as revolutionaries", but, in spite of his generally telling criticisms of them all, his own

position never clearly emerges. And I think that the chief reason for this is that, while he is acutely conscious of the differences in their attitudes towards creation of the writers whom he discusses, he appears to locate these differences simply in their beliefs about the Fall and redemption and not in their beliefs about creation itself. I am, however, convinced that the theological differences that have divided Christians (Greeks and Latins, Catholics and Protestants, Lutherans and Calvinists, and the various schools within each) lie far behind or beneath those that have been explicitly recognised and are rooted in the usually unformulated assumptions made about the character of the relation between finite being, including man in particular, and the God upon whose creative act it is entirely dependent. In other words, the basic problem is precisely that of creation, and not that of fall and redemption, essential as of course these latter are.

This, then, is, as I see it, the weakness in what is in other respects an outstanding book. It is perhaps revealing that, in spite of his wide human concern, the writer should have confined his discussion to four thinkers who, for all their differences, come out of the same Teutonic Protestant background. It is particularly regrettable that there is no reference to the highly relevant work of such modern Eastern Orthodox theologians as Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff, who, whether we go all the way with them or not, have so much fresh air to let into the supercharged atmosphere of our Western controversies, and not least on this question of creation.

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SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP, by Aelred of Rievaulx. Trans. Mary Eugenia Laker SSND. *Cistercian Publications (CF 5).* 1974. 144 pp. £5.00.

After an unhappy hiatus, the Cistercian Fathers have at last been resurrected, and volumes long overdue are now actually appearing, and are available in Eng-

land through Mowbrays.

One of the most eagerly awaited at the time of the collapse was Aelred's *Spiritual Friendship*. Now that it is here,

it is, frankly, a disappointment. The introduction by Douglas Roby is excellent; the editorial notes by Basil Pennington are useful, though maybe a few more should have been added—for instance, 2:22-3 explaining the nature of a kiss as a mingling of breaths would have been a little more intelligible if the reader had been made aware that the latin word is *spiritus*, though even so the whole passage remains rather a foreign body (a similar concept is found in William of St Thierry's Exposition of the Canticle, but there it is much more at home, precisely because William, unlike Aelred, exploits the ambivalence of *spiritus*). But the actual translation by Sr Eugenia Laker is a disaster. The general editor assures us that it is a "beautiful translation". *Salva reverentia*, it is not; it is inelegant and stilted, sometimes to the point of unintelligibility—people are said, for instance, to "fuse their spirits by tinder, as it were" (3:86)! We are also assured that, though the translation was originally done on the basis of the text in Migne, it has been "carefully edited and revised in the light of the critical edition". Once again, it has not. I detected several places where totally indefensible Migne readings have survived (e.g. 2:10; 3:24; 3:41), and others where a manifestly inferior Migne reading is maintained (e.g. 2:27). And, quite apart from that, the translation is riddled with inaccuracies from cover to cover. And, to crown it all, the printer has contributed a few bright ideas of his own. Between them, the printer and the translator assure us that our friend should have suave manners (3:89), should rejoice in our adversity (2:10—adversity apparently translating *secunda!*), and that he should reprove us "without incentive" (3:104). Sounds a nice kind of guy!

Like many another's before her, Sr Eugenia's nerve seems to fail from time to time before the complexities of the latin language. On the rare occasions when Aelred's syntax becomes a bit complicated, she appears to shut her eyes and hope for the best. Thus, for instance, 3:102, which is perfectly plain if one has the patience to work it out, is reduced to

utter nonsense.

She also seems positively to rejoice in misunderstanding the logic of Aelred's thought. With extraordinary persistence she mistranslates his connecting particles when they are there, and otherwise supplies misleading ones of her own. Thus *autem* becomes "for", and *nam* becomes "but", disjunctives turn into conjunctives, "and"s and "but"s swap roles like a feast of fools.

Further fun is to be had by frequently linking the words in a sentence wrongly, by misreferring pronouns, and by recklessly transliterating latin words into the English words that happen to look like them (*honestas*: "honesty", *securitas*: "security"; *suavitas*: "suavity" and so on). Perfectly simple idioms like *aeque . . . ut* lead to extravagant contortions, as in 2:11 where Cicero's definition of a friend as one *cum quo aeque audeas loqui ut tibi* becomes "one to whom you dare to speak on terms of equality as to another self".

In several passages the argument is entirely shattered, as in 2:21, where Aelred is arguing that one can ascend by way of human friendship with God; Sr Eugenia ingeniously makes nonsense of it all by taking "of one heart and mind with him" to mean "with Christ" (which is jumping the gun): it unambiguously means "with one's friend".

And so one could go on. The result of all this is that the unwary reader will get a very false picture of Aelred's thought. And this is tragic, because the Spiritual Friendship is an important monument of the tradition of monastic *amicitia*, and it remains one of the most valuable attempts to situate it theologically in relation to supernatural charity on the one side and spontaneous human affection on the other; it also offers practical advice that is still helpful, on how to progress towards friendship, for instance, not least in the element of deliberate choice there should be before one admits someone to full intimacy, and on how to behave to one's friends in various situations (such as when a friend proves unfaithful in some way); it even touches on the question of

the physical expression of friendship, a point on which Aelred seems to have been unusually unembarrassed, regarding holding hands in the monastery without suspicion, for instance. With regard to kissing, he simply and wisely says that the occasion for it should be determined externally rather than emotionally (which obviously is not to say that it must be devoid of emotion!).

TIME FOR CONSENT: A CHRISTIAN'S APPROACH TO HOMOSEXUALITY by Norman Pittenger. SCM Press Third edition, enlarged and revised, 1976. £1.80. 104 pp.

Christian homosexuals have traditionally been given the choice between a celibacy which they would not willingly have chosen and, at any rate in the case of Catholics, exclusion from the Eucharist. Dr Pittenger's book argues that a new Christian approach is urgently needed. He makes the point, which unfortunately still needs to be made, that people do not choose to go against their natural instincts and become homosexual in some spirit of decadent perversity, but that they *are* homosexual, for whatever reason. Dr Pittenger, I think rightly, doesn't regard the reason as being of any great importance; what matters is how the fact itself is to be dealt with. He argues that both of the traditional alternatives are deeply undesirable, and that homosexuality must be assimilated into Christian moral theology as a way of loving, not anathematized as a vice.

To begin with, it is undeniable, he says, that a "homosexual problem" exists. But whose problem is it? James Baldwin remarked that what used to be known as the Black Problem is in fact the White Problem, arising as it does from the fact that many whites refuse to regard blacks as fellow human beings. In the same way, Dr Pittenger sees the homosexual problem as that of "the prejudiced and condemnatory heterosexual." For homosexuals there is nothing problematic about their own natural feelings, only about society's attitude to them. As an example of this, Pittenger points out that most heterosexuals (and, I would add, most homosexuals) are very ready to despise men who look for sexual encounters in public lavatories,

Now that Dom Hoste has given us a good critical edition of the Latin text of this charming and important work, it is devoutly to be hoped that someone will give us a decent English version. Maybe we could even persuade Cistercian Publications to withdraw this ghastly travesty, and find a new version more worthy of their own high standards.

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without stopping to reflect that, as the author puts it, many men "may be driven to such expedients ... because society has made a different approach not only difficult but often impossible for them." In other words, it should be obvious that most people don't actually *prefer* to meet their sexual partners in these circumstances.

At this point I should say that I'm uneasy about two of Dr Pittenger's attitudes. First, he is very concerned to insist that most homosexuals are *ordinary* people, who don't frequent public lavatories, aren't effeminate, aren't detectable, and so on. I find this kind of pleading rather suspect. It reminds me of Terence O'Neill's reassuring Ulster loyalists that if Catholics are given good jobs and good houses they behave just as Protestants do. I can see no justification for the assumption that there is something inherently wrong and unacceptable about being effeminate, or that "masculine" attributes, as Dr Pittenger later implies, are somehow "natural" and not themselves inculcated by social conditioning. Secondly, he seems to regard acts of promiscuity as incompatible with the desire for a permanent relationship, and notices that this desire is strong and widespread among homosexuals. But surely it is reasonable to see promiscuous behaviour, in many cases, as the search for a permanent relationship which hasn't as yet been achieved.

At the same time, in what seems a contradictory way, Dr Pittenger recognises this when he quotes, approvingly, the judgement of a fictional priest that the man who rings the doorbell of a brothel is