THE CHRISTIAN GOD by Richard Swinburne, Oxford, *Clarendon Press*, 1994; 261 pps., Hardback and Paperback.

This book is an elegant, incisive, provocative, lucid and concise masterpiece. It is divided into two parts. The first sets out a set of metaphysical theses about substance, thisness, causation, time and necessity. The importance of this section is that it shows the necessity of metaphysical thinking in theology, and provides a very good introduction to contemporary philosophical thought in the analytical tradition. It is hard going, since Swinburne's arguments seem to get shorter as he gets older. But it should be required reading for theologians, both to show how difficult their discipline really is, and to expose the absurdity of the claim, still sometimes heard from non-philosophers, that metaphysics is finished.

Having argued for a number of positions, many of them highly contentious, like mind-body dualism and a causal theory of time, Swinburne proceeds, in part two, to deal briskly with God, the Trinity and the Incarnation. In dealing with the divine properties, he defends a temporalist view of God, defining omniscience as 'knowledge of all propositions that it is logically possible for any being at some time to entertain then'. He argues that all the divine properties are entailed by the one simple property of pure, limitless, intentional power. There is one major development from his earlier books. He used to argue that God is the only divine individual. Now, however, he argues that there are three divine individuals, three souls (subjects of mental life), bound together indivisibly to form the Trinitarian ground of being. For an omnipotent and omniscient being will, he argues, necessarily be perfectly good, and a perfectly good being will 'create other persons'. Developing an argument from Richard of St. Victor, he claims that it will create other divine persons, with which to share love and co-operate in sharing love. This means, he says, that there will be just three divine individuals, and no more, bound to one another in necessary agreement and differentiated only by their relational properties. It also means that no being is ontologically necessary (uncaused), but the three divine persons are metaphysically necessary, necessarily causing each other, either actively or permissively.

This argument is dense but lucid, and he describes it as a moderate form of social Trinitarianism. It deserves careful attention, and I will only say here that I am not persuaded of the coherence of the idea that there can be three omnipotent beings. God the Father has the power to destroy the Son, though he necessarily will not exercise that power, because of his goodness. But the Son does not have the power to destroy the Father, who is uncaused and indestructible. Moreover, the Son's power is wholly dependent on the Father, being wholly caused by the Father. Swinburne suggests that the Father's power is dependent on the Son's permissive causality,

but the fact is that he could not be destroyed by the Son. The Son does not hold the Father in being, and could not really destroy the Father. This is a difference in power. In any case, this model is too close to tritheism for my liking. If one thinks it important to maintain that there is only one omnipotent God, a different (more Rahnerian?) account will have to be given of the threefoldness of that one God. Nevertheless, no theologian can afford to overlook the powerful and intriguing arguments which Swinburne provides.

The book ends with two chapters defending what Swinburne regards as a Chalcedonian doctrine of Incarnation. Jesus is an essentially divine soul, which cannot lose any of its divine properties. This soul takes on 'a human way of thinking and acting'. But, though Jesus is essentially omnipotent and omniscient, He exhibits a 'divided mind', the human consciousness having incomplete access to the divine, but the divine having complete access to the human. I doubt if this view is implied by the Chalcedonian definition. It makes the Word too much like a soul, and deprives Jesus of a truly substantial human soul. One also feels uncomfortable about attributing to God a divided mind, which entails that part of God has experiences (of ignorance) that the whole of God does not. What is the difference between what Swinburne calls a 'Nestorian' account of God causally uniting a human soul to himself and the divided divine mind account, except the verbal difference that in the latter case one *calls* the human soul divine? Swinburne's antipathy to modern theology is almost total, and he rapidly dismisses virtually all contemporary Christologies as Nestorian. At the same time, his own theory is distinctively post-Cartesian, in its reliance on views like substance-dualism, the divided-mind doctrine and the interpretation of the divine hypostases as individual souls. Thus he finds himself in the Janus-like role of confronting almost every contemporary theologian with a strongly orthodox-sounding view of the Trinity and of Christology, while at the same time reinterpreting the orthodox views in terms of concepts almost wholly alien to them. That, at least, is my view of the matter. What is indisputable is that the book is clear and powerful in argument. It is merciless to woolliness of thought, and it presents views which demand to be taken account of by contemporary theologians. It treats theology as a discipline demanding rigour. Much of it, Christians will surely think, is true, and all of it is worth-while and supremely well said, with the icy clarity and relentless precision that is the mark of much Oxford philosophy. For once the blurb is right: this will no doubt become a classic in the philosophy of religion.

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