

CHRISTIANITY AT THE CENTRE, by John Hick, *S. C. M. Centrebooks*, 1968. 124 pp. 35s
 WHO IS GOD?, by D. W. D. Shaw, *S. C. M. Centrebooks*, 1968. 126 pp. 8s 6d

These two books, which are the first two of a series of six, are intended for the intelligent but untrained reader to give him a brief account of the tenets of Christianity with a discussion of some of the major objections that have been raised against them. John Hick's book deals with the person of Christ, the resurrection, the reasonableness of belief in God and the problems raised for such belief by the existence of evil, modern science and verification, D. W. D. Shaw's book examines what we mean by the word 'God' and discusses the various attributes that have been traditionally given to God and the problems that these raise.

My main difficulty with John Hick's book is that it does not live up to the title. Although his discussion of the person and ministry of Christ has much to commend it, we never really discover what Christianity is supposed to be at the centre of. Anybody with Marxist sympathies will be disappointed to find that there is no sense of Christianity as a revolutionary movement conveyed at all. Indeed, even for the merely liberal, there is little mention of Christianity as a movement for social change and reform. True, the author discusses whether belief in Christ makes any difference to one's way of life and what is the essence of Christ's teaching on morality, but this is done so sketchily and in such individualistic terms that it has very little bite to it at all. In fact his own presentation of Christianity is very much as a system of 'things to be believed', despite the author's castigation of Aquinas for the same crime. He dismisses with very little discussion the ancient theories of the atonement and offers us something which, though interesting in its presentation of Christ and his death as a revelation of God's love, simply fails to do justice to some of the main Pauline doctrines concerning the redemption. The other great omission from this book is any adequate treatment of grace and the Church. The editors of this series have planned a separate volume on the Church, it is true, but surely a

fuller discussion of the Church is called for in this volume than the author gives us. He treats the Church almost entirely as an institution which has lamentably failed to live up to its ideals. While this is undoubtedly true, it falls far short of a description of the reality of the Christian community as the Body of Christ in which, through men, God realises his purpose for the world. In short, the presentation of the message of Christianity that we find in this book is theologically inadequate in a way that can only be misleading.

Both John Hick and D. W. D. Shaw are clearly more interested in problems raised in the area of philosophy of religion and in this both volumes are much more satisfactory. The prospects of anyone being able to say the last word on any of the topics they discuss is dim indeed, and both authors have obviously experienced some difficulty in knowing just how to present them, since no philosopher could be satisfied with the sort of solutions they propose in the space available. This is not really a criticism, since surely the purpose of bringing these sort of problems to the attention of the 'untrained reader' is to encourage him to think the thing through for himself and in so doing to see the inadequacy of most of the solutions. But both writers present these problems in an interesting and intelligible fashion which is a real achievement, even though I think that more guidance might have been given to the reader to pursue the various topics further. It is a great pity that neither writer really discusses existentialism at any length, surely one of the most important movements critical of theism and one which has also contributed much to modern theological thought. Both authors might have made something of this with great profit. But despite the deficiencies of these two books, both of them could be used to provide stimulating material in sixth-form discussion groups at part of a reflective and intelligent approach to theology.

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