

and more these fundamental questions are being asked by theologians, and philosophers—the thinkers behind what has been termed “Radical Orthodoxy” and the work being done in Catholic theology in response to *Fides et Ratio*, spring immediately to mind, (although not mentioned in *The Practice of Theology*.) For many teachers of theology this reader will be welcomed as an accessible starting place, and shared basis upon which to build contemporary theology on the basis of fundamental, methodological understanding.

But a starting place is all it can, really, be—as I think the editors themselves realise. Perhaps, in the end, it is not so much a box of chocolates, but more a plate of varied *hors d'oeuvres*; if the appetite is thereby stimulated for sturdier nourishment a good job will have been done. But there is always the risk of spoiling our appetites.

CLARE WATKINS

SEVEN WORDS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY by Edmund Newell and others, *Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 2002, Pp.xviii + 116 + CD, £16.95,pbk.,*

The Passiontide devotion of the “Seven Last Words on the Cross” originated, somewhat surprisingly, in the New World and by the end of the eighteenth century it had reached the South of Spain. The famous performance in the cathedral at Cadiz in 1783 set the seal upon this format because the music was written by Joseph Haydn and is amongst his most famous compositions – there being an orchestral and a chamber edition, as well as the original choral. Bishop Richard Harris, in the Introduction, gives an excellent account of its genesis, history and spiritual significance. The format was simple: the text was read, a sermon preached, a movement of the musical work was performed, and a period was devoted to silence and meditation. After all of the seven words Haydn’s score went on to provide a shattering representation of the earthquake that occurred at Christ’s death.

The piety of the time was devotional and inward looking. Both sermon and music were designed to foster this spirit. In this particular case it favoured the highest quality in music, but one would suspect that the spirituality was by contrast escapist and private – perhaps more along the lines of the *Imitatio Christi* than the slant given to Christian spirituality by, say, Liberation Theology.

This book, as the title makes clear, offers us a version of this format for the 21st Century. The sermons are ‘preached’ by a number of notable Anglican divines, of whom the most famous is Rowan Williams. They are specifically outward-looking, seeking the words of the Gospel in our neighbours, seeking to find out who those neighbours may be. For the most part they are, I think, essentially successful. I will not, however, offer awards and prizes.

The music by Adrian Snell, as one might expect, is less of an easy matter to judge. Apart from anything else the format itself sets it up in

competition with one of the greatest composers' masterpieces, but there are other reasons for serious doubt. It wisely avoids closer comparison by being set for the most part for piano alone, whether helpful or not for 'meditation' – or I would prefer to say 'commitment' and/or 'engagement' – I would hesitate to judge. The use of occasional cello and recorder lightens the texture, and perhaps 'points' the message.

The trite and over-earnest unctuousness, however, with which the 'Credo' is performed, might be suitable to the style of The Vineyard, certainly not to anything that I have successfully experienced – the *Reproaches* for example. It goes to the words (the fifth cluster) "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The constant repetition of the fact that we believe in the sun's existence even when it is not shining on us would seem to me theologically suspect in the extreme when applied to our belief and anxieties with regard to God. The music at best, I suggest, does not match up to the overall concept nor to the individual 'sermons'.

What is really good about this book and its accompanying CD is, I feel, that it makes a bold attempt to break away from the pietistic approach to the Passion of Christ which has been throughout the ages essentially 'private' and has done a lot to block the Gospel message. The uneasy attempt to wed words to music, however, and perhaps an uncertainty about audience (indicated possibly by the fancy lettering which, thank God, ends by and large with page vi) somewhat limit its effectiveness.

GILES HIBBERT OP

THE BIBLE IN THE RENAISSANCE. ESSAYS ON BIBLICAL COMMENTARY AND TRANSLATION IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES edited by Richard Griffiths [*St Andrews Studies in Reformation History*] Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002, Pp.204, £47.50 hbk.

The story of the bible during the Renaissance and the Reformation is one of ambivalences and tensions that were largely common to both Catholics and Protestants alike, and defy any simplistic categorization according to confessional lines. Neither side had at first any kind of clear-cut stand on issues of exegetical methods and the ultimate purpose of biblical studies and translations.

Was the principal preoccupation to be with the scriptures as preached or the scriptures as read? Were the hallowed, allegorical techniques of patristic and medieval exegesis (the very stuff of popular preaching hitherto) simply to be discarded and replaced by the new humanist, philological and exegetical skills first applied to the sacred text by Lorenzo Valla and popularised at the beginning of the 16th century by Erasmus and his emulators? Indeed, was it even appropriate to deal with the biblical text as if it were just another classical source, thereby running the danger of forgetting its status as the inspired Word of God, the measure of all piety and aspirations to reform? Finally, was it at all