

Reviews

CREATION, by Claus Westermann. Translated by John J. Scullion SJ. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1974. x + 124 pp. £1.50.

Dr Westermann is engaged upon a great commentary in the German style on the book of Genesis. We are here offered a very readable translation of his study of the first three chapters. It must, however, be recognised at the start that one of his basic convictions is that the first eleven chapters, for all the diversity of origin of their material, form a carefully integrated whole and that much harm has been done by assuming that all the theology is to be found in the first three. For him, man's relation to his neighbour and to nature are as central as his relation to God.

Westermann finds the creation material not only in near-Eastern religion but in the consciousness of mankind as a whole. And, he tells us, 'it can be shown that the narrative of the creation of man is older than that of the creation of the world. The present state of our knowledge tells us that the stories of the creation of the world were formed first in the high cultures, while the stories of the creation of man everywhere stretch right back into the primitive cultures' (p. 71). Without any attempt at demythologising in the common and crude sense he maintains that modern anthropology, psychology and cosmology make the old type of conflict between science and Christianity irrelevant. And he gives an original exposition of the relation between creation and redemption in the Old Testament. 'The creation of the world is not an object of belief, but a presupposition for thought. God's saving action can

be an object of belief; Creation cannot' (p. 114). And again: It is essential for understanding the Old Testament that the relationship between Creation and redemption consists in a polarity. The attempt is nowhere made to bring both under the one notion. And so there is no all-embracing notion of revelation or belief. One must speak of them side by side. They cannot be brought under the one label; or, in other words, what is common to Creation and redemption is not a notion of belief or of revelation; it is God himself. The work of the Creator both in the Old and in the New Testament has its own setting; it has a different origin and history from the work of the saviour' (p. 117).

Whether the somewhat involved chapter in which this passage occurs amounts to a Biblical (or even perhaps a German Protestant) exposition of the distinction, more common to Catholic than to Protestant theology, between natural and revealed knowledge of God I am not altogether sure; if it does it would seem to provide the basis for an irenic and fruitful ecumenical dialogue. We are told that the tenth and concluding fascicule of volume one of Dr Westermann's Commentary, covering the first eleven chapters and consisting of eight hundred pages, is just about to appear in German. As it is unlikely to be read in its entirety by many English students, Fr Scullion's rendering of the author's presentation of the earlier part is particularly welcome.

E. L. MASCALL

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF, by Thomas McPherson. *Hutchinson University Library*, London, 1974. 132 pp. £3.50 (also available in paperback).

A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO RELIGION, by W. Donald Hudson. *Macmillan*, London, 1974. 200 pp. £4.95.

Professor McPherson has written a useful book for those who wish to become acquainted with philosophical ways of examining the nature of religious belief. This volume is a good exposition of the issues an undergraduate could be expected to find in a course on the Philosophy of Religion. The author writes only of Christian religious belief and focuses his attention on topics such as the nature of religious belief and how it might be attained,

doubt and scepticism in relation to religion, and reductionist accounts of religious belief. He also looks at the traditional theistic 'proofs'; the problem of evil, and Freudian criticisms of religious belief. Terms that are characteristic of Christian theism, such as miracle, soul, Christian virtue, sin and grace all come under his scrutiny, before the work ends with a comparison between science and religion and an examination of the possibility of offering

rational grounds for religious belief. It is a worthy contribution to that tradition that sees the philosopher's task as an underlabourer clearing the rubbish from around our ideas. Clarity is by any account a valuable achievement, but in this case I think it is achieved partly by misunderstanding the developing nature of religious belief. To maintain that philosophy is utterly incapable of understanding satisfactorily the nature of religious belief is always a temptation for the religious believer who can pull down the shutters and invoke the First Letter to the Corinthians (1.18-25). But in this particular case I think that the lack of understanding is not necessary. It is clear that the religious belief of which McPherson speaks is fairly static. Not sufficient allowance is made for theology as a developing discipline. This becomes clear when he states: 'The subject matter of theology is a body of doctrine. This is *given*; and although there is room for conjecture about the interpretation of particular pieces of doctrines, the doctrines themselves are not held as conjectures or hypotheses' (p. 110). McPherson is contrasting science 'as dealing in hypotheses . . . and theology as dealing in a body of given doctrine' (p. 110). What is meant here by the 'given'? Of course any discipline has to work with the 'given' of its tradition, but I suspect here that McPherson is speaking of the 'given' in some absolute way, thereby condemning the theologian to a mere syphon for the 'given'. The inadequacy of this conception of the theology (for that is ultimately what is at issue) is the same inadequacy that we find in the sources of the English Empirical tradition (Locke, Berkeley and Hume), where the pursuer of knowledge plays no significant role in the establishment of what is known other than as a passive recipient. Any account of the achievement of human knowledge (and I am including theology as part of that achievement) must pay attention to both the knower and the external world about which knowledge is claimed. Any attempt that neglects either one of these two (as do both Idealism and Empiricism) cannot adequately describe the phenomenon of knowledge. Only when epistemology (and a fortiori theology, as well as the philosopher talking about theology) takes seriously its own subjectivity can we hope for an adequate description of the way it functions.

On his own acknowledgement, Professor McPherson refrains from discussing whether religious belief is meaningful, and whereas such a decision may be justified in such a book because of the size of the problem, his book does lack balance because we practice philosophy within a tradition, conscious that the Philosophy of Religion can never pretend that its ground has not been radically shifted by the work of Wittgenstein.

Donald Hudson begins his book (which is based on the Whitley Lectures given in London

and Manchester in 1970-71) by reminding us of the salient points in Wittgenstein's position, which are to be found in the *Philosophical Investigations* and his *Lectures on Religious Belief*. Already, in a small book on him published by Lutterworth Press in the series *Makers of Contemporary Theology*, he has outlined Wittgenstein's thesis and posed three questions which are inescapable if religious belief is conceived as a Wittgensteinian language-game. In this present book he sets out to discuss these same three questions: Does religion make sense in that it is about something which really or objectively exists? Does it make sense in that its basic concepts and processes of thought are intelligible to modern men? Does it make sense in that it is or can be rational? In answering these three questions, Hudson merely reminds us of the implications of the ideas presented in the *Investigations*.

To answer the first question, he takes us over the well-trodden grounds of the theistic 'proofs', and it is not surprising to find him rejecting them all. It is to McPherson's credit that he expects less of these 'proofs', and Hudson too holds that the existence of God is the presupposition of all religious language-games (Aquinas, although usually used as a *locus classicus* for such 'proofs', holds a similar view: cf. *Summa Theologiae* I a., q. 1, art. 8). To question whether or not those who play the religious language-game are deluded is to fail to understand fully Wittgenstein's thesis. The question cannot be answered within the religious universe of discourse because there the existence of God is presupposed. Neither can it be answered in any non-religious universe of discourse because each such universe only functions on given presuppositions and there is no ultimately correct way of evaluating all such fields of meaning. To expect to find one is to revert to the position of the *Tractatus*. It must be a temptation to the religious believer, and one he should not give in to, that having been granted philosophical respectability by the later Wittgenstein, he should turn and claim for his position a finality that accords with the *Tractatus*.

To answer the third question Hudson examines the ways in which the Christian might fulfil the demands of rationality, which he expresses as: suiting beliefs to evidence; avoiding self-contradiction; using language intelligibly; pursuing a policy only if one judges the expected gain from doing so to exceed the expected gain from not doing so; and holding all one's beliefs open to criticism. It is somewhat surprising to find Hudson arguing to avoid the charge of Wittgensteinian fideism only to find himself in a position in which he might be characterised as a latter-day Deist. His demonstration of the way in which Christians might meet the various demands of rationality is perhaps saved from that charge only because the idea of rationality that was the basis of the

Deist claim has long since been rejected, with the *Philosophical Investigations* helping in its demise.

Both of these questions (the first and third) can be adequately met from the resources of Wittgenstein's thesis. The most challenging of the three questions is the second: if it is possible for language-games to become obsolete, is the religious language-game redundant now? Hudson poses this question in the light of the growth of secularisation. He contains the attack by merely re-asserting the later Wittgenstein's view of language, thereby rebuffing what he takes to be the main enemy, Logical Positivism. This is the least satisfactory part of the book and it is sad that Hudson should see in *Language, Truth and Logic* the main philosophical challenge to religious belief. That he does so is an indication of the insularity of the English philosophical tradition. Any honest attempt to meet this challenge must at least face up to the radical humanist critiques of Feuerbach, Marx and Freud. The point of their criticism is that to indulge in religious language-games is to evade the full claims of our humanity. What the user of religious language has to do to meet their challenge is to

speak of the human conditions in such a way as to show that by using such a language he is embarking on an attempt to face up fully to the problem of what it is to be human. By using the religious language-game man is taking his existence seriously, by refusing to accept his present as his end. By entertaining a Wittgensteinian 'picture', the religious believer is holding his life under a constant and continuing critique, thereby fully facing up to the problem of his humanity. One may ask the further question (not done so by Hudson in this book though he does raise it in his smaller book on Wittgenstein): Is the religious language-game likely to become an outmoded one? Without trying to answer this question by crystal-gazing, one could say that any attempt to be human that does not subject itself to the critique that is at present offered by the Christian language-game would be a misunderstanding of the human condition. Whether the entertaining of different 'pictures' would serve as well as the Christian 'pictures' can only be the subject of a continuing critical examination, in one's attempt to grasp and discriminate among the possible meanings of the human condition.

JOHN IBBETT

IDEAS OF ORDER: THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY RENEWAL OF ANGLICAN THEOLOGICAL METHOD, by Hamish F. G. Swanston. *Van Gorcum, Assen, The Netherlands, 1974.* 244 pp. 38-50 guilders.

In 1861 F. J. A. Hort wrote to John Ellerton of the debate in the Convocation of Canterbury concerning the composite volume of liberal theology, *Essays and Reviews*: 'Surely this wretched paltering with great questions must soon come to an end, or else the Church itself'. It is Dr Swanston's intention to chart the emergence of a more serious and profound response to the great questions of theological truth than the mere conservative reiteration of old answers and traditional defences of an orthodoxy framed in an age remote from the challenges of evolutionary theory and the critical study of the Bible.

He does this by focusing on four rather different Anglican theologians of the nineteenth century: R. D. Hampden, H. L. Mansel, F. D. Maurice and Benjamin Jowett. As his subtitle implies, he looks to see in them a renewal of Anglican theological method, but the impression with which one is left is one of variety, if not of confusion. This is partly the consequence of the different theological stances of the theologians studied—Hampden ranged himself against *Essays and Reviews*, to which Jowett was a contributor; Mansel and Maurice clashed sharply on a number of occasions—but it also appears to reflect a certain lack of clarity in the author's intention in bringing together these four important

representatives of nineteenth-century Anglican theology, and a failure to argue thoroughly the case he wishes to make. The book is uneven, at times rambling, and in some places rather opaque. These deficiencies are not helped by the inexcusable number of misprints—sometimes involving the transposition of whole lines and phrases—for which it would seem the foreign publishers should bear full responsibility.

This having been said, it is fair to point out that Dr Swanston does make a number of important points. He stresses the way in which Paley's apologetic was replaced by that of Bishop Butler, and how Butler was variously used by different theologians, Newman and Maurice appealing primarily to his doctrine of conscience, Hampden and Mansel drawing more on the argument of the *Analogy*. He rightly insists on the importance of Mansel's turning his attention to the limits of the human mind, expressed in his dictum that 'the primary and proper object of criticism is not religion, natural or revealed, but the human mind in its relation to religion'. The awareness of the constraints placed on theological discourse by the fact that it is the discourse of limited, human minds, is of great significance in the pattern of development of nineteenth-century theology, though Dr Swanston