

made in the first chapter by a student: "We were never given anything like that at school. Mark you", she added, "if we had been, we wouldn't have listened." So true. Without for a moment minimising the importance of good content in school RE teaching (and especially at sixth form level), the concept of "readiness" is very significant; however good the teaching may be, many pupils simply do not have the "ears to hear with". Moreover the stress on growth in faith (and in the understanding of faith) for adults implies the need for a number of publications for the adult market in just such non-technical language as this work achieves. So far they are few and far between.

Given the compass of the book there are bound to be some gaps. Nonetheless some will find it surprising that there is no section on prayer. The laudable desire to avoid technical language also leads to some unexpected omissions, of which 'grace' is the most obvious. But these are relatively minor matters and in any case do not detract from the overall merits of this book which is to be thoroughly recommended for the readership proposed and particularly for the interested non-Catholic.

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**THINKING ABOUT GOD, by Brian Davies OP, Geoffrey Chapman, 1985. pp. xii + 346.**

This very valuable and deeply-thought book is concerned with the questions of how we can know that God exists apart from revelation, what reason can tell us about God, and how reasonable or unreasonable Christianity is. It is difficult to conceive of any reasonably intelligent person who is concerned with these matters not being greatly stimulated and informed by reading it. The three successive parts take up the above-mentioned questions in turn.

After a careful but ultimately dismissive account of the argument that the universe must have begun to exist, and that something which may be called God must thus have brought it into existence, the author puts his money on the argument to God from the contingency of the universe (cf. 27). The question 'Why is there a universe at all?' is plainly not a scientific question, in the way that asking why a particular state of affairs obtains within the universe is so. But all the same it seems arbitrary to rule the question out. It may indeed be urged that one cannot *prove* that it is right to ask such a question; as in the case of other possible questions, there is nothing to stop people remaining 'solidly uninquisitive'. And yet, 'the fact of the matter is that the existence of the universe is puzzling' (28). When it comes to the argument from order to design, it is acknowledged that there is some force in the claim that in the classical form advanced by Paley it has been discredited by the triumph of the theory of evolution. But it seems to be going too far to dismiss it entirely on this basis, given that 'the theory of natural selection is, after all, a scientific theory, and, as such, ... presupposes that natures behaves with a high degree of uniformity, or that its processes display a large degree of intelligibility' (40). To rule out the question, 'Why is this so?', once again seems arbitrary (45). The argument from miracles is treated with more caution; the author, while rightly (in my view) maintaining that Hume's case against the evidential value of reports of miracles is not cogent, concludes that miracles can be used only as part of a case for belief in God, as a supplement to arguments like those already considered (58). The argument to God from experience as though of God is again dismissed as unsound, at least standing by itself; while there may be experience which is really experience of God, we cannot argue from any experience in such a way as to show that it is more likely than not that there is a God (73). It seems to the author to be similarly misguided to infer the existence of God from the existence and nature of morality, or even, in Kantian fashion, to regard God as a necessary postulate for moral beings; 'even if God does not exist, there is reason to be moral' (80). However, it is not thereby excluded that what morality requires may depend on God (86). As one might expect of such an

enthusiastic disciple of Aquinas, the author does not think that any form of the ontological argument is sound—that one can establish the existence of God simply by careful reflection on the concept of God (113). In spite of the brilliance of Anselm, and the ingenuity of Malcolm and Plantinga in our own time, the objections of Kant, Frege and Russell seem to the author (as they seem to me) to be basically on the right lines (108).

If God's existence may be established by rational argument, what about God's nature? The author mounts an impressive defence of Aquinas's now unpopular doctrine of the divine simplicity; God as Creator does not have the complexities essential to creaturehood, like the distinction between that by virtue of which one is feline or human or aukish, and that by virtue of which one is this particular cat or human being or auk. Does this imply that God is so far removed from other subjects of which we may speak that we cannot *characterise God positively at all?* (142). *Not quite, according to the author; but he does make large concessions to the sceptic so far as to admit that when we say, for example, that God is wise, while we may know this to be true, we cannot know what it is like for it to be true* (144). (This makes me feel distinctly queasy, for reasons which I shall allude to briefly below.) What would we mean by saying that God is eternal, and have we reasons for making such a claim? (149)? If God brings things about, as any Christian (or Jew or Muslim) would hold, does not God bring them about in time, and does not such activity in time conflict with divine eternity as traditionally conceived (152–3)? Essentially, the author's answer is that it is one thing to bring change about, another oneself to change in doing so; only the latter in God would conflict with divine eternity. But do we have positive reasons for taking God to be changeless? The author insists that we do; as subject to change God would be part of the temporal world, and not its creator as already argued (163). And in the teeth of many contemporary authorities, such as Lucas, Pike and Swinburne, he maintains with Mascall that God is timeless as well as changeless; that God's act is 'at its subjective pole (at God's end, if we may use that phrase), timeless, even though at its objective pole (at the creature's end) it is temporal' (170). From this point the author finds himself in a position to argue to God's omnipotence (on a sane interpretation of the term—God can't get married or fall into a sulk, or for that matter, *pace* Descartes, create married bachelors), omniscience, and omnipresence. As to the ancient and intractable problem of divine knowledge in relation to free human actions which (to us) are future, the author is once again a faithful follower of Aquinas; 'on the assumption ... that God is timeless, it makes sense to say that God can know what people will freely do' (186). Furthermore, 'since places are part of creation, and since God is present to everything as its Creator, then God can be said to be everywhere by being present to all places as their Creator' (197). As changeless, it cannot be that there is as it were room for improvement in God; divine perfection follows from this (193). And God's goodness may be asserted as a consequence of all this, without the implication that evil is unreal, in that God wills no evil directly—there is physical evil because some things by their nature live at the expense of others, and moral evil as a consequence of abuse of their freedom by rational creatures. God 'is good because he is perfect, because he is Creator of various good things, and because, as its Maker, he is the source of everything that is good apart from himself' (229).

To make a case for God, in spite of what some have claimed, is not *eo ipso* to make as a good a case for Christianity. Jews and Muslims, after all, have believed in God as revealed in the Old Testament, without believing in Christ. What, then, of the reasonableness of Christianity? The author distinguishes a number of ways in which it might be and has been claimed to be reasonable, and undermines them one by one. We cannot properly say that its reasonableness is a matter of experience (251–3); again, the mere feeling of conviction which some have had on this subject is irrelevant, as such feelings are no guide to truth (255). Even given the reliability of the evidence presented by the New Testament, which of course many would deny, we cannot soundly claim even that the divinity of Christ is 'probable' on the basis of that evidence. After all, we do not

know enough about what it would *be* for a human being to be God, to say that, even if all the information contained in the New Testament about Jesus were true, it would support the claim that he was God. However, the author does argue that we can go so far as to maintain that specifically Christian belief is *not unreasonable*. In a remarkably short time after the death of Jesus, people were confidently ascribing to Jesus a unique and crucial role in God's plan for humanity. And granted that the narratives of the Resurrection are *not* mere fabrications, they do at least *cohere with* belief that Jesus is God (269). And given sanctity in Christians, one may also hold that belief in the divinity of Christ is not unreasonable—such sanctity is to be expected, granted the divinity of Christ (271). And it cannot be shown, in spite of what has often been claimed, that to say that one being is both human and divine is self-contradictory. 'We cannot, perhaps, see how something can be a human subject without being what excludes that subject being divine. But this is no proof that a subject cannot be both human and divine' (292). Much the same applies to the assertion that there is at once unity and distinction in God, as implied by the doctrine of the Trinity (293–6). Someone might concede that contradiction cannot be demonstrated in the central doctrines of Christianity, but retort that this is cold comfort; what, she might ask, is their relevance? The author suggests that, apart from something like the Christian revelation, we could have no serious reason for belief in God as loving. The fulness of human love seems to demand that there should be another equal to and distinct from oneself; thus the appropriateness of a distinction of 'Persons' within God (302–3). The book ends with a consideration of difficulties about the nature and practice of prayer.

I myself feel that greater weight should have been put, in the early part of the book, on the positive analogy between the divine nature and the human intellect; if God is infinitely and actually in this respect what we are vestigially and potentially, there is no question either that God is wise, or of what is meant by God's wisdom. Also, with regard to the last third of the book, I think that a more powerful positive case *ought to* be able to be made for the centrally constitutive doctrines of Christianity, if indeed one should become or should remain a Christian; the author's negative apologetic, that contradiction cannot be shown, needs supplementing by something more extensive than his remarks about love, profound as these are as far as they go. And I believe that such a case *can be* made; that a consideration of politics, and of comparative mythology and religion, reveals a more or less universal 'hunger for an incarnate God' such as entails the appropriateness of the Christian mystery to the human condition. But these are very minor points, of alternative emphasis rather than of real disagreement, to register with what is really an excellent book.

HUGO MEYNELL

**THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH** by Avery Dulles, *O.U.P.*, 1985. pp. vii + 199. £17.50.

This work is the fruit of the author's continuing meditation on *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council. The material was first presented in the form of the Martin D'Arcy Lectures at Campion Hall in Oxford in the Michaelmas Term of 1983. In exploring the catholicity of the church the book distinguishes this notion from that of catholicism and subsequently discusses the relation between the two. In doing so the author makes clear that the idea of catholicism need not, in the first instance, be automatically equated with the ecclesiastical system known as Roman Catholicism, but ultimately presents his case for claiming that Roman Catholicism most fully embodies and secures the essential catholicity of the church in all senses of that word. His overall contention is that catholicity means fullness in every way, a fullness which will be characterised by an inclusive, 'both-and' attitude rather than a selective 'either-or' approach, and he sets out to show that the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church exhibits this attitude.

It would seem that there is in fact a barely hidden agenda for the book has a markedly