

that those who are wondering whether his theological enterprise is a faithful interpretation of the tradition will be reassured

by his treatment of other's work here. This must be a sadness for his admirers.

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THE PASSIONATE GOD, by Rosemary Haughton. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981. pp 344 ISBN 0 232 51515 8 £12.95

As its title suggests, this is an exciting book, and a first-class example of fresh, living theology. Near the end of it Mrs Haughton states a principle about theological language which she has herself consistently kept in view: 'The right kind of language must . . . image the real nature of the Exchanges which are the life of God, and of God in humankind. But it must do so in a poetry which reflects for those who hear it the known truth of their particular cultural and personal experience. In other words, the poetry of good theology must grow from deep within the actual and concrete experience of people, so deep that when they hear that poetry they recognize in it *both* the accurate expression of their problems and hopes and loves *and* the evocation of deeper layers which they cannot touch but of which they are mutely aware, afraid and desirous' (p 279). This passage has already sounded the characteristic notes: poetry and theology as kindred means of evoking experience in such a way that its divine significance is made clear; the Exchange; the communication between layers or spheres of experience.

Seeking a model which will be flexible, true and dynamic enough to exclude no aspect of reality, the author takes 'Exchange': all life is a moving web, a pattern of flow, a giving and receiving, an exchange of love. This is what Christians understand to be the life of the Trinity, and all creation is made in that image. The 'spheres' of being are intended to be open to one another: matter and spirit, mind and body, heaven and earth; individual identities find their ecstasy and joy in being centres of exchange. But when the flow of love en-

counters an obstacle it is like a dammed river; the force builds up, love seeks a weak spot to break through.

The tradition of Romantic Love was worked out by troubadours and courtiers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and brought to its climax of theological, poetic and pssionage truth by Dante. 'The cultural breakthrough of "Romance" came about in order to allow Christendom to celebrate the fact of spiritual breakthrough between men and women, whole, bodily and in love' (p 45). The full energy of love becomes available at these moments of breakthrough. Typically vulnerable spots are beauty and death; each time it happens there is an invitation to new life, to being and exchange of a different order. Dante meets Beatrice and breaks through into the sphere of glory within himself. The creature falls in love, and is born anew.

This model is used to illumine the central doctrines of Christian faith. Sin is the refusal of exchange, and results in the closing off of the spheres of reality from one another, so that the invitation to fuller life is perceived as threat. The appalling consequences of refusal are apparent not only in spiritual but also in psychological, social and ecological dislocations. The Lover looked for a vulnerable place and found it in Mary: 'It seems that the moment of breakthrough for Mary was also the beginning of the breakthrough of salvation for all creation' (p 133). The Incarnation is the breakthrough of the Passionate God, 'a God so passionate that he has to be Jesus, a Jesus so passionate that he has to be God' (p 7).

Wisdom is the Old Testament's image of mobile, penetrating, ever-flowing ex-

change of love in the dance of creation, and is significantly feminine. The New Testament sees Christ as incarnate Wisdom. But Wisdom's serene sway is not enough in a sin-blocked world, and the supreme breakthrough is needed: cross and resurrection, 'by which the flesh taken was destroyed and became something new, and yet the same person; but a person in whom not merely some but all of the barriers to the exchange between the spheres of experience had been destroyed' (p 144). Love must be vulnerable itself as it asks for love. The resurrection is 'the explosion of fully reciprocated love which knows itself free of all restriction' (pp 152-3). The shock-waves of the resurrection spread outwards from Jesus through the universe of created being, swiftly here where free creatures consent to 'exchange resurrection', more slowly there where they refuse and block the love, ultimately to all matter, to a cosmos groaning in travail. Time-lags are to be expected. The resurrection is a *process*.

Among the most convincing applications of the author's model is her treatment of events in the life of Jesus. We cannot separate the actual human being of Jesus from the "theological things" which happened, which means that there have to be real, credible, human reasons for them, arising out of real situations and relation-

ships' (pp 188-9). This is one of the great strengths of the book; the author continually suggests reconstructions which make excellent sense, notably for the first miracles, the transfiguration and the institution of the Eucharist. The pressure was on him, and his love had to find a way, even if it meant anticipating a sphere of being in which we could not habitually live as yet. This line of approach involves a certain amount of 'psychologizing' of Jesus, but the author is prepared to take the risk: 'This was a man and is a man, a human bodily person with all that this means of need and possibility' (p 189).

The Romantic Love theory works. Only once or twice did this reviewer think its application forced, and then only on points of detail. Like any really fertile idea it puts out branches in many directions, touching nuclear technology and commercial adulteration of food, 'basic communities' and the contribution of women, the meaning of sexuality and the Church's need to be aligned with the poor. If it seems that these concluding sections tail off a little, it may be because the material is here of its nature more opaque. They are examples of the author's courageous attempt at theological breakthrough where it is most needed. This is a rich, provocative book.

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