

the true doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and concluding with a somewhat polemical demolition of the arguments of his opponents. Whether Calvin was entirely just in his portrayal of the Anabaptists' position is doubtful, since in truth their arguments as he relates them seem somewhat feeble; one may suspect that for Calvin this work's principal purpose was less an impassioned defence of the orthodox doctrine, for all its polemic, than a humanist *habilitationsschrift*, a possibility at which Tavad himself hints.

Certainly what is intriguing about the *Psychopannychia* is not so much its specific arguments in favour of the immortality of the soul and against the Anabaptists as its view of the role of the soul in religion: for Calvin, true religion simply is the journey of the soul to God, and Tavad traces in this position a line from Augustine to Calvin via Bonaventure, and pointing beyond Calvin to John of the Cross. The soul is seen as the *locus* of the relationship between God and the human person, and the real value for understanding Calvin of studying the *Psychopannychia* is in discovering that this strong primacy of the soul over the body, with the strong anthropological dualism that is thereby implied, is a theological presupposition that does indeed run through Calvin's later theology, as Tavad goes on to demonstrate in his later chapters. It is beyond question that for Catholics to grasp this is essential if there is to be fruitful ecumenical dialogue with the Reformed tradition; but if there is a flaw in Tavad's clear and enormously helpful exposition of the background and later significance of Calvin's *Psychopannychia* it is that Tavad is unwilling to question this presupposition. The ecumenical endeavour will ultimately benefit greatly if it is admitted on both sides that in this respect the Catholic understanding of the human person, and so of religion, is often subtly but importantly different.

RICHARD J OUNSWORTH OP

CHRISTIAN ETHICS: A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION by J. Philip Wogaman, and **READINGS IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS: A HISTORICAL SOURCEBOOK**, ed. by J. Philip Wogaman and Douglas M. Strong *Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, 2000. Vol I, Pp.xi + 340, vol II, Pp. xi + 388, £14.99 each pbk.*

J. Philip Wogaman, formerly of Wesley Theological Seminary, has produced a stimulating introduction to the history of Christian ethics, which contains a wealth of information in one convenient volume. The book, published first in 1993, has been reissued. A brief history of this kind, as Wogaman notes, cannot be encyclopedic but must be dependable and interesting. It is clear, concise, and succeeds in introducing the student to a vast field in a methodical and carefully balanced manner.

In Part I the author provides a simple but effective approach to the ethical dimension of scripture, by way of a discussion of six pairs of apparently conflicting concepts that have given rise to much of the debate surrounding the ethical interpretation of both New and Old Testaments. These pairs of concepts are revelation and reason, materialism and the life of the Spirit, universalism and group identity, grace and law, love and force, status and equality. There follows a brief review of some of the major

classical philosophical influences both on Scripture itself and on the formation of Christian ethical thought. Part II raises some of the issues in early Christian ethics, including the all important question of how Christians should relate to the material world, and certain issues that could not be fully resolved by the early Church, such as slavery and State power. The author provides examples of ambiguous Christian attitudes to these ethical issues and suggests cogent reasons for that ambiguity. This part concludes with a chapter devoted to Augustine. Part III is perhaps the weakest. It deals with medieval Christianity and the contributions of both monks and mystics, but makes no serious attempt to distinguish between the varieties of religious life. St Dominic and St Francis appear as 'prophetic new monastic figures'. Penitentials are discussed rather anachronistically, after a discussion of St Catherine of Siena.

This historical introduction concentrates on the main ethical issues from the author's contemporary point of view, but such necessary selectivity is bound to affect the historical picture that emerges, and there is a tendency to pass rather too lightly over significant ethical developments, that are clearly of less interest to the author. Wogaman concludes his chapter 'The Confessional', remarking that the penitential system 'made *some* contribution to the establishing and regularizing of Christian morality in Europe'. At the same time the contemporary view point provides interesting insights, such as the observation in chapter eight that 'the institutional form of church...is an expression of the social ethic of the Christian community'.

Part IV deals very competently with the reformers, Catholic humanism, Counter-Reformation, and the Radical Reformers, and Part V with the rationalism and evangelicalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whilst the latter is a useful introduction to such admirable thinkers as Butler, Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, theologians fare better than philosophers, and perhaps more space could have been devoted to the leading philosophers of that period. Kant is summarized in less than one page.

It is not a weakness that the book devotes disproportionate space to the last two centuries (124 pages). This book is thereby of more interest to those concerned with contemporary ethical debate. Parts VI and VII deal with the twentieth century and the future of Christian ethics, the social gospel movement, Catholic social encyclicals, Vatican II, liberation theology and the major thinkers of this period. Here Wogaman adverts to his own ideas on ethical decision making, which attempt to take account of both ethical principles and particular situations. He suggests that one begins with various presumptions, on the basis of which one will act, unless sufficient evidence can be shown that one should not. Thus, war is presumed to be wrong unless it is necessary to avoid a greater evil. No doubt many Christians do make moral decisions in just this way. Nevertheless not all presumptions will be as non-controversial as a presumption against war.

Wogaman has chosen to present ethics in an episodic manner, the episodes corresponding to the contributions of particular thinkers to the

issues with which they were concerned, with the occasional excursus on more general issues. Often the reader is left to supply the connections between the thought of individual thinkers, such as the debt owed by Butler to Aquinas.

Introducing ethics by way of introducing key thinkers in their historical context has obvious merits, and helps both to highlight the historicity of ethical problems that might otherwise appear too abstract, and also to locate Christian ethics in the personal response of particular Christians to the dilemmas they encountered. At the same time, genuine Christian ethics is more than the concern of an individual conscience, and although Wogaman is aware of this, he has a tendency to pass rather too lightly over the issues of communal conscience and Church authority. He notes, for example, a laudable decision by Free Presbyterians to exclude slave-owners from their community, but does not address the question of the obvious need for communal moral authority in other matters. This is not just a Catholic issue. The customary language of human rights raises similar issues of communal moral authority. Wogaman talks of 'the rigidities of a new fundamentalism that defines Christian identity in accordance with the acceptance of specified propositions about the faith' (p.273). That definition is so sweeping as to make one wonder what might be left of a Christianity that was not subject to such a reproach!

Rarely is Wogaman unfair, but one might take issue with his comment that in Clement of Alexandria and Joseph Butler 'the effort to be reasonable vitiated the deeper implications of the Christian ethic'. The laudable attempt throughout the book to be generally fair and balanced occasionally misfires. The author describes Machiavelli as being 'unique in the utter frankness with which he counselled rulers to manipulate the weaknesses of the multitude'. Surely such frankness could justifiably be dubbed cynical?

Wogaman makes a great many shrewd observations, and his balanced approach to the tensions he identifies, will make this work therapeutic for a great many Christians. He is surely right to remind us that there is cause for repentance as well as celebration in the history of Christian ethics. A historical introduction to ethics is perhaps the hardest to achieve and the most likely to succumb to bias. Wogaman succeeds in producing a work that is both interesting and fair, and moreover, full of hope. That is by no means insignificant praise for a book that achieves its introductory aim, whilst remaining faithful to a recognisably Christian moral ethos.

The companion volume, *Readings in Christian Ethics*, first published in 1996, and now reissued, is offered as a tonic for the 'historical amnesia' of contemporary culture, so that an ethics that takes account of the particularity of each contextual situation may also be grounded in tradition. It provides a wide range of extracts from the works of Christian thinkers down the ages, beginning with Clement's *First Letter* and ending with Bernard Häring's *The Law of Christ*. This selection of readings will certainly help to achieve the 'more sympathetic interpretation of a writer's ideas', which is the editors' aim.

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