

divorced from the life of the Church. To bring the two together, and allow them properly to interact, will compel us to evaluate afresh the function and nature of dogmatic statement and doctrinal tradition.

In twenty superbly distilled pages Houlden recalls the diverse, immensely mobile pattern of Christian experience and belief registered in the leading New Testament writers, "subject as they were to no central unifying direction with regard to their conceptual structure, and in most cases unaware, as far as we can see, of responsibility to toe allotted lines" (p.11). This prepares the way for a sampling of the doctrinal work of the New Testament writers. Whether the word "incarnation" is an adequate or even useful term for the diverse ways in which they express their conviction about Jesus may be disputed (p. 55). The word "resurrection" is not the only idiom for conceptualising the vitality of God in relation to mankind (p. 58). It is not only that subsequent doctrinal formulation has inevitably slanted and narrowed various aspects of the New Testament faith but that we have lost the capacity to see them properly. We find it hard to regard stories (as in Luke) as the vehicle of faith (p. 70). More radically still, Houlden suggests that to worry about traditional Christological definitions is to begin too far away from the root of faith. By one route or another we have come to find God, together with his

creation and our relationship to it and to him, most illuminated by lines of thought that stem from Jesus. The Christological question for us must surely be: what account of Jesus enables our theism to receive the shape that the tradition of Jesus gives it (p. 72). And the expression of one's belief must be nourished by many sources—Scripture and liturgy, but also poetry, art, music, and so on. Houlden doubts if, for him, the work of many theologians would be a very nourishing source—apart, as he says, from that of Austin Farrer, to whose memory the book is dedicated. Almost every page demands to be quoted, and the argument as a whole is much too closely knit to be expounded in a review. Beautifully written, this book is a timely example of how to assess Christian doctrine New-Testamentally, or the New Testament doctrinally, and it cannot fail to enlighten many readers.

Maurice Wiles, whose own characteristic concerns are very much akin to those of Houlden's book, provides a clear, simple introduction to theological methodology. Based on lectures which have been given over a number of years to students embarking on the study of Christian theology, his essay contains many observations that the veteran will enjoy as well as much that will instruct the non-professional.

FERGUS KERR O.P.

**THE HOMOSEXUAL QUESTION:** by Marc Oraison, *Search Press, London 1977*  
132 pp. £2.95

**THE CHURCH AND THE HOMOSEXUAL** by John J. McNeill S.J. *Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1977.* 211 pp. £2.60

If modern psychology has led us a long way towards understanding the proper role of sexuality in marriage, it seems to have produced nothing but contradiction and the most profound disagreement in respect of the assessment of homosexuality. We have all a very long way to go before a sound moral theory can be formulated. Both these recent studies of the question are compassionate and apparently well researched, but their respective versions of the "facts" are very different. For Oraison, the consultant psychoanalyst, armed with many a case history, homosexuality is a defect of development root-

ed in earliest childhood. He offers two Freudian explanations: it is a failure to overcome fear of the sexual difference discovered in early life; and it is a failure of the oedipal mechanism, "we can say schematically that when the mother is not forbidden as an object of possession it is the woman who will be forbidden as the object of desire." In any case, what homosexuality amounts to is a "fear of the other". It is a failure to grow out of a stage of narcissism in which desire is for a double rather than for a different and complementary person. Thus eventually permanent relationships—even homosexual

ones—are a virtual impossibility. Clinical experience shows him that disillusionment and tragic breakups are the rule. McNeill on the other hand simply denies both this version of the facts and the explanation. There is apparently a good chance of stable union among mature homosexuals and far from being a developmental defect, it reveals important aspects of humanity that are normally obscured by the heterosexual condition. The sexual stereotypes which do so much damage to relationships between men and women can be transcended, and love between real equals becomes a possibility. The homosexual community—freed from suppression by unjust laws and prejudices—is supposed to show the way for the rest of society. This is the “purpose” of homosexuality among human beings, and it is the purpose of the homosexual component in everyone’s sexuality. Oraison, on the contrary, finds no purpose in homosexuality, only tragedy. It is but one particularly painful version of the fundamental human tragedy that is inseparable from sexual relationship of any kind. It promises an ecstasy and a completeness that are never delivered in this world. The homosexual condition, though entirely involuntary and not a sickness, puts a person farther away from completeness than most others. Pastors, confessors and psychoanalysts must help a person come to terms with it and to save the positive aspects of their condition so that some love can be realised in life. They certainly should not condemn homosexuals for their supposed deviation from “nature”, which is a very dubious category where human relationships are concerned. His final position seems to be personalist, compassionate but entirely unpolitical. He rejects the view, very strong in McNeill’s book, that the suffering and trouble of homosexuals are caused by society’s rejection and persecution of them. Against conservative and radical extremes he argues that there is no such identity as the ‘homosexual’, there are only very different individuals who relate sexually to members of their own sex, and they have to be helped individually to live their own lives. I would certainly agree that much of what passes for homosexual liberation is just as guilty as conservative reaction of foisting a stereotype on individuals, many of whom adopt it for reasons which have

very little to do with their own fundamental sexual orientation. However, where the law is unjust, as it is in the Anglo-Saxon world, though not apparently in France, some kind of corporate political identity is unavoidable. But this should be seen as political and therefore temporary, aimed at liberating people from stereotypes rather than at building them up. On the whole, Oraison adopts the rather patronising tone of an adult trying patiently to explain that social and political action is really only a refuge for the immature who cannot face their personal problems, It is obviously more than that.

McNeill’s main enemy appears to be the kind of liberal catholic moralist, common in Anglo-Saxon theology, who makes a lot of the distinction between objective sin and the subjective responsibility of the individual engaged in it. Undoubtedly too much strain is put on this distinction in order to reconcile modern ways with traditional rules. It results in a kind of moral schizophrenia for pastor and penitent alike. The problem is not the ability of the confessor to make subtle distinctions of this kind but “is rather the homosexual’s consequent judgment of himself or herself. If the judgment that the homosexual condition is objectively sinful is uncritically accepted by the person in question.” It is only in accepting himself that anyone can realise those values of love and fidelity that all moralists agree to be the purpose of any relationship. To teach a homosexual not to accept himself runs the risk of leading him directly to that promiscuous style of life that fits most people’s stereotype of homosexuality. There is obvious justice in this argument. The rest of the book consists mostly of a critical re-examination of the traditional condemnation of homosexuality in christian societies. The Old Testament is fairly easily dealt with. The destruction of Sodom—so influential in civil and ecclesiastical law—is shown to have been due to violation of hospitality rather than to sexual sin. Where homosexuality is condemned in the Old Testament it is either as a part of pagan rites or as an act of dishonour to the male, something abhorrent to ancient societies. In the course of this argument however, McNeill makes the extraordinary generalisation that it is a feature of patriarchal cultures that they “always tend to com-

bine a strongly subordinationist view of women with repression and horror of male homosexual practices." All I can say about this is that he shouldn't believe everything he reads in books, especially books by G. Rattrey Taylor. (He must also have read somewhere that St. Thomas taught that all sexual pleasure is sinful, but it certainly wasn't in the text of St. Thomas.) A moment's independent thought should have reminded him of the male-dominated, woman-repressing pederastic culture of ancient Greece and the widespread tolerance of male homosexuality in Moslem lands, not otherwise known for their liberality towards women. There is a good deal to be said for exactly the opposite view. The New Testament evidence is dealt with far less ably. It is not at all certain that St. Paul was condemning only 'perversion' and not true 'inversion' among the sins "against nature" in Rom. 1:26. But it needs a proper exegete to decide the truth about that.

The outstanding moral question is to do with the legitimacy of sexual union between homosexual partners in a stable relationship. In McNeill's opinion people should abstain if they can, not because there is anything intrinsically evil in it, but because of the difficulties in which the active homosexual will find himself in our society. Otherwise, "if true christian and human love can exist equally in a homosexual or in a heterosexual context, then there is no *a priori* basis for a moral choice between these contexts." What matters is what is unique in human nature, not the sexual difference which so easily relapses into stereotypes, but the personal response of love. I can only agree that it is the recognition of uniqueness that is the specifically human element in love. But this is a general requirement of love and not confined to overtly sexual love. I don't nec-

**THE CRUCIFIED IS NO STRANGER** Todd, 1977. pp. xii + 116 £1.95.

The cover of this book described it as drawing out the implications of a "new kind of discursive but urgent Christology" present in the author's earlier work *No Exit* (London, 1968). The claim to novelty is an exaggeration and 'implications' promises a precision which is often hard to find. The book is diffuse and impressionistic; insofar as I am clear about its import

essarily want sexual intercourse with someone because I perceive his or her personal uniqueness. Usually there are all kinds of reasons for avoiding it. It would simply not be an expression of love. Let us not try to make out that personal uniqueness is a modern discovery and that it somehow makes sexual communication appropriate. Indeed, it is those in our modern society who put most emphasis on sexual activity as the only 'honest' expression of love who are most liable to lose any sense of the uniqueness of the other confronting them. This danger underlies the traditional suspicion of sexual pleasure—it so easily overlooks individuality. The real question is, under what circumstances does sexual intercourse and the activity which leads up to it count as a genuine expression of love? There must be some other factors which determine when it is right. My doubts about this personalist viewpoint put forward by McNeill is that it gives way easily to a dissociation of love from every other dimension of human life so that it is in danger of becoming an autonomous value without any reliable guidelines as to its modes of expression. There is no love without the acceptance of limits. Hence the importance of the old concept of nature in moral thought. It is not good enough to dismiss it because of its supposed Stoic origin, as McNeill does. Demonstrating the origin of an idea doesn't enable us to do without it. But McNeill's is a brave attempt to provide an alternative moral assessment of homosexuality and he has written a book not to be missed by those with any concern for the problem. However, the situation is still one of confusion and uncertainty, even over the facts. The main work has yet to be done.

ROGER RUSTON O.P.

by Sebastian Moore. Darton, Longman and

my feelings are mixed.

According to Fr. Moore, the crucified (Christ) is no stranger because he is somehow *myself*; the crucifiers are really the crucified attacking their real selves of which they are afraid. The crucifixion is a message of forgiveness because it announces and helps to realise the fact that the crucifier is loved and lovable. "Jesus is,