

The other volume from Ventimiglia, *Exposés Ascétiques*, contains two previously unpublished 12th century texts. The first is a moralising, allegorical meditation on the "seven signs" given by Samuel to Saul, when he was looking for the lost asses. The second is a collection of bits and pieces, headed by one which is ascribed to Hugh of Fouillo; it is not clear whether the other pieces are also meant to be by him. Both are fairly commonplace monastic texts.

In addition to providing the Latin texts, Mgr de Clercq gives us a French translation in both volumes, and also a brief Introduction.

De Clercq, very properly, intends to give us an accurate picture of what the MSS contain. However, in both volumes, this intention is impeded by a number of misprints, which makes the reader hesitant in several places, as to whether a peculiar text is due to the MS or to the printer. Worse, de Clercq prints quite a few sentences which simply cannot be construed as they stand; his translation at such points either skirts round the difficulty, or indicates that he is supposing a quite impossible construction. It appears that he has allowed himself to be beguiled by the notoriously erratic punctuation of medieval MSS (although he makes no attempt to reproduce medieval punctuation in his edition). By changing the punctuation, it is

easy to restore good syntax and good sense.

There are other places where the text, as it stands, is quite certainly wrong, and where a simple emendation produces a palpable improvement, which in some cases amounts to absolutely certain correction. (Whether all the false readings of this kind are really in the MS, or whether some of them are due to misreading of the MS, I cannot say, not having seen the MSS for myself). In cases like this, it is surely part of the editor's job to note what the MS has, and then to indicate the correction that has to be made.

In other places, the text is certainly wrong, but it is not clear what the right reading ought to be. The French translation at such points usually cheats, by resorting to omissions, paraphrase, or impossible syntax or interpretation of words. Again, it is surely part of the editor's job, however conservative he wants his edition to be, to indicate and attempt to clarify difficulties in the text he is editing.

These failures on the part of the printer and editor mean that, though we can be grateful to Mgr de Clercq for making these texts available to us, we cannot help but wish that he had made them available in a more satisfactory form.

SIMON TUGWELL O P

**THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY** by Eric Osborn *Cambridge University Press*, 1981. pp xiv + 321 £24.00

Professor Osborn lays great stress on the importance of the method by which a study of early Christian thought is conducted. Drawing on an article of John Passmore on the history of philosophy, he distinguishes five approaches: the polemical (which ignores the historical context and asks simply 'Is it true?'), the cultural (which understands the past exclusively in terms of its cultural setting), the doxographical (which is only interested in sources and finding parallels in earlier writers), the retrospective (which is interested in past ideas only as the precursors of some

later normative position) and the problematic (which seeks to elucidate the problems the ancient writer was trying to solve and the arguments he employs). This typology can be helpful in drawing attention to one-sided treatments, but there is danger in setting the different approaches too sharply in contrast to one another. And this is the trap into which Osborn appears to have fallen.

He uses his typology both negatively and positively. Since no serious discussion of early Christian philosophy can ignore what Osborn calls cultural or doxograph-

ical issues, it is easy to select citations from other scholars which embody this concern, and then to dismiss those scholars as misguided followers of a false method. This polemical use of his typology seems to me to be applied in far too sweeping a manner – reminiscent at times of Tertullian's prescriptive manner of dealing with the heretics.

Its positive application is more promising, but here too the outcome is disappointing. Five areas of debate are dealt with – God; man; the world; history; incarnation. Each of these is subdivided into more specific issues, making a total of twenty-two problems in all. For each problem we are given a summary of the main attitude and arguments of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement. Professor Osborn knows his sources well, as his earlier books on Justin and Clement bear witness. But however accurate the reporting of their views, the presentation is inevitably bitty. Moreover in his determination to avoid the errors of the culturalist and the doxographer, he presents the views of the four writers so baldly that he fails to illuminate the issues as much as he might have done, had he not been quite so concerned to maintain the purity of his method. But what he does give us is clear and to the point.

After the expository material on each of the five main areas stands a separate section entitled 'Problems and parallels'. The expressed intention of these sections

is to consider 'parallel contemporary problems' and 'to show some places where mutual illumination is possible' (p 16). The approach again is interesting; for it is surely right to insist that our problems are not totally different, even though their particular form and contemporary setting preclude too direct an identification with the precise argumentation or conclusions of past thinkers. Thus the juxtaposition of ancient and modern reflections holds out the prospect of a fruitful cross-fertilisation of ideas, while avoiding the confusion of a false identification. But here too the execution of the idea is disappointing. The *Stromateis* that we are offered are made up of random reflections on a selection of recent writings about loosely allied topics. They are too brief and too miscellaneous to be significant in the way desired.

All in all the book represents a courageous and ambitious undertaking. Its desire to show the distinctive character of early Christian reflection on some of the fundamental topics of the faith in its own terms, and thereby to show its continuing philosophical and theological worth is to be commended. Such an objective is not easy to achieve, though I do not believe it to be impossible of attainment. But regretfully I have to report that, though some of the necessary raw material is to be found in this book, it has not here been achieved in an effective or illuminating way.

MAURICE WILES

**LUTHER: A BIOGRAPHY** by H. G. Haile  
*Sheldon Press, London pp 422 £9.95.*

Dr Haile is Professor of German at the University of Illinois. He has previously written a biography of Goethe, and now turns to Luther with an impressive armoury of scholarship, a fluent and vivacious style (although what Dr Vidler calls his "idiomatic, contemporary English" should certainly be "American" – cf. p 350, where some words of Luther are translated "we old ones must live so long in order to look the devil in the ass") and a critical determination to re-enact the life-experiences

of his subject. English students of Luther, nurtured on Boehmer, Watson, Todd and Gordon Rupp, will find something fresh in almost every sentence, and bibliographies on a multitude of matters (in the Notes) which are largely unfamiliar, and above all a concentration on Luther's later years, less vital perhaps doctrinally than the years of his "progress to the Diet of Worms", but even more instructive from the standpoint of human nature and contemporary history.

Dr Haile lights up his story with vivid