

creation is bound up necessarily with the forgetting of being'. It is pointed out that his eventual position of waiting for a 'giving' of being and time to one another, despite his neglecting the need for a 'giver', has a certain kinship with paschal theology—also that an agnostic sort of apophaticism is to be found in the neo-Platonist tradition, even among Christians: what is needed would seem to be 'a proper adjustment of concept and representation, on the one hand, and of a sense of being and mystery on the other', thus avoiding both the ontotheology of 'a God *causa sui*' and the postulation of a wholly unknown power (279). Lafont goes on (page 280 n.) to propose 'a God who is both beyond the world and yet capable of being recovered (*rejoint*), even by the intelligence, in that intermediary perspective which could be called "metaphysical"'. This does suggest a God who is just Top Being, despite disclaimers. To insist on 'being' as having a special and vital metaphysical import can be to invite the reply that the word is a convenient label for all objects known to us, with the implication that there is nothing *intrinsically* common to them. I suggest that the word can be considered profitably as a 'pointer' to what things do prove to have in common, a relationship to an Originator who is 'beyond being'. When Lafont writes of 'the pure actuality of being (*l'être*) by which the being (*l'étant*) truly is' and of 'this stupefying reality which springs up at the heart of everything ... and arouses amazement at the fact that *it is there*' (312, his italics), he might seem to be implying what I have just suggested. But the general context (the acknowledged debt to Gilson, for instance) tells against it.

Such differences of view do not affect the main argument of the book (much of it inevitably left unmentioned); it deserves, I think, translation into English. The perfectly fair and profoundly searching discussion of Henri le Saux's position, for instance (pp. 295–307), seems to me of the greatest importance for the dialogue between Christians and Hindus.

ILLTYD TRETOWAN

THE PARABLES OF JESUS by H. Hendrickx. *Harper & Row/Chapman/Cassell*. 1986. p/b. £7.95. pp. 291.

A great many studies of the parables of Jesus have appeared in the last twenty years. The merit of Hendrickx' book is that it presents many of the insights of form, redaction, existentialist and structuralist analyses while abandoning not only the technical jargon but also the narrowness of each. For example the myopic individualism of existentialist treatments and the questionable limitation of meaning to deep structure in structuralist expositions are rightly eschewed. A chapter is devoted to each of the major parables of the Synoptic Gospels (according to Matthew, Mark and Luke) in its various forms, with a view to recovering Jesus' original version and its significance in his ministry, its reinterpretation by the early church, and its meaning within the literary context of each of the Gospels. A final section headed 'Reflection' considers what the parable has to say to people today. Preachers, in particular, will find the book a valuable resource.

It has to be admitted, however, that assumptions are made which are neither clearly spelled out nor justified. Hypotheses appear in the guise of facts. Mark is reckoned the earliest Gospel and a source of both Matthew and Luke, while Luke and Matthew are thought to share another source, since lost. Distinctions between tradition and redaction, even in the case of Markan parables, or of Lucan parables which find no parallels in the other Gospels, seem to be discerned too confidently, considering the amount of scholarly disagreement. Then, the redactional emphases of each of the Gospel versions is directly related to situations in the churches without any sense of the needs of the literary composition. Most important, it is axiomatic for the study that these parables were at some time spoken by Jesus and not invented by the early church or by the Evangelists. Even

were this hypothesis to be accepted, however, the interpreter would still be at a loss to know the original context in which Jesus pronounced the parable, a matter which is always relevant in determining meaning—what if the parable of the Good Samaritan had been delivered to an exclusively Samaritan audience, for example? Something more should have been said about historical knowledge of the life of Jesus, and especially about Jesus' relationship to contemporary Judaism. The picture which can be pieced together from this book is based more on prejudice than research.

In the general remarks about the nature of parable (Chapter 1), it is shown that it serves the preacher well in distancing, provoking and appealing to an audience. The parable calls on everyday experience to express new points of view, not merely for contemplation but to stimulate action. This characteristic of the parables, however, creates difficulties, since the lives of ordinary people in the first century C.E. were different from ours. Why, then, should the modern preacher bother with Jesus' parables at all, since the experiences on which they draw are alien to us? Why should he not adopt the method without the content? Moreover, this is not just a matter of cultural and material changes but of theological developments. The theological questions addressed by the Gospel parables, appropriate for the preaching of the early Church, are no longer those of a society which can draw on nearly 2000 years of Christian history and learning, and which must meet different kinds of cogent and articulate opposition. The overriding presupposition of the book, therefore, is that the interpretation of Scripture is centrally important for preaching.

MARGARET DAVIES

ORACLES OF GOD by John Barton, *Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986,*
pp xii + 323, £12.95.

From time to time there comes a book which makes us say to ourselves, if not to others, 'I wish I'd written that'. This is exactly such a book as far as this reviewer is concerned. Some years ago I had a rather vague notion that it would be a good idea to write an Introduction to the Old Testament starting from the text as we have it and working back to the sources and separate pericopae that now make up its books. I soon realised that I had neither the time nor, more importantly, the competence for such a task. John Barton has shown that he has the competence and he has found the time to make a start with the prophets. He has written this splendid book as a first stage, contenting himself with an examination of the way prophecy was perceived by people living in the last two or three centuries BC and the first one or two AD. The arguments he uses are so close and complex that one begins the book with some apprehension. Yet there is no need to fear. He provides sufficient signposts along the way both to point us forward and to remind us where we have been and so there is little danger of getting lost and we are able to follow him all the way. Moreover the style is clear and attractive and this makes the book a joy to read.

It is essential to decide what was understood by the words 'prophet' and 'prophecy' in the period and so the first third of the book is taken up with a discussion of questions relating to the canon of scripture and the place of the Prophets within it. In true detective writer style he lines up various theories regarding the formation of the Canon, the choice of books and the different orders in which they are found. Just when we have reached the point where we think we can safely identify the 'criminal' he opens up new questions and leads us on to quite a different conclusion, namely that the three-fold division into Law, Prophets and Writings with which we are now familiar was not in force during the period under consideration and that when the term 'prophets' is used it included many of what we now call the Writings as well as other books not now in our Canon. Indeed 'canon' can be used in this period only if it means books regarded as having some authority, but not if it

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