

Certain themes run through the book: the tension between the pull of classical or other secular literary pleasures and the spiritual imperatives to which Scripture calls the reader, inspiration and eloquence, the Augustinian debate over the appropriateness of applying stylistic criteria to the interpretation and criticism of Scripture and its long-running aftermath. (We are given some useful reflections on seventeenth century discussion as to whether, far from fine style being compared with the Bible's style to its disadvantage, the Bible should be the writer's model for style.)

This reviewer would make three principal criticisms of this exploratory and often stimulating study. The balance of treatment chronologically gives a false impression of the contribution of the mediaeval millennium to the treatment of issues of language. There is somehow missing a 'feel' for the preoccupations and concerns of the periods dealt with, so that the critical comments often seem to come from outside. And it really does matter that we should not slip inadvertently into the implication that the story was leading naturally into an English-speaking world ('God is an Englishman'). Perhaps the second volume will put that right.

There is a pleasing set of plates and a useful appendix giving comparative texts of translations of eight passages.

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THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS, VOLUME XXIII, FINAL WRITINGS BY KARL RAHNER, translated by Hugh M. Riley (Chapters 1 to 7) and Joseph Donceel, S.J., (Chapters 8 to 19), *Darton, Longman and Todd*, 1992, pp. 228.

This book represents Rahner's articles and lectures in the three years preceding his death in 1984. Nearly all have been published in German periodicals or collective works. They show no sign of declining powers. The nineteen chapters are conveniently grouped under four headings: *Christian Life*, largely concerned with Christian conduct; *The Society of Jesus*, a respectful but vigorous protest against unwarranted interference by the Vatican with the Society's affairs, previously unpublished; *Piety*, mainly about the changes in Catholic devotional practices; *Sacraments*, their use and abuse.

The first chapter is an analysis, of the familiar rather heavy-going but rewarding kind, through which Rahner wants to dissuade people from regarding God primarily as a menace but at the same time to insist that the human condition must be considered one not free from the greatest of dangers. He refers, as on other occasions, to the Council of Trent's statement that Christians 'cannot be absolutely certain whether they are in a state of grace' (p. 11). But isn't conversion to Christianity, sometimes at least, the discovery of the truth, indeed of what truth is? The chapter which follows, about nuclear weapons, is Rahner at his most effective: 'Are those who are for nuclear armament for the purpose of preventing war entirely sure that they really reject this war under any and all

481

circumstances?' (p.23). And so I might go on, from chapter to chapter, with great admiration and the occasional venturesome question, but there is no space for that.

The three chapters which follow help us to be clearer-minded about some of life's problems and prepare us to cope with chapter 6 ('Authority'), what that means if it is to make sense of human experience and, in particular, what it should mean in regard to the Church of God. 'The manner of recognizing papal primacy at the end of the twentieth century does not necessarily derive from the essence of the Pope's primacy in the Church' (p.69); 'if we take into consideration the Church's understanding of itself as a free community of like-minded persons in contrast to a society existing from a natural necessity, we will be persuaded to say that the Church in its intrinsic nature does not have to be considered as being equipped with a power of social coercion . . . the Church should nowhere respond to a conflict between itself and one of its members with civil and material consequences' (p.83); 'The teaching authority is a necessary element of sociopolitical authority in the Church, but only if the nature of the Church as a socially constituted creedal community that receives God's historical promise of himself in an eschatologically permanent way is taken into proper account. But it is not more than this' (pp.84-5). The startling chapter on the treatment of the Jesuits follows .

Chapter 8 ('Dimensions of Martyrdom') points out that Maximilian Kolbe, who gave his life for another's in a concentration camp, was canonized as a confessor, not as a martyr, and that Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was murdered for his 'struggle for justice', *would* seem to qualify' (p.111). In chapter 9 ('Eucharistic Worship') Rahner laments the widespread disappearance of Benediction, Corpus Christi processions and thanksgiving after communion: part of the trouble, I suspect, is that Christ's presence in the reserved sacrament has been insisted upon in such a way as to suggest that he is otherwise absent. But that does not explain the almost complete emptying of churches at the end of Mass. A measure of silence in church and an insistence on *personal* prayer are urgently needed. The next two chapters, on devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to Our Lady, which sentimental excesses have made unpopular, show that these are capable of revival. In a chapter on the relevance of the arts to religion it is well said that by the music of a Bach oratorio 'we are in a very special way brought into a relationship with divine revelation about humanity' (p.163). The chapter on the Jesuit, Freidrich Spee, who campaigned so courageously against the torture and burning of 'witches', is a powerful reminder of the dangers of siding thoughtlessly with the majority. Of the chapters on the sacraments, I can now say only that they deserve to be read and pondered not only by priests but by any Christian who takes his or her faith seriously and wants to deepen it. The translators are to be congratulated.

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