

religiously supported individualism' (p. 218). If John Robinson was, as he suggests, somewhat deficient in recognising the interaction of issues of truth with questions of power and vested interests, the Church of England as a whole must indeed have a long way to travel on that issue! But I have misgivings about the language of options. The prophetic voice needs to be expressed more effectively. But it must not succumb to the temptation of falling back on a less radical theology in the hope that that will give it a more effective force. A radical theology and a prophetic voice do not go easily together. But if both are to pursue their tasks with integrity, they need one another. To recognise and make effective the complementary nature of their two styles of discourse is one of the most pressing issues for theologians and church leaders of our time, and one that a commemorative recollection of *Honest to God* does well to call to our attention.

MAURICE WILES

**LICENSED INSANITIES: RELIGIONS AND BELIEF IN GOD IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD** by John Bowker. *Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1987. Pp 164. £8.95.*

This book (as the sub-title indicates) is an assessment of the place that religion occupies in the world today. The author begins by maintaining, against injudicious talk about 'secularization', that very many people adhere to religion with a conviction that is shown, however perversely, in the violence with which they defend or propagate it. Having noted differences between religions and their moral demands Bowker concentrates, inevitably, on Christian theism. Here he propounds two main theses. First, against Don Cupitt he holds that we cannot and need not surrender the objective truth claims of religion. Epistemologically he adopts a form of 'critical realism'. In religion, as in ordinary experience and scientific theorizing, we encounter an independently existing order of reality that sets limits to our descriptions of it although the latter are always corrigible and incomplete. Bowker adds that just as the objectivity of sensory experience is confirmed by the persistence of its characteristics, so too the objectivity of religious experience is confirmed by the persistence of its characteristics throughout Christian tradition.

Secondly, Bowker affirms that the various human causes of religious belief (such as the Freudian and Marxist ones) that have been offered do not rule out the possibility that God exists. Even if we are constrained to believe in God for these human reasons they do not constitute a total and sufficient explanation of belief; for there remains the constraint produced by the distinctively religious modes of experience that Bowker states. Both the human causes of belief (such as the desire for heavenly consolation) and the divine cause of it (operating in God's direct, though also mediated, self-disclosure to the soul) may act simultaneously. We cannot validly infer from the presence of a human cause the absence of the divine one. There is a lengthy Appendix on 'Religions as Systems' that was first published in the Anglican Report entitled *Believing in the Church*.

I find Bowker's presentation of the two preceding theses convincing. Although I wish that he had expounded the similarities and differences between religious and scientific language more systematically, that he had developed his mention of natural theology on pp 97–8, and that he had examined the human 'causes' of belief in greater detail, I welcome the book as a forceful, but also properly cautious, defence of theism on experiential grounds against attempts to discredit or erode it.

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