

(146 out of 200) was that of 'threefold dialogue' — with other religions, with cultures, and with the marginalized, especially the poor. Most commentators in this volume quote approvingly proposition 41 of the Synod which calls for openness, a willingness to listen and for respect in dialogue with other believers. A more problematic question was that of how to proclaim Jesus as Lord in obedience to his command: no easy task in China or in Iran. Here the commentators cautiously praise the exhortation for recommending a *gradual* pedagogy in the proclamation of Christ as the only Saviour although many make no secret of the fact that they would prefer even greater leeway. The desire to emphasise the human traits of Jesus as a compassionate teacher of truth or guru surface throughout the book and one imagines that most of the authors would have been disappointed by *Dominus Iesus* a year or so later.

For me the most fruitful area of discussion concerns the Church's prophetic rôle in Asia. This minority religion is the leaven of transformation in the world. Christians in Asia are coming to terms with the fact that they are probably destined to remain for the foreseeable future a *pusillus grex*. What can it mean for a deprived and persecuted minority to 'go and make disciples of all the nations'? The Synod did not provide the answer to this question, it only elaborated the question and set limits, reminding the church in Asia that Christ's great commission is not an option but an obligation. How this obligation is undertaken in dialogue and evangelisation will necessarily vary between local churches. The truth and fruitfulness of the Synod will perhaps not be seen primarily in the documents but will depend upon the bishops continuing to germinate the seeds of the Synod, strengthened in the new hope it has given them.

TIMOTHY GARDNER OP

RADICAL OPTIMISM: PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD by **Beatrice Bruteau**, *Sentient Publications, Boulder, CO, 2002, Pp 139, \$13.95 pbk.*

To be optimistic is usually taken as either a sign of ignorance, or worse, a Pollyanna-like desire to ignore reality. Dr Bruteau writes that the deepest truth is our union with the Absolute, with Infinite Being, with God. That is the root of reality and, therefore, of her radical optimism. The book is clear and helpful for someone wishing to enter more deeply into prayer as she clearly explains the need for leisure, stillness, and practising meditation. Her section on the power of imagination in our lives is especially helpful.

The key idea of her book is that we have things backwards: 'This is why the abundance of "salvation" has to come first. *First*, learn to relax the ego-defenses by fully accepting God's unconditional sustaining love; *then* enter into the Trinitarian Life of shared personal love energies; and *finally* manifest that life by incarnating it into the workaday world. To make this *last* step of unselfish behaviour in the world the condition of meriting the *first* step, the reception of God's love, is completely erroneous because quite impossible' (p.130).

A weakness in the text is her view of sin as a flaw in knowledge rather than a flaw in the will. "I propose instead that sin originates in lack of sufficient believable unconditional love." (p.83) She rejects the idea that we can sin by preferring our will to God's, or rather sees our choice as arising from existential fear, and the need to preserve the self. The way out is to be really convinced that someone else is sustaining you: 'If you can really believe that someone else *is* sustaining you, then all the self-defence operations which result in sins are going to evaporate, because they are no longer needed. It is at the moment when you perceive this truth and really accept it, ...that *salvation* takes place...If the convincing gesture is "dying for you," then that gesture can be used because it convinces the sinner of the love. It is the love and the conviction of being loved that is salvific' (p.84). This seems to turn the cross into one myth among many rather than the myth become fact that is the turning point of history.

Later she says we should contemplate the mystery of the divine love directed to us as transcendent selves. She wants us to lose our descriptions of ourselves: 'I belong to such a culture, such a religious tradition...and even if these have been transcended, we are left with our sense of personality and with our ideas of how God-world relation is structured: our psychology and our theology. These are much harder to "unknow," and many people hold that we are not to give up identifying with them at all' (p.92).

She agrees with the nineteenth-century Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna that God can be conceived as dualist (the gulf between creator and creature in the Abrahamic religions) and nondualistic (the Eastern religions). I am left wondering if it is my lack of mystical experience that makes these two ideas seem so contradictory and paradoxical. The Trinitarian conception of God, unity in diversity, gives us identity as individuals in communion with each other and with God. This is far from what she calls the nondualistic conception of God. Theology and psychology seem to be inextricably linked.

Her concluding chapter calls us to transform the world collectively, recognising that Jesus prayed for us as individuals, that when we are converted we strengthen our brothers and sisters and become as one as the Trinity is one. Overall, it is a book which speaks in the current language of therapy to explain religious practice to a culture which has lost touch with religious language.

CHRISTINE M. FLETCHER

MIND, METAPHYSICS AND VALUE IN THE THOMISTIC AND ANALYTICAL TRADITIONS edited by J.Haldane, *University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2002, Pp. x + 225, \$ 45.00 hbk.*

This book contains a collection of essays mostly by writers in England and Scotland, which establish links between Aquinas and contemporary analytic philosophy. As Haldane acknowledges, the contributors build on the pioneering work of Anscombe, Geach and Kenny. The essays,