

in a wide-ranging paper Ingolf Dalferth casts some doubt on the necessity of a sacrificial interpretation of the atonement and even more on a priestly conception of the ministry, particularly when it involves the exclusion of women and those not episcopally ordained.

There are many riches in this learned and wide-ranging book. But it does stress the inward at the expense of the need for a move outwards also. Paul believed that the true sacrifice was the living one, of both soul and body. And if the being of the triune God is indeed a communion of mutual giving and receiving should we not stress more the notion that sacrifice is essentially gift? Under the conditions of fallenness, that will sometimes involve the negative connotations of giving up. But do we not need to understand not merely formal worship, but the whole of life, work and play, agriculture, industry, ethics and art, as part of that sacrifice to the creator, perfected, of that which he has first given us? At the beginning of this volume the broadly ethical and, indeed, cosmic dimensions of sacrifice are brought to view, with a demonstration that in the Bible we have to do with the redemption in Christ of the whole created order. But the Bible's breadth is hardly reflected in what theologians have made of its beginnings.

COLIN GUNTON

THE BIBLE'S AUTHORITY; A PORTRAIT GALLERY OF THINKERS FROM LESSING TO BULTMANN by J.C O'Neill (*T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991*), pp.323.

John O'Neill's portrait gallery is a series of intellectual biographies of twenty-one Germanic scholars from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. These include some of the leading philosophers of the period (Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche), the pioneering biblical scholars (Strauss, F.C. Baur, Wellhausen, Gunkel), and several lesser-known names (Semler, Eichhorn, Ewald). In the case of each, O'Neill attempts to place his thought in the context of his life and times, and in doing so he produces an immensely lively and engaging set of portraits which underline the genius of his subjects. His biographical asides are frequently illuminating if also on occasion controversial. Harnack, we are told, 'learnt a sweet and patient tolerance of those who felt Christianity itself was threatened by his arguments - a sweet and patient tolerance, a 'contemplative calm', that must have maddened his opponents' (p.218), while of Barth in the 1930s, it is alleged that he 'helped to foster general public doubt that there were any unalterable absolute moral and political laws like the law against murder by his reiterated insistence that any discussion of such moral rules was a subsidiary matter when the only question was the question about God.' (p.267)

The unifying theme of O'Neill's study seems to be that the dominant German thinkers of the modern era, while convinced of the authority of Scripture, nevertheless subverted that authority in ways that were intellectually indefensible and politically dangerous. Rational,

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philosophical defence of the being and action of God having been abandoned, scholars perceived God either in the hidden, driving force of history, or as One who could be encountered only in some private realm which was inaccessible to the scientific enquirer. This frequently led to an uncritical acceptance of the direction of history, to implausible exegesis, and to a withdrawal of the subject into an interior world of religious engagement. The consequence was that the authority of Scripture was eroded in ways that proved to be intellectually and politically disastrous.

One difficulty in assessing this bold and controversial hypothesis is that the theme of 'the authority of Scripture' is sometimes lost sight of in the course of the discussion. Are there not a wide variety of possible views of Scriptural authority beyond the rationalist view which the writer seems to favour? Do Kant, Harnack and Barth not construe the authority of Scripture in ways that are strikingly different? In this respect, the reader might have been helped by more frequent clarification of the theme of the book, and a more thorough organisation of the intellectual biographies around it. O'Neill's discussion, however, is intended to provoke and challenge, and it is a measure of the force of that challenge that the present reviewer is compelled to protest at the treatment meted out to Karl Barth. O'Neill claims that for Barth theology was hermetically sealed from other disciplines and forms of knowledge, and this that this irrationalism was especially apparent in his assertion that 'the more clearly the Bible claims a revelation has occurred, the less reliable that passage is as history.' Barth's claim, however, is surely the less extravagant one that Christian theology cannot be founded upon the results of other disciplines, including history, since it has its own unique and distinctive subject-matter. This does not imply, however, that theological claims cannot be disconfirmed by historical study (Barth's treatment of the Fall is undoubtedly affected by natural and historical science), or that the theologian can cheerfully ignore what the philosopher is saying. Moreover, in Barth's mature theology it seems clear that he did wish to affirm the factuality of the empty tomb in more than the Pickwickian sense attributed to him by O'Neill (e.g. *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, pp.35 1–2).

The strength of this book lies in the author's determination to contextualise his subjects. The twenty-one chapters reveal careful research into biography and historical context, and this frequently pays dividends. His concluding presentation and critique of Bultmann in relation to his teachers is something of a *tour de force* which offers a lucid explanation of how Bultmann's exegesis and theology hang together. His final reflection that the existence of God and the possibility of scientifically-accessible divine action can and must be philosophically defended reveals a refreshing concern to consider the widest possible implications of biblical criticism. This conclusion is typical of a lively, provocative and original enquiry which in raising a host of questions will elicit widespread discussion and appreciation.

DAVID FERGUSSON

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