

Reviews

IAN RAMSEY, by Jerry H. Gill. *George Allen & Unwin*, London, 1978. 166 pp. £5.25.

CHRISTIAN EMPIRICISM, by Ian Ramsey. *Sheldon Press*, London, 1974. 260 pp. £3.95.

With the appearance in 1957 of *Religious Language*, the late Ian Ramsey initiated a programme for the revision of philosophical theology in the light of the challenge of logical empiricism which he continued even after he moved from Oxford to become Bishop of Durham but which his premature death in 1972 finally cut short. In *Christian Empiricism* a number of papers hitherto unavailable in book form have been assembled by Jerry H. Gill, the most recent of which, a paper read to a meeting in London of the Aristotelian Society nine months before his death, deals, characteristically, with 'Facts and Disclosures'. Perhaps his life's work, as a philosopher, could be summarised as an attempt to make room for the possibility of 'disclosures' of religious significance in a world of empirically verifiable 'facts'. At any rate this collection of papers, the first in a new series of Studies in Philosophy and Religion of which P. R. Baelz is General Editor, provides a useful adjunct to Professor Gill's *Ian Ramsey*, the third title in another series—Contemporary Religious Thinkers, of which H. D. Lewis is General Editor.

Ramsey's intervention occurred originally in a climate of thought dominated by Flew and MacIntyre's *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1955), but the problematic went back to *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), the classical English version of logical positivism, in which Ayer categorised religious language as emotive noise and thus deprived it of any cognitive importance or truth claims. According to Gill, Ramsey resorted to 'the revolutionary insights of the later Wittgenstein' to break out of the dilemma of logical positivism and to develop his alternative approach to the status of religious language. He is said to have learned from Wittgenstein, for exam-

ple, that the starting point for philosophy is the actual use of language, and that no use of language need be ruled out in advance as unworthy of attention. In particular, Wittgenstein's principle that the criteria of meaning and truth that apply in one region of language cannot be imposed on any and every other region of language is said to have legitimated Ramsey's attempts to free religious language from the straightjacket of empirical verification tests. In fact, however, whether these are 'revolutionary' insights (they can and have been put to extremely 'conservative' uses), and whether they are Wittgenstein's at all (for that is surely arguable), it seems more to the point to regard Ramsey's defence of religious language against the positivism of Ayer (in the diluted form of logical empiricism) as a remake of his distinguished predecessor Bishop Butler's defence of natural theology and ethics against the positivism of Hobbes. Both Butler and Ramsey (the latter perhaps through Austin Farrer) stand in sturdy Anglican continuity, perhaps to some extent unwittingly, with the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas; the mediating notion of analogy enables all three to steer their way between theological fideism and rationalist atheism. Given the milieu in which he taught, surely Ramsey simply seized on whatever tools the opposition offered, and strove to beat them at their own game. His great interest was to make Christian faith a reasonable option for people imbued with empiricist philosophy. Against any kind of Barthian temptation to isolate religious language as a private discourse, Ramsey's tracing of connections between religious uses of language and other sorts of uses helps to indicate how religion may be kept within the common field of experience. Time and again he is able to show that

it is not only religious language that displays some logical oddity, and thus he manages to widen the narrowly verificationist account of language and meaning.

On the other hand, for all his 'common sense' approach, Ramsey was a much more complex thinker than might at first appear. As Gill points out, he felt much closer to Kierkegaard and to existentialism than one might expect of an Oxford don—except that, as Iris Murdoch has observed, recent Oxford philosophers have more than a casual and superficial resemblance to certain Continental thinkers. For instance, Ramsey himself saw a similarity between his concept of 'disclosure', as 'discernment' and 'commitment', and Kierkegaard's 'leap of faith'; and both thinkers attached a great deal of importance to the place of self-awareness in bringing about religious awareness of transcendence. The importance of the logic of the first person pronoun as a model is central in Ramsey; the paradoxes of talk about 'God' are constantly situated by analogy with the logic of 'I'. In fact, the main objection to Ramsey's approach has always been his reliance on this analogy, and Gill tries hard to forestall and rebut the difficulties, insisting that Ramsey did not, after all, revert to a form of Cartesian subjectivism. It is surely obvious, however, that Ramsey's analogy depends on certain assumptions about the transcendence of the human subject, for example, which require a great deal more critical analysis than he ever gives them. In countering Humean notions of the self surely he tended to return to a form of disguised idealism, which no doubt relates him to Kierkegaard, but can do little to sustain a post-empiricist doctrine of

God. But the jokey understatement of Ramsey's 'common sense' appeal on behalf of the reasonableness of religion always went with a deep sense of mystery, often somewhat concealed, which comes out well in a paper on 'Theology Today and Spirituality Today', dating from 1967, that deserved to be reprinted in *Christian Empiricism*, though it has been left out, being perhaps regarded as insufficiently 'philosophical'. In that paper he speaks of the importance of *silence*—a 'meditative silence', like a rest in music, 'a point of balance between areas of discourse', and goes on to say this: 'I would say that it is at just such a point of balance that a cosmic disclosure occurs, when the activity of God bears on our own, and this is the silence towards which all theology must point, and from which all theological explication emerges'. To find such a 'silence' in the Church, in the Cross, in the Bible, in the Eucharist, so he says, is to discover the heart of Christian spirituality, the beginning and end of all theology, and he goes on to refer to the Greek Fathers and to Augustine ('at least those sections of Augustine which, significantly enough, are least known and which have given rise to the least theological fanaticism'). One cannot imagine Ian Ramsey as any kind of fanatic; his 'Christian empiricism' would have saved him from that, but it is surely in a much deeper and older tradition that the centre of his complex position is to be found. As a preliminary account, however, *Ian Ramsey* is a welcome and worthy memorial to a philosopher-bishop, a rare though not unique combination of vocations of which the Churches stand sorely in need.

FERGUS KERR OP

ST THOMAS AQUINAS: SUMMA THEOLOGIAE. Vol. LV: The Resurrection of the Lord (III lili-lix), by C. Thomas Moore OP. *Blackfriars; Eyre and Spottiswoode*, London; *McGraw-Hill*, New York, 1976. xvi + 150 pp. £3.50.

This rather slim volume covers not only the Resurrection of Christ but also his ascension, heavenly session and office as judge. For a balanced and comprehensive picture of St Thomas's understanding of Christ's redemptive work it needs to be taken together with the immediately preceding volume on the Passion, with which it is linked theologically; this is all the more desirable because Fr Moore has restricted himself almost entirely to providing a

clear and accurate translation with only the very minimum of additional matter. How far this is to be regretted will no doubt depend on how far, for example, it is desirable to have full-length discussions of the effect, if any, of the differences between thirteenth- and twentieth-century theories of matter on our understanding of various aspects of Christ's humanity; certainly less space has been given in the more recently published volumes to the