The book is provocative because Shorter not only poses radical questions but also does not consider many of the logical consequences of this type of theology and its taking on board anthropological thinking. In the hoped-for dialogue between faith and a recipient culture, Shorter assumes that the faith is Catholicism. What if the culture has been or is being 'invaded' by several forms of Christianity, each of them culturally different? In the work of cultural transformation, does the Catholic Church proceed ecumenically or go its own way, and 'religio-culturally' dominate the scene? Some religious groups are culturally stagnant and Shorter maintains they will consequently die: others of a fundamentalist kind are not seriously interested in culture and proceed along their own cultural path in a blinkered way.

The second part of the book is devoted to applying the concept of inculturation to the development of Catholic Christianity, beginning with early Judaism and going as far as Vatican II. Needless to say he is critical of various stages of the history of the Church, notably the Council of Trent, together with the notion of canon law, which imposed the idea of a single, dominant, triumphant, European culture, and which is still advocated in high places in Rome. He points to exceptional supporters of cultural flexibility, if not inculturation, such as Ricci, working in China, and de Nobili in India, both of them Jesuits.

The issues involved in cultural encapsulation and inculturation are of a fundamental kind. They apply as much to the western world as to the Third World. Shorter's enthusiasm for what the present Pope has called a neologism seems to blind him to rationally insoluble problems. What of the possibility of an enculturated Christ? And the challenge of relativism in trying to judge cultures, and especially where a culture is totally alien to Christianity? He is to be congratulated, however, in opening up, at least to the English-speaking world, an extremely important issue which should engage sociologically-minded theologians, Catholic and Protestant, for a good while to come.

W.S.F. PICKERING

THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM. THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN A.T. ROBINSON by A. Kee. ***S.P.C.K.,*** **1988, pp. 190 + xvi. £8.95.**

This is a dissatisfying book. It examines the work of the late Bishop John Robinson under three headings, Biblical Exploration, Theological Exploration and Social Exploration. The Bishop is neither described as a conservative nor a liberal but as a radical conservative. This is not very illuminating. The labels need decoding. Finding consistency in the Bishop's thought is not easy. Thus, in his biblical exploration he is 'conservative'. Seemingly that means he was more disposed to accepting the historical authenticity of the texts, and an earlier date for them, than many of his 'liberal' colleagues. Yet, he left the biblical categories unexplained for today's readers, as though his work was done when he showed how the inspired writers had used them. Unlike Bultmann, he would not demythologize the Bible; this he reserved for later Church doctrine. So he avoided biblical hermeneutics. Why this was so Dr. Kee never really

explains, saying only that the evangelical Robinson believed the Bible was for all, and that they would believe it if they could hear it (p. 69). In fact, he showed little interest in New Testament theology (pp. 44, 46). Dr. Kee describes his 'distinctive method' as 'dialectical' (p. 29), while his fundamental attitude is 'radical conservatism', with a distaste for 'liberalism' which however can occasionally characterize him (p. 47). He says that Robinson operated without assumptions in biblical criticism (p. 18), yet assumed the historicity of the text, for he worked with 'certain premises' but 'he did not justify them' (p. 18). All of this is very unpromising for the reader who would want to understand the Bishop's mind. Dr. Kee admits that one will never know which way the Bishop will jump, and acknowledges that he does not find him very consistent or coherent (p. 48).

In the section on Theological Exploration, Dr. Kee shows how Bishop Robinson reacted against Thomism as he understood it, rejecting ontology and opting for personalist categories. There is no extended discussion of what the Bishop included under theology. Nowhere did he offer proofs for the existence of God, only an analysis of the meaning of the God he personally experienced. Myths, metaphysics and absolutes were all banned (p. 99). The absoluteness of Christ could only be affirmed within an ontology that had no place for change or development, and to defend his absoluteness on these grounds was purely an academic exercise. As in the former section, one keeps wondering how Dr. Robinson could have been so categoric in rejecting the formulated doctrines of the Church. Indeed his doctrine of the Church is not discussed in the present volume. Dr. Kee has shown how important Dr. Robinson's dissertation *'Thou Who Art'* was for his later thinking in systematic theological, but we do not get the feel that the Bishop was consciously enriching Christian belief so much as making it intelligible to its non-ecclesial ignorers. Some empirical tests should be available on his own terms to see if he were successful.

The section on Social Exploration takes up questions which are now exercising magisterium and moralists in the Catholic household of the faith. Dr. Kee seems to line up with the Bishop that the 'only intrinsic evil is lack of love' (*Honest to God,* p. 118), but he does not engage with those who find this position inadequate. He develops the implications of the Bishop's thought, that 'Christ is not a supernatural being from another realm, bringing a changeless law from an unchanging sphere. He is the Christ because in his life and teaching men experience the absolute demands of the God of love. This is the basis of the authority with which he speaks' (p. 132). Questions of cause and effect must surely be raised here. The banned word 'absolute' is back without theological explanation as to why believers find in Christ an absolute; they would be surprised to find that their belief constituted his absolute authority. When there is exhortation to recover 'the foundations of morality already set out in the New Testament' (p. 134) one wonders what is involved in this more than what all Christians would already agree to. Exegetes differ about the content of New Testament ethics. 'Conservatives' like W.D. Davies, J. Jeremias and M. Hengel have frequently served up very Catholic-looking results from their research, but surely morality has an ecclesial dimension beyond the contingent expertise of the individual scholar. Neither is moral commitment independent of historicity; many factors contextualise Christian beliefs and commitments,

and one can hardly operate without the lived experience of the faith in Community, that is Tradition. Dr. Kee himself is especially sensitive on this issue when Dr. Robinson refuses validity to Orders in the Free Churches. He describes him as 'adopting the conventional attitude of ecclesiastical fundamentalism' (p. 145), limited by 'inhibitions and assumptions' (p. 148). He finds it odd that the Bishop wanted modern translations of the Bible while retaining antique forms of prayer even for the Our Father, refusing 'to demythologise the priesthood' (p. 146) and talking an antiquated language to 'an invisible God' (p. 155). Dr. Robinson still thought that a truly contemporary person could be a Christian ... 'so long as there are no metaphysical, supernatural, mythological or religious prior conditions attached' (p. 161). One wonders whom the Bishop was talking for or speaking to. It is not surprising that he himself recognized that many Christians thought him to be denying what they affirmed, but it is not so clear how he thought that he was not denying what they affirmed. Dr. Kee says that the Bishop opposed the traditional doctrine of God 'because it is wrong, it misrepresents God', and opposed 'the old morality' because it 'was not truly moral' (p. 167).

Dr. Kee does not develop many of these issues in detail, and perhaps the Bishop's thought was not systematic enough to do so usefully. However, the book's title still puzzles this reviewer.

RICHARD J. TAYLOR

THE MAKING OF THE MODERN CHURCH: CHRISTIANITY IN ENGLAND SINCE 1800 by B.G. Worrall. ***S.P.C.K.*** **1988. Pp 312. £9.95.**

This book tells the story of English Christianity since 1800. There are chapters on the usual subjects: the Oxford Movement, for example, and religion and science in the nineteenth century; and on the Missionary Movement, the Ecumenical Movement, and twentieth-century Biblical Theology. One has heard the story before: how Christianity grew amazingly in the Victorian years and spread missionary enterprises all over the globe; how there followed a more recent period of institutional decline, chiefly caused by Liberalism in its various forms; and how the tide has now turned in favour of Christianity, and will not recede as long as 'liberalism' does not revive.

Mr Worrall, who teaches Theological Studies at Thames Polytechnic, sums up this interpretation of modern Christian history, which he has outlined very clearly and moderately, by saying that 'by the late 1970s' (and by how much more, one is tempted to add, in the late 1980's) 'it was no longer common to find the very possibility of spiritual values being denied, and a new openness to religion was widespread'. Similarly, after a discussion of *The Myth of God Incarnate,* he says that 'by the later 1970s most academic biblical scholarship was showing more confidence in the broad historical reliability of the texts and a number of academic