

where young men and women, sickened by the new industrial society which was forming, turned for inspiration to Blatchford, Morris, Tolstoy and many others. The Brotherhood movement, the *Clarion* and its cycling clubs, the Independent Labour Party were some of the organisations in which one may find the traces of a stifled nonconformist revolution or renaissance; and in that stifling orthodox nonconformity played a part.' (*Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*, ed. D. Baker, 1977, p 360) The creative elements in the Free Churches withdrew, and that was why one had quite quickly to speak of a 'lost culture'. There were directly religious reasons as well. In Arnold Bennett's tragic novel, *Anna of the Five Towns*, Anna, who symbolises the desire for an alternative culture, is told by Mynors, the pottery manufacturer who marries her for her money, that she has expected too much of Nonconformist revivalism: 'we cannot promise you any sudden change of feeling, any sudden relief and certainty, such as some people experience; at least I never had it'. Bennett understood, what the political parsons never admitted, that Nonconformity would not survive on a self-serving political programme backed up by appeals to conscience. In politics one has to be speaking for a definite constituency, and by 1900 the chapel sub-culture was already too weak to provide what was needed. The Education Act of 1902, whose story Dr Munson describes very thoroughly, exposed that weakness; the ecumenical movement was to show how little trust the Free Churches placed in their own religious tradition.

JOHN KENT

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS** by M. Keeling, *T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1990.*

This book, by the Dean of the Faculty of Divinity at St. Andrews University, opens with a challenging chapter on the context of Christian ethics in our time. He provides a stimulating survey of theological thought from the social Gospel movement in the late 19th century in the United States and in Europe to the recent emergence of theologies of liberation. What does Christian ethics mean in the midst of a world marred by social sin? Has there been an undue emphasis on personal salvation to the neglect of the social dimension of Christianity? Is not the eschatological hope of the Kingdom to be realised in our world? Does the Gospel not demand action to change society? These are the questions raised as the book begins.

The rest of the book surveys the Scriptures, the history of the Church until the erosion of the common theological perspective on life in the 17th century, the forces which challenged that perspective, and finally the anthropological vision and moral orientation needed to incarnate the Kingdom in the world of tomorrow. A justification for the historical, philosophical and theological selections made and an indication of their intended contribution would have helped the reader to

see what the overall aim of the book is, and to keep it in mind.

For Keeling, the Bible is the articulation in stories of the self-understanding of Jews and of Christians (p.29). Mindful of different theological strands, and of the historical and cultural setting of the texts, he stresses the lines of convergence between Judaism and Christianity and between contemporary paganism and Christianity. Jesus did not bring Gospel as opposed to Law; he mediated Gospel grace in a different way from the Torah. The love commandment merely reformulates the Jewish commandment of neighbour love. Paul basically endorses virtues recognised in the pagan world. Jesus himself was a man in whom God was thought to be present and operative on earth. He was central to the life of the disciples, who became convinced that he was risen and that this gave them the power to live and help realise the kingdom on earth. Beyond questions of Jesus's radical critique of Old Testament morality, the content of agapaic love, and Paul's critical optic on pagan virtue, the failure to provide criteria for an exegesis of moral teaching and for a hermeneutical procedure to ensure both fidelity to the texts and relevance to current concerns leaves Christian ethics with shaky foundations. Even more, why should anyone commit himself in fiducial faith to Jesus, if he is only a paradigm for human living, and to active love of others if Christian faith only portrays the convictions of believers, merely a possible version of events? What assurance is there against trusting in an illusion? The lack of an adequate Christological analysis weakens the whole edifice.

This book will disappoint anyone expecting a systematic analysis of the principles of Christian ethics. There is an attempt to tackle a whole range of issues for their impact upon the Church: Church-State relations (under the Roman Empire, the medieval Papacy, the Reformation, modern totalitarianism), new philosophical trends, (Neo-Platonism, revived Aristotelianism, nominalism, the Enlightenment, social Darwinism), economic and social changes all appear. The sheer breadth of vision is initially impressive and the periodic sections on concrete issues of sexuality, property and politics are a good idea. However, Keeling is too willing to follow received historical opinion and to accept uncritical evaluation. Much more use should have been made of original sources, historical and theological. Patristic theology was not always subservient to Neo-Platonic dualism, and often resisted it. A reading of *De Bono Coniugali* alone would have qualified the negative view of Augustine on marriage. There is no appreciation of the theological structure and content of the *Summa Theologiae*, of the role of conscience or the centrality of virtue, of the New Law of grace as primarily an internal law of the operation of the Holy Spirit. Even a glance at the contents would have alerted Keeling to these features. The only citations are quoted from D'Entrèves, whose focus, like that of Gilson, is philosophical. Relying upon these authors, Keeling sees Aquinas only as a metaphysician and philosopher of law. Reading primary sources is not only a courtesy, but can obviate serious inaccuracy.

Later medieval spirituality is hailed as attending more to personal self-surrender to Christ than earlier 'arid theology'. Bonaventure and Ockham were not just devotional writers, but serious theologians, and Julian of Norwich was not just paying lip-service to dogma, while comments on Aquinas's hymn line 'sola fides sufficit' reveal ignorance of its author, its place (Eucharistic devotion, not the Mass) and its intent (not fiducial faith, but recognition of the Real Presence, for which the senses were inadequate). Keeling is much more at home dealing with Protestant and Reformed theology, though the Weber/Tawney thesis is contentious. There is a surprising failure to pick up fundamental challenges to moral theology: Ockham's voluntarism, Hume's seminal view of the naturalistic fallacy, logical positivism's threat to meaningful discourse on morals, modern Scriptural technique and a 'sola Scriptura' approach to morality.

Two elements persist in Keeling's analysis: adherence to Christ in faith and active love of neighbour as its expression. He is not uncritical of his own tradition, as well as Catholicism, for the failure to respond adequately, or at all, to the social question in the modern age. Marxism and Social Darwinism lead to a potentially interesting anthropological review of the centrality of inter-personal relations and of personal self-development, but the person as an epiphenomenon of matter in Marx is ignored, and the body-person relationship is not pursued beyond the mere assertion that sexuality should foster inter-personal relations and not be exploitative, although it is crucial for sexual and medical ethics.

What are the foundations of Christian ethics after all? For Keeling morality means 'becoming a self', moral evil the 'unmaking of the self'(pp. 221–2). Christian morality is for him primarily formal, 'suggestions' at the concrete level a secondary matter. The essential issue is to accept the vision of action in Christ, then to be committed to inter-personal action, especially for the poor, which would mean questioning the Western political system, suffering for others and accepting responsibility for the whole of creation.

In the absence of any clearly transcendental understanding of God, of any assurance of truth content to Christian revelation (eg. the divinity of Christ, the reality of his resurrection), Keeling's foundations of Christian ethics are not impressive. The Christian faith 'has to be seen today as one claim among others to discern the needs of a person with a wider knowledge of order and disorder' (p. 216), while 'the affirmation of the presence of & God in all experiences gives the power to make ethical decisions to change experience'(p. 221). Anthropocentric reductionism and moral relativism can never serve up an adequate criteriology for the critical evaluation of our presuppositions and for an integrated approach to our moral problems. Keeling invites us make a lasting commitment to one possible version of events, to a possible illusion. A very shaky foundation indeed!

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