

ETHICS IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT, by Paul Lehmann; S.C.M. (Library of Philosophy and Theology), 35s.

This is one of the more serious ventures into original ethical theory that have lately found their way into print. Unlike the more frivolous popularizers of the 'New Morality', Professor Lehmann (of Union Theological Seminary in New York) is generally as difficult to understand as he is worth the effort.

Like them, he has far more to offer by way of criticism than of construction. Two large sections of his book are devoted to studies of the major moral philosophies of the West, and of Christian (mostly Catholic) moral theology. Under the former heading the reader encounters an exposition and evaluation of Aristotle's rule of the mean, Kant's categorical imperative, William James' pragmatic satisfaction of demand, the value-ethics of Paul Weise and Erich Fromm's humanistic system aimed at growth to maturity of productive character, the meta-ethical criticism of the linguistic analysts, and the several attempts by Christians themselves (Augustine, Aquinas, and Schleiermacher) to construct hypothetically natural ethics free of religious considerations. Despite the wildly disparate variety represented by these philosophical systems, Lehmann observes that they all share the same common structure: they all propose Good as the ultimate goal and limit of human activity, and each proposes its respective 'right rule of reason' as the proximate norm to serve as link between the ultimate ethical claim of the Good and the individual ethical act, presuming upon man's conscience to make the necessary rational analysis needed to apply the norm. Lehmann's dissatisfaction is not so much with the diverse norms that the philosophers commend, as of any ethical generalisation whatsoever (be it the rule of the mean, the greatest good of the greatest number, or the affirmation of the true self) to provide behavioural guidance: 'there is no way in logic of closing the gap between the abstract and the concrete. Ethics is a matter not of logic but of life' (p. 152).

Traditional Christian moral theology, in the course of a long and careful section of the book, is of course found wanting on this same count, except that it has in practice proved even more absolute than have the philosophies. A further criticism he makes here is even more serious: moral theology, of whatever tradition, has uniformly followed Aquinas' formula that grace restores and indeed perfects nature, thus making Aristotelian ethics, with a Foreword by the Church, into a Catholic moral manual. This contention, claims Dr Lehmann, is simply semi-Pelagian, and forms the very ground of the Reformation's rejection of Catholic moral theology. 'The aim of this way of doing things has been to try to show that the ethical demand was intelligible and relevant because it presupposed certain original and residual capacities resident in human nature for recognizing and fulfilling it. These capacities, in turn, having been corrupted by sin, were, so the argument ran, restored and rendered operative by the redemptive work of Christ and the gift of grace' (p. 120). Luther, with his doctrine of total depravity, rightly rejected any role of a rehabilitated nature in Christian ethical

activity. Furthermore, there is nothing really specifically Christian about the Catholic moral system: 'the Christian significance of behaviour was bound to be little more than an addendum to the residual goodness of the natural man, which, even as a perfectionist addendum, was likely sooner or later to lose its fascination. If one could be almost as good without Christ as with him, he seemed scarcely worth loyalty, or even attention' (pp. 120-21; see also pp. 316-25).

On the Reformation view (which Lehmann professes to be restoring after some centuries of inconsistent application by Protestant orthodoxy of the insights of the first Reformers), man under grace is so renewed and recreated that no consideration of human nature is relevant to the ethical behaviour of his redeemed life. Nor, indeed, can any code of law or even of advice be of any service. In place of rules, his action is guided by what Lehmann likes to call a context: what God is doing in the world. God's purposes for mankind, worked out in the entire span of political activity (politics understood not as government, but in Aristotle's sense of 'all public affairs'), will for the Christian come to focus in the Church, understood not simply as an empirical institution, but as a hidden fellowship. Whence the title Lehmann takes for his programme: *Koinonia* ethics. 'Christian ethics is defined as the disciplined reflection upon the question and its answer: What am I, as a believer in Jesus Christ and as a member of the Church, to do?' (p. 45). Ethics is no longer normative but descriptive; not a search for morality but a free obedience to Christ the King. Actions are not good or evil in themselves; each situation must be judged for itself by the man whose inward integrity of heart is God's gift.

Many will accept much of this as rather obvious and vague, and not a few Catholics will feel that Dr Lehmann's basic insights are far more reconcilable with a Catholic ethics than he seems to imagine. Unfortunately, despite an astonishingly sympathetic and fair-minded reading of Catholic sources, he has relied on far too few texts, and come away with a fragmentary and unreal image that does not bespeak true acquaintance. Nor does he realize that the future of moral theology is suggested more by the work of men like Bernard Häring than by the worn tradition of Henry Davis. Lehmann has much to say that can help those now struggling to free moral theology from its Talmudic legalism and occasional taint of Pelagianism, but he could offer far more through deepening acquaintance and dialogue.

The flow of the book is repeatedly clogged by a cumbersome literary style (nature here surely stands in the way of grace), a too-frequent use of Barthian jargon, and the inclusion of enormous clots of matter only partially absorbed into the main thesis. But when a theologian is struggling with original answers to agonising questions, the reader is inclined to be more indulgent.

When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,

The line too labours, and the words move slow.

Another fault which, because of its fragrance, the reviewer is obliged to remark, is the high incidence of textual errors. There are errors in Greek on pp. 47 (twice), 48, 64, 69, 84 (twice), 85, 94, 100, 273, 330, 352 (twice), 355 and 357

(thrice); errors in Hebrew on pp. 46, 95, 103 and 353; errors in Latin on pp. 30, 71, 89, 106, 256 (twice), 313 (twice), and 363; errors in German on pp. 64 and 298; errors in English on pp. 109, 196 and 209. There is a mis-translation from the Latin on p. 65. There are erroneous statements on the incidence of biblical words on pp. 47 and 103. Many of these errors can be laid up to faulty proof-reading, but others cannot, and the reader's confidence in several chapters of dubious quality on scriptural ethics, is hardly thereby restored. Also one wonders why the book eschews the use of the German *umlaut* throughout, and then applies it to the lone instance of Hans Küng's name.

JAMES TUNSTEAD BURTCHAEHL, C.S.C.

THE INTERIOR FOUNTAIN, by Michael Day, Cong. Orat.; Geoffrey Chapman, 8s. 6d.

Professional Christians are commonly obligated by their Rule to the practice of daily meditation or mental prayer, a task generally agreed by them to be well beyond their unaided powers and nearly impossible in any case. An abundant literature, if that is the word, has accumulated to supply the necessary help. It is difficult to say how much of it is of value, tastes vary so greatly. But one hears people occasionally recommending such and such a book of 'meditations' as helpful to them and the variety of themes and methods offered at different times should ensure the satisfaction of a huge public.

Fr Day's book is rather different from most. Not only is it unapologetically theological, but, in this too unlike so many, it neither portrays nor analyses but seeks to penetrate and unify. At this point one should make a declaration of non-interest: this is not my meditation book, though most likely there will be many another it will suit. Yet I am not altogether disqualified from commenting. Taken isolated, these meditations stirred in me neither thoughts nor feelings incentive to prayer, but read *in extenso* they were profoundly stimulating to thought. This was not assisted by their style, which is generally scholastic, relieved only to a degree by occasional poetic diction. And the sentences are at times too long and too complex for ready use in meditation. Also it is the ratiocinative mind that is at work rather than the imaginative or intuitive, providing matter for meditation rather than prayer. The opening sentence seems to guarantee this approach: 'The Christian lives in the light of reason enlightened by faith; his life is based on the certainties of reason and revelation grasped in their harmony.'

Despite all this the book is well worth reading and thinking about. On one's prayer its effect may be only cumulative and oblique but it offers solid help in remote preparation. The subject and its arrangement are simple enough. The former may be described by saying that it consists of the thesis that we enter into three distinct realities, ourselves and others and God, at the same time, by the same path, in the same measure; the answer, in a sense, to the Bishop of Woolwich though not advertised as such. The arrangement is to approach this basic theme