

THE FUTURE OF OUR RELIGIOUS PAST, essays in honour of Rudolf Bultmann, edited by James M. Robinson. SCM, 1971. 372 pp. £5.

This is a selection and translation from the essays included in the latest of the Bultmann *Festschriften*, that of 1964 to mark his eightieth birthday. The majority of them are strictly scriptural and concerned with eschatology. The final six essays are entitled 'theology and philosophy', but are of distinctly less interest, showing not nearly the same standard of thoroughness and professionalism (here exception must be made of Heidegger's discussion of Leibniz's monadology, taken from his last course of lectures at Marburg in 1928). Interesting, also, is G. Krause's essay on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rudolf Bultmann, showing how until recently it was left to non-Germans to remark the similarity of their programmes of reinterpreting the truths of the Gospel in non-religious language. The other essays in this section tend to be fragmentary (Gogarten's five pages on the debt and responsibility of theology) or occasional (E. Fuch's lecture, delivered originally to a literary holiday course for Frenchmen, on the hermeneutical problem, which nevertheless has some useful guidelines).

The scriptural part is a staggering monument to the influence of one man, for one cannot be blind to the similarity of method which runs through all the contributions from these distinguished professors. Each of them is so thorough and basic that it is almost impertinent to make any attempt to describe or criticize them; they cannot really be read altogether, but must be studied each for itself by one who is engaged on the particular study of the topic with which each deals. There are, however, a couple of negative comments which may be made on the group as a whole: firstly, and this too is in itself a monument to Bultmann's influence, they tend to take for granted knowledge and acceptance of each other's theses, so that suggestions, which to a non-Bultmannian need a very great deal of proof, are substantiated by the sketchiest of proofs or a reference to works difficult of access (e.g. a *Festschrift* of 1923), which—if one takes the trouble to search them out—certainly do not prove the case. A shared attitude which is most interesting is the absence of any trace of assumption that there is an *a priori* probability that events narrated in the gospel are historically true. To an old-style Catholic exegete it is

almost inconceivable that events did not take place as they are narrated; to the majority of Catholics today there is at least a bias in favour of historicity unless there are good reasons to the contrary; but when these writers ask why the evangelist makes a certain statement it is only as a last resort that they accept the answer that it actually happened this way. A second reservation, not unconnected with the first, is that there is a good deal of Teutonic arrogance to be found among this Herrenvolk of the exegetical world; of course, the *selbstverständlich* and *natürlich* with which most German works are peppered are less forceful than almost any translation makes them seem, but nevertheless the impression remains, even when this is discounted.

In spite of these criticisms the wealth of stimulating suggestions in these essays is fascinating; one can do no more in a review than mention a few themes. Nils Dahl shows the diversity of eschatological figures in Judaism of Jesus' time, particularly in the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls; he then maintains that the Messianic titles were applied to Jesus solely because he was condemned as king of the Jews and because of the unexpected resurrection events. W. G. Kümmel holds convincingly that Jesus expected a coming in the near future, and that he was simply wrong. Ernst Käsemann is duly censorious about the way 'reconciliation' has cannibalized all the other New Testament terms used to describe Christ's death and resurrection, though it plays a comparatively minor part in the New Testament itself. Helmut Koester, investigating what made primitive Christian heresies heresies, arrives at the piously Bultmannian conclusion that it was because they refused to grapple with the mythologies of their time; his task would have been strikingly easier if he had been able to use the ecclesiological angle that what makes it clear that a doctrine is heretical is that the community feels that this doctrine does not express what the Church feels. Hartwig Thyen is most suggestive on John the Baptist, especially about the theological overtones of the circumstances of his mission and about his acceptance posthumously as a Messianic figure in some circles. In line with Dahl's view is Erich Dinkler's essay, whose thesis is that

Jesus had no Messianic consciousness, and that he came to be given the title 'Christos', which he himself had refused, because of the superscription on the Cross.

To an outsider many of the views expressed in this book which go to make up the impression and the standpoint of the whole seem over-hastily reached; they need careful examination and reflection. But to a Bultmannian many of the views imbibed by Catholics with their mothers' milk seem similarly over-hasty and

naive, and doubtless they are. The avowed object of the Bultmannian is to reinterpret religious truths in non-religious language, and to a Catholic this must often seem to be a deliberate exclusion of the supernatural; but then it is equally true that for many a Catholic presupposition the supernatural seemed to lie where it does not necessarily, e.g. in the merely marvellous. *In medio stat veritas.*

HENRY WANSBROUGH

THE MORALITY OF ABORTION. LEGAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES, edited, with an introduction, by John T. Noonan, Jr. *Harvard University Press*, Cambridge, Mass., and *Oxford University Press*, London, 1970. xviii and 276 pp. £4.25 net.

The occasion of this book is a still active debate in the U.S.A. about a proposed move to give legal coverage to more kinds of abortion. 'At a time when abortion is the cry, when the orthodoxies of the hour make questioning of the postulates underlying its immediate acceptance impertinent, when the well-informed managers of the media know that abortion will sweep all before it, it is not too late to face the central issues' (xviii). While this book does not face by any means all the central issues—nor even isolate them clearly, which is a more culpable failing—it does give valuable historical and legal information to make enlightened discussion of abortion more accessible to non-specialists of goodwill.

'An almost absolute value in history' (1-59) is the editor's own historical survey of Christian teaching on abortion and, perhaps, the most valuable paper in the book. After a conspectus of Greek and Roman teaching, Noonan says, 'where even the wisest presented hesitant and divided counsel, where other authorities defended abortion, the Christians proposed a rule which was certain, comprehensive, and absolute' (7). After an untypically poor treatment of the New Testament and the early Christian community, the Fathers are examined. 'Although therapeutic and social reasons for abortion were known from the best doctors and philosophers, these reasons were never mentioned as justification' (18). The Fathers did not agree as to why this was wrong—beyond its being a violation of love for one's neighbour—but did agree that it was wrong: 'The culture had accepted abortion. The Christians, men of this Greco-Roman world and the Gospel, condemned it' (18). Between 450 and 1450 'the monks... transmitted the apostolic and patristic pro-

hibition of abortion. The canon law set it [*sic*] as a universal requirement of human behaviour. [In fact the western canon law did not claim to legislate for all Christians, far less for all men.] The theologians explained the relation of the law to the theory of ensoulment, but on one basis or another condemned abortion at any point in the existence of the fetus. The prohibition was still absolute. But the basis for weighing the life of the embryo against other values had been laid, and in the next period of development a balance was to be sought' (26). From 1450-1750 'The tendency of casuistic examination of abortion had been to question the absolute prohibition', while in the same period 'An opposite tendency, to reinforce the prohibition, may be discerned in the legislative activity of the papacy' (32). From 1750 to 1965 'the teaching of the Church developed to an almost absolute prohibition of abortion' (36) and it was 'the central authority of the Church [he means the papacy, here], far more prestigious in moral matters in the period 1880-1950 than ever before in its history, which dominated the development' (37). 'In 1588 Sixtus V, the most energetic of popes, could do nothing to change the views of the dominant moralists; beginning with the papacy of Leo XIII the moralists, in this area of thought, followed the papal lead' (37).

Noonan concludes: 'In Catholic moral theology... life even of the innocent was not taken as an absolute. Judgments on acts affecting life issued from a process of weighing. In the weighing, the fetus was always given a value [though not always a *human* value] greater than zero, always a value separate and independent from its parents. This valuation was crucial and fundamental in all Christian thought on the subject and marked it off from