

Reviews

ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THEOLOGY, edited by Karl Rahner. *Burns & Oates*, London, 1975. 1,841 pp. £10.

A RAHNER READER, edited by Gerald A. McCool. *Darton, Longman & Todd*, London, 1975. xxviii + 381 pp. £5, paper £2.50.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAITH, by Karl Rahner. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1974. 229 pp. £3.95.

CHRISTIAN AT THE CROSSROADS, by Karl Rahner. *Burns & Oates*, London, 1975. 95 pp. £1.50.

Burke's Peerage won avid readers when the structures of the old society were crumbling and the old certainties had gone. It would be wrong to say a similar state of affairs in present-day Christian theology entirely explains why the *Encyclopedia of Theology's* sales figures are so good. After all, it deserves to sell well. It is rare these days to be offered so much written by so many gifted men, so well produced at so reasonable a price, and there is nothing quite like it in the English-speaking world. But the contemporary Christian's uncertainties are unquestionably part of the explanation: a lot of people are yearning for something with a beginning, a middle and an end. They are still hankering for the ancient scholastic vision which saw reality as a single synthesised truth. This, the latest lexicon to be compiled under Karl Rahner's editorship, looks like the answer to their wants. I have met a man who is reading it from A to Z. At least one Catholic college in America is already using it as if it were a post-tridentine seminary manual. It is selling well in the third world. And by no means only Catholics are purchasing it. That means, though, that it is being bought by some people in the English-speaking world most unlikely to have the basic knowledge of scholastic and German idealist and existentialist philosophy without which a number of the *Encyclopedia's* most important entries can only be half penetrated, and not needing in any case to paddle through the narrow straits of Denzinger-Schönmetzer (a work cited in some of the entries quite as often as the Bible).

The prominence given to Denzinger

perhaps betrays the age of much of the text. Some of it was written as long as eleven years ago, the bulk of this book being made up of most of the main specifically theological articles in *Sacramentum Mundi* (SM) shorn of their bibliographies. Since Rahner's aim has been to produce a work of reference accessible to as broad a range of theological students as possible, he has also, however, drawn articles from *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* on biblical theology, charism and dialectical theology (here translated into English for the first time), and others from *Theologisches Taschenlexikon*. The entries on anthropomorphism, demonology and inerrancy have not hitherto appeared in English, and M-J le Guillou's articles on ecclesiology are new. So too are John Cumming's articles on language (taking account of the work of Chomsky and his contemporaries) and on education (which speaks to an English readership in a way Max Müller's very Germanic article in SM did not). So too is the article by Adrian Hastings on missions (which is more concise and theologically stronger than the SM entry and—unlike that entry—does not think solely in terms of Catholic missions). And to the SM entry on mysticism Rahner has himself added a much-needed note on its theological interpretation. But, although there have been some updatings of the articles from SM, there have not been enough. The entry on the eucharist conveys the feeling that Vatican II has only just closed, and while Peter Gumpel's instructions on what one should tell the faithful about limbo now seem excessively scrupulous, it also seems a little sur-

prising to find, in a Catholic lexicon like this, an article on birth control which urges the duty of family planning without making even a passing reference to *Humanae Vitae*!

Exactly how useful is a book of this kind? Let us take as an example the entry on revelation (largely written by Rahner himself). Most of the articles in the entry should be clear enough to the average seminarian for whom the *Encyclopedia* is intended, but they contain here and there turgid and obscure sentences which indicate not so much Rahner's profundity as the difficulty of turning his prose into English and the difficulty English-speaking people have in thinking in his categories — the categories of German metaphysical thought. Clearly it is a German seminarian Rahner has primarily in mind. Also this entry contains some scholastic terms (e.g. references to 'formal' and 'efficient' cause), the meaning of which is not disclosed anywhere else in the book (the SM articles on, for instance, 'causality' having been dropped). If this book was intended to be of use to people who are not Catholics it should have contained a short glossary of the principal scholastic technical terms, of the kind put in each volume of the new English *Summa*.

Moreover, the absence of nearly all the historical material which filled SM makes the specifically Rahnerian character of the book very evident. (Indeed, it is a very good glossary of Rahnerian terms.) Printed again here, the SM article *Being* by Johannes Lotz, Rahner's friend of student days, says that 'to ignore being is to lose the kernel of philosophy and consequently philosophy itself'. So, presumably, not only is 'analytical philosophy' denied philosophical status, but no ground is given to any of those who would make the concept of meaning rather than the concept of being their referential framework. Rahner's basic position has not, then, shifted. But, leaving aside the even more fundamental question whether it any longer makes good sense to assume theology is something that can be split up neatly under alphabetically-arranged headings, there is, I fear, a danger that the spread of a semi-popular reference book like this (which could well stay long in demand) will prompt the sort of readers it is directed at to see Rahnerian theology not merely as one theology among several, but as 'the theology'.

And debased Rahnerism would be as stifling as debased scholasticism was. Rahner has possibly done more than any other Catholic theologian to help liberate us from a distorted notion of orthodoxy, but, in attempting to bring his teaching to a wider readership, is he in effect delivering Catholic theology from the bondage of pseudo-Leibnitz only to shackle it to pseudo-Heidegger?

We live, then, in peril of the easy oversimplification. However, those who want their Rahner easy will be disappointed by *A Rahner Reader*. It is a well-selected anthology, well indexed, but McCool's introductions to each extract are summaries rather than attempts to locate what Rahner is saying in its context, and his general introduction assumes that the figures and intellectual movements that shaped Rahner's thought need not be explained. Anybody whose knowledge of Rahner is limited to this *Reader* is likely to miss the full significance of his achievement.

Almost certainly it is the philosophical writings of the young Rahner, *Spirit in the World* and *Hearers of the Word*, along with *Theological Investigations I-IV*, that are going to engage men's minds the longest. Perhaps inevitably, none of the text of *Spirit in the World* is here. In his introduction McCool makes a valiant attempt to summarise its basic argument (pp. xvif.), but even this summary will be impossible for the wholly uninitiated to grasp. Joseph Donceel has translated for this anthology 65 pages of the first edition of *Hearers of the Word*. Unfortunately, whatever its other virtues, it is in places opaque. (What a pity Donceel did not imitate Ronald Walls's dexterous punctuating, which makes his translation of the second edition at least tolerable reading.) McCool should have protected the newcomer's patience by supplying much more ample notes in this section. It would have been worth it, for an understanding of these early books is a vital key to the later writings. It was in these early books that Rahner (by facing the objectivity of St Thomas with subjectivity . . . not realising—how could he?—that such an alternative is no longer demanded) made his attempt to lay the foundations of an authentically Catholic theology which took account of post-Kantian thought. In them he outlined the theological anthropology in which his thinking on revelation,

christology and ecclesiology has its roots.

Furthermore, because the *Reader* is an anthology texts are further removed than ever from the historical situation in which they were written, and no room has been found for what may now seem rather dated articles appearing in the *Theological Investigations*—those, for example, on indulgences, the Assumption and monogenism. Therefore it is easy to be unaware here of Rahner's courageous insistence, in a church still nervous about opening its windows, that 'within Christianity as a whole there is nothing unworthy of intellectually honest belief' (to quote Louis Roberts). He demonstrated that it is possible to be both a 20th-century man and a good theologian, and many with opinions different from his found this liberating.

Now, just because, in this swiftly changing world, Rahner's thought is likely eventually to be seen as significant for the influence it has wielded prior to this present time rather than after it, I personally find it hard not to feel slightly ambiguous about his own attempts to present his basic ideas in popular form, admirable although his stress on the pastoral obligations of the theologian undoubtedly is. *Opportunities for Faith* is the first assortment of his more general writ-

ings to appear in English. More welcome, though, are the first three chapters in another collection, *Christianity at the Crossroads*. The rest of the book is a hotch-potch, but in these chapters ('What is Man?', 'Why am I a Christian?' and 'The Core of the Faith') Rahner is writing primarily for the bewildered half-believer, and he does so with extraordinary breadth and sensitivity, and lucidity too. While his basic ideas have not changed, here (on, e.g., pp. 18f., 22f.) we see him facing up to the fundamental problem he first confronted when he was a young man, but now in a spirit of gentle acceptance, including self-acceptance. In other words, in hope. Whatever may be the final verdict on Rahner's epistemology, these relatively slight chapters are the testimony of one of the great Christians of our time, standing in confidence before 'the incomprehensible mystery' (p. 23). They remind us of something which the sheer quantity of metaphysics in compilations like the *Encyclopedia* and the *Reader* can obscure: that one of the reasons why Rahner has been able to bring more intellectual breathing-space into the Church is because he has had a profound enough faith to be able to say, with Anselm, 'I believe in order that I may understand'.

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ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. XX: Pleasure (Ia IIae xxxi-xxxix), by Eric D'Arcy. xxviii + 172 pp. 1975. £2.75. Vol. XXXIV: Charity (IIa IIae xxiii-xxxiii), by R. J. Batten, OP. xviii + 326 pp. 1975. £4.25. *Blackfriars*; London, *Eyre and Spottiswoode*; New York, *McGraw-Hill*.

The treatise on the particular passions of pleasure and sorrow (*delectatio* and *tristitia*) is so closely connected with the general account of the passions which immediately precedes it that the decision to entrust it to the same translator and editor was a wise one, and indeed Dr D'Arcy has found it advisable to repeat in his introduction to the later volume a large part of his introduction to the former. He has in fact been faced with two special difficulties, of linguistic and conceptual nature respectively. The first is that it is extremely hard to find adequate English equivalents for the large variety of Latin terms which St Thomas used to expound the Aristotelian psychology, even harder, we may surmise, than St Thomas and the other Western scholastics must

have found it to find adequate Latin equivalents for Aristotle's original Greek. The second difficulty is that, even when the linguistic problems have been surmounted, the whole conceptual scheme of Aristotelian psychology is vastly different from that of any or all of the psychological schools of the modern world. It is one of Dr D'Arcy's strong points that his acquaintance with modern psychology and philosophy is both extensive and profound; it is therefore a pity that his own contribution to this volume consists of little more than a fairly brief introduction; the footnotes, while numerous and helpful, are brief and there are no appendices. But, in any case, for most readers, this will be one of the less exciting volumes of the *Summa*, for all Dr D'Arcy's competence and diligence, though it