

Reviews

NOUS PRÊCHONS UN MESSIE CRUCIFIÉ, by Bernard Rey. Cerf, Paris, 1989. Pp. 156, 75F.

Following the current of his earlier works Bernard Rey has written a book about redemption that is a theology of the Crucified One more than a theology of the Cross. His preferred key for understanding the Christian belief that the world is saved by the cross is the fact that the One who was executed in that obscenely horrible manner is the One who spent his life proclaiming the Reign of God. People put Jesus to death because his messianic message threatened them. In refusing his preaching they refused the God of grace and forgiveness who revealed himself in him. The passion of suffering that is realised on the cross saves the human family and its world because it is the outcome of the passion of divine love that Jesus proclaimed in his preaching and made visible in his life. That love carried him to total solidarity with his brothers and sisters, driving him to identify himself on the cross with the horror of suffering and poverty and rejection in which the sinfulness of humanity is manifested; it inaugurated the eschatological reign of messianic salvation that he had announced in raising him from the dead and establishing him as Sender of the Spirit.

Rey wants his readers to feel the scandal of the cross, because stumbling on it can bring people to their senses; there is something wrong when it becomes a comfortable, anaesthetized symbol. The gruesomeness of it should always be a scandal for human sensibility: how is it possible that we humans can do this sort of things to one another? Its non-sense and impiety should make it a scandal for people of certain religious and political philosophies, as it was for the Greeks and the Jews of Paul's acquaintance: how can we go on believing in a God that is believed to be on the side of the humanly powerful, when we see what people who thought like that did to a Jesus who told them the kingdom of God was for the poor? But not every way of experiencing the scandal of the cross gives a true feeling for its power to save, and true knowledge of the God who reveals himself in it. There is in the western theological tradition a way of explaining the saving value of the cross in terms of penal suffering and of a debt to be paid to God that can make the cross problematical rather than scandalous for contemporary believers. Rey cites a recent book by F. Varone called *Ce Dieu censé aimer la souffrance* as an illustration of how such a theology can seem to postulate a God who is hard to recognise as the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He works out his theology of redemption with special attention to this problem.

The first part of the book looks at the biblical material on which all theologies of the saving value of the death of Jesus are grounded. In Part II three major authors of the Western theological tradition about redemption—Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther—are examined.

This allows Rey to characterise the dominant tradition of the Western

churches and to measure its strengths and weaknesses against the biblical sources. It also allows him to say some interesting things about the extent to which these authors have not always been well understood within the tradition that looks back to them. But, even at its best, Western theology of redemption tends to see what happened on the cross primarily as the overcoming of sin, and the restoration of the divine order of things that had been upset by sin. The cross dramatizes the restoration of God's benevolent dominion over the universe. Rey relates this preoccupation with the recovering of an order of things that had once existed to the typically mediaeval conception of society as a stable, hierarchically ordered arrangement of things that was at its best when it reproduced and maintained the structures and values carried by a traditional wisdom. This reflection of a mediaeval view of things in the classical western theologies of redemption offers a hint of why they, and their understanding of the cross, are unsuitable for contemporary believers. The contemporary believer belongs to a culture that has a much more historical way of seeing the drama of the universe. So many of the structures of our society are recognised as being oppressive that it is only in a new and unheard of future that salvation can be looked for, and not in the restoration of a golden age from the past that has been upset by sin. This is the messianic, eschatological side of salvation so strongly present in the preaching of Jesus. Rey would find in it a better key for understanding the mystery of the cross today. In Part III of his book he offers an essay in such a theology of redemption. It is centred on the messianic, eschatological rôle of Jesus, and on the way his life and death revealed the true face of God and inaugurated his reign. It draws freely and convincingly from contemporary eschatological theologies of hope, and from theologies of liberation. It integrates these ideas, however, within a christology and trinitarian theology that remains basically classical and dogmatic. Rey does not enter into direct debate with theologians whose eschatological and liberation theologies of redemption bring them to a radical questioning of the classical dogmatic tradition. He is writing for a generally informed audience rather than just for specialists. But one has a sense that he is well aware of what is at stake in this important contemporary debate and that he knows well where he stands. His book, combining as it does a strong biblical ground, a critical sensitivity to the Latin theological tradition, and a concern to respond to contemporary issues, is a convincing piece of theological writing.

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SIMONE WEIL: 'THE JUST BALANCE' by Peter Winch, *Cambridge University Press* 1989, Pp viii + 234. £27.50 (h/b) £9.95 (p/b).

Most philosophers in the Anglo-American philosophical world would not regard Simone Weil as a philosopher of major importance. The majority will not even have read her work. If they have heard of her at all, they will think of her as a religious mystic. Even those acquainted with her religious work may not realise how deeply philosophical her fundamental questions were. Although Winch recognises that it is often difficult to decide whether Simone Weil is engaged in philosophical reflection or religious meditation, he has made an explicit decision to expound her thought, as far as possible,

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