

movement has handed out to cults. However, agreeing with Jenkins that those fears voiced by the anti-cult movement were quite often exaggerated does not mean one has to agree with Jenkins's view that the only thing that distinguishes cults from mainstream churches 'is the issue of tension, which means how each is regarded by society at large'. (p. 17) He is here relying on Niebuhr and Troeltsch.(cf. 242). But the Christian Church is a community, and M. Scott Peck has argued strongly that there is a very real difference between a community and a cult. As the British sociologist Bryan Wilson has pointed out, in the new religious movements in the West the focus is on the individual self and on the self-selected community. Wilson has also pointed out that these movements all depart radically from the soteriological and eschatological prognosis of Christianity. This, however, would not be a problem for Jenkins, who clearly considers that any group has a perfect right to call itself 'Christian' if it wants to, whatever beliefs it holds.(cf. 62).

Professor Jenkins has written a book that it is easy to take jabs at, but this is partly because of the breadth of the ground it covers. It is a stimulating introductory guide to an exotic but undoubtedly influential thought-world occupied by quite a lot of rogues but by some remarkably good people as well.

JOHN ORME MILLS OP

THE CULTIC ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY: THE DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT by **W. W. Meissner** *The Liturgical Press* (a Michael Glazier book) **Collegeville, Minnesota 2000. Pp. xxxiv + 261, \$27. 95 pbk.**

The adjective 'cultic' in the title of this book does not refer to liturgy but means something close to 'sectarian'. For many readers it would carry quite pejorative overtones. Unprepared readers would also find it difficult to disregard the negative associations of the word 'paranoid', which is a key term in this book. The author, a Jesuit and a Freudian psychoanalyst, proposes what he calls the 'paranoid process' as an essential clue to understanding the rise and early development of Christianity.

The 'paranoid process', he explains, is not necessarily pathological, though it frequently becomes so. Rather, it is 'endemic' to human psychology, being precisely that which establishes the sense of self-identity and distinction from others. It is thus normal and helpful; it becomes pathological only when a sense of identity and distinction leads to destructive attitudes and behaviour, ranging from unreasonable suspicion of others to aggression and persecution. The paranoid process in individuals interacts with social forces in the formation and maintenance of groups, such as tribes, nations, voluntary associations or religions. When a religious group — especially one that gathers round a charismatic leader — identifies itself over against the wider society, including the parent religion, it is a 'cult'. Meissner believes that the paranoid process plays a decisive, and hitherto insufficiently recognised, role in the formation of cults. All this is set out in his 'Prelude: A Note on

Methodology', then in the 'Introduction' dealing with the paranoid process and the cultic process.

The first chapter centres round the case of Daniel Paul Schreber, one of Freud's patients, who exhibited extreme delusions of victimisation and self-aggrandisement projected on to God. For Meissner this is the classic case that illustrates, admittedly in a pathological presentation, the paranoid process, in which the experience of humiliation and rejection is compensated for by narcissistic self-absorption and self-importance. The second chapter attempts to show the paranoid process at work at the level of religious groups in the cultic process. Sections II, III and IV of the book review, respectively, the 'Pre-Christian Context' in which Christianity arose, 'Early Christianity' and 'Gnosticism'. In each of these domains, Meissner claims, the cultic process, and hence also the paranoid process, are present. Examples are: the rise of the Jewish sects and eventually of Christianity; the divisions, often perceptible in the New Testament, among the earliest Christians; the rise of Gnosticism. On pages 142–5 there is a summary of how Meissner believes these forces have contributed to the rise and development of Christianity. 'The limited data at hand', he writes, 'points only generically to the sense of frustration, discontent, disillusionment, and rebellion that found its way into the early Christian movement. Jesus's mission was one of confrontation and conflict with the established religious authorities.'

The early church, then, arose in and maintained itself for a considerable period of time in a state of high tension with the social environment, a prime characteristic of cult movements. In addition to this cultic sense of isolation and in-group enhancement, there was also condemnation and rejection of the outsiders who did not embrace the way of the cult and accept its beliefs and convictions. This fanatical adherence was linked to the role of the 'charismatic leader'. It would be too much to expect that Meissner would be a specialist not only in psychoanalysis but also in early Judaism and Christianity and even Gnosticism. In fact, of course, he has to rely on 'authorities', notably Max Weber and R. A. Horsley. Such writers see the rise and development of Christianity in essentially sociological terms; Meissner echoes Horsley when he writes (p. 105) of 'its emergence out of an agrarian protest movement'.

The final section V, 'Psychoanalytic Perspective on the Cultic Process', resumes the author's argument. This book is on the whole clearly written. Technical terms from psychology are usually well explained. It is therefore curious to find '*religionsgeschichtliche*' (p. 150) uninterpreted. Errors such as 'hordes' for 'hoards' (73) and 'capitol' for 'capital' (p. 112 repeated on p. 130) seem to be more than mere slips; here and there the author's command of English grammar is a little uncertain.

My real misgivings about the book centre on three points. First, though no psychologist, I cannot help feeling that a psychological method based on illness (as is Freud's) will inevitably produce a more or less pathological account of the psyche and its processes. I believe this has happened here, and that despite Meissner's best efforts, religious groups and their leaders appear to be doing little more than

compensating for their personal and collective hurts and grievances. Secondly, I do not think that a psychoanalytical reinterpretation of a sociological interpretation gives an adequate account of religious persons, events, beliefs and behaviour precisely as religious, that is, as having to do with God.

That brings me to my final and most fundamental misgiving. Meissner attempts (p. xxix, n. 4) to distinguish between an explanation that is 'reductive', in which 'lower-order explanations might have validity in further extending understanding of higher-order phenomena', and one that is 'reductionistic'. I find it difficult to see how the account he offers of the origin of Christianity avoids being 'reductionistic', that is, by his own definition, one 'in which lower-order concepts are used to explain a set of higher-order phenomena in such a way that a lower-order explanation is regarded as complete and exclusive and the higher-order phenomena are regarded as having no independent explanatory validity on their own terms'.

JUSTIN TAYLOR SM

HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF DUBLIN. Ed James Kelly and Dáire Keogh *Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2000.* Pp. x + 390, £30. 00 Hbk.

The introduction to this work bewails the lack of a solidly consistent tradition of historiographical material for the Diocese of Dublin, as compared to that enjoyed by other Irish dioceses. This book is therefore an attempt to respond to this inadequacy, both by applying to Dublin the conclusions of recent historical research, and by making use of new materials and the improved archival resources now available in the diocese itself. This rather weighty book (380 pages), contains articles from 16 Irish historians, all attempting to give colour and depth to previous narrative, and to clear the ground for further research. It is therefore from beginning to end a response to various different sorts of needs, and not a consistent re-telling of the history of the diocese.

The varied natures of these inadequacies are dealt with by the authors in different ways. First, there is a determined attempt to rework already well worn material in the light of recent revisionist history. The first few chapters deal with the medieval period, a story often told but usually in an anachronistic and triumphalist mould. Howard Clark and Ailbhe MacShámhrain emphasise the uncertain ecclesiastical status enjoyed by the diocese in its early years, trying to move away from the simplistic myth of a 'papal norwegian' Dublin. Relations with England have always been a dominant theme here, but Margaret Murphy looks at them afresh, and challenges the usual assumption that the corrupt Irish Church was reformed by the Norman English, but rather stresses the native character of the reform movement. The later chapters on the Reformation and Counter Reformation have a more restricted historiographical purpose. The former essay by James Murray attempts to apply the revisionist approach to the Irish Reformation associated with Bradshaw and Canny to the situation in Dublin, whilst at the same time developing their approach.

Secondly, many of the authors explicitly set themselves the task of