

Reviews

KARL RAHNER SJ: *Theological Investigations*. Vol. 11: *Confrontations I*. 1974. 257 pp. £4.75. Vol. 12: *Confrontations II*. 1974. 331 pp. £5. Vol. 13: *Theology, Anthropology, Christology*. 1975. 235 pp. £4.75. All translated by David Bourke. *Darton, Longman & Todd*, London.

These three solid volumes are the excellent English translation of Vol. IX and the first part of Vol. X of Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie*. They contain some 42 essays, mainly concerned with questions of ecclesiology, christology and anthropology, but ranging from 'Does traditional theology represent guilt as an innocuous factor in human life?' to 'Theological observations on the concept of time'. Yet no matter how unusual may be the topic upon which Rahner writes, one constantly has a strange feeling of *déjà lu*: there is a curious sameness about nearly all these essays and it derives, I suspect, in part from his almost obsessional return to the problem of theological pluralism.

Theology today is articulated within a wide variety of discourses which are irreducible to each other; there is no single theological discourse which can resume the whole truth of the gospel, and from within which the diversity of theological discourses may be criticised and evaluated. However, although Rahner accepts the fact and inevitability of this pluralism, he clearly experiences it as alien, as a threat to the unity of the Church. Now, given the situation of pluralism, there will, of course, be a pluralism of evaluations of the situation. Even so, I think it not unfair to say that Rahner appears to

have misjudged the nature of the problem. He tends to see pluralism in purely quantitative terms: there are so many theological and philosophical systems being employed today that no individual theologian, or even team of theologians, is able to master them all and produce an overall synthesis; it is the experience of one's inability to understand and therefore evaluate the theological position of others. But surely the phenomenon of pluralism is far more deep-rooted than that. It lies not merely in one's inability to understand 'the other' but in the intrinsic plurality of the discourses that one uses oneself, a pluralism that is not so much the experience of incomprehensibility of what other people say as the condition of the possibility of any creative and meaningful discourse.

Although Rahner is clearly disturbed by many developments in modern theology ('The alien is close to us', Vol. 11, p. 8), yet he tries to achieve a sympathetic understanding with a quite remarkable openness and honesty, and occasionally he can be very illuminating, for example, on 'Human aspects of the birth of Christ' (Vol. 13, pp. 189-194). But it must be said that these essays add very little to what he has already said in the earlier volumes of his *Schriften*.

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TRUTH AND DIALOGUE, edited by John Hick. *Sheldon Press*, London, 1974. 164 pp. £3.25.

THE ASIAN JOURNAL OF THOMAS MERTON, edited by Naomi Burton, Patrick Hart and James Laughlin. *Sheldon Press*, London, 1974. 445 pp. £6.50.

The collection of articles edited by Professor Hick offers substantial food for thought in the present climate of inter-religious dialogue. The fare provided is worthwhile not so much for the insights offered, stimulating though these often are, but because crucial questions in this field are now seen to

occupy the central position they deserve. Rather than attempt a brief resumé of each paper in the book, I wish to indicate two relevant problems that appear to me most worthy of serious attention. Professor Parrinder's contribution ('Is the Bhagavad-Gita the word of God?', ch. 7) throws the first into