

CATHOLIC THEORIES OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION SINCE 1810. A Review and Critique, by James Tunstead Burtchaell, C.S.C. *Cambridge University Press*, Cambridge, 1969. 342 pp. 70s.

During the nineteenth century, the development of scientific and historical criticism raised fundamental questions for understanding biblical inspiration and the inerrancy of scripture. Father Burtchaell discusses those Catholic writers who, since the foundation of the Tübingen school in 1810, have attempted to reconcile traditional belief with the findings of science and history, and he concludes that many contemporary ideas about inspiration are simply moderate suggestions of the more advanced views of the last century. It needed a great deal of courage and industry to cover the wide area of research which this work demanded and any weaknesses will only come to light when others have been able to study some of the details to the same extent. Consequently, this reviewer can comment only on Father Burtchaell's treatment of Newman, Ryder and, to a lesser extent, von Hügel.

Father Burtchaell understands Newman's theory of *obiter dicta* as it was condemned by former commentators. But others would now argue against this traditional interpretation of Newman's thought, and claim that Newman did not necessarily endorse the view that inspiration was partial or limited to matters of faith and morals (p. 76). It is perhaps significant that in his *Letter to Ryder*, von Hügel should have quoted Dausch who included Newman among those holding *Freer Conceptions of all-pervading Inspiration*. It is also possible that Father Burtchaell has ultimately exaggerated the differences between these writers on the subject of inspiration at this time, though Ryder did not really give 'eventual support' to Newman (p. 78) and was originally criticized by von Hügel for giving comfort to Newman's opponents. Von Hügel himself believed that Newman 'with the intuition and prescience of genius, has seen . . . what will be the com-

monly accepted solution of the future' even if he did not quite go far enough. At the same time, Ryder did not write a 'long, conservative treatise' on inspiration (p. 193), but a lengthy paper which was modified as a result of his correspondence with von Hügel who then described it as a 'manly and upright paper' which was 'the best I have yet seen by a Catholic, in its explicit concessions: so at least I think, I, member of the Catholic left or Protestant Centre!'

The important division which von Hügel himself emphasized at the time was between those who adopted an *a priori* view of theological notions, confusing what is with what ought to be, and those who were willing to subject such concepts to an *a posteriori* examination. Von Hügel, therefore, found it easier to deal with Ryder's views than those of conservative theologians such as Franzelin precisely because Ryder recognized the significance of *a posteriori* critical considerations, while Franzelin's views were based on *a priori* expectations rather than evidence. Furthermore, according to von Hügel, the important points were a recognition of plenary inspiration and biblical error; once Ryder accepted these, von Hügel considered that their differences were of degree rather than kind, whereas Father Burtchaell would seem to imply much more.

There is a tone of irritation and even flippancy throughout the book which some will find entertaining and others infuriating. I suspect that the author would not have lost the interest of his readers without it, while his undoubted industry and obvious ability would be more immediately and widely recognized. There is also a use of language and vocabulary which, again unfortunately, might confuse his readers even if it does not offend them.

J. DEREK HOLMES

THE BEGINNING. A study in the Greek philosophical approach to the concept of creation from Anaximander to St John, by Arnold Ehrhardt. With a memoir by J. Heywood Thomas. *Manchester University Press*, 1968, 212 pp. 42s.

GOD THE CREATOR. On the transcendence and presence of God, by Robert C. Neville. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1968. 320 pp. No price.

Dr Ehrhardt has provided a work of considerable erudition, but so far as I can see of little else. Learned footnotes flower from page to page, as we pick our way duskily from the luxuriant growths of Presocratic philosophy, through Plato and Aristotle, to humbler soil of the

hellenistic and Roman periods where philosophy and magic and superstition grow intertwined. Unfortunately the constant preoccupation with detailed reference to ancient texts and scholarly discussion (in itself, of course, most admirable and desirable) seems to have

deflected Dr Erhardt from any consistent soundness of judgment and perspective. I find it odd, I had almost said grotesque, to find it said of Anaximander: 'He by no means abandoned physical research; but he grasped the fact that it had to be based upon transcendental axioms' (p. 143). Words which might possibly have a meaning today in the mouth of some metaphysically inclined research scientist cannot be transplanted to the world of the sixth century. Anaximander could not abandon, nor retain, what he had never known; and to my mind his axioms are in no meaningful sense transcendental. On the following page: 'The method of number symbolism, employed by the Pythagoreans in the field of ethical philosophy, proved to be arbitrary.' I doubt whether numbers were symbols for the Pythagoreans, before Plato at least. They were employed, not 'in the field of ethical philosophy' as we might cleanly say in our application for a grant to the faculty board of theology, but in the only field the Pythagoreans knew before Socrates, the whole of reality. And a theory which was probably a potent force in the genesis of Plato's theory of forms can hardly be said to have proved arbitrary, if by that we mean trivial and sterile.

But these curious growths, and many more of the same family, should perhaps be tolerated for some final grasp of the words of St John: In the beginning was the Word. But I confess that for all the accumulated detail of Dr Erhardt's discussion my understanding when I had finished reading his book was little better than when I had begun it, and my patience was a

good deal frayed. Only in the last page or two was there some light, in a comparison of Philo and the book of Revelations. Philo wrote: 'God is the beginning of creation; while the last and the least honourable part, our mortal frame, is the end' (quoted p. 203). Christ says in the book of Revelations: 'I am alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

Professor Neville's extremely involuted discussion of various traditional problems of ontology includes a refutation of Hegel and a demonstration of the existence of God. It also includes, and I abbreviate from the contents list to the third section, extended discussions on Concern, Conversion, Faith, Certainty, Solitude, Bliss, Dedication, Reconciliation, Brotherhood, Religion and the Other Things in Life, Freedom, Love and Glory.

The main tool which Professor Neville uses is a distinction of determinateness and indeterminateness in existence. Perhaps it is unavoidable that first principles should either be known by inspection, or, if we fail to see the point the first time, then gleaned by a process of osmosis. Neither method was effective in my case. Large areas of Professor Neville's book have a Thomistic flavour, acquired I should imagine at several removes. But despite this apparent Thomistic affinity, I have been unable to grasp quite how Professor Neville would distinguish himself from a traditional or Thomistic metaphysics, if for once I dare allow myself that loose conflation, and I suspect that this is an inability which I share with the author.

DENIS O'BRIEN

THE GREEK PATRISTIC VIEW OF NATURE, by David S. Wallace-Hadrill. *Manchester University Press*, Manchester, 1968. 150 pp. 35s.

This book has decided merits: it is lucid and often diverting. It provides a valuable *dossier* of Greek patristic texts bearing on the sciences and, more especially, on human physiology. The chapter on the interpretation of nature by the Greek Fathers is succinct and just. Yet I must admit to reservations about one of the book's principal theses. Dr Wallace-Hadrill is understandably annoyed by the charge that the Fathers attributed little or no value to the physical world and ordinary human experience. His evidence shows abundantly that they ascribed a considerable, if subordinate and instrumental, value to the physical world and man's study of it. But the author, in his zeal for the reputation of the Greek Fathers, tries to argue

that in practice some of them were interested in nature for its own sake, whatever their theoretical standpoint, and that Clement of Alexandria, St Basil and his brother Gregory, even anticipated St Francis of Assisi in their love of nature. This is surely excessive.

Dr Wallace-Hadrill comes to his rather surprising conclusions through a somewhat indiscriminating attitude to his material and an excessively wide conception of nature. By 'undiscriminating' I mean that the author is inclined to see personal observation where the use of a handbook is more probable, to mistake an interest in theories for an interest in nature and to neglect questions of literary *persona*. For instance, he can write (p. 81): 'It is the eye of a