

- 4 *Guide for the Perplexed* III 32 (quoted by Raymund Martin, *Pugio Fidei* III d. 3 ch. 12, xiii).
- 5 Cf Marcel Simon, *Saint Stephen and the Jerusalem Temple* (JEH 1951, pp. 127-142).
- 6 Insistence on maintaining external practice: *Migr.* 89ff. For allegorical interpretation, e.g. *Spec. Leg.*; *Vit. Mos.* passim.
- 7 Cf J. Leclercq, *La crise du monachisme* (Bulletino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo 70 (1958), pp. 19-41; H. Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter*, pp. 391f; K. V. Selge, *Die Ersten Waldenser*, I pp. 267f. Cf PL 172, 1411; Pl 181, 1720.
- 8 *Theog.* 550, 613. Cf M. L. West on *Theog.* 551f.
- 9 *Epicurea* 360ff Usener. For the critique, cf Greg. Thaum, *Or. ad Orig.* 152; Origen, c. *Cels.* II 27; Atticus, fr. 3 Des Places; Porphyry, *ad Marc.* 22.
- 10 B 5; 14; 15 DK (86; 87; 50 M). For the interpretation, cf M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, p. 145 (I accept his first interpretation).
- 11 William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 94 n.2 (Fountain ppb.).
- 12 Cf T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 201.
- 13 *Ad Uxorem* II 8, 6ff. Cf Jean Steinmann, *Tertullien*, p. 121.
- 14 *L'Abandon*, p. 71. All references to de Caussade are to the editions by M. Olphe-Galliard.

Rahner's Grundkurs

Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity, by Karl Rahner. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978.
£14.00

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The appearance of this book is a considerable event. Many good judges, perhaps the majority, would say that Rahner is the best living Catholic theologian. While his earlier writings have covered a daunting range of theological topics, many of his admirers have felt the lack of an account from him of the nature and significance of Christianity as a whole. Here is what they have wanted. I shall try to sketch the argument of the book, and conclude with a few comments.

Theological studies as they now exist are splintered and fragmented, and often too dominated by scholarship for its own sake (p. 6), rather than promoting an understanding of 'Christianity as the answer to the question which man is' (p. 11). The principal aim of the book is to remedy this deficiency.

What has to be stressed about man as potential hearer of the revelation of God is his nature as person and subject; that is, as free to decide what to make of himself, yet also liable to shirk the issue, to shift responsibility from himself, and to cloud his consciousness on the matter by pursuit of pleasure or business (p. 29). It is by reference to this that one may understand something of 'the ultimate mystery which we call "God" '(p. 44). Genuine

acknowledgment of God is closely associated, contrary to what Marx and some others have thought, with facing the truth about oneself as one is, and refusing to be distracted by superficial concerns. One is liable to overlook God for just the same reason that one may overlook what is most fundamental about oneself as a human being – that awareness of him is not just another instance of the awareness that we may have of the things which surround us in the world (p. 48). All knowledge of God is a matter of ‘reflection upon man’s orientation towards mystery’ (p. 52). Arguments for the existence of God, when properly understood, do no more than draw attention to this ultimate mystery insofar as we reach towards it by the very activity of asking questions at all (p. 69). Belief in God as personal, which is of course fundamental to Christianity, may be abused in such a way as to compromise the divine mystery, and to make it appear as just one more item of the furniture of the world (p. 74). On the other hand, if properly understood, it may serve as a corrective of those views of God which take insufficient account of his close approach to us in prayer and the life of grace (p. 75).

It is inevitable that guilt and sin should be central concerns of Christianity, since it is a religion of redemption, of rescue precisely from sin and guilt by the grace of God (p. 90). In every properly human act ‘there can and must be present ... an *unthematic* “yes” or “no” to this God of original, transcendental experience’ (p. 98). Genuine rejection of God in the depths of one’s life may be quite distinct from explicit atheism (pp. 60-61). We cannot know how many people are finally committed to sin, or whether any particular person, including ourselves, is so; but conscience and the Christian message both impress upon us the importance of decision in regard to the matter here and now (p. 103). And there is no means of being sure how far an objectively sinful act is due to the agent himself, and how far it is to be ascribed to the external pressures of his present or past environment (p. 107). The resulting ‘co-determination of the situation of every person by the guilt of others is something universal, permanent and therefore also original’. In insisting on this somewhat pessimistic estimate of man’s moral state, and drawing out its consequences in opposition to more rosy views, Christians believe that they are not only telling the truth, but doing something to promote a better world here and now (p. 109).

So far it is the presuppositions of Christianity which have been at issue; what of its substance? God has given himself to man, in a manner much more profound than a mere statement of truths about himself (p. 116). ‘What is communicated is really God in his own being, and in this way it is a communication for the sake of

knowing and possessing God in immediate vision and love' (p. 117). The person who accepts this knows that the remote holy mystery which is God 'is also a hidden closeness, a forgiving intimacy, his real home ... a love which shares itself, something familiar which he can approach and turn to from the estrangement of his own perilous and empty life' (p. 131). God's self-communication, his giving of his Spirit, is the basis from which some understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity may be gained. The usual formulations of the doctrine are quite unintelligible to most of our contemporaries; the main reason for this being that the usual meaning of the term 'person', whereby each person is 'his own free centre of conscious and free activity', is actively misleading when applied to the 'Persons' of the Trinity (pp. 134-5). And the kind of speculation about the Trinity in abstraction from the life of grace which has preoccupied so many theologians since the time of Augustine 'neglects the experience of the Trinity in the economy of salvation in favour of a seemingly almost gnostic speculation, about what goes on in the inner life of God' (p. 135). With an eye to God's activity for the salvation of man, however, we may say that as presence divinising our inmost selves God is Holy Spirit; that as unique historical presence in Jesus Christ he is Word or Son; and that as always remaining 'the ineffable and holy mystery, the incomprehensible ground and origin of his coming in the Son and in the Spirit', he is Father (p. 136).

How are the universal claims of Christianity to be reconciled with its status as a particular historical phenomenon? (p. 138). The fundamental point to be grasped here is that for salvation and revelation to occur, as they do for all men everywhere (one may compare the Old Testament conception of a covenant with the human race as a whole [p 148]) is one thing; for them to be at all adequately conceived and reflected upon is another (p. 146). Only in Jesus Christ do we have 'a criterion for distinguishing in the concrete history of religion between what is a human misunderstanding of the transcendental experience of God, and what is the legitimate interpretation of this experience. It is only in him that such a discernment of spirits in an ultimate sense is possible' (p. 157). What has been said implies that someone may be justified, and thus live in the grace of Christ, even when he has no actual contact with Christianity; he is then what may be called an 'anonymous Christian'. Still, it is obvious enough that only one who explicitly professes faith in Jesus Christ is a Christian in the full sense (p. 176).

It must be asked how far the fundamental beliefs of Christianity are harmonious with the modern evolutionary world-view (p. 178). If man is 'the existence in whom the basic tendency of

matter to discover itself in spirit through self-transcendence reaches its definitive breakthrough', and if this human essence awaits fulfilment through 'full self-transcendence into God by means of God's self-communication', then 'the absolute guarantee that this ultimate self-transcendence, which is fundamentally unsurpassable, will succeed and has already begun is what we call the "hypostatic union",' which is also 'the necessary and permanent beginning of the divinisation of the world as a whole' (p. 181). To envisage man as an alien excrescence on the cosmos, as people are apt to do in alleged deference to natural science, is incompatible not only with Christian belief, but ultimately with science itself (p. 188).

The hypostatic union should not be conceived in a manner utterly distinct from and alien to the union with God anticipated now in grace, and finally to be realised in glory, by every human being who accepts God's self-communication. In fact one may say that 'the intrinsic effect of the hypostatic union for the assumed humanity of the Logos consists precisely and in a real sense *only* in the very thing which is ascribed to all men as their goal and their fulfilment, namely, the immediate vision of God which the created, human soul of Christ enjoys' (p. 200). Of course, such transcendental considerations as have been advanced just now only have point in response to an historical encounter with Jesus as the Christ (p. 203). It is this historical encounter, and the response to it in which a person makes Jesus 'the mediation of his immediacy to God', whether competently formulated by an ecclesiastical community or not, which is constitutive of Christianity (pp. 205-6). When considering the documents of the New Testament, and particularly the Gospels, in their bearing on this matter, it is vital not to be trapped by the false dilemma that either an account has to merit belief in every detail, or it is to be utterly rejected (p. 246).

One crucial historical question is that of Jesus' understanding of his own person and work during his ministry; while this need not be unambiguously identical with the understanding of these things by the later Church, still there must not be an actual contradiction here (p. 236). It does seem that 'Jesus saw himself not merely as one among many prophets who in principle form an unfinished line which is always open towards the future, but understood himself rather as the *eschatological* prophet, as the absolute and definitive saviour' (pp. 245-6). We must beware, in affirming the divinity of Jesus, of underestimating the implications of his true humanity; at least so far as his 'objectified and verbalised' consciousness was concerned, it appears that he had to learn from the course of events – for example, that because of his listeners' hardness of heart the Kingdom of God would not come in the way he had thought at first (p. 249). As for his expectation of an im-

minent end of the world, this 'was for him the *true* way in which he had to realise in his situation the closeness of God which calls for an unconditional decision' (p. 250). There is no need to gloss over the fact that Jesus before the resurrection 'proclaimed the kingdom of God and not himself. This man Jesus is the perfect man in an absolute sense precisely because he forgot himself for the sake of God and his fellow man who was in need of salvation, and existed only in this process of forgetting' (pp. 250-1). That Jesus made the decision at the Last Judgment dependent on a decision about his own person, however, is the most reasonable inference from the sources (p. 253).

In considering the problem of the resurrection, 'we must avoid the misunderstanding that resurrection is a return to life and existence in time and space as we experience it'. And faith in the resurrection of Jesus, being confidence in 'the permanent validity of his person and his cause', is not a matter of 'taking cognizance of a fact which by its nature could exist just as well without being taken cognizance of' (p. 267). And our acceptance of the testimony of those who 'saw' the risen Lord cannot be on all fours with cases where someone not present at an alleged event simply believes that it has occurred on the evidence of someone who was present; at this rate the apostolic witness would have to be rejected as incredible. 'We ... ourselves experience the resurrection of Jesus in the "Spirit" because we experience him and his "cause" as living and victorious' (p. 275). However, we do, as the Christian tradition has always insisted, depend on the original witnesses (p. 274), in that this first-hand experience of ours can only be known for what it really is by reference to the *apostolic* testimony to *Jesus* as the risen one (p. 276). 'So far as the nature' of the relevant experiences of the apostles 'is assessable to us, it is to be explained after the manner of our experience of the powerful Spirit of the living Lord rather than in a way which either likens this experience too closely to mystical visions of an imaginative kind in later times, or understands it as an almost physical sense-experience' (p. 276). However, it has to be admitted that, quite apart from the resurrection, the performance of miracles by Jesus is remarkably strongly attested, being corroborated not only by sayings ascribed to him which are almost certainly authentic, but by the hostile witness which comes to us through the Talmud (p. 264).

The resurrection vindicates the claim of Jesus to be God's final and unsurpassable Word of self-disclosure (p. 280). The classical Christological formulae are *one* way of expressing this unique relation between God and Jesus (p. 281); if we are to make contact with our contemporaries, we cannot simply repeat them (p. 289). The official Christology of the Church develops the basic assertion

that 'God in his Logos becomes man' (p. 286). That the logical subject who possesses the 'natures' is not constituted by the union, but is none other than the eternal Word who existed prior to the union, is to be maintained in order that a 'Nestorian' understanding of Christ may be avoided. However, 'in accordance with the fact that the natures are unmixed, basically the active influence of the Logos on the human nature ... may not be understood in any other way except the way this influence is exercised on free creatures elsewhere.' Thus, in spite of the tendency of a theology which has been too influenced by monophysitism, one must not understand the humanity of Christ as a mere 'instrument' of the Logos (p. 287).

When all is said and done, the validity of the classical Christology consists negatively in its preventing Jesus being taken as just one of a line of prophets or religious geniuses, and positively in clarifying the fact that 'in Jesus God has turned to us in a unique and unsurpassable way. In Jesus God is not represented by something other and different from himself, in the way that creatures in general are different from God' (pp. 288-9). When orthodox theology says that Jesus 'is' God, it must be remembered that the copula 'is' is being used in a special sense, to convey 'a unique, otherwise unknown and deeply mysterious unity'; 'Jesus is God' is always in danger of being taken in a monophysite sense, where subject and predicate are simply identified (p. 290). So far as people misunderstand the orthodox faith in such a way, it is only reasonable for them to reject it as mere mythology. The Christian dogma when properly understood has nothing to do with the divine man myths of antiquity, and the real dogma which does indeed call for an act of faith on man's part 'should not be burdened with a lot of mythological misunderstanding' (p. 291). It should be noted that, from the point of view both of Scripture and contemporary needs, the orthodox formulation fails to give immediate expression to the *soteriological* significance of Christ; it would be desirable now to seek a formula which did this (pp. 292-3).

A new Christology should also pay close attention to the consciousness of Christ, and develop a 'consciousness Christology' alongside the classical one. Protestant theologians at the beginning of this century tried to develop such a Christology, but unfortunately it was heretical, 'a kind of modern edition of the Nestorian "trial and probation" christology' (p. 302). An 'ontological' Christology which attends to consciousness as such (as opposed to an 'ontic' one which uses concepts derived from the world of things in the traditional manner (p. 302) would make more intelligible many of the Johannine statements about Christ; and would bring out how it could be that 'the man Jesus exists in a unity of wills

with the Father which permeates his whole reality totally and from the outset, in an "obedience" from out of which he orients his whole human reality,' and 'in this surrender ... is able to accomplish due to God what we are not able to accomplish' (p. 303). Such a Christology will have to treat the question of Christ's pre-existence more cautiously than has the traditional one, leaving exegetes the freedom to investigate with impartiality what Jesus himself intended by his unique 'Son'-ship. If the second 'Person' of the Trinity is taken to be 'exactly identical with God's *ability* to express himself in history', one can properly speak of the pre-existence of that 'Person', without getting involved in the difficulties about the matter which are now felt so acutely (pp. 304-5).

It may have seemed reasonable to suppose at one time that a person's relationship to God was only a private matter; but now hardly anyone doubts that a person is what he is not merely as an individual, but in and through his social nature (p. 323). Thus the Church as 'the institutional constitution of the religion of the absolute mediator of salvation' (p. 322) is essential to Christianity, for all that it is not, as has occasionally appeared, what is primary and most central to it (p. 324). While the objective and the authoritative and the institutional can never take the place of the personal dimension in Christianity' (p. 344), it does not follow that they do not have their own indispensable place. Without some structure, moreover, or division of labour, and a modicum of law and discipline, the Church would not be the Church, but a mere agglomeration of religious individuals (p. 391). However, it must be remembered that 'the more complicated human life becomes, and the more differentiated individual persons in the Church become and have a right to become, the more frequently can there be ... discrepancy ... between the level of what is regulated and can be regulated by the Church and the concrete situation of an individual Christian' (p. 393).

The question of what kind of Church was really intended and founded by Christ is one of the most contentious in theology (p. 324). It is now agreed more or less on all hands that some kind of Church existed soon after the resurrection (p. 327). Jesus did not proclaim religious ideas of a universal kind, but rather a Kingdom of God present through him and because of him; he gathered a people round him consisting of the lost sheep of the house of Israel who had been without their true shepherd (pp. 327-8). It does seem probable, if one takes all the evidence into account, that Jesus expected time to elapse between his own death and the coming in fulness of the Kingdom of God, and this time to be not merely one of waiting but of gathering and preparing the new people of God (p. 328). The conceptions of the Church to be found

in the New Testament, for example in Matthew, Luke and Paul, are very various; yet the same basic idea may be traced everywhere. 'There is the one Church which was founded by Christ and was won by Christ and is united with Christ. It is at the same time a visible and an invisible Church, it has an earthly and a heavenly mode of existence, and it possesses both an exterior form and an interior, Spirit-filled and mysterious essence' (p. 341).

Which is the 'true Church', if there is one, and by what signs is it to be identified? Any contemporary Catholic apologetic which argues that in some sense the Roman Catholic Church is *the* Church of Christ has got to come to terms frankly with the fact that there are real Christians in other denominations (p. 351). Some Christians are apt to cut the knot by maintaining that the denominations which exist are all more or less equally legitimate, and that which any individual should belong to is a matter of historical accident or personal taste. However, such a relativistic ecclesiology is quite unsatisfactory from the Catholic point of view, and would have been repudiated by the great Reformers themselves (p. 353). One mark of the true Church is continuity with traditional Christianity and its Church; every real Reformed or Lutheran Christian will lay claim to the Church before the Reformation as his own (p. 354). A second mark is that the basic substance of Christianity be not denied (pp. 353-4); a third that a norm should be provided for belief and practice which is sufficiently independent of the whims of the individual (p. 356).

It does seem that the Catholic Church 'according to the very simple evidence ... possesses in the concrete a closer, more evident and less encumbered historical continuity' than its Protestant rivals 'with the Church of the past going all the way back to apostolic times' (p. 357). What of the preservation of the basic substance of Christianity, particularly in the light of the controversies on the matter at the time of the Reformation? At the very centre of the protest of the original Reformers were the 'three famous "onlys": only by grace, only by faith, and only Scripture'. Now an orthodox Catholic, just as much as an Evangelical, must insist that no man can 'himself contribute something to his salvation which is not given to him by God's free grace'. The Council of Trent, in maintaining against the Reformers that a person is free in regard to his salvation, in no way denies this (p. 359). Here at least is a dispute which may now be laid aside as due to mutual misunderstanding (p. 360). The doctrine that one is saved 'by faith alone' is only the subjective aspect of the doctrine that one is saved by grace alone; the essential unity of the state of faith may for some minds be partly obscured by the schematic distinctions made by some medieval theologians between faith, hope and love, but here again

there is no difference of substance.

As to 'Scripture alone', in the light of modern knowledge an Evangelical Christian too has to recognise that Scripture is in a very essential way a product of the Church. In fact he is forced to do this as a result of that historical scrutiny of the Bible which arose and made its first notable advances precisely within Evangelical Christianity. To one who protests against tradition as such in the name of Scripture, it may be answered that Scripture, arising as it did in the first instance 'from the concrete, living preaching of the living church' is to that extent 'already the result of tradition' (p. 361). The old Reformation doctrine of Scripture, presupposing as it did a kind of 'verbal inspiration' independent of the life of the Church, is quite untenable in the light of modern knowledge, and is now rejected in effect by informed Evangelical Christians (p. 362). Still, while 'Scripture is a literary concretization of the living testimony of the Church' of the first Christian generations, it remains, for Catholics as well as for Evangelicals, an authoritative norm for the later Church. 'The Church does not receive any new revelation over and beyond this Scripture, nor over and beyond the apostolic preaching of the original Church' (p. 363). It may be concluded that 'for a Catholic understanding of the faith there is no reason why the basic concern of Evangelical Christianity as it comes to expression in the three "onlys" should have no place in the Catholic Church' (p. 365). And Evangelical Christianity serves as a constant reminder to Catholics of what gives Christianity its ultimate meaning, and 'the fact that grace alone and faith alone are what saves, and that with all our manoeuvring through the history of dogma and the teaching office, we Catholics must find our way back to the sources again and again' (p. 367). In approaching the Marian dogmas rejected by the Evangelicals, it has to be borne in mind that in the Catholic view Mary is 'the highest and most radical instance of the realisation of salvation, and of the reception of salvation'. For fifteen hundred years this was really taken for granted by both the Western and the Eastern Church, though 'not always' in the 'explicit and reflexive way' represented in the Marian dogmas (p. 387).

In eschatological statements 'we project our Christian present into its future' (p. 432). We must avoid the temptation to interpret such statements as 'anticipatory, eyewitness accounts of a future which is still outstanding', which gives rise to so many difficulties (p. 431). Belief that man is not 'abolished in death' but 'transposed into another mode of existence' is not belief in 'a linear continuation of man's empirical temporality beyond death'. In finding the latter incredible, as so many of our contemporaries do, it is important that one is not necessarily rejecting the former (p.

436). 'Eternity is not an infinitely long mode of pure time, but rather it is a mode of the spiritual freedom which has been exercised in time, and therefore can be understood only from a correct understanding of spiritual freedom ... The achieved final validity of human existence which has grown to maturity in freedom comes to be through death, not after it' (p. 437). From this perspective, one cannot parcel out 'body' and 'soul' and allot them separate destinies; thus the question of what the 'soul' does when the 'body' is in the grave is in the last analysis a superfluous one (p. 436).

It is of course notorious that the belief of Catholics differs from that of most Protestants in the proposition that there is a place of purification for the soul 'after' death. What this amounts to is that 'through death the basic disposition of a person, which comes about through the exercise of his freedom, acquires a final and definitive validity; but on the other hand, because of the many levels in man, and consequently because of the unequal phases in the process of becoming in which he reaches fulfilment in all of his dimensions, ... there is a process of maturation "after" death for the whole person' (pp. 441-2). It cannot be said that Catholic doctrine has determined exactly how far and in what sense temporal categories are to be applied here; yet perhaps the notion of such an 'interval' between a person's existence on earth and his ultimate destiny may be a means of gaining some positive understanding of and sympathy with that idea of re-incarnation which is so widespread in Eastern religion (p. 442). And it must constantly be borne in mind that Christian eschatology is not concerned merely with the ultimate fate of individuals, but with that of humanity as a whole and even of the material cosmos. 'The *whole* is a drama, and the stage itself is also part of it. It is a dialogue and a drama which has already reached its irreversible climax in Christ' (p. 446).

There is no doubt that the book as a whole represents a tremendous effort to present Christianity as 'the answer to the question which man is'. My own impression is that Rahner is particularly successful when he writes of the relation of faith to authentic humanism, of the nature of sin, and of the essence and justification of what is peculiar to Roman Catholic Christianity. I am much less happy with his treatment of Christology and eschatology. While Rahner is much too conscientious a dogmatic theologian to carry through a thorough reduction of Christian belief in existentialist terms in the manner of Bultmann, he does often show a strong tendency in this direction. I think Rahner's use of the term 'mythology' is particularly unfortunate in this context; one feels that any matter of contingent fact that a typical contem-

porary man finds difficult to believe, or irrelevant to his concerns, will count as 'mythology' in Rahner's sense, and therefore may be rejected.

Rahner's account of the resurrection of Jesus seems to me to be particularly strongly affected by this tendency. He appears to come perilously close to *identifying* the fact of Jesus' resurrection with the attitude that believers have and have had to the life of Jesus. As traditionally understood, the doctrine certainly *justified* the attitude, but could by no means be *identified with* it; it was one thing for Jesus to have risen from the dead, another thing for his followers to acknowledge him as risen Lord. The doctrine of the resurrection as traditionally believed seems to have died the death of a thousand qualifications at Rahner's hands. On this matter, it seems to me that Pannenberg is much more satisfactory, insisting as he does that how historico-critical analysis of the New Testament texts bearing on the resurrection turns out is of central rather than peripheral significance for Christianity.

Of course one can see the reason for Rahner's attitude on this matter; he wants, as they say, to preserve a low profile on matters of New Testament scholarship, so that what is essential to Christianity may seem less at risk owing to the vagaries of scholarly opinion. In this, he is understandably reacting against the 'fundamentalist' attitudes which used to be more or less universal among Catholics and were strongly encouraged by the Biblical Commission early in the present century. Yet however deplorable these older attitudes, they did have their point. The less historical risks are run by Christian belief, the more etiolated it becomes, and the more disingenuous appear the claims of Catholic and other Christians that they still hold to the classical Christian doctrines, which do presuppose the substantial historical veracity of the New Testament documents. Pope Pius X and the authors of *The Myth of God Incarnate* do not have much in common; but one may learn from both parties that the case for combining Christian orthodoxy with what some would hold to be the assured results of scholarly investigation of the New Testament cannot simply be assumed to be a viable one. To put it bluntly, classical Christology was constructed on the assumption that the views of the historical Jesus about himself and his mission are at least roughly what one would gather from the Fourth Gospel, and does not consort at all comfortably with the conviction that they were radically different. Rahner is critical of the historical conclusions of the Liberal Protestants as leading inevitably to a Christology which is Nestorian rather than orthodox; but I do not think his own position is quite immune from this criticism. He is surely right that the traditional Christology, which treats in abstract terms of Christ's

'natures' and so on, needs supplementing with one that treats of his consciousness in the light of the Biblical evidence. And he is properly concerned that the substance of the traditional faith be kept through such reinterpretation. But whether its substance *can* consistently be kept, without a greater confidence in the Gospels, and particularly in the Fourth Gospel, as providing historically reliable information on Jesus' conception of his own person and work, is another matter.

Rahner is hard on the efforts of many theologians, from Augustine onwards, to attain a systematic understanding of the Trinity as it were in itself, apart from the actions of the Persons for and in believers in the life of grace. Here I think he does them an injustice. After all, unless the Church is simply to concede an economic or modalist, and therefore heretical, interpretation of the mystery of the Trinity, it is up to theologians to show at least how it can be other than nonsense to affirm, in effect with the writers of the New Testament and explicitly with the Fathers and ecumenical councils, that there are three distinct beings who are divine, and yet that what is essential to monotheism is not thereby impugned. To insist that, on pain of 'gnosticism', the theologian should think and speak of the Persons of the Trinity only in the immediate context of the history of salvation, is rather to evade the issue than to propose a means of coping with it.

Rahner's approach to eschatology is disquieting for much the same reason as is his treatment of the resurrection; after all his caveats and qualifications, one wonders whether eschatological doctrines on his view have any bearing on what will happen at all, and are not simply expressive of a certain attitude to human life in the present. One is astonished to be reminded so strongly of D. Z. Phillips, who is perhaps the most eloquent of those writers in English who have argued that the 'eternal' life which is the concern of religion has nothing to do with expectation of anything which is literally future. Once again, one fears that Rahner's concern that Christian doctrines should not be dismissed as 'mythology' has led him to compromise fatally their central meaning. The cynic might comment that it is easy enough to reconcile the Catholic doctrine of purgatory with the belief in re-incarnation which is characteristic of Eastern religions if one allows oneself so much latitude in interpretation.

Here, as sometimes elsewhere, one wishes that Rahner had taken a leaf from those analytical philosophers of religion who, whether they have been concerned to attack or to defend Christian doctrines, have insisted on their being presented in such a way that their meaning is so far as possible unequivocal. The book often brings home to the reader how much the Anglo-Saxon and

the Continental schools of philosophy have to learn from one another. Against a background of Anglo-Saxon methods of philosophising, the transcendental anthropology which is perhaps Rahner's outstanding achievement would hardly have been possible. (This does *not* prove that it is simply a tissue of conceptual confusions.) Yet philosophers in that tradition are apt to be much more alive than Rahner to the danger of changing the meaning of a claim in the course of purporting to justify it.

I have given a good deal of space to what I think are the defects or limitations of this book; I hope that its great merits will sufficiently appear from the summary of its contents.

Listening to the Echo

Cornelius Ernst O. P. *Multiple Echo*, edited by Fergus Kerr O.P. and Timothy Radcliffe O. P. (Darton, Longman & Todd London, 1979). pp. 248 £8.95.

Nicholas Lash

My immediate reaction was a twofold sadness. Not simply the sadness induced by the finality of a posthumous set of essays – black marks on white paper still traces of a silenced mind – but also a sadness that, with so much urgently to be perceived, thought, endured, connected in contemporary Catholic Christianity, these nineteen pieces produced between 1963 and 1974 should constitute the 'deposit' of so searching and fertile a mind and imagination. But the first sadness is unprofitable: like all mourning it hovers on the edge of self-indulgence. And the second is in some measure inappropriate: 'the inconclusive, unfinished character of these astonishingly wide-ranging essays', says Donald MacKinnon in the Foreword, 'beckons the reader imperiously on to undertake himself the work whose sheer demand in intellectual energy they advertise' (p. xiii).

It would be impertinent, as well as ridiculous, for one who is not a Dominican to attempt to 'introduce' Cornelius Ernst's work to readers of *New Blackfriars*. If one were, instead, simply to summarise the topics treated in these essays, the result – given their 'astonishingly wide-ranging' scope – would be to convey a misleading impression of eclecticism. Misleading, because it is precisely the *consistency* of concern, a consistency constituted by and not maintained in spite of the range of particular reference