

BIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY TODAY by Celia E Deane-Drummond, SCM Press, London, 2001. Pp. 272, £16.95 pbk.

Why is a scientific frame of mind often thought to be in opposition to a religious one? Celia Deane-Drummond thinks the answer is to be found in the increasingly-secular history of our ways of thinking about nature – as a symbol of a higher order, as a mirror of the divine mind, as an organism, as a machine and as an autonomous reality subject to its own laws. Once human beings began (in 17th century) to think of themselves as able to create their own futures, a religious explanation of nature seemed unnecessary. Nature was thought to emerge through principles internal to it rather than through any divine intervention. Any perceived unity between science and religion was lost, even though individual scientists might continue to infuse their practice with religious sensibility.

This history of ideas forms the background against which Celia Deane-Drummond contrasts the hostile-to-religion genetics of Dawkins with the open-to-spirituality genetics of Barbara McClintock, and traces changes in the way ecology is done from a study of stable systems to a study of chaos. She sketches the basics of modern genetic biology and shows how it enables genetic engineering of bacteria and plants, the cloning of animals and humans, and thus the opportunity for us to recreate ourselves and our world in ways previously unthinkable. She is right, I think, to argue that the new genetic biology, and perhaps the new ecology, challenge our sense of ourselves on the one hand and our relationships with God, the rest of humanity and the rest of nature on the other.

Deane-Drummond analyses a range of Christian responses to these developments. She argues that a tradition of 'Wisdom' literature (from the bible, from Thomas Aquinas and from Sergei Bulgakov) offers the possibility of an ecumenical response to genetic engineering from all the Christian traditions. And she thinks that the concept of Gaia – the idea that the whole earth is a giant ecosystem – provides a science of our environment that is open to collaboration with theology. (A late chapter on feminism in science and in religion seems only tangentially related to her topic of the dialogue between science and religion.)

Biology and Theology Today is described as 'designed to be accessible to undergraduates and those interested in current issues of public concern'. Whether it will genuinely inform either audience is, I think, debatable. For one things, whilst some ideas central to her thesis are laboured at length (for example, the 'philosophy' of Gaia), others are named rather than explained (for example, the claim that Aquinas' 'natural law' is a version of the idea that nature is internally ordered). For another, Deane-Drummond's illustrations of how theological ideas may throw light on contemporary scientific proposals are sometimes shallow. *Imago Dei* truly is a powerful source of reflection about the putative wisdom of producing human beings by

cloning: but there is nothing in her discussion of how so-called 'reproductive cloning' threatens the nest of familial relationships which are recognized and supported by all human cultures, how it represents another great step from procreation to manufacture and how it would involve a despotism of cloners over cloned, a despotism utterly at odds with Christ's insistence that our relationships with others should be marked by the equality of genuine friendship. And whilst there may be truth in the claim that the relevant Catholic theologizing has focussed on the significance of genetic engineering for human beings and 'by-passed serious consideration of the issue associated with non-human species', it is unreasonably dismissive to claim of the former focus that it has a tendency to 'reduce the theological implications of genetic engineering to a pro-life dogmatic standpoint': the Catholic Bishops' report entitled *Genetic Intervention of Human Subjects of 1996* (which she cites as an illustration of the response of the Roman Catholic Church) includes a suggestive discussion of the distinction between those ways of influencing a child's development which respect the dignity and individuality of the child and those that do not.

BERNADETTE TOBIN

CHALLENGING WOMEN'S ORTHODOXIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FAITH, edited by Susan Frank Parsons, *Ashgate, Aldershot [Heythrop Studies in Contemporary Philosophy, Religion and Theology]*, 2000. Pp. 246, £ 17.99 pbk.

This is a varied collection of lively papers on the subject of women and religion (mainly Christianity), which will give pause for thought to feminists and their opponents alike.

Several of the articles conform quite closely to the expectations raised by the title, whilst others seem more removed from the book's ostensible theme. For example, Kerry Ramsay, an Anglican priest from South Africa, locks horns with the difficult question of women's relationship to the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice and suffering for others. Because self-denial has been strongly elevated as a specifically feminine virtue, often used to promote women's subservience to men, many feminists have rejected it, seeing the promotion of a sense of self-worth as being of greater value to women in their relationships with both humanity and divinity. Ramsay, however, draws on recent Christian feminist writing which understands the suffering of Christ to point to vulnerability and suffering as human rather than narrowly feminine characteristics, and she describes the strength of this approach by reference to her experiences of life under apartheid and the attendant struggle for freedom and justice.

In a rather different vein, although with an equally passionate commitment to the establishment of truth and justice, is Anne Primavesi's 'Theology and Earth Science'. Primavesi has been a flag-