

It was not easy, I suppose, to decide on a title for this book. The thesis is that the existence of saints can be seen as evidence for the activity of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful and so also for immortality. The title's neatness is thus only momentarily enigmatic. Dr. Sherry's sympathies with the traditional Christian approach to these topics are not disguised, but he is well aware that many readers will not go all the way with him; he makes his proposals with a disarming modesty and with careful attention to theological and philosophical positions opposed to his own. It seems to me that this book deserves a warm welcome; I have only to give some further account of its contents and to suggest that a more definite stance can be argued for on certain issues.

The introductory chapter stresses the necessity of prayer for religion ('without some experience of God's touch it becomes dry and risks death') and endorses the view that 'an inferred God is an absent God' (p. 3) Since this position (which I share) is basic and a matter of active controversy (in this country, at least) both among Reformed and among Catholic thinkers, it would have been useful to add something about it in the notes, where much further information is well supplied on many other topics. The chapter shows excellently how theology and spirituality have come together again for Western Christians in recent years. In the second chapter there is a valuable discussion on which Sherry points out that both the objections of positivists to the notion of 'spirit' and Professor Richard Swinburne's attempts to meet them depend upon their definition of 'spirit' as 'disembodied person'. I cannot forbear to quote one (uncharacteristically) forthright passage:

The spirit described in Swinburne's thought-experiment sounds more like a super-Frankenstein than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Now to be fair, more is said later in the book about the moral and religious attributes of God. But even so, one often feels that 'super-Frankenstein' is merely giving way to Mathew Arnold's 'infinitely magnified Lord Shaftesbury' (p. 13).

Sherry refers, in contrast, to certain Biblical uses of 'spirit':

The spirit of God is seen as a *power*, a power which *permeates* the world, especially men, and one which, when permeating men, is particularly associated with the *heart* (in the Biblical sense of the inner person, the seat of reason as well as of the will and of the emotions, which is aware of God's presence and determines conduct. (p. 17).

He answers objections to the claim that 'the power which someone experiences is the Holy Spirit or Spirit of God': 'This is not something one could simply "read off" from the experience of being empowered, but it is an interpretation based on reflection on one's own experiences and on the religious tradition in which one stands' (p. 29). That is typical of his patient treatment of current prejudices in this chapter.

Turning in the following chapter to the question of 'sanctification', Sherry remarks: 'What is distinctive to religious people is, not that they alone see and admire the process, but that they draw it into a wider range of theological concepts and explanation' (p. 33). In the unpacking of that statement these passages are perhaps particularly valuable: 'What is more important than any episodic experience is the continued ordering of the inner life, not just in prayer and so on, but also in the development of attention and recollection and (something ignored in much traditional spiritual writing) in the education of the emotions' (p. 40); 'it (spirituality) is not something to do merely with the private realm of inner experience, for we are concerned with the whole man, with total self-transformation' (p. 41); 'there is no reason why the spirit of God should not work through "natural" means, in this case the powers of our mind' (p. 42).

In the second half of the book Sherry moves towards the proposal that

sanctification is 'an anticipation of the life to come' (p. 51). This is plainly a part of the Christian tradition, and he makes the point: 'it would seem that in principle the argument could be extended to any theistic religion' (p. 59). There is much more here that I am tempted to quote, but there seems no need to give further proof of the book's merits, so I shall confine myself to the one topic on which I find Sherry's conclusions insufficient, that of the Beatific Vision. He speaks of the life to come as 'an embodied existence involving activity and community' and refers to writers like Unamuno, for whom there must be time and change in it, 'for man's highest aspirations are dynamic rather than static' (p. 62). He also writes: 'The relationship between the Beatific Vision and mystical experience may well hold, but we do need to supplement what has been said about it by considering the dimensions of community and of personal growth', distinguishing 'the *experience* of the Beatific Vision' from 'our completeness, healing and purification' (p. 81). I agree with him that, if 'mystical experience' is taken as the clue, there must be development, but the reason for this is not, I think, that it is needed for our 'acquisition of holiness' but that God is inexhaustible (so Gregory of Nyssa). That presupposes a theory of the Beatific Vision as a union with God (in which knowledge and love of him, I suggest, become indistinguishable), not a static awareness but the highest possible human activity, the perfection of man in the ontological sense. Resurrected bodies, on such a view, would be part of the Kingdom's 'new earth' of which the blessed become aware 'in God' just as they become aware 'in God' of those whom they have known and loved on earth (v. Aquinas, ST 1a. 12, 8). The blessed, I would say, are healed and purified immediately *by* this experience, the development of which makes them indefinitely more and more 'complete'. But in any case these are matters only incidental to an admirably presented thesis, which should be of great service.

ILLTYD TRETOWAN

GOD, JESUS AND BELIEF by Stewart R. Sutherland. *Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984. Pp. 218. £5.95.*

For someone like myself who shares few of Professor Sutherland's presuppositions this is both a challenging and a difficult book: challenging because his rigorous critique of traditional positions demands a more articulate response; difficult because it is not always easy to comprehend what has led him to espouse his alternative proposal.

His previous book *Atheism and the Rejection of God* might have warned us what was to come. At all events, the problem of suffering is central to his rejection of traditional theism. He believes that there is no adequate answer that philosophy of religion can offer, and, when to this is added the conceptual difficulties of talking of God as a person, whether timeless or temporal, he deems this sufficient to jettison the notion. God has no objective existence; the value of the concept lies simply in giving an alternative perspective to our actions, as *sub specie aeternitatis*. But, if the existence of evil was one of the central concerns of that first book, the religious perceptions of novelists was another, and that also finds its echo here, with the claim that even Dostoevsky had to admit his failure to achieve a plausible portrayal of the triumph of good over evil in his Christ-like figure of Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*. For that Sutherland believes a more ambiguous figure is required, and that he finds uniquely in Jesus himself. So, though the objective existence of God has been excluded, Christ still finds a central place in the moral scheme of things.

There is a subtlety in his argument, what he himself at one point calls 'contortions and complexities' (p. 98), that means that one is not always quite sure that one has grasped his meaning. Some of his challenges are certainly hard to answer, but the following two criticisms do seem fair.

First, his rejection of all attempts at a solution to the problem of evil in the philosophy of religion ignores two very different roles that need to be assigned to