

GOD'S WORLD, GOD'S BODY by Grace M. Jantzen. *Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984, London. Pp xi + 173 p/b £6.95.*

This learned and curious book maintains that the universe is the body of God. Though at one point the identification of God and universe is dismissed as sounding like a crass theological joke (122), the aim of the book is "to work out a theologically adequate account of the relationship between God and the universe within a broadly Christian theological framework" (126), and, despite disavowals of the reducibility of God to the physical universe (127), the conclusion that God and the universe are one reality is reached, treated as theologically pivotal (142, 157) and adhered to as far as consistency permits. It is also held to ease our understanding of divine perception, action and omnipresence (74–100).

It is allowed, with believers in creation, that the universe is wholly dependent on God (132, 136); but, instead of recognising that this involves the distinctness of God, Jantzen contends that what follows is that there is no existence outside of or other than God, and hence that all believers in creation must, in a sense, be monists and pantheists. It is also held that the universe is God's self-expression or self-manifestation (134, 135); that God depends on the world in that if the world were not to exist, neither would God; and that therefore if God were to destroy the world he would thereby abolish himself.

This set of tenets is surely inconsistent: if the world depends on God, then there is existence other than God's, and there is a creative agent distinct from the world, who might have existed even if the world had not. Talk of self-manifestation is no way out of these problems, but a source of extra confusions: for if the resulting universe is something other than the initiator of this process, as the rejection of the reducibility of God-talk implies, then the world is *not* God's self after all, and this initiator cannot be identical with the universe; and if the universe really *is* God's self (142), then reductionism cannot be rejected, and, further, there is no room left for talk of transcendence or creation or dependence. (The very notion of self-manifestation here is suspect, since what is manifested is so clearly, and professedly, not the self which does the manifesting). Indeed the fact that an inconsistent set of propositions implies everything greatly assists Jantzen in finding answers to a multitude of envisaged objections.

Jantzen's case, however, for her pantheist interpretation of Christian theology is partly based on a negative appraisal of belief in an incorporeal God. Assuming the falsity of mind-body dualism and of belief in incorporeal souls, she maintains that it is just as absurd to believe in divine incorporeality, particularly if God can be understood on the analogy of persons. God's personal characteristics, she suggests, are best understood if, instead of treating his 'omni-attributes' (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence) as given, we modify our ideas of the latter to fit the most cogent mode, i.e. an embodied one, of the former (70, 152); and, if we adopt this approach, we shall jettison belief in God's timelessness (which she persuasively maintains to be incoherent (50)) and spacelessness, and hold instead that he exists everywhere and all the time (49), and knows and acts accordingly. The origins of belief in incorporeality are traced to Platonism (21–35), and the historical survey of philosophical positions about time (39–44) is, perhaps, the most rewarding part of the book.

The problem with this approach is that the sense of language about God must be geared to at least the possibility of belief in creation, at any rate if theistic religions are not to be misrepresented, and that accordingly the sense of predicates concerning God's knowledge and action must be fitted around the required qualities of omnipotence, omniscience and (I suggest) timelessness and incorporeality, and not *vice versa*. Unless some such approach is adopted, the word 'God' will be employed in a sense quite unrelated to the traditional one; yet it is "within a broadly Christian theological framework" (126) that Jantzen is aiming to work. Sometimes, though, her

point is that there is no reason to accept the traditional doctrine of creation with its implications of disembodied knowledge and action, as opposed to other doctrines about God; setting aside the point that if so there is little reason to accept the other doctrines either, I should claim that the cosmological and teleological arguments supply ample reason for belief in God as creator, despite Jantzen's rather superficial rejection of the former argument (131); and that his timeless knowledge (based on intentions) and timeless creativity of an everlasting but creaturely universe should be understood accordingly.

If, however, Jantzen were read as putting forward a new pantheistic theology or religion, a different assessment might be in place. Purged of its inconsistencies, the model of the universe as God's body might indeed "help to do justice to the beauty and value of nature" (156). I have argued elsewhere that belief in the intrinsic value of the flourishing of creatures coheres well with a traditional belief in God and his love (*The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, 161); but those who reject the latter belief, and among them eco-holists in particular, may find in Jantzen's position a theological articulation of their own. So too may adherents of other world religions (158); in particular, the teachings of Ramanuja seem close to some of Jantzen's (as, of course, some of Hegel's also are). There would be the danger of worship of the creature rather than of the creator; but, as long as the resulting religion adhered to "the importance of conservation and ecological responsibility, the significance and dignity of the human body and human sexuality" (156), little harm and perhaps much good would be done. The days of pantheists (such as Bruno) being burnt at the stake are happily over; as a Quaker I should add that they should never have begun.

ROBIN ATTFIELD

THE REFORMATION AND THE ENGLISH PEOPLE by J.J. Scarisbrick *Basil Blackwell*. Pp viii + 203. £14.50.

Historians of the Reformation seem to rejoice in the certainty that it is impossible to write purely objective unbiased history. It was certainly time for a new emphasis on the Catholic point of view. For some decades several well known historians have been displaying their researches from a fairly bluntly anti-Catholic point of view. Drawing on a wide range of original material Scarisbrick presents a picture which shows that the Reformation was not wanted, was imposed and was successfully resisted by a very wide spectrum of individuals who subsequently handed on the old traditions in spite of all the efforts of the State, the State Church and the sects.

Fifteenth century wills show entire contentment with things as they were. Anti-clericalism was largely a myth. Lollards were only occasionally found and burnt and were of little importance in any case. Indulgence preaching provided excellent incomes for important undertakings and charities. It was not a bad idea to have the bishoprics of Salisbury and Worcester held by Italians so that there was a lobby at Rome. Things were not perfect, they never are. But the Church was supported by the whole of society and the faithful enjoyed their religion. The Reformation was not based on any kind of consensus, populist or otherwise. It was imposed. The brutal tyranny of the 'spoliation' is told again in summary, the callous destruction by Henry VIII and Cromwell, with all its dishonesty and special pleading, of the monasteries and other religious houses—a destruction desired by no one. The general resentment at the changes helped to power most of the rebellions of the rest of the century. Finally, Scarisbrick shows the very considerable determination and success, intellectual and social, of the recusants who included people from all classes, whether secular or Jesuit priest supported. He issues what looks like an effective challenge to Bossy's theory of the birth, in Counter Reformation times in England, of a quite new kind of seigniorial Catholicism.

Essentially Scarisbrick's picture is one we have seen before, notably in the 1400 pages of Philip Hughes great work of thirty years ago, *The Reformation in England*.