

is one of my favourite poets and devotional writers; but I had no idea that my opinion was so widely shared in the seventeenth century as is shown by Helen Wilcox. I trust that Matthew Henry's use of Herbert's *Temple* in 'Friendly Advice to Drunkards and Tipplers' was effective. Dominic Baker-Smith makes illuminating comparisons between theologians and literary exegetes; as he shows, an important aspect of the revolt against Scholasticism in the sixteenth century was a recognition of the principle that biblical texts should not be 'treated as a store of isolated *dicta* suitable to syllogistic elaboration but as a personal encounter which unfolds naturally as prayer and what can best be called imaginative participation'. On the newer view, with the aid of Scripture 'the imagination performs, in effect, a moral alchemy'. Michael Edwards suggests what a Christian theory of narrative might be. That at all times and in all place human beings have told one another stories is an odd fact, as he says and not at all to be taken for granted. Ingeniously, he selects Boccaccio's *Decameron* as a parable about the nature of story-telling in general; as Boccaccio's young women and men fled from the Florence of the Black Death to tell one another stories, so in general do human beings tell stories to distance themselves from a world plagued by the Fall. There would be no point in story-telling in Eden. The thesis is pursued through Chaucer, Malory and Shakespeare.

All in all, this collection is highly to be commended, and would make a good textbook for university courses in this subject.

HUGO MEYNELL

**THE PROBABILITY OF GOD.** By Hugh Montefiore. *SCM Press. Pp. 195. £6.95.*

The Bishop of Birmingham has always been fascinated by the latest scientific developments and eventually he took sabbatical leave to study them in more detail. This book is the result, and it summarises his thinking about the probability of God, 'with special reference to the so-called argument from design as it looks in the light of the contemporary scientific scene'.

He begins by stressing the primary importance of the question of the existence of God remarking that without the prior conviction that there is a God there is no reason that a secular society should be interested in Jesus as the Son of God. This conviction can come in many ways, and he is concerned with the intellectual grounds of this belief, and in particular how these have been affected by developing scientific knowledge.

After a short introductory chapter on the possibility of natural theology the main body of the book is devoted to a series of chapters on current scientific knowledge, from the initial big bang, through the development of the cosmos, the earth as a finely balanced organism, the emergence of life, the evolution of species and finally the evolution of man. To assemble this information he has indeed read widely, and the story is told with clarity and with praiseworthy accuracy, as far as I can judge from the sections on physics.

When this is complete, he stands back and surveys the whole process and asks how it all bears on the existence of God. He is willing to admit that the possibility that there is no God remains open, but asks how probable this is. His balanced judgement is that this is 'exceedingly improbable'. This provides the necessary basis for the leap of faith into personal commitment and trust in God.

This final transition from intellectual acceptance of a high probability to the certainty of faith is of such importance that it deserved more attention. If a scientist were similarly informed that his belief that he is investigating an objectively-existing external world is 'exceedingly probable' he might be somewhat dissatisfied. He would be unable to construct a logically compelling proof of the world's existence, and yet he is so impressed by the way everything fits together in a most detailed and precise way (what Newman called the unity of indirect reference) that he can make the final leap from 'exceedingly probable' to 'certain' without difficulty. Once this is done, he sees the world in a new way, and uses his knowledge to forge tools for further successful

explorations of the world that still further strengthen his belief.

The concept of probability, so freely used in everyday speech, is much more difficult than might appear, and also deserves more analysis. In the chapter on evolution the author speaks of 'chance' as if it were a causative factor. What does this mean? Can it mean anything but an unknown cause, and then one is led to analyse the causal process, to identify its author and to understand the reason for its intelligibility. Concerning design, the arguments have to be re-thought against the background of evolutionary theory. As Newman remarked, 'I believe in design because I believe in God; not in a God because I see design'.

This book may be recommended to anyone who wants a clear overall survey of the world-view of modern science, and its implications for belief in God. But it needs to be supplemented by an equally clear and comprehensive account of natural theology such as that provided by Brian Davies' book on *The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford 1982).

PETER HODGSON

**THE GOD OF JESUS CHRIST** by Walter Kasper. *S.C.M.*, 1984. pp. x + 404. £12.50.

The book begins with an excellent account of the problematic character of faith in God at the present time. The objections of 'protest atheism', which bases its rejection of God on the experience of evil in the world, are particularly well described. Kasper's central thesis is that contemporary atheism can only be met by a Christian doctrine of God that is firmly grounded in God's historical self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Monotheism is not a boo-word for Kasper as it is for Moltmann (provided it is concretized (sic.) by the trinitarian Christian confession), but there is a post-Enlightenment 'heresy of Christian theism' (p. 285) which is powerless in the face of modern atheism and which must be sharply differentiated from a proper trinitarian understanding of God.

What then is the distinctive nature of the God of Jesus Christ? How is his nature known to us? And how does faith in him meet the challenge of atheism? He is the God revealed in scripture and tradition, and Kasper leads us through the familiar evidence provided by scripture and the early church as it relates to the person of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of the Trinity. The account is well-documented, shows detailed knowledge, and is carefully and skilfully presented. But the presentation is in a form which shows everything as pointing forward unhesitatingly and inevitably to the truth of the trinitarian doctrine as defined by the later church.

It is this feature of Kasper's account that gives rise to serious misgivings about the whole conduct of his argument. Scripture can be presented as supporting his case as strongly as it is, because it is selectively cited and interpreted in the light of those beliefs to which it did in the long run give rise. The fathers are assessed in similar vein. Thus it is said of Origen that 'despite numerous ambiguous statements' and 'many formulas that suggest subordination (his) intention at every point is to maintain the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father' (p. 256). All this in my judgment is illegitimate eisegesis. Kasper is not easy to argue with because later orthodox developments of doctrine are regularly described as soteriologically and doxologically motivated penetrations into the inner mystery of earlier confessional statements and not speculative developments from them. In itself that distinction is not without force. Doctrinal development neither does nor should proceed by a process of logical deduction from earlier affirmations. That fact makes the assessment of what is an appropriate development notoriously difficult to judge in a way that Kasper does not adequately acknowledge. If the argument he develops is to work, two premises would seem to be requisite, both of which I believe to be false: (1) that the method and motivation of the heretics, such as the Arians, was the exact reverse of the orthodox, and (2) that the fact that a development is soteriologically motivated can be regarded as