

vocation. The answer may be that they were deficient, but it may also be that we are wrong in wanting to force Christian living into those categories.

This is perhaps a particular case of a more general scruple the reviewer would have about theological discourse. Very strictly speaking, if God is simple, then nothing can be said about him, because everything that is said must be complex. So what we call theology is really not about God, but about creatures, notably about ourselves: about ourselves in relation to God, not (still very strictly speaking) about God in relation to us. So it is difficult in a discussion of grace, for example, to allow that God might give or withhold the charism of preaching, indeed that he might give different graces at all, as

is suggested by St Paul's list of the gifts of the Spirit. God can only give God, though we perceive this one gift under a multiplicity of categories. But perhaps this is a red herring. St Thomas's distinction in I-II.110.2 ad 2 between what grace is and how we receive it no doubt settles the question, and what sounds like anthropomorphism – much more frequently in St Paul than in Tugwell – is really only excusable shorthand.

Tugwell's book, with helpful historical contributions by Allan White, will be useful to any sort of preacher, and it does bring home the truth that we are all of us preachers.

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HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE: Towards a Hermeneutics of Consent by Peter Stuhlmacher. *SPCK*, London 1979. £2.95.

This is a book to be read and understood on its own terms before there can be profitable dialogue with it. It is written for the German scene, with only one English-speaking writer cited; and though it speaks appreciatively of the contribution now being made within that scene by Catholic exegetes, its perspective remains that of the German Reformation, and the sacred text itself the true locus of the word of God, if approached with an adequate hermeneutic. Stuhlmacher sees the rise of historical criticism as not merely justified by, but a direct consequence of the Reformers' drive to establish the original meaning of the texts (*a retour aux sources*, after the prolonged dominance of the 'spiritual sense', which may be compared with that which in the second century, in reaction against Gnostic innovations, had brought about the formation of the New Testament Canon). A further impetus to its development, in his view, was the challenge to the hardened dogmatic positions of classical Lutheran orthodoxy which originally owed as much to pietism as to the Enlightenment (an interesting argument against retreating into fundamentalism, if not one that will survive transplanting into Anglo-Saxon soil).

Stuhlmacher writes very candidly of

the impasse in which his own tradition finds itself following the breakdown of the last major attempt at a post-critical hermeneutic, that of Bultmann. He is deeply disturbed by the tendency of many younger scholars (Catholic as well as evangelical) to advance ever wilder and more extravagant hypotheses about Christian origins (his list includes the attempt to identify a 'canon within the canon', theories of drastic interpolation of the Pauline epistles, the 'traditions in conflict' view of Mark, the pseudo-primitive theology ascribed to the so-called Q community, and the opposite extremes of a historical Jesus of whom nothing can be certainly known and one of whom enough can be recovered from analysis of the gospel texts to make (as Schlier put it) 'a fifth gospel and the test of the other four'). He is no less disturbed by the current radical response to the problem which short-circuits any attempt to establish the truth about these matters by taking refuge in a political theology for which truth is what we make true.

What specific has he for this situation? Not to jettison the critical method as discredited, not to modify its rigour in any way, but to reunite it with that from which it should not, at any rate outside the laboratory conditions of the university

lecture-room, have been separated: a readiness to listen to what a text may have to teach, not only about man and his world, but about 'transcendence', and a recognition that the Christian exegete stands in a tradition of interpretation which is part of the total data to be considered. These are the principal components of what he calls a 'hermeneutics of consent', an expression destined, I fear, to pass into the jargon of this debate (as 'transcendence' has already passed into the vocabulary of academics shy of introducing God into their discussions even in inverted commas). But whatever its terminological shortcomings, it nevertheless suggests that between a Lutheranism thus attentive to tradition and a Catholicism renewed by its own more recent *retour aux sources* there need be no very deep gulf fixed.

All the more reason to examine very carefully his unstated assumptions. When in his final paragraph Stuhlmacher protests against 'the hypothetic unravelling of the New Testament tradition into a multiplicity of single strands, solitary communities, and isolated theologies which can no longer be correlated', is this in the name of what is or of what must be — of the facts or of the construction that his theology requires him to make upon those facts? And when he proposes that we should instead 'attempt the outline of a synthetic biblical theology of the New Testament which is consonant with development in the history of Israel's language and religion, and which extends to the formation of the Christian canon', is he maintaining, as a matter of demonstrable fact, that this

can be done, or, as a matter of theological principle, that it must be done, if his system is not to collapse beneath him? If the latter, he is surely open to the charge of allowing his theology to determine what the facts are. But if the former, then the basic premiss from which he starts is contingent and falsifiable; what will he do if it cannot be sustained? To put the matter another way, why should his synthesis of biblical theology extend no further than the formation of the canon? Can one ever be arrived at in terms of the New Testament alone, rather than of the tradition's ongoing reflection on the diverse New Testament data, a process which is never complete? Stuhlmacher has already appealed for Protestant exegesis 'to strive for contact and connection with a dogmatics able to correct and guide it'; perhaps what is called for is a more explicit recognition that dogmatics is not only 'charged with a contemporary account of the faith', but, like the tradition of exegesis, has a history.

Professor James Barr has provided an introduction to the English edition which the non-specialist reader will do well to read first. The translator's contribution is, regrettably, less helpful. Too often he has been content to translate the words, but reproduce the German idioms intact. The result is not only distressing for the reader with a feel for the English language, but at times seriously distorts the sense of the original. There is a particularly glaring example at the top of p 77.

H. BENEDICT GREEN CR

HOUSEHOLDS OF GOD by David Parry O.S.B. *Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980.* pp xvii + 199. £4.50.

THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINES 1540-1688 by David Lunn. *Burns & Oates (London) and Barnes & Noble (New York), 1980.* pp xii + 282. £13.50.

THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINE CONGREGATION by Dom Bernard Green. *Catholic Truth Society, 1980.* pp 100. £2.50.

BENEDICT'S DISCIPLES, edited by David Hugh Farmer. *Fowler Wright Books Ltd. 1980.* pp xii + 354. £12.50.

COMMUNITY AND ABBOT IN THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT by Adalbert de Vogüé. *Cistercian Publications, 1979.* pp 256. £15.50.

1980 marks the fifteenth centenary of the birth of St Benedict, a suitable occasion for a spate of literature on matters Benedictine. Four of these books represent

ent a good crop of the English offerings to date, and all of them have something to recommend them.

Households of God is a translation of