

and sermon-articles.

The sermon for Christmas (1970) exemplifies the method. Schillebeeckx first draws his hearers aside from an over-material and image dominated approach to Jesus' birth. The shepherds, the crib, the stars, the Magi can all come later, when we know what the Incarnation is all about. The point of Christmas is that Jesus appears in the middle of Israel's story. It is a story of God's concern for mankind. In his life, Jesus takes up the thread of that story in such a way that his disciples can see in him a visitation of God. His invisible splendour shines visibly on Jesus' countenance for everyone to see: i.e. for all who open themselves to his love. By his life and actions, Jesus upon his death had given the story of Israel such "an unexpected and incalculable twist" that those who believed in him were able to appreciate anew God's love for man, and able to re-orientate their own lives. It is through our understanding of their encounters with

Jesus that the church is empowered to say in its creed: "I believe in Jesus"; 'I believe in Jesus as the Christ, as the only begotten Son, as the Lord'" (p 12). The Creed may judge the story, "open our eyes" to their meaning, but it is the stories, the encounters with Jesus, that men for the most part live by.

The telling of stories is the theme which unites the diverse material found in this book. It contains an interesting chapter on Dominican spirituality where Schillebeeckx tells the story of his own Order's still continuing career in Christian history. Near the end of the volume the story of St Albert the Great, told with spare words, a few facts, a couple of insights from the saint's own writings, but with such loving familiarity, is a high point not to be missed. It shows Schillebeeckx's method at its best, bringing the story of a great and complex Christian life into focus.

JOHN HILARY MARTIN O P

REVELATION AND ITS INTERPRETATION by Aylward Shorter. *Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1983. 277 p., paperback. Price not stated.*

This is the first volume in a new series, 'Introducing Catholic Theology,' under the general editorship of Michael Richards of Heythrop College. The author has taught in Kenya and Uganda, and his intimate acquaintance with African religion has had considerable influence on his writing of this book.

There are two obvious ways in which one could go about writing a book on revelation. One way would be to examine the concept of revelation, to uncover its assumptions about God's communication on the one side and human receptivity on the other, to list and compare the modes of revelation, to ask about the affinities of revelation to other forms of experience, and so on. That might be called the 'formal approach', and it has obvious justification as clarifying and justifying a fundamental theological concept. However, a purely or predominantly formal approach runs the risk of becoming too abstract. What is

important for faith is not the concept of revelation as such, but the content of revelation. So one may also expound revelation by recounting its content. It is this second, more concrete and experiential way of proceeding, that is adopted by Father Shorter, so that his book turns out to be not so much a study of the concept of revelation as a handbook of the revealed truths of Christian faith. His own claim is that he has 'tried to eschew altogether the *a priori* or definitional textbook style, and to offer an experiential theology with arguments of a more inductive nature'.

The book begins with a quotation from Cardinal Newman, in which it is asserted that there is no 'unaided' knowledge of God. We can have knowledge of him only on the basis of his own self-communication. This, of course, sets up a tension with the modern mentality, which accepts as the paradigm of knowledge the empirical knowledge of

facts and which proceeds by a 'methodological atheism' in the investigation of these facts. God and his communication are not to be found in the realm of empirical fact. We need a sensitivity to symbols if we are to hear what God is saying.

At an early stage, Fr. Shorter makes clear his belief that God gives the knowledge of himself not only in the Christian revelation but through all the great world religions, and even in ethnic and tribal religions. This seems to him a consequence of God's will that all should be saved. Perhaps he does not sufficiently allow for the fact that some religions have been cruel and corrupt, but all through the book there recurs the problem of the relation of the Christian revelation to the teaching of other faiths. Fr. Shorter shows a generous openness towards the non-Christian religions, while at the same time seeking to maintain the definitiveness of the revelation in Jesus Christ. Whether he comes to a consistent finding on this question is hard to say, but he does well to avoid both the exclusivism of those Christians who deny any truth to other religions and the thoroughgoing relativism of those who regard all religions as equally valid (or invalid).

The witness of the Old Testament is examined in detail. Our author has interesting things to say about the prophets and the intimacy of their relation to God. 'They felt that they were drawn into the emotions of God himself. They identified themselves with his designs in history, and they shared in the feeling of God's own heart, his wrath, his love, his sorrow, his revulsion and even his doubts. God's own sensibility flowed into the prophet's psyche'. These words might seem even to prepare for the mystery of the incarnation, so it is somewhat surprising to find the author saying later on that 'Jesus, unlike the Old Testament prophets, was not a mere "speaking tube" for God. He was

himself the epiphany of manifestation of God'. At this point, he might have paid attention to Schillebeeckx' use of the concept of prophet as applied to Jesus and to the potentialities that lie in it.

Revelation continues in the life of the Church, both as old truths are more deeply understood and as they disclose fresh understandings in new situations. Indeed, like Gregory of Nyssa, Fr. Shorter believes that the exploration of God is something to which there can be no end.

While the book is on the whole constructive and generous toward divergent opinions in what the author believes is a pluralistic theological period of history, there are some sharp and often perceptive criticisms of extreme positions. The secular theology of the sixties and the 'death of God' theology which still lingers on are ably criticized. 'Don Cupitt's faith', we are told, 'is the faith of a well-intentioned atheist'. Similarly, those recent theologies which have allied themselves with the ideology of some sectional group or other and express themselves in highly polemical terms are rebuked. 'A theology which needs an enemy for its own self-definition' has to that extent ceased to be Christian.

Some criticisms of the book must be made. Sometimes, words are used too loosely and imprecisely. An example is the use of the word 'myth' in relation to the Old Testament. Again, when it is said that 'we do not preach Christianity, but Christ', is this a real distinction, or one that would be convincing, say, to a Muslim? Sometimes, too, there is a hint of anti-intellectualism, as in the exaltation of myth, narrative and praxis over critical theology, without the recognition that these things can be very dangerous without critical analysis. But these are minor blemishes in a book which sets out to be concrete and an aid to faith rather than to academic theology.

JOHN MACQUARRIE

A NEW DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY edited by Alan Richardson and John Bowden. SCM Press, 1983. Pp 614. £19.50

Alan Richardson's *Dictionary of Christian Theology* appeared in 1969. He died in 1975. John Bowden, to whom English

theology already owes much, has supervised this thorough reworking and expansion. With forty-six entries to his