mutual concern, and they are many, with well intentioned non-believers. Prominent theologians began to argue that there is no specifically Christian ethics. Among them were men who had been in the forefront of the renewal movement. They argues that ethical reasoning is autonomous, and that the Christian revelation only adds specific motives and gives ethics a Christian form and context. Other exponents of renewal reacted strongly. They considered the claim for autonomy a betrayal of the renewal. They foretold grave dangers for the Church if this line of thought were pursued. They continued to argue for an ethics based on belief, a Glaubensethik. And so two parties were formed, the autonomy school and the Glaubensethik school. The debate between the two is as yet unresolved. It has continued for about fifteen years.

It will be clear to the reader that this is a very important, as well as a very interesting, debate. Whatever stand one takes will determine how one grounds moral norms, how one expects bible reading and meditation on the faith to affect one's daily living, what one thinks is the role of the teaching Church in the sphere of morals, and with what presuppositions one engages in ecumenical dialogue and dialogue with non-believers.

The author traces the progress of the debate from its beginnings to the present. He analyses the neo-scholastic moral system, the hopes expressed by early exponents of renewal, and the arguments for and against autonomy in morals. He moves the debate forward by highlighting imprecisions in terminology or argument on the part of either school. He broadens the scope of the argument by going deeper into matters about which there is disagreement. For example, he shows that neither party has sufficiently attended to developments in the theology of revelation; both operate with a propositional view of revelation, whereas contemporary theology sees revelation more as the expression of the faith of scriptural writers and communities. This radically changes our approach to the Bible. He brings philosophical analysis to bear on the precise meaning of intention, motive and justifying reason and the distinction between them, and is able to show that, in the light of a clearer understanding of moral agency, the autonomy school's relegation of Christian considerations to the sphere of motive, as if motive did not enter into the meaning of a moral act, is unsatisfactory. He has very useful sections on agape, which the Glaubensethik school maintains is peculiar to Christianity, and on the validity of the divine command model of Christian ethics. Systematic theology and metaphysics shed light on the nature of morality and the kind of God-talk appropriate to moral discourse.

Neither party is found wholly wrong, but neither emerges unscathed. It would be unwise for anyone to write further on the topic without first studying and absorbing this book. It can be enthusiastically recommended, for its interest, its importance and its scholarship.

BRENDAN SOANE.

KNOWING THE UNKNOWN GOD: IBN-SINA, MAIMONIDES, AQUINAS, by David B. Burrell, C.S.C, *University of Notre Dame Press,* **Indiana, 1986. Pp.x + 130. Cloth: $15.95.**

Although the subtitle of this book might suggest an historical study, its aim, as the author points out, is 'more contemporary and philosophical'. (p. ix) It is presented as an 'essay in conceptual clarification,' necessary for knowing 'what it is we are speaking of in speaking of God, how to relate this divinity to whatever else we may know, and how especially to handle the religious tradition's avowal that God lies beyond our ken'. (p. 1)

According to the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God is transcendent, distinct from all that we know, and thus unknowable. Yet there is a 'connection' (chapter 1) between God and all things that enables us to speak of him. To

secure both the 'distinction' which safeguards divine transcendence and the 'connection' which allows us to have 'some notion of what it is we are referring to' (p. 2) when we speak of God is the task of philosophical theology and of Burrell's book.

Burrell finds that the 'distinction' between God and the world is most adequately expressed in terms of essence and existence or 'to-be' (Burrell's translation of *'esse'* which cateches the dynamic force of the Latin infinitive). While the essence of every creature is distinct from its to-be, God's essence is his to-be. Here is a distinction at once manifest in the world (thus allowing us to speak of God) and yet 'not expressing a division within the world' (thus allowing us to maintain God's transcendence). (p. 17)

Burrell traces the development of this distinction from Avicenna through Maimonides to Thomas Aquinas. (Chapter 2) Although Avicenna and Maimonides affirm that to-be is distinct from essence, they still think of it in terms of essence, either as something that 'comes to' or 'happens to' an essence (Avicenna) or as an 'accident attaching to what exists' (Maimonides). (p. 18, 26—7) Aquinas, beginning with existing things rather than with essences, sees the primacy of to-be as the primacy of act over potency. (p. 29) Burrell argues that a 'shift in our perspectives' is needed if we are to appreciate Aquinas' existential insight and overcome the essentialist tendency 'endemic' to human thought. (p. 44) By his careful analysis and clear examples, Burrell encourages us to initiate that change in perspective.

The distinction between essence and to-be is put to use both in the 'more expressly metaphysical' discussion of the divine nature (Chapter 3), and in the 'linguistic' presentation of divine names or attributes (chapter 4). Here Burrell distinguishes between 'formal features' (p. 46) and 'positive attributes' (p. 62) or 'constituent properties' (p. 47). Formal features (such as 'simplicity' and 'infinity') do not directly signify the divine substance, but rather affirm the distinction between God and creatures and determine how 'anything whatsoever' (p. 47) is to be said of God. The distinction allows Burrell to explain how a multiplicity of divine attributes does not (as Maimonides feared) contradict, but rather flows from, the simplicity of God as *ipsum esse subsistens.*

The question of the connection between God and the world is taken up in the discussion of God's knowledge of particulars (Chapter 5) and of future contingent things (Chaper 6). Burrell traces developments in the philosophical understanding of God's knowledge of individuals from Muslim advances over neo-platonism, through the decisive contributions of Maimonides, to the insights of Thomas Aquinas. In the course of his discussion, he presents a number of salutary criticisms of the tendency to view the freedom of God's creative act as a kind of divine choice between alternatives that 'could have been otherwise' (p. 108) rather than as a consequence of the very mode of being of contingent creatures which receive their to-be from God. Although Burrell recognizes that God's intimate presence to each creature can be safeguarded only by maintaining God's transcendence and eternity, he exhibits a tendency to make God into just one more temporal being alongside of others by his assertion that, with regard to rational creatures, 'God can be responsive to them as they are responsive to divine promptings'. (p. 105)

Burrell concludes his study with some remarks on the relations between faith and philosophy. Since our notions of God are 'never purely philosophical,' they are best discussed not by philosophy as such, but by philosophical theology, a discipline which respects the religious uses of such notions and is open to both their historical (diachronic) and semantic (synchronic) dimensions. This approach and the analogical discernment that it entails will, he hopes, be particularly useful in the 'intercultural situation' of our age. (p. 111—113)

Burrell is to be commended for his brief but insightful presentation. While primarily useful to philosophers, his work will also be of interest to theologians who are concerned with the use of philosophy in their discipline. Though carefully written, the book does have a few typographical and editorial flaws, notably the omission of footnotes 44 and 45 in chapter 2, (p. 34, 119).

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