

choice. He concentrates emphatically on 400, indeed on the late fourth century as well as on the early fifth; and in particular on the person and the mind of St Augustine. Naturally, Augustine deserves more close study than Cassian, Salvian and Caesarius of Arles, with whom at last we reach at least the beginning of the sixth century. But a curious impression is left, at least on this reader, at the end of it all: namely that Cassian, Salvian and Caesarius were much more in tune with the process of de-secularisation, much more influential in forwarding it, than St Augustine. They are very minor figures in the history of Christianity, of Christian thought and culture; Augustine always has been, is, and always will be, a colossus. But for better or for worse, (in this case definitely the latter) the general Christian ethos is formed more by the little men than by the great.

With many of the more glaring deficiencies of this ethos through the centuries Augustine is routinely debited, simply because he is great, and everybody has heard of him, and practically nobody has heard of Caesarius, let alone Salvian. One of the many values of this book is that it proves with authority that Augustine was not guilty. Thus in the little matter of sex and sexuality, in which he often figures as the major ogre, responsible for all the traditional Christian and Catholic hang-ups on the subject, Professor Markus shows that, on the contrary, the great man almost deserves to be regarded as the first Christian sexual liberal. And he has a section precisely headed, 'Augustine; a defence of Christian mediocrity'.

The book, it must admitted, is not particularly easy to read. It is written by a very learned scholar in conversation and argument with other learned scholars, and for the advanced student of the ancient world and Church history. The writer assumes a considerable knowledge in the reader that the ordinary student is unlikely to possess. So definitely not a book for beginners.

But it should prove of considerable interest to all those, theologians and pastors and others, who are concerned with the problems of 'inculturation of the gospel' in today's world. These problems vary enormously in the so-called mission lands of the third world, and in the post-Christian, thoroughly secularised world of Europe and North America. And in neither case are they the same as the problems facing the Christians of Augustine's time and the following centuries. But these afford a useful comparison and contrast. And studying them can help to make us aware of the cultural assumptions and prejudices we have inherited from our past, or absorbed from our very pressing present.

EDMUND HILL OP

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND UNBELIEF edited by Ian Hamnett.
Routledge, 1990. Pp. viii + 279. £30.00.

'Pluralism is, I believe, a matter of absolutely primary importance for theologians, philosophers, students of religion, human beings because human and religious experience is irremediably pluralist'. So writes Adrian Hastings at the beginning of his contribution to this collection of papers (p. 226). The point is that religious pluralism is a social fact which is virtually world-wide. Bizarre are those countries which would deny it or those thinkers who would reject it. Such negations speak of inhumanity. Now that

man is conscious of the world's multitudinous cultures and religions, he has to be tolerant and accept their legitimacy. Deny this and the death-wish for the others' humanity wins the day. Pluralism is fact and ideology.

The papers were presented at a recent conference held in Bristol with the help of the Colston Research Society. Since the ramifications and consequences of the fact of religious pluralism evoke wide concern, it was obvious that the conference had to be multi-disciplinary. Of the 15 contributors, two were anthropologists (I. Hamnett, I.M. Lewis), three sociologists (E. Barker, K. Flanagan, P. McCaffery), three theologians (K. Ward, G. D'Costa, K. Surin), and one each, classicist (T. Wiedemann), philosopher (M. Hesse), church historian (A. Hastings), Judaistic studies (P. Morris), missiologist (C. Sugden), lawyer (A. Allott), indologist (R. Gombrich). Here is a formidable body of scholarship, which perhaps spread itself slightly too far and which did not always keep to the subject, viz., the relation of religious pluralism to *unbelief*. Nevertheless nearly all the papers are highly commended, as is the editor.

Some contributors rightly show that religious pluralism is not unique to modern western society, based as it is on a liberal, humanistic ideology. Wiedemann's point is that religious co-existence can be found in the Roman Empire and that Christians were persecuted because they posed a threat to pluralism. The triumph of Christianity bore out the fear. Gombrich recalls the fact that Hinduism and Buddhism also present tolerant attitudes to other religions. And in a more subtle way, Lewis points to certain preliterate societies where pluralism also exists. In probably the most pertinent essays, Morris expounds the origins of modern western pluralism in terms of political and philosophical thought, beginning with Descartes, in differentiating the subject from the object. Morris goes on to show how Jewish thinkers reacted to secular liberalism.

Some of the ambiguities which arise out of modern religious pluralism are considered by Morris and Gombrich. For the former, using the cases of Victoria Gillich and the slaughtering of animals by Jews and Muslims, the problem is whether they are to be seen as public or private issues. If public, the criterion is common rationality: if private, individual religious beliefs (see also Allott's paper). For Gombrich, a great upholder of tolerance and a critic of some recent theology, the only enemy of which one has to be intolerant, is intolerance.

Some theologians have seen pluralism as a social factor which must mediate their thinking on a grand scale. The attempt by John Hick to construct a theology based on the acceptance of the validity or authenticity of all world religions with no privilege for any one, receives criticism from several authors, notably Ward and Surin. The logical outcome of such theology is to strengthen the market-place mentality (see contribution by Barker), which in the end often means that no one wants to buy. Flanagan argues forcefully that reckless changes towards pluralism in Roman Catholicism since Vatican II can and do have similar effects.

Omitted is any protracted reference to the contribution of certain Reformation churches to the notion of personal freedom, (and with it, the notion of the Nonconformist conscience), and also a serious attempt to assess whether any growing disillusionment with religion is a result of pluralism and pluralistic theology.

W.S.F. PICKERING