

quotations by fillers such as 'essentially', and 'almost seems'. All the editor has to say of the piece by Hopkins discussed above, is that with Herbert and Vaughan he is 'wrought up to a considerable pitch of stress before ... surrender to the experience of the Divine' (p. 113). Entitled to expect an anthology of religious and poetic experience, what we discover is a very narrow selection from, or definition of, both poetry and religion, even where the poetry such as Hopkins' exposes the folly of that reductionism. The religious is a narrowly understood mysticism; the poetic a Romantic creation far from the wit and wordliness of Dryden and Pope. Karen Armstrong has been teaching nineteenth and twentieth century literature: this is a book for the Tamworth Reading Room; don't buy it.

RICHARD FINN OP

**AIDS. MEETING THE COMMUNITY CHALLENGE.** Ed. *Vicky Cosstick. St. Paul Publications, Slough 1987. £5.95 p.b.*

As an exercise in pastoral theology this collection of 28 short essays has much to commend it. It is interdisciplinary, or at least multidisciplinary; (for it to be interdisciplinary the contributors would need to have met before producing their essays). It is a sort of community effort, and reflects quite a range of stances. It is a primer rather than an advanced text book, and a primer is what most of us need on the subject of Aids and Christian responses.

One disadvantage of this approach is that one or two important points are made briefly several times, instead of being developed at greater depth. For instance, several people make the point that it is inadequate to view Aids as God's punishment for sin; and several reiterate the view that it is inadequate to change your behaviour merely out of fear. It would be good to see one more thorough development of each of those points.

It would also be valuable, I feel, to conclude the book with a substantial theological afterword which would offer some systematic response to, and articulate some relevant questions arising from the different contributions.

There are groups of essays on the medical facts, on the experience of suffering Aids, on Aids and 'family values', on theological perspectives, on Pastoral approaches (through education, chaplaincy work, the mobilization of the Christian community, and individual solidarity); there are 6 statements by representatives of the Catholic, Anglican, Free Church, Jewish, Orthodox and Quaker communities; and essays on legislative and legal possibilities and limitations. I'd have traded most of the representative statements by Church leaders for a good essay on sociology and one on ethics.

I'm tempted to talk about the essays moving between the positive pole of perceiving Christ in the Aids sufferer, and the negative one of reiterating traditional moral stances without considering the situation of homosexuals or the unwillingly single, (e.g. between David Forrester's 'The Path to Reconciliation' and Douglas Brown's 'The Christian Family and the Media'). But that would be to neglect the clue given in the Introduction that 'there need be no fundamental tension between showing compassion and making moral statements; they ought not to qualify each other since they spring from the same, common and fundamental Christian desire to celebrate our human bodiliness'. While I don't think that Douglas Brown's essay on its own would stand as a very good example of Christian understanding of the problem, the thrust of the book is towards the conclusion that Aids calls us beyond the perceived dichotomy, through a radical conversion, to the com-compassion which makes concern for the other the unifying factor in our behaviour.

But if I speak of a 'conclusion' I may be misleading. The purpose of the book is to alert the Christian community, to promote a debate which has to be carried much further, to indicate some of the many facets there are to any full Christian response to Aids: I think it does this well, and I hope that we shall see a more thorough discussion of the topics it addresses.

COLIN CARR OP