

present reality.

Mr. Wilson would be wise to take more seriously the appeal to experience with which his book ends. He writes of 'God coming to us and making his presence unambiguously clear' (p. 118). To stay with this realisation might free the author from the tragically distorted and impoverished form of Christianity which much of his book commends. In face of the possibility that experience of God's presence might prove a delusion, he points to the fruits of the Spirit manifested in the lives of many Christians. It is a pity he stops there. Sebastian Moore hints at where this emphasis might lead when he writes of the Sermon on the Mount:

The stringent, impossible demands in the Sermon are expressions not of strictness but of phenomenal freedom. If you will let the real God come into your life, you will be free of the anxiety that makes it impossible to forgive injuries, to lend on demand, to 'turn the other cheek', and to look at an attractive person without lust. ... Once you're on course with this God, you will want to throw out anything that is going to stop you from reaching his Kingdom. The brutal hyperboles about plucking out the eye, cutting off the hand or foot, that confuse you, become understandable in this context – *and in no other*. Jesus' teaching is full of wild exaggerations. For Jesus is a wild man. He is not restricted by our human fears.'

(*The Inner Loneliness* pp. 82–83) (Reviewer's emphasis)

A.N. Wilson recognises that it is timidity which deters us but leaves it there, characteristically regarding a morally descriptive statement as if it were an explanation. I enjoyed this author's biography of Belloc, but found this book sadly hollow.

PETER HARVEY

ENCOUNTERS: EXPLORING CHRISTIAN FAITH, Michael Mayne, ed., Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986, £3.50.

Encounters began life as talks for the University Mission in Cambridge, February 1985. The theme of 'encounter' was chosen to unite and guide the talks, and was meant to signify encounters with God, with other people and with the self 'which take us out of ourselves and reveal a reality and a truth we had not previously seen.' (p. 2) As is usual with such intentionally broad schemes, the quality of the eleven short papers is uneven; their connections with each other are often tenuous, while at the same time there is a fair amount of overlapping material. Nonetheless, the simplicity and the intensely personal quality of much of the writing makes *Encounters* an interesting collection of modern spiritualities.

The contributors come from a wide variety of theological and pastoral backgrounds, and most are well-known Christian writers. Those familiar with the more abstract works of Una Kroll, Timothy Radcliffe and David Sheppard (for example) will find these more direct and personal statements illuminating. The informal approach of the several items by Robert Runcie sheds useful light on his more structured statements as Archbishop of Canterbury. Taken as a whole, the articles reveal certain continuities of concern between varied styles and backgrounds: the nuclear debate, our treatment of the earth, the plight of the poor in this country and abroad, and perhaps most noticeable, an uneasy awareness of the restraints placed upon us by class, culture and upbringing and the need sensitively to see beyond these.

This collection of disparate articles reaches no climax and comes to no conclusions. Nevertheless, *Encounters* provides an illuminating view of the reasons for belief and the consequences of that faith which are highly individual, yet share common contemporary Christian concerns.

KATE MERTES