

Reviews

GOD AS SPIRIT: THE BAMPTON LECTURES 1976 by G. W. H. Lampe. Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1977 pp. 239 £6.50

'I believe in the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the sense that the one God, the Creator and Saviour Spirit, revealed himself and acted decisively for us in Jesus. I believe in the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, in the sense that the same one God, the Creator and Saviour Spirit, is here and now not far from every one of us; for in him we live and move, in him we have our being'. (p. 228).

With that *credo*, Professor Lampe ends his 1976 Bampton lectures.

In contrast to the ephemeral and uneven quality of some other recent English studies of christological problems, in these lectures massive resources of biblical and patristic learning have been elegantly and lucidly set to work in the construction of a 'model' of 'the relationship of Jesus to God, and of God, in and through Jesus, to believers' (p. 12). The key term in this model, which seeks to be both consonant with the biblical witness and 'available' for contemporary use, is 'inspiration'. God, as Geoffrey Lampe invites us to contemplate him, and trust him, is transcendent spirit, immanent in natural and human process, enabling and enlivening that process and bringing it to its own fruition in him.

The central conviction of all Christians is that Christ is the focal point of the continuing encounter between God and man which takes place throughout human history' (p. 13). By 'Christ', in that context, he means 'Jesus interpreted by others' (pp. 104-105): 'In his life, and his death as the climactic outworking of his attitude to God and to his fellow men, Christians see the decisive revelation of God's dealings with his human creatures and of their proper response to him' (pp. 13-14). Because Christians 'see', and will continue to 'see', in Jesus, the 'decisive revelation of God's dealings' with man, therefore 'The Christ-event ... for which we claim so cen-

tral a place in the history of the divine self-disclosure to man includes all human thought inspired by God which has Jesus as its primary reference-point' (p. 106). (There is surely an awkwardness in speaking of an 'event' which 'includes' thousands of years of Christian faith; an awkwardness which might be avoided if the concept of 'event' were construed in more Barthian terms than Lampe would, I suspect, be willing to do. But let that pass).

'Logos', 'Wisdom', 'Spirit', are parallel and interchangeable models for christology, and for articulating the experience of God (cf. pp. 116, 179). Amongst the considerations that lead Lampe to select the model of 'Spirit', two are of particular importance.

In the first place, the concept of 'Spirit' had the advantage of lending itself less readily to the kind of hypostatization that would make of a personified 'Logos', or 'Wisdom', or 'Son', a being other than and intermediary between God and man (cf. p. 41). thus not only diminishing our appreciation of divine immanence but threatening the unity of God. The task of articulating an expression of Christian faith that might be both practically and theoretically persuasive in a culture pervaded by the 'absence' of God is made immeasurably more difficult when the available models of God, and of divine action, apparently cannot accommodate the recognition that transcendence and immanence are not alternative but correlative conceptions in theology' (p. 207), quoting J. R. Illingworth). And the difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that the model of God with which many Christians seem to work wobbles unsteadily between various forms of 'ditheism', 'tritheism' and 'christomonism' (ugly names for monsters of mythology).

In the second place, in our quest for

security we tend, again and again, 'to try to identify areas of experience where pure and undiluted, and therefore perfect, unchangeable, and infallible, divine truth is revealed, and where direct and unmediated divine action is encountered' (p. 206). It is perhaps not surprising that 'Pentecostalism' and charismatic movements should flourish amongst conservative Evangelicals and conservative Roman Catholics, seekers alike for 'undiluted', 'unmediated' expressions of divine truth and divine activity. Such forms of the flight from rationality, the flight from the contingency of the contingent, the flight from the recognition of the inescapably mediated character of all human perceptions and embodiments of even divine truth and divine reality, have not infrequently appealed to a christological model which would make of Jesus a temporary visitant into our history, irruptive of its web of causes and consequences, from the world of the eternal. Lampe is not arguing that a Logos-christology *need* have taken this form or served this purpose, but that it in *fact* came to do so, and to do so so effectively that our best course is to go back to the drawing-board, or rather to the sources of our tradition, and to reconstruct a model of God's presence and activity which is at once fully personal in character and according to which God, as constitutively present at the heart of all created reality, has no need to 'intervene', to 'interrupt', let alone to 'compete' with the products of his love.

I have made no attempt to summarize a work that is as carefully and densely argued as it is rich in the materials with which it works. Instead, I have simply tried to give an impressionistic sketch of the task which Professor Lampe has set himself and of the manner in which he has sought to execute it. *God as Spirit* is undoubtedly a distinguished and original study. Lampe, like Newman, is recognisant of the interdependence of spirituality and theology. He has therefore sought to construct a theological model which is available for use by the religious imagination and the theological intellect. However, interdependence is by no means the same as identity. The price that we pay for abandoning the *distinction* between 'imagination' and 'understanding', between 'metaphor' and 'theory', between 'real' and 'notional'

apprehension, is a heavy one. If Geoffrey Lampe has (leaving aside particular topics, such as his treatment of resurrection, on which I would want to press him further) served the religious imagination well, I am not convinced that his study meets the demands of the critical intellect. The grammar of *God as Spirit* is ideological, rather than theoretical, and the day has long passed when Christian faith could hope to survive as ideology alone. Because that charge may seem at once obscure and severe, let me throw out a few illustrative hints.

Lampe is convinced that one of the advantages of the concept of 'Spirit' is that it is 'an analogy drawn from personal life' (p. 43). He speaks of God's creativity involving the 'personal interaction of divine Spirit with human spirits' (p. 21), and says that, in speaking of God as Spirit, 'We are speaking of God himself, his personal presence, as active and related' (p. 208). What is wholly absent from these and similar passages is any sense of the logical puzzles involved in thus attempting to speak of God and man as 'personal' *in the same breath* (if I may be pardoned what seems to me to be, in the circumstances, a useful *jeu de mots*).

If these logical puzzles are not attended to, are we not likely to find ourselves saying of the mystery of God that for which we have inadequate warrants, and doing so in such a manner that, having swept one series of myths out of the door, we find the house inhabited by seven other myths at least as dangerous? Thus, for example, there is much talk in this book of God's 'outreach', of his 'interaction' and 'dialogue' with his creatures. Are such terms being used metaphorically and, if so, as a metaphor of what? Or are they being used analogically, and if so, what are the logical constraints imposed upon the manner of the predication? What are we saying, how are we saying it, and how do we know what, if anything, what we are saying means?

Such questions may seem exceedingly abstract, but I take it that abstraction is a strength, not a weakness, in matters of logic or metaphysics. (I say 'logic or metaphysics' because, following Aquinas, I would want to suggest that the metaphysician differs from the logician, not in hav-

ing some privileged access to underlying structures, but simply in his conceptual power). Professor Lampe has little sympathy with metaphysics: a reference to the 'dry abstractions of Augustinian orthodoxy' (p. 227) is typically dismissive. Our mutual colleague, Professor Christopher Stead, has recently shown, in his *Divine Substance* (Oxford, 1977), the delicacy and discrimination that are necessary if the work of men influenced by the logical and metaphysical heritage of Plato and Aristotle is to be appropriately assessed. The disturbing imprecision with which, in *God as Spirit*, terms such as 'being' and 'entity' are handled (cf. e.g. pp. 81, 118, 226-227) suggests that Geoffrey Lampe does not regard such discrimination as either necessary or profitable. It is thus hardly surprising that much patristic trinitarian reflection taken, as it were, simply at imaginative face-value, is easily made to seem merely bizarre. (On a related point: Aquinas' doctrine of subsistent relations, a *tour de force* of logical sophistication, may be unconvincing or even incoherent, but, in order to show that it is either, one must first understand it, and this Lampe seems to me to have signally failed to do: cf. pp. 136, 226).

Shortly after reading *God as Spirit* I read Stead's *Divine Substance*, to which I

have already referred. The effect of reading two such divergent yet complementary works was powerfully to reinforce a growing suspicion that constructive theology is no longer the name of a task that can be adequately undertaken by individual theologians. A work such as *God as Spirit* may do much to meet the exigencies of the religious imagination, but it does little to meet the no less compelling demands of formal, theoretical enquiry. And even a work that met these two exigences would still have to meet the demand, which developments in European thought from Kant to Marx have rendered inescapable, that we attempt critically to ground our forms of speech and behaviour. Yet it seems to me clear that no individual theologian can any longer hope to possess the temperamental, scholarly and conceptual resources that are necessary if this triple exigence is to be met. I do not know what follows from this, but I suspect that, if Christian speech is to survive as something more than the decorative rhetoric of a socially irrelevant cognitive minority, it will be obliged to discover patterns of practical and theoretical collaboration beyond our present conceiving.

NICHOLAS LASH

THE BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke, by Raymond E. Brown, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1977 £49.50.

If the resurrection narratives, their historicity and their theological meaning, can cause widely divergent opinion among intelligent believers (as recent numbers of *New Blackfriars* have shown), the same holds true for the infancy narratives. They share much in common with the resurrection stories: a dense literary and theological construction; a centrality in Christian belief and imagination; and troubling questions about history, fact and meaning. But with the infancy narratives there seems to have been an even greater reluctance to explore them with the tools of critical exegesis. And for Roman Catholics, dark intimations from Rome have contributed to that hesitation. As a result, there has been no major commentary in English on these complex areas of the Matthean and Lucan gospels.

Raymond Brown has now provided us

with a careful, clear and comprehensive account of these narratives. He is well aware of the problems surrounding the writing of such a commentary, but wishes to continue his task of making critical exegesis more available to a wider audience while respecting the canons of the scholarly community.

Brown does not shun the problem of historicity; but he does note that the trend in exegesis has been away from isolating the historical bits of the Matthean and Lucan narratives within the avowedly theological presentation of the evangelists. Now the concern is more for the evangelists' intent in constructing these narratives and their relationship to the rest of their gospels. Brown is clear in his commitment to redaction criticism. A history of religious approach and a structuralist analysis would also add to our understanding of