

the Greek Fathers than his immediate predecessors or contemporaries, although his knowledge of the Latin Fathers was less remarkable: since most of the great debates about the Incarnation were in the Eastern Church, this is especially important. I. Backes credits him with introducing the authority of St Cyril and of Constantinople III into medieval theology. He was the first scholastic of the high Middle Ages to quote the texts of Chalcedon and other early Councils [p. 178].

If these judgements stand, St Thomas's Christology should be of contemporary interest, for, largely as a result of Dr John Meyendorff's *Christ in Early Christian Thought*, the commonly held dogma in English-speaking circles that Greek Christology to all intents and purposes came to an end at Chalcedon, and had ceased by then to offer anything creative anyhow, seems at last to be on the point of revision. Certainly it appears that the Fifth Council (Constantinople II), if not the Sixth and Seventh, was needed in order to make the Chalcedonian teaching about Christ's person altogether explicit. This does not mean that Chalcedon was itself defective, only that (perhaps like Vatican I) its bearing was not immediately evident. Its real triumph, as Meyendorff shows, was to make plain, in its insistence upon the one divine Person and the completeness of the human nature in Christ, that Jesus underwent the totality of human experience and that he who underwent it was—and is—God. In St Thomas's words, 'to the hypostasis alone are attributed the operations and properties of the nature and all that pertains to the nature in the concrete' (III, xxii, 3c). And here, perhaps even more than in the treatise on the Trinity, it is

imperative to emphasise that such Christological statements as this, in spite of all the limitations of human language, are describing genuine facts about reality and not just conforming to certain agreed conventions about the use of words. As Fr Hennessey remarks (p. 109), there is a short section of this treatise which is pure speculation; but it stands out sharply from the rest and St Thomas clearly saw that it did. And I would suggest that the really important outstanding problems of Christology (such as those of the character of Jesus's developing human knowledge and of his relation as Christ to the human race and the universe as a whole) offer far more fruitful and coherent possibilities for a Christology that starts from Chalcedon than for the neo-Nestorianism, neo-Adoptionism, kenoticism and process-thinking that have been so common in recent years.

But St Thomas, of course, did not have to cope with our situation, though he has a great deal to offer us in it. Fr Hennessey has done his work skilfully and helpfully. On p. 7, l. 8, a sentence is missing. P. 35, l. 28, for 'nature in the incarnate Word' read 'incarnate nature in the Word'. P. 69, l. 16, for 'has existence' read 'has real existence'. P. 157, l. 13, a clause is missing which suggests that a woman's beauty makes her suitable for marriage!

St Thomas, like St John Damascene, gives us, Fr Hennessey tells us, 'not the whole reason why the Incarnation happened, but a greater insight into what it involves. . . . His effort is to show *how* the revealed mysteries are true in our thoughts. It is not so much a question of deducing theological conclusions as of recognising the interrelation of the articles of faith' (p. 177). And this really goes for the *Summa* as a whole.

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AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, by Aylward Shorter. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1975. 167 pp. £2.

THE PRAYERS OF AFRICAN RELIGION, by John S. Mbiti. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1975. 193 pp. £2.50.

The entry of black Africa into a wider world has taken place at a time when, doubtlessly by an erroneous parallel with technology, all human achievements are expected to reach full flower without any painful period of growth. Thus, the emergence of African democracy, African socialism, the great African novel, African phil-

osophy, African theology, all of course full grown, is eagerly expected, and when they appear in disappointing forms they are greeted with cynical disillusion. The growth of 'authentically African' philosophies and theologies requires not simply Africans trained in Western philosophical and theological methods, but a self-appropriation of

their history by African intellectuals. At present, what we are getting are attempts to prepare an introduction to future African philosophies and theologues. Over recent decades, there have been several attempts to write about African traditional religions from a specifically theological angle, giving them the same academic respect as Judaism or Christianity, and a number of African Catholic priests and seminarians have written theses at Rome seeking to relate aspects of Catholic belief and practice to the traditional religion of their home community. These studies deserve, sometimes, academic respect; others may be disappointing as works of scholarship, but are still significant as attempts to overcome the experience of cultural and spiritual dividedness which faces so many African Christians. The effort of overcoming this experience of division will surely help to generate the reflective understanding of existence and faith; but studies of this order are preparations for theology, rather than theology itself.

The two books under review, Professor Mbiti's *The Prayers of African Religion* and Father Shorter's *African Christian Theology*, go beyond the study of particular religious systems to look for elements of a future Christian theology. There are certain points of contacts between the two books; thus, Professor Mbiti draws on a collection of prayers made by Father Shorter and Father Shorter quotes Professor Mbiti's writings.

The Prayers of African Religion is a collection of prayers from African sources, almost all without Christian or Islamic influence, accompanied by an introduction and commentary. Nobody who reads through these prayers carefully will be able to speak contemptuously of African traditional religion. Prayers of petition tend to predominate, but there is also a magnificent delight in God's power shown in creation. Many of the prayers have much of the Psalms about them, the same forthright request for blessings or curses, the naively honest expression of grief or joy. Professor Mbiti's introduction and commentary are helpful in understanding the background. I feel, however, that he has at times tended to overstress the monotheism of traditional African religion. There is, of course, plenty of evidence from widely diverse parts of Africa of prayer addressed to God, but usually cults of other spiritual powers exist at the side

of, or in conjunction with, the cult of God. Moreover, as traditional African religions do not have written dogmatic formulas, and usually allow considerable scope for individual adaptation, within the same culture a set of religious practices could be interpreted in either a primarily monotheistic or essentially polytheistic way. To give a more specific criticism, there is one unfortunate bibliographical error. *The Ill-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* by E. W. Smith and A. M. Dale is quoted as a source, when obviously *African Ideas of God*, edited by E. W. Smith, is meant. It is also rather unfortunate that A. M. di Nola's *The Prayers of Man*, an anthology from which many of the more attractive prayers have been taken, seems frequently very vague on attributions.

One wonders if this book marks a certain change of direction in Professor Mbiti's approach to African religion. Fr Shorter quotes him as saying in an earlier book that for African Christian theology the study of African traditional religion is 'a background which cannot be ignored' and elsewhere of commenting on traditional worship, 'Man's acts of worship and turning to God are pragmatic and utilitarian rather than spiritual or mystical'. But in this volume Professor Mbiti seems—surely rightly—to recognise a genuine spiritual life among some, at least, of the adherents of traditional religion.

Fr Shorter's book is the most recent addition to an already impressive list of publications. His earlier book, *African Culture and the Christian Church* provides a more coherent set of pointers to understanding the presence of the Catholic Church in African societies, and it is probably best to read *African Christian Theology* as a series of moves forward from understandings attained in the earlier book, even though it has a certain unity in its concern with dialogue between Christianity and African traditional religion.

Roughly, his argument is as follows. In the pioneering days of missions in Africa, two kinds of closed societies, the Christian churches and the traditional societies, confronted each other without comprehension. Even those missionaries who wrote detailed studies of particular traditional religions were obliged by the theology in which they had been trained to condemn them. This situation has been entirely changed by the second Vatican Council, which now calls Christians in

Africa to engage in dialogue with African traditional religion. Fr Shorter sharply distinguishes between dialogue—of which, in this case, there has been very little—and syncretism, of which there has been a great deal, marked on the one side by the absorbing of Catholic saints into spirit-medium cults, on the other by the inadequately Christocentric piety of many African Christians. But what does dialogue of this kind involve? Fr Shorter recognises that there exists no body of academic theologians capable of conceptualising African traditional belief from within. It is, however, still possible for Christian scholars to meet with men with a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the traditional cults, to learn from them in extended conversations what their beliefs and practices mean to them, and also how they see and understand Christianity.

The author then passes to considering how an African theology, which he considers an essential if Africa is going to make a contribution to the world Church, can develop. He thinks that the attempts by Tempels in the forties and Kagame in the fifties to develop an African philosophy were too closely tied to European models, and seems to believe himself that 'African theologians are already sensing that the old search for an African Philosophy is leading them nowhere and that what they need is an anthropologically based theology, not a philosophically based theology'. He goes on to note the emergence of 'black theology' in South Africa, claims that it is not simply a reproduction of black American 'liberation theology', disagrees with Bishop Sundkler's view that African theology will emerge through preaching, and offers some suggestions on the impact of African theology on the world Church, notably in a renewal of symbolism, a reconciliation of the 'sacral' and 'secular' stresses in Christian theology and ethics, and an understanding of man-in-community.

In chapters III to VII, he discusses the theory and practice of the comparative study of African religions, and gives quite a good review of the various attempts to make comparisons between different African religions. He argues that it is possible, by comparing a limited number of religions in neighbouring areas, to trace similar themes and to establish with a reasonable degree of certainty historical connections. It is not possible immediately to establish a set of common values found

in all African religions; nevertheless, the linked sets of themes for certain areas should immensely stimulate Christian theologians in those areas. He lists a number of themes—memorial, co-creativity, judgement, the wholeness of the community—which he regards as frequent in traditional religions, and as providing common ground with Christianity. In chapter VIII, he returns to the question of dialogue and cultural pluralism and movingly asserts his faith in the cosmic Christ, present not only in history and in Heaven but in all cultures and social situations. The final chapter discusses, with frequent references to papal documents, the validity of the concept of an African theology.

Here is a book one has to respect. There do seem to me to be a number of points on which, however, one also has to offer criticism.

To begin with, Fr Shorter's philosophical and theological underpinning seems at times rather thin. His suggestion that African theology will emerge from anthropology rather than philosophy shows that he regards philosophy as a thing-in-itself with its sharply marked off sphere of influence and its own sacred language rather than as a universal dimension of all meaningful human action. Certainly social anthropology will influence theology in Africa, but only in so far as it is in some sense a meta-anthropology, seeing particular institutions in particular cultures as telling us something about human knowing and saying in general. Then, while the influence of Teilhard de Chardin is apparent, it is decidedly odd to find no mention of Daniélou or de Lubac who, already in the forties, were providing a theological basis, drawn from the writers of the first Christian centuries, for reassessing traditional religion.

Again, an African Christian theology will also have to include a moral theology. It is reasonable enough to point out that actions and institutions which Europeans may find distasteful have to be judged in their cultural and social context, but much more difficult to see, let alone to guide, the growth of new moral attitudes out of already existing ones. Thus, the 'extended family' in the past provided Africans with their primary centre of loyalties, but in a modern African state may be regarded as a source of nepotism. Fr Shorter does touch on a number of such points in *African Culture and the Christian Church*. He hardly alludes to them in

African Christian Theology, yet effective moral guidance for people caught up in social change is at once an urgent pastoral priority and a stimulus to theological reflection. I feel that changes taking place in African societies and in the ways Africans understood their own cultures were much more significant in conversion to Christianity than Fr Shorter explicitly recognises. If so, his portrait of two sets of closed societies engaging in uncomprehending confrontation is certainly not the whole truth. For that matter, on the missionary side, considerable adaptations of parish structures took place well before the second Vatican Council, as anybody who has encountered the formidable church committees of Nigeria will agree.

Furthermore, while his anthropological background frees him from the unduly static view of African religion that has afflicted some writers, he is at times not entirely satisfying in the way

he links social and religious institutions. Thus, surely, one reason for the relative lack of dialogue between missionaries and the adherents of traditional religion in the 'golden age' of missionary work was the colonial setting, but this is not really mentioned. Similarly, there is no discussion of how changes in social structures and political systems may affect the background in which theologians work, and hence their theological findings.

My criticisms may seem rather carping, particularly since I am dealing with what seems to be the only book surveying realistically the possibilities for African theology. And perhaps I would be ashamed of having put finger to typewriter key if Aylward Shorter, whom I have known for over twenty-five years, were to continue the dialogue by saying, 'Yes, Adrian, quite so. Why not write something better yourself?'

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JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND THE ABBÉ JAGER, by Louis Allen. *Oxford University Press*, London, 1975. 202 pp. £7.50.

Newman's controversy on scripture and tradition, with the Abbé Jager, between 1834 and 1836, has long been recognised as marking an important stage in the development of his thought. In particular, it was in a letter to R. H. Froude, discussing the controversy, that Newman first explicitly formulated the distinction between 'prophetic' and 'apostolic' tradition. This distinction was then developed in Newman's second letter to Jager, chunks of which were subsequently incorporated into the *Lectures on the Prophetic Office*. As an attempt at 'dialogue' the controversy was not particularly successful. Jager never really understood the precise sense in which Newman was using the key concept of 'fundamentals', and the Frenchman's eclectic prolixity made it difficult to keep the issues in focus, or their treatment under control: 'I am impatient to be on the field of battle; but I am hindered by an obstacle in my way. That obstacle, my dear sir, is yourself. You wish me to hasten to seek you out, and you flood the road which separates us' (p. 82). Newman was, in fact, less interested in Jager's views than in developing his own, and yet he was more profoundly influenced by Jager than he acknowledged, either then or later.

What Louis Allen has given us is a painstakingly scholarly edition of New-

man's contributions to the debate (the last of which has not previously been published), with summaries of Jager's voluminous offerings, a good introduction and a useful series of appendices (including one devoted to the correspondence with Froude, mentioned above). Whereas Henry Tristram, in an early account of the controversy, treated it as something rather exceptional in the history of the Oxford Movement, Allen argues that 'it must therefore clearly be seen as being not only in the mainstream of the perennial debate between Gallicans and Anglicans on the nature of the Church, but also as part of the detailed picture of the Anglican Church which was continuously presented to French Catholic readers between 1830 and 1850' (p. 3). Allen further claims that 'the key text of the *Via Media*, and the main idea behind the *Essay on Development*, are directly derived from this controversy' (p. 3). Here it is necessary to sound a note of caution. As I have recently tried to show elsewhere, there is both continuity and a fascinatingly subtle series of shifts in Newman's views on tradition from *Arians* (in 1833) to the *Essay* (in 1845) and beyond. That the controversy with Jager had a part to play in this development is undoubtedly true, but it would be as unhelpful to exaggerate that part as to underestimate it.

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