

# Reviews

PHILOSOPHY OF GOD, AND THEOLOGY, by Bernard Lonergan, S.J. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1973. £1.70.

That Bernard Lonergan is the only figure in the English-speaking world (he is Canadian) whose achievement in Catholic theology ranks, in range, learning and influence, with that of Karl Rahner or Yves Congar (in fact all three celebrate their seventieth birthdays this year), surely cannot be disputed. With the publication of *Insight* (1957), the two volumes of *De Deo Trino* (1964), the reprinting of his early exegetical studies of *gratia operans* and *verbum* in St Thomas Aquinas, and the appearance in 1972 of the long-awaited and much-heralded *Method in Theology*, not to mention a stream of essays and reviews, his reputation is securely and solidly established. The years he spent lecturing at the Gregorian University in Rome (1953-1965) afforded him a unique opportunity to reach a whole generation of clerical students, particularly through the countless future seminary professors whom he must have taught. Among the many introductions to his thought readers should remember the essay in this periodical by Nicholas Lash (*New Blackfriars*, March 1968).

The book under review contains a set of three lectures given at Gonzaga University, Spokane. The text of the lectures occupies forty-four pages; there are twenty-four pages of (presumably) taped and edited discussion, and six pages of index. As a point of entry into Lonergan's work this is perhaps as brief and lucid as any, though it cannot be regarded by more experienced students as much more than an extended footnote to *Method*. The argument, essentially, is that *philosophy* of God ('natural theology'), though distinct from systematic theology, must nevertheless be practised in a properly *theological* context. As Lonergan says, 'I taught theology for twenty-five years under impossible conditions'—by which he means, as he goes on to say (page 15), that he had to work, increasingly conscious of the strain, within the intellectual space defined decisively by Christian Wolff, the eighteenth-century German Protestant mathematician whose formalistic recrystallisation of the Scholastic metaphysics of the baroque era continued, incredibly but fatefully, to dictate the style of Catholic theology until 1962 (cf 'Verité évangelique et métaphysique wolffienne à Vatican II' by M. D. Chenu, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, October 1973). Now, however, we no longer live in an age characterised (as Lonergan puts it) by classicism, conceptualism, and the ideal of deductivist logic, and it thus becomes possible, and necessary, to raise the

question about God in the more appropriate setting of religious experience, since 'conversion' (a key theme in Lonergan) grants us the only 'horizon' in which questions about God make proper sense. 'The question about God', he says (page 16), 'is much more important than the proof of God because at the present time people deny that the question arises'—the first move *now*, in 'natural theology', is to broach the question.

These lectures, then, like most of Lonergan's writings, yield their meaning fully only when they are read as attempts to deal with—to break with—a particular intellectual structure. They must often puzzle readers unacquainted with the deductivist extravaganzas and speculative grotesqueries of *philosophia aristotelico-thomistica* in its heyday. Lonergan tells us (page 62) that, when he was a philosophy student at Heythrop in the late 'twenties, he used to take refuge in Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. Certainly the set of problems he is dealing with here would not seem very absorbing and imperative to anybody formed (say) in the Catholic Tübingen School, or to those who studied in places where the text of St Thomas was read without much recourse to the rococo commentators and the later manualists.

How decisive Lonergan's break with the neo-Scholastic tradition is remains a problem, at least in this reader's mind. He recognises that the tradition has broken down (page 57): 'People generally no longer accept or even consider a scholastic metaphysics'. He goes on to speak—all too truly—of 'the havoc wrought on people's faith when their philosophy is jettisoned without being replaced': 'The consequence has been that they water down or reject the truths of their faith', and 'this they excuse on the ground that the early Church at Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Rome had no interest in metaphysics'. He very rightly says, in reply to a question (page 63), that the fundamental problem in the Church at the present time ('I'm not talking about the world problems') is 'not celibacy or faith but theory'. The inadequacy of the philosophy and the scholarship and the notions of science that we have had in the past has ended in a crisis in theology, which is to say a crisis in *theory*. But elsewhere, replying to criticisms by Emerich Coreth and William Richardson at the Lonergan Congress (1970), Lonergan seems to regard himself as accepting 'traditional metaphysics' to the extent that it is 'isomorphic' with the basic terms and relations of his 'cognitive theory'

(*Language Truth and Meaning*, pp. 311-2). But surely if the 'classicism' represented in conceptualism' and 'deductivist logic' is being overcome, do we not have to seek 'another starting-point' altogether (as Heidegger would say), rather than simply fuse Scholastic metaphysics and transcendental method (a short-hand and brutal summary of what Lonergan seems to be doing)? In the end one cannot help wondering, a little sadly, how much the

great septuagenarians who have done so much to free Catholic thought from the grip of Wolffian structures can now help in initiating a different, and necessarily post-'metaphysical', way in theological method.

The text contains some charming misprints: 'the evolutionary tree' (page 7), popularizers who 'similify' (page 8).

FERGUS KERR, O.P.

ISRAEL IN EGYPT, by Siegfried Herrmann. *Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series*: 27. SCM Press, London, 1973. 98 pp. £2.

Why and how did the Exodus tradition come to hold so important a place in the faith of Israel? This is the question Professor Herrmann sets out to answer. His study is more one of *Israel de Aegypto* than of *Israel in Aegypto*.

Modern scholarship has set aside the immediate—and naive—answer that the events themselves were of such a spectacular nature that they naturally shaped (or compelled?) belief in Yahweh's activity and so became the foundations of a new religion. A careful untwining of the literary strands and a critical appreciation of the poetic and mythological reduces the Plagues, the Passover, the Crossing of the Reed Sea and the encounter at Sinai to scarcely more than 'ordinary' events. The problem of their subsequent importance and the inadequacy of this type of reductionism are thus highlighted. It is no solution either to claim that it was the immediate results of these bare events which invested them with more than meteorological or natural significance for, in the short term, the results were extremely limited. The movement of Hebrews both into and out of Egypt was of almost no significance to the Ancient World: neither migration shook the foundations of history. Moreover, it seems increasingly probable that only four of the twelve tribes actually participated in the Exodus and that the other groups had settled in Canaan some while before. It was not until some two centuries after the entry of the Exodus tribes that the disparate groups were welded together by David (c. 1000 B.C.). The presence of three founding fathers—Abraham, Moses and David—in the biblical narrative reflects the complex origins of the nation; the continuity between them is superficial and imposed. And, further, any clear reference to the Sinai Covenant disappears until the 'discovery'

of the Book of the Law in Jerusalem in 622 B.C., which makes it questionable how much this part of the Exodus tradition played before then.

Unfortunately Professor Herrmann provides no satisfactory answer to the problem, confining himself to the scale of the events and their interpretation. He whittles away at the various layers of the biblical account until he reaches a plausible—but nonetheless hypothetical—reconstruction of the bare events consistent with what we know of the political and social structures and ethnic movements of the time. Event and interpretation are painstakingly untwined. But while it is true to conclude, as he does, that these events were important for Israel not because of their scale but because of the depth to which they were experienced, both at the time and especially later, he fails to look further. We need to know the history of the tradition among the people who nurtured it, and not merely some abstract history of its literary and theological development. The tradition cannot be fully understood apart from its community. In particular, we need to know how it was that an exclusively Israelite (or Northern) tradition came to be taken up and fostered by Judah, why it was that these events were recalled and meditated upon and given founding significance by a people who had not participated in them. The problem of the role of the Exodus tradition cannot be satisfactorily answered until we know considerably more about the relationship between Israel and Judah, an area still largely un-researched.

Professor Herrmann presents us with valid and often valuable exegesis, but at the end it proves a disappointing—and expensive—excursion.

RICHARD PEARCE