

medical supplies) but not comprehensively as this would defeat the purpose of the sanctions.

But, overall, this little book has the great merit of presenting a comprehensive and coherent account of the moral principles which could underlay a Christian response to Kofi Annan's call for reform of international law and its structures.

MICHAEL TATE

SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: ALLIANCE AND CONFLICT
 edited by David Martin, John Orme Mills and W.S.F. Pickering,
Brill, Leiden, 2004, Pp. x + 219, £37.26 hbk.

It is odd to write a review of this collection of essays on a unique dialogue between these two disciplines in the late Dr. Hamnett's office. Returning from its last meeting in 1979, he announced that the dialogue had run out vision and that it was now up to local groups to think of ways forward. To find that this dialogue had closed down just when one was getting interested in joining in was deeply frustrating. The petering out of this dialogue was tragic for both disciplines for as Mills indicates in his 2004 introduction, relationships between the two are even poorer than at the time the first edition was published in 1980. Ironically, each discipline needs each other all the more since the dialogue fell silent. Each has suffered badly since 1980.

Theology has become grounded in some decidedly sloppy sociology dominated by a culture of recognition where the politics of inclusion seem to have become an article of faith. In sanctifying imperatives of gender and sexuality, those who seek to represent these most in their theology have lost the plot. Efforts at modernisation and connection have been rewarded by the advent of a post-Christian society, whose prime casualty is academic theology itself. Contrary to John Milbank's implosive efforts to stutter otherwise, theology needs sociology badly to re-cast its moorings on the ground of culture where belief is made.

It cannot be said that the fate of sociology has been any better since 1980. Its specialism, sociology of religion, became hijacked by concerns with sects and cults and the uncritical acceptance of notions of secularisation suggested that the main churches were closed for business. Yet, oddly the 1990s marked a curious sea change in sociology in its dealings with theology. From the wreckage of post-modernity emerged concerns with the self, identity, the body, and a revolt against nihilism, that indicated a turn into an implicit theology, one peculiarly shaped to sociological needs. In this era,

sociology lost its theological innocence and discovered the apophatic. Thus, as academic theology sought to represent the mire of the cultural marketplace, strangely, sociology sought to gaze upwards from it, hence the rise of concerns with the sublime, the spiritual and the sacred. These offered escape from the tyranny of the particular in a journeying well exemplified in Bauman's half century of disciplinary advance from faith in explanation to affirmation of the need to nurture understanding.

Since Vatican II, English Dominicans might have made many useful contributions to the development of theology, but few are likely to endure as well as these colloquia they hosted whose essays were largely edited by a member of the Order. The introduction to the 1980 edition opened with the statement that "This book is a product of the 1970s", a phrase deleted in the 2004 expanded version, as if this would undermine justification of a re-issue. Far from suggesting something dated, the phrase, however, captured well an intellectual time and ripening in the two disciplines in an era that uniquely facilitated such a fruitful dialogue. It is good that the essays that make up the collection are unchanged, for they all have withstood well the test of time. Doubtless, many of the contributors have moved on in their thoughts, but many were writing at the cusp of their careers. Tilting towards the enabling and facilitating, the dialogue, as in chapter 2, has an admirable largeness, a civilised cast that seemed to reflect its Oxford setting. Whatever rumours about the culinary arrangements of the colloquia, the published result is an intellectual feast. It would be a most impoverished academic library that does not have a stock copy of this prescient and generous collection.

In his prescient introduction, in 1980, Mills reflected well on the growing insecurity of the two disciplines each faced with a growing subjectivization and privatisation of religious belief, properties that have matured greatly with the onset of postmodernity. The divisions between the two disciplines were not about God, as one might expect, but in "practical day-to-day working" that placed each apart (p. 5). With the re-centring of culture into sociology and theology, this reference to the practical, to the ground upon which religious belief is realised, is all the more potent. Although the collection never quite got to the ground of practicalities of enquiry in substantive areas, its value lies in its careful working out of the nature of the relationships between the two disciplines.

Three notable Anglican contributions came from Bill Pickering, David Martin and Robin Gill. It was the lively set of critical theological responses to Gill's *The Social Context of Theology*, published in 1975, that led to the colloquia being organised. His essay pursued a notion of a "praxis theology" where sociology would deal with the unconscious consequences and effects of theological positions.

Martin supplied a characteristically elegant account of the sociological mode and the theological vocabulary. He also drew attention to the way sociologists felt that theologians “cheat” by invoking the Holy Spirit to cover dubious sociological arguments. The organic basis of the growth of faith forms his concerns. This notion of conservation seems at odds with the instinct of some theologians and liturgists to endlessly uproot. Pickering’s contribution on theodicy and social theory is a fine piece.

The three Dominican contributions (Mills, Radcliffe and Lion) dealt with the blending of sociology into theology. Many facets of Lion’s contribution stand, such as his reference to collective memory and Catholicism, and also the role of the theologian, but one might wonder if he would still cast his contribution so much in a Marxist ambience? In this reviewer’s opinion, the two best essays in the collection came from Mills and Radcliffe. These essays had a singularly irenic cast. For Mills, the main danger each discipline posed to the other lay in what he termed an “epistemological imperialism” (pp. 148–150). This is and always has been the danger involved in bringing the two disciplines into proximity. In a point that still escapes many theologians, but one that is more potent than ever, he suggested “that it is increasingly difficult not to theologise in what are sociology’s categories” (p. 160). The theological task is to think authentically through these categories that so shape the world to be understood.

Using a chapter title of Berger’s *A Rumour of Angels*, Radcliffe supplies a brilliant and enabling chapter on how the two disciplines might proceed. Acknowledging the dangers of theology being relativised out existence by sociology, nevertheless, Radcliffe points to the liberating properties sociology offers the theological mind. Sociology can itself “provide a locus for the encounter of gospel and world” (p. 177). It is the internal transformation of sociology that he seeks. In many respects, this was a prophetic point about how the two disciplines could and should move in mutual harmony, but it was a vision sadly not pursued since. There are few about who seek to direct their sociology into a theological ambit.

As an account of the procedural problems of melding sociology with theology, the collection is unrivalled. Its strength lay in its liberal conversational property that opened out a unique sense of possibility of how to go forward. Unfortunately, this carried a price of not sufficiently bringing into focus the animus between sociologists and liberal theologians in the decades after Vatican II. In the jungle of belief that followed the Council, a loud sound was of ungrateful sociologists biting the hands of liberal theologians in a fury at what they offered the discipline as a reading of culture.

Few theologians understood the radical basis of the critical sociological response to Vatican II, that it formulated a strategy for

dealing with the world in ways that were opaque and naïve to sociology. The uncritical affirmation of the world promulgated by the Council generated a critical backlash from a number of prominent sociologists and anthropologists. For them, the crisis of faith was not about relationships between culture and God, but the sanctioning under the authority of the Council of a profoundly ill-directed reading of the world that inadvertently led to the scaffolding of faith being dismantled. What has come to pass in the past decade lends a peculiarly prophetic cast to what some sociologists wrote in the 1970s. Admittedly in the past decade, Vatican readings of the world have been far more sophisticated, yet in sociological terms they are insufficiently radical. There is a peculiar irony in sociological responses to theology, that what it endorses has a conservative property that masks the radical basis of its insights. The despairing prayer of sociologists to the Holy Spirit is why Weber, Durkheim and Simmel were not compulsory reading for the Fathers of the Council before they said anything about the modern world.

After the Council, theologians ran into the world through avenues where sociologists feared to tread and in the present climate of indifference nobody in the discipline is bothering to put up trespass signs. A brief recognition of this unpalatable point appears in Orme Mills' introduction when he refers to the insights of Bill McSweeney (p. 9). Unfortunately, his brilliant work, *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance* came out in 1980, ironically when the colloquium shut the window. It almost seems fated that the entries and exits of the two disciplines are doomed to misconnection. The window of opportunity utilised in this collection seems to be denied to those who came after 1980 to these questions. For that reason, the collection is absolutely indispensable for those who might now wonder how the two disciplines might speak to each other.

KIERAN FLANAGAN