

the following questions: Apart from the case of a tiny minority of intellectuals, is Christian faith compatible with very radical scepticism about the historical accounts of the life of Jesus? Is such scepticism really the assured or the probable result of objective investigation of them? Is there perhaps a distinction between rejection as out-dated of what was meant by the ecumenical Councils of the Church,

and the re-expression of what they meant in terms which contemporary man can understand? Even if Professor Mascall were not right in many of his main contentions—and I am dreadfully afraid that he is—contemporary theology would be greatly indebted to him for his constant reminder that these questions are important.

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HUME'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION by J. C. A. Gaskin. *The Macmillan Press Ltd.* 1978 pp. x + 188 £10.00

John Hick's Library of Philosophy and Religion is notable for the high price of its issues. Are such expensive, though sometimes short, books really worth acquiring? Some of them are not, but Gaskin's is not among them. The print is minute and right-hand margins are unjustified, but the overall product is useful. A Dominican reviewer might be expected to relegate Hume to a footnote in the history of intellectual aberrations. But Hume is still, for better or worse and probably for worse rather than better, influential. Since he wrote a lot about religion this gives him a certain relevance to philosophical and non-philosophical theology. Unfortunately, however, many of his comments on religion are scattered. A complete picture depends on access to the *Dialogues*, *The Natural History of Religion*, the two *Enquiries*, the *History of England*, *A Treatise of Human Nature* and various letters and papers. Gaskin has examined all these and has provided a compact and coherent presentation of them insofar as they bear on religion. For this we owe him a debt of gratitude. The reader will wonder whether Gaskin has fairly represented Hume. As far as I can see he has. He has also improved on standard accounts of many of Hume's views by indicating their literary and historical context. In Chapter 7, for example, Hume's account of miracles is usefully situated against the eighteenth-century controversy about the miraculous, the work of Whiston, Collins, Woolston and Sherlock.

Many of the philosophical points made by Gaskin are cogent, if unoriginal (some, of course, derive from Hume). Others seem to me debatable, or at least in need of development. It is plainly wrong to deny that a conclusion has demonstrable

certainty if its denial is not self-contradictory (p. 83). That would mean that I cannot demonstrate that Socrates is mortal if he need not be. On p. 11 Gaskin says that "the teleological argument is vulnerable to any scientific advance (such as Darwin's theory of natural selection) which might show that the appearance of purpose in nature are explainable by reference to the operation of laws which have no foresight of the ends to be achieved." But the fact that I can explain fact A by fact B does not mean that I cannot explain both A and B with reference to some other fact. The fact that natural selection explains certain phenomena (if that is indeed true in the sense I take Gaskin to imply) does not mean that the data appealed to in supporting the theory of natural selection cannot or need not be explained by a theory favourable to a teleological argument or to something like one. Here it seems to me that Gaskin has gone wrong on questions of inference. And this is not the only place where this occurs. Gaskin agrees, for instance, that "Philo's conclusion that the original cause, *as inferred from the phenomena*, is non-moral (that is lacks any concern with or interest in the existence, let alone the happiness of men) is the correct inference from a non-selective and impartial view of the universe." (p. 44) Bearing in mind that this argument allows that there may be a designer of the universe, since men exist it is not an obvious inference that the designer lacks 'interest' in their existence. For if P is responsible for the existence of B by designing it, then it seems reasonable to believe that P has some 'interest' in the existence of B. And since men exist with the capacity for happiness it is not obviously best to infer that the designer is un-

concerned with their happiness. This is because if P is responsible for the existence of B by designing it, and if B has the characteristic of being capable of happiness, it seems reasonable to believe that P has some 'concern' with the happiness of B. What might be inferred from a 'non-selective and impartial view of the universe', whatever that may be supposed to

be, is that the designer is not interested in laying on a certain kind of happiness for certain individuals who are as they are by virtue of his designing activity. But that is a different matter and a subject for something other than a book review.

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RUSSIAN MYSTICS by Sergius Bolshakoff *Cistercian Publications. 1977. pp. 303*
£10.50 (hardback); £3.75 (paperback).

This is a useful, though necessarily rather hasty, survey of Russian monasticism from its first beginnings up to the present day (as Thomas Merton points out in his preface, the title is misleadingly narrow). A few of the more outstanding spiritual writers are treated at slightly greater length, with an outline of their doctrine and brief extracts from their works. The style is at times a bit reminiscent of the old second nocturns, and there is a certain coyness apparent in references to "circumstances" which mysteriously cause people to leave their monasteries sometimes, or even, in one case, cause someone to lose his chastity (at which, we are told, he was much upset); but there is a mass of information here which it would be difficult or impossible for most of us to get hold of otherwise, and that alone should secure for Dr Bolshakoff's work an honourable place in our libraries. Unfortunately the presentation of this material is somewhat haphazard; the over-all chronological plan is only very vaguely followed—Abbot Naz-

arius, for instance, who died in 1809, features in the chapter on twentieth century monasticism. This, combined with the lack of an index, rather impairs the usefulness of the book as a work of reference, which is what it ought to be. The bibliography is also slightly out of date—the book is essentially a revised translation of an Italian edition published in 1962. There is no mention, for instance, of Meyendorff's work on Palamas, nor of Spidlik's book on Theophany (Rome, 1965), nor of the English translation of the Counsels of John of Kronstadt (ed. W. J. Grisbrooke, London, 1966). The book is also marred by frequent misprints (in one place we even meet a contemplative mink!), and occasional inconsistency in nomenclature (the unexplained *Imyabozhniki* movement on p. 237 is the same as that of the *Onomolaters* explained on pp. 245ff). But in spite of all these defects, this is a very valuable contribution to Cistercian Studies.

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