

THE LOVE COMMANDMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, by Victor Paul Furnish. *SCM Press* (New Testament Library), 1973. 240 pp. £3.25.

'By respecting the integrity of the individual New Testament traditions and writers we have sought to understand the various ways in which the command to love was received, interpreted, and applied within the earliest church . . .', says Dr Furnish in his concluding chapter. *Agape* in the New Testament is a well-worn topic but there is every justification for a study which avoids the 'concordance' approach that has severely limited the value of some previous studies in this area. Far more satisfactory results are produced if we do not try to pretend that *agape* is an exclusively Christian word and that it consequently means exactly the same well defined thing every time it is used, regardless of context, or that when it is absent and other words are used we are somehow not dealing with the real thing. On the whole this new study is justified in the result. It is a scholarly analysis of the way in which the various New Testament authors have handled and interpreted the love commandment. It is shown that it was central to the original teaching of Jesus and that it was conscientiously received by the different church traditions, which constantly struggled to interpret its meaning for the new situations—not always with entire success. But there is no recognisable decline in its importance from Jesus to the Second Century church.

In a concluding chapter we are presented with a number of summary statements about the commandment which the author hopes will be of use to contemporary discussions of Christian ethics. This may be so, even if it is partly through stimulating others to disagree. The basic consideration is that the 'New Testament commendation of love is formulated in a command to love'. This means apparently that 'love in the Christian sense is *not* something "spontaneous" (author's italics), but something which must be repeatedly called forth and repeatedly obeyed'. We are then recommended to read Kant's discussion of the Great Commandment in the Critique of Practical Reason. We are told that it is a duty and a function of the *will* and that 'this much, at least, is true for most and perhaps all New Testament writers: love is not to wait upon some interior attitudinal transformation'. If this is all there is to it, what are we to make of the woman in Luke's gospel whom Jesus

commended, saying that she loved much because she had been forgiven much (to reverse the normal, misleading translation)? Surely the transforming action of God's forgiveness is the subject of this tale. And it cannot be seriously claimed that the emotional display on the part of the forgiven woman was simply a manifestation of duty. But this highly informative episode is hardly mentioned by the author. While it is true that the practice of Christian love is not dependent on waiting for the 'right feeling', it is surely true that we look forward to some kind of interior transformation—some transcendence of the old unfortunate split between emotion and will—that will enable us to love in every way those whom we cannot at present bring ourselves to love except by screwing out some kind of 'charity'. If not, then there is no escape from the cold achievements of will-power, which will never bring about the kingdom of God. This one-sided interpretation of love as duty is partially corrected later in the final chapter, though without much theological support, of which there is plenty in the New Testament if one looks carefully. The apparent dilemma of love—is it pure spontaneity or is it pure duty?—is a false one in the end. St Paul in several places, and the author of I John, by a masterly use of ambiguity manage to overcome it. They manage to present love simultaneously as what can be experienced in the Spirit and as a command. For St Paul it is the 'fruit of the Spirit', which, however, we must take care to walk in. Dr Furnish rightly notes that love is both a gift and an exhortation and that the man of faith is able to discern what is required. But discernment surely demands a transformation of affectivity, not merely of some rational faculty of the 'will'.

These criticisms apart, the other remarks in the final chapter are valuable. In particular it was well worth pointing out that the love commandment of the gospel does not provide an ethical system, but is itself a kind of continual critique of all ethical systems and all moral choices, putting them at one and the same time under judgment and under the saving purpose of God.

ROGER RUSTON, O.P.

PROBLEMS OF THE SELF. Philosophical papers 1956-1972, by Bernard Williams. *Cambridge University Press*, London, 1973. vii + 267 pp. £3.75.

Other problems than those of the self are discussed in this volume, notably problems of Ethics; but the hard core is a series of papers starting with Professor William's Aristotelian Society paper of 1956 'Personal Identity and Individuation' and ending with an enlivening set

of reasons for welcoming death called 'The Makropulos Case: reflections on the tedium of immortality', first published in this volume. These papers have already attained canonical status in the contemporary development of the controversy over personal identity initiated by