

prejudice or left baffled. Those who are sceptical about the social teaching of the Church will have their scepticism confirmed, while those who are not so sceptical but sincerely want to understand the value of the teaching, will hardly be helped.

The truth is that the differences of emphasis and direction that the cultural assumptions of changing historical contexts have impressed upon the documents of the social *magisterium* do not undermine its basic coherence. As the author himself points out, in considering the changes which have occurred over the last twenty years (a period in which he rightly considers such changes to have been very marked), these changes nevertheless affect “not its basic truths and values” but “the practical implications for the life of the Church”. The tortuous attempt therefore to show that through the ‘option for the poor’ the light has just dawned is vitiated. The basic truths and values remain what they always were.

These are my general and serious reservations about the book. In detail one could be more carping. For example, the throwaway observation that in the 1930s the Pope “seems to have flirted with Fascist corporative systems and leaders” is akin to saying that *Laborem exercens* represents a flirtation with Soviet Marxism. It may be paradoxical therefore for me to say that

despite all these reservations, I welcome the book. Its detailed analysis of the documents and of their contents (whatever the defects of the concept used in their analysis), remains of extreme interest, is basically fair and, in the true sense, critical. There are many indications throughout the text that had Father Dorr not given himself, or had not been given, the rather restrictive and distorting perspective of a catchy modern phrase he could have said all that he wanted to say in a much more positive, coherent and generally helpful way. He has a strong historical sense and is able to balance the nuances of the modern social teaching with those aspects of Catholic thought from previous generations which complement – and indeed in many important areas clarify – it. What he has written makes a very useful contribution to the revival of serious interest in Catholic social teaching. In this context its strengths far outweigh its weaknesses. One of the reasons why the social teaching of the Church did fall out of favour in the 1970s is that it was treated too uncritically before the Second Vatican Council. Once the reasonably knowledgeable reader has got over his annoyance with the perspective of the author he will find a great deal of lasting value and interest in what he has written.

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**FAITH AND REASON**, by Anthony Kenny. *Columbia University Press, New York*, 1983. pp 94. £16.95.

It has been held that one rationally believes that *p* only if *p* is self-evident, evident to the senses, or held on the basis of reasons. Kenny rejects this view. He thinks that some propositions can be rationally believed without evidence and that the criterion just mentioned fails to satisfy its own requirements.

Does this mean that any proposition at all can be rationally held? Kenny thinks it possible to offer some way of deciding what is and what is not rational, and he thinks that one may do so in a way that takes account of what he calls basic and nonbasic beliefs. A rational basic belief, he says, is self-evident, evident to the senses

or to memory, or defensible by argument, inquiry or performance. Nonbasic beliefs depend on basic beliefs, and they are derived from basic beliefs by inference and testimony.

With these points made, Kenny turns to the question of the belief that there is a God. This belief, so he argues, is not self-evidently true, it is not universally accepted, and we can reject it without wrecking our whole way of reasoning and arguing. Nor, so Kenny adds, is it rationally supported by religious experience, for experience ‘includes items of very diverse cognitive statuses’ (p 55). Some would here appeal to the experience of mystics, but

Kenny's answer to this is that the notion of a 'sense' of God comparable to the external senses rests on a misleading analogy.

Yet belief in the existence of God may, says Kenny, be basic if traditional natural theology somehow works, i.e. 'if the traditional activity of offering evidence for the existence of God and the arguments against disproofs of the existence of God can be successfully carried out' (p 64).

Can it? Kenny does not argue the matter. Instead he contents himself with recording his own state of mind on the problem: 'I do not know of any argument for the existence of God which I find convincing; in all of them I think I can find flaws. Equally I do not know of any argument against the existence of God which is totally convincing; in the arguments I know against the existence of God I can equally find flaws' (pp 84 f). An objector might say that the issue can be settled since one can accept divine revelation by faith. But, so Kenny urges, faith is a vice unless God's existence can be rationally justified outside faith, and unless the historical events which are pointed to as constituting the divine revelation can be independently established as historically certain, as, for example, can the assertions that Hitler existed, that Cicero was once consul of Rome, or that Charles I was beheaded in London (pp 82 f).

That, in brief, is the thesis of *Faith and Reason*, which, as far as I can see, represents a shift of opinion from the position advanced in Kenny's last work on philosophy of religion. In *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford, 1979) Kenny's line was largely negative and the main conclusion was that 'the traditional doctrines of omniscience and omnipotence cannot be stated in a way which makes them compatible with other traditional doctrines such as that of divine immutability, divine lack of responsibility for sin, and human freedom of the will' (pp 10 f). To accept this view is to regard traditional natural theology as inherently and inextricably confused. But

Kenny's position now is that an acceptable natural theology is both necessary and possible. And with that conclusion I agree entirely. We have been much reminded in recent years (notably by D. Z. Phillips) that religious responses do not seem to be based on the acceptance and the giving of reasons. But, given the doctrines of God commonly advanced by the Churches, it seems fair to retort that if there is no viable natural theology then the rational conclusion regarding God's existence is that of agnosticism. And to say that natural theology is simply impossible is grossly to beg the question. The case must be decided by examining the arguments of natural theologians, not by dismissing them in advance. We may well think that there is some logical muddle in any given doctrine of God, and *The God of the Philosophers* argued that we have some reason for thinking this. But proofs of coherence are hard to produce in the abstract, and a proof of God's existence gives us a reason for supposing that the existence of God is indeed possible. Kenny now seems to concede this clearly, and the concession is welcome.

Other aspects of the present volume are equally worth praising. The discussion of rational belief does not seem to me to do justice to radical scepticism, but it is persuasively argued. And Kenny has many cogent things to say about faith and religious experience, though it is a traditional Catholic view of faith that he considers and this will leave many a Protestant reader rather annoyed. The book consists of Bampton Lectures given in 1982, so its writing has been subject to the constraints of space; and this is a pity since the result is sometimes sketchy and hurried. But it is all elegantly and clearly written, and the whole is a very worthwhile essay which could well serve as an introduction to its subject matter or as a text for group discussion or seminars.

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