

satisfied? Are they not ungrateful pigs to envy the beautiful houses we have built in their country, and now that they are shouting at our gate should we not mow them down with a machine-gun? Yes, my

Religion Without Explanation, by D. Z. Phillips, *Basil Blackwell, Oxford*. 1976, xi + 200pp. £7.00

According to many distinguished writers religious belief is either explanatory or explicable and hence misguided. D. Z. Phillips is out to challenge both assumptions. He holds the first to be false because of the role played by language in the lives of religious believers. He dismisses the second by attempting, through a discussion of authors like Frazer, Tylor, Marett, Freud, Durkheim and Fuerbach, to demonstrate that supposed explanations of religion are not necessarily explanations of religion at all. The conclusion therefore is that religious belief is invulnerable to philosophical criticism, that 'religious and magical beliefs are misunderstood if they are thought of as mistakes or errors'. (p. 102) Instead of regarding religious beliefs as hypotheses verifiable or falsifiable, enlightened or confused, instead of regarding them as dubious statements of fact, one should attempt to understand them as data requiring an adequate philosophical analysis. 'in showing the kind of thing religious belief is, one is not advocating belief in it.' (p. 7) But one is not endorsing a general refutation of religion either. As far as religious belief or atheism is concerned, 'philosophy leaves everything where it is'. (p. 190)

In its addiction to a certain kind of jargon, much recent philosophy of religion ludicrously assumes that there is an easily identified something called 'religious language'. Apparently this can be broken down and rejected as improper without regard to the whole use of language within religion and with almost complete lack of attention to the reactions, behaviour and practices of religious people. Phillips is ostensibly concerned to avoid this mistake and that can only be a good thing. No useful discussion of religion can emerge from a failure to try and understand what religious believers are really saying. But is Phillips' own contribution the needed corrective? Here one begins to have reservations. What, for example, is the book about? The natural answer is 'religion and

dear, but first give me another cup of tea and put on that record of H.M.S. Pinafore to drown their screams.

ADRIAN HASTINGS

explanation', but what does this mean? Phillips does not provide a clear response. As far as 'religion' goes all he does is offer purported examples of religious beliefs. Yet what is the good of that and how can it furnish conclusions about religion? One might just as well suppose that 'Harold Wilson' answers the question 'What is an Englishman and what can be said about him?' On the issue of 'explanation', the nearest Phillips comes to defining his language is to say that 'the explanations I have in mind are those which I discuss in various chapters: explanations which seek to characterise religious belief as the false or confused result of ignorance, emotional stress, social pressure or metaphysical impulse, or explanations which seek foundations for faith in philosophical arguments or proofs'. (p.x) But this, of course, is no definition. Neither the characterizing nor the seeking of a foundation for something is an explanation. So what is this dreadful thing, this explanation, to which Phillips is clearly opposed? And what is this religion which cannot be explained and is not itself explanatory? As I asked above, what is *Religion Without Explanation* about?

Despite the noble intentions with which it is conceived, Phillips' overall concern is thus, to say the least, something which it is hard to greet with enthusiasm. The same goes for many of his questions and answers. Can there be a proof of God's existence? Can we infer the existence of God? Can there be evidence for religious belief? All these problems are raised by Phillips but both their purpose or significance in his account and his answers to them remain something of a mystery because more fundamental questions remain undiscussed. 'The whole notion of God and another world which we can infer from the world we know is', we read (p. 21), 'discredited.' But what is inference anyway and what, in particular, is this luminous world we know? "There is a God", says Phillips

(p.131), 'though it seems to be in the indicative mood, is an expression of faith,' But how do indicatives differ from expressions of faith and what, in any case, are indicatives? Questions like this are prompted by Phillips' argument all along the line and since he gives no answers to them the answers he does give are hardly even assessable. They are answers to problems which are themselves unclear to begin with.

Throughout his book Phillips acknowledges a considerable debt to Wittgenstein. He could have chosen a worse mentor. According to Wittgenstein, however, philosophy is a difficult and demanding occupation. To his way of thinking the great danger lies in a lack of puzzlement. If I were asked to sum up my feelings about *Religion Without Explanation*, I would

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH TO THE EVE OF THE REFORMATION, by Philip Hughes. Sheed & Ward. 1976. xx + 1319 pp.

I cannot see why this expensive paperback was published at all. The original three volumes of which it is composed were written between the early thirties and the end of the war: they are utterly out of date. The last thirty years has seen an immense flowering of scholarship on the topics Father Hughes dealt with. In his day one man could, just about, master the relevant secondary literature provided he set aside the primary texts. I should judge it to be impossible to do this now. The period is covered by the first two volumes of the Christian Century series—which when I bought them cost about the same as this book does in hardback—written by Danielou, Marrou, Knowles and Obolensky. I am afraid Father Hughes cannot compete in that league. (In many ways the more solid German series, of which there is an English edition edited by Jedin and Dillon, *Handbook of Church History*, is better still: it isn't so readable and not all of it is very church-centred but it is very good.) The trouble with Father Hughes's book is that it suffers from the kind of anaemia due to undernourishment from the original sources and it comes close in places to being a summary—not always a very good summary—of the notorious *Fliche et Martin*. Father Hughes could not free himself from the then prevailing triumphalism and probably wouldn't have found a publisher if he had.

say that its author is not puzzled enough. The book is provocative and entertaining, but it moves too fast and assumes too much. It persistently refuses to see problems where problems undoubtedly exist and, where matters needing explanation are concerned, it fails to see the need to explain. At the head of his text Phillips reproduces a remark related by M. O'C. Drury. 'Do you think there *must* be a significance, an explanation? As I see it there are two sorts of people: one man sees a bird sitting on a telegraph wire and says to himself "Why is that bird sitting just there?" the other man replies "Damn it all, the bird has to sit somewhere." That might sound clever, but a bird looking for a quiet sleep may know better.

BRIAN A. DAVIES

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH TO THE EVE OF THE REFORMATION, by Philip Hughes. Sheed & Ward. 1976. xx + 1319 pp. £11.50

In the first section what mattered to the author was to show how the papacy controlled and guided all the developments in early theology. Most of the early heresies are baldly and very curiously summarised because what matters is to show that the pope of the day was nice, wise and right. The glimmerings of a more candid approach can be seen (and did not in his day endear him to authority). Father Hughes makes no bones about the lack of participation by the Roman See in the Council of Nicea. Under the then pope, Sylvester I, he said the papacy seemed to pass through a quarter of a century's retirement. On the other hand, in a curious version of the *Quo Vadis* legend, Our Lord, mindful of pontifical dignity, tactfully invited Peter to return to Rome. Moving on, the account of the so-called Gregorian reformation, based on a not very well understood version of the late M. Fliche's very inadequate interpretation (a former student of mine once called Fliche's Gregory the Pope *en pantouffles*) is hopelessly inadequate. We are told Gregory VII was not intransigent but the very soul of reasonableness. This of the man whose favourite biblical quotations were "cursed be the sword that abstains from blood" and "disobedience is worse than witchcraft". We are told that the papal election decree of 1059 still prevails. Since it reserves the sole power to nominate the pope to half-