ate that Williams does not mention in his bibliography the important edition of the Praktikos by the Guillaumonts in Sources Chretiennes.

The chapter on monasticism from the Desert Fathers to the Cistercians is also unsatisfactory. In view of Williams' concern that we should take conflict seriously, it is odd that he fails to see how much conflict there is in our monastic sources. He does indeed interpret the flight to the desert as a protest against the church of the city, but he does not see how much monastic literature is a protest against other kinds of monasticism. He does not do justice to pre-Egyptian types of monasticism, nor does he advert to the evidence (usually negative) of its survival as a source of tension and conflict in Egyptian monasticism. He does not mention the tension there is between, say, the Historia Monachorum and the Apophthegmata, or the important (latently polemical) shift that there is between the Greek sources and Cassian. He assumes far greater continuity in the concept of monastic obedience, for instance, than can really be substantiated, failing to appreciate the colossal change that occurs as monasticism becomes more institutionalised. The baneful influence of the Regula Magistri on Benedict is not mentioned at all, nor is the conflict between the stable, rule-bound monasticism of the Benedictine tradition and the periodic resurgences of free-lance monasticism, culminating in the clash between monks and friars in the 13th century. The friars, incidentally, are not discussed at all, which is a pity. The section on Cassian and Benedict (pp 101-5) seems to be more influenced by modern communitarian Romanticism than by genuine history.

This is unfortunate, not only as a matter of history, but also as a matter of spiritual theory, as the conflicts within religious life highlight two essential dilemmas of christianity: (i) Which is more important, safeguarding one's own christianity or risking everything to help one's brother? (The apostolic forms of religious life involve a real risk, as Jerome pointed out, and remain a highly ambivalent feature of the religious scene throughout the period treated by Williams): (ii) How far can one trust people's own motivation and discernment? (This is a crucial point at issue between friars and monks in the 13th century, but is already patently a problem in Cassian – witness his reinterpretation of *discretio* as following the *instituta patrum!*).

In the section on Eckhart it is unfortunate that Williams depends on pre-critical editions and translations. The splendid texts cited on p. 134, so far as I can discover, are not genuine; at least, I cannot find them in Quint, either in the published parts of the editio maior or in the modernised editio minor.

No doubt most readers will regret the absence of someone or other from Williams' book. I should have liked to see something on the friars, particularly the Franciscans, and something more on the English mystics. And the monastic section could profitably have been stretched to include Barsanuphius and Dorotheus in Gaza. But Williams has rightly preferred to take the authors who illustrate, for him, the major doctrinal issues. Spiritual theology is always and should always be, I suspect, to some extent polemical, because the clash between different versions of what it means to be a christian is one of the most successful, if crude, ways of preserving the vitality and richness of catholic tradition. And inevitably different views draw on different sources, both for approval and for disagreement. It is most unlikely that, in such an underdeveloped subject as serious spiritual theology, any one writer will be able to do justice to the whole complex texture of christian spirituality. Williams is to be thanked for giving us his view, and his book will enlighten and provoke us to a deeper understanding of our faith.

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SOCIAL ETHICS AND THE CHRISTIAN by Enda McDonagh. *Manchester University Press*, 1979. pp 89 £2.75

One may wonder whether anything really useful can be said about social ethics and the Christian in 89 pages, but the present book is not intended as a definitive manifesto. The text is based on the 1978 Ferguson Lectures and is, as Professor

McDonagh puts it, "the beginning of a beginning" p 3, a "provisional" work designed to indicate "some necessary starting points and some fruitful directions". p 4

The argument may be briefly (and, I hope, fairly) stated thus.

1 There is no "comprehensive and systematic body of reflection and analysis of the whole range of society's needs and problems in the light of the Christian faith which one could call a Catholic/Christian social ethics or a social moral theology" p 6.

2 One must move away from the prevalent and traditional concentration on individualistic or personal ethics. People exist in society.

3 The issues involved in social ethics are complex and an overall analysis of them is difficult. One method of handling them is to split up topics and discuss them in isolation. But although this move has its advantages it distorts the connection between facts and problems and can lead to avoidance of questions about presuppositions. One must certainly try not to locate moral issues in certain traditional terms. Such terms can fail to comprehend the wide range of actions, practices and institutions which have to be assessed morally. Moral issues face us where many traditions fail to discern them. And one must note that it is difficult to define, analyse, locate and advise the subject who must act in many moral situations. When social issues are at stake the subject is often a group.

4 There are difficult questions about religion and ethics. Is there a specifically Christian social ethic? Can one do social ethics without appealing to some specifically Christian element? Should one distinguish theoretical social ethics with Christian roots from other kinds of social ethics which are purely secular?

5 The basis for analysis of morality is "the di-polar subject of person-in-community and community-of-persons". p.26 People act as part of society and society responds morally when human needs are respected and when the society acts so as to respect the individuality of its members who can in turn act freely thereby transcending biological ties and emerging as moral agents. The goal here is the making of history as future and the achievement of "higher human unity through deeper human differentiation". p. 31 A balance must thus be struck between the influence of the community and the influence of individuals, though the difficulty of achieving any workable programme must not be minimized. There is the existence of evil to take into account. But the goal of social ethics is endorsed in Christian teaching. "By his resurrection Jesus broke the bonds of death and meaninglessness, not least for our social moral enterprises". p. 40

6 With various apologies and qualifications, it is possible to concentrate on the state in considering questions of social ethics and in pursuing the notions of differentiation and unity. Ideally the state will act in deference of the individual's value, dignity and equality with others. It will care for vulnerable groups and play a crucial role in satisfying basic, physical needs. It will also be concerned for the physical needs of those in other states and it will seek to protect people from violence. But state and society cannot be simply identified. "Deeper differentiation in fuller unity or freedom in communion cannot be properly pursued or achieved in a society totally identified with the political order and organization of the state". p. 74

7 The symbol of the kingdom has been much invoked in seeing the Christian significance of social demand. But the kingdom is not identical with what has been achieved morally, though it is the surety of something future and beyond history and is not totally discontinuous with the aspirations of social ethics. The kingdom embodies a tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' which is of significance to one's view of social ethics. And it can be witnessed to, though not identified with, the Church, which is also called to promote unity through differentiation.

Considering the space available in this book there can, I think, be little doubt that Professor McDonagh has done a good job in producing it. His style of writing often makes it difficult to see at first reading what he is driving at, but he has clearly indicated some important problems in social ethics and I am quite sure that many of his positive suggestions are correct. Yet, for at least two main reasons, I have reservations with his account.

In the first place, it contains no real

philosophical discussion of the nature of moral judgment. In some contexts such an omission might justly pass without criticism. Moral theologians do not always have to do moral philosophy. But Professor McDonagh approaches ethics with a concern for foundations. He has his dogmatic background, and he rightly acknowledges the problems posed by it for ethical debate; but he also seems concerned to find a basis for social ethics which can be illuminated rather than dictated by Christianity. And this concern leaves him with some pretty hefty questions which he does not discuss and on which at least some comment would have been desirable. How, for example, is moral truth arrived at? How does the demand to promote unity through differentiation cope with the denial that there are any inviolable human rights? What of the view that morality is a rational attempt to promote self-interest? What of moral relativism? The nearest one comes to what might be understood as a response to the issues raised by these questions is on page 27. Here Professor McDonagh says "I find it possible to recognise a moral dimension to human experience which manifests itself as obligation or call to behave in a certain way, or as ability to recognise a distinction between right and wrong or good and evil in my own and other people's behaviour". But this remark is not very illuminating. How does one recognise a moral diimension? What is a moral dimension anyway? Is Professor McDonagh sponsoring a version of ethical intuitionism? Or is he, perhaps, thinking in terms of some other approach?

My second major reservation is theological. Professor McDonagh tells us that the symbol of the kingdom originally signified "first and above all the achievement of God and not of mankind' p. 76. He adds that "It is primarily the coming of God", that "moral achievement by the steady progress of mankind through history does not do justice to the divine initiative or to the disjunction as opposed to continuous progress which it introduces into human affairs and human history" pp. 76-77. These remarks, although possibly open to a favourable interpretation, seem strongly to suggest the possibility of a distinction between what we do and what God does or will do as part of his kingly reign. But Professor McDonagh does not justify the distinction implied and various important questions fail to get discussed regarding it. Why should a human act, whatever it is, ever be distinguished from the act of God? And on what basis is the distinction to be made? It has to be allowed that on page 65 Professor McDonagh asks "how far the understanding and achievement in social ethics is simply human achievement and not gift". With reference to this question we later read that "here we encounter a further mystery of human existence, knowledge and achievement, that it is given or received as much as it is achieved". But the implications of these last statements and their relationship to those quoted above are unfortunately not pursued.

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