

show a susceptibility to the person of Saviour, he is not someone who takes upon himself the sin of the world, but a healer and deliverer from immediate hardships. I wonder whether this view does justice to the phenomenon, and I would rather think that these

African Christians are really concerned with radical evil (see my article in *New Blackfriars*, June & July 1972). In that way they may be nearer to the essence of the Christian message than Mbiti's article suggests.

ROB VAN DER HART, O.P.

ETHICS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT, by J. L. Houlden. *Penguin Books*, Harmondsworth, 1973. 125 pp. 35p.

If the characteristic question of ethics is 'What must I do to be good?', that of religion is 'What must I do to be saved?'. The rich young man of the gospels makes the transition when he finds that merely being good is not good enough. The second question demands a genuine religious answer: to lay oneself open in some way to the salvation which is offered. The answer given in Acts 16.31 to the frightened jailor who asked it was, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household'. Clearly then, insofar as the books of the New Testament are written with the intention of answering this question they are not ethical documents. Ethics in the strict sense did not emerge until Christians began to ask the subsidiary questions about how they should conduct themselves until the day of their salvation arrives. Then a diversity of ethical sources were called upon to do service, from the remembered words of Jesus himself to the generally accepted conduct of decent Hellenistic society.

The book we have here is accordingly not an *Ethics of the New Testament*, but an essay on *Ethics and the New Testament*. It is not an account of what the New Testament 'teaches' about morals but a sketch of the place, if any, that ethical concerns have in the writings of the various authors. We are well used by now to the idea that the gospel writers as well as the other authors each have their own distinctive interpretation of the mystery of Christ, which results in a theological pluralism at the very outset of Christianity. Among other things, this makes a harmonised 'New Testament Ethics' an impossibility. Pluralism is not, of course, to be confused with relativism and the discovery of the variety of ethical outlook among the different authors is salutary in that it forces us to go deeper and search out the underlying unity shared by them. In the end this search is synonymous with the search for Christ. Besides justification by faith, there are other influences which tend to make ethics a non-starter; among them the devaluing of the world, particularly prevalent in the Johannine writings, and the expectation of the imminent end of the world, wonderfully disruptive of ethics in Paul. Writings in which these

influences are relatively weak show a correspondingly strong ethical interest. So we have a whole spectrum from the almost complete lack of interest of Mark to the conventional moralising of the Pastoral Epistles. Mr Houlden is excellent on the diverse outlooks of the writers, showing how their ethical statements fit the overall interpretation of Jesus or of the Church which they are trying to convey. Thus, on the perennial problem of the New Testament teaching on divorce, he shows that some original words of Jesus, whose context is unknown, have been used for a variety of different purposes, all highly coloured by a particular theological outlook. Meanwhile, as he points out, we have traditionally been content with 'enforcing the Markan teaching in a Matthean spirit', with very little concern for any kind of context or theology.

The attempt to trace detailed ethical teaching back to Jesus himself is complicated by the fact that the earliest writers such as Paul and Mark seem not to be interested in it. However, they all agree that Jesus, in his teaching and his life, instituted a critique of the Law. But even here there are different interpretations, from Paul's version of replacement of the Law by faith and the love which flows from it, to Matthew's picture of Jesus the reforming rabbi bringing the law to perfection. But the fact that even in Matthew Jesus seems sometimes to be more lax and sometimes far more rigorous than the old Law forces us to search for something more than ethical directives. It is in the significant acts of Jesus and in the parables that the truth is to be found. And this truth is of a theological and rather elusive kind, though none the less demanding for that. What one is looking for is a theology from which Christian ethics can be generated afresh. This certainly means breaking loose from the letter of the ethical teaching which we find already developed in the New Testament. Mr Houlden thinks that the respect paid to the canon of the New Testament has often led to a departure from the true message of Jesus. It has encouraged the view that Christian ethics is a static code merely to be read off the sacred pages. This is certainly true. The discovery of theological plurality in the New

Testament has made us re-examine what we really mean by canonical literature. Even the letter of the gospel can kill, as St Thomas pointed out. Proper study of the writings leads us in the end to 'question the usefulness of ethics as an object of independent interest. Morality will only be for man's health when placed in the wider context of his standing in relation to God'. Within the narrow limits of space and purpose which have been set for this book, Mr

Houlden manages to demonstrate this and other things with great clarity and to raise some very important theological issues in the process. Although there are one or two notable lacunae—particularly where the Old Testament ethical influence is concerned, so important as a background for writers like Paul and Luke—this is as good an introduction to the subject as one is likely to find.

ROGER RUSTON, O.P.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF LORD ACTON AND RICHARD SIMPSON, Vol. II, edited by Josef L. Altholz, Damian McElrath and James C. Holland. Cambridge University Press, 1973. 328 pp. + index, £11.80.

Here is the second volume of correspondence on the high-class but low-circulation periodical of the liberal Catholics in Victorian England, beautifully produced by the C.U.P. at more than twice the price of the first volume, which appeared two years ago. Evidently the circulation is expected to be as low as the *Rambler's*. Addict though I am myself of the quarrelsome mid-Victorians, the full publication of these almost day-to-day exchanges between the two editors does not seem entirely justified. The *Rambler* episode has been very fully treated recently, once by Professor Altholz himself, and nothing new seems likely to turn up now.

About two-thirds of the correspondence is concerned with the contributed letters and articles (meticulously annotated, so that we know which appeared and which did not) and with the mechanics of getting the magazine out, especially the January number each year, because, according to Simpson, the printers were always drunk after Christmas. This volume starts in September 1859, when Acton took over again from Newman, and continues till June 1862, by which time the bi-monthly *Rambler* had been transformed into the quarterly *Home and Foreign Review*. At the beginning Newman was still partly involved, and although both Acton and Simpson were sometimes impatient at the old man's caution, Acton valued his judgment (especially as it was generally endorsed by Professor Döllinger) and Simpson appreciated his powers of thought, wondering how Goldwin Smith had 'the impudence and cheek to knock his little earthen mug against the huge iron sides of Old Noggs' in argument over the question of reason and faith. At the beginning of 1862 there is some gossip about the Oratory School row, from the sidelines. Acton was inclined to support the position of the headmaster, Fr Darnell, against Newman's, while trying to dissuade him from hasty ac-

tion, but he got very tired of the most loquacious of the rebels, the lay master Oxenham, who stayed too long at Aldenham, keeping Acton up till two in the morning and preventing him from doing any work for a fortnight. Simpson got equally tired of the 'spooniness' of Oxenham's style as a contributor; his comments on style are good hatchet stuff and Acton's observations on the reasons for Dickens's habit of caricature are more perceptive than one would have expected.

Among Acton's letters there are a few of intrinsic interest—on the education of the clergy, with France for comparison, on the history of the papacy, on the Temporal Power, and on the relative importance of the scientific and the historical attacks on the Church. Much of this was published long ago by Gasquet, though with the omissions, sometimes amounting to suppressions, that in his day were considered necessary for discretion. In the introduction to the first volume the editors gave the correction of Gasquet as a reason for printing the whole correspondence, but often I found myself wishing that the more interesting letters had been printed correct and entire and at a price within the means of the general reader, rather than the whole mass resurrected in such detail. But if we are to be so minute, perhaps I may ask why, when the editors insist on underlining Simpson's signature (after ticking him off for doing it) they do not give any explanation for the fact that, alone of these letters, No. 386 (Acton's) has no conclusion and No. 387 (Simpson's) no beginning. However, when the third volume has completed the series, they will certainly grace a library shelf, and help us to remember that half those battles are still going on, a hundred years later.

MERIOL TREVOR