

concerned with the option for the poor have a prophetic ring, and are much the better for this. It is possible to write sociologically about the emergence of a new framework for thinking and action within religious institutions, and about the power struggle that such changes imply, but the nature of the subject requires more. The emergence of the option for the poor necessarily involves a critique of contemporary Western society and indeed of the Western Church itself and in engaging this debate in a well-informed and committed manner, Sweeney surpasses the limits of sociology. He is undoubtedly right to do so.

What then can the reader gain from this book. First, as someone unfamiliar with the history and development of religious orders I learnt a great deal at the factual level. The Passionists are set within a wider framework of religious orders and their inspiration and historical development are clearly portrayed. The similarities and differences with other orders are further developed as all of them face the turmoil within the Catholic Church brought about by Vatican II. The cataclysmic nature of this event dominates much of the book which reveals both the liberating nature of the Council, but the inevitable confusion that it prompted for the Passionists, for the religious orders in general and for the Church as a whole. It is at this level that the case study works best for the positive and negative of post-conciliar Catholicism can be seen in microcosm. The Second Vatican Council shook the Church from top to bottom; the emotional nature of the subsequent decision-making is well illustrated by Sweeney's painstaking research.

Despite my own background in sociology, I am less happy about the surrounding theoretical chapters. Not because of the subject matter, for I have already commented favourably on Sweeney's discussion of and commitment to the option to the poor, but because the sociological discussion tends to detract from rather than add to the essential argument. At this point the prophetic message struggles to get out. "If it is true that where religious are going there is no path, then making a path requires creative social action. This, however, needs more than administrators or theorists to bring it to birth. What is required is 'a living guide, capable of winning consent because of being spiritually and morally authoritative'. The requirement is for the elusive *elan of charisma*." (p. 195) Indeed it is. Then don't let theory, even sociological theory, get in the way of what you are trying to say.

GRACE DAVIE

ABRAHAM: A SYMBOL OF HOPE FOR JEWS, CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS by Karl Josef Kuschel. SCM, 1995. Pp. xxix+286. £14.95.

In its declaration on the relation of the Church to non Christian religions (*Nostra Aetate*) Vatican II urges us to enter into dialogue and collaboration with members of other religions, in keeping with the

deepening bonds of humanity, aware that all men are united in one human race and tending to one goal, namely God. Kuschel's book reflects the spirit of this exhortation, by exploring the role of Abraham in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as a source of communality between these three Semitic religions and as a vehicle for having a positive regard for each other. In a time of continuing conflicts between members of these traditions, he writes in hope that, by enabling recognition in Abraham of fraternal ties and ways of solving their disputes, theological examination can lead to progress in actual reconciliation and peace.

The book divides into two parts. There is a detailed historical sketch of the place Abraham has had for each of the three traditions. Then there is an exploration of the possibilities for what Kuschel terms an 'Abrahamic ecumene', a recognition of common ground as a basis for cooperation.

For the new comer to the study of these traditions Kuschel, in the first part of the book, offers an impressive gathering together of the sources and reveals the crucial importance of Abraham and the dynamic nature of the meaning of his story and himself as a figure for each tradition's understanding of itself and of the possibilities of salvation for others. In particular, he focuses on the way the Abraham story has provided a basis for inclusivism and exclusivism for each religion. Abraham can be seen as a model for the ideal Jew, Christian and Muslim and yet also as a figure that challenges each tradition to accept the working of God's saving plans outside itself, in contemplating the one who, at least historically, could not be said to be any of these three.

At the beginning of the book, Kuschel indicates that he wants to avoid the excesses of syncretism or pluralism. In the second half of the book, he wisely warns that Abraham cannot be used to create an alternative religion or as part of an attempt to go back to a golden age before sectarian divides. Rather he discusses Abraham as a paradigm for constructive settling of disputes as a figure that has been and can be invoked as a pointer to fraternity and reconciliation. Abraham can be a figure against exclusivism and intolerance, a figure that induces the members of the three traditions to look positively at each other, to endeavour to co-operate in trusting God and in prayer, without submerging their distinctiveness and particular claims.

Some points mar the otherwise quite careful approach of this book. There is a tendency to a somewhat rhetorical style and elements of simplification in the outlines of the history of beliefs and attitudes in the traditions. At times, moreover, the writer seems to want to reach beyond the limitations of the theme and material. At the beginning of the book, for example, he mentions the need to recover the images of Sarah and Hagar as primal mothers but, in the course of a book that

makes a point about restricting itself to the sources themselves, can offer little scope for this. It is unfortunate that the author sometimes gives the impression of wanting to abandon the caution he elsewhere acknowledges to be necessary.

On the whole this book is a good and praiseworthy attempt to examine theologically the basis for a growth in the kind of practical dialogue that leads to harmony and peace in life. The reader expecting a comprehensive or revolutionary solution to the problems of different religions' attitudes to each other is likely to be disappointed. The difficulties of making statements in this area that do not go beyond fidelity to individual traditions come across clearly in the self acknowledged limitation to what the writer can hope to do and in the seeming tentativeness of the actual elements of the 'Abrahamic ecumene' suggested. Such cautious optimism, however, is surely the most likely to be acceptable and to bear fruit.

MARTIN GANERI OP

MODERNITY AND RELIGION, ed. Ralph McInerney, Indiana: *University of Notre Dame Press*, 1999. xii + 172 pp.

The relation of religion to modernity is a vexed and complex one. This is, indeed, the era of hot-housed secularism. This is, indeed, the era of advanced humanism, liberalism and secularism. Increasingly, from the post-modern perspective, the story of modernity's worship of reason, positivism, technology and science is the story of modernity's desacralization of the world. And that is the story told and retold through this volume. Louis Dupré tells it from its classical perspective. In the opening essay, he details the cultural change as belief in a cosmological schema collapsed beneath the nominalism of the late Middle Ages and gave rise to philosophical tendencies which promoted "the virulent anti-theisms of scientific positivism, of social determinism and axiological humanism" (p.15). François-Xavier Guerra tells the story from the perspective of the disintegration of shared ethical values. In the second essay, he outlines the historical movement from Machiavelli, Luther and Descartes to modernity's current crisis following the Second World War when the Church, as the last upholder of traditional values, was affected. Peter Koslowski tells the story by comparing the model of religion and social order in Christian theology - which strives to defend a position between individualism and collectivism - to liberal economic policy. He argues that they have much to agree about, but the liberal dream of a human and free society is only possible on the basis of a theological order. This is the only essay in the collection which views religion and modernity as allies rather than enemies. But given the extent and depth of the enmity outlined in the other articles Koslowski's conclusion seems somewhat