

and be transformed in the process. The authors have no time for the extremes of Christian reaction to the perils of this world: the view that poverty alone qualifies for the Kingdom of Heaven, or the medieval embargo on interest-charging, or the renunciation of marriage altogether in an effort to put down selfish accumulation. State socialism is anathema to them as much as the unregulated market is a disgrace. Fair-shares, partnership, co-operation, moderate size, please them. Lord Stockton rather than Margaret Thatcher; Tawney rather than Savonarola or Simon Stylites. The feature of Christian thinking that impresses them and that they have richly documented is 'the growing conviction that some middle way must be found between unrestricted individualistic competition on the one hand and state socialism on the other'. Christians join with anarchists in anticipating evil from the latter; Proudhon and Marx reach hands towards Christians in the radical critique of monopolistic capitalism. The focus is on the place of work in human life. Simone Weil believed that without religion we have no hope of creating a 'civilisation founded upon the spiritual nature of work'. It is also upon roots. 'Every human being needs to have multiple roots'. Weil again, baptising Marx, Proudhon and Kropotkin. Not only work, but the over-riding concern for the right to work.

The authors hold that 'doubtless there are still those (especially in the Roman Catholic Church) who think that the most perfect realisation of (our) capacities is contemplative prayer. Nevertheless for general consumption most Christians would settle for something nearer to what we find in Marx's Paris Manuscripts: free and intelligent productive work, or use for the benefit of all men of the natural world God has created for the benefit of all'.

E.P. Thompson comes in for criticism for his swipe at the Sunday Schools movement and their indoctrination of working class children in the worst phases of the exploitation of labour and for his punitive singling out of the Methodists; Edward Norman for his loyalty to the political and economic tradition of *laissez-faire*. We are a long way from the Peterhouse right. There is less about Maritain than about F.D. Maurice, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day. Schumacher of *Small is Beautiful* we learn was Jewish, married a Lutheran and became a Catholic. There is something of this pluralist pilgrimage about the book, evidence of its author's strengths in philosophy, history and economics. The text is a model of evenness and clarity. The record is told with justice to the humanist as well as the Christian roles.

Such a history is badly needed for senior students, teachers and for those of us who may have thought it was a dull or a dishonourable story. Lamennais would recognise the echo of his 'Since liberty is individual it follows that property, in its essence, must be individual too' and the Methodist Hugh Price Hughes the re-iteration of his conviction that Jesus Christ came to save human society as well as individuals and that you can't effectually save the one without saving the other. This is a book to be read before the election as well as in the schools, apt for the crisis of capitalism as well as socialism, remembering the Congregationalist R.F. Horton who, lecturing on unemployment, 'spoke of Jesus as the leader of the labour party (or Labour Party—reports differed).'

ARTHUR HILARY JENKINS

THE UNACCEPTABLE FACE. The Modern Church in the Eyes of the Historian by John Kent. SCM, 1987, pp 261, £12.50.

John Kent reviews in this book the way modern Church history has been written and he is intensely critical. Very often, it has to be confessed, the tone is one of acerbic displeasure of almost every book and every point of view—Anglican, Catholic, Evangelical, Marxist, scholars in the Durkheimian tradition. I think he probably dislikes Anglicans, especially the Anglo-Catholic viewpoint, most of all. He has undoubtedly a good case—a great deal of Church history is conceptually very inadequate and rather softly self-satisfied. Nevertheless it may be questioned whether the critique here offered is really thought through in

historically coherent terms, and is not rather too dyspeptic.

The main, substantiated criticisms made are of three kinds. The first is that there is a supernatural aura or at the least an unjustified presupposition of providential purpose running through much of the writings. I doubt whether this is really true of the best modern Church historians. Nevertheless, it is obvious that if one is a believing Christian, one cannot but in some way believe in the Church. The crucial thing is to ensure that such faith does not spill over into a benign interpretation of this or that particular event. The second is that Church history has too often been written as little more than a history of theology, rather than as a history of religion, of an institution comprehensible only within a political and cultural context. This is certainly true, though the best medieval historians at least are now well beyond this fault (but Kent starts his survey with the Reformation). The third criticism is that Church historians are consistently too indulgent towards the moral failings of their subjects: there is just far more wickedness and sheer stupidity in the story than is generally admitted.

All this is true enough. Yet Kent's own approach is far from wholly satisfactory. He attempts to set it out most clearly at the start of chapter 2 when he asserts that the historiography of modern Europe is best approached by making a distinction between 'committed' and 'uncommitted' historians. He defines the 'committed' as those taking a specifically 'Christian' view of their material. I am afraid this is not good enough. Indeed a page later he is attempting to divide up 'uncommitted historians' between those 'indifferent to the religious content of events' and those 'committed to some specifically non-Christian philosophy of history'. So the uncommitted may be committed after all. And, of course, every decent historian is. A historian of the Reformation who regards it as 'of no great significance in history' is probably not a very good historian and is also, most probably, of the opinion because of some other controlling but unprovable secular view of what is or is not historically significant. As a historian you cannot escape commitment of some sort. What is crucial is that while allowing one's commitment to affect one's vision (because there is no alternative), one endeavours to be self-critical, particularly on the look-out for what might seem to go against one's own beliefs or predilections, sensitive above all to the ambiguity, confusion and lack of clear line within all human history.

This work seems to have begun as an annotated book list and it remains useful particularly as such, with some essays within it a lot better than others. A great many books are referred to! The essay on Methodism is very good, as one would expect; that on Christianity outside Europe entitled 'Failure of a Mission' far less perceptive. The chapter on the ecumenical movement is entitled 'The Light that Failed'. Kent is dominated by a sense of ecclesiastical failure. It is good to be anti-triumphalistic, but one feels that a rather monotonous view is being imposed right across the material almost regardless of the evidence. Anglo-Catholicism, the Victorian Church, the missionary movement in Africa are all written off far too easily. When he turns his guns on Roman Catholic theologians, it is mostly on Aubert and Delumeau. I wish he had analysed more carefully the younger generation—Scarbrick (rather than Philip Hughes), Bossy, Sheridan Gilley, Eamon Duffy. It would have been helpful to have had a quiet consideration of Anglican Church historians like David Edwards (his recent three volumes surely deserved more consideration), Bishop John Moorman, Roger Lloyd. A chapter critically assessing the work of Owen Chadwick as a whole would have been the greatest boon of all—most of his books, including the more recent ones, are not mentioned, and he is surely, despite faults, the giant in the field. This book could have been an almost comprehensive and authoritative handbook to modern Church history, at least as written in Britain: the author would have been capable of it. It fails to be that which is rather a pity. It is all the same a book which many a Church historian will find useful, just because it is not only frequently very perceptive but also determined not to give Church historians the benefit of the doubt, while being written by an insider who knows the literature unusually well.

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