

think one must add, sometimes at least transgressing the limits of the visible Church) within which fellowship 'Christian Ethics comes alive'.

An even greater emphasis on the centrality of Christ to moral theology and Christian Ethics is to be found in Fr Gillon's book. *Christ and Moral Theology* is an attempt to re-evaluate the moral theology of Aquinas in the light of contemporary debate. The insights of Tillman and Steinbuechel into the nature of the theology of the Christ-exemplar and of the moral agent as an Ego responding to the demands of the Divine Other, are followed through their development in the elaboration of the theology of the following of Christ, which in turn is compared to the thought of St Thomas. The whole discussion bears the marks of thorough-going erudition and is very clearly presented. And surely Fr Gillon is right in emphasizing the relevance of Thomas's thought to present-day discussion in moral theology, even if the Angelic Doctor attends our debates as an expert adviser and elder statesman rather than as adjudicator or referee.

On one point, however, I have strong misgivings about both of these books: the emphasis of both authors on the centrality of Christ to the theology of the Christian experience of moral judgment and decision is surely correct, but the tone of both books does suggest that Christ is also the norm of the moral life. This view is becoming common among moral theologians, but unless it is interpreted very carefully can be the source of a kind of moral fideism, where the goodness of the good pagan becomes as much a problem to the theologian of morals as his salvation was to the dogmatic theologian of days now (thank God) gone by.

Christian revelation is not a revelation of moral norms or principles; in so far as the content of revelation is relevant to Christian Ethics it is the revelation of the Divine Context of moral experience, and of the theological significance of moral life. Morality is not only living according to the laws of nature, the ideals of selfless love etc., it is also a moment in the dialogue between the creator and his creation, some of the significance of which stands revealed in the life, crucifixion and

resurrection of Jesus. We know that Jesus is good before we know he is the ultimate norm of Christian morality. Christian morality is not so much a new way of being good (is Christian morality in any way superior *as morality* to Jewish or Buddhist morality?) but a new way of seeing what it means to be good. The moral teaching attributed to Jesus is the purest Pharisaical Judaism.

*Absolutes in Moral Theology?* is a good book and an important book. It is a collection of essays on the various aspects of the problem of the moral absolute. Most of the essays attack the problem in one of its more general aspects, but there are specific discussions on the absolutes in medical ethics, care of the dying and the indissolubility of marriage. Martin Nolan contributes an excellent essay on the principle of Totality. . . .

The subject of this book is obviously of central importance to the development of a credible moral theology, and the tone of the essays in the book is constructive and positive, although some efficient and necessary demolition work is carried out in the course of the various discussions. The last sentence of the essay by Robert H. Springer on Conscience and the Behavioural Sciences could be the subtitle of the whole book: 'Greater relativity in the abstract will yield sounder moral conclusions in the concrete.' To put it another way, we need to incorporate a sound and adequate anthropology—and a multi-dimensional one at that—into the theoretical aspect of our moral theology. It is not enough for the moral theologian to think of men as rational created beings making decisions and performing responsible actions; he needs to understand the degree to which and the manner in which the individual is determined and formed by hereditary and environmental influences, the degree to which the *actus humanus* is an ideal aspiration rather than an everyday experience of the cucumber seller in the market-place. He needs to find a way to the theological significance of the life in the suburban semi and the slum. In that quest he will find *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* useful and inspiring; but it does not contain all the answers.

DAVID JOHN MELLING

**BONHOEFFER, The Man and His Work, by René Marlé, S.J. Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1968. 141 pp. 25s.**

On the first page of this account of Bonhoeffer the reader is told both in paragraph heading and in text that the theologian 'was an aristocrat',

four lines later he is said to have been born into the 'upper middle class', and nine lines after that, still on the first page, he is

described as a member of the 'middle class'; on the next three pages Fr Marlé does his best to prevent further decline in our hero's social position and he at last emerges as a 'chivalrous young man' and the representative of 'an aristocracy of the mind'. This sort of thing readily convinces that the best policy is to skip the commentary and enjoy the catena of quotations.

Such a reading method has its own rewards. Bonhoeffer speaks with such various voices. Sometimes he sounds just like Pius XII: 'The spiritual office is the divinely ordained authority to exercise spiritual dominion by divine right. It does not proceed from the congregation but from God.'

Sometimes, again, he sounds just like Herr Hochhuth: 'Only a man who will speak out in favour of the Jews has the right to sing Gregorian chant.'

And once or twice he recalls the indignation of Lord Melbourne: 'The secrets known by a man's valet—that is, to put it crudely, the range of his intimate life, from prayer to his sexual life—have become the hunting ground of modern pastoral workers. In this way they resemble (though with quite different intentions), the dirtiest gutter journalists.'

What he says, in any voice, is usually interesting.

Strangely, Fr Marlé is not keen on our concentrating on what Bonhoeffer actually says: 'I am quite sure that, *as they are expressed*, Bonhoeffer's ideas are not merely disturbing, but actually dangerous. The use that has all too often been made of them shows that I am right in thinking so.'

However, once he had decided that Bonhoeffer is 'a valuable antidote within Protestantism itself to the impoverishing influence of Bultmann' he quieters all worries about Bonhoeffer with the bland assumption that if he had lived longer he would have explained away oddities and made a sensible scheme of things. Fr Marlé works in the fashion of those literary critics who lament the might-have-been poems of Keats instead of paying careful attention to the import of what has been written. Fr Marlé 'could hardly contain' his astonishment when a colleague spoke of the 'frightening' quality of Bonhoeffer's work. I am mildly surprised that Fr Marlé does not see what Bonhoeffer is doing. Even the sorcerer's apprentice would have noticed the new broom at work here:

What do we really believe? I mean, believe in such a way that we stake our lives on it? The problem of the Apostles' Creed? 'What must I believe?' is the wrong question; antiquated controversies, especially those between the different sects; the Lutheran versus Reformed, and to some extent the Roman Catholic versus Protestant . . . no longer carry conviction. . . . Barth and the Confessing Church have encouraged us to entrench ourselves persistently behind the 'faith of the Church', and evade the honest question as to what we ourselves really believe.

Fr Marlé has not Fr Malevez' understanding of Bultmann nor Mr Kuhns' of Bonhoeffer. Not a good buy.

HAMISH F. G. SWANSTON

**DIALECTIC IN PRACTICAL RELIGION**, ed. by E. R. Leach, *Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology No. 5*. Cambridge University Press, 1968. Pp. viii + 207. Bibliography. £2.

The word 'practical', as used in the title of this collection of essays, Dr Leach glosses in his Introduction as having 'much the same meaning as the word '*Sauvage*' in Lévi-Strauss's *La Pensée Sauvage*; . . . not concerned with the thought processes of savages, but with the ordering of categories in all unsophisticated forms of human thinking.' This admirably succinct definition of Lévi-Strauss's usage comes as a welcome corrective to the crassness of the English translation of his title; at the same time, it gives a clue to the kind of modish terminology within which the unity of this collection of essays is postulated.

In the first three papers, all of which are concerned with Buddhism, 'practical' religion,

in the sense of religion as practised by laymen at the village level, is contrasted with 'theoretical' or philosophical doctrine, as contained in the Pali texts and the theological commentaries upon them, which have until recently provided the main basis for Western scholarly understanding of Buddhism. The authors of the first two essays, Dr Obeyesekere and Dr Tambiah, have the advantage of having themselves been brought up in the Buddhist tradition, and therefore writing about it, despite their professional detachment, in some sense 'from within'. Dr Obeyesekere, indeed, seems determined not to avail himself of this advantage: starting out from a critique of Weber's analysis of 'the eternal problem of theodicy', his first