

tion and reconciliation. A chapter on time and eternity, the distinction between which is 'the chief structural principle' of Barth's theology is followed by a final chapter on the *Church Dogmatics* as embodying a spirituality of knowledge: 'The theme of the impossibility of theology without prayer runs right through the *Church Dogmatics*' (p 173).

My principal regret about a monograph of considerable importance for current debates on theological method is that Ford did not unpack his argument from the tight confines within which it was, as a doctoral dissertation, originally restricted. The text is only the tip of the iceberg. In order to feel the force of the thing the reader would probably have to engage as closely

(and critically) with Barth's own texts as Ford himself has done. And this is something which most theologians in this country still fail to do, preferring (unless they are 'Barthians', as boring a breed as the 'Thomists') to signal their ignorance and incomprehension by waving tired banners of 'neo-orthodoxy', 'fideism' or neglect of biblical criticism. Barth himself, of course, is partly to blame: both by the provocative pugnacity of his temperament and the daunting scale of his product. Perhaps the most one can hope for is that, as Walter Hollenweger puts it in his Foreword, 'the way David Ford reads Karl Barth' may 'help to make him understood in unexpected places' (p 8).

NICHOLAS LASH

ART AND THE QUESTION OF MEANING by Hans Kung,
SCM Press, pp 71 (paper) £2.95.

In what seems, though this is nowhere stated, to be the text of a lecture, Professor Küng is most gracious in his assumptions of his hearers' expertise: 'As you know, in connection with art, the important distinction has been introduced between the meaning and the purpose of a work of art', (p 22) and 'as you know, there has been considerable vigorous discussion in the last two decades about this sociopolitical dimension of art', (pp 23-24) and, later, of his hearers' understanding, 'as you see, there is a middle way between academic claims to style and anti-academic lack of style' (p 49). He is quite easy too, in his assumptions of his own expertise: 'I myself have had doubts and wondered what contemporary art will do next', (p 11), but 'No, I am not condemning here historical consciousness' (p 39), 'What I want to warn against is only ideological futurism', (p 42) and 'No, I am not attacking impressionism', (p 44). Sometimes audience and lecturer are thought to share a familiarity, 'We may recall Kandinsky's "On the Spiritual in Art" and the *Blaue Reiter*, the manifestos of dadaism, of the Bauhaus, of futurism, of surrealism....' (p 36). It is a pity, therefore, that

what must be a misprint has left him talking of 'Henri Matisse's chapel of Venice', and that what must be an homeric nod has let him forget Raymond Loewy in his dismissive talk of 'the fabricated and artificially reproduced reality of Coca Cola bottles, stereotypes and idols' of the pop culture, (pp 45-46).

Professor Küng, in this short but majusculed tract, begins from the thesis that the crisis of art 'must be seen against the background of the general crisis, outwardly of norms, inwardly of values, and thus profoundly of meaning' (p 25). What we feel only so far as we are vaguely and superficially sensitive, 'many artists go through consciously, intensively, and painfully', (p 29). Professor Küng had recently read the obituary of Max von Moos, 'in a leading German newspaper', which said the Lucerne artist had revealed the situation of modern man, 'a slave to blind and evil lust for life, now afflicted with his nightmares, without finding hope or mercy', and Professor Küng has in this context a phrase about 'a nihilist who after reading Nietzsche had lost his belief in the Church but not in hell' (p 30). He is not, of course, recommending that art should again be-

come conventionally religious, or artists learn to make happy use of traditional symbols of transcendence. Though, here again, 'we may recall Rouault's, Nolde's, and Manessier's great works and the portrayals of the Crucified by Corinth and Slevogt, Gauguin and Ensor, Beckmann and Buffet' as examples of those who have 'given form to sacral materials', This is all very well for some, but those of his readers who do not recall Manessier, who think of *Don Giovanni* whenever they recall Slevogt, and who shudder a little at the recollection of the way in which the 'sacral materials' of Ensor's 'Entry of Christ' have been manipulated to express a disgust for ordinary women and men, may wonder just what Professor Küng intends by his question, 'Should not the art of the future again become open to religion?' (p 38).

It has been common for even the most distinguished German theologians to indulge a small disdain for the philistinism of the middle classes. Nietzsche attacked poor D. F. Strauss for writing theology for those who go to the zoo on Sunday afternoons. Bultmann seems never to have spoken with anyone who remained within a world of 'sunset' and 'solid gold', no one asked him to 'be an angel'. Professor Küng is not to be accused of anything in this sort. He is, indeed, by his demand for an openness to religion, entering a protest, in our general name, against an art which is closed to anything other than its own play. His example of such an art is, however, unfortunate. He refers to Wagner's ambition for an 'Artwork of the Future'. Professor Küng declares that 'this work of art certainly has the future no longer before it, but only behind it' (p 28). Bayreuth has been, he says, 'demythologised'. He makes in this connection rather a vulgar fun of Lohengrin's swan. Examples are dangerous. Lohengrin's swan carries away the saviour hero, the girl who put her hope in the old magic is wholly disappointed, while the decent ordinary chap, Gottfried, is given his chance to run the kingdom. Wagner is always demythologising. And that *Gottes-*

dammerung which Professor Küng supposes to have been substituted by the history of national socialism, was already a declaration by the composer of the coming time when gods and heroes and dukes would all go up in smoke and ordinary folk would inherit. Wagner's appreciation of how our future is not touched by the praise of national socialism nor the pity of Professor Küng.

Wagner was certainly open to religion. But, then, religion opened to him. Parsifal dismisses the Christian mythology of the girl who wipes his feet with her hair and the king with the spear wound in his side, and becomes his own man. What is to be done with such an artist? How is he, how is anyone, to be made aware of the vital power of the divine in our existence, the mystery in us and around us, 'the supra-sensible ground of meaning of all our reality in the midst of the world of sense', (p 55)? I did not find in this tract any suggestion of how an answer was to be made to such a question. At any rate, not, it is devoutly to be wished, by any device as impertinent as Professor Küng's re-writing of Brecht's *Es steht noch mehr bereit*. 'Out of respect for Brecht's challenge', he says, without any evident embarrassment, 'little is changed here: two letters in the first verse, one word in the second, a little more only in the third and fourth', then the poem may be read 'in a tone of calm conviction and friendly invitation; instead of a seduction by the bigot, or a counter-seduction by the godless, an initiation by the believer', (pp 68-69). It will not, of course, be Brecht's art, it will not ask his question, it will not express his meaning.

At several places towards the close of his lecture, Professor Küng suggests a parallel by his use after 'art' of the parenthesis '(and theology)'; (pp 39, 40, 42, twice, 43), and there is a final note, perhaps Professor Küng's, perhaps the translator's, referring the reader to *Does God Exist?* for 'the philosophical-theologian substantiation of the basic conception largely taken for granted here', (p 55). I cannot suppose

that those who are wondering whether his theological enterprise is a faithful interpretation of the tradition will be reassured

by his treatment of other's work here. This must be a sadness for his admirers.

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THE PASSIONATE GOD, by Rosemary Haughton. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981. pp 344 ISBN 0 232 51515 8 £12.95

As its title suggests, this is an exciting book, and a first-class example of fresh, living theology. Near the end of it Mrs Haughton states a principle about theological language which she has herself consistently kept in view: 'The right kind of language must . . . image the real nature of the Exchanges which are the life of God, and of God in humankind. But it must do so in a poetry which reflects for those who hear it the known truth of their particular cultural and personal experience. In other words, the poetry of good theology must grow from deep within the actual and concrete experience of people, so deep that when they hear that poetry they recognize in it *both* the accurate expression of their problems and hopes and loves *and* the evocation of deeper layers which they cannot touch but of which they are mutely aware, afraid and desirous' (p 279). This passage has already sounded the characteristic notes: poetry and theology as kindred means of evoking experience in such a way that its divine significance is made clear; the Exchange; the communication between layers or spheres of experience.

Seeking a model which will be flexible, true and dynamic enough to exclude no aspect of reality, the author takes 'Exchange': all life is a moving web, a pattern of flow, a giving and receiving, an exchange of love. This is what Christians understand to be the life of the Trinity, and all creation is made in that image. The 'spheres' of being are intended to be open to one another: matter and spirit, mind and body, heaven and earth; individual identities find their ecstasy and joy in being centres of exchange. But when the flow of love en-

counters an obstacle it is like a dammed river; the force builds up, love seeks a weak spot to break through.

The tradition of Romantic Love was worked out by troubadours and courtiers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and brought to its climax of theological, poetic and pssionage truth by Dante. 'The cultural breakthrough of "Romance" came about in order to allow Christendom to celebrate the fact of spiritual breakthrough between men and women, whole, bodily and in love' (p 45). The full energy of love becomes available at these moments of breakthrough. Typically vulnerable spots are beauty and death; each time it happens there is an invitation to new life, to being and exchange of a different order. Dante meets Beatrice and breaks through into the sphere of glory within himself. The creature falls in love, and is born anew.

This model is used to illumine the central doctrines of Christian faith. Sin is the refusal of exchange, and results in the closing off of the spheres of reality from one another, so that the invitation to fuller life is perceived as threat. The appalling consequences of refusal are apparent not only in spiritual but also in psychological, social and ecological dislocations. The Lover looked for a vulnerable place and found it in Mary: 'It seems that the moment of breakthrough for Mary was also the beginning of the breakthrough of salvation for all creation' (p 133). The Incarnation is the breakthrough of the Passionate God, 'a God so passionate that he has to be Jesus, a Jesus so passionate that he has to be God' (p 7).

Wisdom is the Old Testament's image of mobile, penetrating, ever-flowing ex-