

Nichols' co-religionists would not find so congenial. May I refer him to von Hugel when he said,

“Never get things too clear. Religion can't be clear. In this mixed up life there is always an element of unclarity... Religion can't be clear if it is worth having. To me, if I can see things through, I get uneasy—I feel its a fake. I know I have left something out, I've made some mistake.

Aidan Nichols OP, *The Panther and the Hind: A Theological History of Anglicanism* Foreword by the Rt. Revd Graham Leonard T & T Clark, London, 1992 pp 186 .

Reviews

CREDO: THE APOSTLES' CREED EXPLAINED FOR TODAY. By Hans Küng, *SCM*, 1993, Pp.xv + 196. £9.95,
BELIEVING THREE WAYS IN ONE GOD: A READING OF THE APOSTLES' CREED. By Nicholas Lash, *SCM*, 1992, Pp.viii + 136. £7.95.

These two books on the Apostles' Creed, both by radical Catholic theologians, come from the same publishing house in rapid succession—but what a world of difference between them! Neither will bring great surprises to readers already familiar with their earlier, and in Küng's case, much longer writings,—though Lash's fertile mind seems often to be in process of surprising itself. But it is good to have such major theologians risking this apparently simpler but actually much more difficult role.

There is a sharp contrast of style between the two. Küng's book is based on popular lectures to vast audiences in Tübingen. It keeps the racy, colloquial style of such a setting, using the device of hypothetical questions from a variety of standpoints—traditional catholic, more radical forms of belief, atheistic, adherents of other religions—, which are then taken up and dealt with in a direct and straightforward manner. Lash writes in an elegant and elusive prose, full of memorable aphorisms that by their puzzling nature tease the mind into thought.

Their first major difference in terms of content is in their

understandings of what sort of thing the Creed is. For Küng it is "a limited 'selection' from the possible 'articles' of Christian faith",—in old-fashioned language "a 'Little Catechism' of Christian belief"(p.xi). For Lash it is "no catechism"; it is an act of worship, embodying "identity-sustaining rules of discourse and behaviour governing Christian uses of the word 'God'"(pp.8-9). Those differences are reflected in the subtitles of their books; Küng offers an explanation of the Creed, Lash "a reading".

So they set about their tasks of exposition in markedly different ways. Küng's explanation is designed to take "seriously the questions of contemporaries" and at the same time "to take its bearings in unconditioned intellectual honesty by the gospel, i.e. by the original Christian message as it can be described to-day by means of critical-historical research"(p.x). This involves acknowledging that "the 'Creed' has unmistakable limitations in content, because it was composed in the first half of the first millennium"(p.xi), particularly, as "wide-awake" Christians are aware, in not saying "a single word about Jesus' message and life"(p.68). Having defined his task in these terms, Küng does indeed tackle the task courageously and with good sense. Difficulties are squarely faced and thoughtful lines of solution put forward. That those solutions themselves often raise further problems that are barely touched on is perhaps an inevitable corollary of the extent of the ground covered and of the genre of the work's original presentation.

More fundamental are questions about the general nature of Küng's approach. Its 'liberal protestant' character has often been commented on and is very evident here in the account of the Church to which it gives rise (pp.126-36). More significant in the context of this book is Küng's judgment that the doctrine of the Trinity, which finds no mention in the Creed and whose classical form "even appears only at the end of the fourth century", must be interpreted in terms of the New Testament, where "Jesus himself does not say a single word about a 'central mystery' or 'basic dogma' concerning 'three divine persons'"(pp.150-1). The difficulty inherent in his whole approach stands out most clearly in relation to the Resurrection. This is seen as essential if the crucifixion is to be not fiasco but the basis of faith (pp.87-8). But, taking seriously the questions of contemporaries, the Resurrection involves no intervention of God (pp.107-8); the appearances are most likely to "have been inward visionary events and not external reality" (p. 107), and stories of the empty tomb "legendary elaboration of the resurrection"(p. 105). If that is right, as I am ready to accept, will the Resurrection so construed bear the weight of evidence that Küng needs still to rest on it? Or does it suggest that the implication of following out his method with the rigorous honesty that he both claims and displays is that the method itself needs reformulating on a broader basis?

Lash is in no doubt that it does. He too aims to make good sense of the Creed for those who inhabit his contemporary cultural context (p.13), but his different understanding of what a creed is ensures that he does it very differently. He is well aware of the problems with which Küng so

manfully grapples, but since the Creed is not for him a summary of Christian belief, they can be treated briefly as relatively peripheral matters. Thus although the centrality of the Resurrection for faith is one of the things Küng and Lash have most strongly in common, Lash speaks only generally of "many different images and stories" about Christ's resurrection in the New Testament, but no worry about appearances or empty tomb sullies his pages. That the Creed was a gradual growth is for Lash a source of strength not of weakness. To suppose "that the closer an idea is in time to Jesus Christ" the better it interprets him" is "theological primitivism" (p.14); the Newmanian saying, 'Great acts take time', is a recurring refrain. It is the long continuance rather than the late appearance of the creeds that is significant for Lash; "the great fourth-century creeds", he points out, have kept their status unimpaired through so many changes of culture up to (or almost up to) the present day (pp.14– 15). Here, I think, he under-estimates the role that the authoritarian attitude of all the main churches (which elsewhere he strongly deplors) has played in maintaining the status of those creeds. Be that as it may, their long-standing traditional status is not to be ignored or made light of. Their meaning (as the meaning of all words) depends, Lash argues, on the context of their use. And that is: to define how Christians speak and act in relation to God. So, far from being reticent about the Trinity, the Apostles' Creed is through and through trinitarian. Its structure shows that "there are three ways we believe in God", or "to be more exact: three ways in God, three ways God is" (p.31). The title of the book is, it would seem, intentionally ambiguous— allowing weaker brethren, like this reviewer, to read it, as I did, in its less exact sense, while suggesting a fuller meaning to the *cognoscenti*. Lash lays a healthy stress on the mystery of God which precludes us from defining the nature of God's threeness ("person" in this context has no more content than "x" or "thing" [pp.31–2]—nor too therefore, I presume, has "ways"), and also on the interweaving of all three in the distinctive roles linked respectively with Father, Son and Spirit which he names "producing", "appearing" and "peacemaking". In light of those emphases, it is not clear to me what the grounds or the significance of his more exact formulation really are.

In the context of this general approach, the omission of any reference to what Jesus said or did is seen as a positive asset (pp. 65,70). It fits well with a Johannine, even Kierkegaardian, insistence that God's Word says "nothing in particular" (pp. 71–2)—though, no doubt, like Gilbert and Sullivan's House of Peers, saying it very well! But more positively, what he offers in the main body of this trinitarian reading of the three interlocking aspects of God's relation to the world, especially when writing about the Spirit, is a most impressive vision of God's unfinished work of creation. It is no episodic salvation history that we are given, but an admirable and illuminating account

of the emergence of our world as a matter of God's producing, appearing and peacemaking from start to finish.

Lash modestly describes it as "a reading" of the Creed. That is a fair enough description, if we take it to imply using the Creed as a kind of *aide memoire* to stimulate constructive reflection on some of the great central themes of Christian thought about God. But I worry whether there may not be a touch of false modesty about the description. Lash certainly hopes to oust "widespread contemporary misreadings" (p. 13). And these clearly include those who are said "to misunderstand the grammar of the Creed" by treating it as a list of things that Christians believe (p. 16). But is there not a false dichotomy here? The Creed functions as "identity sustaining rules of discourse" precisely by way of listing things that Christians believe. That seems to me to be how it was historically and to make good logical sense. It is entirely legitimate to concentrate attention on the former role, but that does not invalidate the other approach. To assert that it does is an evasion. Lash, and others who follow the same line, do so, I suspect, out of what I shall provocatively call an unconscious residual element of triumphalism. If we allow the latter approach, we are bound to end up as K ung does, in a critical attitude to some of the Creed's contents. We have been through it with Scripture, and we are reluctant to have to do it with the creeds also. But just as a critical reading of Scripture should neither be refused nor treated as a purely negative enterprise, but something that needs to be integrated into any constructive, spiritual reading of Scripture—so too with the creeds. Lash, I suspect, would agree, but my reading of his text suggests a desire to bypass the issue.

These are both valuable books. They tackle a central issue for contemporary faith with rough-hewn courage on the one hand and creative imagination on the other. Above all their juxtaposition is serendipitous. They need each other in the kind of way that the Synoptic and Johannine gospels might be said to need each other. K ung's approach could only benefit from a broader grounding of the kind reflected in Lash's creative imagination, while Lash needs to continue to wrestle with the sort of problem that K ung faces so fearlessly if his talk about Jesus as "God's complete appearance" where "there is nothing missing nothing more to see" (p. 80) is to escape vacuity. I hope that the critical stance that I have taken in this review in relation to both books will be seen as a tribute to their stimulus and a commendation of their worth.

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AT THE HEART OF THE REAL, edited by Fran O'Rourke. *Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1992. Pp. 427. No price given.*

This book is a volume of essays in honour of Dr Desmond Connell, Professor of General Metaphysics at University College Dublin from 1972 to 1988, when he became Archbishop of Dublin. Few reigning Roman