

Reviews

THE UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH. Interpretation and criticism by Edward Schillebeeckx, *Sheed and Ward*, London, 1974. 170pp. £5.

How can faith in a past revelation as man's ultimate, eschatological meaning be made intelligible to modern consciousness, with its power to move around freely within various language worlds and within divergent mythological, existential, scientific and everyday worlds of meaning? Such seems the central issue in this work of rare intellectual and human openness and theological depth. The issue Schillebeeckx poses is only secondarily apologetic: it is first of all a question for the believer and the theologian themselves, who are part of modern consciousness and who seek to understand their faith. This renewal of understanding could be set on its way when the meaning of faith, as the religious act of surrender to God in Jesus Christ, is referred anew to the future kingdom (ch. 1), to lived experience (ch. 2), to the unfolding of experience in language (ch. 3), to the enduring structures of theological tradition (ch. 4), to the correlation of human question and Christian answer (ch. 5), and to the critical and emancipatory movement for man's liberation (ch. 6 and 7).

Of particular significance here is the treatment of theology and language and the attempt to bring together theological hermeneutics and critical theory. The advantages of Schillebeeckx's programme of research, a programme basically shared by Ricoeur, Pannenberg and others, are undeniable. Once theology becomes more sensitive to the philosophy of language, it is at once more attuned to the modes of biblical revelation, more aware of the validity and limits of a pluralism of faith interpretations, better able to justify critically the status of theological and religious language, and equipped to enter into communication with other interpretations of reality. Once theology understands itself as 'the reflective and critical self-consciousness of Christian praxis', it can begin to rediscover an empirical basis in the community of believers, incorporate within theological

hermeneutics the emancipatory intention of critical theory, and confront that deadliest threat to historical and contemporary Christianity by which it forgets its own meaning as liberating praxis and becomes a purely intellectual and ultimately sectarian gnosis. It could perhaps be questioned whether Schillebeeckx has gone far enough, whether he would not be greatly assisted in his task through a unified theory of the text. Such a text theory could advance beyond a general description of the meaning and limits of a structural, phenomenological, ontological and logical linguistic method (pp. 20-44), and show their interrelation and interference within a single text theory and within a comprehensive notion of reading. This would reveal, as Ricoeur has shown, an intrinsic reference of structural method towards a depth semantic; a surprising convergence between phenomenology and linguistic analysis; a possible application of linguistic analysis to biblical hermeneutics in particular (for example, performative speech categories applied to prophetic discourse) and not only to religious language in general: finally, an openness of language to revelation, culminating in poetic language, and yet implied, as the analysis of metaphor shows, in the movement of ordinary language itself. Schillebeeckx effectively relates theological hermeneutics to critical theory: a unified text theory could bring out perhaps even more radically their mutual implication, since it is through the very nature of the text as projecting a world that the critical power of hermeneutics and the hermeneutical presuppositions of critical theory best emerge. In fact, once the language worlds, the worlds of meaning, and the conflicting interpretations begin to proliferate, the condition for a non-eclectic critique would seem to be the construction of the passage from one interpretation to another: to this end, a theory showing how the excess of meaning within a particular text allows

new interpretations to emerge would seem essential.

One final point: this book admirably relates faith to that desire for meaning which can never be simply intellectual but must intrinsically become praxis, orthopraxis, the kingdom. For the be-

liever, the heart of that process is Christ. One looks forward impatiently to the day when Schillebeeckx's great work on Jesus, published in Dutch in September 1974, is available in the main European languages.

PETER MANN

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY FOR AFRICA AND THE WORLD. Essays in Honour of Harry Sawyerr, edited by Mark E. Glasswell and Edward W. Fasholé-Luke. SPCK, London, 1974. 221 pp. £5.95.

Professor Sawyerr was born in the Mende country of Sierra Leone, son of an Anglican clergyman, went to school in Freetown, and has devoted his working life as teacher and administrator to Fourah Bay College there. Fourah Bay was formerly affiliated to Durham University; it is now, since 1970, part of the new University of Sierra Leone, of which Professor Sawyerr was Vice-Chancellor from 1970-1972. This collection was originally intended to mark his sixtieth birthday in 1969, and the movement from teaching into administration.

As a piece of book-making, expensive at that, it will interest above all Anglican students and clergy with West African connections. A few of the biblical contributions, especially those by Barrett, Moule and Cranfield, will be of interest to all NT students. Barrett looks at the Stoic and, especially, at the Epicurean elements of the speech at Athens in Acts 17. Moule interprets Paul by Paul in Phil. 2, 2 Cor. 5 and Rom. 8, 20 ff. Cranfield examines the freedom of the Christian in Rom. 8.2. I could not make much of Thompson's idea that OT sacrifice is retrospective, in contrast to African sacrifice, which is prospective. To sustain it at all he has to deny that there was a covenant sacrifice at Sinai, in spite of the clear evidence of Ex. 24. Nor could I make much of Glasswell on Mark 1,1, where he wants to take *arche* as ground, not beginning, and attribute to Mark an interest in the relation between 'the historical Jesus' and 'the gospel'. On the first point Luke (3,23) is preferable to Glasswell, and the second seems a recipe for muddle. What is really objectionable is his liking for post-Marxist pseudo-profundity: 'After the event of John is the event of Jesus . . . or, rather, the event of John precedes that of Jesus'.

There is a cosy, parochial Anglicanism about too much of this volume.

H. E. W. Turner, for example, has written on justification by faith in modern theology without real reference to the Roman Catholic theology he criticises. He adduces Prat on Romans, but makes no reference to the French ecumenical translation *Traduction OEcuménique de la Bible: Nouveau Testament* of 1972 nor to the convergence in exegesis expressed in the very full notes in that edition (notably, in this context, in the notes on Rom. 3,24 and 28). He claims 'For an Evangelical Grace is relational, for the Catholic it is ontological' without reference to Rahner's (very traditional) work on the primacy of uncreated grace or to Schillebeeckx's work on sacramental encounter with God. He does not know that 'the principle of *ex opere operato*' was laid down to emphasise the work of Christ as founder and first minister of the sacraments, and that the sacraments are from first to last sacraments of faith, as Schillebeeckx again has emphatically reasserted.

It is notable too that Kwesi A. Dickson's essay on African theology is all but exclusively Anglophone and shows no knowledge of current Roman Catholic work in this line, whether at Lovanium or Katigondo. In the final essay, on ancestor veneration and the Communion of Saints, E. W. Fasholé-Luke was probably wise in avoiding any direct reference to Purgatory and brave in asserting that 'African theologians must . . . recover the practice of the ancient North African Church and pray in faith for the departed, both Christian and non-Christian'. The link between prayer to the saints, prayers for the dead and traditional African customs is part of the making of Black Theology among Catholic Africans also, right down to the southern-most tip of the continent.

JEROME SMITH OP