

human Christ in being dead. He cannot save himself. He fully shares the impotence of the sinner in hell. In developing these ideas Balthasar manifests his courage as he fearlessly takes on the centuries-old interpretation of this mystery as a triumphal journey into the underworld to liberate those captive in Sheol. Balthasar does not hesitate to be iconoclastic and polemical when a central issue of Christian faith is at stake.

If the section on Holy Saturday is a dialogue between Balthasar, the Fathers and the great spiritual masters, the last chapter on the resurrection finds him in debate with the exegetes. Balthasar is often reproached for neglecting modern biblical criticism. This chapter is testimony, at any rate, that he is far from ignorant of it. The chapter is filled with references to the great commentators on the resurrection in our century: Barth, Bultmann, Koch, Marxsen, Schlier. Balthasar shows that he is aware of the exegetical problems and is by no means naive in dealing with the texts. He also spells out clearly the exegetical options, but more importantly, he shows that the real issues are pre-exegetical. Do we want to read the New Testament texts shackled by the world-view of modern historical criticism according to which the dead do not rise and no event can in principle transcend our spatial-temporal matrix or do we take the texts as they themselves ask to be read? Do we let ourselves be challenged by them? For Balthasar the resurrection is a meta-historical event which cannot be grasped by modern historical methodology. Thus it is not *historisch* in the scientific sense but it is *geschichtlich* in the sense that it impinges upon our history and gives that history sense by opening up its genuine future.

This brief overview of some of the highlights of this book should be enough to indicate its richness. Balthasar often deplored the chasm which has separated theology from spirituality since the end of the Middle Ages. This work bears marvellous witness to the fact that it is still possible to write on the central mysteries of Christian faith in a way which both challenges the intellect to think and invites the heart to pray.

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THE END OF ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY by Robert Markus.
Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. 258.

Professor Markus states his purpose in writing this book as being the study of 'the nature of the changes that transformed the spiritual horizons of the Christian world between around AD 400 and 600'; the investigation of 'the shift that took place during these centuries in the way Christians understood what was involved in following their Lord' (Preface, xii). His concern is almost exclusively with the western, Latin half of the Roman Empire and Christian Church. He sees change as a process (a very complex one, as the reader is soon made to realise) of what he calls 'de-secularisation, "a contraction in the scope that Christianity, or more precisely its educated clerical representatives and officials, allowed to the "secular"' (16). One could also call it, I suppose, a process of sacralisation; the sphere of the secular is turned either into the 'Christian', or its religious opposite, the 'pagan/idolatrous'.

The author's attention is not given evenly to the two centuries of his
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choice. He concentrates emphatically on 400, indeed on the late fourth century as well as on the early fifth; and in particular on the person and the mind of St Augustine. Naturally, Augustine deserves more close study than Cassian, Salvian and Caesarius of Arles, with whom at last we reach at least the beginning of the sixth century. But a curious impression is left, at least on this reader, at the end of it all: namely that Cassian, Salvian and Caesarius were much more in tune with the process of de-secularisation, much more influential in forwarding it, than St Augustine. They are very minor figures in the history of Christianity, of Christian thought and culture; Augustine always has been, is, and always will be, a colossus. But for better or for worse, (in this case definitely the latter) the general Christian ethos is formed more by the little men than by the great.

With many of the more glaring deficiencies of this ethos through the centuries Augustine is routinely debited, simply because he is great, and everybody has heard of him, and practically nobody has heard of Caesarius, let alone Salvian. One of the many values of this book is that it proves with authority that Augustine was not guilty. Thus in the little matter of sex and sexuality, in which he often figures as the major ogre, responsible for all the traditional Christian and Catholic hang-ups on the subject, Professor Markus shows that, on the contrary, the great man almost deserves to be regarded as the first Christian sexual liberal. And he has a section precisely headed, 'Augustine; a defence of Christian mediocrity'.

The book, it must admitted, is not particularly easy to read. It is written by a very learned scholar in conversation and argument with other learned scholars, and for the advanced student of the ancient world and Church history. The writer assumes a considerable knowledge in the reader that the ordinary student is unlikely to possess. So definitely not a book for beginners.

But it should prove of considerable interest to all those, theologians and pastors and others, who are concerned with the problems of 'inculturation of the gospel' in today's world. These problems vary enormously in the so-called mission lands of the third world, and in the post-Christian, thoroughly secularised world of Europe and North America. And in neither case are they the same as the problems facing the Christians of Augustine's time and the following centuries. But these afford a useful comparison and contrast. And studying them can help to make us aware of the cultural assumptions and prejudices we have inherited from our past, or absorbed from our very pressing present.

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RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND UNBELIEF edited by Ian Hamnett.
Routledge, 1990. Pp. viii + 279. £30.00.

'Pluralism is, I believe, a matter of absolutely primary importance for theologians, philosophers, students of religion, human beings because human and religious experience is irremediably pluralist'. So writes Adrian Hastings at the beginning of his contribution to this collection of papers (p. 226). The point is that religious pluralism is a social fact which is virtually world-wide. Bizarre are those countries which would deny it or those thinkers who would reject it. Such negations speak of inhumanity. Now that