

demonstration, it seems to me, he has been largely successful.

The book has a pleasingly well thought-out structure: the first part concerned with Luke 1-2, the second with the virginity of Our Lady, the third with Mary in the theology of Saint John; in addition, there are thirteen detached notes on, among other things, 'Mary's Vow of Virginity' and 'The Name "James" in the New Testament'. Throughout, Fr McHugh writes lucidly, with scholarly precision and considerable sensitivity to contemporary theological discussions. There are several notable achievements. In the case of the Lucan infancy narratives, for example, it is argued convincingly that their status as midrash does not denote their essential fictitiousness; we have no evidence at all to suggest that the stories are mere fabrications, romances or legends constructed from an amalgam of OT texts. Perhaps, he asks, Luke has stood midrashic exposition on its head. Might it not be that he begins, not with a text, but with a real *event*, the birth of the Saviour, and then uses midrash to expound its significance? (p. 22). The story of the Nativity was not dreamt up in the study of some first century don but derives ultimately from Our Lady herself, mediated to Luke by a Johannine source, McHugh contests. As he says, 'Luke could not have failed to perceive that his account of the infancy of Jesus would be trustworthy if, and only if, the basic factual content (as distinct from the literary and theological presentation) came originally from Mary herself' (p. 149).

The main section of the book, nearly two hundred pages, is devoted to a study of the Virginity of Mary in the NT. McHugh vindicates the historicity

and theological indispensability of both the Virginal Conception of Jesus and Mary's perpetual virginity. In a most interesting chapter (in which Karl Barth is quoted at length and with approval), it is argued that 'the doctrine of the virginal conception is *the* outward sign or sacrament in which the mystery of the Incarnation is spoken of in the NT and in the creeds' (p. 340). An original theory to explain the meaning of 'the Lord's brethren' is presented (although McHugh is disappointingly negative in his assessment of the historical contribution of *The Protoevangelium of James*), and in a concluding theological chapter the Fathers are drawn on to show that Mary's perpetual virginity is a sign that she gave Jesus the undivided love of her soul. In fact, the inclusion of Patristic witnesses is one of the most refreshing aspects of this chapter, and indeed of the whole book. The Fathers are quoted not for antiquarian reasons but as authoritative teachers of the faith and exponents of Scripture, doctors from whom we continue to learn because we are in solidarity with them in the Communion of Saints. Fr McHugh himself puts into practice the teaching of *Dei Verbum* quoted in his Introduction: 'Sacred Tradition and Holy Scripture constitute a single deposit of the word of God entrusted to the Church'.

This book is an outstanding achievement. It is written with humility and charity, in a truly ecumenical and irenic spirit, yet with dogmatic firmness and clarity of vision. It must surely be the definitive work on the subject in English for many years to come and should be read widely by Christians of all traditions.

JOHN SAWARD

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS, by J. C. O'Neill. *Penguin Books*, Harmondsworth, 1975. 315 pp. 75p.

Although it has been typographically designed so that at a superficial glance it looks as if it is part of the useful and quite distinguished series of Pelican New Testament Commentaries edited by Dr Nineham, this markedly independently-spirited volume does not in fact belong to that series. John O'Neill bravely attempts a defence of his method in his introduction:

'The reader for whom this commentary is written might well expect

that after nearly 2,000 years the experts would have got Paul's Epistle to the Romans straight, and that in these pages he would find a clear explanation of the great man's idea. If this is what he expects, he will be disappointed' (p. 11).

And indeed in some sense I am. Not that there is any failure to expound every word of the extant text, nor that a weight of scholarship has not gone into this book: it most certainly has. And perhaps it is time

someone spoke up for the seriousness of this work. I do not think it really belongs in Pelican Books, and certainly not as some kind of half-hearted annexe to the Pelican NT Commentaries, but it is a most substantial work in its own right. And, granted that I am not personally one whit in sympathy with the method, previously applied with some critical acclaim to Galatians, if scholars may prose on about the authenticity of Mark 16, 9-20 it is surely legitimate to test the manuscript tradition and logical oddities of Romans.

Unfortunately Dr O'Neill does not stop short at variants in the manuscript tradition, but boldly excises whole sections, e.g., 1,18-2,29, without textual warrant, on the grounds that the language is un-Pauline and that the passage does not fit into his thesis. There is a certain circularity in both these arguments: whoever wrote it was working close to OT texts and with an eye upon actual opponents, and in that context the passage does fit. O'Neill's general argument at p. 16, that the original cannot have been 'so obscure, so complicated, so disjointed', since then 'it is hard to see how Paul could have exerted such an influence on his contemporaries' seems peculiarly weak: it is the integral text, difficult as perhaps the author of II Peter found it (II Pet. 3,16), that has had such an extraordinary effect on the development of Christian theology.

Nor is the book free from ideological bias: 'There are a few passages that seem to me wrongly con-

ceived and hateful (for example, those that teach predestination and the section on the state at the beginning of Chapter 13) . . .', p. 21, which O'Neill *therefore* attributes to glossators. He has an equally cavalier way of dealing with 4,6-8: 'The writer of v. 6 is either playing with words, or he thinks sin is like a black ball which can be cast into the urn against a man, and righteousness like a white ball which the happy man has cast in his favour. His words give rise to the theory that righteousness is imputed; a large sum is credited to the account of the man who really is in debt. The Psalmist did not mean this, nor did Paul mean this. Righteousness in *Romans* always elsewhere means the goodness Israel was seeking, that is, a goodness men should try to show in their lives. This meaning is already assumed in v. 5, but will scarcely fit in v. 6. *Accordingly* [italics mine]. I conclude that vv. 6-8 were written by a later commentator who anticipated and prompted Luther's doctrine of imputation' (p. 87). This is clearly a method that would make the evolution and evaluation of dogma much simpler than it seems to be to most of us.

A commentary with a solid theological interest here, then, and one that deliberately runs risks in the interest of discovering a simpler and more acceptable Paul. Though it appears in semi-popular guise it deserves to be weighed as carefully as many seemingly more ponderous and foot-noted contributions.

LEWIS JEROME SMITH OP

THE SEXUAL CELIBATE, by Donald Groegen. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1976. 266 pp. £6.50.

The significance of Christian celibacy as a way of life must ultimately be sought in a theology of spirituality, so Don Groegen says, and that would require a deeper approach than his own in this book (page 2), but the sexual aspects and implications raise enough problems to be going on with, and these are what he concentrates on. Himself a member of the Dominican Order, with training in psychology as well as in theology, he has written a sensible and sensitive book which will certainly prove immensely helpful to many men and women in religious life. While plainly rooted in personal experience his argument eschews obtrusive emotional rhetoric and consis-

tently displays a rigour and a logic that are not always noticeable in current Catholic discussions of sexuality. Making no claim to infallibility, he remains open to the possibility of changing his mind on some matters ('I am only thirty', page 9).

The opening chapter cuts five exploratory trenches in the Judaeo-Christian tradition about sexuality: the Yahwist stresses fellowship; the Song of Songs celebrates eros; Matthew makes room for a Qumran-type ascetic celibacy in the overwhelmingly marriage-orientated Jewish milieu; Paul proves 'positive but cautious', because of his mistaken eschatology; and finally Augustine, not surprisingly,