

**GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND THE CHRISTIAN NOTION OF GOD** by  
**Gerard Watson, Maynooth Bicentenary Series, Columba Press,  
Dublin, 1994, IR£ 8.99.**

This is the bicentenary year of Maynooth College, and to honour its two hundred years of teaching, 'members of the college staff are publishing a series of books in a number of academic disciplines . . . [ranging] from texts based on standard theology courses to interdisciplinary studies with a theological or religious involvement'. Professor Watson's work discusses what may be called the natural theology of (1) the Presocratics and Socrates, (2) Plato, (3) Aristotle, (4) the Stoics and Epicureans, (5) the Schools of Plato and Aristotle, (6) Plotinus and Neoplatonism, (7) Marius Victorinus, Boethius and Augustine, (8) The Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena, and (9) Thomas Aquinas.

Professor Watson holds that Plato 'is the most important influence on Christian theology' and rightly notes that 'in a sense the whole book is about him' (p.9). He is especially interested in the concepts of The One, The Other and in the problem of evil. The book reveals wide and detailed reading of the original texts of all the authors studied. There are frequent, and apposite, quotations. It also shows a comprehensive knowledge of the secondary literature. The author notes that 'the book 'should be accompanied by the excellent specialist studies' which are referred to. The work is certainly no primer, and could be fully appreciated only by someone trained in the classics, or in philosophy. The discussion is deep and measured, and Professor Watson's learning enables him to reach balanced conclusions.

Discussion is omitted of the Greek Fathers whose influence was less felt in the Western world.

This is a work of considerable scholarship and of many years of study. Modern writers who deprecate the influence of Greek thought on theology might well learn from it the depth and quality of that thought. But one may need to remember that Christian theologians, influenced by Platonism though they were, maintained their own perspective. To read Augustine is a spiritual experience quite other than that found in the reading of Plato.

The book ends with an account of Platonic elements in Aquinas. These are present, and influential, but Aquinas is incorrigibly an Aristotelean. He failed to persuade later theologians to follow him in this, and the Platonic clash of the One and the Many dominates the thinking even of those who reject Plato. But Aquinas did fail, historically, and there is no better way to reduce a contemporary theologians to trembling impotence—well, to impotent trembling—than to hiss 'Thomist' as he passes.

**MICHAEL NOLAN**