

# Reviews

**THE SPIRIT OF LIFE: A UNIVERSAL AFFIRMATION, Jurgen Moltmann, translated by Margaret Kohl, SCM, 1992, pp. xv + 358, £17.50**

'It is dreadful if faith does not grow with people, and if they go on cherishing childish beliefs and notions after they are grown up. It is the mutual influence between beliefs and the experience of life which essentially speaking constitutes the *vita christiana*'. He might have said the *via christiana* because it is along this way that Moltmann has published a succession of books pursuing questions that have arisen explicitly or implicitly in earlier volumes. He locates the present volume in the series begun in 1980 with *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* with its social trinitarianism, subsequently developed in *God in Creation* (1985). Here he explores further the nature, activity and person of the Spirit in the context of 'life's quickening and sanctification'. The translation is good; the lack of general index a pity.

The issues covered are too wide-ranging to be summarized, but certain interrelated motifs give shape and coherence to the discussion. First, Moltmann bases his case on scripture and experience (though not without critical analysis of 'experience' and other key terms, such as 'freedom' and 'person'). This frees him to take issue with tradition, or at least to relativize or balance what he claims are onesided doctrinal or credal formulations, and to draw widely on biblical metaphors and the experiences they supposedly grew out of, to build up his composite, holistic picture of the Holy Spirit. This approach accords with the eschatological orientation of his theology and enables him to argue for a dynamic concept of God with a history as well as active in history.

The relative independence he attributes to the persons of the Trinity allows Moltmann to distinguish their efficacies and relationships and to address them from different perspectives. In this way he aims to break through some at least of the impassés posed by a narrow 'either/or' approach. Thus he can affirm the transcendence of the Father — the primordial origin of the being of the Son and the Spirit (his Word and Breath) — in his acts in creation, ascribe reconciling sufferings to the Son, and regard the Spirit as the presence of God in person in relation not only to the soul or the Church, but to the whole of creation and the new creation. He can then use metaphors of immanence for the Spirit (not the whole Godhead) without inhibition, including motherly images ('born again') and impersonal energies (fire, light, etc.), not only admitting

'panentheism' but reclaiming 'emanation' from neo-platonism.

However, Moltmann remains totally opposed to hellenistic dualism of spirit and matter. Instead, he returns to the Old Testament *ruach* as the power of *vitalization* to be found in the whole of life, rejecting the *spiritualization* (ascribed to Augustine and others) which sets God and the soul against the body and the world. Moltmann turns also to the *shekinah* of later Jewish speculation to identify the Spirit as God's self-differentiation or counterpart, through whom God could share in Israel's suffering and exile and, finally, in Christ's suffering on the cross (involving the Spirit in a way lacking in *The Crucified God*).

Moltmann's open Trinity of mutual, reciprocal relationship and perichoretic indwelling has its counterpart in ecclesiology - the community of faith is 'inspired' from below and characterized by *koinonia*, freedom, room to grow and openness, with the goal of differentiated unity. He contrasts this with the hierarchical ecclesiology he associates with monotheism, or at least with the onesided monarchical Trinity of the Western Church. By effectively subordinating the Spirit to the Father and the Son, this distorts the truth of the Trinity and panders to clericalism. If God is represented by Christ and Christ by the Pope, bishops and clergy, then the Spirit is tied down to the operative acts of the priesthood instead of being seen as God's presence in and for the world and not merely in the Church.

Predictably, Moltmann comes down against the *filioque* as not only superfluous, but wrong in itself and pernicious in its historical effect. It militates against a Trinity of equal persons and obstructs adequate expression of trinitarian doctrine. It is in arguing to this conclusion that Moltmann is most challenging and interesting. His case is that traditional trinitarian doctrine arose out of the post-resurrection christological pneumatology of Paul and John; it fails to do justice to the pneumatological christology of the Synoptic Gospels. In this variant of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, Moltmann aims to overcome onesidedness by emphasizing Christ's own history in the Spirit and the Spirit's role in making Jesus the kingdom of God in person. From this perspective, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests on the Son, but in becoming the Spirit of the crucified Christ, Christ 'puts his impress on the Spirit'. The recipient of the Spirit becomes the giver of the Spirit. Thus from this perspective he proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son.

On occasion rhetoric takes over from argument, the use made of biblical texts might be questioned, and more seriously, the distinction between the divine Spirit and the human spirit seems on the verge of disappearing. Yet Moltmann not only challenges his readers to rethink fundamental questions but offers profound reflections on many practical aspects of Christian living including friendship, sociality, justice etc. The

implications for such issues as ecumenism, ecology, and the relation of Christianity to other faiths, will no doubt be pursued further on his *via christiana*. His route deserves the closest study by those growing up in faith, whether or not they choose to follow it.

TREVOR WILLIAMS

**SCHILLEBEECKX. OUTSTANDING CHRISTIAN THINKER SERIES, Philip Kennedy OP, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1993.**

Most great Christian thinkers if they live long, think a lot, and often write reams. It is then notoriously difficult to introduce lesser thinkers to their thought. Kennedy overcomes this problem. His triumph is to achieve both a fairly comprehensive overview and yet give us a detailed inspection of seminal themes in Schillebeeckx's work: creation, Christology, and God.

He also succeeds in writing in an ordered and succinct manner about a writer who often lacks these virtues. In fact Kennedy gains an imprimatur from Schillebeeckx who praises Kennedy for putting his thought in a biographical context. He criticises the book for its lack of a chapter on eschatology, and for the inevitability of relying on textual evidence for influences, whereas practical experiences may have often been far more significant. Both these criticisms are minor for Schillebeeckx has not published much on eschatology (as he acknowledges, although Kennedy has seen unpublished manuscripts on the topic), and Kennedy could not be expected to write a comprehensive biography. Hence, this book is a success.

Kennedy spends the first four chapters introducing us to Schillebeeckx's historical context, theological concerns and significant influences. He is able to account for Schillebeeckx's many concerns and lack of a systematic style in noting that Schillebeeckx's interests have evolved in response to practical questions facing his local church and get shaped by the many disciplines and sources he constantly absorbs. While sometimes repeating himself, Kennedy produces a helpful portrait of Dutch Catholicism, before and after the Second Vatican Council and the intellectual state of European theology during Schillebeeckx's formative period. What is lacking in depth is balanced by breadth.

Kennedy carefully traces the early influence of De Petter and Chenu in forcing Schillebeeckx to theologize experientially and historically, in contrast to the then prevailing overly conceptual neo-Scholasticism. In the sixties, Schillebeeckx undergoes a profound change in philosophical presuppositions, whereby Critical Theory and hermeneutics signalled a shift in concerns and methods. Kennedy does a fine job of seeing the continuities and discontinuities between the early and late Schillebeeckx. This is borne out in the final four chapters dealing with creation,