

determining activity; the relation between agency, intention and the social dimension of human action and finally some of the problems associated with any adequate explanation of human action (e.g. motives, intentions, etc.), and the causes of such.

The fifth and final chapter develops in the light of Hauerwas's critique of Calvin's and Wesley's teaching on "sanctification". The author's position hinges on two principles: (a) that "character is the qualification or determination of our self-agency, formed by our having certain intentions (and beliefs) rather than others" (p.115), and (b) that this character "is not just the sum of all that we do as agents, but rather it is the particular direction our agency acquires by choosing to act in some ways rather than others" (p. 117). Thus the sanctification of the Christian, his gradual growth in holiness, "is the continuous unifying of the Christian's intentions through the central image of Jesus Christ....The idea of character therefore provides the means of explicating the nature of the Christian life without separating that life from its source" (p. 231).

Between the three principal chapters of the book are two assessing background sources. Chapter two clearly outlines those aspects of Aristotle's and Aquinas's doctrines on the interrelation of thought and action, habits and virtues. Chapter four illustrates the inadequacies implicit in the theologies of R. Bultmann and K. Barth who, with varying emphasis, use the lang-

uage of command and obedience.

Character and the Christian Life is a very good synthesis of the philosophical and theological complexities involved in any thoroughgoing study of human activity. Both dimensions are handled with historical sensitivity. The author shows not only a sound grasp of primary source material but also refers to a wide spectrum of contemporary philosophical writing. His thought is, on the whole, expressed with admirable clarity for so difficult a subject. The use of the phrase "gradual impartation" of holiness (p. 187), and the term "rightwising" of the believer (pp. 185, 193, 215) were not particularly felicitous, I feel. Physically the book is clearly printed, well bound and has a wide inner margin that gives sufficient room for the reader's notes and comments.

Dr Hauerwas has provided us with an excellent example of what Professor Macquarrie calls "practical ecumenism" (*Christian Unity and Christian Diversity*, chapter 3) and on this count the work deserves a place in theological libraries and a reading by those concerned with fundamental issues in moral theology. One would hope that the author will develop his thought, in the future, beyond this somewhat formal study of moral action to the more knotty problems concerning the criteria for and content of the Christian moral life.

LAURENCE J. McNAMARA C.M.

PROPOSALS FOR A NEW SEXUAL ETHIC: by Jack Dominian, *Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1977. 99pp. £1.50*

We owe a debt to Dr. Dominian for trying to work out a christian morality of sex that takes into account the vast increase in knowledge that we now have at our disposal. His work has the strengths and some of the weaknesses you would expect from a moralist whose basic training is in psychiatry.

Briefly, the argument is as follows: among Christians there has been a breakdown of consensus about the criteria for judging the rights and wrongs of sexual activity. Previously there had been a straightforward link between the legitimacy of sexual pleasure and the procreation of children within marriage. This made it fairly easy to pass judgments on sexual

misdemeanours. The farther away the practice was from the norm, the more 'unnatural' it was and therefore the more sinful it was reckoned to be. But now the social facts have changed so much that the traditional morality no longer makes much sense. Most sexual activity, even within marriage, is now "knowingly non-procreative" in function. The pleasure of sexual activity is now easily, and often necessarily, dissociated from the production of a family. Besides this, modern psychology has made a great change in our understanding of the role of sexuality in promoting life. Probably the most important development in modern times has been the realisation that everyone is a sexed being

right from the beginning of life and that sexual relationship and identification of one kind or another is the means by which all kinds of other important events take place apart from begetting children. These include infant dependence and security, sexual identification, differentiation and adolescent separation. So it is absurd to proceed in morals as if there were only one possible function for one's sexuality so that it must be held in check both mentally and physically until the appropriate time for this to be performed.

Personal growth towards "wholeness" is the source of the criteria we must adopt in order to judge right and wrong in matters of sex. Wholeness is achieved by developing all dimensions: intellectual, physical and emotional. We must be "perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect". This amounts to the "realisation of one's potential". So sexual activity is not to be judged by the presence of pleasure, but by the presence or absence of these various human dimensions. The whole person must be engaged, not just a part. Now this happens through love which can be defined in terms of three basic human needs: sustaining, healing and growth. Love is a matter of making these possible for another person. It can be shown that for each of these to receive its full scope there must be a relationship which is permanent, continuous and predictable. It follows that permanent monogamous marriage is *the* relationship for the realisation of love. And the provision of this environment for the couple is the true function of marriage – only as a consequence of this does marriage become a suitable starting point for a family.

This argument has important consequences for the moral assessment of such things as masturbation, pre-marital sex and sex within marriage, about all of which there is considerable disagreement among modern Christians. The Church has been wrong in her objective judgment of masturbation. It is a perfectly normal and expected part of adolescent development, having to do with one's discovery and appropriation of one's sexuality. Lack of growth may perpetuate it in later life, but it does not in itself cause lack of growth. As for sexual intercourse outside of marriage, this must not be judged under the single heading of 'fornication'. It all falls

short of the fullness of love, but in so far as it involves elements of sustaining, healing and growth it is not to be dismissed or condemned as merely sinful and worthless. Within marriage, sexual activity must be a function of that permanency which is necessary for love. It is a bodily language which can express all kinds of things such as gratitude, hope, reconciliation etc. Consequently, there is no reason to reject contraception or sterilisation if it promotes these values in any particular marriage. The real evil of our times is not over-indulgence in sexual pleasure, but the "disposable relationship" which amounts to the trivialisation of persons for the sake of mere sexual gratification.

"Openness to life" then, which is the traditional criterion for judgment, can be given a much broader meaning, depending on the stage of life at which any particular sexual expression is appropriate. As life changes its meaning as we grow, so does the role of sexuality in promoting it.

I would not wish to quarrel with most of this argument as far as it goes. If there is anything to criticise from the moral point of view it is in the absence of certain "dimensions", to use Dr. Dominian's own term. In the first place, to talk uncritically of "marriage" as if everyone understood and accepted its present conventional form is misleading. Thousands of couples, even "happy" ones, are in process of criticising modern marriage as an adequate framework for proper human development in the sense in which Dr. Dominian speaks of it. It is too much to expect of most marriages that they will provide the ideal environment for the 'sustaining, healing and growth' which are needed by the individuals involved. To expect this exclusively from one person, as many people are led to do by the contemporary ideology – heavily promoted as it is by commercial forces which thrive on the fragmentation of society into small consuming units – is to expect far too much of most marriage partners. This unreal expectation surely has much to do with the very high rate of marital breakdown. The fact that so many thoughtful and faithful married people are thinking in terms of communes and larger family units demonstrates the inadequacy of the present form of marriage to provide the values that Dr. Dominian rightly looks for. I suspect that the professional goal of

'adjustment to social reality' has played a considerable part in his argument.

Another professional preoccupation with complete and harmonious psychological development is surely responsible for his extraordinary interpretation of the gospel text, "Be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". It will not do to say that this means the "realisation of one's potential" (p 37) implying that this is a matter of cultivating one's faculties and gifts to the full. This sentence comes at the conclusion of the antithesis of the law in the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew's Gospel. It is about fulfilling the law in the heart: not being angry with your brother, not committing adultery by intention, not taking revenge even though the law would allow it and so on. It is realising one's potential for love, but scarcely in the way that Dr. Dominian means. Some distinction should be made between psychological and moral maturity. Psychiatrists tend to blur the distinction. It is

this which makes one suspect that sexual misdemeanour is being explained as immaturity and lack of integration at a psychological level. There is a missing dimension, that of justice: the old association of injustice with sexual sins ought to be retained, even if it has to be rethought for a new society. In any case, as several other gospel passages make clear, one might have to cripple oneself and deny one's fulfilment—lose one's life—in order to realise one's potential for love. Perfection can mean very different things. The reality of marriage in our world, far from providing the ideal environment for the personal perfection of two people, often enough makes this impossible, and it is in the almost certain failure of the institution in which they have put their trust that they have to realise their capacity for love.

ROGER RUSTON O.P.

ATHEISM AND THE REJECTION OF GOD, by Stewart R. Sutherland. Blackwell, 1977

This is a study of one form of atheism, that delineated by Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and of the answer that Dostoevsky thought possible to it. The form of atheism is one which, as the author complains, is not as a rule regarded as a subject proper for discussion by contemporary English-speaking philosophers. 'Philosophers of religion could profitably spend much more time than they do examining the tissue, bone, and muscle of atheism.' Atheists who expect contemporary philosophers to 'bring their belief to a consciousness of itself' must often be disappointed.

For Ivan Karamazov, speculative atheism is no better than speculative theism; his protest against God is essentially in the name of morality. Dostoevsky's proposed reply to this form of atheism is embodied in the religion of Zossima. But one may well wonder whether this religion is essentially different from that sense of the beauty and mystery of things which is available as much to an agnostic as to a theist. Zossima sees the beauty and mystery as bearing witness to God, and healing as expressive of his grace and will. But by what right, as Ivan would ask, does he

not see the suffering in the world as equally expressive of God's purposes? Is the torture of innocent children willed by God, or is it not? If one says that it is not, one is driven to a position much closer to agnosticism than is acceptable to orthodox Christianity. If one says that it is, one is left with the enormity of worshipping a being who wills such things.

While the difference between atheists and theists amounts to 'much more than ... a difference in attitude to the proposition "God exists"', it is not the case, as Professor Sutherland seems to suppose, that it can amount to 'something quite different' (22). An attitude to life which was not characterised by disbelief in the proposition 'God exists' would not strictly speaking be atheism. In my view, philosophers have been right to be preoccupied with the question of what this proposition might mean, and whether it is true or false; and at least to try to approach these questions as objectively and dispassionately as possible. Professor Sutherland has been unduly influenced, I think, by that profound but misleading dictum of Cook Wilson's, to the effect that the conception of God can only be realised by us with certain emo-