

might reasonably hope to find said about this leading figure of early modern European culture. Alas, a high price has to be paid for this convenience. Words such as 'brief' and 'concise' must be deployed regularly in describing McConica's exposition of Erasmus's ideas, and the degree of brevity forced upon McConica by the format of the 'Past Masters' series obliges him to truncate debates (e.g., on the nature of humanism in and northern European humanism in particular), or omit highly relevant material which ought to have found its way into the text. Nevertheless, the work is studded with brilliant insights and summaries, in which McConica shows himself to be not merely the master of his historical sources and the secondary literature which attends them, but also possessed of a rare ability to summarize their essence in a few splendid sentences — for example, in his comparison of the approaches of Erasmus and Luther to theology (pp. 78—9).

Perhaps McConica's most significant achievement in this little work is to explain clearly to the lay reader why Erasmus, although merciless in his criticism of the abuses and pretensions of the established church of his day, never felt entirely at home with the Protestant Reformation. Although this aspect of Erasmus' persona is well established in the literature, it has rarely been explained with such clarity. The reader is allowed to gain an understanding of why Erasmus—who saw himself as a mediating figure in an increasingly polarized religious debate—came to be marginalized by both sides. But the present reviewer was left with the impression that Erasmus has perhaps been treated too generously. More critical studies have often highlighted Erasmus' often unrealistic attitudes, and cast him in the role of an armchair warrior, steeped in classical learning yet isolated from the harsh realities of everyday life. McConica does not succeed in disinvesting this impression of Erasmus, if, indeed, he ever intended to do so. Perhaps the reason why Erasmus slayed his thousands, and Luther his tens of thousands, lay in the latter's closer pastoral contact with the everyday world.

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EARLY CHRISTIANITY, Edited by Ian Hazlett, *S.P.C.K.* London, pp. 294, price £14.99.

This collection of very useful and at times very challenging essays appears as a book designed to do honour to W.H.C.Frend, 'the distinguished British historian of the early Church.' The editor has put the reader further in his debt by furnishing at the end a list of Professor Frend's numerous publications together with a 'conspectus of early church history' in the form of a date line.

The contributors to this volume represent all this best in modern British patristic scholarship. The preface, short but characteristically

epigrammatic and stimulating is from the pen of Henry Chadwick, who makes the important observation, as true of the early church as it is today, that 'universality is singularly difficult to reconcile with coherence and order.' It is a further ironical fact that though in many ways Chadwick and Frend represent two very different approaches and stand for rather different traditions within the Church of England, the essays written to salute them wrestle inconclusively with the same problem, the nature and the rise of orthodoxy. Was it always there, or had it to be discovered? And was it a reaction against a prior deviant strain? In other words is heresy older than orthodoxy—a thesis advanced earlier in this century by Walter Bauer, and if that is the case, what are we to make of the claim advanced by writers from Irenaeus onward, that heresy represents a corruption of the primal revelation? Although the name of Bauer does not loom so large in this collection as in that dedicated to Chadwick, his ghost still rides.

Each of the articles is brief. Hardly any exceeds twelve pages. Each is treated by an acknowledged expert in his/her respective field. So, for example, we have Ritter of the Creeds (#7), 'Hall on Ministry, Worship and Life' (#9), Rousseau on 'Christian Asceticism and the Early Monks' (#10), Frances Young on The Greek Fathers (#12) and Sebastian Brock on The Oriental Fathers (#4). Section V contains some very stimulating pieces, to some of which I shall return, including Stead on Greek Influence on Christian thought (#15), an influence of which somewhat surprisingly, he appears to approve, Rudolph on Gnosticism (#16), more of what is sometimes styled a Forschungsbericht than a deliberately argued thesis, Wiles on 'Orthodoxy and Heresy' (#17)—a very characteristic piece, and Louth on 'Mysticism' (#18). If anyone wishes to be up to date, therefore, in church history and early doctrinal history, this book will provide a useful, accurate and stimulating guide.

This is not to be taken as implying that all the contributors adopt a similar standpoint on the same subject. So, for example, Louth's attitude to the growth of mysticism within the church connects it with the passing of martyrdom. Rousseau writing on asceticism is not so sure and insists (p. 116) much more on the variety within the tradition. Louth (p. 211) sees a 'shift of emphasis from literal to a spiritual martyrdom of ascesis'. It is true that the two writers are describing distinct phenomena, the nature and the rise of asceticism. Even so I am inclined to think that asceticism antedates the decline of martyrdom and that it is a much more uniform phenomenon than Rousseau wants to admit.

Stead's article referred to above is very lukewarm in its assessment of the place nature and value of greek philosophy within the christian heritage. For, although his final words are moderately favourable, much that is ventured *en route* could hardly count as praise. His position could be summed up in the following three propositions. i)

Greek philosophy is self enclosed and excellent of its kind. ii) Christian faith is a quite different animal. iii) Therefore although the former may help to elucidate the views contained in the latter, it can be of little further use to anyone who is a serious christian, and indeed can and often has led christians into gross perversions of the gospel. I find one of the weaknesses of this approach is the assumption that greek and christian occupy two quite distinct worlds of thought and discourse and therefore that any attempt to appropriate greek philosophy, except in the most external fashion, must be ruled out as flawed from the outset. Stead's argument presupposes two assumptions. i) Greek and christian inhabit two hermetically sealed compartments. ii) We know what the essence of Christianity is and can derive it from the Bible. But this connexion of Christianity with the Bible is a non proven theologoumenon; and even if it were accepted, it is surely an open question whether or not it is fair to deny to the Bible any contamination with greek ideas.

Finally something must be said about the article by Wiles, and its counterpart, that of Ritter. Both authors are concerned with the same problem. By what line of argument, if any, would a christian defend the view that creeds are of the essence of Christianity? Wiles (cf. esp. p.207) wishes to argue that creeds have no necessary place within the christian religion, because they assume a consensus within the church antecedant to the formulation of the creed and such a consensus never existed. It might be noted in passing that. if Wiles is correct and there never was a consensus, it is difficult on his theory to account for the existence of a creed at all. It must have represented an imposed, minority view. In other words if the Nicene creed is innovatory—the conclusion of Wiles' argument, implied if not directly stated—then however was it accepted by 'the great body of conservative eastern churchmen'? Were the 220 fathers of Nicaea all craven cowards willing to accept anything on the whim of Constantine? Ritter, on the other hand, is nothing like so revolutionary as Wiles. He believes that there was a confession from the beginning, a demarcation line between christians and those not of the household of the faith. He insists, indeed, in good protestant fashion on the superiority of Bible to creed, on the distinction between 'rule of faith' and 'symbol', on the importance of the democratic element in the church. On the other hand, despite these reserves he does not regard the idea of the creed or its contents as being inherently revolutionary. And, finally, although the history of the Nicene creed was troubled, it did in the end,, with, probably, the addition of a few clauses from 381, triumph, and is still over 1600 years later the eucharistic creed of eastern and western Christendom.

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