

**MY GOD: LETTERS FROM THE FAMOUS ON GOD AND THE LIFE
HEREAFTER.** Collected and edited by Hayley Mills and Marcus
Maclaine. *Pelham Books*, London, 1988. Pp. xii + 180. £9.95.

When Bertrand Russell was jailed for certain views, he found himself faced by someone taking details. His name, Russell said, was 'Russell'. Asked about his religion he said 'Write down *Agnostic*'. The response was 'Well, there may be many religions, but we all worship the same God'. Which is, of course, a load of nonsense. And not just because agnostics worship no god at all. Even those who call themselves Christians manifestly have no common object of worship. Their beliefs are too diverse.

The contents of this book are also diverse. Hayley Mills and Marcus Maclaine have persuaded numerous people (most of them very well known) to answer the questions 'Who or what is your personal concept of God?' and 'What do you believe happens to you when you die?' They have also persuaded Princess Anne to write a Forward in which she seems resolutely determined to have no opinions on the questions provoking the book. The results (fairly predictable) range from Lord Soper's declaration that Jesus is a photograph of God (p. 122) to Patrick Walker's 'All I know for sure about God is that it isn't me' (p. 15).

Patrick Walker is probably right, but one wonders about the point of a book like this. Its royalties are to be donated to the Save the Children Fund (hence Princess Anne), so it obviously serves a good purpose, and anyone with money to spare should buy it (or donate the money directly to Save the Children, which will do the cause more good). But it hardly helps thinking about God and the life to come. For, though it contains some good Christian sense (cf. the contributions by Archbishop R. Eames, Viscount Tonyandy, John Polkinghorne, and Hasan abu'l-Hakim), it yields precious little reasoning plus pages and pages of absolute drivel (not just from Christians). It is wonderfully quoteable and I shall live off it in lectures on God for a long time. It also contains a splendid story for children by Spike Milligan (pp. 178f.) and some funny cartoons (the best, I think, on pp. 24 and 150). But it really has little else to offer, and it encourages the view that off-the-cuff and unargued-for comments on matters of life and death coming from people known to the public are of importance and *per se* to be noted, which they are not. Matters of life and death have screwed up philosophers and theologians for centuries. That is a sign of their importance, but it is also a reason for doubting that justice is done to them by producing a book like this one (if that 'doesn't seem too oracular', as John Cleese says on p. 2, following the deliverance that 'when we die, the essential part of us returns to its source').

On the other hand, however, it might not be bad for people to read Patrick Moore explaining that his 'concept of God is NOT a supreme being who will tolerate the World Council of Churches (backed by the Church of England) in its continuing support and organization of murder and terrorism in South Africa' (p. 15). The offering by Desmond Tutu (pp. 125f.) seems remarkably tame by comparison.

But then again, the book is not to be taken seriously.

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