

Reviews

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY TODAY by W. Montgomery Watt. *RKP*. London 1983. pp 157. £8.95.

Montgomery Watt, now Professor Emeritus at the University of Edinburgh, has provided the student of Islam with many standard works. This volume, he says, is 'in some respects a personal statement based on over forty years of "inner dialogue" which has necessarily resulted from the fact of being a Christian immersed in Islamic studies'.

He begins with a brief survey of the traditional Islamic attitudes to Christianity and the Christian attitudes to Islam, and defines dialogue as what happens 'where the relations between members of different religions is a friendly one' (p. 5). This takes place in various contexts, for instance officially organised meetings, where neighbours become friends and find their conversation turning to religious matters or when the scholar is engaged in study of another tradition. Encounters can cause people to erect or strengthen the defences of their faith but some enter into dialogue by opening themselves to the other's truth; 'for dialogue might be described as the mutual exchange of views between people who have a genuine concern for one another and are open to learn from one another' (p. 5). The materials for Watt's dialogue are the doctrinal aspects of mainstream Christianity found in the ecumenical creeds, and mainstream Sunni Islam. He considers the following themes: the names and attributes of God; scripture as the Word of God; God the creator; God as the Lord of history; and humanity in relation to God. However, before he looks at these areas, he discusses the attacks on religion from scientism, in the face of which the Muslim and Christian will often stand together (p. 6). Scientism he defines as a body of unproved assumptions which belong more to philosophy than science. These assumptions, he says, are threefold (p. 31). (1) Objects studied by the sciences are the sole reality. (2) The account of the original form of a thing shows what it truly is. (3) That analysis of a thing into parts shows what it really is.

In response to scientism Watts sets up what he claims to be a reliable, common-sense view of reality which accepts the assured results of science, which is to be distinguished from scientism. The position he adopts is based on the insights of Berger and Luckmann into the social construction of reality, on the correspondence theory of the relationship between reality and truth, on the centrality of action, on action as the test of views of reality and on the verification of religious views of reality on the basis of fruits (as in W. James). He discusses different types of symbolic language (p. 23 ff.) and says, 'in religious matters it is found that symbolic language is not fully descriptive but rather suggestive or evocative'. Watt later in the book adds to these bases for the modern world view 'a provisional philosophical cosmology' with reference to Polanyi and Teilhard de Chardin. This material is in the section on God as creator.

Two points need to be made about the inclusion of this area and these issues within the book. Firstly, anyone who has serious doubts about the philosophical positions, or Watt's use of the positions, will find it difficult to read on with any enthusiasm. Secondly, it makes the book a trialogue rather than a dialogue, and Watts moves between Islamic ideas, modern views of reality and Christian ideas in a rather unsystematic way. He makes no specific reference to Islam or Christianity when dealing with reality and truth (p. 9–12). In the section on the verification of religious views of reality he quotes *all* the great religions as having 'worked' (p. 19). In matters of language he sums up by saying, 'though the knowledge of God attained by symbolic

language is complete, it is sufficient for our guidance in the practical business of living. Intellectually it may disappoint hopes and expectations, but practically it makes it possible for us to "relate ourselves to the ultimate conditions of our existence" in a way that is wholly satisfactory' (p. 31). There is a definite tendency to oversimplify the complex issues of dialogue (not to mention dialogue) and their solution. Examples appear on pages 102, 103, 123 and on 144 'when one appreciates the fact that symbols which appear contradictory are not necessarily so, many of the differences between the religions fall away'. The tone of the ending is far, not middle, eastern. 'The first stage would rather be that of mutual recognition where the various world religions accept one another as fellow-climbers of the cloud-covered mountain on whose summit in the mist God dwells unseen'. This book contains much of the challenge and daring of a mountain landscape, but many Christians and Muslims will not find it possible to follow the paths Watt maps out.

PEGGY MORGAN

THE VISION GLORIOUS: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism by Geoffrey Rowell. *Oxford University Press*. 1983. £15.00.

'The *Via Media* has slept in libraries; it is a substitute of infancy for manhood'. But, Newman notwithstanding, the Catholic revival in the Church of England did come to an end in 1845, when Newman went over to Rome. Not only did it continue to exist, but it transformed the pattern of Anglican worship. The emphasis upon the sacramental nature of the Church brought colour, ceremonial and mystery into the lives of worshippers, particularly into those of the poor and dispossessed for whom the sacramental sign spoke more strongly than the written word. There is more to this excellent book than its modest sub-title suggests, since it is more than the history of a party. It moves steadily to the issue which now squarely confronts the Church of England and the Church of Rome—what is the role of the papacy? Is it a source of permanent dis-union, or of ultimate unity? Only a century ago John Mason Neale could assert that if England ever became a Catholic country, it would be through the Church of England and not through the Church of Rome; and Archbishop Tait, in speaking of the foreign missions, affirmed that 'Bishops in Roman Catholic countries were sent by the Pope; in our country bishops should be sent by the Queen, who stood in the same place as the Pope'.

En route to his conclusion, Dr. Rowell faces Newman's challenge directly. He gives the Anglican Newman in *Tract XC*: 'since bishop is superior to bishop only in rank, not in real power... the bishop of Rome... is not the centre of the unity, except as having a primacy of order'. But Newman was to find such safeguards insufficient: 'If Christianity is both social and dogmatic and intended for all ages, it must, humanly speaking, have an infallible expounder'. The development of the Anglo-Catholic movement created a crisis of identity within the Church of England which has yet to be resolved. Bishop Gore, for example, believed that the Anglican vocation to witness to the comprehensiveness of the Catholic Church could not be fulfilled 'without a greater theological and practical unity between Anglicans'.

As one would expect, the issues are most effectively defined by Michael Ramsey. Beginning with the local Church, Archbishop Ramsey argues that it can claim the Christian's loyalty 'only by leading him beyond itself to the universal family which it represents'. A papacy which expresses the general mind of the Church and is a focus for the organic unity of all Bishops 'might well claim to be a legitimate development'. What is unacceptable is a papacy which stands over against the Church' and depresses the due working of the other functions of the one Body'.

Such views are no longer shouted across an unbridgeable gulf, but, since the second Vatican Council and the Pope's visit to Britain, they are part of the theological discourse of both the Anglican and Roman Churches.