

Fowl and Jones repeatedly return to the significance of character formation: we need to develop specific patterns of acting, feeling and thinking well. But here, as in much of the recent talk of 'virtue ethics', the classical virtue tradition is rarely in evidence, there is no articulated view of the human person or the good(s) of persons, and all moral principles are regarded as revisable. How then are we to distinguish virtue from vice? How do we know a community is engaging in formation rather than deformation? How can we pick which community to join? How do we identify a genuinely prophetic outsider? Since the right reading of scripture requires prior (if continuing) formation of virtuous character, one cannot without circularity appeal to scripture.

Reading in Communion is well referenced, and reflects a thorough acquaintance with much modern scripture science and Christian ethics (even if there are some surprising omissions). Reflecting this acquaintance, it criticizes fundamentalist attempts to replicate the supposedly unambiguous prescriptions of scripture in the present. But the book shares the scepticism of our post-critical period regarding 'sciences' such as historical-critical exegesis. It recognises that there is no neutral or context-independent method for ethics or interpretation; both are inevitably bound up with particular social contexts and the character of the interpreter. Doomed are attempts by exegetes to isolate 'the meaning' or 'the values' of particular texts, and by ethicists to apply the results. The book identifies convincingly the arbitrariness and question-begging of much scripture science; the interpretative interests and ideological constraints of the scholars; and the socio-political nature of hermeneutics and ethics. This surely does not mean we should renounce all efforts to read scripture 'fairly', to suspend our prejudices and preconceptions as best we can and allow scripture to challenge them, and to be docile to revelation.

Among other results of these insights, the authors propose that our readings would be clarified and enriched by rehabilitating those of Christians as diverse as Origen, Aquinas, Teresa, and Luther, alongside the more recent efforts. There is no single correct exegetical method (although surely there are some wrong ones?). Instead 'the aim of faithful living before the Triune God becomes the standard to which all interpretative interests must measure up.' Yes but.

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SACRIFICE AND REDEMPTION *Durham Essays in Theology*, edited by S.W. Sykes, Cambridge University Press, 1991. pp. xi + 339. £35.00

The fact that 'sacrifice' remains so much a part of everyday language, albeit often in impoverished form, is strange witness to its continuing importance. The essays contained in this volume, of immense range as they are, show why this is so: not only matters narrowly religious, but ethics and the very nature of the human habitation of the world come to be focussed by different dimensions of the topic. The book

is divided into four parts, the first three of which follow the historical development of a theology of sacrifice from the Old Testament to Simone Weil, while the fourth contains papers exploring the topic's systematic significance.

The first section leads from the Old Testament to the patristic period. Papers on the Old Testament and Apocrypha lead to Professor Dunn's development of a theme he has treated before, the significance of the humanity of Christ in Paul. The heart of the matter is argued to lie in a sacrificial chiasmus or interchange (p.46). In a paper on the Letter to the Hebrews a case is made, in my view not very convincingly, that sacrifice is not a necessary category in which to interpret the death of Christ, the eucharist or the Christian life. The following papers in some contrast demonstrate the centrality of the matter for the patristic writers, who, true to the spirit of the author to the Hebrews, centre their interest not on the cultic dimensions but on sacrifice as a way of understanding the human relation to God in worship, action and devotion.

And so to the period when it all began to fall apart. A long and lively paper by P.J.Fitzpatrick indicates both the attractions of the medieval development and the reasons for Luther's polemics. The vigour of the writing reveals itself in one judgement: 'the medieval setting was not propitious for a grasp of what the shape and purpose of the liturgy were. . . Ritual is construed as camouflage, and what else is being camouflaged but cannibalism?' (p.134). And yet, the merits of Aquinas' approach reveal among other things that 'rites and ceremonies draw their virtue from the inner giving of ourselves to God'(p.151). Indeed, the author concludes (qualifying the assertion carefully) that 'religion seems to need a dash of crudity if it is to flourish' (p.152).

It is impossible in the space of a brief review to do justice to all the papers, save to say that Trent, the Puritans and Anglican social ethics serve to emphasize the contributions that all streams of Western theology have made to the overall development. But there are limits, and the pathology of sacrifice is also treated. Kierkegaard can manifest 'an almost Manichaeian disgust... at the natural life of the material world' - precisely the opposite, I believe, of what the theology of sacrifice has to teach us - while the use of the idea in Irish nationalism underlines other dangers. As Dr Gilley's paper concludes: 'it must be said of Pearse's sacrifice that it was magnificent, but hardly Christianity. Perhaps there is a lesson here for the liberation theologies of our time, which can be so free with the blood of the oppressor' (p.231). With Ann Loades we move from the sacrificial destruction of others to Simone Weil's 'imaginative act of self-destruction' (p.258).

Can any general conclusions about the theology of sacrifice be drawn from the book as a whole? Three final papers treat the systematic questions directly. In 'The Semantics of Sacrifice' Edward Hulmes reinforces the Augustinian belief that the essence of sacrifice has shifted from the external act to the inward disposition of the heart. Stephen Sykes argues for the systematic focussing of sacrifice in worship, while

in a wide-ranging paper Ingolf Dalferth casts some doubt on the necessity of a sacrificial interpretation of the atonement and even more on a priestly conception of the ministry, particularly when it involves the exclusion of women and those not episcopally ordained.

There are many riches in this learned and wide-ranging book. But it does stress the inward at the expense of the need for a move outwards also. Paul believed that the true sacrifice was the living one, of both soul and body. And if the being of the triune God is indeed a communion of mutual giving and receiving should we not stress more the notion that sacrifice is essentially gift? Under the conditions of fallenness, that will sometimes involve the negative connotations of giving up. But do we not need to understand not merely formal worship, but the whole of life, work and play, agriculture, industry, ethics and art, as part of that sacrifice to the creator, perfected, of that which he has first given us? At the beginning of this volume the broadly ethical and, indeed, cosmic dimensions of sacrifice are brought to view, with a demonstration that in the Bible we have to do with the redemption in Christ of the whole created order. But the Bible's breadth is hardly reflected in what theologians have made of its beginnings.

COLIN GUNTON

THE BIBLE'S AUTHORITY; A PORTRAIT GALLERY OF THINKERS FROM LESSING TO BULTMANN by J.C O'Neill (*T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991*), pp.323.

John O'Neill's portrait gallery is a series of intellectual biographies of twenty-one Germanic scholars from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. These include some of the leading philosophers of the period (Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche), the pioneering biblical scholars (Strauss, F.C. Baur, Wellhausen, Gunkel), and several lesser-known names (Semler, Eichhorn, Ewald). In the case of each, O'Neill attempts to place his thought in the context of his life and times, and in doing so he produces an immensely lively and engaging set of portraits which underline the genius of his subjects. His biographical asides are frequently illuminating if also on occasion controversial. Harnack, we are told, 'learnt a sweet and patient tolerance of those who felt Christianity itself was threatened by his arguments - a sweet and patient tolerance, a 'contemplative calm', that must have maddened his opponents' (p.218), while of Barth in the 1930s, it is alleged that he 'helped to foster general public doubt that there were any unalterable absolute moral and political laws like the law against murder by his reiterated insistence that any discussion of such moral rules was a subsidiary matter when the only question was the question about God.' (p.267)

The unifying theme of O'Neill's study seems to be that the dominant German thinkers of the modern era, while convinced of the authority of Scripture, nevertheless subverted that authority in ways that were intellectually indefensible and politically dangerous. Rational,

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