

'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-

tions. Still, I am sure he is right that philosophers have not on the whole attended sufficiently to the whole complex of feelings and attitudes which is characteristic of atheism, and that great literature is the place where one might expect to find it

most tellingly expressed. The exciting, intelligent and sensitive book which he himself has produced is a fair illustration of the point.

HUGO MEYNELL

**A HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA by Robert T. Handy. The Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1976.**

American society is the home of a curious, fascinating and often exasperating blend of the idealistic and the pragmatic. Ideology, as distinct from idealism, is unofficially but forcefully proscribed by idealist and pragmatist alike. Getting things done in a context of moral satisfaction is a great American need and in some versions of the story, a great American accomplishment. Organized or at least identifiable religion has played a considerable role in the development of this American self-definition.

The art of telling the story of religion's role in American society has undergone a considerable evolution. Beginning with a "providential" view of history in such works as Jonathan Edwards' *History of the Work of Redemption* and Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, it moved in the nineteenth century to a more denominational focus, when Establishment was seen to be out of the question. Robert Baird's *Religion in America* (1843) reflected this shift, though the author concentrated on the evangelical bodies which he thought would create a (voluntarily) Christian America. With the revival of interest in religion in the mid-twentieth century the focus shifted to "politics". Here the emphasis fell on the relationship of religion (now more broadly defined) to public affairs. Sydney Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People* (1972) was the most representative and comprehensive work to emerge from this period.

It may be that a stage in any evolutionary process can only be identified when it is essentially completed and a new stage is already in progress. Ahlstrom felt that the events of the late 1960's signalled the end of the "Puritan epoch" in America and as a consequence, "The idea of America as a Chosen Nation and a beacon to the world was expiring." Getting things done in a context of moral satisfaction was perhaps a thing of the past. There was too much

dissatisfaction with what was getting done (the Vietnam war, urban decay, etc.) and too much psychological distance from the source and even the language of historical, moral and religious ideals.

Recently Martin E. Marty (in *A Nation of Behavers*) has suggested that a retreat from the hope that religion can exert a comprehensive influence on American life is producing a more limited but more concentrated emphasis on individual religious traditions by the people who belong to them. It is also calling forth a new paradigm for the explication of American religious history. The former he calls "re-tribalization",—"a great clustering into separateness that will, it is thought improve, assure, or extend each group's power or place, or keep it safe or safer from the power, threat, or hostility of others." The "others" here are those who would try to obliterate the uniqueness of, for example, black, Indian or Roman Catholic religious experience in the interest of shoring up a questionable as well as generalised national morality. The latter, the new historiographical paradigm, Marty calls "a species of social history", an effort to determine what individual religious groups have really believed by concentrating not on their doctrinal controversies so much as their religious experience and social behaviour. This paradigm-in-formation enlists the services of quantitative methods of research, psycho-history (Erikson style) and local history.

Whether this alleged new stage in American religious history will yield substantive results remains to be seen. Can it, as its proponents seem to imply it can, substantially modify American moralism? Will it result in a new and more critical relationship between religious traditions (especially Christianity) and political realities? Will it provide new models for justice, alternative to the "justice" of the capitalist's freedom?