

practice, and now a qualified and critical realism holds the field. The concept of model is particularly important for understanding contemporary science, and this also finds fruitful applications in theology.

At the same time as these developments in the philosophy of science there have been changes in theology, in particular the increasing awareness that God is experienced in and through our actual lives as biological organisms. There is also a new openness of Christian theological traditions to each other and to science and to non-Christian religions. Theology refers to the highest level in the hierarchy of complexities constituting reality, and so many of its concepts, models and metaphors may not be reducible to those applicable to the lower levels. Theology must listen to, and adapt to, but not be subservient to the new understanding of the world afforded by the sciences.

These ideas are developed with reference to the transformation of the scientific world view by twentieth century physics and cosmology. We now have a much clearer idea of the evolution of the universe from the time of the singularity about ten billion years ago, and our concepts of space, time and determinism have been modified by modern physics. At this point Dr. Peacocke discusses the role of chance in evolution, but it may be questioned whether determinism has really been banished from physics, or whether this conclusion is no more than the result of positivistic analyses of certain atomic phenomena. 'Chance' is often interpreted as a causative factor in evolution, whereas it is more intelligible to interpret it as simply a convenient name for ignorance.

The risk taken by God in creating beings with the freedom to reject Him leads Dr Peacocke to speak of a suffering Creator. He finds that the concept of God as both immanent and transcendent needs supplementing by 'such models as that of *pan-en-theism*, whereby the world is regarded as being "within" God, but the being of God is regarded as not exhausted by, or subsumed within, the world. 'Thus a feminine image of God as Creator proves to be a useful corrective to purely masculine images by its ability to model God as creating a self-creative world *within* God's own Being.' It is here that the connection with actual scientific results becomes tenuous, and language proves inadequate to bear the burden of the thought.

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**TWELVE MORE NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES** by John A.T. Robinson. *SCM*, London, 1984. Pp viii + 184. £7.95.

The death of John Robinson in 1983 was a loss to the Church as a whole, and the present volume amply demonstrates that those of us who are engaged in the study of the New Testament were particularly impoverished by it. In a field increasingly dominated by North American and German scholarship, here is a thoroughly British contribution—committed to history, to the empiricist tradition, to the winsome expression of common sense. The collection of essays, some of which are published for the first time, is also striking for its range; the attentive reader is invited to consider, among other things, the influence of the book of Hosea on Matthew's account of the virgin birth, a fresh presentation of the case for a common source behind the Synoptic Gospels, and key aspects of the teaching of Jesus. But the bulk of the volume is devoted to the Gospel according to John, to the study of which Robinson gives new impetus and urgency.

In the tradition of Gardner-Smith and Dodd, Robinson argued cogently for the independence and historical value of the Johannine witness to Jesus. In order to do so, of course, one must resist two elements of the present consensus: (1) that John's Gospel represents a development of the New Testament preaching by several generations of teachers, and (2) that the idiom of the Gospel is so thoroughly theological as to rule out any claim that it is historically accurate as it now stands. Robinson does not directly argue against these two propositions, but he does show that

one can appreciate the Gospel—or, at least, those parts of the Gospel he chooses to deal with—without assuming they are true. He argues in successive essays that the Johannine prologue was written as a meditative preface by the author after he composed the bulk of the Gospel, that the foot washing scene is to be understood within the context of Jesus' ministry, that there are points of correspondance between John and the shroud of Turin (which Robinson believed may be genuine), that John the son of Zebedee was Jesus' first cousin, that John's version of Jesus' occupation of the Temple makes better historical sense than that of the Synoptics, that the Gospel should be used to understand how Jesus thought of himself, and that it might fruitfully be used in the task of rethinking Trinitarian doctrine.

It is difficult to think of any other post-war critic who would have dared to cover so much treacherous territory; and none, having dared, could possibly have done so with Robinson's grace. Implicitly, however, Robinson acknowledges that his suggestions fall far short of being convincing arguments; he repeatedly urges the reader to pursue the line of thought here opened in *The Priority of John*, the Bampton lectures he did not live to deliver. His conclusions in the present work are even more tentative than they were in *Redating the New Testament*, where Robinson admitted his procedure was to press a hypothesis to its limits, and even beyond its limits. Because he does not refute the two commonly held suppositions cited in the previous paragraph, his own efforts seem more the investigation of a possibility than the application of a hypothesis. More crucially, Robinson is here concerned only to cite those passages which support his suggestions, not to demonstrate that his reading is, taken as a whole, exegetically superior to that, say, of Raymond Brown (whom he frequently attacks in general terms). Because his suggestions are not defended as exegetically preferable, they appear rather inchoate. But there is no shame in pursuing a potentially fruitful idea, no matter how tentatively it must be considered. And if only a fraction of the historical and doctrinal possibilities sketched by Robinson stand the test of critical discussion, then we can expect a renewed approach to the historical Jesus towards the end of our century which will at last bring an end to the programmatic agnosticism which has characterized the majority of critical work for several generations.

Indeed, part of the allure of his writing is that Robinson is keenly aware of and conversant with the dogmatic considerations which must attend a reading of the New Testament from the perspective of faith. Like those of Küng and Schillebeeckx, of whom he was to some extent the Anglican counterpart, Robinson's programme involved reclaiming the New Testament for theology. But he was not interested in anything less than the New Testament as critically understood, and as soon as he referred to long held critical understandings of the New Testament within the context of theological discussion, he was mistaken by some as some sort of radical modernist. The fact that he was so mistaken reflects less on his own tendency to bluntness than on the ignorance of those who attacked him, their failure to take account of critical reflection on the Bible they claimed was their supreme authority. The fact that he pursued his programme in the teeth of considerable opposition is a testament to his courage. The present book is part of that testament, and an incentive to consider the Gospel of John as the nodal point of a new approach to Jesus, at once historical and dogmatic. Fortunately, the Bampton Lectures, which form a necessary supplement to Bishop Robinson's suggestions, were delivered by Prof. C.F.D. Moule, and I understand they are to be published. When they are, one can only hope that the tantalizing possibilities here offered will find fuller, exegetical substantiation.

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