

- 15 W.S. Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy.* Columbia U.P., 1961. pp 71f.
- 16 Rubin op. cit. p. 122.
- 17 Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture.* O.U.P., 1959. p. 74.
- 18 Harold Rosenberg, *Tradition and the New.* Scribner, New York, 1960. p. 210.
- 19 Hans Küng, *Art and the Question of Meaning.* Hodder, 1981. pp. 12ff.
- 20 Paul Gauguin, *Letters to his wife and friends.* Saturn Press, 1966. p. 224.
- 21 Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music.* Southern Illinois University Press, 1957. p. 117.

## Reviews

**DISCERNING THE MYSTERY: AN ESSAY ON THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY,** by Andrew Louth. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1983 pp xiv + 150 £12.50

The Chaplain of Worcester College, Oxford, seeks to redefine the recent history of theology in the West. The opening chapter argues that confidence in tradition as the chief bearer of truth was destroyed at the Renaissance. The rediscovery of the Classical world showed people a reasonable and humane alternative to medieval Christendom. The exposure of the False Decretals sapped many people's confidence in the traditional ecclesiology of the Catholic Church. The text of the New Testament which Erasmus brought out in 1516 opened people's eyes in a comparable way. By the time of Descartes (*Discours*, 1637) and Locke (*Essay*, 1690), the search was on for a method that would guarantee certain knowledge of truth independently of the deliverances of all tradition.

From early on, however, an alternative existed. The second chapter traces the anti-Enlightenment line from Vico (1688—1744) through Dilthey (1833—1911) to Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960). The chapter concludes with the reflections in Collingwood's *Autobiography* (1939) on the anti-historical 'realism' among the Oxford philosophers of his day. That is the main point—the neglect of *history* as a form of knowledge is the characteristic mark of the Enlightenment line. Gadamer is taken to have shown that the methods of the sciences are not the only way of getting at truth.

Against this background, is theology a science or one of the humanities? Starting with a critical look at Torrance's *Theological Science* (1969), the third chapter takes up Michael Polanyi's emphasis on how scientific ways of knowing depend upon tradition, as expounded particularly in *Knowing and Being* (1969). This opens the way back to St. Cyprian's famous formula: "He who does not have the Church as mother can no longer have God as Father". The fourth chapter, deploying St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* to great effect, but with the help of Congar and Lossky as well as many other patristic references, spells out how tradition, as carried in rites, practices and life as well as beliefs, is the milieu that creates the kind of receptiveness for Scripture to become the word of God.

The fifth chapter is where all this has been heading. Mr. Louth's prey is the theologian who takes his stand on *sola scriptura* and scientific method—"an alliance between the Reformation and the Enlightenment" (page 101). A great deal of modern western theology, it is clearly suggested, springs from this ignorant contempt for the

liturgical tradition, combined with an old-fashioned scientific positivism. No names are mentioned, but some will occur to those who are familiar with Anglican trends. John Keble's *Tract 89* is commended, on the "mystical sense" of Scripture. We are reminded of the works of A.G. Hebert, whose name is misprinted (page 109). But above all it is the "great work" of Cardinal Henri de Lubac on patristic and medieval exegesis which this chapter highlights. It certainly demonstrates the idiocy of supposing that nobody understood the Bible before Luther came on the scene. But even a reader who agrees with nearly everything so far may stumble in the course of this chapter. With all the will in the world can the "mystical sense" be widely recaptured today? Even those who have listened to a daily ration of patristic literature for many years breathe with relief when they get back among their modern books. This reader at least has to confess that he found little joy or instruction in the only extended example of how allegorical exegesis opens up the theological significance of a biblical text—how the baptism of Jesus was expounded from Origen to Jeremy Taylor.

The dichotomy between critical reason and historical imagination certainly has to be recognised and transcended. The final chapter refers us back to Von Hügel's "great work", *The Mystical Element of Religion* (1908) and, further back still, to Newman's University Sermons (1826 to 1843) and the "Tamworth Reading Room" letter in *The Times* (1841). Thus we are brought back to Oxford, and to the first years of the Oxford Movement. At one level, *Discerning the Mystery* is a tract, in an honourable tradition: it seeks to restore theology in Oxford to its Catholic responsibilities. Apart from the intra-Anglican polemics, always somewhat elusive to the outsider, the book is a marvellous catalogue of important and often neglected books with which any student of Catholic theology would be familiar (but few are). But theological self-questioning is never very interesting unless the questioning has analogues in neighbouring disciplines. That allegorical exegesis has much to offer us today may remain doubtful. But of one thing there is no doubt—this book cuts right to the core of the problems that we have inherited from the Enlightenment. The recent history of theology is a case study in the recent history of our culture. This book is an important contribution to a difficult and perhaps undecidable argument.

FERGUS KERR OP

**LANGUAGE, SENSE AND NONSENSE**, by G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker. *Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984. Pp. xiii + 397. £22.50.*

What are the principles an implicit grasp of which comprises an understanding of our language? This question, and related ones, seem important to many modern philosophers, some of whom place 'meaning' at the top of their agenda, and some of whom aim at a systematic theory of meaning. Names to conjure with here are Davidson, Dummett, Carnap and Tarski. You might also add Frege and Wittgenstein. These writers, at various stages in their careers, have placed on the philosophical table a set of problems which have occupied a whole generation of their colleagues.

The authors of this book deplore all this, which they take to be the product of radical misconceptions. Their main argument moves on two connected levels. Part of it deals with theses seen to be advanced as part of a single philosophical enterprise. The verdict passed on these is unfavourable. The conclusion then is that the enterprise itself is confused and misguided. Backer and Hacker also suggest that advocates of the enterprise have sometimes been inspired by the work of others the true nature of which has been misunderstood or misapplied. The book therefore has a third level of argument, for it also maintains that historical or exegetical insights can help one to see why many modern philosophers have been led astray and when the rot set in.

What exactly is the rot supposed to be? It seems to consist of a collection of theories such as 'Language is a calculus of rules for the use of symbols' or 'The fact that a speaker of a language can understand sentences he has never heard before calls out