

- 4 Christopher Dwyer, "Animals and the Catholic Church", *The Month*, June 1995, p. 248.
- 5 John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter for Jubilee Year 2000", *Catholic International*, March, 1995, p. 113.
- 6 Dermot A. Lane, "The Future of Creation", *Milltown Studies*, Autumn 1994, p. 108.
- 7 Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, *Heaven in Ordinarie*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1972, p. 192.
- 8 Lionel Swain, "Descent of Christ into Hell", *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane, eds., Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1987, p. 288.
- 9 Gerald O'Collins, SJ, *Jesus Risen, The resurrection, what actually happened and what does it mean?*, DLT, London, 1987, p. 155.
- 10 Lane, "The Future of Creation", pp. 111-112.
- 11 Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, Fortress, Minneapolis, 1993, pp. 91-92.
- 12 Richard Bauckham, "Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age", in *Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ*, J.B. Green and M. Turner, eds., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1994, pp. 19-21.

Reviews

REINHOLD NIEBUHR AND CHRISTIAN REALISM by Robin W Lovin.
Cambridge University Press, 1995. x + 255pp. Hardback £35.00, paperback £11.95.

Reinhold Niebuhr's books and journalism covering theology, ethics, political philosophy, historical, social, and cultural issues, and his political activism, teaching, preaching, and prayer challenge those with a predilection for classification. When Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers Union, sought Niebuhr's counsel to help him devise a strategy for the latest pay claim, it was not because he needed to speak to a non-reductive coherentist ethical naturalist Christian Realist. However, having taken up the challenge, these categories describe Robin Lovin's Niebuhr, and by neatly organizing Niebuhr's life and work in 'Niebuhr's century', he has attempted to ensure that its essence is available for the 'new century'.

Lovin first situates Niebuhr as a Christian Realist, a term coined in 1941 by Niebuhr's friend and colleague John C Bennett, but the theological stance originates as 'Religious Realism' with D C Macintosh, a former teacher of Niebuhr. According to Lovin, Christian Realism is a combination of political, moral, and theological realisms. Theological realism provides the ground for both the moral experience in that morality requires a meaningful universe, and political realism because if the ultimate context of choice is ignored, political thought and action will soon go wrong. Christian Realism as a version of moral realism holds

that moral claims can be true regardless of our moral beliefs. Lovin even suggests that Christian Realism is, in a sense, a version of a natural law theory of ethics in that it understands right action to be action conforming to human nature, but there can be no determinate set of rules, goals, and virtues because one essential ingredient of human nature is freedom (self transcendence), the imagination and power to create situations beyond present constraints. Christian Realism as a version of political realism insists that values have a real contribution in the multiplicity of forces brought to bear on political choices.

The chapter covering theological realism is appropriately entitled 'God'. A realistic theology rejects both the moral relativism of pluralism and the moral certainties of religious communities. Niebuhr's mythical method prevents confusing the truth of God with beliefs about God, and claims input into establishing justified belief rather than claiming knowledge of the truth in a situation. It is important, argues Lovin, that Christianity should be a participant in public discussion which aims to identify what Rawls terms 'overlapping consensus', the minimum agreements necessary for social harmony. But Christian Realism is not just concerned with the adequate functioning of social harmony, it has a positive contribution in that its sense of moral obligation rests on the imagination that can transcend the particular situation and envision new possibilities of living together.

Lovin reconstructs Niebuhr's ethical theory as a non-reductive coherentist ethical naturalism. It is coherentist because Niebuhr established connections between human experience, social fact and biblical symbol, and a naturalism rather than intuitionism or voluntarism because he held that moral judgments are about natural properties and persons. For example, the decision about the justice of a welfare programme is related to accounting procedures and cost, the facts of the situation. Finally, it is a non-reductive naturalism because reductive naturalism does not consider all the available facts of a situation.

in a chapter entitled 'Freedom', Lovin explains that the primary experience of freedom is the capacity for finite change for limited persons bringing about new situations that are 'particular, local, and contingent' (p 130). It is the nature of human consciousness itself. In this context Lovin discusses Niebuhr's account of sin as the denial of human freedom expressed as the sins of pride (over-estimation of freedom) and sensuality (evasion of the responsibility of freedom), and there is acknowledgement of the fact that Niebuhr tended to concentrate on analysis of the sin of pride. The sin of sensuality, writes Lovin, is 'the sin of little people' (p 143). Lovin fails to develop the theme that for Niebuhr it is also the sin of big nations, for just as imperialism is an expression of pride, so isolationism by an hegemonic power is an expression of sensuality. Of course, the label 'sensuality' seems inappropriate and many have criticised Niebuhr on this score. Lovin prefers to use the term 'sloth' borrowed from Barth (p 147), (although Niebuhr uses the term

'sloth' to characterize the collective sin of isolationism on page 112 of *The Irony of American History*) but this too seems inadequate especially when one of Lovin's examples is someone obsessed with the rituals of health and exercise. It would be difficult to convince a panting park jogger or a sweating weightlifter that they were guilty of sloth. Actually, the last two subheadings of this chapter, 'Sensuality and Politics' and 'Institutional Sloth' appear to be over the wrong sections.

Lovin has a high estimate of the potential of politics to create human good for it is where Christian Realists 'might meet the One true God' (p 190). Niebuhr himself would not have put it quite like that knowing that one is more likely to meet impersonators. The Christian attitude to politics should not simply be seen in terms of an Augustinian restraint of evil, nor an abrogation of responsibilities (v Hauerwas, *et al*). The role of Christian Realism is to '*reconnect* (italics mine) politics to the vital center of human activity' (p 176). This might seem vague but it appears in the context of considering America's foundation documents 'a major human achievement' (p 170), so presumably Christian Realism's political role is to reawaken the ideals and spirit of the founding fathers.

The final chapter is entitled 'Justice', and the main thrust of the argument is how to move beyond the contemporary liberal minimalist version of the requirements of justice as exemplified by Rawls where mutual respect for people's aims and goals is the guiding principle, to Niebuhr's concept of justice as the requirements of the law of love. Realistic justice is based on love, for it is only when we love that we can understand what justice requires. 'Love makes moral realists of us all' (p 201). The operative word is 'benevolence', the disposition to seek the well being of others.

For Christian Realism there are two 'regulative principles' of justice - equality and liberty. Justice is about equal access to the good life, not the assertion that everyone is equal, because it is clear that everyone is not equal. Lovin cites the experience of African Americans because their idea of what constitutes the good life has changed. During the civil rights period African Americans wanted to join the dominant idea of the good life. Now, however, they are rejecting assimilation in favour of proclaiming cultural difference and forging identities that are not governed by the hegemonic culture. While veteran civil rights campaigners might shake their heads in disbelief, Christian Realists can accommodate this shift. Lovin does not mention that during the civil rights campaigns there were African Americans (eg Malcolm X) who were strongly against the dominant idea of the good life.

Liberty stands as an ideal of participation in the creation of the good. In relation to basic human freedom people not only require freedom *from* the community (evading a 'good' chosen by others), they also need freedom *for* community. Lovin cites black South Africans as an example because they required more than freedom from apartheid, they wanted to take part in government. 'Liberty means being free to build community

as well as dream it' (p 229).

Ultimately Lovin is concerned with the distinctive contribution of the Christian faith to public discourse in America, and *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* is an important work in this regard. It is written in a gentle style with the quiet confidence of knowing that, despite every threat to meaning, the source of meaning of life and experience has been revealed in Christ. It is not an exhaustive study of Niebuhr but it is indispensable as an assessment of Niebuhr's continuing relevance, and for establishing Christian Realism as a theological method. We are not given the Niebuhr warning the nations that the total human enterprise is opposed to God, and exhorting America to mediate grace to the world rather than judgment, and we can't hear Niebuhr's incredible voice, but we are made aware of his intellectual power. It is an essential text for moral theology, political theology, and moral philosophy and leaves the reader eagerly anticipating Lovin's next book.

KENNETH DURKIN

THE NATURE OF GOD by Gerard Hughes, *Routledge, London and New York, 1995. £37.50 Hb. £12.99. Pb, Pp ix + 218.*

This book, which deals with the various terms that have been traditionally applied to God, has an interesting format. For each term the author first presents his interpretation of how various philosophers/theologians have understood it along with what he sees to be the problems inherent in those interpretations. Then Hughes tells us what the term means to him, including what he believes we can borrow from the chosen authors. So the student and, frequently, the formed philosopher, will grow in understanding of the history of natural theology as well as of the discipline itself.

One meets the following authors: Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Leibniz, Molina and William of Ockham. The terms that are dealt with are Existence (about which more later), Simplicity, Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Goodness.

I want to pay some attention in this review to the chapters on Existence and Omniscience. One of the surprising omissions is the way Aquinas deals with existence in the *De Ente et Essentia*. What Thomas says there was never explicitly repudiated. It looks very much as if he regards existence as an attribute which is added on to the essence and something which can be lost, leaving behind an intact essence. The same impression is given when he appears to say that what God causes is the actuality of a thing as distinct from what is actualized: it is as if we could talk about one thing's being the cause of, for example, motion and another thing's being the cause of its actuality.

Hughes, himself, sees that there cannot be a common subject of existence and non-existence. As Kant says, to deny that King Arthur exists is not to say that Arthur lacks existence in the sense in which he