rather than a scientific hypothesis, for "the subject matter of eschatology contains answers which will only satisfy the questions of a believer" (p. 146). Only to a believer is God real, and the reality of God is the sole foundation for belief in a future life and indeed constitutes that life: "by faith is God discovered as a future beyond death" (p. 147). In fact Van der Walle argues that all words associated with our future destiny are in reality ways of talking about God. Thus "heaven" and "eternal life" are "synonyms for God" (p. 29), "'resurrection of the dead' is a paraphrase of the word 'God'" (p. 164). "'Purgatory' is God who goes through us to purify us, and 'Hell' is God as the opportunity we have lost" (p. 220).

The difficulty with this approach is that language is not a private possession such that we can simply declare words to be synonomous. Words are the common property of a linguistic community. And it is easy to demonstrate that all the phrases which Van der Walle calls "synonyms for God" have a long history of use within the community of faith to refer not to God, but to a supposed future life after death, and all discussion must cease if it becomes impossible to differentiate between different affirmations of faith.

However, to claim that after death we live in God is a potentially significant claim, but what does it mean? One possibility is that we live on in the same sense that God who lives in us is eternal and therefore in so far as we are indwelt by him we participate in his eternity: "our limitations do not exist for the one who lives in us" (p. 188). Another possibility is that we live on in the sense that God remembers us and "to be remembered by God, to have my consciousness sustained by the Supreme Consciousness, is not that, perhaps, to be?" (p. 166). However, neither of these possibilities offers genuine immortality, which Van der Walle insists must consist in the continued life of the "human subject with his or her own awareness, relationships and personal activity" (p. 166), and where the "dead live as the same people they were before death" (p. 190).

But how can I be the same person if, as the author claims, "the bodily resurrection" in which I am to partake has "no material character" and the heaven in which I am to dwell is not "a place"? (p. 190). Moreover if my destiny is solely to abide in God and find fulfilment through "knowledge of God...interpreted in terms of mystical union" (p. 192), why talk of a "body" at all? Such a destiny seems to correspond exactly with what was formerly expected for man as an immortal soul. If Van der Walle responds, as his book constantly asserts, "I need a body because I am essentially a psycho-somatic unity" then one can only respond that a non-material non-spatial non-locatable "body" is just as contrary to such a picture as any concept of the soul.

The blunt fact is that there is no middle path to follow. If neither the resurrection of the body nor the immortality of the soul are credible, then death means extinction. God endures for ever but we perish as though we had never been. This conclusion is not inevitable, for both the traditional beliefs can be articulated and defended today. But the construction of such a defence is not the task assayed in the present work.

PAUL BADHAM

THE PROMISE OF NARRATIVE THEOLOGY by George W. Stroup. *SCM* **1984,** *John Knox Press* **1981, 288 pp., £7.95.**

'During the last ten years a new approach to theological reflection has emerged under the rubric of "narrative theology". As is the case with most new proposals in theology it remains to be seen whether narrative theology is only another fad in theological discussion or whether it is a substantive contribution to the task of making Christian faith intelligible in the modern world. ... For some time it has seemed to me that the use of narrative in theology provides rich possibilities for understanding and interpreting the content of Christian faith'. (p. 6)

George Stroup's gently argued and persuasive book strikes me as one of the most

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convincing accounts so far of the genuine 'promise' in a theological movement that has at times seemed likely to become a mere fad. By way of clearing the ground he surveys the progress of 'narrative theology' from its beginnings in the work of H. Richard Niebuhr, and shows that 'narrative' and 'story' have sometimes been almost empty counters, standing for nothing in particular or oscillating between a very precise meaning (e.g. particular genres within Scripture or other Christian writing) and a very loose one (as where 'the Christian story' means, in effect 'the Christian world-view'). His own proposal is that language about narrative in theology belongs to the doctrine of *revelation.* The first part of the book shows that there is a crisis in the (Protestant) churches about revelation: a loss of nerve, resulting in either a mere sell-out to secular culture or a nervous retreat to some form of religious obscurantism (e.g. fundamentalism). What is needed is some fresh way of asserting the objective reality of revelation which avoids the many pitfalls into which the doctrine has fallen since the heyday of Neo-orthodoxy. Stroup's proposal is that revelation is an event rather than a body of information, and that it occurs at the point where a person's perception of his own autobiography or story collides with the story in which the Christian community expresses its own corporate identity—a story which includes but is not simply to be identified with the scriptural narrative running from Abraham to the resurrection, and a story, moreover, which is rooted not merely in its own 'meaningfulness' or 'narrativity' but in genuine historical events. As he goes on to show, 'A description of Christian identity as that confessional narrative which emerges from the collision between the *Credo* narratives of the Christian community and an individual's personal identity narrative has important implications for what Christians mean by revelation, faith, confession, and conversion'. (p. 198). This is illustrated with a few sample studies, for example, a narrative account of the doctrine of justification by faith; but there are (tantalising) hints that it could be applied to less obviously congenial doctrines, such as the doctrine of the Trinity. 'The doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian answer to the question, "Who is the person that is identified as 'God' in the church's narrative history?"... The claim that personal identity is always an interpretation of personal history applies to all persons—human beings and the triune God'. (p. 246).

When the potential scope of a model for a complete systematic theology is so far-reaching, a book of a couple of hundred pages is obviously no more than an impressionistic essay, and the author clearly intends his work to be seen in this way. He tries his model out on various classics, such as Augustine's *Confessions* and Barth's *Church Dogmatics,* with a pleasing blend of adventurousness and tentativeness. Maybe the model is too frail to stand up to more rigorous application. It would be particularly interesting to try to use it within a Catholic framework, with the somewhat different assumptions about the likely locus of revelation that would apply there. The present reviewer is deeply attracted to 'narrative theology' as a *style,* but suspects that the vagueness of the term, despite Stroup's attempt to give it more definition, may turn out to be incorrigible in the end and to preclude its use as the basis of a *system.* Meanwhile few readers will fail to be stimulated by this fresh and attractive essay.

JOHN BARTON

HEALING AS SACRAMENT by Martin Israel. *Darton, Longman and Todd,* **London, 1984. Pp. 116. £3.95.**

A book of this title, by somebody who is an Anglican priest in charge of a London parish and lecturer in pathology at the Royal College of Surgeons, well known as lecturer, retreat-giver and broadcaster, promises well.

The contents bear out this promise. Beginning with a brief evocation of the chemical, emotional, rational and spiritual dimensions of health, suggestively correlated in terms of the notion of *vis medicatrix naturae,* or 'healing power of nature', he goes on in a series of ten further chapters to reflect on various components and aspects of

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