

user or the designer? What are acceptable design goals? Is intelligence a criterion of being human? How do we explain free will and grace in the face of theories that explain human activity simply in terms of brain states? These, I suggest, are more urgent problems than the possibility of AI machines a hundred years hence.

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Reviews

THE CATHOLIC FAITH, by Roderick Strange. *Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 192. £12.50 hardback, £3.95 paperback*

Out of his experience as university chaplain at Oxford over a number of years Father Roderick Strange has written a valuable account of the Catholic faith. His aim has been to provide something readable, intelligent and not too technical that could fill some of the gaps for the student who wants to know more about the faith, answer some of the questions of the believer puzzled by Vatican II, and calm some of the anxieties of those Catholics who were never prepared for the possibility of change. It seems to me that he has admirably succeeded in his aims.

The whole range of Catholic faith is covered in the book, beginning with Jesus of Nazareth and ending with the Trinity. In between there are chapters on redemption, resurrection, the Church, the papacy, the sacraments, morality, the theological virtues, and Mary. Quite a tall order! The danger of such a broad canvas is superficiality, but within the clear parameters within which he is working this has been largely avoided.

The style is easy and conversational; the reader might be chatting to the author in the Old Palace. There is a logical development. Questions are posed with great clarity and sometimes in such an original way as to throw new light on old favourites. The book obviously owes much to Fr Strange's long experience of talking with and listening to students, and shows many signs of his own wrestling to express his faith clearly. The examples with which he leads into a new section or illustrates a teaching are fresh and helpful. The use of scripture is admirable.

The focus of the book is simply: "The belief that God became man in Jesus of Nazareth... The word of God became a man. The divine and the human were perfectly united in him and the divine was revealed by means of the human." (p. 128) Everything takes its cue from this fundamental assertion, as indeed it must, since the Incarnation is the basis of the Christian revelation to which all else is related. The method of the book follows this same pattern (the divine revealed by the human), and it is this which makes the work particularly attractive. A theological symposium once included among its mass of comment: "God's revelation to us about himself would have no meaning for us were it not also a revelation about the meaning of human life." Revelation tells us something about ourselves, and equally if we are to come to grips with revelation we must do so in the context of our ordinary lives. Throughout the book Fr Strange never loses sight of this and as a result what he writes is often immediate, compelling and real.

There is undoubtedly a need for books of this sort today. There is a telling comment

made in the first chapter by a student: "We were never given anything like that at school. Mark you", she added, "if we had been, we wouldn't have listened." So true. Without for a moment minimising the importance of good content in school RE teaching (and especially at sixth form level), the concept of "readiness" is very significant; however good the teaching may be, many pupils simply do not have the "ears to hear with". Moreover the stress on growth in faith (and in the understanding of faith) for adults implies the need for a number of publications for the adult market in just such non-technical language as this work achieves. So far they are few and far between.

Given the compass of the book there are bound to be some gaps. Nonetheless some will find it surprising that there is no section on prayer. The laudable desire to avoid technical language also leads to some unexpected omissions, of which 'grace' is the most obvious. But these are relatively minor matters and in any case do not detract from the overall merits of this book which is to be thoroughly recommended for the readership proposed and particularly for the interested non-Catholic.

+ DAVID KONSTANT

THINKING ABOUT GOD, by Brian Davies OP, Geoffrey Chapman, 1985. pp. xii + 346.

This very valuable and deeply-thought book is concerned with the questions of how we can know that God exists apart from revelation, what reason can tell us about God, and how reasonable or unreasonable Christianity is. It is difficult to conceive of any reasonably intelligent person who is concerned with these matters not being greatly stimulated and informed by reading it. The three successive parts take up the above-mentioned questions in turn.

After a careful but ultimately dismissive account of the argument that the universe must have begun to exist, and that something which may be called God must thus have brought it into existence, the author puts his money on the argument to God from the contingency of the universe (cf. 27). The question 'Why is there a universe at all?' is plainly not a scientific question, in the way that asking why a particular state of affairs obtains within the universe is so. But all the same it seems arbitrary to rule the question out. It may indeed be urged that one cannot *prove* that it is right to ask such a question; as in the case of other possible questions, there is nothing to stop people remaining 'solidly uninquisitive'. And yet, 'the fact of the matter is that the existence of the universe is puzzling' (28). When it comes to the argument from order to design, it is acknowledged that there is some force in the claim that in the classical form advanced by Paley it has been discredited by the triumph of the theory of evolution. But it seems to be going too far to dismiss it entirely on this basis, given that 'the theory of natural selection is, after all, a scientific theory, and, as such, ... presupposes that natures behaves with a high degree of uniformity, or that its processes display a large degree of intelligibility' (40). To rule out the question, 'Why is this so?', once again seems arbitrary (45). The argument from miracles is treated with more caution; the author, while rightly (in my view) maintaining that Hume's case against the evidential value of reports of miracles is not cogent, concludes that miracles can be used only as part of a case for belief in God, as a supplement to arguments like those already considered (58). The argument to God from experience as though of God is again dismissed as unsound, at least standing by itself; while there may be experience which is really experience of God, we cannot argue from any experience in such a way as to show that it is more likely than not that there is a God (73). It seems to the author to be similarly misguided to infer the existence of God from the existence and nature of morality, or even, in Kantian fashion, to regard God as a necessary postulate for moral beings; 'even if God does not exist, there is reason to be moral' (80). However, it is not thereby excluded that what morality requires may depend on God (86). As one might expect of such an