Extensive suggestions for further reading, and an index of modern authors, are included.

<div align="right">M. CECILY BOULDING OP</div>

IDENTITY by Vernon White, *SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd*, **Norwich, 2003, Pp. x+176, £9.99 pbk**.

When Alasdair McIntyre wrote *After Virtue* he had in mind two books, one concerned with ethics, the other with social theory. Vernon White in his book *Identity* seems to have in mind at least three projects, one philosophical, another sociological and a third theological. One of the merits of this work is White's attempt to combine these projects to provide a coherent argument showing how Christian theology can provide 'unique resources' to tackle the social problems of our times. Such a task requires considerable skill and knowledge to perform, yet, as White declares, the thesis of the book is straightforward. Modern life with its rapid pace of change brings fragmentation. Christian theology, specifically through the notion of faithfulness, can offer modern people a resource that creatively enables us to form our identities within our changing world.

White begins with the philosophical project, briefly examining Josiah Royce's writings on the concept of loyalty. Royce was responding to what he saw as social disintegration at the beginning of the twentieth century, and saw loyalty as the pre-eminent moral good, the practice of which would bring about social integration. The weakness in Royce's moral theory, as White acknowledges, is that in itself a principle of loyalty cannot distinguish between commitments to good causes and those to evil causes. In order to provide content for the concept of loyalty White briefly examines the works of Gabriel Marcel and H. Richard Niebuhr, both of whom see God as the principle and ultimate object of loyalty. Despite the work of these two authors, White points out that loyalty's value for theology has been little developed.

His preliminary philosophical investigations of the notion of loyalty have led White in the direction of theology, and chapters two and three will now take up the theological project. White begins with some brief and general discussions concerning the difficulties of God-talk, and the dangers of identifying God with a reductive theory of ultimate reality. Here he mentions the classical problem of avoiding the opposed views of Heraclitean flux and Parmenidean static unity when attempting to describe reality. His own solution to the difficulty of God talk is to derive divine identity from divine action. Here is where the notion of loyalty comes in, expressed as God's loving faithfulness to his people through time and change. White

argues God's loving actions in his faithfulness reveal the nature of divine identity, showing God to be the fullness of change and new possibility, yet at the same time constant in his love. Just as philosophically White makes loyalty the chief of the virtues so now in his doctrine of God faithfulness is the chief expression of God's love. Only thus can we begin to talk of God in terms of ultimate reality, for here we have neither the static view of Parmenides nor the constant flux of Heraclites, but constancy in change. White believes that the theological virtue of faithfulness enables us to thus come to some understanding of divine identity.

After outlining his doctrine of God, White then turns to the question of how this impacts on human identity. Here he proposes two theories. First, since God is the origin and source of all that is, we are called to respond to his faithful love through faithful creative change throughout the course of our lives. Secondly, we are in this response to imitate God, living lives constant in our faithful commitment, yet at the same time creatively able to respond and change when these commitments demand such. The remainder of the book is an exploration of the need for and the challenges to creative, faithful living. Here is where the sociology comes in, White arguing that the virtue of faithfulness enables us to preserve our identity against the fragmentary forces of modern living, whilst responding positively to the new creative possibilities the modern world offers. Constrained by space, White cannot provide a full sociology so he develops this theory in two key areas: personal relationships and work.

From the above summary it is clear that White has attempted an ambitious project, and should be applauded for bringing together insights from so many fields. However, it is also a weakness of the book that it attempts to pack so much material into one hundred and fifty pages, leaving the reader desiring more discussion on certain topics and a more careful working out of various arguments. As mentioned earlier, White himself notes the problem of making loyalty a morally empty formal principle, yet his solution of understanding loyalty in terms of faithfulness to God can be an equally empty formal principle. How many fanatics have justified their crimes as faithfulness to God? If faithfulness is to be the key character of God's love, how is this related to his other attributes? Similarly, how does the virtue of faithfulness relate to other virtues, and if it is the principal virtue how does it enable us to make substantive choices between different commitments, whilst ordering our other virtues? There are questions also as to whether the notion of faithfulness as developed by White is really the universal key to the identity of God he wants it to be, or whether it is a projection of various modern ideas, i.e. modern notions of creativity and change. The very attempt to define the divine identity is itself problematic. Is White here falling into the danger he himself outlines of mistaking a particular idea for

ultimate reality? Other problems arise in regard to White's analysis of modernity, for although he is critical of modernity he often fails to get behind the alternatives modernity proposes. For example, against modernity he notes the need for tradition in developing our identity through faithfulness, but equally he seems to see tradition and creativity as opposed.

The prevalence so many questions point to weaknesses in White's theory, but at the same they show that the merit of the work is to bring together debate across a wide intellectual landscape, and leave the reader hoping that White will continue to explore these themes in future works.

DAVID GOODILL OP

AFTER THEORY by Terry Eagleton, *Allen Lane, imprint of Penguin Books*, **London, 2003, Pp. ix+225, £18.99 hbk**.

For Terry Eagleton, the golden age of cultural theory is over, because not much has been written that matches the ambitiousness and originality of the innovative theoretical currents of the 1960s and 1970s.

His new book is fundamentally about what kind of fresh thinking our new era demands after the golden age of cultural theory. 'Theory' for Eagleton is the most general form of critical self-reflection. Reflecting critically on our situation is a feature of the particular way we belong to the world, and without it humanity would not have survived as a species. As linguistic animals we have the ability to ask ourselves the moral question such as whether our beliefs are sound or whether their reasons are good ones. Eagleton notes that recent theory on the whole fails to deliver: 'It has been shamefaced about morality and metaphysics, embarrassed about love, biology, religion and revolution, largely silent about evil, reticent about death and suffering, dogmatic about essences, universals and foundations, and superficial about truth, objectivity and disinterestedness' (pp.101–102). *After Theory* seeks to remedy those deficiencies.

Eagleton advocates a form of essentialism inspired by the thought of Aristotle and Marx. The essence of human beings is to realize their nature as an end in itself. 'Nature' is here understood as the way we are most likely to flourish, which brings happiness. The justification he offers for this argument is that it is 'natural'. 'Nature is a bottom-line concept; you cannot ask why a giraffe should do the things it does. To say 'It belongs to nature' is answer enough. You cannot cut deeper than that. In the same way, you cannot ask why people should want to feel happy and fulfilled. It would be like asking what someone hoped to achieve by falling in love. Happiness is not a means to