

INTERPRETING JESUS by Gerald O'Collins *Geoffrey Chapman*
London, 1983 pp.214

Two years ago Dr O'Collins published his *Fundamental Theology*, which I reviewed in this journal for July/August 1981. In this book he has gone on to 'provide a textbook in Christology for a wide range of English-speaking students' (p.ix). The style and general approach of the two books are remarkably similar. Those who welcomed the earlier book as a lively expression of a traditional catholic faith, showing awareness of the problems caused by the contemporary world, will find similar help in this new book. Those who felt that the earlier book did not really come to terms at a deep enough level with the critical challenge of those contemporary problems are not likely to have that feeling expunged by this later work.

Dr O'Collins sees the work of theology as explicating a faith already known to be true. The role of philosophy within Christology is not therefore to prove the 'truths about Christ's resurrection, saving function and divinity. Rather philosophical reason plays its part in clarifying the meaning and presuppositions of such truths' (p.29). That is a reasonable approach to the work of theology. But can one distinguish as clearly as that formulation of it suggests between the content and the meaning of the truths of Christian faith? By accepting as fully as he does the framework of truths laid down in catholic tradition, the philosophical and historical reflections which he conducts fairly and judiciously seem to me to be worked out in an un-

satisfactorily restrictive setting. Thus I find it questionable whether, within a Christology that is fully attentive to the challenges of contemporary understanding, issues such as the scope of Jesus' knowledge or the nature of his faith either merit or are amenable to the kind of argumentation that he accords to them.

A further role that he ascribes to philosophy is that of organising Christology into a coherent whole. His own Christology he says, 'will be structured around Graf Durckheim's insight into human existence as a radical quest for and experience of life, meaning and love' (p.30). Strangely Durckheim is not mentioned again, and Dr O'Collins pedagogic concern to deal with a large range of historical and interpretative questions does not allow him much scope to present his own position at all fully. But in so far as it does come through, it is one whose positive and constructive character should prove pastorally helpful for many people— as many of his shorter, more popular writings have already demonstrated. But the 'wide range of English-speaking students' to whom this book is particularly directed, should not accept too quickly the coming together of traditional and contemporary insights offered here, without first looking more deeply into the intellectual and conceptual problems that face us as Christians to-day.

MAURICE WILES

MUHAMMAD by Michael Cook. *O.U.P.* 1983 £1.95.

There are obvious tensions in the study of any religion or great religious figure between their portrayal in seemingly straightforward historical terms and an appreciation of their meaning for believers of a particular tradition. Many people who buy this book will be interested not only in a man who, like other figures in the *O.U.P.* 'Past Masters' series, has greatly influenced world history, but also in Islam.

The author remarks in the Preface that from an Islamic perspective 'the term

'master' is properly applicable only to God', and that the 'insinuation of intellectual originality' is not appropriate to Muhammad since, 'as a messenger of God the task was to deliver a message, not to pursue his own fancies'. This is encouraging sensitivity from Cook, who in 1977 was joint author of a book called 'Hagarism, the making of the Islamic World', a book which was deeply offensive to most Muslims. The Introduction to 'Muhammad' continues by emphasising the extent