

towards explaining Boff's own attitude towards his summons to Rome last year, and towards the Notification of March 1985. He knows full well that "The incarnation of the community among the poor, living the Gospel in the concrete place of the poor, can become a risk to an essential dimension of the Church, its catholicity and universality" (p. 126)—surely exactly the keynote of the C.D.F.'s *Libertatis Nuntius*. These pages, where Francis' own reaction to the central authorities of the Church is examined, make sense of Boff's expressions of loyalty, and his acceptance of the C.D.F.'s notification: "Because Francis embraced both forms of the concretization of the Church—as institution and as event—he truly could be called *vir totus catholicus et apostolicus*" (p. 129).

It is in the last chapter of *SF* that Boff touches on what is, at least for this reviewer, at the core of *CCP*. In his ecclesiological essays part at least of what is disturbing is that the critic of the Church does not appear to see himself as its accomplice. He sometimes appears not to have assimilated the unsatisfactory parts of the body which forms him. However, here in chapter 5 of *SF* Boff presents us with a St Francis who integrated the negative, who was both critic and accomplice in our Christian endeavour, without losing the salt of his flight from the established order. It is Fr Boff's movement towards integration of criticism, complicity, and radical christianity which often makes him rewarding reading.

Reviews

POETRY OF THE PASSION : STUDIES IN TWELVE CENTURIES OF ENGLISH VERSE by J.A.W. Bennett (Oxford, 1982), *Clerendon Press*. £17.50

Professor J.A.W. Bennett, who died in 1981, was one of the outstanding medievalists of his generation. He completed this book just before his death; it is based on a series of lectures given at Cambridge, where he was Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English. His book is an excellent testament both to the quality of his mind and to the breadth of his learning. He takes an important theme, the Passion of Christ, and traces it from the beginnings of Christian literature in English to the Twentieth Century. The book does not claim to be a complete survey of this vast subject: but it covers the major texts, and it firmly places the English texts it examines in the context of their European sources and analogues. Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is Professor

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Bennett's familiarity with the patristic and liturgical images behind the vernacular poems.

As Bennett remarks, 'the history of Christian poetry in English begins with a masterpiece': the first chapter of the book consists largely of a sensitive and stimulating reading of the Old English poem, *The Dream of the Rood*. This is the best exploration yet published of the relations between the Anglo-Saxon poem and liturgical texts. It is followed by an even more impressive chapter on the Middle English lyrics on the Passion: Bennett examines their relations to such texts as the Meditations attributed to St Bonaventure, and to Franciscan spirituality. A chapter on the devotional texts in which Christ is presented as a Lover Knight looks back to the images of *The Dream of the Rood*, and also provides a relevant introduction to a fine chapter on the passages in *Piers Plowman* in which Langland describes or refers to the Passion. Professor Bennett is particularly good on how important the theology of the Incarnation was in Langland's poetic vision, and how, in contrast with the writers of the *Devotio Moderna*, Langland preserves the balance between the themes of Incarnation and of the Passion (pp. 98–9). The survey of Medieval poetry is completed with a chapter on the Scottish poets. Here Bennett gives impressive interpretations of Henryson's 'Bludy Serk' (a late example of the theme of Christ as Lover Knight), and of Dunbar's poem on the Passion. This in turn is contrasted with Walter Kennedy's poem on the theme, which Bennett relates convincingly to the Bonaventuran tradition. Thus, although each chapter consists of a close examination of one or more devotional texts, Bennett establishes close links between the chapters, and places his texts within a convincingly historical perspective.

Five of the eight chapters are devoted to pre-Reformation poetry; but perhaps the most interesting feature of the book is the way in which Professor Bennett brings the story from the Reformation to the present. He is particularly good on the extent to which medieval and patristic commentaries on the Passion were read and used by Protestant writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (p. 145), and on how the traditional images were developed by Lancelot Andrewes, George Herbert and John Donne. Bennett shows how Herbert's 'Sacrifice' radically rearranges and extends earlier series of typological images, relating them to the incidents of the Passion in a new way. While his reading of Herbert's poem is naturally closer to Rosamond Tuve's historical interpretation than to Empson's famous interpretation in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Bennett shows that Empson 'was surely right in seeing more in this poem than the survival and continuation of a traditional mode. Its tone is harsher and more ironic than that of any medieval antecedent, or of any contemporary presentation' (p. 158). Particularly interesting is Bennett's demonstration that it was Evangelicals, rather than 'High Church' Anglican poets, who continued to use 'the traditional modes and figures of Catholic hymnody' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He finds appreciative things to say of the use of traditional images in Toplady's 'Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me', and in William Cowper; but dismisses Keble's poem on the Passion in *The Christian Year* as 'a conscious literary exercise' which is 'flaccid in form and dubious in theology' (p. 184).

One of the delights of Bennett's book is his ability to illuminate his theme with unusual but convincing examples. He illustrates the similarity between the Methodist revival of hymnody and medieval Franciscan spirituality by examining the figure of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*, and attributes to George Eliot 'a power no preacher of her time possessed' when she expressed the sense that "'in all the anguish of the children of men infinite Love is suffering too'". Bennett movingly demonstrates that English poets writing of the first and second World Wars often had a similar sense.

Bennett has written a book which is of interest to many other readers besides those who study English Literature. One of his major themes is that the art of poetry plays a major role in 'the liberation of theology—from academic patterns and worn stereotypes, and vain repetitions' (p. 206). He convincingly demonstrates the truth of this assertion, particularly in his examination of Langland's poem, and in his concluding pages on *The Anathemata* by

David Jones. The only difficulty with the book is that its very richness of reference, and Bennett's technique (reminiscent almost of a patristic commentator) of following up the many verbal reminiscences which a line of poetry suggests to a mind as learned as his, means that the book is by no means easy to read: like the poems he examines, his book must be savoured slowly. But students of theology and of Church History; those interested in the history of taste and in the power of poetry will find the effort to assimilate this book worth while.

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CREATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (Issues in Religion and Theology 6)
Edited by Bernard W. Anderson. SPCK/Fortress Press, 1984. Pp. xiv + 178. £3.50.

This sixth volume in the series *Issues in Religion and Theology* is to be welcomed, for (as the Editor, B.W. Anderson, points out) from Barth to Bultmann creation theology in the sense of origination has been regarded as peripheral. This situation is in part the fault of Old Testament scholarship itself influenced by von Rad's thesis that the Old Testament doctrine of creation was never able to attain to independent existence in its own right but was always subordinated to soteriological considerations. As a result, over a century after the publication of Darwin's *The origin of Species*, discussion of the Genesis narrative continues to be undertaken on the false antithesis of fact or fiction, science or the Bible—totally inappropriate for the poetic character of the material. The merit of this collection is that it not only establishes the centrality of the doctrine of creation within the Old Testament, but also its importance in the questions facing contemporary theology in the nuclear age.

After an excellent introduction which stresses the importance of Davidic theologians, the collection begins with an extract from Gunkel's classical work *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895) and continues with the well known essays of von Rad, 'The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation' (1936) and Eichrodt, 'In the Beginning: A Contribution to the Interpretation of the First Word of the Bible' (1962), both of which are criticised in subsequent contributions. There then follows McCarthy, "'Creation" Motifs in Ancient Hebrew Poetry' (1967); Westermann 'Biblical Reflection on Creator-Creation, (1971), Schmid, 'Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: "Creation Theology" as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology' (1973); and Hermisson, 'Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom' (1978). The collection concludes with two topical contributions on 'Creation and Liberation' by Landes (1978) and 'Creation and Ecology' by the editor (1983).

While to-day Gunkel's conclusion that Gen. 1 was 'faded myth' deriving ultimately from Babylonian tradition is taken as axiomatic for Biblical research, scholars equally recognise the importance of the already existing Hebrew traditions of J in shaping the material, whether or not (as seems more likely to this reviewer) an independent P source ever existed. Although the editor rightly stresses that the literary function of the text in its overall Biblical context cannot be ignored, it is only Landes who brings out the tension between Gen. 1 (man made in the image of God) and Gen. 3 (man grasping at divinity). Indeed, the Priestly account is not in the end primarily concerned about creation at all (which, as Westermann holds, was always presumed to have been by God since there was no alternative) but rather with Israel's universalistic mission within creation. Following her defeat and exile, did her election still hold, and hold for what?

But as Deutero-Isaiah affirms, creation theology cannot in the end be reduced to origination: it includes both maintenance and consummation as well. Otherwise God would be reduced to an absentee landlord, and man become both master and prisoner of his own destiny.

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