

**IN SEARCH OF DEITY: AN ESSAY IN DIALECTICAL THEISM** by John Macquarrie. *SCM Press., London, 1984. Pp. x + 274 £8.50*

This book is offered as a critique of 'classical theism' and a defence of 'dialectical theism'. In Part One of the book Macquarrie explains what he means by these terms and why we should opt for the dialectical variety of theism rather than the classical kind. According to Macquarrie there is an important tradition of dialectical theism, and representatives of this are introduced in Part Two. They include Plotinus, Pseudo-Denys, Scotus Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa, Leibniz, Hegel, Whitehead, and Heidegger. Macquarrie devotes a chapter to each of these. In Part Three he then turns again to a defence of dialectical theism. This phase of the discussion also includes reflections on the traditional theistic proofs and the significance of dialectical theism for spirituality, ethics, theology, and thinking about the world religions.

Perhaps the chief value of the book lies in its insistence that natural theology is both possible and able to yield results. Macquarrie has sensible things to say about the significance for belief in God of Hume and Kant, and he indicates well enough reasons for supposing that the existence of the world is something that raises causal questions which remain unanswered as long as one confines oneself to a view of things which cannot allow for a doctrine of creation. This thesis, of course, is ancient, and Macquarrie has nothing very original to offer on its behalf. But much of what he does say is to the point, and much of it is also historically informative. Part Two of the book is a good introduction to the history of natural theology and deserves comparison with texts like C.C.J. Webb's *Studies in the History of Natural Theology* (Oxford, 1915).

In other ways, however, the book is disappointing. 'Dialectical theism' proves to bear strong resemblances to 'di-polar theism' as presented by writers such as Charles Hartshorne. What Macquarrie recommends is, for example, very like what is offered by Keith Ward in his recently published book *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (Oxford, 1982). And the plain fact of the matter is that it will not do. According to dialectical theism God, among other things, is both passible and impassible, temporal and eternal. Yet, as others have observed, if that is true then the existence of God is no less puzzling than the changing world itself. Macquarrie, of course, is well aware of some of the likely criticisms of his position. But he does not seem to me to engage with them in anything like an adequate way. And some of his arguments against classical theism are just repetitions of hackneyed ones which have surely now been exposed for what they are. An example is the familiar claim that if God is not passible then he cannot love. The answer, of course, to this is that if God's love involves him in being passible (except in the sense acknowledged by the doctrine of the Incarnation), then it also involves him in being a creature. You cannot preserve a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and maintain that God is acted on by anything. If you insist that he is really acted on, you end up not with a Creator but with something akin to a demiurge. And that, I fear, is what Macquarrie is finally proposing to us as an object of worship. He wants us to recognise that when it comes to God we should be prepared to be subtle. We should allow God the possibility of enjoying a complex form of life which is richer than that of other things. And with all of this one can agree. But there are limits to what can literally be affirmed of God, and Macquarrie's way of drawing them seems to me not only unconvincing but also theologically suicidal. An atheist could make out a good case for accepting all that Macquarrie believes about God. But he could still then call himself an atheist.

As a final point, and given the origin of *New Blackfriars*, it is worth adding that Macquarrie is very misleading on the subject of Aquinas. Macquarrie actually singles out Aquinas as a typical representative of classical theism, but I doubt that many who have read Aquinas seriously will recognise him in the portrait of him painted by Macquarrie. This shows him saying that God is 'another being or entity in addition to those we meet in the world' (p. 32). It also shows him arguing that God is the only non-

contingent being (*ibid*) and that 'the creation is external to the creator, and has its own reality and even a measure of independence, though these are derivative and limited' (p. 35). Here one wonders what has become of Aquinas's view of divine simplicity, according to which God is in no genus and according to which there is in him no *compositio* of form and matter, *suppositum* and nature, essence and existence. One also wonders what has happened to Aquinas's assertion that there are many non-contingent beings and that God operates in every operation. It is, indeed, true that Aquinas refers to God as *ens*. But since he believes that 'There is a God' must logically be distinguished from propositions like 'There is nothing the matter', he could hardly do otherwise. It looks as though Macquarrie would have him say that God is nothing, for he tells us in Chapter XIII that 'God is being and God is nothing' (p. 172). But this is either logically nonsensical (for reasons derived from philosophers like Frege and Russell), or it means what Aquinas means when he asks us to distinguish between God and his creatures without denying the existence of God.

BRIAN DAVIES OP

**THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE NEW RELIGIOUS LIFE** by Roy Wallis.  
*Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. Pp x + 156. £12.50.*

The title of the book might encourage the reader to imagine that here is an extension of Durkheim's classic, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Durkheim brought up to date at last! This is certainly not the case and the title is misleading. Nowhere is Durkheim's book mentioned but on occasions when the author refers to the grand master he is to be congratulated on the fact that he rejects vulgar Durkheimianism and in particular a crude reading of his functionalism, not least in connection with the role of religion where it is held to play an integrating role in society.

If Professor Wallis's new book does not excite Durkheimian scholars, it should certainly be welcomed by those who are fascinated by new religious movements—by what are commonly referred to as sects. There are others of course who are not fascinated. For them such movements as Scientology, Krishna Consciousness, the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organisation, the Church of Eductivism, Syanon, *est*, the Children of God, T.M., and a host of others, are obscure, bizarre, and redolent of madness. This book will in no way change their opinions: it will probably confirm them. Strangely enough, sociologists are somewhat divided about such vagaries. The social reality of the phenomena cannot be denied. But not all that is real in this sense is significant. It is a common charge today that sociologists all too readily run after trivia and overlook what is crucial. The debate can hardly be settled here. At least it can be generally accepted that the recent upsurge of strange religious movements is a reflection of society's uncertainty about its basic values, virtues and achievements. Professor Wallis, and his mentor, Dr. Bryan Wilson, spend much of their professional labours in fishing in dark waters in attempting to make clear the currents at work in such groups and in providing answers to basic questions—what are the social conditions which give rise to these irrational outcomes?—why are such groups in many cases, but clearly not in all, so ephemeral? The professionals wade in where others have little wish to tread.

What Roy Wallis has done in presenting yet another book on sectarianism is to be commended on a number of counts. There are as many sects as there is sand on the sea-shore and he has very wisely limited himself to religious movements which have arisen or accelerated since the 1960s. He has also avoided getting embroiled in the age-long and now tedious wrangle (started by Weber) of what constitutes a sect or cult in contrast to a church. He does not attempt an extensive typology by which all sects or movements can be classified. And he sees the impossibility of simplified explanations which will fit all sects at all times. Nevertheless, he is rightly impelled to say something