

ground for their authenticity and authority, is thus to miss the point entirely: to seek to ground the authority of the Bible in its accuracy as past history is often to break down its real authority altogether' (p 61). But can the point of a story, its significance for readers today, be so easily divorced from its accuracy as history? Barr writes: 'While on the surface narrating the past, the interest of the writers was often in the present and the future. Stories about Abraham were told, not in order to inform the reader how things had been in the second millenium, but in order to give pictures of the way in which the promise of God, which was yet to come, had been fulfilled – and therefore of how, for others much later, it might be fulfilled' (ibid.). But if the Abraham stories are not substantially accurate as history, then the promise of God was not fulfilled in the way that they propose, and if it was not in fact fulfilled in that way in the past, then there is no reason to suppose that it will be fulfilled in that way in the future, either. If the Abraham stories are perceived as historically false, then they lose their power to create and mould expectations about the future course of events. So it appears the fundamentalists have a point, after all, in insisting on the literal truth of the text, even if, as Barr says, they are forced in doing so to adopt unnatural interpretations of it.

This rather obvious point is perhaps answerable. The absence in Barr's book of any attempt to provide an answer is a serious omission, for the point threatens some

of his major positions: it appears to vitiate his attack on fundamentalism, to weaken the force of his distinction between story and history and to throw open again the question of the nature of the authority of the Bible and its place in the life of the believing community. There are as well other important omissions. Most notably, there is no discussion at all of the problem of what is to be taken as the meaning of a text, or whether it is possible to speak of *the* meaning of a text at all. Barr is confident that critical study will often be able to establish the 'true meaning' of a text, but does not make clear what he means by this; is the true meaning the meaning the author meant to convey, what would be understood by his contemporaries, that attached to it by later editors, by those who formed the canon, by early commentators or by modern believing communities (which ones?), or is it the sense that God intends it to convey to readers today? This is a large question, and an important one for Barr, for the answer one gives to it will determine the methods one uses to uncover the 'true meaning' of the biblical text. The critical method Barr espouses clearly presupposes a certain range of answers to the question, and rules out others. Both for its intrinsic importance to biblical study and because it has an important bearing on what Barr wants to say, some discussion of the problem should have been included.

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**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION** by Brian Davies. *Oxford University Press*, 1982. pp x + 144. £9.95 hardback; £3.95 paperback.

This book is a concise and lucid introduction to all the main problems in the philosophy of religion. It consists of twelve chapters on the following topics: verification and falsification, theistic language, the problem of evil, the arguments for God's existence, religious experience, the divine attributes of eternity and omniscience, the relation between morality and religion, the concept of 'miracle', and life after death. There is also a good bibliography. Obviously anyone who seeks to

cover so large an area in such a brief scope is bound to be selective. But I think that Dr Davies has made the right selection and presented the topics he has chosen in an appropriate order. Some readers may be surprised that out of all the divine attributes he has chosen 'eternity' and 'omniscience'. Yet I think he was wise to do so; for these are the attributes that are apt to provoke the most philosophical disagreement. Inevitably there are points at which any reviewer would wish that Davies had

said a little more about some things even if it meant curtailing his treatment of others. Thus I should have welcomed a more extensive (and perhaps more sympathetic) discussion of religious experience within the context of religious epistemology as a whole. However, the merits of the book remain. In his Introduction Davies says that he has tried 'to write about things in a way that should enable the reader to take up some sides for himself' and 'to write on the assumption that the reader has little or no philosophical background'. I believe

**GOD INCARNATE: STORY AND BELIEF**, edited by A E Harvey, *SPCK*, London, 1981. pp 104 £3.95.

This book is a collection of papers given at a seminar of Oxford scholars which met in response to the publication in 1977 of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, and which questioned the centrality or even the appropriateness of belief in the divinity of Christ. Anthony Harvey, the editor of the present book, explains that though most of the contributors recognised the force of the arguments of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, yet they were unable to accept its conclusions. It might indeed no longer be possible to express a belief in the divinity of Christ in "logically coherent propositions" (p 1), but there are other ways of articulating one's faith, above all that of the story.

This, and the very title of the book, might lead one to expect a number of papers devoted to the exploration of the relationship between narrative theology and claims for Christ's divinity, but the relationship between the two is only rarely pursued in this book. The papers are almost without exception, stimulating and provocative and yet the authors most convinced of the sufficiency of narrative theology seem least concerned about the question of Christ's divinity, and vice versa. Harvey's opening essay is devoted to a useful consideration of in what senses the "christian story" may be said to be true, yet none of these seem to help one to understand in what sense the claim that Jesus is God might be true. He gets a little closer to this question when, in another paper,

that he has fulfilled both of these aims. With the minimum of technicality (though without philosophical over-simplification) he fairly offers arguments for and against the various views he presents. Thus he encourages students to pursue their own reflections in the light of further reading. Taken as a whole this book is a valuable addition to the other introductions to the subject (chiefly, in my view, those by H D Lewis and John Hick) to which Davies refers.

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he shows the gospels offer good evidence that Jesus was believed to speak with the authority of God himself. James Barr has some interesting things to say about the relationship between story and myth, but believes that Messiahship rather than Incarnation is central to a proper understanding of Christ. John McQuarrie, in perhaps the most illuminating paper of the book, shows how the gospels, as works of art, disclose the truth about Jesus in a way that a simple historical report could not, but he then goes on to claim that this does not release the theologian from the task of making ontological claims about the nature of man and of Jesus that, presumably, go beyond the scope of narrational theology. Geza Vermes, the Jewish scholar, does not believe that the evidence of the gospels warrants any claim for the divinity of Christ. Peter Hinchliff explores the relationship between belief and experience but also recognises the need for belief to issue in some ontological claim about Jesus.

The nearest we get to tackling the relationship between story and belief in Christ's divinity is in the superb paper by Rachel Trickett on imagination and belief and in the brief but suggestive Christmas sermon by Peter Baelz. And so one could not claim that this book convincingly established an alternative locus for the expression of belief in Christ's divinity. Nevertheless it was worth producing and does suggest theological perspectives which may one day be fruitful.

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