

unproblematic. And such difficulties will need to be addressed before radical orthodoxy (or at least certain forms of it) can realise its commitment to 'reclaim the world'.

None of which, however, is to detract from the undoubted achievement of these theologians. They have re-drawn the boundaries of the theological landscape in a remarkably short space of time. The uniqueness of radical orthodoxy lies in its efforts to create a space for theology not before or within, but *beyond* the 'death of God'. We have seen that this gives rise to a theological orthodoxy, but one that is *made possible* by a philosophical and theological radicalism that analytic, modern and liberal theologians are bound to contest. So the combats will continue with a renewed vigour. But, of course, there is disagreement here not only in terms of theological content but also in terms of theological method. For unlike their rival combatants, radical orthodox theologians consider criteria of evidence, rationality, plausibility and facts to be, at best, frivolous distractions. Instead, they seek merely to 'persuade' the hearer by telling God's story. Finally, then, their 'new' message echoes a somewhat 'older' one: those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

GAVIN HYMAN

THE WAY OF THE LAMB: THE SPIRIT OF CHILDHOOD AND THE END OF THE AGE by John Saward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999). Pp. xii +170, £12.95 pbk.

John Saward writes books of a kind no other British theologian does, although his voice carries constant echoes of Hans Urs von Balthasar. What makes him distinctive is the unembarrassed retrieval of certain highly-charged spiritual writers and themes, combined with a firm dogmatic underpinning. This is a doctrinally secure, exuberant Catholicism that proposes to change lives and be counter-cultural.

Saward is a married lay theologian, who has just returned from teaching in the United States and now divides his time between England and Austria. His latest book is on a theme that has long fascinated him—a theology of childhood. He has come to regard the book as a gift to him from his own children. Saward's interest is not only in the possibilities that childhood has for children, but also in how childhood is an essential ingredient in the Christian life of adults and worthy of their respect. The theme becomes counter-cultural in opposing so much violence done to born and unborn children, and in opposing the over-valuing of 'adult faith' or 'Christianity come of age'. The book is not a chronicle of all the main Christian writings or dimensions of the theme of childhood. It reflects on and articulates a constellation of themes present in a particular group who were either contemporaries or born not long after. The book inevitably organises and orders the themes more than the authors did, but it stays close to their words and it is after all an exposition.

To repropose the values of childhood Saward turns chiefly to St

Thérèse of Lisieux, Chesterton, Péguy, Bernanos and Balthasar. The selection is instructive in itself including as it does three married laymen and only one professional theologian. Multiple ideas and perspectives are derived by Saward from his chosen guides. Childhood can disclose the perennially valid experiences of trust, wonder, playfulness and hope. For the Christian, it indicates the way of confidence in the Father, play with the Son (Christmas matters), soldiering with the Spirit and delighting in Mary as mother. Baptism is the moment of regeneration, the genesis of spiritual childhood, and confession that of renewed innocence. One of Bernanos's characters remarks that the grace of God makes the most hardened of men a little child. In one of Saward's most perceptive reflections, he says of St Thérèse's experience of the desolation of the faithless that her very innocence is a force of connection, for sin separates even sinners from each other. Holiness alone can unite.

It is, of course, the notion of childhood that is being reposed, not childishness in adults or what Chesterton derided as 'Peter Pantheism'. Not for nothing did St Thérèse, Chesterton and Péguy have a particularly intense devotion to the massacred Holy Innocents. Saward's guides had no illusions about the pain and horror of life or the evils of their age. Like his guides, Saward too can be robust (if occasionally too sweeping) in his criticisms of various contemporary tendencies. Yves Congar recalls somewhere Gerson's project to reform the Church through children, and Saward is definitely a reformer.

Saward gives ample space to direct quotations from his chosen authors, so that this is a book to be lingered over. In fact, its insights and resonances will only be fully discerned if approached with trust and confidence. In this, it enacts its meaning.

ROBERT OMBRES OP

GENTILE TALES: THE NARRATIVE ASSAULT ON LATE MEDIEVAL JEWS by Miri Rubin (New Haven and London: *Yale University Press*, 1999). Pp. 266+ xiv, £25.00 hbk.

Miri Rubin, Reader in Medieval History at Oxford University, is already well known as the author of *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (1991). The present book is an examination of a peripheral series of stories which attached to the Eucharist in late medieval piety. Rubin details two archetypal stories of abuse of the Eucharistic species: in the first and older of the two, 'the Story of the Jewish Boy', the protagonist received Communion with other boys and came home to tell his father what he had done; the father, enraged, threw the boy into an oven. The boy's mother attempted to save him, but the fire was too hot; local townsfolk inquired, and when the fire subsided, they saw the child unharmed as the result of protection from the Virgin and her Child. The boy and his mother converted; the father was thrown into the oven. This story can be traced to the sixth century, and was a popular one in Marian devotion even before it was retold as part of