

Reviews

CHRIST: THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IN THE MODERN WORLD by Edward Schillebeeckx. *SCM*. London, 1980. pp 925 £19.50.

ERRATUM

Misprints seldom seriously mislead the reader but they need to be corrected when they reverse the intended meaning! In the review of Edward Schillebeeckx's *Christ* in our March issue (p 140) the following sentence occurred: "The gulf between him and the neo-Thomist theologians of the Holy Office is due far more to differences in Catholic faith – not that *that* is an easy or innocuous distinction". The sentence should have read as follows: "The gulf between him and the neo-Thomist theologians of the Holy Office is due far more to differences in theological method than to differences in Catholic faith – not that *that* is an easy or innocuous distinction". The point was that, in my view, the differences between Schillebeeckx and his critics are at the level not of *faith* but of *theological expression*. The letter which Fr Schillebeeckx received from the Holy Office (cf *The Tablet* 20/27 December 1980, page 1271) seems to confirm this. His explanations as regards the nine controverted questions about the Virginal Conception, the Resurrection, and so on, have evidently been accepted, while he is asked by Cardinal Franjo Seper to clarify two new points – *scil.* the relationship between revelation and experience and the role of apologetics in theology. The first of those two points is dealt with at great length in *Christ*, in a way that should satisfy critics of the treatment of the question in the first volume (the one delated to the Holy Office).

FERGUS KERR O P

HEBREWS AND HERMENEUTICS. THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS AS A NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION by Graham Hughes, *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 36. Cambridge University Press 1979 pp xii + 218 £7.75.*

The letter to the Hebrews has always been something of a puzzle. Its concept of the Christian life as a pilgrimage has given much stimulus to Christian paraenesis; and

it has made a crucial contribution to christology, particularly in its presentation of Christ as High Priest. But a comprehensive grasp of the epistle's rationale has more

often than not elude commentators – particularly its peculiar tension between Platonic idealism and Palestinian eschatology.

One potentially productive path of inquiry is the epistle's use of the Old Testament. The obvious importance of this aspect of the epistle has attracted a fair amount of attention. But on the whole earlier studies have confined themselves to the mechanics of citation. What we have lacked is a study of Hebrew's hermeneutic, of how the author regards the Jewish scriptures, of his theology of revelation. Graham Hughes, Lecturer in Biblical Studies at the United Theological College in Sydney, has now supplied that lack. His study, a reworking of his doctoral thesis under Professor C. F. D. Moule at Cambridge, succeeds in clarifying the thought and arguments of the writer in a way which greatly illuminates his theological perspective and intention. It is not light reading, but it will repay careful study – a weighty contribution to our understanding of Hebrews and also to the larger science of hermeneutics.

The investigation begins with the prologue (chap. 1), where the issue is at once presented – God's speaking through the Son, which is both the same word as that which came through the ministers of the old covenant, and yet at the same time is the perfected form of that word which renders the old covenant outmoded. Thus the hermeneutical problem is posed – how to understand the relationship between the now outmoded forms and institutions of the Old Testament worship and those of the distinctively new Christian faith which the writer expresses, how to understand the continuity and discontinuity of the Word of God in its different historical forms.

In history the work of God necessarily takes the form of promise (chap. 2). On the one hand this means, since Christ is the final and definitive form of the word, that the remembered life of Jesus becomes for the writer a frame within which and through which to interpret the earlier and more limited forms of the word. In these 'realized eschatology' passages the discontinuity with the old covenant is at its sharpest, and accordingly the Old Testament

text is handled with greater freedom. On the other hand, the writer is conscious that they themselves are still within history, and so are caught in a similar eschatological 'not yet' as those of the old covenant. Consequently in the paraenetic passages where the 'futurist eschatology' emphasis is most prominent the continuity between the old and new covenant is more obvious.

In chapter 3 the christological ramifications of this hermeneutic are explored. In order for the revelation of the word in Jesus to serve as a hermeneutical frame a knowledge of the life of Jesus is theologically indispensable for the author. Hence the presentation of Jesus as pioneer and high priest is thoroughly rooted by the author in the remembered faith and willing sacrifice of Christ – a conclusion which allows at least some historical control on the claims of faith.

The final chapter attempts to set the particular hermeneutic of Hebrews within the wider and modern debate on hermeneutics. The axiomatic assertion of the priority of God's speaking implies that a Christian hermeneutic can only be a hermeneutic of faith. Faith seeks primarily not what the text of scripture *meant*, but what it *means*. This meaning will be partly determined by the frame of reference provided by the interpreter's own situation. 'Modern man' cannot be allowed to determine what is believable, but he does provide *horizons* for Christian meaningfulness.

Dr Hughes has demonstrated his thesis – Hebrews is the first Christian document to attempt to develop a coherent hermeneutic. This is a major achievement, accomplished with skill and perception, and evincing a mastery of the text and of the secondary literature. Apart from a feeling that he has not done enough justice to the Philonic-type background of the writer, my only major misgivings focus on the loose ends left in the final chapter. He argues, for example, that the critical historical method functions only to determine what meanings are *excluded* when we now ask after the present meaning of a text. But a theological hermeneutic must surely operate within the control of a more posit-

ive continuity between originally intended meaning and present meaning, if the New Testament is properly to be regarded as the fulfilment of the Old. And while I recognize the attractiveness of his theoretical model with his talk of 'frames', 'screens' and 'horizons', I am not sure how it helps us resolve various crucial hermeneutical questions: e.g. is an interpretation of Jesus' resurrection in terms solely of 'the rise of Easter faith' excluded by a historical critical analysis of the texts or does it lie within the bounds of legitimate

present meaning? And does the world's 'horizon of meaningfulness' exclude a concept of miracle or of the devil? It would be unfair to press these points. It is only Dr Hughes' willingness to attempt to relate his exegetical findings to much wider theological issues which leaves him vulnerable to such criticism. The attempt to show Hebrews' continued relevance in this whole area is much more valuable than the loose ends such a necessarily brief attempt can hardly avoid leaving.

JAMES D G DUNN

THE DIALOGUE: CATHERINE OF SIENA. Translated and introduced by Suzanne Noffke O P with a Preface by Giuliana Cavallini. *SPCK (Classics of Western Spirituality series)*, London, 1980. pp 398. £7.50.

It is appropriate that the sixth century of the death of St Catherine of Siena (1349-1380) should be marked by the publication of a new English translation of her one book, 'my book' as she called it. Such a translation has long been needed. For one thing, of the only two previous attempts to present this compendium of Catherine's teaching to English-speaking readers, the first dates back to the early fifteenth century and is not now readily comprehensible to most people (Text reprinted in the Early English Texts series, OUP, 1966), while the second, besides being Victorian in tone, is available now only in a somewhat abridged form (paperback reprint of shortened version of Algar Thorold's translation of *The Dialogue* (1896) distributed by Augustine Publishing Company, Devon). Moreover, all previous translations were in effect rendered obsolete by the publication in 1968 of a splendid new Italian edition of *The Dialogue (Il Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza, a cura di Giuliana Cavallini, Edizione Catheriniane, Roma, 1968)*. Though not a critical edition in the strict sense, the text of this edition is based on one of the earliest and most reliable extant manuscripts of Catherine's 'book' and includes a critical apparatus covering the main variants. More importantly, however, the editor has divided the text in a way that almost certainly corresponds to the book's original structure, which seems to have been one

of petition, divine response and thanksgiving, of 'dialogue', in fact, between the soul of Catherine and the person of God the Father. In her preface to the present translation, Cavallini explains how the puzzling earlier division of the book into so-called treatises and chapters came about, and describes how she came to discover the key to its true structure.

A strong recommendation for this new translation is, then, the fact that it is based on the text as edited by Cavallini. But even with the best of texts, the task of translating Catherine's vigorous and at times idiosyncratic use of her lovely fourteenth century Italian remains a formidable one. One does not have to read very far to discover that her logic 'follows a relentless pattern of "layering" in which she restates her arguments frequently, but almost always with the addition and integration of new elements' to such an extent that 'even seemingly incompatible metaphors become inextricably joined'. (Introduction, p 15). Moreover, the very concept of an extended 'question and answer' dialogue between God and a human soul is so strange that one wants to ask how Catherine came to conceive her book in that form. Dr Noffke does not discuss this question directly, but she surely adumbrates part of the answer when she quotes from a seminal paper on the composition of *The Dialogue* in which the late Professor Dupré Thesider showed that, for Catherine,