

ASCENT TO THE ABSOLUTE: METAPHYSICAL PAPERS AND LECTURES, by J. N. Findlay. *Allen and Unwin*, London, 1970, 271 pp. £3.00.

To a reviewer who was brought up in the afterglow of Anglo-Hegelianism, the title of this book has a definitely nostalgic quality. To be sure, for at least a generation 'Absolute' has been virtually a bad word, not to be uttered in respectable academic circles. But now one may ask whether the shades of Bradley and his contemporaries are coming back among us.

Findlay does like to stress the differences between himself and the Anglo-Hegelians of an earlier time. His earlier book on Hegel did indeed give a more faithful interpretation of that great philosopher than did most of his English disciples. Findlay's strength lies in the fact that he has gone through the analytic phase, so that when he turns to speculative questions he does not lose himself in some cloudy heights but keeps in touch with distinctions, definitions, alternatives. In this, he believes that he is keeping close to Hegel, though the intellectual disciplines of Husserl are also in evidence. Yet in spite of the differences, many things in Findlay's philosophy recall the Anglo-Hegelians. For instance, on pages 110-11 we meet something very like Bradley's doctrine of the degrees of truth, when Findlay writes: 'Truth in the ordinary acceptance is an all-or-none affair; it either hits its relatively broad target or misses it. But truth to the appearances, to the matter before us, to what we encounter in experience and thought, is an infinitely graded matter.'

Since the book consists of a collection of papers, it is inevitably repetitious, while some of the pieces seem to be only loosely related to the main theme. That main theme is metaphysics—and Findlay declares without blushing that it is a full-blooded revisionary metaphysics that interests him, not a merely descriptive one, to use Strawson's terminology. The metaphysical task is described in various ways throughout the book. Among other things, it involves 'a profound sinking of our mind in the sense of words, an examination of this sense

from wonted and unwonted angles, an attrition of case upon case, a giving heed to questions, protests and promptings not normally felt, a descent into minutiae that ordinarily escape notice and an ascent to generalities not ordinarily hazarded . . .' (p. 110).

Chiefly, the book is concerned with the ascent to the idea of the Absolute. Its most valuable feature is its examination of the logic of an Absolute. What must be the formal structure of an Absolute? According to Findlay, an Absolute to which a cosmos of finite entities is necessary is more of an Absolute than one that could exist apart from such a cosmos. (Of course, Bradley's Absolute too was nothing apart from its appearances.) It is also asserted that an Absolute must have contingent and non-essential features as well as essential ones.

The theological implications of Findlay's reflections are obvious. His discussion of the qualities of an Absolute (p. 178) reminds one of theological meditation on the attributes of God. Is the Absolute God? Findlay raises this question on page 73. The suggestion is that although God has been conceived in various ways in different religions, the term might best be reserved for the Absolute. A weakness of Findlay's book, however, is his lack of acquaintance with theology. At least, he gives no evidence of such acquaintance, alluding from time to time to 'orthodox theology' and 'Semitic-Christian religion' without once following his own recipe of descending into the minutiae and discussing the position of some specific theologians. His allusions to the Eastern religions have more substance, but are also too general.

Nevertheless, this is an important and even a courageous book. Its author has made clear not only that philosophy has not entirely forsaken the ancient questions but that it can still bring power and illumination to their consideration.

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ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, edited by Johannes B. Bauer. *Sheed and Ward*, London and Sydney, 1970. 3 volumes, 1141 pp. £15.

The original German edition of this work appeared in 1959 and was so widely acclaimed that in less than a decade two much-revised and enlarged editions were published; the English edition is a translation of the third

edition published in 1967. The *Encyclopedia's* 209 articles cover the main themes of Biblical Theology, as well as many less important topics. The work of many of the German, Austrian, Swiss and French Roman Catholic