

erudition I find staggering. I have found only two slips: 'the *Cloud* appears regularly (one writes to *The Times*), and on 16 there is mention of an attitude 'which sat lightly by [?'set little store by'] the common prayers of the church'.

Rosemary Dorward is to be congratulated on producing so smoothly running a text. What she tells us about collations of the manuscripts makes clear that no substantive issues are involved. I have left Professor Janel Mueller's Preface of ten pages to the last because it raises the question on which I want to end. Her central theme is that Hilton's 'ecumenism' is a model which we can use today, especially as regards his 'biblicism'. Doubtless she would say, in reply to objections about Hilton's insistence on hell-fire for the unorthodox, that it was a matter of course for his time. Her writing is so close-packed that it is hard to follow, and she has occasion to refer to 'the space available to me'. The question which I want to ask is whether the fine book here under review might have been still more useful if *The Scale* had been shortened by the omission of repetitions and blemishes (Hilton, usually so gentle, lapses occasionally into denunciations). There would have been room then for a longer Preface and for extracts from Hilton's other writings, at times as good as anything in *The Scale*, even perhaps for more estimates of Hilton made by writers of our time. I am emboldened to mention my abridgement and presentation of *The Scale* (London, 1975), in which I include nearly all of *Scale 2* and only about a quarter of *Scale 1*, by a kindly reference to it in the Select Bibliography.

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THE MEANINGS OF DEATH by John Bowker. *Cambridge University Press*. 1991. Pp. xii + 242. £16.95.

John Bowker delves into that territory 'from which no traveller returns'. It is a topic on which an ambivalent Wittgenstianian silence often pervades contemporary writings. Too often in theology, an awkward gap exists between pastoral and academic theological literature on death and dying. Bowker tries to build a bridge between the latter and the former, and also one between secular/scientific and religious attitudes to death. I am not entirely convinced that he succeeds in either of these two tasks, but the book is always readable, intelligent, well informed and sometimes moving.

Bowker's thesis is this. There is a commonly held

presupposition deriving primarily from Marx and Freud that religions provide illusory scenarios of life after death to detract from harsh realities. For Marx the illusion subverts protest and change of the structures of hell here on earth for the oppressed. For Freud, heaven resolves the struggle between Eros and Thanatos in favour of the loser, thereby constantly subverting redeeming self knowledge. For both, in different ways, Christianity and Judaism (rather than 'religions' as Bowker often implies) mask the reality of death, and use it as part of the Lodgian game of snakes and ladders to control, threaten, bribe and thrill. This view of the origins of religion is tackled head on by Bowker and dispelled with the sheer weight of substantial evidence from the religions (chapters 2–6), and from archaeology and anthropology which of course is unable to properly answer (either way) the question of the origins of religion. It is not clear as to why he does not draw on sociological writings which bear upon the question of the origins and role of religions, especially as he could find support for his thesis here. Weber, for example, can certainly be seen to emphasise the this worldly concerns of religion and be read as a partial refutation of Marx.

In the main body of the book Bowker's investigation into parts of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist traditions shows that there is immense variety and difference within and between these religions and much that qualifies for Marxist and Freudian reproach. But he also notes that (with exceptions) in much of the earliest materials death was regarded as something to be postponed for as long as possible, since there is nothing after death to which one might look forward as a place of compensation or bliss. As Bowker puts it, 'For our ancestors, there was definitely no future in dying.' (30). Both Marx and Freud were wrong here.

Bowker also shows that within all the traditions the relation between sacrifice and death is profound, although construed in various ways. Bowker treats the traditions in a manner which respects the radical differences within them and sometimes the chapters are quite dense and would prove difficult for someone with no prior knowledge of the tradition being discussed. There are also some curious judgments. For example, in the section on Hinduism he begins with the *Gita*, and then, reversing the chronology, contrasts its outlook with that of the *Vedas*. It would have been easier for the reader to understand the relationship of the *Upanishads* to both had he treated the material chronologically. He also incorrectly claims that Zaehner follows Sankara's

interpretation of the *Gīta* and that *ahimsa* is a fundamental virtue and demand of Hinduism. After completing this inspection, which is not entirely restricted to the five traditions (as he is sensitive to the complex causal relations between the main five and other more minor or not practiced religions), Bowker brings the materials together in a concluding chapter.

While acknowledging substantial differences and important conflicting claims, Bowker summarises his findings. 'First, that there is about us that which continues consequentially through the process of time'; and second, while death may be regarded as an intrusion and sometimes as punishment, 'it is nevertheless also necessary as a means to life. It was, as we have seen, supremely through the category and actions of sacrifice that both [eastern and western] traditions originally explored and expressed that truth.' (211). This is when Bowker turns to biology and physics to show that the same basic insights are present: 'it is not possible to have life on any other terms than those of death; but where you do have death, there immediately you have the possibility of life.' (220) Hence there is a convergence between religious and secular views which should give a basis for a wider pastoral care.

Three comments. First, I do not think that this minimalist commonality will take us very far. It can only do so with the flesh and bones with which each religion forges these insights and upon which some take solace in dying. But precisely this specificity and rashness is denied to the traditions by Bowker, rendering much profundity which he has so carefully inspected into a slightly anaemic secularised conclusion. It is also a conclusion that loses sight of the dissonance he mentions earlier in the book. Second, Bowker does not really address (as is claimed) the complex pastoral issues raised by the study. Third, it is curious that Bowker does not include comment on John Hick's masterly study *Death and Eternal Life*. While very different in style, there are similarities in purpose and in a demythologising tendency. But I should end on a positive note, for Bowker's study is very important in bringing together such a wealth of information and insight with a courageous Tielhardian vision.

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