

involves a contradiction may well fail to convince his opponents. He claims that deity and humanity are 'open' concepts, which have not been shown to be incompatible with each other. But critics like Hick are troubled by the thought that if Jesus Christ was both God and man, he must have been both omniscient and limited in his knowledge—which is a contradiction. One obvious way of trying to evade this difficulty is by appealing to the idea of *kenosis*. Owen, however, specifically rules out this solution (p. 41) and insists that Christ's divine attributes were not changed, suppressed or abandoned; but in a footnote he allows that "The Incarnation was an act of divine self-limitation in the sense that God restricted the effects of his divine attributes on his human nature so that the finite integrity of the latter might be preserved" (p. 50). In the absence of further explanation, this remark simply slithers over the problem. Despite these inadequacies, I found Owen's book an impressive one on the whole. It is a brief and intelligent defence of main-line Christian belief and, as such, it will be useful to many categories of people.

PATRICK SHERRY

**ETERNAL LIFE?** by Hans Küng. Translated by Edward Quinn. Collins, London, 1984. Pp. 327. £9.95.

The earlier instalments of his trilogy, *On Being a Christian* and *Does God Exist?*, often limped; Küng's *Eternal Life* jogs along at a fair pace. No doubt the audience deserves some credit there, for these are lectures addressed to students in general studies at Tübingen in 1981. So the interest is correspondingly broad and the oral style favours neat summaries to mark the progress of the argument.

Question marks readily attach themselves to Küng's titles. Here questions proliferate; many are provocatively posed and might serve as useful discussion starters for adult inquirers. All the same, English readers may sometimes find references to German literature heavy and unfamiliar—the author comes from Switzerland, that land of clinics, and teaches in Germany, a country where philosophers have taken death as seriously as the poets—but much survives the journey across the cultural divide, felicitously conveyed by the translator: What relevance to belief in eternal life have the experiences of those who have been resuscitated after clinical death? Is consciousness and knowledge of God any more than self-consciousness or self-knowledge? Is not the humanist's denial as suspect of being a projection as the believer's affirmation of eternal life? Can the apparently conflicting beliefs of Buddhist and Christian be reconciled through the *via negativa*? Will reincarnation do justice to the relation of creature to Creator? The range is great, but from this initial questioning on death as the horizon of life the alternatives that emerge are clear: dissolution or eternal life, a cycle of repetition or finality achieved, if not by rebirth, through an irrevocable option.

The argument turns to the substance of the Christian hope. One may not be able to refute someone who says: "Death is the end of everything. I die like all the animals, and nothing comes after" (p. 102). But the counter-affirmation is equally possible and irrefutable: there is a well-founded, not provable, belief that transcends the horizon of our ambiguous experience, an option for God as end and ground, 'a reasonable trust'. In the New Testament that option is focussed upon the person of Jesus risen from the dead, not on a resurrection event, though that event, if outside history, is real enough for Küng. And if he regards the Gospel accounts of the empty tomb and the Easter appearances as secondary, still he takes to be primary the witness there to Jesus alive and not, as he is careful to say, just to the vitality of the mission. Christian hope is presented, then, as a radicalizing of belief in God in the face of the final test of death, a confirmation of belief in Christ's way through death and a daily struggle to take the side of life over against death. While diabolic evil is imprinted on the German memory as a fact of twentieth-century history, the eternity of Hell, even as a condition made by the refusal of love, has lost its credibility for many Germans—83% of Protestants, 59% of

Catholics, we are told (p. 173)—and, strangely, Purgatory, here plausibly described as an aspect of encounter with God, for even more.

Finally, in spelling out the consequences, the author brings us back to present concerns. He makes a plea for a medical ethic informed by a Christian sense of humanity, sickness and therapy, allowing death with dignity but rejecting euthanasia. He conjures up a new way of living, responding to Marcuse's dreams of the '60s and the current policies of the Green Party: not Heaven on earth but out of a belief in what is ultimate, stripping away illusions about the self, an initiative of freedom to make the earth more human and habitable. Heine may say "The heavens we can safely leave / To the angels and the sparrows", but Küng finally holds to a solid correlate to those biblical metaphors of hope that speak of justice, freedom, love and salvation, in a word 'eternal life', and to a Hell that imposes no limits on the mercy of the God who wills all to be saved.

OSMUND LEWRY OP

**INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT** by **Werner H. Schmidt**, *SCM*, London 1984, pp. xi + 368, (limp) £10.50

This introduction is based on the premise that the once agreed consensus concerning the origins and institutions of ancient Israel can no longer be accepted. The theories of those Germanic giants von Rad, Noth and Alt which established the framework against which the Old Testament material was to be interpreted have given way not to new theories but uncertainty. Indeed it has become increasingly difficult to say anything of Israel's theology before the late monarchic/exilic period. Old Testament scholarship, once broadly united, is now deeply divided: 'What previously seemed more or less obvious and indisputable has become doubtful'.

Schmidt's Introduction does not however make a complete break with past scholarship. Indeed he acknowledges as its precursor Johannes Meinhold's *Einführung in das Alte Testament* (1919, 1932<sup>3</sup>), though he orders his material differently. While Meinhold structured his work on historical lines, Schmidt largely falls back on the Biblical order, claiming that dating the material is now too uncertain to justify any other method. So he groups the material in three sections, the Pentateuch and Historical books, the Prophets (in chronological order) and Liturgical and Sapiential Poetry.

Noting that an *Einführung* must be made up of three thematic areas: (i) 'history of Israel'; (ii) literary criticism; and (iii) 'Old Testament theology', Schmidt begins his book with a survey of the Old Testament and its history, including a chapter on aspects of social history. He recognizes that his treatment of the issues raised by current scholarship inevitably results in a certain subjectivity: this is a risk that cannot be avoided. While articulating the complexities of current criticism, which asks more questions than supplies sure answers, Schmidt gives emphasis to majority views which he attempts to justify. The result is a very readable treatment of contemporary Old Testament scholarship whose translation into English only five years after its original publication is much to be welcomed.

Since it is always a minority who seek to change established positions, Schmidt's adherence to majority views gives his Introduction a conservative stance. But this is right in a book which will be widely used by students. It is particularly to be seen in the author's maintenance of the Pentateuchal sources J and E with their traditional dating. Indeed Schmidt believes that the classical Pentateuchal source theory will continue to hold the field despite sceptical predictions to the contrary. Yet while it would seem premature to surrender all the sources to a late monarchic/exilic/post-exilic date, for the present reviewer doubts still exist about the meaningfulness of the traditional designation of an E source, while the theological creativity of the so-called Proto-Deuteronomists needs greater consideration. Yet for all its uncertainties, Schmidt rightly defends literary criticism as not only a worthwhile exercise but a necessary one if