

Barth takes his stand on the *homoousion* in proclaiming an 'interactionist' God, distinct but not distant, free to be himself in revelation. Through the Son and in the Holy Spirit knowledge of God through *internal* relations is possible, which is impossible in terms of the external relations of the Latin heresy, where attempts to overcome the problem, whether Catholic, Protestant, liberal or fundamentalist are doomed to failure. (It is interesting here to reflect on the similarities as well as the differences in Tillich's attempt to show knowledge of God to be possible in terms of internal relations which, however, embrace the created order panentheistically rather than being extended to humanity miraculously.)

This chapter sheds light retrospectively on the recurrent theme of Barth's attempts to liberate theology from the shackles of alien preconceptions in philosophy or natural theology—'We can never think of going behind the back of Jesus Christ in order to know God', else revelation is domesticated and subordinated to human ideas instead of being allowed to shatter them.

Yet the account given of revelation, especially in the chapter, 'Theologian of the Word', remains problematic in respect of the revelatory value ascribed to Scripture. Despite disclaimers (e.g. 'there is no hypostatic union between the Word of God and the word of man in the Bible' p.91), the explicit parallels drawn between God the Word actively revealed in Christ and in Holy Scripture amount to a virtual doctrine of 'enbibliation' alongside the doctrine of incarnation. With the Bible almost elevated to be co-redemptrix alongside Christ, (analogous to the Virgin Mary in some traditions), the Trinity almost becomes a quaternity. If Scripture was not ascribed such an exalted position in relation to the person to whom it witnesses, a way out of Barthian exclusivism might be found without sacrificing his Christological foundations. At the same time, the idea of the Holy Spirit as 'the freedom of God to be present to the creature' (p.180) might gain more substance than Barthian constraints allow.

Whether one shares Torrance's enthusiasm for Barth or not, he has provided not only an invaluable guide to the theology of two profound and influential Christian thinkers, but a challenging account of what Christian faith means.

TREVOR WILLIAMS

**THE NONCONFORMISTS: IN SEARCH OF A LOST CULTURE**, by James Munson. *SPCK*, 1991. pp viii + 360, £17.50.

James Munson subtitles his study of the last great days of Nonconformity: 'in search of a lost culture'. His aim 'is to show the influence which Nonconformity had on English society, literature, education, religion and politics -the culture behind the phrase, the Nonconformist Conscience'. He has even claimed (in *The Guardian*, 5 August 1991) that Nonconformity 'decried and despised as narrow-minded and provincial, has had a lasting effect denied both to

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Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral', but this sounds like the kind of statement which Nonconformists were prone to make about themselves circa 1900 and should not be taken too seriously. Moreover, by 'Nonconformists' Munson means chiefly the Baptists and Congregationalists, whose sense of being a religious minority persecuted for conscience's sake had allegedly given them a keener sense of social justice than that of the Wesleyan Methodists, whom he correctly sees as displaced Establishment-men anxious to recover a lost standing. He is also wise to ignore Professor John Bossy's provocative suggestion that English Roman Catholics should be counted as part of a wider 'Nonconformity': Newman's *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* was written to deny that English Catholics were in any sense socially 'unsound'; their sense of being 'in', not 'out' of the mainstream culture explains why there was never any question of upper-class Catholics agreeing to a 'Catholic university' instead of Oxford or Cambridge. Less acceptable is Munson's virtual omission of the Quakers and Unitarians, without whom one could hardly hope to find a 'lost culture' which could be called 'nonconformist'. But Dr Munson's study began as an essay and then a thesis on the Free Church opposition to the Education Act of 1902, and his attempt to widen it out is not altogether successful.

Has Dr Munson rediscovered a lost culture? No doubt there was one, but I doubt if he has entirely identified it. There was more than 'conscience' at the core of the Free Church sub-culture. Munson's account of Parnell's fall, the *locus classicus* of the Conscience *per se*, is politically acute, but nevertheless, this demand for 'purity' in politicians was always selective. In reality, late nineteenth-century Nonconformist political parsons were tempted into exploiting a temporary political advantage—their weight in the Liberal Party—to try to impose their provincial view of politics and their particular idea of respectability on English society as a whole. There is nothing surprising in this: American historians are familiar with the way in which, at much the same period, American Protestantism tried to impose an 'unofficial establishment', despite the 'wall of separation between church and state' allegedly built into the American constitution. Echt-Nonconformists will never forget and rarely forgive the fact that three of the most sophisticated minds of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, rejected the 'lost culture': it is, after all, a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Wellers, and to have a superior 'conscience' was one reply.

Indeed, Dr Munson, though full of useful information and shrewd comment, makes less of the Nonconformist sub-culture than he might have done. After all, he is describing the critical years in the modern development of Nonconformity, the years in which there was a fierce struggle between the obtrusive, self-approving ministry and its well-to-do supporters, on the one hand, and a younger generation of lay people who really wanted to open the 'lost culture' to a wider world. 'All over England', I once wrote in an essay which was denounced as a betrayal of the good old cause, 'the Nonconformist sub-culture became a place

where young men and women, sickened by the new industrial society which was forming, turned for inspiration to Blatchford, Morris, Tolstoy and many others. The Brotherhood movement, the *Clarion* and its cycling clubs, the Independent Labour Party were some of the organisations in which one may find the traces of a stifled nonconformist revolution or renaissance; and in that stifling orthodox nonconformity played a part.' (*Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*, ed. D. Baker, 1977, p 360) The creative elements in the Free Churches withdrew, and that was why one had quite quickly to speak of a 'lost culture'. There were directly religious reasons as well. In Arnold Bennett's tragic novel, *Anna of the Five Towns*, Anna, who symbolises the desire for an alternative culture, is told by Mynors, the pottery manufacturer who marries her for her money, that she has expected too much of Nonconformist revivalism: 'we cannot promise you any sudden change of feeling, any sudden relief and certainty, such as some people experience; at least I never had it'. Bennett understood, what the political parsons never admitted, that Nonconformity would not survive on a self-serving political programme backed up by appeals to conscience. In politics one has to be speaking for a definite constituency, and by 1900 the chapel sub-culture was already too weak to provide what was needed. The Education Act of 1902, whose story Dr Munson describes very thoroughly, exposed that weakness; the ecumenical movement was to show how little trust the Free Churches placed in their own religious tradition.

JOHN KENT

**THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS** by M. Keeling, *T.&T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1990.*

This book, by the Dean of the Faculty of Divinity at St. Andrews University, opens with a challenging chapter on the context of Christian ethics in our time. He provides a stimulating survey of theological thought from the social Gospel movement in the late 19th century in the United States and in Europe to the recent emergence of theologies of liberation. What does Christian ethics mean in the midst of a world marred by social sin? Has there been an undue emphasis on personal salvation to the neglect of the social dimension of Christianity? Is not the eschatological hope of the Kingdom to be realised in our world? Does the Gospel not demand action to change society? These are the questions raised as the book begins.

The rest of the book surveys the Scriptures, the history of the Church until the erosion of the common theological perspective on life in the 17th century, the forces which challenged that perspective, and finally the anthropological vision and moral orientation needed to incarnate the Kingdom in the world of tomorrow. A justification for the historical, philosophical and theological selections made and an indication of their intended contribution would have helped the reader to