

book reviews

GOD. By Charles Moeller. Staten Island: Alba House, 1968. 141 pp. \$2.95.

GOD UP THERE? A Study in Divine Transcendence. By David Cairns. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. 111 pp. \$2.95.

GOD THE CREATOR: On the Transcendence and Presence of God. By Robert C. Neville. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 320 pp. \$8.50.

One good result of the "death of God" movement is the spate of new books which deal unashamedly, and even with some urgent enthusiasm, about the existence and nature of God. The three books I have at hand treat of the subject matter analyzed by Thomas Aquinas in the First Part of his *Summa Theologica*.

Neville uses a purely philosophical approach to transcendence and immanence ("presence" is his well-chosen word) of God. He considers the problem on the metaphysical level. He constructs a metaphysics of creation in a Platonic-Augustinian framework; from within this system he criticizes the work of Aquinas, Tillich, Hegel, Royce, Hartshorne, and Weiss. He then argues epistemologically to the need for a metaphysics of creation. Finally, he applies all this to religion. He insists that this final phase is not theology, but rather a philosophy of religion; comparison of his book with those of Moeller and Cairns will quickly convince the reader that Neville has indeed avoided entering the more exciting arena of theology. He applies his metaphysics only to Judaeo-Christianity, but suggests that he could do the same with other religions.

David Cairns' little book is exciting because it is an attempt at vital dialogue with other contemporary theologians. He explicitly shuns a discussion of Bonhoeffer because the latter is no longer alive to defend himself and Cairns thinks (and I agree) that there is no available consensus concerning the true thought of Bonhoeffer. Rather Cairns tries

to explicate and challenge such men as John A. T. Robinson, Werner Pelz, Paul Tillich (who has his disciples to defend his thought), Gregor Smith, Edward Farley, Kenneth Hamilton, Paul van Buren, Eric Mascall, and others. Cairns tends to follow the theologizing of Emil Brunner. He is opposed to those who want to cure the illness of modern theological uncertainty by a turn to natural theology. He says that the transcendence of God is encountered in revelation and it should not be inserted into some philosophical system; transcendence loses its over-againstness in such a process. Cairns also objects that we really have no direct access to being, and so we should not get involved in natural theology.

Charles Moeller has written the first volume of the new three-volume series *Modern Mentality and Evangelization* (subsequent volumes are concerned with "The Church" and "Christ and the Virgin Mary"). The thrust of this series is to be catechetical. In this little book about God Moeller investigates the phenomenon of God in today's literature; of course, much of this study is concerned with atheism. From this sociological consideration he moves to a section on the God of the philosophers. He argues for the necessity of a metaphysics of God, but he adroitly tempers this so as to make it a real possibility in catechetics. He is as much concerned to avoid inaccurate and misleading philosophical notions about God as he is to develop some possible arguments for the existence of God. He counsels catechists not to use the classical Thomistic proofs unless the catechist himself fully appreciates the metaphysical subtleties involved. A wrong understanding of some of these proofs can lead to making God something of a child's hero who is available to prevent all sorts of evils. But Moeller's caution is not cowardice; he insists that we need a metaphysical basis in order to discuss God. I think that a significant insight in his work is that the lives of saints and mystics point to God; we must have recourse, in his words, to the "*fact of sanctity*." The final section of Moeller's book is about God's self-revelation. This, I think, is what finally makes his book valuable. I would disagree with some of his exegetical principles (e.g., it is too simplistic to solve the problem of the creation accounts in Genesis by merely asserting that the two accounts should be examined side-by-side, and then holding as revealed only what is found in both versions), but he has other ideas worthy of being put into practice (e.g., the doctrine of original sin should be taught from the perspective of Christ rather than from that of Adam; Christianity is not a religion about sin, but about the remission of sin).

I think that Catholic theologians today have an opportunity to adopt a new approach to the God-problem. We feel the urge to respond to contemporary denials of the God Who is at once transcendent and immanent, but we have no desire to return to the apologetics on which we were reared. We sense that our world will not accept a metaphysical approach to God, and yet the constant tradition of the Church is in

terms of such a metaphysics. I think that our response today must be to preach the self-revealing God as He is found in the Scriptures, and to practice what we preach. The atmosphere of our time is charged with invitations to believe in (or to deny) God. Rather than be pre-occupied with formulating arguments, we must live the Good News and preach it. People today are moved by the convictions and commitments of their fellowmen. Our lives should witness to our belief that Jesus is indeed the fullest revelation of the Father.

Some object that we have no direct access to being; in faith we achieve communion with Being. I think that we certainly do constrict Being when we place it within a metaphysical system; no human science can adequately embrace God. But this inadequacy is no excuse for rejecting a metaphysics about God; natural theology and "pure" theology are impossible without metaphysics. We need metaphysics, but we must also remember that it is the proclamation of the Good News about Jesus (not a metaphysics about the transcendent God) which will move our neighbors to believe and love.

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EVOLUTION AND THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN. By Stephanus Trooster, S.J. Glen Rock. Newman Press. 1968. 138 pp. \$4.95.

What are we to do when our secular knowledge gives us one picture of the world and our religious knowledge gives us a contradictory one? We can sequester the two pictures in different corners of our mind, but that is not satisfactory for long. We can hold fast to the traditional formulations, come what may, or we can let our science dictate our theology; but these are both simplistic approaches. Some kind of reconciliation must be attempted.

Dutch theologians are currently trying to reconcile the evolutionary world-view and our traditional notions of original sin. Doctor Trooster gives us a résumé of how the discussion has gone thus far and makes a few suggestions of his own. In particular, he stands somewhere between his mentor, Piet Schoonenberg, who is very conscious of the tradition, and Hulsbosch, whose theology is more philosophical. Trooster cannot accept the traditional picture of a superhuman Adam in paradise nor can he equate Adam with Everyman or reduce original sin to cosmic immaturity.

He does assert, however, that a more accurate reading of the Scriptures will give us an understanding of original sin more in keeping with the modern world-view (and within the limits defined by the Council of Trent). The Scriptural account of Adam in the Garden was meant more as theology than history and should be read as such. It is "pro-