

- 4 Throughout his life Newman showed incredible skill in using these forms of argument, and indeed used them with such ease that (unlike in the case of most of the text-book theologians of the period) they are hardly visible within his prose. If proof of his familiarity with these precise procedures be needed we need only look at R. Whatley's *Elements of Logic* (London 1831 [I have a preference for the fourth revised ed.]) where Conditionals and Modal Conditionals are treated together in Bk 2, chs 1-3 (pp. 95-101); see p. ix of this work for the famous tribute to Newman's contribution to its production; it should be noted that in these pages, for the first time, we see that language on the illative force of conditionals that is so characteristic of Newman's thought for the rest of his life
- 5 I take this as a hendiadys for the patristic notion of *theosebeia*; cf. T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh 1988) pp 17-18 for a convenient description of the notion.
- 6 Cf. A.A. Cayré, *La contemplation augustinienne* (Paris 1954), ch. 8.
- 7 This is the *Vetus latina* reading.
- 8 The repetition of the basic identification of the task; of the theologian with the activity of Mary is found in the phrase: "And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also."

Reviews

IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE? By Hugo A. Meynell. London, *Geoffrey Chapman*, 1994. x + 149 pp.

The question which forms the title of this book is one that today we are often told not to ask. The narratives of the Bible and the utterances of Christian teachers from the apostle Paul down to (but not, apparently, including) those who issue these prohibitions are true or false, allegedly, only in the same way as novels and lyric poetry; to ask if they are true in any other way is to miss their point and, indeed, to betray a soul religion has never managed to touch. Not the least merit of Professor Meynell's book is that it calls this view sharply in question. Meynell argues that every religion involves some beliefs about what, as a matter of fact, is, has been or will be the case. Even those doctrinal minimalists the Theravada Buddhists must suppose that individuals really are reincarnated (p. 38). He allows legitimacy to the notion of what he calls 'profound' truth: a statement is profoundly true, in his sense, if it enhances the lives of those who meditate on it and gives them peace and fortitude (pp. 37, 42). But there is another sort of truth that attaches, or fails to attach, to news-reports and the utterances of witnesses in court; and he insists that Christians have always assigned this 'literal' truth (p. 42) at least to the propositions that a personal God exists, that Jesus

Christ was both divine and human, and that there is a life after death.

On this issue I myself side firmly with Meynell, and it seems to me that within the rather tight limits of a short book addressed to the general reader he makes a good job of arguing that it is not irrational to maintain that these propositions are actually true. In the Introduction he runs over some traditional grounds for holding that the universe depends on a personal principle, and sketches replies to counter-arguments. Here, as elsewhere, his writing is clear, crisp and honest. In Chapter 2, 'On Christianity and the religions', he identifies characteristics of prophetic religions, typified by Islam, mystical religions, typified by Hinduism, and 'lower' religions which typically have a hero that gets killed and eaten; and he then (p 47) formulates an admirable account of what the claim that 'Christianity is the uniquely true religion' amounts to. It implies '(a) that there are in Christianity . . . elements satisfying the points of view expressed in prophetic, mystical and "lower" religions; (b) that its "story" (i.e. the New Testament story) is on the whole a matter of historical fact.' Chapter 4 contains Meynell's reasons for accepting (b), and in particular for accepting that 'Jesus' character, self consciousness and manner of speaking have on the whole been preserved for us by the four gospels' (p. 66). He does not offer any arguments of his own against those who impugn the historical reliability of the Gospels, but he points readers towards plenty of books where such arguments may be found. In Chapter 5 he addresses the doctrine of the Trinity and outlines the traditional theory that the Son is the Father's conception of himself and the Spirit 'love evinced in accordance with this conception' (p. 99). I do not think that this theory can satisfy otherwise sympathetic critics of Christian belief who find the idea of three persons in one God deeply incomprehensible; but something needs to be said if the doctrine that Christ was the Son of God is not to be left hanging in the air, and Meynell's Augustinian account is at least highly orthodox. He takes a less well trodden path in his last chapter, 'Life after death', where he goes at some length through recent empirical evidence for the temporal existence after death of something answering to a Platonic conception of the soul.

In an appendix Meynell tries to answer an unnamed philosopher who accuses him of 'the fallacy of affirming the consequent'. He seems not quite sure what his critic means; I suspect it is that he fails to distinguish between arguing that there are no good reasons for thinking Christianity false, and arguing that there are some good reasons for thinking it true. It must be conceded that the book is stronger on the first point than the second. Nevertheless it will be found both welcome and enjoyable by those readers—and among Catholics of my generation they are not few—who were taught at school to seek rational defences of a lot of difficult doctrinal positions, and now seem to have been abandoned in them by professional theologians. Their chief complaint will that *Is Christianity True?* is not longer; if I add a couple of further queries it is not to dissociate myself from them.

First, Meynell may not have been well advised to give prominence in

his first chapter (pp. 21–32) to the Euthyphro problem. This is not usually given as a barrier to Christian belief, and although beginners at philosophy sometimes say 'If what God commands is commanded because it is right and not right because it commanded, then there is something superior to God' this reasoning seems to me too weak to be taken seriously. Christians often think that though they may not know whether a particular act is right or wrong, God does, and accompany this reasonable belief with an ultimately unsatisfactory idea of what God's knowledge of such matters is like: they may unconsciously model it on a speaker's knowledge of what he has commanded. But it could equally be modelled on wise general's or doctor's knowledge of what ought to be commanded. The issue seems peripheral to the truth of Christianity, and the space saved by ignoring it could have been used later to say something about the miracles in the New Testament, which modern readers do sometimes find off-putting.

Secondly, I wish Meynell were less deferential to the feminists. His unremitting use of 'she' and 'her' where traditional English calls for 'he' and 'his' suggests that only women concern themselves with religion. And just as we are learning to discount this suggestion we discover he has reserved the masculine gender for examples of evil and vice. Apart from actual people with names, the only male human being in the book is 'an irascible and profligate father who makes the life of his wife and children a misery' (p. 15). Among all those females embraced by 'she' and 'her', is there none that nags or is unfaithful?

WILLIAM CHARLTON

PASSION FOR THE TRUTH; CATHERINE OF SIENA: SELECTED SPIRITUAL WRITINGS edited by Mary O'Driscoll OP. *New City Press*. Pp. 144. \$8.95

Mary O'Driscoll has issued a selection of Catherine's writings under the title, *Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity*. Catherine's writings were always a mean to an end, the sanctification of the Church in Christ. The writings consist of letters, extended prayers and her only book, which she called simply "my book", but which is now better known as *The Dialogue*. The Dialogue should be read in its entirety as it is a carefully structured work, which has been shown by Giuliana Cavallini to be one continuous narrative, despite the fourfold division of the central section which had caused confusion since its introduction in an edition by Onorio Farri in 1579. The Cavallini edition uses a more basic structure, consisting of petition, answer and thanksgiving which runs through the entire work. There now exists an English Translation by Susan Noffke in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* series published by the Paulist Press. The selections in the O'Driscoll edition come from this translation but are no substitute for reading *The Dialogue* itself. They do show though some of the crucial themes of Catherine's thought. The section entitled *The circle of self knowledge*, gives readings which focus on the fundamental notion of humility in Catherine's thought, a humility which is