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BOOK REVIEWS

The Incarnation: Collected Essays in Christology, by **Brian Hebblethwaite**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. viii and 184. Cloth, \$34.50; Paper \$10.95.

Reviewed by **THOMAS V. MORRIS**, University of Notre Dame.

This book presents a dozen essays on the Incarnation by the Cambridge theologian Brian Hebblethwaite. Nine of them have been published previously in various journals and books. The strength of these papers resides in the strong dose of sound common sense Canon Hebblethwaite brings to a defense of the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation, the central Christian claim that Jesus was and is both human and divine, God Incarnate. They are very clearly written and easily accessible to a theological or philosophical novice. Hebblethwaite writes as a theologian, but as one with philosophical interests and at least a modicum of philosophical skills. On its literary and basic theological merits, the book is a pleasure to read.

But it has two major weaknesses. First, there is a great deal of repetition in exposition and argument across the various papers. This is almost an inevitable consequence of reprinting a number of papers written on the same topic, but originally penned at different times and published in a variety of places. There are two ways of dealing with such a problem. One is to excise repetitions with the editor's pen. The other is to re-do the original pieces in such a way that the same points made in different contexts are enriched or deepened by interaction with the different concerns dominating those contexts. Some of the papers presented here have been expanded a bit, but not enough to mitigate this problem.

The second weakness of the collection is that, for all the remarks in appreciation and defense of metaphysics in christology, the author does very little to even attempt to lay out the metaphysics of God Incarnate. His avoidance of the deeper philosophical issues leaves the level of the resulting book a bit too close to the surface, a bit too superficial in its treatments of the problems.

Chapter one, "Incarnation—the essence of Christianity?," argues that the doctrine of the Incarnation is at the center of traditional Christian faith, and that the sort of christology it defines is preferable to the non-incarnational christologies now dominating the theological scene—views of Jesus according to which his being the Christ amounts to no more than his being an especially inspired and inspiring prophet, a powerful agent of the divine in human history. Hebblethwaite argues here and throughout the collection that the Chalcedonian definition of Christ is not, as critics charge, logically inco-

herent, and that it carries with it a religious and moral value not attainable by its non-incarnational rivals.

Responding to recent claims that the idea of a God-man is like the idea of a square-circle, a conception of the logically impossible, Hebblethwaite protests:

But 'God' and 'man' are far from being such tightly defined concepts. It is difficult enough to suppose that we have a full and adequate grasp of what it is to be a human being. We certainly have no such grasp of the divine nature. Who are we to say that the essence of God is such as to rule out the possibility of his making himself present in the created world as a human being, while in no way ceasing to be the God he ever is? (p. 3)

Although I agree wholeheartedly with the author when he says that "Modern theologians are much too ready to cry 'contradiction'" (3), I am afraid that in this paper, and elsewhere, he dismisses their charge far too easily just on the basis of the slightly agnostic remarks quoted above, along with numerous assurances that the charge of incoherence is 'baseless' (4 and 25). In a later essay (reprinted as chapter six), he acknowledges that he was a bit cavalier in these early papers about the incoherence charge, and that more by way of a "positive defense" (65) is needed, but it is a defense he never satisfactorily provides, or even attempts to provide.

Moreover, in his suggestions in this first essay and elsewhere that the traditional doctrine has a moral and religious value not attainable by any non-incarnational alternative, he is only suggestive, and not sufficiently explicit in developing his points, which turn mainly on the conviction that only by directly entering into human history as a human being can God fully accomplish what Hebblethwaite calls "taking responsibility for the world's evil" (6). A deep implication of the Incarnation for our dealing with the problem of evil has been hinted at by numerous authors, and is felt by many Christians, but exactly what the connection is remains to be spelled out.

Chapter two, "Perichoresis—reflections on the doctrine of the Trinity," emphasizes the importance to Christian faith and thought of the Nicean doctrine of the Trinity, the claim that God is a unity of three persons. Hebblethwaite shows how recognizing an intra-trinitarian life of love given and received has great religious and metaphysical value. Only with such a doctrine is it easy to block an entailment from the nature of God as perfect goodness and love to a necessity of the creation of rational creatures to be recipients of that love.

In chapter three, "Jesus, God incarnate," the author takes a very reasonable stance on the fact of religious pluralism, relating it sensitively yet rather traditionally to the ancient claims of uniqueness for Christ. Here and elsewhere, Hebblethwaite defends the belief that there has been only one incarnation of God by attempting to argue that there *could* be no more than one

divine incarnation, contending that "If God is one, only one man can *be* God Incarnate" (23). But even if we were to suppose that only one person of the Holy Trinity could become incarnate in human nature, the two-minds picture of Christ that Hebblethwaite elsewhere seems to endorse appears to allow the possibility that God the Son take on more than one human body and mind composite if he so chose. Most traditional Christians believe that he *has* not, not that he *can* not.

In chapter four, "The moral and religious value of the Incarnation," Hebblethwaite hammers on the theme that much of great significance is to be lost by abandoning the classical picture of Christ. He suggests that insensitivity to its moral and religious significance can lead to a failure to assess properly the grounds that are available for thinking it true. This essay brings out forcefully the role of the doctrine of the Incarnation in revealing to us the moral and divine status of humility, an extremely important virtue, even arguably a font of all others.

In chapters five and six, "Further remarks on the 'Myth' debate," and "The propriety of the doctrine of the Incarnation as a way of interpreting Christ," Hebblethwaite surveys a good amount of theological literature on the doctrine, providing helpful summaries of positions, and argues both for the coherence and historically legitimate status of the doctrine as the appropriate Christian assessment of the person of Christ.

In chapter seven, "The Church and Christology," and chapter eight, "Christ today and tomorrow," the author explores questions concerning what difference it makes, or ought to make, to one's assessment of Christ if one is a believing member of the Christian church. He contends that theology as a church enterprise may deviate for good reason from the results of a thoroughly secularized "religious studies" approach to evaluating christology, and suggests that it is not necessarily the churchman who is at a disadvantage.

In "The doctrine of the Incarnation in the thought of Austin Farrer," Hebblethwaite explores the occasional writings and sermons on Christ by a philosophical theologian whom he greatly admires, a writer best known for his metaphysical treatise *Finite and Infinite*. In "Contemporary unitarianism," the author is rightfully hard on those contemporary theologians who, in the words of Lord Russell, seem to believe that "there is at most one God" with undue emphasis. There are some good discussions here on method in theology, in particular, on how we decide, and whether we should care "what the evidence demands" (130). The focus is on the epistemology of trinitarian doctrine.

"'True' and 'false' in Christology" defends a correspondence conception of theological truth, re-asserting a realist stance against the many currents of contemporary anti-realism in the theological community. And the final chapter "Further Reflections and responses," attempts to assess the overall theo-

logical importance of the Incarnation debate as well as to reply to critics who have responded to themes in the earlier papers.

Hebblethwaite stands in a tradition of clear, concise and even inviting prose, a tradition long cultivated by numerous British theologians and even some British philosophers. He has provided a book which will help the beginner see certain important aspects of a central theological debate, and which may even assist the expert in appreciating the magnitude of what may be at stake. Despite its faults, it is a book well worth consulting.

The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell, edited by William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. Pp. 269. \$.

KENNETH KONYNDYK, Calvin College.

This *Festschrift* honors Basil Mitchell, for many years Oxford's Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion. The impressive list of contributors attests to the respect and esteem of Mitchell by his colleagues. Mitchell is impressive for the depth of his Christian convictions and for his independence of current intellectual fashion. The latter feature is conspicuous in the piece that was for many of us our first acquaintance with Basil Mitchell—his contribution to the famous and oft-anthologized "University discussion." There he responds to Flew's verificationist challenge, not by giving up or revising his Christian beliefs, nor by adopting a noncognitivist view of Christian belief, nor by proposing a new theory of belief, but by telling a parable, a very sensible and effective parable.

Oliver O'Donovan opens this volume with a warm appreciation of Mitchell as man, mentor, and philosopher, praising Mitchell for consistency of thought and character. O'Donovan describes him as "a philosopher who is a Christian" rather than as a Christian philosopher, the difference being that Mitchell accepts and works from what he regards as a philosopher's point of view, seeking to defend Christianity from that point of view, rather than trying to adopt a peculiarly Christian point of view and speak from it.

The papers that follow are by W. A. Abraham, Maurice Wiles, Gordon Kaufman, J. R. Lucas, Rom Harré, Janet Martin Soskice, Grace Jantzen, Richard Swinburne, I. M. Crombie, Steven Holtzer, David Brown, and Michael Dummett. This collection includes a number of very fine essays. For the most part, they either pick up problems and ideas from Mitchell, or they attempt to philosophize in the spirit of Mitchell. Nearly all deal with the rationality of religious belief. I will not try to consider them all here; instead, I will look at several that deal with the idea of a cumulative case for Christian