

# Editorial

It seems to be one of the features of Liberal Christianity that it makes its impact felt through the medium of the symposium. Even now, we remember the celebrated *Essays and Reviews* which appeared as long ago as 1860, and the scarcely less famous *Lux Mundi*, which came out in 1889. More recently, we have had *Soundings*, edited by Alec Vidler, and of course, *The Myth of God Incarnate*. Less common, and certainly far less successful in terms of audience reaction and memorability, are the conservative answers to these works, particularly the symposia which they have occasionally called forth in reply.

But now there is a new book in the shops, which in terms of distinguished contributors and subject matter, deserves to rank with the great collections of the Liberal past. This is *Different Gospels*, edited by Andrew Walker of the C.S. Lewis Centre and dedicated to a full-scale attack on Liberal (or 'Modernist') Christianity in the spirit of the late C.S. Lewis. The contributors come from a variety of ecclesiastical traditions and do not all subscribe to the same views on a number of liberal/conservative issues, notably the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture, but they all do share a common distaste for what has been dominating the theological scene in recent years, and they have a common desire to recover 'mere' Christianity for the scholar, as well as for the average layman.

The book falls into three separate parts, of which the first is a series of interviews with leading churchmen. Here we have the views of Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh alongside such other giants as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, Professor Thomas Torrance and Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens. The second section takes us through a number of doctrinal issues and considers them in the light of modernist thought. Contributors to this section include Thomas Smail, Alister McGrath, Keith Ward, R.J. Berry, Alasdair Heron, James Dunn and the Bishop of London. Lastly, there is a section dealing with contemporary issues facing the Church and society, where Colin Gunton and Peter Berger, among others, give us the benefit of their wisdom and insight.

In his foreword to the collection, Billy Graham makes it clear that not everyone will agree with everything written by all the contributors—that is inevitable, and is an issue which must be faced at the beginning. But what this symposium has done has been to bring together a number of eminent, though quite different, theologians who at least speak the same language—the language of traditional Christian orthodoxy. Moreover, they are convinced that this language is still alive and speaking to us today, in spite of what the latest trendy

clerics may be saying. They do not mince their words when they claim that the modern Church has fallen victim to the spirit of the age at a time when that spirit is being increasingly challenged in the secular, and especially in the scientific, world. They claim that theological liberalism is the product of a philosophical dualism which has been discredited everywhere else, and that the sooner this fact is realized, the better it will be for us all.

A book of this kind is long overdue, and ought to challenge the establishment in a way that few such books have ever done before. Sadly, this is unlikely to happen. Modern liberalism is deaf to all external criticism, living as it does in an enclosed world in which the only voices it hears are those of people on the same wavelength. Anyone who imagines that modern academic life provides a forum of genuinely open intellectual debate is sadly mistaken, and it is as well to remember that several of the contributors to this volume either do not hold appointments in our theological faculties, or if they do, represent a minority voice in them. Another problem is that the contributors lack a solid constituency of support—Conservative Evangelicals would clearly be a major element in this, but they are (in this reviewer's opinion, needlessly) offended in a number of places, where the contributors go out of their way to attack a type of American fundamentalism which few of us would hold.

Nevertheless, this is a book deserving of our support and commendation. It is high time that orthodox Christians banded together to make a common witness to the world, even if we accept, as Bishop Newbigin so graciously does, that we shall never agree on everything. The enemy without does not worry about secondary differences; anything which can be used to attack the Gospel is acceptable. We may wish to be more scrupulous in our response to this sort of thing, but respond we must. Let us hope that this book can serve as a departure point for all those who are puzzled, who want a new way forward in the current maze of opinions, and above all, who are determined to remain faithful to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is the same, yesterday, today and for ever.

**GERALD BRAY**