

## Book Reviews

*The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature:* by Paulos Gregorios. World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1978. Pp. 104. Price Sfr 10.

This book by Metropolitan Paulos Gregorios of New Delhi is a timely contribution from the Orthodox Christian point of view to the current debate provoked by the ecology and resource crisis and the search for a new understanding of the relation of man and nature provoked by that crisis. The author contends that the present day environment crisis, the economic crisis, the crisis of justice, the crisis of faith and other contemporary crises are all symptoms of humanity not becoming what it ought to be, that it is trekking along a wrong track. He strongly pleads for an intellectual renewal that will correct our world picture and also for a genuine international community effort to face some of the ethical problems that confront us today.

Mar Gregorios states that a wrong or at least imperfect understanding of nature largely contributed to the present impasse. So after posing the problem he analyses the various understandings of nature from the biblical, the Indo-Hellenic and the Patristic traditions. The discussion on science and nature leads him to evaluate the contributions of a number of authors. While recognising the relevance of Theodore Roszak and his writings, Mar Gregorios strongly repudiates his position as immature, unbalanced and uninformed. Examining Whiteheadian metaphysics and Process theology, Mar Gregorios dismisses them as assumptions and not as scientifically demonstrated truths. Then he turns to the palaeontologist-biologist turned theologian Teilhard de Chardin. He admits that Teilhard's vision of the universe is definitely a unitive one, but his inclusive view of humanity and nature needs to be placed within the context of the trinitarian economy of creation-redemption.

At this point the author finds the classical Christian cosmology of Gregory of Nyssa extremely relevant and interesting. In his characteristically erudite, but at the same time lucid way, Metropolitan Gregorios ably summarises the profound thought of the Fourth Century Cappadocian Father emphasising the unity of all creation and the unity of all humanity. The mediatory and participatory role of humanity in relation to God and the world is stressed as the human vocation in time and space. He concludes the chapter by saying, "If all human activities and abilities, including the development of science and technology, were subordinated to and integrated with the quest for justice, freedom, peace, and creative goodness. **the**

human rule over the creation could mean a blessing for the whole universe." The eastern tradition is further traced in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. Recent eastern Christian reflection on the human role in God's creation is also brought out with examples from the works of the lyrical prophet of humanity, Vladimir Solovyev, and a few articles of still more recent writers.

The chapter on "Mastery and Mystery" drives home profound Christian insights on the subject. The author declares, "Humanity has a special vocation as priest of creation, as the mediator through whom God manifests himself to creation and redeems it... Christ has become part of creation, and in his created body he lifted up the creation to God, and humankind must participate in this eternal priesthood of Christ." He further expounds the relation between technology and sacrament. In doing so, he blames science and technology for alienating man from reality, giving him the two options of either standing apart from it and knowing it objectively or manipulating it technologically. As a result, man has lost the capacity to respond with his whole being to the being of the Wholly Other who presents himself to man through the created universe. He explains "mysticism" as participatory union, in and with Christ, with the *energeia* of God as it gives existence to man and to all other reality in creation. "This union with God and with each other, in Christ," says the author, "is the true meaning of the eucharist, and the only authentically Christian mysticism." He calls for the subjection of the mastery of the universe to God by giving nature into the loving hands of God in the great mystery of the eucharistic self-offering. As Christ, on the Cross, gave himself, with humanity and nature, to God in self-denying love and thereby saved humanity and nature we are called upon to participate in that eternal act of sacrifice and love. He warns that the mastery of nature must be held within the mystery of worship, otherwise we lose both mastery and mystery.

The closing two chapters together unfold his vision for the future. He laments that humanity has become a victim of science and technology, the prevailing educational and training systems making man transcendent-vision-blind. He affirms that science is not as objective a system of knowledge as it was thought, to be. As such he invites man to make amends for the past mistakes of creating a system based on science and technology. In proposing alternatives, he asserts that man needs to create images for the future not subservient to scientific-technological creativity but on the basis of a new spirituality. Finally he pleads for immediate Christian ethical reflection and action taking into consideration the essential freedom of man. Seizing the technological-ecological crisis, he says, we have to devise and practise a new way of life. A new pattern of civilisation is to be evolved in which humanity can grow towards the fullness of its God-given vocation. In this context he discerns the significance of an international participating reflecting community of charismatic persons covering a wide

range of competence, cultures and different religious traditions. From such a community, the author hopes, new reflection and new patterns of living may emerge which could provide models for the wider society to adopt and assimilate. He emphatically affirms that only a new civilisation and a new world grid of economic and political power can lead humanity forward.

Running to 104 pages this book provides substantial material for deep thinking and reflection. It stimulates our intellects, refreshes our minds and widens our visions. Theologians and theological students will certainly find this book most exciting, enriching and ennobling. With the present volume Metropolitan Gregorios has further enriched the theological thinking of our generation.

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*Israelite and Judaeon History*: edited by John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller. S.C.M. Press, London, 1977. Pp. xxxii+736. Price £ 15.

For almost twenty years the histories of Israel by Martin Noth and John Bright have been the standard works on the subject. Of more recent works that of Herrmann may now be placed alongside these two. Sad experience shows that B.D. students find these books (perhaps Herrmann less so) highly indigestible: the demand for an "easy" book comes up annually. It is difficult to know what to recommend. Ehrlich's *A Concise History of Israel* is probably the best possibility, but it is too brief for any serious study.

The book under review will hardly fill that gap. At over 700 pages and 1020 grams, all but the most persevering of students are likely to find it somewhat daunting. And a certain opacity of phraseology in some of the essays will do little to encourage. (How about "semi-nomadic transhumance and gradual sedentarization"?) But bulky and not particularly easy to read though it is, the book is likely to prove essential not only for scholars, but in the classroom, for packed between these covers is "the current state of the debate" for all important aspects of Israel's history, at least as it was in the second half of the 70s.

There are eleven chapters, some of them with more than one author (there are fourteen contributors). The eleven chapters cover the whole period of Israelite prehistory and history from the patriarchal narratives to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. (There is also a first chapter on the history of the study of the history of Israel from Hecataeus of Abdera to Wellhausen.) In each chapter emphasis is given to the identification and evaluation of sources and the different