

Book Reviews

Cosmic Man : The Divine Presence : by Paulos Gregorios. Sophia Publications, New Delhi/Kottayam, 1980: Pp. xviii+265. Price: cloth Rs 42.00, paperback Rs 27.00.

Metropolitan Paulos Gregorios focuses his study of St. Gregory of Nyssa's works on some basic aspects of the Cappadocian Father's anthropology, his approach to man as related to God and to creation. He also links the study with visions of man as we have them today according to various ideologies, new and not so new, and therefore with the underlying perspective of modern sciences.

The whole treatment falls into two parts. In the first two chapters of Part One the learned author reviews successively : the intent of Scriptures, their central place, and the articulate use by Gregory of the best heritage of Greek philosophies, both Platonist and its offshoots, and Stoic. The Metropolitan shows, for instance, that man as microcosm according to the Stoics is not wholly acceptable to Gregory. Then while examining the starting point of Gregory's theological investigations, i.e., the refutation of the Arian-Aetian follower, Eunomius, we realise how the Bishop of Nyssa had developed his own ways of thinking theologically, his approach to the use of philosophies, and his ontology.

In Chapter III, the term *akolouthia*, i.e., order, sequence, coherence, be it logical or ontological consequence, is brought to the fore. It is the mental "following-up" of the coherent order of created reality which makes possible our knowledge thereof. Moreover it is the adherence to Scriptures which is the higher type of *akolouthia*, being the key to the coherence of the cosmos. Scriptures and the "teaching of the Fathers" complement each other. It is clear that Gregory, as a devoted disciple of Origen, makes much use of the allegorical explanation of scriptural passages. This is particularly the case when he exposes his admirable considerations on the Christian quest for perfection, the *akolouthia* of good. He remains, however, a discerning user of allegories.

In the second part of the analysis of Gregory's anthropology, corresponding to the last five chapters of his book, the writer exposes what is actually his main interest. Obviously it turns round man and his relations with God and with the cosmos.

In this respect *diastema*, i.e., discontinuity, is a capital notion in Gregory's thought. Such a discontinuity, or gap, interval, does not affect, of course, the Trinity (as pretended by Arians and Semi-Arians), but it exists indeed between God and the world he created.

Here also we come across one of the originators of the *apophatic* or negative approach to theology, of the Greek Christian tradition, i.e., we can never speak fully of God because we cannot have a direct conception or apprehension of the being of God (p. 93).

Diastema includes also "spacing-out" in time and place; it is change and movement, not a static reality, as far as created existence is concerned. The author then provides us with a rather long and detailed analysis of *diastema* under its three aspects: no *diastema* in the Creator: one way *diastema* as the character of creation; its causing man's inability to comprehend God. Another leading aspect of Gregory's thought is set forth in Chapter V, i.e., *metousia*, the participation of created beings "in the will, energy and wisdom of God" (p. 100). With much critical perception the author acknowledges his indebtedness to D.L. Balas' book entitled *Metousia Theou. Man's Participation in God's Perfection According to St Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome, 1966). In fact Gregory's views on the matter are hesitant. They deal with such a participation according to corrected influences arising from the Neo-Platonists, above all Plotinus. In the eyes of the Bishop of Nyssa there are found two types of participation, one by nature, the other in the qualities of another nature (pp. 124-125).

Chapter VI deals with freedom, which means both the absence of subjection and a self-ruled being. Man is free because he is the image of God redeemed by Christ. He thus becomes independent from external necessity and compulsion. He can reach real *apatheia*, dear to the eastern tradition (p. 150). It does not follow, however, that man cannot sin in the present historical circumstances in which he is living. This is why the learned Metropolitan goes on in Chapter VII to analyse the opinions of Gregory on sin and sinfulness. Obviously they are not the same as those of St Augustine, partly at least because these two Fathers start their respective investigations from different problems. Here the author sides with several eastern Fathers, including St Ephrem, according to whom, so it seems, sin is not attached to human nature as such. He castigates the so-called western tradition on this thorny subject, as a kind of almost dualist attitude with too much opposition between grace and nature.

Mar Gregorios admits, however, with other specialists of Gregory's theology, that there lies in it an unsolved contradiction about the reason that justifies *diastema* and its relation to sinfulness in the world as we know it. Even history is a consequence of sin, because it is contrary to the authentic existence of man; time leads to death which itself results from sin. But the use by Gregory of the symbol of "wings" indicates man's fall from and return to his pristine status.

What is, therefore, the meaning of man in history, of the redeemed man? It is to gather the whole humanity, the cosmos also, in order to fulfil everything in Christ. When this has been achieved, i.e., when the *pleroma* is completed, history will be over. Towards this

end man is to fight in the arena of time. This is the whole significance of the ascetical-mystical theory and practice of the Christian, on account of which Gregory, with other Christian teachers before and after him, borrows words and expressions from Neo-Platonism, while filling them with a deeper Christian outlook. Adaptation of Stoic ideas and attitudes is also noticeable, though much transformed and reintegrated. God's grace is, of course, capital, true Christian freedom arising from it as well as from human efforts. All is grace, but all is also response to grace, that is *synergia*. And God's grace is first and foremost manifested in the liturgical feasts which commemorate Christ's great deeds, and in his sacraments. Once more here the learned writer insists time and again on the real freedom of the Christian man.

In the conclusion of his book (pp. 219-233), the author summarises the chief results of his study, and also provides further insight on some more difficult points. He applies, not unsuccessfully, certain chief viewpoints of Gregory to our present situations, for example, in science and technology, as coming from man's freedom to act as a deputy of God. There also we come across Gregory's definition of Christianity: "Christianity is the imitation of the Divine Nature" (p. 230). Finally, he elaborates on Gregory's treatment of Baptism, while adding to it some forceful statements on the social implications of the gift of Baptism.

The bibliography is excellent, and almost exhaustive, though its division, particularly according to languages, may not appeal to everybody. The French translation of Gregory's *The Creation of Man* (Sources Chrétiennes, 1943, No. 6), by J. Laplace with notes by J. Daniélou, does not seem to be mentioned in the bibliography. It is important especially due to its introduction of 72 pages.

Mar Gregorios' contribution to the growing literature on St Gregory of Nyssa is both important and helpful. It does help towards a deeper understanding of Christian realities, as well as of the lasting foundations of eastern Christian anthropology. It is to be hoped that this work will inspire many in this country to "go back" to the Fathers, particularly the eastern ones, after having already gone back to the Bible.

May I be permitted to add a few additional remarks. The book is filled with well-selected passages from the Nyssean. These translations avoid, on the whole, too much literalism, and this is welcome. Yet, in some cases at least, they could have been more accurate, e.g., in the passage on p. 169 taken from *The Creation of Man*, where "passions" should rather be "sickness." The date ca. 330 A.D. given in the sub-title as the approximate birth-date of Gregory is approximate. It is given more accurately on p. xiv as between 335 and 340 A.D. Does Gregory really deny all possibility of *analogia entis* (p. 77)? If so, such a denial could be regarded as another root cause of the apophatic theology of the Byzantine tradition. Perhaps

the analysis of grace in Gregory's writings is a bit hasty (pp. 130ff.). Can it be said today that in the eyes of St Augustine sin is the distinct and decisive element in man (p. 138)? Yet, I quite agree that Gregory sees man's nature in a broader way (p. 140). Lastly, how far is Severus of Antioch still misunderstood in the West? For the last eighty years or so, much has changed for the better understanding of that illustrious champion of what has been called, rightly or wrongly, "verbal monophysitism." However, as the Metropolitan himself writes, he *was* formerly misunderstood in the West (p. 161).

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When Prophecy Failed : by Robert P. Carroll. SCM Press, London, 1979. Pp. 250. Price £7.50.

The sub-title, "Reactions and responses to failure in the Old Testament prophetic traditions," suggests the content of the book. Regarding the purpose of the book the author writes, "This book is an attempt to examine the prophetic tradition in terms of their predictive elements and the responses to the failure of the expectations aroused by them" (p. 2). Predictive prophecy is vulnerable to failure. Biblical prophecies, according to him, are no exception. They are not to be taken at their face value. When prophecy fails, immediately the ground for its continuance is created, a religious structure of a resultant system in which people who witnessed the failure of the prediction make their reaction. They reinterpret the prophecy in such a way as to provide a place for that prophecy in the prophetic traditions. Thus the prophecy that failed also finds its place in the prophetic tradition.

Dr Carroll makes use of the theory of cognitive dissonance (pp. 86ff.) propounded by the social psychologist Leon Festinger in order to examine the prophecies that failed and to explain their continuance in the prophetic tradition. He deals with the theory of cognitive dissonance elaborately for the sake of laymen. Selected prophecies from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai and Zechariah were dealt with prior to applying the theory of dissonance (pp. 130ff.).

The dissonance response gives rise to hermeneutics (p. 124). The text of a prophetic message only gives part of the prophetic tradition. The text remains ambiguous and meaningless without the accompanying hermeneutic. The hermeneut who comes as a dissonance response interprets and sometimes reinterprets the prophecy that failed. The study of the texts undertaken by Dr Carroll suggests that there are many interpreted and reinterpreted prophecies in the Old Testament. It was the hermeneutic that accompanied the dissonance response to the failed prophecy which helped to preserve the prophetic traditions.