

# ETHICAL ISSUES

# In a nutshell

ONE of the marks of a good book is its ability to stimulate thought and provoke argument. The ideal combination, or so it appears to me, is to find a book that contains much you agree with and something you cannot quite accept. That combination creates the maximum mental excitement as you try to discover why, at the crucial moment, you are not able to follow the author wholeheartedly towards his conclusions. By those standards, *The Peaceable Kingdom* is an excellent book.

Dr. Hauerwas is Professor of Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame, and he calls his book "A Primer in Christian Ethics." It is not, strictly speaking, a primer, if by that you mean a text-book that summarises historical positions and schools of thought. On the other hand, it is a primer in the sense that it is a summation of the positions Dr. Hauerwas holds to be of the first importance.

In this book he is not presenting a detached account of classical attitudes to ethical problems: he is telling us what he himself thinks and where he stands. The book is, therefore, something of a manifesto or personal testimony. It is clearly

## Child-care

**FAMILY CENTRES.** By Jan Phelan. (Children's Society, £7.55)

THE Church of England Children's Society, like similar Victorian foundations, has had to change with the times; and the establishment of family centres has been one of its latest innovations. The intention behind these centres is primarily preventative—to help keep children out of care; and Jan Phelan's study outlines the setting up of twelve such centres and provides an analysis of their development.

This proved a complex research project and a demanding assignment for the author. Each centre is essentially an individual unit which has developed in response to local needs. At the same time each centre is necessarily an extension of the Society's own philosophy and planning; and one of the merits of this book is the way in which it manages to juxtapose theory and practice.

The study was commissioned to monitor and evaluate the work of these specific centres, and inevitably much of it is concerned with growing-pains—the clash of aims and values, for example. But the basic worth of the centres is never in doubt; and the final chapters, giving the author's own reflections and a summary of lessons learned, contain just the kind of useful data to get all future centres off to a flying start.

**MARGARET DANIEL**

**THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM.** By Stanley Hauerwas. (SCM Press, £5.95)

written from the heart as well as from the head. It is a committed book.

Like every other human enterprise, the study of ethics is subject to the vagaries of fashion and the impact of culture. We seem to be well into a reaction against the situationism that, in one form or another, has dominated ethics for many years. Situationism was a form of ethical crisis-management; it was a way of

By **RICHARD HOLLOWAY**

making decisions. It gave the impression that human beings frequently arrived alone and unsupported at moments of crisis where a judgement was called for. At the great moments of decision, they were all found in a sort of existential vacuum.

Dr. Hauerwas quotes Iris Murdoch twice as having said somewhere that "decisions are what we make when everything else has been lost." That is precisely what this book opposes. We might say that Dr. Hauerwas wants to form a body of men and women who won't have to make decisions at all, because they will have a character that has been so formed by the practice of virtue and the disciplines of the Christian life that their conduct will simply express that commitment without fuss or drama, although it may be at great cost to themselves.

Recent writing on ethics has stressed the importance of virtue, of positive character-formation. The most important recent text on the subject, quoted frequently by Dr. Hauerwas, is Alasdair MacIntyre's "After Virtue," but it is by no means the only swallow of the impending summer. *The Peaceable Kingdom* is another sign that we are returning to an ethics of character-formation and turning away from an ethics of crisis-management.

★ ★ ★

Dr. Hauerwas writes from the very centre of the Christian tradition, and it is *Christian* ethics he writes about. He is a Christian positivist. He believes that there is a quite definite Christian ethic and that it is, above all, an ethic of non-violence; and it is here that I found myself prodded into argument with him.

One of the best things in the book is the last chapter. In it the author describes the celebrated debate between the Niebuhr brothers occasioned by the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1932. That debate between Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr classically fixes the markers in the enduring Christian dilemma: how does a Christian respond to organised evil in the world?

Richard talked about "the patience to do nothing." For him Christian

ethics was eschatological, an ethics of the Cross, of non-violence, even in the face of evil. He did not preach non-violence as a tactic for opposing evil that was likely to be more successful than violence. He saw it in eschatological terms, knowing that it was likely to lead to the triumph of evil but believing that no other response was possible for one who would follow Christ. It is a noble position and one that his brother respected, though he could not follow it.

Reinhold pointed out that Christ preached non-resistance, not non-violent resistance. Like his brother, he agonised over the appropriate application of the mysterious example of Christ to the conflicts between nations. He came to the uneasy and tortured conclusion that the attempt to apply the way of Christ to disputes between collectivities was inappropriate and would only lead to the permanent ascendancy of evil. He believed in doing something, no matter how opposed it seemed to be to the example of Christ, because history had taught us, in Edmund Burke's phrase, "that the only thing needed for the triumph of evil was for good men to do nothing."

That debate will never be conclusively resolved for Christians, but it is a testimony to the greatness of the Niebuhr brothers that we all find ourselves Niebuhrians of one sort or another. Dr. Hauerwas is confidently in Richard's corner, while I lurk uneasily behind Reinhold. I am grateful to this stimulating book for making me wrestle with these issues yet again.

## Richly human

By **KENNETH SLACK**

**MARCUS WARD: A Man for All Churches.** By John Newton. (Epworth Press, £3.95)

I FIRST met Marcus Ward in Calcutta a year or two before the inauguration of the Church of South India. The brilliance of his mind, allied with the extraordinary warmth of his personality, had already made him, at the age of forty, a somewhat legendary figure on the Christian scene of India.

Certainly my Methodist colleague in RAF chaplaincy work had spoken of him in what seemed such exaggerated terms that I was very ready to react the other way. But to meet Marcus was swiftly to realise the secure ground on which his reputation rested. And, in all our occasional contacts thereafter down the years, I never met him without feeling not the impact—which would be quite the wrong word—but the warm sunshine of that radiant personality, so unusually blended with the refreshing breeze of a sharp and downright intellect.

And now, in this short memoir, Dr. John Newton has brought him splendidly to mind. A devout Methodist, nourished in the best strain of Wesleyan piety, he was one of the makers of the Church of South India (although, interestingly, he seems to have thought that it was a mistake to give congregations the power to exclude presbyters from a different tradition from their own, which influenced his contribution to the abortive Anglican-Methodist scheme). He closed his life with several post-retirement years teaching New Testament in the Jesuit Heythrop College. He was the archetype of the ecumenist who has the power to respond to widely different traditions because he has troubled to be, and to remain, rooted strongly in his own tradition.

Just because Marcus Ward's contribution to the Church of God was chiefly what he was and what he did as a teacher both in India and in Britain, it is good to have so excellent a memoir of him. His publications were few for a man of such formidable industry and intellectual powers. Partly this arose from the range of his commitment to the life of the Churches, partly from concentration on the task of theological teaching at which he was so expert. (I might say, however, in passing, that I regard his short commentary on *St. Matthew* rather more highly than Dr. Newton appears to do. He calls it "his useful, brief preacher's commentary": I have found it sheer gold.)

COMMENDING a fifteen-pound book for its cheapness may, even in these inflated days, seem ironic. However, this really is a bargain, not just comparatively (infinitely less good book-buys are published at similar price) but absolutely—in terms of text, range and quality of illustrations, and the richness and refinement with which they have been combined in a volume which is truly "a thing of beauty."

Mind you, you had better not take it away on holiday, or your plane will never get off the Gatwick runway; while only forty daily press-ups will give you the arm muscles needed to support it comfortably in bed.

Dr. Morgan, the editor, is best known for his "Consensus and Disunity," which, in a striking feat of revisionism, rehabilitated the Lloyd George Coalition of 1918-1922 from its unsavoury fame as the most cynical and corrupt British Government of modern times. Dr. Morgan's scrutiny revealed that, in its inability to beat the boom/slump cycle, it merely conformed to the modern British norm of well-meaning incompetence, diversified by fitful flashes of efficiency. More recently, his book on another post-war Administration, the Labour Government of 1945-1951, has also won high praise.



MARCUS WARD

Dr. Newton gives a rounded picture of the man—and how appropriate that epithet is to that bulky frame! Marcus Ward was a richly human person, fascinated by all the variety of human experience, loving his work, loving his pupils, loving going to the "flicks" and rugby, and loving his Lord and the Christian fellowship with a warmth and intensity that makes an hour or two with this book possess something of the refreshment that an hour or two with Marcus Ward always brought.

## DUTY TO GOD

THE author is a well-known leader of worship, and he gives us here much sound advice on an all-important topic.

Among modes of worship unfamiliar to many European Protestants is that of dance, which in recent years has become acknowledged and respected as one way in which worship (particularly charismatic worship) can be expressed—though, to be effective, it must be a spontaneous and organic part of a worshipping congregation, not just a collection of in the author's words "spectator Christians."

Just as bodily movement, including dancing and music, is an important element in worship, so is silence. "We must learn how to be quiet and listen, to prick up the ears of our spirit, and to take a word, a phrase or verse of Scripture and meditate upon it in the presence of God. Surely all of us would benefit from

**THE OXFORD ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF BRITAIN.** Edited by Kenneth O. Morgan. (Oxford University Press, £15.00)

Obviously, in a book where each of a team of ten historians has, on average, fifty pages in which to encapsulate the spirit of a whole epoch, one is not looking for the fruit of fresh research, but rather for the capacity to let each age's great themes sound and to decorate them with telling detail, while at the same time keeping the proportions of the structure true and clear. All the distin-

By

**MARTIN FAGG**

guished contributors give excellent value in these regards; and it is only my own historical predilections that made me enjoy Peter Salway on "Roman Britain," John Morrill on "The Stuarts," H.C.G. Matthew on "The Liberal Age (1851-1914)" and Dr. Morgan's own final commentary on the years 1914-1983 above the six other sterling essays.

Dr. Morgan cuts a vivid trail through the terrifying jungle of twentieth-century event. Of course one can always nit-pick at the results of hyper-compression. Emphasising, for instance, the stark 'thirties contrast between the burgeoning prosperity of the new motor, electrical, chemical and textile industries of the Midlands and Home Counties and the collapse of the older industries of the North, he remarks that it was "a time of very low inflation." He lacks the space in which to note that, for the first half of the decade, prices steadily and substantially fell—so that a static salary or wage-packet left one, year after year, with a real-terms increase.

★ ★ ★

Sometimes, however, unfairness and actual error creep in. Mr. Morgan writes of "the surrender of over 30,000 British and Empire troops on Singapore." The actual number of those who became Japanese prisoners after what Churchill called "the worst capitulation in British history" is notoriously difficult to arrive at; but it was certainly no fewer than 80,000 and, if local auxiliaries are included, may have been as many as 130,000. It was the Japanese army to which this enormous (and largely unused) force surrendered that numbered only 30,000 or so.

But the surface flaws, unavoidable in a book of this scope and range, are totally eclipsed by its many insights. Dr. Morgan writes: "A sporting hero such as . . . George Best suggested very different values from those of Jack Hobbs." Could any two other figures more graphically illustrate the tonal gulf between 'twenties and 'sixties?

## Escaping from Fundamentalism

James Barr

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**WORSHIP.** By Graham Kendrick. (Kingsway Publications, £1.95)

a course to learn the gentle art of silence before God."

In defining his subject—which he does in many different ways which may confuse a beginner—Mr. Kendrick comes very close to the heart of the matter when he says: "Worship is a response to the character and activity of God, past, present and future."

Though his thoughts and the manner in which he expresses them may strike some readers as obvious and others as lacking the depths of those countless spiritual directors, public and private, who have gone before him, few will not find this book useful, stimulating and reassuring as well as challenging.

**ROBIN DENNISTON**