



Reviews



Fifty Key Christian Thinkers, Peter McEnhill and George Newlands, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. xi + 257, ISBN 0415170508. £13.99

At first I thought this was going to be yet another book of extracts but it is far from that. In fact it is a helpful and by no means simplistic summary of the thought of fifty important figures in the history of Christian theology.

The fifty chosen are presented alphabetically – from Abelard to Zwingli – and the pattern followed is, first, a brief biography, then a summary of principal emphases, sometimes including a précis of particular works, then a sentence or two of rather judicious criticism (in which, incidentally, one can occasionally recognise the impish humour of Newlands), and finally a list of the thinker’s major works and recent studies of them. There is an extended glossary of technical terms (but where is “Geschichte”?!) and a full index of authors and subjects.

One could of course, as the authors recognise, quibble with the choice of ‘thinkers’ – e.g. while Feuerbach is undoubtedly important in the history of Christian thought he could scarcely be described as a “Key Christian Thinker”. Furthermore, I can imagine the adherents of some denominations regretting the absence of some of their father figures. On the whole, however, the selection, stretching from St Paul and the early Christian fathers to late twentieth and early twenty-first century figures such as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and David Tracy, includes nearly all the ‘thinkers’ one would want.

I could see this being an extremely useful aid to students and to ministers, as well as to non-specialists. I wish I could have had access to it while revising for divinity finals, or indeed when wishing to check the accuracy of my memory when daring a theological reference in a sermon. Indeed, following the order set out in the chronological

table and reading an entry a day would constitute a rather useful refresher course in the history of Christian thought. It is a pleasure to recommend it.

(A curious gentleman called ‘Epipanius’ makes his entry on p. 289!)

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Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul, Tony Hendra, London: Penguin Books, 2004, pp. 272, ISBN 0141020784. £8.99

When the words ‘international bestseller’ appear on the cover of a paperback, we do well to be suspicious. International bestsellers tend to be frothy and trashy fiction or else the biography of a dim-witted sportsman or showbiz star. But who would believe that a book about a contemplative monk, who rarely emerges from his monastery, could sell like hot cakes? No one could believe it until after reading this remarkable spiritual autobiography.

Tony Hendra is a successful satirist, best known in Britain as one of the creators of the *Spitting Image* television puppets and in America as a stalwart of *National Lampoon* magazine, movies and television shows. But he was a late convert to satire. His original ambition was to become a monk.

Hendra was fourteen and in disgrace when he first visited Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight. He was the unfortunate (and largely innocent) third of a love-triangle and was dragged there by the irate husband, a devout Catholic. Fearing wrath and retribution, Tony suddenly found himself being counseled by the most wonderful man he had ever met. Father Joe was a huge, gangling, knobby-kneed, stammering mountain of goodwill and Christian compassion. Father Joe soon put an end to the illicit relationship and then, without preaching, lecturing or any pretentious piety, guided Tony into a new awareness of the God of love.

