

and devotes his energies towards its achievement.

The modern Western world is unique in finding the idea of a cosmic drama between good and evil difficult to swallow. For Graham this is a measure of its confinement rather than its enlightenment. Inevitably one wonders about the metaphysical status of the seducer and he is reluctant to say too much about this. What is certain, he believes, is that spiritual agency has a real explanatory role that cannot be reduced to human agency while necessarily being described in similar terms. The final chapter revisits the inadequacies of humanism and argues instead for a theology of hope based on the promise of God.

This is a very interesting and stimulating book even if the feeling, at the end, is of having read a series of related essays rather than a single sustained argument. The difficulties faced by humanism in the face of evil are well outlined. At times the tone comes close to that of a British judge, referring to the criminals only by their surnames and declaring them very wicked indeed. This is not to minimise the evil of their actions but to recall a solidarity that all human beings share with them, a propensity to turn away from the truly good, just as we share solidarity in the call of Christ, our hope of glory.

VIVIAN BOLAND OP

CHANGING CHURCHES: THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE STRUCTURES OF CHANGE edited by Michael Warren *Pastoral Press, Portland, Oregon, 2000. Pp. 272, \$12. 95 pbk.*

This collection of essays resulted from a symposium held in New York, on the theme of 'Religious Education: The Local Church as Keybearer of the Possibility of Gospel Practice', with the inevitable variation of quality and value among the contributors. The editor's warning, that his own introductory essay could perhaps be left till last since it may seem to be overly theoretical, should be taken seriously: it is highly technical and excessively jargon-filled as to have left no impression at all on the present, non-specialist, reader, while his shorter prefaces to the following ten essays do them a disservice rather than otherwise.

The essays deal with such topics as the geography and material conditions of local churches; the role and attitude of the laity and the possibilities of raising their consciousness or re-orienting their outlook; the manner and effectiveness of Christian education and formation in local congregations in the context of increasingly secularised contemporary culture, and the benefit of regular attendance, preaching and liturgical practice in relation to moral and ethical values in both private and public life. The setting is essentially North American, despite one Irish contribution, which somewhat limits the relevance of the conclusions drawn and the recommendations offered.

Michael Warren's introductory essay arises out of disillusionment

with 20th-century Christian living and poses what he calls 'millennial questions' in order to diagnose the reasons for this. He recommends a revival of the Aristotelian distinction between theoretical and practical wisdom as a mode of response. Joseph Komonchak discusses the relation between universal and local church, correcting the misguided use of 'catholic' to mean merely variety or pluriformity without real integration. C. Ellis Nelson focuses on the effects of rapid change in society, and the consequent erosion of a sense of permanent values which should characterize Christianity, while Martin Kennedy tackles a similar theme specifically in relation to the need for a totally new paradigm for the Irish Church.

Marianne Sawicki develops the same point in some detail in relation to the physical and circumstantial influence which affect any local congregation, while Edward Farley produces a useful analysis of what a congregation actually is. Paul Lakeland makes a powerful plea for the real utilisation, in these circumstances, of the lay members of the congregation, emphasising the difference between their life-style and that of the clergy — not least in the areas of permanence and security — and asserting the need for lay theologians to be 'stimulators' and 'therapists' rather than teachers among the oppressed laity. Rosemary Luling Haughton distinguishes between trying to change the local church from within the structures and offering an alternative model, attractively if not wholly practically presented in terms of the ancient Celtic church structure — or lack of it.

Stanley Hauerwas analyses the defects of 'volitional' or 'supermarket' Christianity, and argues for the recognition of the fact that our local congregational attendance and practice are too often already shaped by our existing cultural milieu and inclinations. There is need to revive the realisation that 'Christianity is not something about which I make up my mind, but a set of practices to which I submit my life'. (p. 25) John Barrett reflects deeply and seriously on the significance of preaching precisely at the Eucharist, for the possibility of both individual and ecclesial-social transformation in relation to issues such as justice and peace. Finally Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra deal with 'the particulars of the specifics' — a piece of jargon from the editor which belies the value and simplicity of the essay. Their burden is that the Christian practices perpetuated in local congregations embody specific truth in a way that is educational and formative, since they are thus translated from the realm of abstract statement into that of daily living, so bringing together the inherited age-old wisdom of the church and contemporary needs.

Interest and value can be found in the essays of Komonchak, Farley, Haughton, Hauerwas, Barrett and Bass, and occasional gems elsewhere such as, 'Lay-people, however well-qualified and with whatever virtues and talents, are children in the house of the Lord' (Lakeland, p. 173), but overall the book is prolix and unexciting.

M. CECILY BOULDING OP