

BOOK REVIEWS

Allen, Diogenes. *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. 238 pp. Paperback, \$15.95.

Diogenes Allen's *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* is an apology of Christianity addressed to the educated churchgoer who, under the influence of postmodern scientific culture, may wonder, "Why should I go to church when I have no religious needs?" Allen's answer is that they should do so "because Christianity's true" (p. 1).

Understanding the truth of Christianity, according to Allen, requires a rather general awareness of our postmodern times. As a result of the mindset which originated in the Enlightenment, "Christianity has been on the defensive intellectually" (p. 2). However, "our situation is now far better than it has been in modern times because our intellectual culture is at a major turning point. A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages. The foundations of the modern world are collapsing, and we are entering a postmodern world" (*ibid.*). Allen broadly defines his understanding of "postmodernity" as post-Enlightenment (post-Hume and -Kant) (p. 6). Postmodernity in Christian theology is a reaction to nineteenth-century liberalism that includes four main trends: 1) the confessional trend indebted to Barth; 2) the existential-hermeneutical trend indebted to Heidegger and Schleiermacher; 3) a very recent deconstructionist trend indebted to Heidegger and Derrida; and finally, 4) a process trend indebted to Whitehead and Hartshorne (*ibid.*). Allen summarizes his argument in favor of the truth of Christianity in three main steps. First, a proper understanding of the existence of and order in the world points "to the possibility of God." Second, "our needs, unless deliberately restrained, lead us to search for what is ultimate." Third, "the conviction concerning the reality of God comes from the actual experience of divine grace frequently made possible through the witness of the Bible" (p. 19).

Christian Belief in a Postmodern World appears to be a project conceived mainly in terms of negative rather than positive apologetics. Allen's approach to Christian apologetics in three stages is very appropriate, yet it broadens the range of areas to be defended beyond the mere existence of God (part 1) into some basic problematic Christian doctrines (part 2), and the relationship of Christianity to other religions (part 3). Allen's apologetic strategy consists basically in allowing for both the possibility and necessity

of God vis-à-vis our scientific culture, which has been criticized and brought up to date. In the first part, Allen is able to show that a scientific approach to knowledge does not necessarily contradict the existence of God or the human need for God. On the contrary, science in its incompleteness seems to point to God.

In the second part, Allen follows the same kind of strategy, "making room" for belief. Yet, he now deals with issues like grace, faith, revelation, and providence, that presuppose a more precise theological interpretation than the general issue of the possibility of God. It is at this point that some difficulties in Allen's presentation come into view. First, science is assumed as the parameter for the possibility of the Christian understanding of the issues at stake. Second, Allen's defense is based on a reinterpretation of the content of the issues he is defending. Even though it is clear that many difficulties are solved when a proper understanding of Christian doctrines is achieved, such a task belongs to systematic theology rather than to apologetics. Third, the profile of the interpretation of Christianity that Allen has in mind is not totally clear. Allen's defense covers a wide and complex range of issues that are not clearly analyzed. In order for clarity of presentation and argument to be enhanced in this kind of hermeneutical apologetics, a more precise presentation of the reinterpretation itself is required. For instance, when the central issue of God's activity is dealt with, Allen dogmatically rejects that God's creation can be understood within the physical order of cause and effect because "God does not physically interact with the universe" (p. 160). Yet, when analyzing the divine agency in a scientific world, the possibility of miracle in the physical world is recognized (p. 180). One wonders about the reasons for discriminating between the actions of God. Why is the physical action of God in the historical continuum allowed in some events (the cross, miracles of Christ) but dogmatically rejected in others (creation of the world)? Allen's clarification on this and similar issues may contribute to a more precise communication of his thought and perhaps to an enhancement of his argument.

I wonder whether Allen's approach to apologetics is not pointing beyond itself to the need for a much deeper reinterpretation of Christianity itself: a reinterpretation that should be developed in faithfulness to the foundational ideas that the Christian community has preserved in its original reflection, namely, the Bible. Allen seems to work with an understanding of Christianity that is more open to philosophical and scientific foundations than to an original search for them in the Bible. Be that as it may, Allen's work is worth reading, considering, and analyzing, not only for its threefold approach to apologetics but also for its overall clarity in argument and serious scholarship in analysis.