

Reasonable Belief: A Survey of the Christian Faith. By A. T. Hanson and R. P. C. Hanson. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 283 pp., \$26.95.

Over the years the Hanson brothers, identical twins, have kept us well supplied with thought-provoking and sometimes ground-breaking books. Writing on the edge of their retirement from their respective posts (A. T. Hanson as professor of theology at Hull University, R. P. C. Hanson as professor of historical and contemporary theology at Manchester University), the two here collaborate for the first time and winsomely tell the reader that he will be "fortunate if he can read the book with the same ease and pleasure as the authors experienced in combining to write it."

This is not a book of systematic theology, even though its chapters cover many of the same points featured in the standard works on dogmatics—God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, Christianity and history (subsections dealing *inter alia* with eschatology, Marxism, providence and predestination), and so forth. The book by the Hanson brothers covers these topics by examining them "historically"—i.e., by surveying what the Bible seems to say of them, how much of this can be believed or defended today in the light of our present knowledge, ways in which these topics have been handled here and there in the history of the Church, all culminating in what the Hanson brothers hold to be "reasonable belief." The book leaves aside the niceties of footnotes and aims for the mythical well-read layman.

The presentation is interesting, stimulating and well-written. Theologically it is very much in the tradition of Alan Richardson, to whom the book is dedicated. This means among other things that in general the authors avoid stooping to exegetical ingenuity to cover up their own inability to believe something the Bible teaches. Because the Bible is a witness to revelation, not revelation itself, they are not embarrassed to find the witness wanting at numerous points. They are always courteous to those who hold positions further left than their own, and some of their critique (e.g. of logical positivism or of depth psychology) is telling. Unfortunately they are frequently condescending to those who are further to the right than they are—e.g., "The ancient doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible," which, acknowledge the writers, was universally held by ancient Judaism and early Christianity, "is impossible for intelligent people today." Indeed it represents "the first step towards the ever-recurring sin of idolatry."

The eclecticism of the options selected from Church history is rather disconcerting, and the rapidity with which each is picked up, weighed, kept or rejected, though usually competent within the authors' limited space (though I have grave reservations about the accuracy of some sections—e.g., their comments on the philosophy of science), will not convince everyone who has probed these matters thoroughly. The Hansons' critique of Chalcedonian Christology, for instance, is so brief that it fails to weigh the counter-arguments that centuries of debate have forged. Chalcedon has its problems, and more work on Christology needs to be done. But I am not persuaded that it is weaker or less Biblically faithful than the Hanson brothers' synthesis of Baillie and Pittenger. And their Logos doctrine (Logos is God-in-revelation) paves the way to a painfully sub-Biblical Christology and an unconvincing treatment of the Trinity.

Nevertheless, the book deserves wide reading, especially by conservatives whose views need the goad of challenge and criticism. At the end of the day, however, I remain persuaded that the Hanson brothers' "reasonable belief" owes rather more than it should to a dated liberalism that stipulates in advance what it is prepared to believe. The "ever-recurring sin of idolatry" against which they rightly warn us may also rear its head in the form of a kind of culturally-enslaved intellectualism where the limits of creedal acceptance are determined rather more by certain academic tradition than by the constraints of the Biblical presentation of God's gracious self-disclosure.