

conservatism of his statements on most subjects during his visit, the role of Knock, concludes Whale, was to confirm Ireland 'not merely in a rigid but in a credulous Catholicism.' (ibid., p 191)

John Paul II has established his stature as a world figure and it would be churlish indeed to deny his achievement in focusing attention in an immensely attractive way on significant aspects of the Christian presence and message in the modern world—the underlining of the size of one sub-section of this presence is in itself significant. It may yet be that those elements in his personality which are most difficult to appreciate and accept because they appear to threaten the advances of Vatican II and to make ecumenical dialogue more difficult, will be modified. All who have valued such advances should certainly pray for modification. Yet the omens are not good. As Whale warns, previous popes who have 'benefited from popular adulation' have had 'their reactionary tendencies confirmed and strengthened' (ibid., p 11).

PETER WILLIAMS

Opinion

Theology seeking an experience

Dr Packer in his recent articles quotes the popular expression, 'The charismatic movement has been called "an experience seeking a theology"', and adds that it is as much 'lacking' and 'needing' a theology as 'seeking' one. We could equally well describe the charismatic movement as 'a theology seeking an experience', for church life today too often has a theology 'lacking' and 'needing' an experience. Dr Packer has pointed to the need for theology to be lived out, and this is what the renewal is pointing to, particularly in the area of the power/ability of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. However theologically diverse, the movement is not so diverse regarding the theology of the central content of the Spirit's ability in the church. This is theology seeking an experience.

Healing

Dr Packer argues that charismatic healing ministries cannot be convincingly equated with the healing gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians, and he writes that 'healing was then instant' and that 'there is no record that they ever attempted to heal without success.' Has he not fallen into the trap of undervaluing contemporary healing ministry simply because it is not always instant and successful?

There are two main reasons why the healing ministry may not be

manifested with the same success rate as in the New Testament. These are faith and expectancy. There is today a lack of expectancy that healing and other gifts of the Spirit should be manifest. It is still only since the turn of this century that these realities have again been seen in the life of the church with any frequency. With regard to faith, we read in Matthew 13:58 that Jesus 'did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.' How much more true is this today? We may blame the church community for its corporate lack of faith: not any individual.

A puzzle is that Dr Packer seems to be saying that the reason why people are not healed is because God is unwilling, unable, or both. Surely it is distressing to be told that God does not will to heal you (wills you to be ill?) or is unable to do so. Surely it is correct to believe that it is 'not ordinarily God's beneficent will for his children' to suffer physical disorder and discomfort. Dr Packer does agree that total healing is in the atonement, but argues that 'it is a potentially disastrous mistake to expect on earth what will only be given in heaven.' He links total healing for the body with total sinless perfection. We can agree that neither is going to be totally experienced now, but the emphasis is on the word 'total'. Total sinless perfection now? No. Total healing for the body now? No. But there is a growth in holiness now; and therefore a growth towards sinless perfection, however imperfectly realized, is part of the new covenant. Hence there is also healing now, and a growth towards total healing is also to be looked for. It is God's perfect will that we be whole. Dr Packer points out that 'the indwelling Holy Spirit' is the one 'whose presence and ministry are the first instalment of the life of heaven. . .', which surely implies that we may have a real expectation of healing manifested now as a first-fruit of the total healing of heaven.

St Michael and All Angels,
Loughton, Essex

ANTHONY P. JOHNSON