

In the Study.

IT is more than half a century since the Cambridge Greek Testament commentaries began to appear, and though a few of the more recent contributions, notably those dealing with Matthew and Luke, are still of contemporary significance, the need for complete revision has for long been widely realized. The recent commentary on Colossians and Philemon from the pen of the General Editor provided a noteworthy beginning to a new series. Now we are offered a study in St. Mark¹; and those who have sampled appreciatively its author's articles in this field in past issues of the *Scottish Journal of Theology* will open this volume with eager anticipation. In general they will not be disappointed. Only the price will dismay. It is discouraging to find that the publishers will not at present admit to any plans for a paper-backed edition.

The outstanding strength of this commentary is linguistic. It bases itself on painstaking examination and assessment of the Greek text. The variant reading, its manuscript evidence, its possible importance and originality, are amply presented. Thus it is ensured that theological exposition shall ever rest on firm foundations. The result is a study that is solid, sober and sane. The Gospel is anchored firmly within its church setting, and at points its significance as Word of God to our day is suggested. Interpretation is never wild and at times, notably in relation to the Little Apocalypse, challenges comparison with the best that others have written. If there is a golden key to the understanding of the Gospel, we are asked to find it in recognition of the essential indirectness and veiled nature of God's self-revelation in Jesus.

If adverse criticism is to be advanced it must surely concentrate itself at two points, one minor, one major. Any commentator has to make the difficult decision as to what extent he shall refer to and quote from the work of other scholars. As to reference, Mr. Cranfield is excellent. Unerringly he points us back to the really important discussions. As to quotation, he may be adjudged less satisfying because less wisely selective. One reader at least closes this commentary with the feeling that he has had a little too much of Vincent Taylor and John Calvin. Taylor's tome still overshadows the British field, and all the best people have now rediscovered Calvin's biblical expositions. Nevertheless, quotation is seldom

¹ *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. By C. E. B. Cranfield. Cambridge University Press. 40s. 1959.

rewarding unless the substance is memorable or the style appealing; and even the great ones can be jejeune and verbose.

But the substantial queries cluster round the complex issues of historicity. On almost all occasions Mr. Cranfield maintains a conservative position, eager to claim Petrine reminiscence, quick to defend Mark as an honest and industrious compiler, confident to argue for the historical reliability of the gospel narrative. We need not necessarily quarrel with his conclusions. We shall, however, be wise to study carefully his criteria of decision and his application of historical method, and to ask whether he really justifies a belief such as the availability to us of "a substantially reliable picture of the historical Jesus." It is a long step from the proposition: "This is pre-Markan material" to the further proposition: "this is what Jesus actually said and did."

For this reason it will be found useful to preface the study of this Gospel commentary by a very careful reading of an examination of historical methodology now made available to us.² If we are concerned to claim that Christianity is a historical religion, then we must be prepared to grapple unremittingly with the burning problems that immediately arise. Is history ever concerned with "bare fact" or always with "interpret-fact"? Is objectivity possible? Are the Gospel writers seeking to present historical narrative, to provide the material for a reliable portrait and account of the Jesus who lived in first-century Palestine? To what extent is the Faith affected by and dependent upon the results of historical critical enquiry?

Mr. Roberts offers us an initial exposition of historical methodology, a central examination of the methodology of historical theology by reference to work in the field of the Gospels of Burkitt, Dodd, and Farrer, and a concluding discussion of problems relative to the historicity of the gospel tradition. We are led from the confidence of the "liberal" Life of Jesus, through the succeeding scepticism which substituted for "historical document" "confession of faith," to the new concern for the establishment of the historical truth about Jesus of Nazareth and the new conviction that the Gospel records might yet provide the necessary material. Source criticism, form criticism, and typology are brought under review. And for purposes of illustration and examination it is the varied use of and attitude to the Markan Gospel that is made central.

Since the work of R. G. Collingwood has been so widely referred to in the interests of Christian apologetic, it is valuable to have presented to us some critique of his approach and some assessment of its validity. It is argued, on the whole convincingly, not only that it is philosophically vulnerable but also that it is widely misinterpreted in Christian circles. More positive approval is given to the

² *History and Christian Apologetic*. By T. A. Roberts. S.P.C.K. 25s. 1960.

exposition of historical methodology provided by the French historian Marc Bloch; and here a careful and discriminating discussion sheds light in many a darkened corner. All who aspire to wield the tools of critical enquiry will do well to listen, weigh, and ponder.

Mr. Roberts leaves us with the largest question posed but unanswered. How do we move from the necessary use of the secular tool of historical criticism to the final evaluation of documents that enshrine religious affirmations and testify to the intervention of the divine? But if the problem remains, yet the preconditions for any solution have been illumined. We must not abandon the methods of historical enquiry. Rather must we sharpen our weapons, and use them more skilfully and more sensitively. Too quickly and too easily many of us impart orthodox answers into evidence and tremble to live with the hazards of Incarnation. It is just here that C. E. B. Cranfield's commentary on St. Mark leaves me unhappy and dissatisfied.

The effective reconciliation of Christian faith and natural science is another problem and demand that still confronts us; and it would surely be increasingly agreed that a more humble and fruitful approach is rightly required than the attempt at integration by reference to the natural knowledge of God within some comprehensive view of the world. Seen from the standpoint of the believer, the first chapter of Genesis proclaims a world of order and of goodness which reflect the glory of God. Does science report an orderliness in nature, and discern therein a reliability, a proficiency, an economy that may speak to us of "goodness" and wholesomeness; and can man, living in the precariousness of his freedom, find within the natural world some hints of graciousness which suggest that that world brings honour to God, that the fullness of the whole earth is His glory? If such questions do not seem to take us very far, and if the answers to them would appear to provide little obvious support for our religious concerns and preoccupations, we must not necessarily despair. It may be that we are being summoned to restate the old problems, to gain a new theological perspective, and to find the unified vision that we crave through the sensitivity of our living.

This is the sort of terrain through which the 1959 Riddell Memorial Lectures guide.³ The discussion is brief and the treatment inconclusive, but no attempt is made to heal our hurt lightly. Careful reading and re-reading will bring reward outweighing the gain from a dozen more superficially relevant and immediately convincing studies. Furthermore, it may be that we shall be driven to take another long look at the associated work of Mascall, Hesse, and von Weizäcker, and re-examine and discard our stock of glib clichés.

³ *Order, Goodness, Glory*. By W. A. Whitehouse. O.U.P. 9s. 6d. 1960.

Mr. Whitehouse gives substantial attention to the opening verses of Scripture, finding in them faith's affirmation of God's transcendence (over against cosmic mythology), of the relationship of the world to God in terms of creation to sovereign Creator, of this earth as the arena of man's achievement of freedom. This interpretation is illumined and confirmed by a new essay in the series: *Studies in Biblical Theology*.⁴ Here, also, the distinctiveness of the biblical understanding of reality is carefully expounded, and the measure of continuing tension between it and the myths it bent to its service is delicately assessed by way of exegesis. In opposition to the assumptions made by Bultmann and Gunkel, it is a phenomenological definition of myth that is adopted.

This valuable analysis is supplemented by a positive appreciation of the Old Testament's view of reality as expressed in categories of time and space. Israel made use of the mythical pattern *Urzeit-Endzeit*, but the pivotal position of eschatology ensured a transformation. While the myths look essentially to the past, the Old Testament looked to the future, and found the "new age" imposing itself upon the "old," the "new space" entering into the "old," to bring into existence a new temporal and spatial reality. This new reality is in fact "New Israel," the obedient community taking form within the historical Hebrew people.

Professor Childs is offering here his answer to one of the crucial questions of contemporary discussion. What is it in the Old Testament that is ultimate and of permanent significance, and where within it is reality to be found? Is it in certain ideas, in abiding truths that may be distinguished from temporal trappings? Is it in existential history, in certain historical elements within the tradition, in empirically validated historical happenings from which inferences of faith are drawn? Or is it not rather that reality must be discerned in the total experience of historical Israel, in the categories by which she expressed her existence and through which she articulated her self-understanding, in the total formulation of her memory, consciousness, and existence?

This is an attractive solution. It recognizes the importance of the concrete life of Old Israel and of the need for a criterion for the determination of the new reality within it; and it finds this criterion to be given by Scripture itself—namely Jesus Christ in the totality of His existence. Thus is the Old Testament given its significance, not simply as prolegomenon or preparation, but as manifestation in its measure and after its kind of that which is wholly incarnated in the Christ. This is surely true. Only on the question of historicity do we hesitate. To historical criticism is allowed a descriptive function; but it is affirmed that "the new reality is not tied to the

⁴ *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*. By B. S. Childs. S.C.M. Press, Ltd. 9s. 6d. 1960.

historicity of Biblical events." Unless language is here being used in a highly subtle and sophisticated manner, I wonder whether this does not really concede defeat just when victory is in sight.

To attempt a three volume work on the theme of human spirituality is to undertake a demanding task; but this first volume⁵ indicates that the burden will be shouldered lightly. Attention is here concentrated on the area of ecclesiology, since any serious examination of Christian spirituality must recognize the basic communal and historical element. The student must speak first of the doctrine of the Church, and treat of the Church as a necessary community. Perhaps this is the inevitable place for an Anglican to begin.

The major and most weighty part of this study deals with the biblical roots of the People of God and the direct line from biblical theology to the catholic doctrine of the Church of Christ, and proceeds to a comprehensive discussion of the Church Militant in terms of structure, function, and authority. The minor and concluding section speaks of the Anglican Communion, its nature, its potentialities, and its ecumenical significance. The whole bears the mark of the influence of F. D. Maurice, and stands in the broad tradition of A. M. Ramsey's *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*.

Nothing from the pen of Langmead Casserley could ever be dull. But we could have wished for something less slight, sketchy, and discursive. Foundations must be more carefully and deeply laid if an edifice such as this is really to stand. The defence of the historic episcopate as essential to ministerial and Church structure is central to the argument; yet I fear it will not convince the doubters. For the exposition betrays too slender and external an understanding of the positive Reformation insights and positions. And this is doubly unfortunate, since Langmead Casserley is probably right. Certainly the coming Great Church must be evangelical and catholic. Certainly the middle of the road Anglican is the bane of the Church of England. Certainly the rich heritage of Canterbury can with difficulty be paralleled. I applaud the candour and honesty of the criticisms of Protestantism. I endorse the author's estimate of the riches of the Communion into which he stumbled. Yet I still suspect that he lacks a prophetic awareness of the basic weaknesses of the tradition he would commend. And I think that the hope of Anglicanism lies not in England, but overseas.

And so to baptism, and to a book⁶ that in its own way seems to me to mark the end of an era. Written in support and expression of a Baptist position, it covers much of the ground treated by the

⁵ *Christain Community*. By J. V. Langmead Casserley. Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd. 21s. 1960.

⁶ *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*. By R. E. O. White. Hodder & Stoughton. 30s. 1960.

recent symposium *Christian Baptism* to which Mr. White himself contributed, and has the added advantage of presenting material controlled and unified by a single hand. Jewish background and biblical teaching are carefully and fully reviewed; current paedobaptist apologetic is painstakingly examined; the restoration of the biblical pattern in Baptist thought and practice is uncompromisingly demanded. If the upholders of believer's baptism have won, yet nobody is yet entitled to the prizes. The conventional Baptist position will hardly accord this study unqualified approval. There is much talk of initiation, of dynamic sacramentalism, of the baptismal gift of the Holy Spirit, of baptism as "effecting," "conferring," "accomplishing." That all this can and must be said in the context of a powerful assertion of the personal, ethical, confessional significance of the rite should surely make our churches think again, and re-examine their principles and practice.

This is an important and valuable work. The chapters on proselyte baptism and primitive catechesis bring together material not readily available elsewhere to minister and student, and offer sober and illuminating evaluations. The comprehensive surveys of modern paedobaptist apologetic, proceeding on the general principle of divide and conquer, demonstrate with appalling force the shifts and inconsistencies to which the defender of infant baptism has been reduced. Mr. White has put his brethren in his debt. Let us hope that they will not be too preoccupied with basking in the sunshine of his victories to listen to and act upon his strictures and his pleas.

Nevertheless, I doubt the effectiveness of the impact of this book in paedobaptist circles; and it is surely important that it should be scrutinised from this standpoint. The author is handy with a blunderbuss, but perhaps a more representative armoury should have been employed and a more adaptable proficiency displayed. It is often easy enough to dispose of some particular verbal formulation as groundless or illogical, but the rebuttal that carries conviction and prompts self-questioning must first enter sympathetically into the opponent's case, must concern itself not simply with what is said but with what is struggling for expression. Logic is admirable, provided that it is discerning. It is here that Mr. White falters, sometimes doing less than justice to paedobaptist intentions, often overstating his own argument by failure to allow for the untidiness of the logic of life and experience. There may be instanced his discussion (p. 103) of the wilderness temptations which not only ignores some doubts of contemporary scholarship as to their messianic significance but also seems to assume that a temptation conquered is a temptation disposed of—which the whole story of the Ministry contradicts. I fear that at many points the paedobaptist will cry: "This is not what I meant," and will not be helped by Mr. White's rejoinder: "This is what you said."

Such misgivings prompt further examination of this massive and apparently impregnable edifice. And then three cracks begin to appear. The first is the attitude to and interpretation of Scripture. It is this that makes the first two chapters, dealing with Old Testament and covenants, the most unsatisfying of the whole book. The approach is what is rather roughly and unfairly described as "liberal," and the scholars quoted in support are in the main of that era or persuasion and are preponderantly Baptist. At the least, this is tactically unwise. With it and through it runs the suspiciously logical Oesterly and Robinson line of progressive revelation, with the prophets as the fount of most if not all wisdom, with Jeremiah and Ezekiel as the exponents of the new and crucial individualism, with remnant theology as virtually a prophetic creation, with the allied determinative shift from nation to religious unit, from membership based on racial inheritance and accident of birth to membership based on moral choice and spiritual qualification. Of course so terse a summary is unfair to Mr. White. He is not living in the the Dark Ages of Old Testament scholarship. But the criticisms and questions remain. There is little attention paid to the necessity of interpreting the prophets in the light of the Mosaic context in which their thought unfolded and from which it must in part be interpreted, to the need of comprehending the Old Testament in the light of its own inner criteria and perhaps ultimately in the light of the New, to the importance of the modern recognition of Old Testament theologians that divine election and the religious basis of Old Israel reaches back behind the J document to the beginnings of her history. I am not denying the perils of a christological interpretation that ignores history and reads Scripture "on the flat." I am not here concerned to argue that Mr. White is necessarily wrong. But I do find in his exposition at this point a slightly musty flavour, and a lack of recognition that his opponents may still disagree because he has failed to come to grips with a method of biblical interpretation which is reputable and contemporary, and lies at the heart of much of this controversy.

Equally alarming and significant is the lack of interest displayed in the vexed problems attached to kingdom and church. On the whole the author seems happier with the kingdom—and with the Gospels rather than the Epistles. Is this perhaps the source of the uneasy feeling that remains with me that theology is too much written here in terms of the historical Jesus? I am not denying that the Ministry is vital, that history must not be bypassed, that the Christ is Jesus. But surely our theological stand must always and wholly be on the other side of the Cross and Resurrection, and all our theology be explicated from the perspective of the Ascension. Is it because this is not seriously attempted that the problems of kingdom and church are never really examined, and that their

virtual equivalence seems to be assumed? The sole gleam of light I have traced is the passing assertion that the church is "the kingdom in embryo."

Beyond this and connected with it, there lies the failure to reckon with the theology of F. D. Maurice and all that it involves for modern biblical and theological thinking. Because of this Mr. White does not discern the possibility of a realistic and tenable paedobaptist attitude to evangelism (p. 304). Nor can he quite come to terms with the real issue of prevenient grace. He cannot conceive that "anyone baptized in the twentieth century could miss the point that redemption antedates his personal faith" (p. 285). I could produce him a whole host of the baptized who do just that. For it all depends on the connotation of redemption. Here Maurice has profoundly influenced paedobaptist thinking, and with him we should reckon.

It is for such reasons as these that I adjudged this book to mark the end of an era. I doubt whether after it Baptists will ever quite be the same again; and I would think that in twenty years' time no reputable Baptist leader would dream of questioning Mr. White's thesis and conclusions. Our task now is to achieve an ecumenical encounter with the paedobaptists; and I wonder whether, at this point, the approach of which this book is our finest example is quite what is needed. I suspect that the apologetic of the next decades must strike out along different lines.

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