

Reviews

Christianity among the Religions, by E. L. Allen. (Allen and Unwin, 159 pp., 18s.).

This book is clearly written, useful, and eminently readable, although it cannot be regarded—as might have been hoped—as a significant contribution to the great debate which Dr. Hendrik Kraemer opened up twenty-two years ago. Others have taken up Dr. Kraemer's challenge, though no consensus of belief is in sight. But Mr. Allen virtually by-passes the issues posed by classical doctrines of Christian revelation. Two quotations in which the matter is settled out of hand will suffice. "We have to choose between the two interpretations of Christianity that have been current since the beginning, one exclusive and the other inclusive. For the first, the revelation of God in Christ is confined to a single stream of history, that which rises in Israel. For the second, what is revealed in Israel and in Christ is a dealing of God in mercy with all men at all times. The crucial significance of Christ is maintained on either view, but in the second case he is the point at which God so discloses himself that it can be seen that he is present at every point. For myself, the inclusive interpretation is the only possible one." (p. 119). That "all religions are false save one's own . . . can surely not now be held by anyone who has some knowledge of the great religions of the East" (p. 120).

On the other hand, if certain premises are assumed, whether because others find them as self-evident as does Mr. Allen, or because they have their own basic arguments for this approach, then a well-developed thesis emerges of great practical value for the actual task of encounter with those for whom the great non-Christian religions are living and personal faiths.

The first seven chapters give a very useful history of Christendom's growing recognition of religious and ethical truth to be found in non-Christian religions. "It was in the 13th century that Western Christendom began to be shaken in the conviction that it possessed the absolute truth." Christians from Europe came face to face with Islam, then with Chinese civilization, and later with Buddhist and Hindu religious philosophy and literature. Mr. Allen gives a history of ideas, not of those embodied in these non-Christian religions—for there is hardly a quotation from Eastern literature—but of those successively put forward by a long line of great thinkers from the 15th to the 20th centuries, as they reflected upon the significance for Christianity of this fact of truth discovered in other faiths.

In his eighth and ninth chapters, while recognising the complexity of traditions in both hemispheres, Mr. Allen shows how

East and West genuinely differ in the fundamental presuppositions governing their everyday thought and action. He then illustrates, from various Western thinkers, the four different attitudes which may be adopted towards these rivals for men's spiritual allegiance—neutrality, assimilation, hostility, or understanding.

The final three chapters embody Mr. Allen's constructive contribution. One by one he considers five different relationships between Christianity and the other great non-Christian religions, from the standpoint, not of theology, but of the philosophy of religion. "The finality of Christianity is not the initial assumption. . . . While the approach is from a Christian standpoint, the Christian allegiance of the writer is, as it were, held in solution throughout." Mr. Allen follows Troeltsch in pointing out "the fallacy of supposing that one has demonstrated Christianity to be absolute or superior when one has assumed as much as the outset by taking a Christian standard as absolute or superior." An absolute religion, he maintains, is a contradiction in terms. He does, however, admit that "the absolute is that which claims me personally here and now . . . this is a matter of personal commitment arising out of personal discernment, and not something that can be demonstrated."

Mr. Allen quotes Professor Zaehner that "the religions differ, not because they give different answers to the same question, but because they ask different questions," and agrees with Professor W. E. Hocking that "the religions may not be dissolved into general ideas; their strength lies to no small extent in what marks them off from each other." With Karl Jaspers he therefore sees "the will to boundless communication" as the one way forward. "I must regard my neighbour's truth as challenge and opportunity. In open communication with him, I shall either (a) come to hold my truth more firmly, or (b) abandon it because I have seen that it is not true, or (c) recast it in the form of a fuller and richer truth." Thus alone can the Christian "serve that Kingdom of Christ whose triumphs are only those of truth and love."

English-Speaking Missions in the Congo Independent State (1878-1908) by Ruth M. Slade. (Published non-commercially by the Académie royale des Sciences coloniales, 80a rue de Livourne, Bruxelles 5).

Miss Slade is to be congratulated that it has been decided to reprint this thesis, for which she gained her Ph.D. degree from London University. It was first published in 1959. The granting of independence to this new nation, subsequent turmoil and uncertainties regarding the future, and the heartfelt interest and

concern of British Baptists for the Church of Christ in Congo, in no small measure planted and nurtured by missionaries of the B.M.S., all make this study of topical importance and lasting value.

During the period 1951-1959, when the writer of this review served at B.M.S. headquarters, Dr. Slade was intellectually the most brilliant young woman who came before the Society's Candidate Board. Her offer of service, however, had to be withdrawn before she had completed her training, as she had come to accept the claims of the Roman Catholic Church. Her thesis, if in any way affected by this change of allegiance, is improved rather than impaired; it breathes a proper spirit of historical objectivity, while manifesting an understanding of both Protestant and Catholic work. In accordance with her limited subject, Dr. Slade states that her study "attempts to estimate the contribution which Protestant missionaries have made to the history of the Congo, during the period of the Congo Independent State and the early years of Belgian colonial rule. . . . In general, Catholic missionaries have only been mentioned when their work provides a parallel with that of the Protestant missions, or an illuminating comparison with it."

Dr. Slade is indeed a historian of promise. Her style is limpid and her narrative unflinching. But she is first and foremost a capable and conscientious research worker. Her very interesting introduction, together with a select bibliography, report the materials through which she worked. Her use of archival sources was supplemented by extensive perusal of missionary society periodicals; in these she found much of value, though she is under no illusion as to their limitation for historical purposes. "An examination of minute-books, where these exist, has been particularly valuable for tracing the development of the official policy of the missionary societies towards the Congo reform campaign; especially in the early years, little hint of this was allowed to appear in the missionary periodicals." Even more can be discovered when archives permit one to get behind official minutes!

No complete history of the Congo Independent State has yet been written. This book makes an important contribution to that wider task. After dealing with the early introduction of Christianity into Congo by the Portuguese, the signal stimulus provided by Robert Arthington, and the opening of their pioneering work by the B.M.S. and the Livingstone Inland Mission, Dr. Slade unfolds the expansion of the missionary enterprise, studies the methods employed, and relates the campaigning which culminated in the settlement of 1908. The interaction of political and missionary motives and moves afford a fascinating and illuminating study. The author proceeds with sure step in a field

long obscured by polemic. In spite of the thesis title, in her last chapter Dr. Slade moves to more recent years; her last few pages indicate certain assessments of the situation to date, although for the most part she has left her readers to make their own appraisal of the story presented.

The reviewer would like to raise two points. Dr. Slade refers to Dr. Latourette's judgment that "in the three decades after 1914 the increase in the number of Christians in the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi was among the most impressive of any in Africa, or indeed in the world." What factors essentially led to this church growth? By 1950 there were over 300 African ordained Protestant pastors, but none of these had had as full theological training as their European counterparts, whereas only about 200 had been raised to the Roman Catholic priesthood, yet these had received training as exacting as any in the world. This leaves which Church in a stronger position today?

VICTOR E. W. HAYWARD

The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation, by R. E. O. White. (Hodder and Stoughton, 1960, 30s., pp. 374 plus indexes).

This book offers a more comprehensive treatment of the subject of Baptism than is to be found elsewhere in recent theology, and the relevant literature available in English is put to good use. All readers will acknowledge the smoothness and speed with which the argument flows, and some its irresistibility. Many things in the book will immediately command the highest respect, such as the solid beginning made with the divine covenant, the affirmation of the wholeness of man and the associated wholeness of the effects of Baptism, the reiterated distinction between theology and exegesis, the importance of cataphesis alongside Baptism, and some things said in the discussion of symbol. The book exhibits acuteness of argument, for example, in discussing "vicarious Baptism," wide acquaintance with what paedobaptists say (admittedly often irreconcilably with one another), good sense in dealing with the dominical command to baptise, balance when it talks of the "two impaired baptisms" that presently operate in Christendom, vigour in refutation (e.g. of the Church of Scotland Report, p. 281, note 1), and at some points boldness quite undaunted by the undoubted strength of the opposition (e.g. p. 101, note 1).

The key to the book seems to lie in five words. They are apparently innocent and acceptable enough, and they occur on p. 31: "Inwardness and individualism go together." The author uses them to indicate a turning point in the development of Old Testament thought, as the new covenant of Jeremiah is conceived and proclaimed. The reader on the other hand can hardly fail to

see them as indicative of a position which dominates the entire book. The thought in general is that at this point in Israel's history the decisive step is taken of repudiating the idea of covenant based on birth and race; participation in the covenant-relationship is now a moral and spiritual matter; and "the centre of gravity in religious experience is shifted from the nation to the individual." This replacement of nationalism by individualism is not the only reading of the Old Testament facts. For while nationalism and individualism are indeed opposed and perhaps irreconcilable, neither is opposed to the idea of the people of God, and this single strand continues unbroken throughout both Old and New Testaments. This people of God is always primarily constituted by God's gracious choice. It is composed of the elect, not of the electing. The fact that inwardness supplements outwardness no more implies individual units who must aggregate themselves to form the people of God than the fact that each person must *singlatis* be circumcised atomises the idea of nation. On the other hand, if early Old Testament nationalism is regarded as being simply displaced by individualism, almost everything else in the book follows as a matter of course. Unresolved tensions are discovered in Jeremiah and Ezekiel; personal decision becomes a matter of primary importance; the people of God becomes a voluntary association; it is right to talk of "spiritual qualifications for Baptism," of "terms of salvation" and of faith paving the way into the Kingdom; and of course there can be no infant Baptism. Readers of this journal will not wish me to conceal what I think here: I regard the virtual identification of inwardness and individualism in Jeremiah's revision of the covenant idea as not the result of a difference of opinion but as an error of fact.

So we come to infant Baptism—and it is certainly not easy to see an early end to disagreement about its legitimacy. It is a pity that the last word the book has to offer on the subject is a quotation from H. Wheeler Robinson: "modern explanations of infant Baptism . . . are simply attempts to explain an existent practice by those who repudiate its original meaning." Of course the statement is true enough of some of the more trivial apologetic offered in modern days; but acute controversy always generates such peripheral argumentation. The serious arguments attempt to do justice to whatever it was in its understanding of Baptism that induced the New Testament Church (if one accepts J. Jeremias: *Die Kindertaufe in den ersten vier Jahrhunderten* 1958, and of course others), or (if one does not) at least the early Church, to extend in changing circumstances the ministration of Baptism to infants, believing that it was the same rite that was being extended and not a new one being invented. And, it is to be feared, the

argument from results discernible in recipients of Baptism is a weapon with too dangerous a recoil to be used by either side with safety.

In the end the book hardly makes it clear enough (at least to a non-Baptist) how Baptism as represented in it is real initiation at all. Baptism in the view of non-Baptists may involve problems, but it is essentially simple. It admits men to all Christian privilege and responsibility. A profession of faith is *not* required of infants because in their case Christian life makes an absolute beginning with Baptism; a profession of faith *is* required of adults because Christian life has in their case to make a start with a renunciation of the un-faith or the other-than-Christian faith that preceded it. But in every case, Baptism is the beginning of Christian life and faith. It is difficult to see how any beginning is made with a Baptism that is just "the appointed and appropriate expression of the faith." If it only "*marks* the entrance of the convert upon all the privileges, responsibilities, opportunities and enjoyments which the Gospel confers," it is not a real beginning; but how, on the other hand, *can* it be said to *begin* all this, since faith can hardly be thought to arise and come to the point of profession unless it be nourished by just such Gospel gifts?

Christians other than Baptists always find this puzzling—and perhaps some Baptists do so too. But it is at all events clear that Mr. White has done all the Christian Churches a real service in thus forcibly bringing so many old issues to the forefront of attention and so many new ones to light.

J. K. S. REID

The Population Explosion and Christian Responsibility, by Richard M. Fagley. (Oxford University Press, 260 pp., 28s.).

The key to this important book is found on page 94. In the first six chapters, Mr. Fagley has been explaining the reasons why family limitation is of crucial importance to the health and welfare of people in the underdeveloped areas. He now says that the actual requests of governments of the densely populated societies in Asia are "adjusted to the intimations from assisting governments as to the kinds of aid they are prepared to extend." He points out that no such intimations are forthcoming in the field of family limitation, and says "the only discernible reason is the fear lest religious controversy be engendered." This is certainly a striking and challenging statement, which if true should cause us to redouble our efforts to think and work ecumenically in the study of these problems. Mr. Fagley, executive secretary of the Churches Commission on International Affairs, has worked hard to discover and even to achieve some consensus of opinion among the non Roman Churches on the subject of family limitation and

the appendix (pp. 225-234) gives us the report of an international study group convened in 1959 by the officers of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council. This report states that "companionship and parenthood are established together" (in the Biblical faith) "as the purposes of marriage from the beginning, with sexual union as the ordained servant of both."

While, therefore, non-theological factors have led to the Protestant awakening on the subject of family limitation, the fact is that a solid theological foundation can be laid for the view that procreation is not the only aim which may be envisaged in sexual intercourse. In other words, the report comes down firmly on the side of family limitation by scientific contraception, provided any such course of action is the responsible decision of both parties.

In the first part of his book, Mr. Fagley has no difficulty in justifying the title "population explosion." Whereas the nineteenth century growth of population in the west *accompanied* the industrial revolution, in these twentieth century areas of rapid social change the population increases are unfortunately *preceding* any large scale economic and social development. He draws attention to the growing proportion of young people in these areas. It appears that no less than 45 per cent of the Chinese population is under 18.

In the second part, Mr. Fagley deals with the Biblical and ecclesiastical attitudes to parenthood and in a concise and helpful manner. He has chapters on the early Fathers, and the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant viewpoints. He pays a well deserved tribute to the pioneer work in this field of Anglican scholars set out in the Lambeth preparatory volume "The Family in Contemporary Society." He quotes the view stated by Thomas Aquinas that marriage is for common life and mutual aid as well as procreation and finds evidence in the statements of Pope Pius XI that the Roman Catholic communion may be able and prepared to re-think the application of their doctrine of marriage and parenthood, for instance, by a more scientific understanding of periodic continence as a method of family limitation. However, it is incumbent upon the non Roman Churches to press for an enlightened population policy by governments, and an educational campaign among citizens about responsible parenthood.

The Baptist Union of Denmark is quoted as an example of a body with a sense of responsibility over the population question. A paragraph written by Mr. J. E. T. Hough for the Citizenship handbook was presented to the international study group as representing a probable consensus of opinion among British Baptists. Unfortunately, the Baptist Union had made no declaration on family life or responsible parenthood. C. H. CLEAL