

In The Study

THE problem of biblical interpretation is still far from being solved. It is true that we can handle Scripture with far more confidence than was the case even twenty years ago. It is equally true that the overwhelming majority of the books that claim to show us how to understand and use the Bible attain what clarity and assurance they possess only by ignoring or submerging some basic unresolved issues. For this reason a book¹ that shows awareness of our real predicament and which attempts to expose the skeletons and wrestle honestly with the serious dilemmas must be of more than usual interest.

What is the relation between exegesis and exposition? What is to be our theory of hermeneutics? What is the nature of the unity of Scripture, and wherein does it consist? Is there a rightful use of typology, allegory, analogy? Is it meaningful to talk of the inspiration of the Bible? In what terms is the authority of Scripture to be understood? Where is "biblical theology" going, and where ought it to be going? These are the questions that preoccupy Dr. Smart and which lead him to pay considerable attention to the work of Bultmann and of Barth. What we are given is not a systematic thesis that moves methodically from a stated opening via an ordered path to a rounded conclusion. It is rather a sustained attack from many directions upon a most elusive target.

So it is that a large proportion of this enquiry is devoted to presentation and criticism of the views of twentieth-century scholars. This is ably and perceptively done. Implicit assumptions are revealed for what they are; and current dogmatisms wither under the icy blast of a relentless analytical gale. The result is a real shaking of the foundations—the essential preliminary to a firmer building and a more adequate construction. But that we still await. For Dr. Smart deals not in solutions but in prolegmena. This is partly strength, partly weakness. It is strength in so far as it is a reflection of the true understanding that the Bible controls us, not we the Bible. It is weakness in so far as it reflects the confused situation within which the Church still stands. For the problem, though it must constantly be referred back to the theologian, in fact comes

¹*The Interpretation of Scripture*, by J. D. Smart. S.C.M. Press Ltd. 35s. 1961.

alive most vividly for him who proclaims the Word of God. This study is rightly placed by its publishers in The Preacher's Library. It is a book for the working minister who seeks by learning from the past and understanding the present to fulfil his calling more faithfully and truly in the coming days.

Such a minister will do far worse than turn at once to a recent translation of a commentary on the Book of Genesis.² Seldom has there been a finer example of what a twentieth-century commentary should be. Literary criticism has ploughed this piece of biblical soil to pieces; and many, despising the barren inheritance and reacting against the tools that despoiled it, have turned with mingled relief and hope to what seemed more fascinating and sophisticated ways. But von Rad is wiser. He knows his debt to the Graf-Wellhausen labours, and delicately and discerningly he makes use of what has already been provided. Similarly he is discriminating debtor to Gunkel and the form critical harvest, and even more obviously to the historical perspective associated with Alt and Noth. Creatively he presses all these insights into service. He grapples closely with the text but never loses sight of the wider horizons. He acknowledges the aetiological motif but carefully refrains from riding it to death. He reckons with layers of tradition but ever seeks to make room for the final word that Scripture would speak. He is concerned not with the making of contemporary applications, but with the unfolding of Genesis' own living message.

The introductory section is short but valuable. The hermeneutical question is finely discussed in terms of the true definition of saga and the allied problem of historicity, and the distinctive emphases of the narrative sources, J, E, and P are delineated. But von Rad is at his best in his preoccupation with the credal basis of the Hexateuch and supreme artistry of the Yahwist in his handling of the primitive crede. Upon the basis of the old cultic confession—the plan of sacred history from patriarchs to conquest—and by the incorporation of diverse traditions (whether of Sinai, of the patriarchal period, or of *primaeval* history), he forged a unified presentation of tremendous and enduring power. To understand Genesis involves a primary appreciation of the strange genius we call the Yahwistic narrator. Von Rad's contribution at this point cannot be overemphasised.

The exposition which occupies the remainder of this volume is, in the best sense, theological commentary. Seldom have I received a stronger impression of being confronted at every point with exegesis rather than eisegesis. It is the work of one who has listened to the text with patience and sensitivity. Perhaps the word that comes most obviously to mind is empathy. When this is combined with fine scholarship, it results in exposition that at times rises to

² *Genesis*, by G. von Rad. S.C.M. Press Ltd. 50s. 1961.

real heights. This book was not intended solely for the expert. It is to be hoped that its purpose will be realised, and that it will circulate widely.

It is the same kind of empathy that is required for fruitful dealing with the Scripture of the first century A.D., for the New Testament abounds in images rather than logic. Its writers are incessantly pointing towards realities that break language and defy classification. Naturally this is to us a source of exasperation. We want answers to contemporary questions, solutions to modern problems, and we fail to find them. So we force the shifting images into an alien mould. We talk of mere metaphor or, more grandly, of ontological realism. We strive to pin down the Church of God within the descriptive categories of precise ecclesiology, and we claim Scriptural sanction for our constructions. So we remain divided. It is the measure of the debt we owe to the work of the Faith and Order department of the World Council of Churches that it is from the heart of its continuing ecclesiological study and debate that there has emerged a work³ that materially assists deliverance from our impasse. Probably it could have come from no other milieu.

Professor Minear brings under review the vast range of New Testament pictures of the Church and plots their interdependence. Minor images are not left out of account. But more considered attention is directed towards three clusters of images which point to the conception of the Church as the People of God, the New Creation, and the Fellowship of Faith. The one group relates the Church to the historical covenant community of Israel, the second sets it in its universal and cosmic context, the third points to its inner solidarity and mutuality. Thus the way is cleared for an examination of the images that cohere in the term Body of Christ, and for a final endeavour to relate the major pictures to each other by thinking them together and to draw some significant conclusions that may bear on the ecumenical predicament.

At the end we are left still posing many of the perplexing questions with which we began. The author is aware of this. He will not foreclose where the images leave open. But he will leave us with the dawning conviction that some of our questions are the wrong ones and that many of the others must be restated from a new perspective. This book may easily be underestimated because it is (like the images) suggestive rather than definitive. But this is precisely its strength. It speaks to us of the Church in her grandeur and her lowliness. More important still, it directs our eyes away from the Church herself, to her ground in the eternal life of the Triune God, to her purpose in the world of God's creation.

It is in harmony with this emphasis that we are constantly being

³ *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, by P. S. Minear. Lutterworth Press, 30s. 1961.

reminded in our day of that New Testament commonplace that the Church exists for the world. Christian citizenship is accordingly a phrase much upon our lips. Whether this salutary preoccupation is rooted in factual knowledge and deep understanding or expressed in much relevant action is, however, a more open question. For that reason, many will feel that two significant volumes⁴ now before us are long overdue. The one seeks to comprehend science and technology both in themselves and in their relation to social life. The other seeks to examine that social life in certain key areas and to relate to it the ideal of equality. Both are concerned with the consequent imperatives laid upon the Christian community in its life, task, and witness.

Dr. Cunliffe-Jones quotes all the right people. If anything this slim volume suggests overmuch a series of jottings filled out with a catena of illustrative quotations. Yet this has its advantages in that it aids the reader to follow the logical progression of what is always a close-knit argument. The comment in a field where too much Christian nonsense is solemnly and regularly presented is unusually perceptive. Rightly understood, science ministers to a concern for the truly personal. Rightly used, technology nourishes healthy social life. Dangers and abuses abound; but the way through is the way forward. Science must be thought through until its implications for mature human living shine clear. This study is most satisfying when it is exploring science at depth, least satisfactory when it attempts to plot necessary church reform in a technological society.

Dr. Cunliffe-Jones sees the relationship between the primary disciplines or departments of thought in terms of an equality (there is no one Queen of the Sciences) wherein each supplements other by contributing its own distinctive excellence. Mr. Jenkins also seeks to define his ideal of equality through the category of excellence rather than that of quantity or uniformity. There is an equality of uniqueness which needs to be emphasised and given expression over against all philosophical egalitarianism. It is from this perspective that the social life of contemporary Britain must be brought under criticism and survey. But equality is a slippery concept. It is not easily patent of meaningful definition. We are not quite clear that Scripture is really at home with it—and certainly the Conservative Party is not. Indeed, this book comes out of the radical tradition and must be read in terms of it. It is none the worse for that, even if from time to time we suspect that it is really talking not about equality but about human worth and the nature of truly human community.

However this may be, Mr. Jenkins has some acid but constructive things to say, as he moves from industry to incomes, from class to

⁴ *Technology, Community and Church*, by H. Cunliffe-Jones. Independent Press Ltd. 16s. 1961. *Equality and Excellence*, by Daniel Jenkins. S.C.M. Press Ltd. 21s. 1961.

education, from British society to Britain in relation to the wider world. He is good on management, not so good on trade unions; excellent on schools, awful on Oxbridge; and nowhere on ecology. But from first to last he is dealing with real issues which should be attracting a weight of Christian comment, study, and action. He has provided some basic material and much stimulating criticism. His trenchant examination is worth more than a truckload of contemporary booklets and pamphlets.

Slowly and painfully we are learning to associate worship not primarily with ritual and ceremonial but with theology and reformation. It is never easy to subject ourselves, our lives, our practices to Scripture and dogmatics; most difficult of all when they grind mercilessly upon our exposed nerve, the religious man's most vulnerable spot. There will be much travail and heartache before the cleansing and renewal are accomplished. Meanwhile, if we are wise we shall welcome all tools that sharpen our vision and enlarge our understanding, which prompt us to ask the right questions and construct at least tentative answers. We shall seek to learn again of Scripture, of tradition in its fullness, of our own past, of our separated brethren, and to add application to illumination. It is because of this that five recent studies⁵ should command our attention.

What do we know of Christian corporate worship within the New Testament period, and what were the motives and comprehension that governed practice? Any answer to such problems will involve enquiry into background and origin, will demand keen attention to any linguistic material that bears on ritual, will presuppose alertness to all pointers to non-sacramental observances, as well as to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Professor Moule is aware of all this and quarries the right terrain. No better guide could be selected. For what is required here is not simply competence, but a certain sanity and sobriety, a judicious spirit, a refusal to move too quickly beyond the probabilities. It is fatally easy to make the facts support the preconceived theory, precisely because in this field the facts are so few and so malleable. But of all New Testament scholars Professor Moule is the least likely to outrun evidence, to offer the neat schemes and the inspired intuitions. He is content to confess ignorance, to leave issues open, and to follow where the signs dictate even when it means conflict with the accepted positions. The value of his essay is not that it presents much new material but that it is an eminently trustworthy chart. It asserts that "the

⁵ *Worship in the New Testament*, by C. F. D. Moule. Lutterworth Press. 8s. 6d. 1961. *Christian Worship*, by T. S. Garrett. Oxford University Press. 15s. 1961. *Worship and Theology in England, 1690-1850*, by Horton Davies. Oxford University Press. 42s. 1961. *The Eucharistic and Liturgical Renewal*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr. Oxford University Press. 21s. 1961. *Teach Yourself to Pray*, by S. F. Winward. The English Universities Press Ltd. 6s. 1961.

Christians of this period saw the worship of God as the whole purpose of life," and that in the New Testament "Baptism is essentially *death* and *burial*—not mere *washing*." Such dogmatic pronouncements are rare. When they are made they can be accepted.

But worship belongs to the developing community life. We are not New Testament Christians. We had best stop trying to act and live as though we ought to be. We must reckon with the inheritance of nineteen centuries of liturgical tradition, must seek to understand it, and it may be to enter into it. T. S. Garrett provides us with the summary guide, writing from within the Church of South India, and rightly and inevitably betraying his background in his emphases and his preoccupations. Baptism, ordination, and the Christian year are not outside his purview, but in the main his concern is with the eucharistic liturgy down the years. Once more we shall not find much new material, though a tremendous amount of detail is in fact presented, which includes not a little for which recourse would normally have to be made to the large technical works. The "received" position is almost always followed in matters both of history and of interpretation. But in a text-book this is an advantage, and Mr. Garrett is the essence of reliability. Occasionally he ventures a judgment which would provoke an extended debate, as when he offers defence of the treatment of Morning or Evening Prayer as a valid form of Ante-Communion. But this is a rarity in a book which supremely fulfils its purpose.

Since Mr. Garrett is basically concerned with formulated liturgy, he has little to say about the Puritans, their heirs and successors. It is just here that Dr. Horton Davies provides the extended supplement that we need, in a volume which covers the period in England from Watts and Wesley to Maurice and which will eventually form part of a comprehensive series tracing worship against the background of theology. This procedure is particularly helpful, for it recognizes and does justice to the extent to which Christian worship is theologically determined in every age. The author has made this field peculiarly his own, and provides some three hundred pages which are packed with a combination of source material and shrewd judgment. He discerns three main divisions: the period 1690-1740 which is marked by the dominance of rationalistic moralism and is in general a time of decline from classic Reformation positions; the period 1740-1830 which is governed by evangelicalism and the life and innovation it carried with it; the period 1830-50 which is the era of traditionalism as focused most obviously in the Oxford Movement. Illustrative plates are inserted and a generous bibliography appended. The result is a handsome volume which goes a long way towards filling a gap in available literature.

It has but one major weakness. The proper balance of the relevant material is not preserved. Quite disproportionate space is

allotted on the one hand to the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield and on the other to the teaching and beliefs of F. D. Maurice. It is not easy to avoid the conclusion that the lengthy excursus on the great Methodist figures was inserted partly because the author had the material to hand and wished to use it; and a saving of space here might have enabled us to have an extension of the final section. The complaint is not that Maurice is an unimportant figure. He is pivotal—at least from the standpoint of our own age. Nor is it to be denied that the Oxford Movement dominates the second quarter of the nineteenth century. But what we seek and what we lack is a delineation and discussion of the worship of Dissent at this point, in the context of the Tractarian renewal. It may be that this will follow in the succeeding volume, and would be regarded by Dr. Horton Davies as strictly falling beyond the confines of his present task. Nevertheless, something should have been provided at the close of this volume. For in one sense the story of Nonconformist worship at the middle of the nineteenth century is the story of reaction to the Oxford Movement. The two belong together.

This influence of the worship of the Church of England upon that of the Free Churches whether positively or negatively is one of the continuing factors in the historical scene. For this reason if for no other many will welcome any opportunity of learning what contemporary insights and emphases are abroad in the Anglican Communion. The collection of addresses delivered at a liturgical conference and edited by Massey Shepherd represents, of course, the American situation. But the liturgical revival knows no frontiers, and most of this material has its relevance to our own situation. Unity is given by a common theme, for most of the contributors are in the end concerned with "the meaning of the Eucharist in all its manifold, social, and practical implications." Free Churchmen have their own understandings which may fit somewhat uneasily into this frame of reference. But if they have something to give, they have also much to receive.

If all this leaves the simple believer somewhat bewildered and feeling the need for some clear directives, he will be able to turn with relief to S. F. Winward. This author is wisely determined to make as few assumptions as possible, to start always from first principles, to state the elementary if that is what most needs to be said. He discusses the various aspects of prayer, its private practice, its corporate background, its context which is nothing less than life itself, and by way of illustration he adds a month's diary of personal prayer for morning and evening use. The whole presentation has a concealed profundity which will ensure that it will prove itself serviceable to a wide and varied audience.

If there are weaknesses, then they emerge from the heart of those features of the work which in principle constitute its greatest strength. It has a simplicity which is in no way akin to superficial-

ity. Yet, just occasionally, the simplicity becomes a way of obscuring or bypassing the problems which are real—as in the short section on persistent petition. It has also a certain timeless quality which suggests that it could have been written at any time, at least since the Reformation; for it draws on the distilled wisdom of centuries of Christian spirituality. Yet, from time to time, this results in a lack of necessary attention to the modern scene and the contemporary situation within which *we* have to pray. I say “*we*.” I had more accurately said “the laity.” For there is just a suggestion here of the parson projecting his own experience on to his congregation, and through his own coloured spectacles subtly misinterpreting their lives. This is not basically a criticism of Mr. Winward. It is a regretful recognition of the rather obvious fact that ideally this book should have been written by a layman.

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