

Reviews

Prophecy and Tradition, R. E. Clements, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1975. 104 pp., £2.25.

Dr. Clements' latest book is published in Blackwell's series "Growing Points in Theology". Rightly so, for it deals with a subject which has been to the forefront in recent years as a result of the work of people like Alt, Noth and Von Rad. Much attention has been given to the question of the formation and use of tradition in the OT in general and in the prophetic books in particular. This has resulted in a new assessment of the work of the classical prophets. Whereas at one time the prophets were regarded as the true founders of Old Testament religion they are now seen in a different light as men who were dependent on existing religious traditions. It would be easy therefore to conclude that the prophets were completely lacking in originality. Such a conclusion has not been drawn, of course, by those scholars mentioned and Dr. Clements' book will ensure that it never is. In his customary careful and thorough way he examines the way in which the prophets handle those traditions which were strong and powerful in their times. Their originality lies precisely in the way in which they do this.

A tendency of the school of tradition criticism has been to discover different "blocks" of tradition each with its own special theology or theological emphasis. So one has been tempted to speak of "wisdom" or "Priestly" theology or of the theology of sacrifice or of Zion as though there were several identifiable bodies of belief and doctrine. This book rightly challenges this point of view recognising, for example, that there were many different attitudes to sacrifice in ancient Israel just as there were many ways of regarding Zion. It cannot really be said therefore that the prophets spoke against the background of, say, the "current theology of sacrifice". Nor is it possible to place prophets and wise men into different, water-tight theological compartments, even if we may distinguish them as separate groups. For instance, since teaching was given not only in the Wisdom schools but also in the home and in the Temple didactic language, method and theology cannot be located exclusively in any one group of people or in any one *Sitz im Leben*.

Dr. Clements discusses the prophets' understanding of the Covenant, their experience, their office, their teaching about foreign nations and the relationship of their message to Wisdom and Apocalyptic. All this he places in the light of existing traditions and of traditions which grew up about prophecy and prophets. So, without denying the originality of the prophets he seeks to understand "how the sub-

jective experience presupposed by the claim that God had spoken to them was related to an objective world of ideas and institutions”.

The book is expensive, as most books are nowadays, but for anyone wishing to know what is currently being said about the prophets and their message it is essential reading.

H. MOWVLEY.

Familiar to all: William Lilly and Astrology in the Seventeenth Century. Derek Parker. London. Jonathan Cape. 1975. 272 pp. £5.50.

This entertaining book is concerned with the life and times of the astrologer William Lilly (1602-1681). Lilly lived long enough to see the popularity of his craft chilled by the cold winds of the new developments in natural science. Nevertheless, he himself seems to have made a very good living by astrology, to have considered himself a good Christian (he was a church warden in his later years and had published a book entitled *Christian Astrology*) and to have known when to change sides from king to parliament and *vice versa*. His most impressive prophetic *coup* seems to have been a prediction published in 1648 which linked London with a catastrophe including plague and fire for 1665/1666.

The author, while sympathetic it appears to astrology himself, recognises with engaging candour that Lilly's reputation depended "to a great extent on his own quick wit and the gullibility of his clients". Among his clients were at least two Baptist leaders, William Allen (adjutant-general under Cromwell) and Colonel John Read, sometime governor of Poole for parliament. While this book is not to be regarded as reliable for its understanding of the church politics of the period (almost as many mistakes are crammed into one paragraph on page 40 as the most unkind reviewer could require) or for its historical grasp, it can be read as an introduction to one facet of the thought world of the Seventeenth Century. It is engagingly written and helps the reader to understand why astrology had such a strong appeal to many highly intelligent and thoughtful people in England's century of revolution. At the same time Mr. Parker does not fail to remind his readers of the astrologers' ancient caution: "the stars incline, they do not compel".

B. R. WHITE.

Jacobin City: A Portrait of Norwich 1788-1802. C. B. Jewson, F.S.A., Blackie & Son. 1975. 178 pp. £5.50.

This book will be warmly welcomed by our readers on two counts. First, it is by one of the Society's Vice-Presidents and, secondly, it is a contribution to the usually neglected story of the strong radical tradition in this country in the closing years of the 18th century, a

tradition to which Dissenters, and not least Baptists, made a considerable contribution.

Mr. Jewson has already shown himself a diligent and careful historian of his native city and county, as well as giving to them distinguished public service in local government and through his business interests.

“Norwich is a very fine city, and the castle, which stands in the middle of it, on a hill, is truly majestic.” So wrote Cobbett, when he arrived there on one of his “rural rides” in 1821. He goes on to praise the fine market square, the cornmarket in the spacious St. Andrew’s Hall and the neatness of the women. Mr. Jewson concentrates on the reaction of the city to the French Revolution and to contemporary social and political problems. The population numbered about 40,000 and though the weavers were not as prosperous and secure as in earlier days, Norwich remained one of the most important manufacturing centres in the country. Whigs and Tories fought one another vigorously at elections, using the methods of the time, but the strength of Dissent was one of the most striking features of the city’s life. Presbyterians, Baptists, Independents, Quakers and the followers of the Countess of Huntingdon all had influential communities, led by respected citizens. Mr. Jewson’s *Baptists of Norfolk* and articles he has contributed to the *Quarterly* provide useful background to the references to Baptists in these pages.

The “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 was regularly celebrated in Norwich and when Joseph Kinghorn arrived in 1789, there was already organised agitation against the Test and Corporation Acts. Kinghorn shared the general welcome when news came of the fall of the Bastille. Mark Wilks, who had recently moved from the Tabernacle to found St. Paul’s Baptist church, became a much more excitable and vocal supporter of the French Revolution and reform. William Taylor, a leader at the Octagon Presbyterian chapel, where radical theology as well as politics found favour, visited France in 1790 and “kissed the earth”, when he arrived. He went there again in 1802.

Not the least interesting pages tell of the links with the trial of the leaders of the London Corresponding Society and of the sermon Mark Wilks preached on Athaliah (2 *Kings*, xl 14) in order to raise funds for the defence. We hear of a visit by William Winterbotham, of Plymouth, after his imprisonment for some intemperate sermons. Kinghorn was not very favourably impressed, but Winterbotham was allowed into the St. Mary’s pulpit. Strongly left-wing sentiments were also to be heard from the King’s Lynn Baptist minister, William Richards.

Chapters on “Shops and Shopkeeping” and “The Pursuits of the Mind” make this a book that will appeal to many different tastes. We shall hope for more from Mr. Jewson’s pen.

ERNEST A. PAYNE

A Desirable Object—The Story of the First 150 Years of Stroud Baptist Church. W. O. Wicks. John Street Chapel, Stroud, Gloucestershire, 1974. 80 pp. £1.50.

Mr. Wicks, who himself has given devoted service to the church whose story he tells, skilfully employs memory and muniments to produce a fascinating account of one hundred and fifty years of chapel life and outreach in Stroud. A detailed text is greatly enhanced by excellent graphic design to make a most attractive whole. The first two pastors, Henry Hawkins and his son-in-law William Yates laid good foundations: a lively outward looking church emerged. Disciplined with typically Victorian severity, the church suffered a characteristic schism (linked to the Downgrade issue) in 1894. Complete with Sunday Schools and P.S.A. the church developed a full array of agencies. Nor was the church's influence confined to Stroud, the story is told of John Yates, the draper, who was known to shut up shop when necessary and put a notice in the window "Gone to the Missionary Meeting": perhaps that is why his business did not prosper! The story of Victorian growth makes a more romantic appeal to our imaginations than the attempts of 20th century ministers and deacons to hold the line, a story which is told rather more sketchily and with a less certain sense of strategic design.

J. H. Y. BRIGGS

We have been here for 100 years, centenary brochure of Christ Church Baptist Church, King's Langley, 1975. Unpriced.

This attractive, "king-size" brochure was produced to mark the church's 100 years of witness. It contains a letter from the present minister and details of special centenary events in 1975. 2,100 copies were distributed locally.

The historical text, consisting of roughly 500 words, tells the story of the church from the time a century ago, "when it was still safe for children to spin a top in the middle of the High Street", till the present day. There is also a photograph of the first church at Primrose Hill and one of the splendid new building.

The brochure is supplemented by a 17-page cyclostyled document, which seems to be a special centenary edition of the church magazine. It contains a reminder from the minister (Rev. Michael Hambleton), that "a centenary must be forward looking", and a fascinating little article, "Bygone Days", based on reading scrap books and talking with long service members. This provides some interesting glimpses of former ministers and members.

Strictly speaking, neither document is a church history, but both contain material of interest to the church historian. Not every church is in a position to publish its history, but this kind of material is within the scope of most churches. Other churches approaching their centenaries might well consider following the example of King's Langley.

ERNEST F. CLIPSHAM.

Hall Green Baptist Church: A History of the Church (1914-1975).

R. W. Ram. Printed by the Orestone Press, 1518 Stratford Road, Hall Green, B28 9ET, 1975. 16 pp. 25p. (Obtainable from the church).

The Hall Green church is in Birmingham, and the author is a member of it. This booklet was produced in connection with the Golden Jubilee celebrations in March, 1975. The church is fortunate in having someone of Dr. Ram's ability and experience to undertake the writing of its history.

We are given a coherent picture of the church's life and development over a period of 60 years. Yet this is more than simply a record of the main events in the story of the church. We are shown a congregation asking searching questions about its rôle—What is the Church? What is the gospel? What ought this church to be doing?

The church portrayed in this booklet is one marked by intellectual awareness, social concern and ecumenical interest, concerned to express its faith in a way which is relevant to the times. Nevertheless, the author is honest and objective in his appraisal, and is not afraid, at times, to use words like "unsuccessful" and "failure".

My one regret is that Dr. Ram seems to have relied almost exclusively on official records. The result is that the story of the church is told very much in terms of its ministers. I would have appreciated some glimpses of ordinary members. Even the ministers come across as policy makers rather than real live people.

These, however, are minor points. Here we have the story of a 20th century Baptist congregation, told with care, sympathy and objectivity, and it is a story well worth reading.

ERNEST F. CLIPSHAM.

Alfred Dye, Minister of the Gospel. Alan Sell. London: Fauconberg Press, 1974. 60 pp. Unpriced.

Dye was born at Tasburgh, Norfolk, on 14th July 1851. His mother was a Baptist and his father a parish church warden who eventually followed his wife to the Baptist chapel. Alfred began his preaching ministry in Norwich in January 1874, supplying various pulpits and he continued to itinerate until 1888 when he became the Gospel Standard Strict Baptist pastor at Bell End, Rowley Regis in the Black Country. His ministry here lasted thirty-five years, after which he itinerated again until his death in 1930. As a representative of the self-educated Baptist and Independent preachers of an experiential High (or even hyper) Calvinism his life and teaching exhibit both the strength and weaknesses of this tradition. Unfortunately the biographer does not develop this theme. Dye was the author of tracts, books and hymns and in 1891 published his autobiography as *Sovereign Grace over Sin Abounding*.

The brevity of this study will inhibit its usefulness to historians of the 19th Century Church; but, no doubt, it will be much appreciated among Strict Baptists, not least for its fine photographs.

PETER TOON.