

# Reviews

*God in History* by E. W. Ives. Lion Publishing. 1980. 185 pp. £1.95.

*Patterns in History* by David Bebbington. Inter-Varsity Press. 1980. 210 pp. £3.75.

Every historian makes assumptions and views history from a particular point of view. He is entitled to do so. The Christian historian, therefore, may properly regard history as the sphere of activity of a loving God, provided that he recognizes that others may make different conclusions from the same evidence. "When he tries his faith in the historical fire, he can hold it without reproach." Such is the conviction of two books on Christianity and history published recently, *God in History* by E. W. Ives, and *Patterns in History* by David Bebbington.

Both men are University lecturers in history; both are convinced Christians of an evangelical turn of mind and Baptists; both are anxious to be rigorously honest in their history and recognize, for instance, that morality triumphs only occasionally in history and then is often aided by economics, but both assert in the end their belief in the divine providence.

Dr Ives, who lectures at Birmingham University, has a clear apologetic purpose in *God in History*. He is out to tackle the difficulties the non-Christian historian may find. He begins with the historicity of the gospels, dealing fairly with form-criticism. He draws the contrast between Christianity and those other world-faiths that have a historical point of reference and he asks what reasons Christians have for discerning pattern and purpose in history, and he asserts, as against Tillich and Bultmann, that Christianity must make particular historical statements. Then he goes on to defend, if not the record of the Church, at least the reasonableness of Christian belief, in the light of such stumbling-blocks as the divisiveness of the Reformation, Christian militarism, "Protestant" capitalism and traditional clericalism.

Dr Ives examines carefully and squarely before coming down on the side of the angels. If, on occasion, one feels he has reached his angelic conclusion a little swiftly, this is probably due to the large range of topics he covers in a fairly slim paperback. This is a good book to put into the hands of a 6th form or undergraduate historian who may be considering the Christian faith.

Dr Bebbington's book, *Patterns in History* has a more scholastic purpose, as is evidenced by the excellent index he provides. He analyses a number of philosophies of history, beginning with the Greek cyclic idea. The two most important schools seem to be those attaching to the Enlightenment (which produced a pragmatic view believing in generalized laws of history and in the idea of progress) and to the Romantic movement (producing an existential view, that sought to understand intuitively a particular situation on the assumption that different kinds of men tend to react differently). He finds these two tendencies at work still among modern

philosophers of history. This reviewer is not competent to judge the accuracy of the summaries of various historian's view but is grateful to Dr Bebbington for slotting into place so much that had been confusing.

But *Patterns in History* has another purpose also. Dr Bebbington is anxious to show that it was the Christian approach to history that gave rise to both the schools mentioned above, and that it can unify them into a satisfactory whole. It offers hope, for instance, without insisting on continuous observable "progress", and it offers an underlying principle that does not bind man's freewill. Marxist history has also offered a synthesis, but it appears to be an unstable one, toppling either into relativism or determinism.

This is a fascinating theme. One wishes, in a way, it had been made clearer from the start, for the survey of patristic and mediaeval historiography, entitled simply "Christian history", draws a rather confusing picture.

At several points, e.g. in his recognition of the tension between "general" and "particular" providence, Dr Bebbington faces issues not raised by Dr Ives. In general he appears to have a more professional readership in mind, yet without demanding detailed technical knowledge. Readers of the *Baptist Quarterly* will find much profitably to ponder in both books.

P. G. SAUNDERS.

*Praise God* compiled by Alec Gilmore, Edward Smalley and Michael Walker. The Baptist Union. 1980. xvi + 176 pp. £3.95.

Theology and worship go together. There is a constant interaction between them as the people of God confess their faith and praise the Lord. Neither the understanding of God's ways, nor the expression of worship, keep constant form, since the people's life is not static. Neither is God. The people move on through changing times and the Eternal God travels with them in pillars of cloud and fire, in flesh and blood, in bread and wine, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Knowing the story of God's ways, they look, listen and respond in faith and praise in each generation to God the Eternal Contemporary.

Since its publication in 1960 E. A. Payne's and S. F. Winward's *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship* has been much appreciated by those, Baptists and others, who lead the people of God in worship. Now twenty years on, the Baptist Union has produced a new book entitled *Praise God*. Twenty years is a short time but they have been years of social, intellectual and theological change. This is reflected, as we would expect in the new book.

There is an obvious contrast in the language used. *Orders and Prayers* was pre New English Bible, pre "You" instead of "Thou", pre many new liturgical texts and forms of prayer. *Praise God* draws from old and new sources and uses various modern translations of the Scriptures. Both in the language used and the thought of God expressed *Praise God* is a child of its time as was *Orders and Prayers*. To say this is no criticism. The

compilers have drawn upon resources of long ago and only yesterday to help us praise God today. That is how it should be.

Another contrast is between the more formal style of *Orders and Prayers* and the open quality of *Praise God*. The two sub-titles are revealing. *Orders and Prayers* is a Manual for Ministers. Services are provided to cover many situations. For each there is an order. *Praise God* is sub-titled "A Collection of Resource Material for Christian Worship". It is just that. There are few "set" services and even these presuppose a good deal of personal work by those in the situation. There is no doubt that *Praise God* reflects the present mood. It has more the feel of an open necked shirt than a stiff collar and tie!

*Praise God* has three parts. First, based on the Christian Year, are sentences, prayers, readings and hymns from Advent to All Saints. Each section has an all too brief but helpful introductory note with some suggestions for ways of worship. The second part is a collection of sentences and prayers arranged under the traditional heads of thanksgiving, confession etc. There are also prayers for particular occasions of Thanksgiving, Remembrance, Dedication and Mission. Finally the book includes orders of service for Sunday Worship (taking word and sacrament as the norm), Infant Dedication and Thanksgiving, Christian Initiation (baptism, laying on of hands, reception into membership, communion), Christian Marriage and Christian Burial. The form of each service is briefly introduced and then follow prayers with lessons from Scripture and other sources. It is clear that a number of theological traditions and understandings have been drawn upon. Theological students, and others, might usefully attempt critiques of the understanding of baptism, marriage etc. that underly these services and prayers. Does, for example, the Infant Dedication material represent a shift in Baptist thinking about the relationship of the child to Christ and his Church?

The book is well produced, clearly printed and indexed. As befits a resource book there is plenty of space for personal notes, additions and cross references. This is how the compilers hope the book will be used.

The compilation of such a work must have been no easy task, but overall it has been well done. Among my own disappointments are a shortage of strong affirmations of forgiveness, of prayers of dedication of the people's offering and any direct references to the ministry of Christian healing. I had hoped for something more on various ways of expressing our worship of God, some more imagination perhaps, but maybe that is to ask for another kind of book. In any event this minister is grateful for what he has received. He will not discard Payne and Winward, not least for its excellent introduction, but he is already grateful for the stimulation and helpfulness of *Praise God*. It is a book for today and today's ministers will be grateful.

BRIAN HAYMES.

*Evangelicalism and Anabaptism* edited by C. Norman Kraus. Herald Press. Scottdale, Pa. 1979. \$5.95. pp. 187.

*The Victorian Flight: Russell Conwell and the Crisis of American Individualism* by Daniel W. Bjork. The University Press of America, Washington D.C. 1978. pp. 130.

A recent survey of public opinion in the United States suggests that one adult American in every three considers himself an evangelical; that some forty million adults claim to have "had a born again conversion". Opinion polls enjoin caution, but — when considered alongside the powerful organizational presence and buoyant activism of evangelicals, the Christian colleges, broadcasting stations, publishing houses, business associations, and so on — the strength of popular evangelicalism is indisputable. No longer is it a movement of backwoods America, of the dispossessed, the outsiders; it is mainstream, powerful and, as symbolized by its capture of the White House, part of the political and social establishment.

The major aim of *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism* is to analyse the character of this movement. The volume grows out of a series of lectures delivered at Goshen College, Indiana, in 1977-78; most of the authors are of a Mennonite persuasion; the editor is himself a Mennonite minister. The short essays can necessarily do little more than sketch patterns, but a number of them whet the appetite for further reading and more substantial treatment. Particularly helpful are J. Lawrence Burkholder's appraisal of the movement, which places it in the context of the conservative cultural mood of contemporary America, the editor's swift survey of the various Pentecostal and Fundamentalist roots of what is more a coalition than a monolithic movement, J. C. Wenger's examination of the controversy over the inerrancy of Scripture, and Marlin Jeschke's treatment of the eschatology of evangelicalism. John A. Lapp tackles the question of evangelicalism "as a political phenomena" (*sic*) with more vigour than elegance.

A second aim of the volume is to view the movement from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. Although the editor claims that "none of the writers attempts to make the case for or against either Evangelicalism or Anabaptism", it is clear that at least some of the authors are sympathetic to the radical critique of evangelicalism and American society that the Anabaptist tradition provides. At times they explicitly commend the emphasis of radical evangelicals and Mennonites on non-violence, and on "costly discipleship", right living and social justice. They are out to challenge the reinforcement evangelicalism gives to the conservative mood of America, to its materialism and individualism.

Such a congruence between materialistic and evangelical ideals is not new to the American experience; indeed at first sight it seems to explain the career of Russell H. Conwell (1843-1925), the Baptist minister, church-builder and founder of Temple University, Philadelphia, whose famous lecture "Acres of Diamonds" appeared to insist that every American had a God given duty to get rich. That Conwell delivered the lecture six thousand times to paying audiences suggests how well he expressed the hopes of

individualist-minded Americans of the Gilded Age. It is one of the merits of Daniel Bjork's essay that he shows how Conwell's life and message amounted to more than this: in an era when individualism was threatened by a corporate, bureaucratizing America he offered security and a link with the past. Unlike earlier biographers of this secondary figure, Bjork sets out neither to condemn nor to praise: Conwell's life, rhetoric and style are used as specimens for psycho-history, for sociological and social-psychological analysis. The approach sometimes jars, but this is a generally readable, often shrewd book. It is a pity it was not given better proof-reading.

RICHARD CARWARDINE.

*Guide to the Parish and Non-parochial Registers of Devon and Cornwall, 1538-1837* compiled by Hugh Peskett. Devon and Cornwall Record Society: Extra series. Vol. 2. 1979. lxxvi, 258 pp.

This *Guide* is a work of wider usefulness than the title suggests. Its aim is not merely to list the surviving registers of the churches and chapels of Devon and Cornwall, but to record all congregations which might have kept registers before 1837. It includes about twenty Baptist churches or preaching-stations in Cornwall and nearly sixty in Devon, although the registers of only thirty-five churches can be traced. Most of those registers were surrendered to the Registration Commissioners in 1837 and are in the Public Record Office (at present at Chancery Lane), but it is noted that twelve Baptist churches keep their early records, which may include registers, on their own premises. The list provides information about copies of registers, indexes and related sources such as memorial inscriptions. The compiler also discusses the historical uses of the registers and sets them in the context of changes in population, jurisdiction and religion. Students who are not specially interested in Devon and Cornwall will find useful hints about the vagaries of recording practices. One example concerns the Morice Square chapel at Devonport, which was founded by the Independents in 1784; when the building was sold to the Baptists in 1799, the Baptist minister continued to use the old chapel register. Tiverton Baptist church illustrates both deficiencies and unexpected bonuses in the records. It is claimed as one of the five earliest Baptist churches in England, yet no registers earlier than 1767 seem to be extant. In 1837, however, the person responsible for sending its registers to London made a fuller return than the law demanded, and he included retrospective entries for births occurring as far afield as Nottinghamshire and Ghent (Belgium).

The *Guide*, clear, painstaking and well produced, is to be recommended to church historians and genealogists alike.

ROSEMARY TAYLOR.