

IN THE STUDY

It may seem faintly perverse to seek an understanding of Old Testament "wisdom" by ignoring the conventionally labelled Wisdom Books and peering in less obvious corners. The procedure might indeed be judged as positively dangerous in an era when scholars find Wisdom under almost as many Old Testament stones as they do the Deuteronomistic School. Does such audacity pay off in the recent book¹ that it produces? The answer must be a very qualified Yes.

It has to be said that in language and style this study leaves a lot to be desired. Convoluted and occasionally stilted prose does not ease the reader's passage through an argument where clarity is of the essence. Morgan in fact begins in that inchoate area of Israel's history which antedates the monarchy, moves on to firmer ground with wisdom gleanings from the Yahwist, the Succession Narrative and the early chapters of I Kings, does the familiar prophetic tour (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk), probes the Deuteronomistic Movement's literature, tests the exilic waters (Ezekiel, Priestly Code, Deutero-Isaiah), and finally beaches his craft in Esther, Daniel and the Psalms. As might be expected, we hear not only of royal and court wisdom but also of popular wisdom, some of it clan-based.

It can be argued that the enterprise is flawed from the start. What purports to be an "holistic overview" of wisdom influence in non-wisdom literature, shedding light on the development of the wisdom tradition, must start with some defined understanding of what counts as evidence for the influence of wisdom. Morgan speaks of literary forms and theological perspectives and major characteristics of the wisdom tradition which can act as scholarly control. Yet such phrases never find content precision. Hence the identification of wisdom influence in text after text has about it an air of the arbitrary.

Such a judgement, if accurate, is damaging rather than damning. Circular much of the argument may be, but not all circles are vicious. To float a hypothesis and see whether it will accommodate the evidence without violent straining is sometimes a fair way to proceed. The difficulty in this instance is not that the case for a pluralist matrix to Israel's religion fits so happily with one of the dominant contemporary theological moods: nothing surprising in that. It is rather that the distinctive significance of an assertion of the interrelatedness of the theological traditions (of which "wisdom" is one) becomes so elusive that what starts out as a relatively fresh insight threatens to end as a blinding statement of the obvious.

That the wisdom tradition is not an awkward secular surd in the total equation that was Israel's faith scarcely needs argument at this late date. That from the beginning it was in

¹ *Wisdom in the Old Testament Traditions* by D. F. Morgan. Blackwell, £4.95. 1981.

fruitful theological interplay with other theological traditions seems wholly likely. But to define and identify it outside the Wisdom Literature remains hazardous and the plotting of its developing course remains difficult. In this study, Morgan extends recent perspectives on Wisdom in a stimulating fashion. But I would think that there are stronger reasons for pluralism in theology than this particular attempt to ground it in the Old Testament.

At his untimely death a decade ago, Leonhard Goppelt of Munich had completed the bulk of a *Theology of the New Testament*. A translation of the first of two volumes² is now available. It is accurately sub-titled *The Ministry of Jesus in its Theological Significance*. After the tabling of some relevant historical background it presents Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, his ethical demand, his offer of salvation, his mighty works, his self-understanding, his summons to discipleship, his death and resurrection, all with the intent of providing a *theological* picture from the materials the Gospels contain. The forthcoming second volume will plot the Apostolic witness to Christ in the remainder of the New Testament.

At least two questions have to be asked of any enterprise of this kind. Is the structure of the project adequate? Is the working out of the project satisfactory? The first question enquires whether what is on offer presents the theology of the New Testament in the way in which it ought to be presented. The second question enquires whether, within the chosen understanding of the nature of the task, a satisfying and comprehensive execution has been achieved. It is obviously easier to answer the second question than the first.

Certainly within his chosen frame of working Goppelt has performed with impressive skill. His learning is comprehensive and his judgments invariably judicious. There is a quiet mastery of material perhaps most delicately displayed in the coherent manner in which paragraph follows paragraph and section follows section. Believing that it is possible to glean from kerygmatic gospel material a reliable picture of the ministry of Jesus, and believing further that this does and must continue to constitute the base of New Testament theology, Goppelt probes behind the gospel (particularly the synoptic) tradition(s) to expose the earthly Jesus. Inevitably this involves an endless chain of critical decisions, many of which cannot within the limits of space be argued and not a few of which are contestable even from a standpoint sympathetic to Goppelt's own. More serious is the nature of the principle of selectivity at work. Facets of the material get exhaustive treatment. Other elements (e.g. the Temptations) qualify for scarcely a mention. On balance, however, the achievement merits high praise.

The significant problems lie elsewhere. Is this the way to present a New Testament theology? Here I must confess to being in two minds. Goppelt is clear that the Easter kerygma

2 *Theology of the New Testament. Vol. 1.* by L. Goppelt. SPCK, £12.50, 1982.

is the starting point for New Testament theology and that the Jesus tradition is a retrospective formulation. Let it be granted that this does not inherently result in the Bultmanian conclusion that the message of Jesus is (merely) presupposition of New Testament theology. At the same time it surely puts a searching question mark against a presentation that puts such enormous weight upon unscrambling what the Gospels themselves have so carefully "mixed". That is one side of the perplexity. The other side resides in the thematic nature of the tabling of the Jesus tradition that is here provided. The scheme offered is admittedly an attractive one, except that the material gathered on discipleship and the goal of Jesus' ministry seems oddly grouped - almost as though a place had to be found for fragments that fitted nowhere else in the structured portrayal. But the lurking feeling remains that the mould should spring from the Gospels themselves - and does not.

Let the carping critic do better! And there's the rub. Meanwhile, in its bold concern for the pressing of exegesis to theological conclusions and theological overview, this book from a latter-day Schlatter strikes all the right notes.

The basic questions provoked by Goppelt's presentation surface all over again with a recent Introduction to the New Testament.³ Is this the way to do the job? If so, is the execution of it adequate? There are however complicating factors arising from the joint authorship involved. This study is a revision by Dennis Duling of a work by Norman Perrin originally published in 1974. We need also to ask how radical is the revision and whether and in what ways the result is an improvement.

The Perrin version sought to offer a picture of the New Testament as scholarship revealed it. What emerged was not an "Introduction" in the conventional sense, but rather something more like an unfolding of the developing stages of Christian understanding recoverable from the New Testament by the application of form and composition criticism. Indeed, one of the early chapters bore the title "A Theological History of New Testament Christianity". The subsequent story began with Apocalyptic Christianity, drew towards its close with the Literature of Emergent Catholicism, and en route visited Paul and his school, the Synoptists, and the Johannine writers. At every stage the attempt was made to expose the intentional structure of each writing. Weaving in and out as unifying strands were the key elements of the volume's subtitle: Proclamation and Paraenesis, Myth and History.

Such a presentation blew through the stuffy stereotypes of New Testament Introduction like a breath of invigorating air. The perspective had genuinely creative facets. In many respects it constituted a stimulating beginning to a long overdue enterprise. Yet it was arguably flawed at a number of crucial points. In the first place, Perrin was a Synoptic

3 *The New Testament: An Introduction* by N. Perrin and D. C. Duling. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. £9.70. 1982.

Gospels and Christology man; the treatment of some of the other parts of the New Testament was on occasion almost embarrassingly jejune and slapdash. Secondly, the favoured tools deployed worked a good deal better with some scriptural books than with others; in places the exegetical structured surveys became little more than unrevealing paraphrase. Thirdly, key controls dictating interpretation and presentation sometimes needed rather more convincing argument than they received: the "delay of the Parousia" syndrome seemed to be "read in" almost as often as it was "read out".

What then of the Duling revision? It is indeed a genuine revision, resulting in a one-third increase in length. "Background" material is considerably richer. Substantial reordering marks the total presentation. Even the wording of sentences from time to time suffers change. Much more attention is given to social history. At all these points significant gain must be registered.

Yet Duling remains a Perrin disciple; and that has at least two consequences. It means that the perspectives of Bultmann and his school dominate. It means also that unbuttoned critical judgments tend to force the whole New Testament rather too neatly into an arguably oversimple developmental mould. The angle of vision remains fruitful, in that it enables breathtaking glimpses of significances too often overlooked. Yet at points, I would judge, it seriously distorts perception. That might not matter among peers accustomed and equipped to weigh and measure. In a book designed for beginning students, however, it means that hesitation remains.

Donald Mackinnon has been one of the most impressive of our philosopher theologians in the post-war period. A recently published *Festschrift*⁴ seeks to do him honour and on the whole succeeds. After an uneasy start, with C. F. D. Moule briefly and not altogether convincingly searching for ontological implications of New Testament language and the late Geoffrey Lampe deploying his daunting knowledge of the early centuries to illumine the relationship between "Athens" and "Jerusalem" but dealing at almost obsessive length with the magi and their star, the contributors begin to get into their stride.

To mention the most discerning of the essays is to indicate something of the weight and quality the editors have amassed. Don Cupitt is engaged in what he does best when he discusses Kant in relation to the old tradition of negative theology and powerfully indicates why and in what way the Enlightenment constitutes so stern a chasm between yesterday and today. Nicholas Lash once more tables his familiar concern to keep theology in partnership with the intellectual marketplace by exploring the necessary road from the narrator with his religious tales to the metaphysician treading the way of analogy; and in the doing valuably reminds us of the danger of reading Aquinas through the eyes of Cajetan. It is worth noticing

4 *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology* ed. B. Hebblethwaite & S. Sutherland. C.U.P. £17.50. 1982.

that, at a much later point, Roger White, exploring analogical predication, enters exactly the same caveat. Meanwhile Torrance gives us his characteristic presentation of the resemblances between science and theology, and S. W. Sykes plots the understanding(s) post-Kant of the place of theology in the University and inserts a plug for systematic theology.

This kind of symposium often leaves the impression that the honoured recipient might have been anybody and that the contributors merely looked in the study drawer to see if they had something of approximately the right length which had not already been delivered or published in more than three places. Mackinnon rates better, and has received it. An encouraging number of the writers consciously engage his interests and attempt improvisations on some of his chosen themes. A sane and sober philosophical realism, a proper respect for the metaphysical task, a refusal to sell out yesterday and today on the promise of a happy tomorrow, an unyielding commitment to the particular and the actual even when they wear a tragic face - these are notes which both mark Mackinnon and are not absent from these "frontier" studies.

A "major work" is the blurb description of the latest volume⁵ of the writings of Pannenberg to receive translation. This is publisher's code for a "collection of studies", and the essays included range in origin from 1962 to 1977. Inevitably the quality and weight is uneven and the total effect episodic.

Pannenberg is an uncompromising protagonist of a theological basis for ethics. Dissatisfied with the time-honoured consignment of the State to the position of bulwark against chaos in a fallen world, he is yet concerned to ease substantially the christological constriction that a Barth provides in this area. Something of the path he would take emerges in discussions of the theology of Law and of the Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. It comes as no surprise that the argument is carried on throughout in dialogue with modern thinkers from Schleiermacher to Ebeling and with many a wide-ranging glance down the centuries.

The other essay-addresses are frankly unremarkable if sometimes thought-provoking, whether the theme be human unity, world peace, or the nation. The exception is the study of the basis of ethics in Troeltsch. This provides a helpful and perceptive discussion of one who touched most of the theological nerves of the modern era, the final counting and weighing of whose legacy remains an unfinished item on the contemporary agenda.

The British Journal of Religious Education (formerly Learning for Living) has for long occupied a crucial place as a forum for discussion. The reputation of its editor almost guarantees that his published selection⁶ of articles from the

5 *Ethics* by W. Pannenberg. Search Press. pa.£6.95. 1981.

6 *New Directions in Religious Education* ed. J. Hull. Falmer Press. pa.£5.95. 1982.

seventies will be weighty and judicious. So indeed it proves. We are led from contemporary research on religion in childhood to the attempt to formulate a rationale in connection with the nature of religious education, and on via an exposure of the implications of our pluralistic social context to the bread and butter issues of curriculum and teaching method. Seventeen articles in all, deftly tied together by the editorial pen.

Of course, it is all a far cry from that science of religious education towards which the more optimistic hope to move. "Let a thousand flowers bloom" might seem the more appropriate slogan. Partly the problem is a shortage of hard facts, Goldman and Peatling notwithstanding. Partly it is the speed of social change, with comments on the secular society made in 1971 sounding a trifle superficial in 1983. More significant yet is the total lack of unanimity as to the basic rationale for religious education, as to what religion is, and as to the presuppositions from which to move. The religious as well as the educational assumptions of a Goldman of a Loukes, of Schools Council Working Paper 36 or the West Riding Syllabus, have determinative influence on aims, methods and end products. And in education we live for a generation with our mistakes!

That is why a book that reminds us of some of the paths in religious education recently advocated or explored is of interest to more than the professional educationalists. The fact is that there exists a half-open door between religious education in schools and Christian nurture in the Church, and the traffic has threatened to become one way.

Everyone may agree that the tasks are different. Yet too easily that recognition can become a statement of a distinction in the "what", accompanied by an identity in the "how", together with an assumption that no other dimensions have to be faced. Perhaps those concerned with nurture need to ask themselves with a new urgency what assumptions underlay the turning, for example, to life themes as a methodological point of entry vis à vis the child. Suppose we oversimplify for a moment an admittedly complex issue and suggest that the assumptions are at least two. One is that experience must be the starting point. The other is that, since the distinction between the sacred and the secular is on the whole spurious, any basic human experience will do. The first of these is almost indisputable. The second begs a mound of questions. Both are educational judgments. Yet they are also significant religious, even theological, judgments as well. And they have left their confused imprint on the curriculum of churches the length and breadth of the land. A further reason why the ongoing dialogue this volume samples merits the widest possible involvement.

Take an editor's preface, an author's preface, and a series of seven essays almost all of which have already been published between 1959 and 1974, and the resultant whole⁷

⁷ *Jesus' Parables and the War of Myths* by A. N. Wilder.
S.P.C.K. £10. 1982.

scarcely gives promise of constituting a bargain for the impecunious. I linger over it because, in his own distinctive way, its aged author is a giant. The publication in 1939 of *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* served notice that an independent mind was treading the boards of New Testament scholarship. Throughout the post-war period, in lecture and learned journal as in more accessible writings such as *Early Christian Rhetoric* (1964) and *Theopoetic* (1976), delivery was made on the promise of the earlier years. It became clear that an unusually discerning spirit was standing at the critical junction where Bible, Literature, and Theology meet.

Never was the sentinel more needed than in the sixties and the seventies. As the continental exports of structuralism and semeiotics began to disturb the settled routines of Anglo-Saxon biblical understanding and rival schools of interpretation threatened to take up embattled positions, some, reeling under the jargon, dismissed it all as Gallic intoxication while others embraced it as the interpretative key for the future. Yet through it all one figure kept his cool and, because of the enormous respect he commanded, could not be written off as *passé*. Amos Wilder assessed, assimilated and, with a generous and judicious penetration, held the line against narrow enthusiasms and premature foreclosings.

The present collection of studies is illuminatingly subtitled *Essays on Imagination in the Scripture*. It is further broken down into two parts respectively headed *The Parables of Jesus and the Full Mystery of the Self* and *The Symbolics of Jesus and the War of Myths*. Thereby we are alerted to an overarching preoccupation with the dimensions of language and the fundamental significance of biblical rhetoric.

Put thus baldly, it might easily be concluded that what is on offer is an overdose of aesthetic pretension, an exercise in insulated literary contemplation, an exuberant over-indulgence in the beauties of linguistic adornment. Nothing could be further from the truth. What is projected is a probe into the subsoil of the biblical tradition, the linguistic heart of that epic narrative which is scripture, as it moves from first to last things and orders life in all its fulness. The parables are unfolded as scenarios of life and destiny. The New Testament imagery is exposed in terms of myth and vision. And in and with it all Wilder is constantly moving backwards and forwards between yesterday and today, plotting the continuities but at the same time illuminating the variables. It is an impressive and impressionistic portrayal.

Three binding threads seem to run through the whole. There is, first of all, a governing conviction that biblical language has referential significance; it has an inalienable hold on reality; it is not mere private artificial signification. The naming and imaging of reality lies at the heart of the scriptural concern. Failure to give this due weight is always the fateful road to a false reductionism.

Secondly, there is the continuation of Wilder's early concern with eschatology, now particularly related to apocalyptic text though still recognised as a controlling frame for vari-

eties of Gospel material. Biblical apocalyptic also has an inalienable hold on reality, never degenerates into phantasmagoria, is tied fast to universal history, signals renewal and restoration rather than final destruction and catastrophe. I confess I would have looked for some more explicit recognition that biblical apocalyptic does not always avoid the danger of what I would describe as eschatological overload, with a consequent blowing of fuses. But the main point is cogently argued, and surely stands.

Wilder's third thread seems to be his doughty recognition of the social and cultural dimensions and rooting of the biblical language modes. It is this characteristically American insight that distances him from the European preoccupation with the Word as "address" directed at the will and from the secular literary tendencies to insulate and isolate language from its full contextual range and depth. Indeed, apocalyptic and other language genres are not abstract, timeless types that float across the centuries.

A wise book, this, from a wise man. If theology awaits a "rebirth of images", then preaching awaits a rebirth of language. And, in the end, the two are one.

NEVILLE CLARK

C. H. Spurgeon was born in 1834. To mark his Ter-Jubilee the Society intends to hold a short summer school at Histon Baptist Church, Cambridge, in early September 1984. Further details will be given in the next issue.

A full Summer School is planned for 1985.

The Archives of the Devonshire Square Particular Baptist Church and of its Amalgamated Churches

The Minister of the Devonshire Square Church deposited these archives in the Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, London EC2P 2EJ, in November 1982. They have been catalogued (Mss.20,228-49) and are freely available for consultation by researchers between 9.30 a.m. and 4.45 p.m., Monday to Saturday.

The Devonshire Square Church, originally in the City of London but since 1871 in Stoke Newington, London N16, is among the oldest and most notable of Baptist congregations and its archive is of great interest. It includes church meeting minutes in almost unbroken sequence from 1664, Deacons' meeting minutes from 1885, various registers of members between 1664 and 1891, accounts 1687-1934, and a minute book relating to the removal from the City of London in 1870-72. With it are the archives of amalgamated churches: minutes and membership lists of the meeting successively at Petty France, Artillery Lane, Walbrook and Turner's Hall, between 1675 and 1727, when it came to Devonshire

Square; and minutes 1828-83, membership lists 1822-84, accounts 1858-84, and Sunday School minutes 1848-85, of Shacklewell Baptist Church, Stoke Newington, which joined the Devonshire Square meeting in 1884.

REVIEW

The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870 - 1930
by Jeffrey Cox. O.U.P. 1982. pp.xii, 322. £22-50.

"The churches of England are now almost empty on an ordinary Sunday morning". That opening sentence does not inspire confidence in the powers of observation of an American scholar who must have spent several years in London pursuing his research. Potential readers should, however, be assured that Cox is more reliable as an historian than he is as an observer of contemporary religious practice. His book is, in fact, the most thorough and illuminating study of church life in late Victorian and Edwardian London that has yet appeared. The strength of the work lies in its reluctance to invoke generalized theories of secularization as an historiographical *deus ex machina* to explain the rapid disintegration of Victorian religiosity and in its wealth of detail on the particular experience of South London churches. The mood of Edwardian nonconformity is particularly well captured, and Baptist readers will be interested to find illuminating sketches of such figures as Archibald Brown, Walter Hobbs and S. A. Tipple. Excellent historical material is unfortunately marred by a tendency to impose categories of generalization which will not fit: nonconformist churches are divided into "plebeian" and "liberal" categories, the former being equated with theological conservatism and the latter with middle-class respectability. F. B. Meyer thus emerges as a "liberal" who preached conversion to the working classes in the afternoons but held to safer liturgical ground with his middle-class congregation in the mornings.

Cox wishes to discard theories of secularization as too easy and too "inevitable", and in their place advances an argument in terms of the varying abilities of different churches to compete in the free market of ideas encouraged by the secular state. It is plausibly suggested that the most successful churches in such an environment will be those with a strong emphasis on recruitment and without direct dependence on the state, whereas established churches will be the least successful. The problem about this argument is that the experience of early twentieth-century England was almost precisely the opposite: nonconformity declined drastically, whereas most Anglican indices do not begin to fall sharply until the late 1950s. Cox places most emphasis in attempting to explain the decline of institutional Christianity on the fact that secular agencies progressively displaced the philanthropic functions of the churches, with the result that by