

TABLE 5

<i>Numbers of Conversions or Baptisms in the last 2 years</i>	<i>Conversions</i>		<i>Baptisms</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
0 - 4	44	58	41	54
5 - 9	15	21	14	19
10 - 19	10	13	5	7
Don't Know	3	4	10	13
	—	—	—	—
	75	100	75	100
	—	—	—	—

While one must be careful about drawing sweeping conclusions from such data as to the success or failure of churches in evangelism, it is clear that in at least one-third of the churches questioned there had been at least five conversions in the last two years. In many others although they were not specifically asked, it is also clear that there were none. At least one-half of the churches questioned had less than four—or two or less a year.

Only one thing is common to those churches which recorded ten or more conversions, that is an enthusiastic concern on the part of a group or even one person within the church for the task of evangelism.

## ARTICLE REVIEW

### A NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

G. C. D. Howley, (*General Editor*). Pickering & Inglis 1969, 666 pp., £2.50.

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*A New Testament Commentary*, edited by G. C. D. Howley, with assistance from F. F. Bruce and H. L. Ellison, needs no introduction to CBRF readers at this point. Nevertheless, some comments and reaction from the other side of the Atlantic may prove to be helpful to our membership.

That the commentary is based on the RSV seems most appropriate. This version, despite lingering deficiencies, is gaining a more general acceptance, though it is neither advanced enough for the newer breed of NEB readers nor conservative enough for the older churchman clinging to his AV. A working knowledge of the Greek text may be assumed throughout this commentary, despite the inconsistent usage of citations from same. This fact, together with employment of a conservative English text such as the RSV, ensures a moderate approach to textual variety.

The layout is traditional for such a book: dual columns in Biblical style. For the introductory articles a straight single-column page might have been better, but the editors seem to have been taking their cue from the *New Bible Commentary*. We appreciate the bold-face type in citations

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of Scripture, in contrast to the latter volume, and also having the author of each section identified clearly at the head of his section. This is a refreshing contrast to a work like the *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas*, edited by E. M. Blaiklock, where only a protracted searching of individual pages leads the reader to the conclusion that half the book is by one author (not the editor) while other contributors have written scarcely a paragraph.

The Commentary represents twenty-five contributors, all Christian Brethren, but most obviously eschewing any denominational parochialism. Compared to the old NBC, there are more so-called 'laymen' (at least six of whom do not have theological degrees), about the same number of professional scripture teachers (twelve out of twenty-five in the NTC vs. twenty-three of forty-seven in NBC), and, naturally, fewer professional pastors. The prominence of the 'teaching brother' in the NTC and his counterpart, the parish minister, in NBC, shows up in marked contrast to the largely American *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, where only two out of forty-eight contributors come from the parish rather than the schools. Such continued vitality in the pulpit, both in Brethren and non-Brethren circles throughout the United Kingdom, cannot fail to make a difference in the life of the respective churches.

By nationality, NTC includes two Americans, some Commonwealth men, but no contributors from the Continent. NBC has the same proportion of Americans (the revised NBC includes a number of Canadians), and representation from the Netherlands and Greece (though both are missing from the revision).

With reference to critical matters, especially those of authorship, the NTC is firmly traditional, but without the dogmatism of spirit which has marked many conservative works in the past. Even such touchy problems as the authorship of 2 Peter and the 'Pastorals', the provenance of the 'Fourth Gospel', and the possible dis-unity of 2 Corinthians, are given only minimal discussion, although the issue is never entirely passed over.

Bibliographies show a good variety in theological viewpoint, but are largely limited to works in English (or in English translation). Apparently the audience envisaged is one that does not interact with German scholarship; on the other hand, its reading is not limited to the kind of 'safe' book found in the typical evangelical bookstore. A slight denominational flavour is added by the citation of William Kelly, W. E. Vine, C. F. Hogg, G. H. Lang, H. Craik, and even B. W. Newton and J. N. Darby (once each, I think). Other evangelicals, especially American, are ignored, sometimes to the detriment of the overall work (e.g., Longenecker's useful work *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* is missing on page 123—a serious oversight). The reader will be thankful, however, for a good, standard summary of the best of British scholarship in each area covered.

## PART I—GENERAL ARTICLES

The tone is set by the General Editor in his opening article on the authority of the New Testament, an authority based not so much on rationalistic proofs or Scriptural proof-texts, but on the living authority of the apostolic

witness to the presence of the divine word in Christ. Although Howley comes down hard on the side of a traditional evangelical view of inspiration ('the standpoint of this volume is that both form and content are important' page 18), he spends little time either 'recapping' traditional fundamentalist arguments or refuting contemporary theological options. Authority is, in the best reformed tradition, tied to the Scriptures rather than Church or 'Reason', and its authentication is attributed to the Holy Spirit. A necessary corrective to the individualism of twentieth-century evangelism is the insistence that this inner spiritual testimony comes both individually and in the fellowship of the Church, although the writer does not explain just how the Church is the recipient of this enlightenment.

'Text and Canon' by D. F. Payne takes a traditional view, claiming original authority for each book, but recognising that the formation of the canon and acceptance of the books as we have them was a process which occupied about 350 years. In recent years R. L. Harris (*Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*) has questioned whether this process-theory of canonisation, as almost universally accepted among Protestants, can be squared with the objective criterion of apostolic authorship; but most evangelicals remain unconvinced. Payne's section on canon is followed by a helpful review of the textual questions inherent in New Testament studies, including some examples of why RSV has departed from AV readings and a listing of major manuscripts.

David Clines' scholarly treatment of 'The Language of the New Testament', is marked by the writer's obvious interest in Semitisms behind the text, an interest which does not detract from his ability to interact with the Greek text itself. There could have been a fuller treatment of the perplexing problem of the language of 2 Peter, and the bibliography might well have included reference to Deissmann's *Light from the Ancient East*.

'Archaeological Discoveries' are treated by A. R. Millard, newly appointed Lecturer in Semitic Languages in the University of Liverpool. His section on the papyri overlaps a bit with Clines's article, and in general the material on sites and people keeps to standard paths. That the Garden Tomb is suspect and the Antonia questioned as the actual site of Pilate's praetorium should not surprise anyone. A closing section deals with Dead Sea and Nag Hammadi material, both of which are adduced as support for increased faith in the reliability of the gospels. Bibliography is popular, slanted toward the literary side of things, and might well have included both Kenyon's important study *Jerusalem* and W. Gasque's much more modest work on Sir William Ramsay in the Baker Biblical Archaeology series.

J. M. Houston's 'Environmental Background' might better have been designed to consider solely physical features, for the opening sections on sociological and religious environment seem properly to belong in Rowdon's subsequent essay. (As an example of what might have been more helpful, readers should consult Dr. Houston's own article on 'Geographical Background' in the *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas*.) Footnoting is extensive throughout (*vis a vis* Rowdon), but the bibliography could have included more specifically geographical works, particularly the

new *MacMillan Bible Atlas* (which, however, may have arrived too late for inclusion).

In two detailed chapters, H. H. Rowdon deals with 'Historical and Pagan Religious Backgrounds'. Rowdon's authoritative survey suffers from a complete lack of footnoting, an omission which is most disconcerting when the discussion reflects an argument, such as that of Stauffer concerning the date of the birth of Christ (page 63), which gives no indication, either in text or bibliography, as to its source. In the section on chronology (again duplicated in part by Houston), Rowdon affirms the identification of the Council in Jerusalem (Ac. 15) with that described in Galatians (2:10); an identification rejected both by the General Editor (page 119) and F. R. Coad (page 444), whose acceptance of Ramsay's later view, which put Galatians before the Jerusalem Council, seems to this reviewer to be the only satisfactory harmonisation of details of both passages. The conversion of Paul is then pushed back to AD 33, but this leads to the difficulties which Coad discusses on pages 446ff.

A wealth of information is given by H. L. Ellison in his essay on 'Jewish Backgrounds'. A stimulating history of ideas from Ezra (dated traditionally at 440 BC) to New Testament times demonstrates the writer's own grasp of the material. Dangers inherent in any history of ideas built on documents, the dating of which is in dispute, are evident, however; and one wonders whether the 'lateness' of the 'intellectual rationalism' attributed to Hellenistic influence is really demonstrable in Ecclesiastes: and, if so, whether that fact is not his proof of the late date of the book (c. 200 BC) rather than an independent testimony to a development of thought.

In a section on religious parties in Judaism, an Essene background for Hebrews seems to be in mind (page 75); although this is not explicitly stated. Ellison's usual iconoclastic bent is more evident in the section on Synagogue and Law, where the oft-quoted Talmudic taboos concerning the trial of Jesus are put out of court as anachronistic.

In one of the most important articles, W. L. Liefeld traces the development of doctrine in the New Testament. The treatment is cautious, scholarly, and Biblical throughout. Although mildly indebted to form-criticism, Liefeld clearly avoids making the church the creator of doctrine. Rather, he sees forms such as *kerygma* and confession, hymn and exhortation, as part of the original tradition. The section on the 'new people of God' (page 85ff.) leaves open the possibility of a later return to concern with national Israel, but clearly equates the present people of God with the Church. A 'connection (but not identification)' is seen between the Kingdom and the Church. In general, Liefeld has written an excellent introduction to a historically-based theology of the New Testament; something conservatives have long been without.

In 'The Fourfold Gospel', F. F. Bruce duplicates some of Liefeld's material on primitive Christian sayings, tracing helpfully the progress of the material through the apostolic tradition, the missionary *kerygma* (Peter and Paul are seen as being in agreement on essentials), and early Christian worship and teaching, coming finally to 'the written gospels'. A cautious approach to source criticism affirms Markan priority and a primitive 'Q' for the sayings of Jesus, but Bruce emphasises (page 99) that

the 'gospels themselves are much more important than their putative sources'. Closing statements on 'The Fourth Gospel' and the 'The Gospel Collection' wax devotionally eloquent, achieving the tone of reverent scholarship that should mark a work like this Commentary.

An essay which, understandably enough, is more distinctively 'Brethren' than the other articles and commentaries is F. R. Coad's 'The Apostolic Church'. Opening with a section on Church and Kingdom (cf. Liefeld), the author launches into a study of church 'pattern', the results of which are sure to provoke varied responses. If there is any 'sacred cow' among Brethren, it is the conviction that they are following New Testament church order, an idea challenged by Coad's (and incidentally, Henry Craik's) argument that the Church from Jerusalem to the towns evidenced considerable diversity. Indeed, growth and diversity of expression are taken as positive qualities. The author does not go on to suggest that the presbyterianism of Jerusalem and the congregationalism of Paul's missionary churches might both be valid in 1970, but the suggestion is implicit.

On the unity of the Church, however, the author comes down hard; and in such a way that one is left asking whether some visible form of unity might not be preferable to our current intensely congregational loyalties. By stressing that visible unity is the result of spiritual union cemented by love, the essay stops far short of modern ecumenicism's tendency toward mere organisational connection; but only a final plea for sympathetic understanding of separatist movements within Church history keeps Mr. Coad from a place back in the Darbyist camp with its visible 'circle' of fellowship. Perhaps the actual distance between Darby and Coad is best explained in pragmatic terms. Coad, although favourably disposed toward Darby's ideal, never loses sight of its idealistic character; Darby, on the other hand, pressed the concept of visible unity to an extreme which, as Mr. Groves once prophesied, would lead to innumerable divisions and hopeless fragmentation. Not only in the above, but also in its re-examination of other questions with which Brethren have been continually concerned, this stimulating article merits further consideration. (Ellison's *The Household Church* would seem to merit inclusion bibliographically.)

From the pen of the general editor comes a second article, 'The Letters of Paul'. Departing from tradition (cf. Guthrie's 'Pauline Epistles' in the *New Bible Commentary: Revised*), Howley suggests a three-fold rather than a four-fold division of the epistles. The problem of 2 Corinthians, like the question of Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, is simply introduced, with strong affirmation of the traditional position in each case. Discussion of Pauline theology is linked to C. A. A. Scott's contention that the whole may be subsumed under the term 'salvation'; a judgment with which we can certainly concur.

Howley's comment about a 'noticeable development' in Paul's teaching concerning the Body of Christ (page 121) leads us to wonder whether such a metaphorical switch (in 1 Corinthians, the head is not distinguished; in Colossians, Christ is the head) is really to be seen as a development, or just two sides of the same metaphor shaped to suit the purpose of the moment. Perhaps a more fruitful investigation of development might have taken as its foundation the eschatological questions probed by both A.

Schweitzer, C. H. Dodd and (more recently) C. F. D. Moule, or the question of Jewish responsibility, raised more recently by R. Longenecker (*Paul, Apostle of Liberty*). Schweitzer's thesis on Pauline mysticism is indeed mentioned (page 117), but nothing of that scholar's argument as to its development is included. I am not sure this is necessarily a genuine weakness of the Commentary, but in certain places there seems to be a tendency to quote widely from various scholars without going into the real point being made by the scholar in question. Perhaps an introduction to names like Schweitzer, Dodd, Barrett, and Scott is all the general reader needs; if so, the Commentary has done the community a service. One might wish, however, that there were some better way to apprise the general reader of some of the further issues raised.

Professor Bruce's essay on The 'General Letters', reflects his usual grasp of scholarly data. Discussions of authorship are put aside in favour of a history of the canonicity of these 'catholic' epistles. Thus we are left without critical discussion of questions such as the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter (let the reader understand), but the lacunae are filled in the introductions to the books themselves. Bruce argues briefly, but forcefully, for a common fund of primitive preaching on which both Paul and the Twelve drew, thus negating the claim for divergence or even an excessive Pauline influence in the general epistles. Finally, there are brief summaries of each book with an especially good outline of James.

A useful article by D. J. Ellis, 'The New Testament Use of the Old Testament', closes out the first section of the Commentary. In an essay concerned chiefly with hermeneutical considerations, Ellis sees the New Testament use of the Old Testament as controlled by historical and then-current exegetical principles, but free to see a new element in a complete and final revelation. It is this new element, the concept of fulfilment or completion, which (following Bruce et al) becomes the basis of a New Testament theology of the Old Testament. In a concise treatment of the suggested use of 'testimonies' as a basis for quotations concerning Jesus' Messianic role, no decisive answer is given. The problem of allegory and type is fully considered, with discussion reflecting current debate, some of which may be followed by the average reader only by reference to the original literature on the question (e.g., D. J. Ellis' disagreement with E. Earle Ellis on the use of *typos*). Because of the importance of these hermeneutical questions this final article is important to the reader wishing to keep abreast.

## PART II—COMMENTARY

In this section we can only consider certain pivotal passages, in order to gain some general idea of the directions of thought. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 - 7) provides an immediate touchstone for the discussion. Ellison views the sermon as thoroughly Jewish, but (*contra* dispensationalists) argues that its intended audience is those who 'by grace have passed beyond the law'. In his handling of the parables of Matthew 13, Ellison is again difficult to label. Both the Scofieldian 'minute allegorisation' of the parabolic material and Dodd's rejection of any independent significance to the details are set aside. The Kingdom itself

transcends, but includes, the Church (cf. previous discussion by Liefeld, et al, and Ellison's own note on 'The Kingdom of Heaven', page 143), and the parables are applied as cutting across rabbinic teaching, but also as directed to the church.

David Ellis' 'John' is sober, refusing even to speculate on some of the suggested symbolism in John's handling of such events as the marriage in Cana. In chapter 3 there could have been further discussion of background to the 'new birth' figure, and also a word or two on the meaning of *monogenes* in the light of differences in translation from AV to RSV in verse 16. The figure of 'bread/body' in chapter 6 is treated in traditional low-church form, while the suggested Messianic implication in Jesus' use of *ego eimi* (I am) as a reflection of a prophetic passage (John 8:58) is given most cautious acceptance. Traditional arguments about eternal security are passed over in both chapters 10 and 15, but the implications of John 17 for ecumenical thinking are made explicit. On 17:21, we read: 'Nothing less than organic unity will satisfy the prayer of the Saviour', a statement that must be taken in light of that comment on 10:16, 'It is Christ himself who gathers . . .'

Trenchard's treatment of Acts is marked by a distinctly devotional concern. The Christian Church is seen as beginning at Pentecost, although no attempt is made to sort out reformed and dispensational views of the exact nature of its newness. (Trenchard, like most other contributors, would seem happy with G. E. Ladd's work on the Kingdom, thus assuming a much less radical break between Israel and the Church, but not going so far as to blur the distinction.) Pentecostal *glossolalia* are considered to be of a different order from those of 1 Corinthians 14, and no attempt is made to evaluate the question as it applies to present-day manifestations. A consistent bias toward immersion-baptism is evident in the section on Acts as well: witness the comment on 8:38, 39 to the effect that, 'the joint descent into the water certainly suggests immersion'.

Leslie Allen, writing on Romans, offers considerable help from the original languages, but tends to quote much more extensively from other writers than some. His treatment generally exhibits the same caution found in each section of the book. Although no attempt is made to duplicate traditional theological arguments, the mildly representative position taken with respect to Adam's sin in Romans 5 is consistent with recent reformed dogmatic thought. There is, however, no uncertain sound in the discussion of chapter 6, where baptism by immersion is enthusiastically pictured as a 'dramatic mime of what God has done with a man (in the new life)'. The original missionary situation of Romans 9-11 comes to the fore, with the conclusion that, although the unity of the people of God is stressed in the figure of the olive tree, Paul makes no attempt to assert that Old Testament promises to Israel had 'automatically passed *en bloc* to the largely Gentile Church . . .' In fact, Israel as a whole is still to be saved, but only by faith, and following the Gentile Church's ingathering. The position taken here, like that of the Commentary generally, hardly reflects the charge of traditional amillennialism affirmed by some of its dispensational critics.

A few references to articles on the other epistles will have to suffice.

P. W. Marsh takes a rather strong position on 1 Corinthians 7 (consistent, it would seem, with the text), ruling out the possibility of divorce when both parties are Christians, but allowing for the possibility of remarriage when the original marriage, consummated before belief came to one of the partners, has fallen finally apart. The difficult passage in 7:14 is referred to ceremonial cleanness, by analogy with Exodus 29:37, etc., and no thought of the personal conversion of the unbelieving partner is permitted. Typical of the way in which a problem verse is handled throughout the commentary is the treatment of 1 Corinthians 15:29, where various options are given (but unfortunately only Grosheide's view is identified by author) but no conclusion is given.

F. R. Coad's comments on Galatians again show the direction of thought in contemporary Brethren circles, where law (5:18) is no longer seen in the simplistic and negative framework set by earlier teachers, but rather with a dual role, on the one hand condemning the guilty, but on the other hand providing direction for life.

H. C. Hewlett, in his discussion of Philippians 2:1-11, comes down hard against any kind of kenosis theory, but might be accused of evasion by his failure to explain why the expression 'in the likeness of men' does not detract from His (Jesus') true manhood. Again, a basic tendency of the commentary is evident: not every exegetical problem is raised, but when one is, no attempt at glossing or even choosing a simple answer is made.

Gerald Hawthorne's treatment of Hebrews will doubtless prove controversial. A constant in the handling of the warning passages is that the true Christian will be proven such by his endurance, a note certainly consistent with the emphasis in the epistle. The difficulties of chapter 6 are not passed over, but allowance is made for either true Christian experience (in which case, by implication, there must have been some kind of practically experienced loss of same) or simply a profession. Hawthorne seems more at home with the former view, but again emphasises that the real question is the practical one: does the kind of Christianity we profess endure the test of faithfulness? If so, it is genuine; if not, it is false, whether the conversion appeared to be valid or not. His treatment of 4:14-16 is even more controversial. Here Mark 13:32 is cited in support of the possibility that Jesus, though, in the nature of the case, unable to sin, might not have *known* that this was so. A particular sensitivity to any realistic appraisal of that humanity of Christ has marked some Brethren as well as others through the years, and we may expect some reaction again. It should, however, be noted that Hawthorne makes no attempt to solve traditional systematic questions on the impeccability of Christ, but simply tries to do justice to an emphasis clearly and consistently made by the author of Hebrews. Whatever one may think of his suggestion concerning Jesus' omniscience, there can be no question from his own discussion but that his Christology is fundamental to the core.†

†Few critics of Hawthorne's comment have realised that it is not original, but in fact is highly commended by such an evangelical stalwart as the late Dr. Griffith Thomas in his *Principles of Theology*. It is thus apparent that allegations of unorthodoxy in respect of this comment are unfounded. An indication of the dangers of controversy in this difficult area of theology is to be gained by the fact that some criticisms of Hawthorne have themselves not kept free of near-heretical expressions—*Ed.*



Further room for discussion is provided with the interpretation of chapters 8-10, in which the New Covenant is seen as fulfilled in the present rather than future; whether the commentator holds to a future for national Israel is not clear. All he is saying is that, in Hebrews' use of Jeremiah 31, there is no application to future Israel, a conclusion which only a distortion of the obvious context could dispute. Hawthorne's opting for the Old Testament concept of 'covenant' or 'agreement' as the meaning of *diatheke* (instead of 'will' or 'testament') except possibly in 9:15f. is held also by Coad (cf. comment on Galatians 3:15-18) and, though not entirely without problems, seems to satisfy the context in most passages.

Bruce's commentary on Revelation may confirm the fears of those looking for 'heretical' prophetic positions. If the still future aspect of chapters 4-22 is considered axiomatic, Professor Bruce's argument from 1:1, that the book is concerned with the near future, will be rejected. For one accustomed to a futuristic evaluation of the Apocalypse, this is a hard pill to swallow, but it must be remembered that neither Brethren nor this Commentary have any official position in eschatological matters. The keynote of the treatment is struck repeatedly: Revelation is the book of the triumph of Christ. The millennial period of chapter 20 is seen as commencing with the resurrection of the martyrs to share Christ's throne, and the attack of Satan is seen between this messianic age and the establishment of the new Jerusalem. Whether these events of the apocalyptic age are to be taken literally and placed into some chronological scheme is not, to our knowledge, discussed. A much needed exhortation is given, however, at the close of the treatment (page 665) and with that any charge that the commentary is negative toward the Lord's coming may be stopped: 'In the Christian doctrine of the Last Things, however, the imminence of the end is moral rather than chronological; each successive Christian generation . . . may be the last generation. In that sense the time is always near; it is therefore the path of wisdom for believers to be ready to meet their Lord . . .'.

## CONCLUSIONS

*The New Testament Commentary* is certain to be compared with the *New Bible Commentary: Revised*, with which book its contributors and its purpose obviously overlap. Apart from more concern with traditionally Brethren problems, one might say that the NTC demonstrates a slightly more modified reformed position, is consistently Baptist in tone, and represents a developing 'school' of Brethren thought in the British Isles. The scholarship of this group is based on a wide appeal to standard British writings, but in some cases one wonders whether the acquaintance is first- or second-hand.

In summary, we may say that this book certainly stands worthy of full consideration alongside the NBC (Revised), stronger in its introductory material, but perhaps a bit less consistent in the quality of its exposition. Perhaps the most noteworthy fact of the entire proceeding is one just barely alluded to in the preface: i.e., that the Commentary represents an

effort of contributors all of whom are associated with churches of the 'Christian Brethren'. That such a work could have been done so well is testimony to the continued vitality of the movement. That the influence of their Brethren heritage is so quietly and unobtrusively introduced is evidence of a strong departure from traditional 'denominational' patterns of Brethren thought. That such a book could have been completed without a single strongly dispensational article (though dispensationalists have, one feels, less reason to complain than they might have imagined) may prevent its making claim for representative status in the 'Christian Brethren' movement, but it does demonstrate how false any claims for a monolithic theological structure among these churches must be.

Hearty congratulations must go to the editorial staff and the many contributors as we join in their prayer that the blessing of God may rest upon the work!