

# Editorial

## Editorial.

### The Debate about Christology.

Few of our readers will be unaware of the Christology debate which is in full swing in Britain at the moment. While there have been a number of radio and television programmes which have brought to a large audience the views of some radicals within the church, things have been brought to a head by the publication, with a press conference, of *The Myth of God Incarnate* (SCM Press, 1977. 211 pp. £2.95) which is reviewed by Bishop Stephen Neill in this issue. A very speedy but strong counterblast has been produced in record time by Michael Green with the cooperation of four other scholars (*The Truth of God Incarnate*, Hodder, 1977. 144 pp. £0.80). The latter is certainly not a full refutation of the views put forward in the former but it is a necessary reminder that radical views have not entirely captured the church. The other contributors are Bishop Neill, Bishop Christopher Butler (auxiliary bishop to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster) the Rev Brian Hebblethwaite of Queens' College Cambridge and Professor John Macquarrie of Oxford. We are still in need of some major work on Christology which can take into account many of the problems of translating different thought-categories into those of today while still being loyal to the basic revelation of God in Christ. It will be helpful to be better informed about the patristic period when so many Christian doctrines were hammered out into the form in which the church has received and recited then throughout the centuries. To this end it is good to welcome in paperback form *Documents in Early Christian Thought* edited by Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer (CUP, 1977. 268 pp. £2.95) which was first published two years ago. Professor Wiles' patristic scholarship will serve us well here even if we do not agree with his attempts elsewhere at translating patristic ideas into modern thought.

One of the reasons for the current mood of christological radicalism in some quarters is our recent confrontation with other faiths in Western countries as well as elsewhere. Can Christ really be the only saviour of mankind? A helpful treatment of this problem is given in *Christian Witness in a Plural Society* by Bishop Leslie Newbigin (BBC, 1977. 26 pp. £0.50). He shows clearly that Jesus is both the unique saviour and the universal saviour but refuses to allow us to cut the tension by either denying the possibility of eternal loss for anyone or adopting some opinion about who are to be finally saved and who to be finally lost. He reminds us about the surprising nature

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of the judgment as it is revealed to us in the New Testament and the responsibility of Christians to preach the Gospel and to bear witness without knowing the final outcome. Considering how much confusion there is these days about this subject, Bishop Newbigin's booklet deserves a wide circulation. Those who wish to understand more about their new neighbours in Britain will also be helped by *Asians in Britain: A Christian Understanding* by Patrick Sookhdeo (Paternoster, 1977. 64pp. £0.80).

### The Debate about the Bible.

One of the reasons for the emergence of modern liberal and radical theology has of course been the failure of many theologians to take the Bible seriously. Yet, to the great irritation of some of these, the majority of people in the church, and many outside it too, do tend to go on trying to believe it, with various degrees of sophistication and ability to distinguish the proper approaches to the different types of literature which it contains. There are in this issue several reviews of books which bear on this subject of which the most important is James Barr's *Fundamentalism* to which John Goldingay gives a thorough and measured response.

The Old Testament is often thought to be much more vulnerable to negative criticism than the New and a recent BBC TV series entitled 'BC: The Archaeology of the Bible Lands' appeared to suggest that scientific study had led to the conclusion that much of the Old Testament story was to be dismissed as legend. A brief and clear reply, which has been careful not to claim too much, has been quickly written by Alan Millard in *The Bible BC: What Can Archaeology Prove?* (IVP, 1977. 48 pp. £0.50). While this will prove useful as a first line of defence, the important thing is to have the teaching of the Old Testament opened up to us. Who to do this better than the Archbishop of York? We have received for review the second edition of a book first published last year *For All Mankind: A New Approach to the Old Testament* (Bible Reading Fellowship and John Murray, 1977. 120 pp. £1.95/£0.95). Those who have heard and read Stuart Blanch's expositions will agree with one of his colleagues on the bench who described them to me as 'enchanting'. You need not agree with all the positions taken to see the great value of this for the individual and the group as a way of opening up the Old Testament and showing what its relevance can be to modern life.

In the wake of *Honest to God* (SCM Press, 1963) the popular image of Bishop John Robinson was that of the *avant-garde* radical, though those who knew his New Testament work realised that he took fairly conservative lines on a number of issues. Most were however surprised when in his major book *Redating the New Testament* (SCM Press, 1976) he argued that the whole of the New Testament was probably written before AD 70. (For a review of this

by Stephen Smalley see *Churchman* 91.1 January 1977. pp. 84f). He has followed this up with another book which will hearten those who feel that biblical scholars have tended to fall over backwards to avoid seeming naive in accepting the New Testament at its face value. (*Can We Trust the New Testament?* Mowbrays, 1977. 142 pp. £0.75). This is an excellent popular introduction to New Testament scholarship, and as always with John Robinson, clearly and attractively written. He defines four prevalent attitudes towards the New Testament at 'The Cynicism of the Foolish', 'The Fundamentalism of the Fearful', 'The Scepticism of the Wise' and 'The Conservatism of the Committed'. It is the last view which he finds to be probably more entrenched in his likely readers and 'if I am honest, deep down in myself' than any of the other attitudes. 'It exhibits that self-rectifying balance and solidity which has enabled English scholarship, as well as English religion, to weather the extremes of Continental radicalism and Transatlantic fashion. I believe too that more often than not it has been proved right – even if for wrong or muddled reasons. Yet it is not on the whole a trustful faith'. Robinson calls us to be free to follow the truth wherever it leads and the general drift of the book should help to give people confidence to do that. He does not however wish to leave people there but to lead them on 'to rethink pretty drastically how we can make the New Testament tradition meaningful today'. It is not necessary to accept his viewpoint in full in order to see this as a most encouraging and stimulating book.

#### More on J.ewis.

Few writers have done more to promote acceptance of orthodox Christianity in the English speaking world than the late C.S. Lewis. We welcome *C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* by Paul L. Holmer (Sheldon Press, 1977. 116 pp. £2.25). This is described by Walter Hooper, who ought to know if anyone should, as 'the best book about C.S. Lewis that has ever been written'. He is of course dealing with more than just Lewis' theology. I cannot do better than quote the author.

Instead of insisting that religion will give you what you need in modern twentieth-century terms – no miracles, no taxing commitments, no heaven and hell, and a new policy that will ensure equity, justice, and peace – Lewis delineated the long-standing need we all have for a very tough and virtue-guarded personal life. Along with that and fitting it at every point, he revived the biblical account of a moral and holy God, of Jesus performing miracles and being resurrected from the dead, and a story of salvation on behalf of sinful mankind. All kinds of old things fell into place in his writings, and the entire content and shape of the Christian teaching began to take on a vivacity it did not seem to have in other contexts.

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Holmer stresses that Lewis' Christianity 'was not quite liberal, conservative, fundamentalistic, or conventional'. This is of course part of the attraction of a man whose integrated mind helped to give to so many a far deeper understanding both of the greatness of God and of the reality of the human condition.

### An Open Letter.

There is likely to be a good deal more in *Churchman* over the next year or two about relationships with the Roman Catholic and other churches not of the Reformation tradition. At this stage we can only commend briefly an Open Letter to the Archbishops and Bishops of the Anglican Communion signed by well over a hundred leading Anglican Evangelicals in Britain and other countries. It was produced under the auspices of Latimer House, Oxford and is obtainable (£0.30 post free, or £0.25 for more than three copies) from Marcham Books, Appleford, Abingdon, Oxford. The commitment of such a solid body of Evangelical opinion to this particular debate is a matter of the utmost significance. There are no easy ways through, as criticism of the recent ARCIC statement on Authority in the Church has shown, but it is to be hoped that this enterprise will prove a great deal more rewarding for the church as a whole than the task of countering some of the wilder vagaries of modern liberalism.

A brief mention should be made of two Irish contributions to the debate. In *Being an Anglican* (APCK/SPCK, 1977. 64 pp. £1.00) Henry McAadoo, Archbishop of Dublin explains his position. As he is co-chairman of ARCIC his exposition of the authority report and Roman primacy are of some interest. On the other hand in *A Critique of 'Authority in the Church'* (1977. 65 pp. £0.80), Gilbert Wilson, Dean of Connor, equally steeped in history, rejects the report because the views of progressive Roman Catholics are taken as the norm rather than the current official teaching of their church. The political as well as the religious dimension is looked at in a reasoned and positive booklet entitled *The Irish Problem and Ourselves* by Giles Ecclestone and Eric Elliott (CIO, 1977. 25 pp. £0.45) It is a reminder that mainland Christians cannot wash their hands of Ireland as many are tempted to do.

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After a difficult year in the production of this journal we hope to be able to announce new arrangements for 1978 which should ensure a better service. Meanwhile it is gratifying to hear appreciative remarks from quite different quarters of what *Churchman* is trying to do.

R.E.N.