

Book Reviews

The Church of South India (the Movement towards Union, 1900-1947): by Bengt Sundkler. Lutterworth Press, London (1953). Agents in India: The Christian Literature Society, Post Box 501, Madras 3. Price Rs.12.

This book gives, as the sub-title shows, a history of the 'Movement towards Union' which resulted in the formation of the Church of South India. The author is eminently qualified to write such a book as this; he is the Professor of Missions, Uppsala University, Sweden, and late Research Secretary, International Missionary Council. Being a member of the Church of Sweden, he writes the book not only 'from outside South India but also from outside any of the Churches which took part in the union negotiations'. As such, he claims to have begun his study 'without any conscious bias'. We feel that the book has amply substantiated this claim. It is as objective and sympathetic a study as one can expect.

The book begins with a careful *resumé* of the nineteenth century background, and then goes on to deal with the Rise of the South India United Church and the Faith and Order discussions after Edinburgh (1910). From Chapter VI onwards the author takes up the Tranquebar discussions and the various difficult and intricate yet thrilling stages of the negotiations towards Union. The chapter on the 'Historic Episcopate and Equal Ministry' is particularly clear and brilliant. Finally it ends with the Inauguration of the Church of South India and an Epilogue.

There is no doubt that Professor Sundkler has taken a great deal of pains in getting at and arranging facts in their true perspective, as the comprehensive bibliography and the copious notes on each chapter will show. His approach is scholarly, objective, yet sympathetic. The author has done a great service to the Church of South India and the Church as a whole by such an unbiased, careful and painstaking study. This book is essential to any student of Church Union Schemes. It is not merely an historical narrative. The theological issues involved in the Union have been discussed by the author with great ability and clarity. At the same time he is not lacking in charity. The differing viewpoints have been presented with great skill and impartiality. Hence even if the book deals with past history, the issues involved are ever present and vital. This makes the book useful and interesting even now.

The most striking impression on reading it is the wondrous way in which the Holy Spirit has ruled and directed the wills of men who were open to His guidance. Speaking of the day of Inauguration, the author says, 'History was present that day, to be sure, because history had of necessity played a fundamental rôle in shaping the Church'. If we substitute 'Holy Spirit' for 'History' in this sentence, it gives us the gist of the history of the Church of South India.

The price of Rs.12 is beyond the reach of the average Indian Christian reader. But when one considers the time and energy that has been put into this work by Professor Sundkler as well as the present cost of production of a book containing 457 pages—it is not too much. But we hope a cheaper edition will be available soon.

We strongly commend this thorough, well-documented and scholarly book of Professor Sundkler to all who are interested in Church History and Schemes of Church Union.

Nagpur

A. E. D. FREDERICK

Christianity in the Indian Crucible: Dr. Eddy Asirvatham. Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, Calcutta: Second and Revised Edition, 1957. Pp. xvi+274. Price Rs.4/00.

This book grew out of lectures that the author gave to theological students in Boston University, and while there is much that an Indian Christian can and needs to learn from it, it is obvious to the careful reader that the constituency addressed is in the main non-Indian (e.g. 'At home' on p. 66 means the West; statements about money are more often made in dollars than in rupees). It will help the foreign reader to understand not only the condition of the Indian Church, but also a great deal of the political and social situation in India. It will help the Indian reader, especially the Indian Christian, to understand the problems that face the Church as well as its own strength and weaknesses.

The first chapter on 'the Indian Scene' is a masterly summary of the history of the subcontinent for the last decade. It is perhaps unavoidable that because of the constant changes in the situation some of the details are already out of date. The Niyogi report which was very much in the public eye a year ago seems to be almost forgotten and the twenty-five pages that the author devotes to it may appear disproportionate. But the lessons, direct and indirect, that are drawn from that report are still mostly valid.

The rest of the book is more directly concerned with the Indian Church, particularly the non-Roman section of it. Dr. Asirvatham shows no blind optimism regarding the future, nor gives an unqualified defence of the *status quo* in the Church. He is clear-sighted enough to see the weaknesses in, and the dangers that face, the Church and brave enough to point them out. He

is aware of the ignorant and foolish attitude of some of the Christians, Indian and foreign, towards Indian religions and culture. The unavoidable difference of opinion between a Christian who accepts Dr. Kraemer's position (in *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*) and a thoughtful Hindu is discussed, perhaps with more fairness to the Hindu than to Kraemer, and the following solution is suggested (p. 35): '... *That God reveals Himself to men of all climes and faiths is a fact so apparent, as to leave no grounds, or should leave no grounds, for disagreement. What He reveals is variously interpreted by all religions.* It is in the latter field that the Christian missionary rightly labours, sowing what he interprets to be the content of God's revelation, i.e. the transformation of man from a natural to a spiritual being through Jesus Christ.' It must be confessed that this conclusion does not carry us far, as the Hindu would find it difficult to concede that he is not already a spiritual being, and it would be a poor evangelist who sows what he interprets to be the content of God's revelation. Many who would wholeheartedly agree with the author in thinking that there is need for a deeper understanding of, and sympathy and respect for, the non-Christian religions, would find it difficult to accept the suggestion (p. 45) that non-Christian antagonism to evangelism may be overcome by emphasizing 'Christian character, citizenship and stewardship *rather than Church membership*' (italics ours).

On the question whether India wants foreign missionaries the author's answer is in the affirmative, but he sees need of a new type of missionary. Perhaps the sending churches have not yet sufficiently recognized the problems that arise because the missionaries come today to a relatively backward society from an environment that is industrially and economically advanced. This is a new element in the situation not paralleled in New Testament times or later, until the beginning of the modern missionary enterprise. Dr. Asirvatham rightly insists that changing conditions demand a new type of missionary, different both in training and attitude from the majority of those of the last generation.

The chapters on Rethinking Christian Theology, an Indigenous Christianity, and Indigenous Evangelism discuss a large number of questions very relevant to our times and open up a great many new avenues of thought and activity. In the last chapter on Dimensional Pioneering the author emphasizes the great need of Christian planning, initiative, and co-operation in the many new facets of social and political life in a country that is striving to become a welfare state. Dr. Asirvatham is a recognized sociologist and his analyses and suggestions deserve the respect and attention of all thoughtful Christians, Indian or foreign, who are interested in India. But the positive suggestions made regarding indigenous theology and evangelism are not original or convincing. Surprisingly little is said about the achievement and negotiations in the sphere of Church union.

There are a few minor misprints, but otherwise the printing and get-up are quite attractive, and the price is remarkably low.

Serampore

M. P. JOHN

The Gospel according to St. Mark : Introduction and Commentary by Geoffrey Paul. (Christian Students' Library, No. 13.) Rs.3/00.

This commentary is sure to prove extremely useful. It provides something not easily found elsewhere. We have our 'Jesus of History' commentaries of 40 years ago and our 'Form Criticism' commentaries of 25 years ago, each with their peculiar insights. But it has not been easy up till now to get a medium-sized, broadbased commentary on St. Mark, which combines former insights and is also a theological commentary in the deepest sense of the term. (A. M. Hunter's commentary in the S.C.M. Torch series has been the nearest approach, but was less full than this.)

The eschatological message of the Gospel is emphasized throughout. It is the Gospel of Messiahship. It proclaims Christ as Messiah, and as Beginner (also Perfecter) of the great revolutionary movement known as the Kingdom of God. It also proclaims the tremendous vocation of the Messianic Community, the Church. The relevance of this Gospel to the present world situation (and not least to the situation in Kerala, where the commentary was written) is stressed. The world wants a movement which knows what its end and goal is. It finds such a movement in communism. In fact, the Christian Church is also such a movement, if we would only realize it and hear anew the message of St. Mark to us.

This interpretation of the Gospel is of course in line with most modern study of the Gospel, which stresses how St. Mark saw the life of Christ as part of a cosmic struggle between God and Satan, and His miracles and exorcisms as part of a cosmic victory. (A struggle and victory which the Church, in Christ, is called to carry forward.)

Several points in the commentary attract special attention :— First, some good comments on the miracles, the knowledge of Jesus as Man, and the cry of dereliction . . . points at which some standard commentaries, with the tendency to arid analysis, have been at their weakest. But here there is a good mixture of theological, critical, devotional and homiletic comment. Second, there are some interesting imaginative reconstructions of Jesus' movements, e.g. His crossing and re-crossing of the lake after the feeding of the 5,000. Thirdly, the notes on chapter 13 are positive in tone. The apocalyptic sayings of our Lord are taken seriously. Attempts to 'explain them away' (including Jewish Christian Apocalypse theories) are fairly discussed but dismissed. The two sayings about the coming 'in this generation' and then

'no one knoweth' (Mark 13:30 and 32) are seen as giving a bifocal truth. Verse 30 is seen as Christ giving some sort of date, in order to teach the inevitability of the Kingdom's coming (and of the judgement upon the Jews) if the Church remains faithful and accepts suffering. Verse 32 is seen as Christ being reluctant to give a definite date, in order to teach that only God can finally bring in His Kingdom. There is nothing particularly new here in interpretation. (The old explanation in verse 30 of a 'prophetic foreshortening' comes to much the same thing.) But the application of this message is well brought out, and there is much thoughtful discussion on the Christian theology of time and history underlying these verses. On controversial matters, the commentary is never hesitant. The Feeding of the 4,000 is a doublet. The Last Supper is a Passover Meal. In the former instance however the case is put almost too strongly and one or two of the minor arguments adduced are of little value as evidence: e.g. to say that the second Feeding is absent in Luke and John proves nothing, for of course Luke omits the whole block of five Marcan miracles in Mark 6:45 to 8:26, and 'omission' by John is common throughout.

There are, however, certain points which one would like to see rectified in any further edition of this volume. First, the long section in the Introduction on 'The Eschatology of St. Mark's Gospel' (which is additional to much eschatological material elsewhere in the Introduction) should be much shorter or should be placed in an appendix. It covers much the same ground as the commentary on chapter 13 and does not seem at all suitable as it stands. Secondly, the section on the 'Son of Man' might be re-drafted. At the beginning of the section we read, 'We should not think that the phrase "Son of Man" refers to the humanity of Christ as contrasted with His godhead'. At the end of the section we find 'It seems likely that Jesus was glad to use this phrase with its emphasis on manhood, to show His solidarity with humanity . . .' As here expressed, this is confusing. Thirdly, since this is a Christian Students' Library volume, certain unnecessary technical words and phrases might well be removed: e.g. 'denouement' (p. 7), 'ad loc.' (p. 21), and 'premisses' (p. 146). Which leads us on to a final and inevitable question about the book as a whole: 'Is this good commentary really simple enough for the L.Th. level?'

Calcutta

CECIL HARGREAVES

The First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians: by W. B. Harris. The Christian Students' Library. Rs.3/00.

(Obtainable from the Christian Literature Society, P.B. 501, Park Town, Madras 3.)

This book is published under the Biblical section of the Christian Students' Library series, sponsored by the Senate of