

Book Reviews

Old Testament Introduction: by C. S. Thoburn, Christian Students' Library, No. 24. Madras, 1961. Christian Literature Society. Pp. 329. Price Rs.3.75.

Dr. Thoburn's book has two special merits. First, he treats the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. Secondly, it is a useful handbook for pastors, teachers and theological students. During the last fifty years or so great progress has been made in the study of the Old Testament. Archaeology has opened up many new vistas which have considerably changed the direction of all branches of Old Testament study. The great wealth of literature from the Ancient Near East has set the study of the Old Testament literature in an entirely new context. Dr. Thoburn introduces the readers to some of these interesting fields of study. He also maintains throughout the connection between the Old Testament and the New.

The book is divided into main sections: I, The Old Testament as a Whole; II, Book by Book Introduction to the Old Testament. In the first section topics like authority, canon, versions, language and text are considered. There is in this section a great deal of material conveniently arranged which the student would find useful. The second section deals with the discussion of each book of the Old Testament in the order in which it appears in the English Bible. The author gives an outline and discusses the composition, authorship, date and in the case of some books special problems. He also comments on the religious teaching. Biographical sketches of the prophets are given wherever possible. Some of the less read books like Leviticus the readers can now appreciate and understand in a new light.

In the assessment of differing viewpoints the author on the whole shows careful and sound judgement. His consideration of problems like the creation stories of the book of Genesis and the scientific accounts of creation and the date of Exodus are useful no doubt. But they do not all belong to the field of Old Testament introduction. Clearly, the former of the two questions here cited is better discussed in a commentary on Genesis and the latter belongs to the field of history.

There are a few criticisms which have to be made. In a book on Old Testament introduction some attention must be given to the types of Old Testament literature. The author leans too

heavily on the 'literary critical' method and seems to have nothing to say about the 'traditio-historical' method with its emphasis on the role of the oral tradition, powerfully advocated by the 'Uppsala school'. Professor Engnell, for example, considers the methods of literary criticism as totally out of date. No discussion of the Old Testament canon can be said to be complete without the consideration of the important works of Hoelscher and Oestborn. The bibliography as the author himself admits is largely taken out of Pfeiffer's book and it is not up to date. The more important works in this field, like G. W. Anderson: *Critical Introduction to the Old Testament*, A. Bentzen: *Introduction to the Old Testament*, H. H. Rowley (ed.): *Old Testament and Modern Study*, E. Nielsen: *Oral Tradition*, are not included. There are also simpler works that need mentioning: H. H. Rowley: *Growth of the Old Testament*, H. W. Robinson: *The Bible, its Making and Meaning*. What will really help the student is to give a graded bibliography.

Several misprints can be noticed: 'we' for 'be' (p. 3), 'ecrolls' for 'scrolls' (p. 10), 'mishlim' for 'meshalim' (p. 168), to mention only a few. The first double bracket on page 11 should only cover Ezra and Nehemiah. The reader is left to guess what is 'Jacobite Bible' (p. 7), A.S.V. (p. 160), Jacobite Chaldean (p. 3, footnote). The problem of the differing numbers of the books of Esdras in the Greek, Vulgate and the English versions could have best been clarified once for all in the first reference to this with a suitable footnote.

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Thus Saith the Lord: by D. H. Mason. Christian Students' Library. Pp. 159. Price Rs.2.50.

The book under review is the twenty-sixth publication of the Senate of the Serampore University for the Christian Students' Library series. The Rev. Donald H. Mason, the author, has to his credit long years of experience in India as a missionary, a fact which has made him qualified to write the book against the Indian background.

In size the book is small and in style simple. It has five major divisions and seventeen chapters. The close-type printing is a drawback, as it hinders smooth reading. But the author's comments at the close of each chapter are able to remove the monotony, and they shine out clearly at regular intervals.

The author has wisely introduced the book by giving a section on 'Preliminary Enquiries'. He has brought out in it rather clearly some of the captivating ideas of the O.T. religion, which inspires the reading of the book. Proper paragraph titles would have given the reader easy access to the subject-matter.

With a view perhaps to justify the subtitle of the book, namely *An Introduction to the Prophets of Israel*, the author has made a few critical statements regarding the authorship and composition of certain prophetic books. It remains to be seen how far they are helpful to the L.Th. student. The author takes pains to relate the prophetic message to the Indian theological background, but makes hardly any effort to point out the distinctiveness of the Biblical revelation, except in a few cases, such as *karma* (p. 108). In his eagerness to make relevant the message of the prophetic religion to the Indian situation today, the author has lavishly used Indian terms, like *karma*, *punarjanma*, *harijana*, and so on, without at the same time explaining their real meaning. It is important that one should be careful not to let syncretistic ideas creep into the minds of the readers.

From a study of the prophetic religion the author challenges the Christian community in India to follow the missionary zeal of the O.T., which was catholic and dynamic in its very essence. The vision of the roll to the prophet Ezekiel was the sign for the people of God to revere the word of God. Are they not sufficient indications to the Church today to worship the only wise God? (p. 137).

Through the last chapter the author clarifies the distinctive O.T. contribution. The O.T. is the seedbed of the Gospel; without it the Church has no roots (p. 154). This book, with its special emphasis on the O.T., is a welcome addition to Indian theological literature, where in some quarters the appropriateness of the O.T. has been called in question. The title of the book, it may be hoped, will lead the Christian to listen to its message.

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Isaiah 1-39: by John Mauchline. Torch Bible Commentary. S.C.M. Press, 1962. Pp. 237. Price 15s. (Obtainable from the Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, Calcutta 16).

The Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature in the University of Glasgow has made a most useful and substantial addition to the S.C.M. Torch Bible Commentary series. His scholarship is marked by an abandonment of hyper-critical positions that would deny to Isaiah of Jerusalem teaching that would not fit into an arbitrarily determined evolutionary scale. He does, however, recognize that at times we have material intruded into the genuine prophecies at a later date, for example, 4:5-6, 13:17-22; and 35.

He is obviously attracted by the views of those who see considerable importance in a festival of the enthronement of Yahweh. He not only regards as a 'plausible idea' the connection of the

prophet's inaugural vision with that festival, but also the utterance of some of the 'messianic' prophecies. He pays particularly close attention to the 'Immanuel' passage in Isaiah 7, and attempts to find significance in the presence of Shear-Jashub on that occasion. His conclusion is not altogether clear, but this is certainly a line of interpretation that should be explored. Is it that Isaiah was sent with his son, 'A remnant shall return', to deliver a message of hope, but that in view of Ahaz's disbelief, he in fact gave a sign not of deliverance (God with us), but of judgement? The child to be born will be called 'May God be with us', a cry for divine help, for before he has reached the age of discretion, he will be reduced to a nomad's diet in a desert land. Is that the significance of curds and honey? This line of interpretation certainly fits in with Isaiah 7:16-17.

Dr. Mauchline attempts to link the 'messianic' passages of chapters 7, 9, and 11, and suggests they may be connected with the hopes aroused by the great deliverance of 701. He does not, however, either in the introduction or in the commentary on chapters 36-37, mention Bright's theory, put forward in his *History of Israel*, that in the accounts of 701 as we have them, we have a confusion of two separate deliverances. To the reviewer, there is much in Bright's suggested reconstruction to commend it.

A notable feature of this commentary is the many references to original non-Biblical texts collected in *Documents from Old Testament Times*, edited by D. Winton Thomas, and published by Nelsons. The reading of this commentary will prove a double blessing if it also induces the reader to buy or borrow a copy of that excellent book. Finally, I should note some good passages of exposition, those on the parable of the vineyard and on the prophet's call being particularly excellent.

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Sacrifice in the Bible: by H. Ringgren. World Christian Books.
No. 42. Pp. 80. Price 2s. 6d.

'Sacrifice', if it means anything at all to modern minds, usually denotes self-denial. In this monograph by a Swedish scholar of the University of Uppsala, we are introduced to the strange and complex world of Biblical sacrifices. In a careful review of the Old Testament documents, we see the texts relating to the ritual for sacrifices, the prophets' teaching and the psalmists' reflections. The author has succeeded in recreating the world of ideas in which animal sacrifices had their origin, and in which they were meaningful. The closing chapter briefly reviews the

New Testament references to Jesus, 'the end of sacrifices'. This is a helpful study on what is to many people a confusing subject. Turning once again to the Old Testament, one can feel that light has been thrown on many dark places.

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Upon the Earth: by D. T. Niles. Lutterworth Press, London.
Pp. 270. Price 25s.

One of the really excellent things about this book is that it seems to contain a good deal of the preaching of D. T. Niles. Niles' pastoral connection, of which Bishop Newbigin speaks in his preface, is fairly obvious. One is tempted to commend this book merely for its potential value to other preachers: there is here a faithful presentation of Bible teaching, sharply defined, directed to issues that should be engaging the minds of leaders of the Church.

But the book is important for what it has to say about its subject, the mission of the Church. And it is far from expressing a merely individual point of view, for it arises from a series of consultations initiated by the Division of World Mission of the World Council of Churches. It is published as the third in a series entitled 'Foundations of the Christian Mission'. It aims at bringing many more Christians into the discussion of the Church's mission that has been taking place in ecumenical circles. Specifically, it aims at providing 'a general framework of thought' for the initiation of discussion about critical issues for the missionary obedience of the Church.

The strategy of the Christian mission, says Niles succinctly, is *penetration*. The gathering of men into the Church has too often been a movement never reversed according to the pattern of the Gospel: those who have come in have not gone out. Insularity, institutionalism and ghettoism have been attitudes marking the arrested movement of the Christian mission. 'Service institutions' such as schools and hospitals, intended to be instruments of the mission of the Church, have often in the East become 'buttresses' of a static institution. They have filled the role of supporters of the Church in a particular place by serving the 'not-so-poor'. Niles pleads for the 'plurality of administration' seen sometimes in the West where hospitals and schools are rarely directly managed by Churches. In this and in all other possible ways the Church should accept the risk of going out of controlled situations, in compounds and in 'Christian' institutions in order to be an effective presence in the world. As against the too familiar pattern of the failure of Christian mission Niles envisages 'the sprouting here and there of the Christian community in the service of the world'.

This book, like the New Testament, is written from faith to faith. Its postulate is the conviction that God is active in the redemption of the world, that God addresses men in mercy and judgement far beyond the boundaries of the Church. The turning in of the Church's mission upon itself indeed involves, as Niles points out, a fundamental theological distortion. It is forgotten that the Gospel is for the world: 'God and man, the Gospel and the world, the Holy Spirit and the new creation: these are the true correlatives as we have them in the Christian faith'.

It is within the context of this faith that Niles deals with the question of Christians and other religions. He favours openness and co-operation with men of other religions. In such co-operation Christians may be able to witness to the Lord who is already present. 'The burden of Christian religious living is so to live within this area of common existence with men of all religions that in it may become luminous the true Christian differentia—the presence in the world of the Risen Christ, the ministry through the Church of the Holy Spirit, the proof in the lives of men and women that they represent that event which will mark the consummation of God's redemptive purpose for the world because it has already happened to them.'

This may serve to indicate the 'general framework of thought' expressed in *Upon the Earth*. It hardly begins to relate the issues raised. Is it true that Gnosticism gives the clue to 'the chief climate of thought in large sections of the Christian Church today'? Is there a movement in the Church in the West toward the strengthening of 'world confessionalism' or denominationalism? 'The churches in the West must make up their minds as to what they want', says Niles. 'Do they want to maintain their position of leadership within denominational families . . . or do they want to put their strength at the disposal of the younger churches in the common tasks which these younger churches face in the lands in which they are set?' Do elements in the churches in the West resent and oppose the development of nations in the East? Do they resent the wish of the younger churches to be united in their own lands so as to be the Church in and for those lands?

It is in connection with these last questions that a note of criticism must be introduced. Niles sees the development of new nations in the East as a fact of life in the twentieth century, a fact comprehended in God's plan to bring healing to men and nations. Gratitude for this fact, and loyalty to the truth that the Gospel must come to men in their national 'homes' must not obscure the primary truth that the Church is one body in its dispersion. It was a developing sense of this that led the Oxford Conference on Life and Work in 1937 to declare that 'If war breaks out, then pre-eminently the Church must manifestly be the Church, still united as one body in Christ though the nations wherein it is planted fight one another'. Niles speaks of the Church as One in God's purpose, he speaks of denominations, he

speaks of the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches as 'the instrument of the resolve to be churches together' in obedience to the mission given. But he gives little developed consideration to what constitutes the substance and sinews of the Church's life across international boundaries. There is lacking an exposition of the Catholicity of the Church (to use the traditional word, absent, I believe, in this book) to balance the excellent discussion of the 'selfhood' of churches.

The very number of questions raised will daunt some who should read this book. It does, however, very effectively present a theology of mission, a strategy based on that theology, and a great many of the 'facts' of life impinging on the Church's obedience in its mission upon the earth.

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