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# Editorial

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## *New Commentaries*

AT first sight it might seem strange to some readers to consider together *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* edited by R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and R. E. Murphy, Chapman, xxxvi & 637 & 889 pages, 10 guineas, and *A New Testament Commentary* edited by G. C. D. Howley, F. F. Bruce and H. L. Ellison, Pickering & Inglis, 666 pages, 50s. But both commentaries are significant in that they come from Christian groups revealing new attitudes, groups which have in the past had their biblical exegesis somewhat fettered by apologetic interests, but which have now emerged as fully abreast of modern scholarship and fully open to what the Bible itself is saying. Both volumes are well produced, and both reasonably priced for their sizes. Both contain commentary, full bibliography, and a number of doctrinal and Bible background articles.

JBC is the product of RC scholarship, nearly but not quite all American. Throughout generous tribute is paid to Protestant scholarship and the preface explains that the editors considered inviting Protestant contributors, but decided against it because a suspicion remains within and without the RC church that liberal RC biblical scholarship is a realm of private enterprise without official backing. The question of *the* Catholic interpretation constantly appears (p. xviii). The editors dismiss 'once and for all the myth of *the* Catholic position'. The candour of the editors is indeed disarming. How does it work out in the commentating? Over the Pentateuch the history of criticism is admirably chronicled, the familiar JEDP are set out. The conclusion is cautious, 'Modern scholars are extremely hesitant about formulating rigid conclusions . . .' (p. 3), but, despite that, JEDP are asserted to be separate traditions, the exact demarcations being debated still, and are treated as a working hypothesis (if not more) in the commentary. Deuteronomy is treated as 'the result of a long process of formation . . . passed on in the north and edited by a Judaeian hand some time after the fall of Samaria (721)' (p. 102).

On the thorny problem of Ezra-Nehemiah, 'Resolute suspension of judgment among the three equally tenable alternatives would seem to be the most warranted scholarly posture' (p. 427). Torrey's confident reconstruction is dismissed, a single author for Chronicles-Ezra is

upheld, but the author was not Ezra. With Von Rad the writer considers Ezra the redactor of the Pentateuch, 'from whose Sinai orientation the work of the Chronicler was written as an emphatic dissent' (p. 428). Deutero-Isaiah is regarded as separate, indeed it gets a separate article, on literary and doctrinal grounds. In the New Testament the same general posture continues: a short statement of current academic opinion, sometimes prefaced by a brief history of criticism, cautious refusal to take sides in most cases, with the occasional tendency to opt for something radical. Certainly the writers have demonstrated that they have cut free from *ecclesia docens* in their exegetical freedom, but are they guilty of the usual mistake of going to the other extreme, and somewhat intoxicated by their own new found freedom of ignoring most conservative scholarship? There are occasional indications that this is so. What then is the doctrinal justification for the new approach? The historical articles give the first clues. The Pontificate of Pius XII 'who deserves the title of patron of Catholic biblical studies' is the turning point with *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) while the conservative reactionaries were fought off by Pope John at Vatican 2 (p. 625f). The writer's attempt to deal with the potential friction between *ecclesia docens* in Rome and free biblical enquiry is an anticlimax. All he can say is that the problem is not confined to Rome, and that he remains optimistic that Rome will not interfere. Then he refers to the article on *Hermeneutics* where R. E. Brown takes us little further. The Magisterium does not judge a passage's meaning 'by some sort of mystical instinct or by direct revelation from on high'! (p. 621), but 'we are close enough to Vatican 2 to know that when exegetes pointed out that Scripture was being misused, such misinterpretation was dropped from the conciliar documents'. That frankly is no answer, and one gets the impression that these writers are so preoccupied with their new freedom that they just evade the dogmatic issues, while piously hoping that Rome will remain tolerant and not interfere. We can admire their fresh approach to the Bible, but has not history taught them to consider the debilitating effects of biblical liberalism in the life of a church? You can live on capital for so long, but what happens when it runs out? Protestants have found out. Perhaps the successors of these writers will too.

The JBC is not too good on the dogmatic issues, tending to avoid the real issues, but that should not conceal the fact that it is overall an excellent volume, full of fresh air and admirable summaries of major problems. It is indeed a work that serious Protestant readers will be glad to use. NTC is much smaller but in its way nonetheless significant. We doubt if Plymouth Brethren have ever produced so scholarly a work which is at once readable and free from special pleading. This work does indeed confirm the new found Christian scholarship amongst the Brethren. We should expect high standards from established scholars like F. F. Bruce, D. F. Payne and D. J. A. Clines but the general level

including the contributions from those who have always been outside academic realms is very high, and their breadth of reading is laudable. The first part of 138 pages is devoted to articles, the ecclesiology in *The Apostolic Church* by F. R. Coad being the only one to show distinctive Brethren tendencies, and there only with caution, and a rather defensive note about his interpretation of the position of women which will surely unsettle some good Brothers. The commentary itself is on the RSV text and is intended to be 'a tool for the reverent handling of the NT'. Brief preliminary remarks are followed by an analysis and the comment. Full use is made of linguistic scholarship but without technical intrusions. A book like Revelation where Brethren fancy has been known to run riot is soberly and judiciously handled by F. F. Bruce. This volume should be a blessing to many Brethren *and others*, and will be a serious contender for first place with the *New Bible Commentary* in its revised form.

### *Another Decade*

WITH this number we move into the nineteen seventies. At such junctures it is fashionable for editors to make wide-sweeping surveys of all that has happened in the past decade. It is not our intention to do that, save to point up a few questions to which we shall return in the next few issues and try to explore in some detail. Here we note four. First, the structures of the Church of England which are changing very fast. Some may imagine that the end of Church Assembly, the advent of Synodical Government, and an impending Church and State report are just administrative streamlining and bringing the laity into church life. That may be the official patter, but we suspect that in reality something far deeper and much more disturbing is happening to the Church of England. Second, the ecumenical movement. Is it running down? Has its emphasis altered? Has it failed on the church union front and is it switching to way out social action? What is its future? Third, what about churchmen themselves? Are they in good heart, or have they lost their nerve in the face of advancing secularism, 'death of God' and a collapse of confidence within the church? Fourth, what about evangelicals? Has the confidence of Keele been fulfilled or was it justified? And what about the evangelical structures? Are evangelicals on the crest of the wave as some aver, or are they divided amongst themselves?

We hope to look at some of these issues shortly. Our look will be sober and critical. We have no intention of making out that evangelicals are right and everyone else wrong. By contrast we intend to look every bit as critically at evangelicals as at others.

### *Church of England Yearbook*

AS we go to press, the 1970 edition is to hand. It has rightly been described as an indispensable reference work. The statistics and

personnel are all up-dated of course, and a short preface surveying events in 1969 is added. The wisdom of this last may be doubted, for an official publication cannot have the pungency of an anonymous *Crockford* writer, and the risk of offending people by commenting on such controversial items as the Anglican-Methodist union scheme's defeat is great. The editor has clearly striven to be fair, but it would surely be better if he did not attempt such surveys. Are they really in place in a reference work? The five page preface is an annotated catalogue of Church Assembly and Convocation actions together with lists of personnel changes at the end. The book as a whole is comprehensive covering Church of England affairs and structures, at the centre, diocese by diocese, Anglican Communion information, a *Who's Who* covering mostly Church Assembly members, a list of religious organisations (Anglican and otherwise) and ecumenical information, with a concluding section on Church Law. The production is still not perfect with some misfolding in our copy, and some sample checking revealed the sort of inaccuracy not found in *Crockford*, e.g. the new warden of Latimer House is John H. Wenham (page 291) while the same gentleman is Wenham, John William quite correctly on page 389. The Latimer House postal code is not given incidentally. On page 37 the chaplain of Northern and North-Western Polytechnics (London) is not given his doctorate, though some of his colleagues get theirs. The quantity of phone numbers included has increased a little, but the editor seems to have failed totally in standardising and rationalising them. For instance under the dioceses the phone numbers of most Church Assembly members are given, but when the same people appear in *Who's Who* a few of them get their phone numbers again, but most not. It is true that there is a note about this in small type on page 311, but will the casual reader ever find that, and in any case why should he have to? Surely an editor ought to have made his entries consistent on so mundane a matter as phone numbers. We point these blemishes out not because the book is a bad one, which it is certainly not, but because a reference work must be absolutely reliable, and some of these shortcomings have not been rectified from previous editions, which does unfortunately indicate a certain slackness in the publishers.