

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php

Book Reviews

Patterns in History: by David Bebbington, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1979. Pp. xi + 211. Price £ 3.75.

David Bebbington, lecturer in history at the University of Stirling, in this book raises the sort of questions in relation to history that have recently dominated the biblical and theological fields in the hermeneutics debate. He not only surveys the various philosophies of history that have been advanced from time to time (with special emphasis on the period after the eighteenth century), but also relates them to historiography, the actual writing of history (what Herbert Butterfield calls "technical history").

After an introductory discussion of some of the main issues in historical studies (mediated access to the past, perspective of the historian, probability of historical knowledge, the question of historical "fact", historical argumentation, and the assumptions of the historian), there are chapters on the cyclical view of history, the Christian linear and providential view, followed by four chapters (the most important part of the book in this reviewer's opinion) dealing with the polarization between what the author calls the positivist and idealist schools of thought that emerged in the eighteenth century and thereafter. The last part of the seventh chapter and the eighth chapter present a Christian response and (the author hopes, though without substance) solution to the problem.

The main argument is that the many different philosophies of history and approaches to historiography put forward in modern times can be classified as belonging to one or the other of two main traditions that arose in the eighteenth century out of the Enlightenment—and the critical repudiation of the Enlightenment. He identifies these streams as "positivism" and "idealism". Positivism grew out of the Enlightenment and is associated with such names as Voltaire, Comte, Hume, Macaulay and Acton. It is a point of view that has tended to dominate historical thought in the Anglo-Saxon world until recently. Some of its principle features are a belief in the idea of progress, the belief that general "laws" of human behaviour can be identified on the basis of which predictions can be made—

in the same way as is done in the natural sciences, and that it is possible for the objective scholar to determine the "facts" of history. Idealism grew out of the reaction against the positivism of the Enlightenment known as historicism or romanticism. It is associated with men like Kant, Ranke, Dilthey and Collingwood and generally was centred in Germany. It reacted against the positivist idea of objective, "scientific" study of history, arguing for the method of empathy or intuitive understanding in the conviction that experience alone is necessary for understanding the world. Against the positivist emphasis upon causation (which the author holds to equal determinism) it affirms the uniqueness of the human (free will) and of history. Rejecting the generalized value system of positivism it maintains a cultural relativism.

Bebbington believes that the key to understanding the distinctiveness of the two schools of thought is their view of man. The positivist sees man as simply a part of nature, determined by his environment, a means to a future goal towards which history is progressing; the idealist sees man as above nature, a free agent unconditioned and moved primarily by ideas rather than context. He holds that both schools of thought have their origins in the Christian understanding of history—a point that can be substantiated without great difficulty. He suggests, therefore, that the reconciliation of the two is best achieved by returning to that common foundation—restoring those elements in the Christian view that each has rejected in the process of secularization. The author points out that other attempts at reconciliation have been made, such as that of Karl Marx, but without permanent success. Hence Marxism, for instance, has become polarized between those who emphasize one or the other of the two elements Marx (and to some extent Engels) tried to hold together. Thus Soviet Marxism has become essentially positivistic, while western Marxism (most notably the Frankfurt school that has greatly influenced Latin American liberation theology) has tended to move in the direction of idealism. In his anxiety to establish his hypothesis that the Christian understanding of history alone offers a satisfactory reconciliation of the two camps the author tends to depreciate the significance of other attempts at synthesis—such as those of Marx, Hegel and Max Weber. The argument that the Marxist synthesis has proven unstable could just as well be used of the Christian view(s) of history.

As masterful as the author is in dealing with a vast amount of literature produced in Europe (non-European developments, including those in the Americas, are almost totally ignored) during the past two hundred years, one is rather disappointed with his arguments on behalf of Christian historiography. At the heart of the Christian understanding of history, in his view, is the idea of providence, the belief that God is active in history. But he is no more successful than those like Herbert Butterfield and C. S. Lewis, with whom he is mildly disappointed, in attempting to explain why a God who is the Lord of all history (general providence) finds it necessary to intervene directly at particular points in history (particular providences). The affirmation that the answer lies in the cross illustrates the paradox but does not illuminate it.

Especially disappointing at the end of a book which contains some extremely useful analysis of a very complex and important subject is Bebbington's attempt to instruct the working Christian historian ("A believer should not be a Christian and a historian but a Christian historian" 186) on how to relate the Christian philosophy of history to his actual historiography. He concedes at the start that the "Christian historian cannot write history in the manner, say, of the writer of the Second Book of Kings," arguing that the reason he cannot is not because such an approach would be bad history but because the modern Christian historian "lacks the inspiration that gave the biblical historians their special insight" (183). He admits also that it is difficult actually to discern the hand of God in historical events, but feels that it is not totally impossible in certain very clear-cut cases. The few illustrations he gives do not tend to inspire confidence in that judgment. He suggests that one type of evidence of providential action in history is the way in which God often brings good out of evil (thus revealing a positivist bias, one is tempted to suggest). "In economic history, for example, the characteristic divine tactic of bringing good out of evil can frequently be recognized. The recurrent plagues of the fourteenth century were certainly a horrifying experience, but they seem to have prepared the way for a marked increase in the standard of living of English labourers. Again, the acceleration of the British rate of inflation in the mid-1970s brought a needed—but perhaps too little heeded—rebuke to post-war materialism" (184). That a scholar who has been able to deal competently and with sympathetic insight with the

various schools of philosophy and historiography since the eighteenth century should be reduced to supporting his terminal arguments with such weak illustrations simply underlines the difficulty of the problem under study.

Even more unfortunate is his treatment of the bread-and-butter issue of how the professional Christian historian should write in the context of the current academic world where "the canons of ordinary historical scholarship have not permitted references to God for nearly 200 years" (186). If the Christian historian makes reference to providence the academic world will not take him seriously and he therefore fails to communicate. Bebbington, therefore, proposes a double standard. When writing for Christian groups the historian should openly affirm his conviction that history is to be understood in relation to God's providential actions, but when addressing the larger academic world he should remove references to divine intervention—"the Christian historian is not obliged to tell the whole truth as he sees it in every piece of historical writing. He can write of providence or not according to his judgment of the composition of his audience" (187). Somehow, he believes, Christian commitment will nevertheless be present in the real Christian historian's work even when God's involvement in history is not explicitly mentioned. But sometimes there is a need for proclaiming "the providential framework of history . . . without reserve" as a kind of evangelistic effort on behalf of the academic world. "Christian history brings hope. But how are people to hear the message of hope without a historian?" (188). One is tempted to ask, why not through a preacher or theologian? Until I reached the latter part of chapter seven I continually asked myself the question of how a book of this type had come to be published by the Inter-Varsity Press. By the time I had come to the end of the eighth chapter I had my answer.

Actually the concluding arguments on behalf of the Christian philosophy of history's reconciliation of positivism and idealism form a very small portion of the book. While it is unfortunate that the Christian position is not more persuasively argued in what is, for the Christian historian, a crucial issue, there are others who have done so (Butterfield perhaps being the best known) and the analysis of recent trends in the philosophy of history and historiography that forms the bulk of the book is very well done. Chapter seven, the

philosophy of historiography, is especially valuable. In fact this book is an excellent introduction to the primary philosophical and historiographical issues underlying much current discussion in the theological disciplines as a whole (not just the history of Christianity). It is to be particularly recommended for theological teachers and advanced theological students. The bibliography at the end contains an excellent selection of the most important writings available in English on the subject.

FREDERICK S. DOWNS

United Theological College, Bangalore

Fullness and Freedom: by R. C. Lucas, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1980. Pp. 191. Price £ 2.65.

This little book (a paperback) is another addition to the series "The Bible speaks today." It gives in simple (non-technical), yet forceful language, the message of the epistles to Colossians and Philemon. Dick Lucas, rector of a church in London, writes with a pastoral bias and is conservative in his interpretation (true to the trend of this series). He has a very effective way of putting across his ideas and makes them relevant to our time. Since the scope and size of the book are limited, it is not fair to compare this book with some of the standard commentaries such as the one by Eduard Lohse on Colossians and Philemon (Hermeneia series), noted for its meticulous and detailed exegesis. The title of the book—*Fullness and Freedom*—as well as the section headings are catchy and appropriate. I feel that the method adopted by the author is not entirely satisfactory. It is expository from the beginning till the end with little exegesis. Exegesis followed by detailed comments could have made it a useful tool for theological students. The author has done a good job in bringing a very difficult epistle in the New Testament (Colossians) and a tiny personal treatise, often ignored (Philemon), nearer to readers today.

M. V. ABRAHAM

Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur

History and Criticism of the Marcan Hypothesis: by Hans-Herbert Stoldt (translated and edited by D. L. Niewyk), Mercer University Press, Georgia, USA, 1980. Pp. xviii + 302. Price \$18.95.

By the very nature of the problem that the book deals with, much interest and heat have been generated since its appearance in 1977. Professor William Farmer of Perkins School of Theology, an ardent advocate of Matthean priority and an authority on the Synoptic problem, offers very enthusiastic support for Stoldt's work.

The fact that the author is a retired educationist and not a biblical scholar does not minimise the importance of his conclusions. In Part I of the book he traces critically the history of the two-document hypothesis (Marcan priority plus Q as a solution to the Synoptic problem). He surveys the work of the originators of this hypothesis (Wilke and Weisse), its refounder H. J. Holtzmann and the two men who made it popular—B. Weisse and Wernle. While Part I is a diachronic treatment of the Marcan hypothesis, Part II is a synchronic critique of the seven main proofs that the originators and supporters of the Marcan hypothesis had put forth in its defence. The seven proofs are: common narrative sequence, uniformity, originality, language, doublets, Mark's Petrine origin, and psychological reflection. Part III deals with the original motivation of the two-source theory and how it established itself. According to Stoldt the creators and perpetrators of the theory were engaged in an ideological warfare against D. F. Strauss who had made inroads into the Gospel tradition by publishing his book, *Leben Jesu: Kritisch bearbeitet* (1835). The two-source theory derived its strength in this polemical context. With the acceptance of the theory by the form-critics, especially Dibelius and Bultmann, as the basis of their studies, the Marcan hypothesis received its respectability, though negatively. Stoldt goes on to say that Dibelius and Bultmann, however, were well aware that the two-source theory was only a hypothesis and that there were continual difficulties with it.

Stoldt tries to prove that the Marcan hypothesis is untenable. Whether he has succeeded in that exercise or not, his study is thorough and provocative. His book provides valuable information on the background of the Synoptic problem during the past 140 years. The main drawback of the book is that it concentrates more on the historical and ideological (polemical) background of the Marcan

hypothesis and less on the philological analysis of the Synoptic material. (Hans Conzelmann's criticism of Stoldt on this point is justified, however much Stoldt tries to defend himself.) A second criticism that may be levelled against him is this: while he is so sure how Mark obtained his material, he is not at all certain from where Matthew and Luke got theirs (p. 260). He is in agreement with Griesbach's hypothesis, in a somewhat qualified form. Stoldt has shaken the foundation and superstructure of Marcan hypothesis. How bad is the jolt and the enormity of its impact, time alone will tell. Probably this will pass off as a local storm and the Marcan hypothesis will come out unscathed as it has weathered such storms in the past!

M. V. ABRAHAM

Archaeology, the Rabbis and Early Christianity: by Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange, SCM Press, London, 1981. Pp. 207. Price £ 4.50.

Here is an outstanding book, the product of a Jewish-Christian venture in the field of archaeology. The authors are field archaeologists and, although they belong to separate religious persuasions; they have a common goal, viz., to draw an accurate picture of Rabbinic Judaism and early Christian origins. To achieve this end they make use of archaeological findings which were hitherto not readily available for ordinary readers.

The book has been divided into nine chapters through which the writers consistently develop their theme to a climax. At the outset the relevance of non-literary sources both for the understanding of Judaism and of Christianity has been established. However, the limits of archaeology have not been ignored. The influence of cultural setting on these two religions has also been considered, in the context of archaeological evidence from Jerusalem, Nazareth, Capernaum and other important sites.

The significance of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin in the early centuries is brought out. Epigraphs on sarcophagi are also made use of. Jewish burial practices and beliefs in after life, evidence

for early Christianity in Palestine are given adequate treatment in the light of careful investigations. There is a chapter on synagogues, art, and the world of sages, in which some of the popular beliefs are highlighted, although they are not warranted in the traditional religion.

The final chapter concludes the salient thoughts of the book. Although at the close of every chapter the authors try to summarise their thoughts, the last chapter enables the reader to have a glimpse of the major lines of approach.

The list of maps and diagrams of archaeological sites and excavated synagogues is an additional feature of their book.

The book is a bundle of information made available to students and others who care to look into the life of Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity. The language is simple and lucid. Technical terms are avoided as far as possible. Those unavoidable words have been explained in a glossary at the end. One may heartily recommend this scholarly and readable book, the first such Jewish-Christian endeavour, to all students who are interested in archaeology, the Rabbis and Early Christianity.

K. V. MATHEW

Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam

Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives: edited by A. R. Millard & D. J. Wiseman, Inter-varsity Press, Leicester, 1980. Pp. 223. Price £ 6.95.

The Old Testament has now been given a significant place among the literatures that deal with the religion and culture of ancient West Asia. The origin of Old Testament literature is shrouded in oral traditions which in course of time have taken literary shape. Now considerable interest has been created among Old Testament scholars to take a fresh look at the history and tradition of the patriarchal period. Archaeology comes to their aid. This concern is to show that the biblical Patriarchs were a literary, even pictorial, creation of the first millennium BC to provide the nation, Israel, with "founding fathers." The value of these studies has not been given, it seems, sufficient importance.

In the light of the new awakening in this field for the historical reliability and theological teaching of the Bible, the Council of Tyndale House, Cambridge, has set up an Old Testament project group to investigate afresh aspects of the problems raised. The book under review is a collection of such essays which deal with problems raised in patriarchal studies.

The book includes seven essays mainly by British Old Testament scholars, except the last one which is written by a Canadian. The essays lay stress on the Patriarchs in Scripture and history, methods of studying the patriarchal narratives, the dating of the Patriarchs in the light of archaeological data, comparative study of the customs of the patriarchal age, the patriarchal religion, and diversity and unity in the structure of Genesis. "The essays review past work and attempt in their various ways to break new ground and stimulate further study. They aim to make a positive contribution, not merely to criticise the works of other writers" (p.7).

The authors highlight some of the key issues as they make their individual reflections on the theme under discussion. John Goldingay, for example, says, "the key word (in Genesis 17:2-8) 'blessing' is replaced by the key word 'covenant'—which in effect means 'a commitment to bless'" (p. 14). "This theme holds the narrative together by constituting both a thread running through it and the key motif to which the individual scenes relate" (p. 20). Regarding the historicity of the patriarchal narratives, he writes, "History's reference and fiction's reference *intersect* upon the plane of the basic historicity of human experience" (p. 39). A. R. Millard concludes his article by saying, "The patriarchal narratives are our only source for knowledge of the earliest traditions of Israel, that traditions can be correct reflections of ancient events, and that they do not pretend to be text books of ancient near-eastern history or archaeology" (p. 56).

Each essay is unique in itself. The authors make a comprehensive survey of the contemporary literature with which they are concerned. The reflections in these essays provide the readers with enough material for further study.

The editors seemed to have taken no effort to curtail the freedom of these individual essayists. They give full vent to their reflections which, in turn, have enhanced the scholarship of the book under

review. One could see throughout a conservative stand with regard to Scripture and its understanding. "It is the story told in Genesis to which we are invited to listen and respond in faith, not to whatever base events of ancient near-eastern history lie behind it," says John Goldingay (p. 40). M. J. Selman argues for a "Back to the Bible" plea. About the stand of the form critics, he says, "While form critics generally have argued that little reliable historical memory has been preserved in the patriarchal narratives, they have hardly been able to put any agreed alternative in its place" (p. 107). Conservatism does not mean a closed attitude to external evidence for the correct exegesis of the text. "The controlled use of both groups of materials opens up a more profitable route towards the interpretation of the Patriarchs," says M. J. Selman. The writers do stress the need for a balance in our approach to critical studies of the Old Testament.

The bibliography, and the biblical references, author and subject indices are helpful for further research. The notes on individual essays are given at the end of each chapter. The book is another addition to Old Testament scholarship and provides the readers with necessary impetus to continue investigation in Old Testament research.

K. V. MATHEW

Prema Yoga: by Satyanveshi. Published by the author, Mangalore, 1981. Pp. xv + 217. Price Rs. 12.

Satyanveshi, the name taken by Fr Anthoniraj Thumma, has already published one book in the area of sin and salvation. *Prema Yoga* develops the same interest, and a forthcoming title, *Are You OK? The Art of Self-Realization*, demonstrates the author's pre-occupation with the problem of sin and salvation.

The book under review is the author's reflection on the socio-psychological and spiritual condition of man. Using the social and psychological approaches for analysing the human predicament, Satyanveshi writes that, despite progress in science and technology, increase in consumer goods and forms of recreation, modern man is rendered spiritually void, physically broken, emotionally

disturbed and socially insecure, thus making him a "lonely" creature. Man's loneliness is characterised as "a major personal and social problem," giving rise to individual and social tensions, oppression and exploitation.

"Lovelessness" is diagnosed as the cause of loneliness. Man has lost sight of God's unique gift, namely "Love" or *Prema*, also referred to as *agape*. "Lovelessness," says Satyanveshi, "fills the world with ills, that love alone can cure; there is no substitute for love" (p. 11). And that lovelessness leads man to "estrangement, alienation, de-personalization and meaninglessness" and eventually to "crime, aggression, exploitation, manipulation, repression and discrimination" (p. 24).

Prema Yoga is prescribed by Satyanveshi as the panacea for man's loneliness and estrangement, and for the ills of the world. *Prema* is capable of solving the problem because it is "salvific and liberating" and "Liberation in its truest sense is possible only through *Prema Yoga*." The formula is simple: stop hating and start loving; apply *Prema Yoga* and you get a loveable and liveable world. Thus Satyanveshi invites "heroes of love and prema yōgins to fill the world" and "to save it from loveless catastrophe" and "to guide the pilgrimage to LOVE" (p. 217).

The solution offered by Fr Thumma is pietistic and simplistic for he forgets that there is a dialectical relationship between man and his world. Man creates the world which in turn acts upon him (Peter Berger; *The Sacred Canopy*). It is naive to believe that individual change will automatically induce structural and institutional changes. (Caste practice among southern Christians is a case in point.)

Change is necessary but it must happen concomitantly both at the level of structure and of consciousness. Any methodology that aims at transforming the individual and not the institutions and structures or vice-versa will end in failure. It is here that the author has defaulted badly.

Fr Thumma is trained in western philosophy, psychology and theology and applies them profusely in his book. Yet he picks up an Indian title for his book which is thoroughly western in content and approach. Hence the title *Prema Yoga* is a misnomer and misplaced. It attracts the reader but does not help him in his quest for

a methodology based either on the Yoga philosophy or any other Indian religious tradition to attain spiritual goals. Fr Thumma could have discussed certain ethical precepts of Yoga philosophy such as *Ahimsa*, *Satya*, *Santosha*, *Yama*, *Niyama* and *Dhyana*.

The book is readable and easy to understand for the author has been frugal and careful in his usage of technical terms. However, the reviewer is disappointed with Fr Thumma for not supplying references and a suitable bibliography which does place the reader, especially the student of religion and society, at a great disadvantage.

SATISH GYAN
SCM, Bangalore

Jesus. An Experiment in Christology: by Edward Schillebeeckx, (translated by H. Hoskins), Collins, London, 1979. Pp. 767. Price £ 9.

Christ. The Christian Experience in the Modern World: by Edward Schillebeeckx, (translated by John Bowden), SCM Press, London, 1980. Pp. 944. Price £ 19.50.

Perhaps the weightiest theological achievement of the 1970s, these 1700 tightly-packed pages could nourish Christian thinking, teaching and preaching far beyond Roman Catholicism for the rest of the century. The two volumes are about the New Testament, but they are the work of a systematic theologian. The author, a long respected Dutch Dominican, is "in search of a biblical foundation for a contemporary understanding of the message of the gospel in the light of the demands and questions of the present time" (2, 112). That requires "a historical and critical approach, set within an intention of faith" (1, 56).

It is the scale on which modern NT scholarship is taken up which distinguishes these books from most doctrinal theology, and the determination with which the material is thought through theologically which distinguishes them from much biblical scholarship. They are thus New Testament theology in the best sense of that phrase, i.e., theological interpretation of the NT,—and that is what makes them such a potential help to any Christian preacher and teacher with the energy to spend time on them. The second (and larger) volume in particular can be taken piecemeal, one NT author at a time, when one is reading that part of the lectionary, or leading a study group.

The two volumes are differently oriented. Though set in a theological framework, the first is largely historical and devoted to the Synoptic Gospels. The second adopts a more literary approach as it seeks to understand the witness of each NT document. The search for Jesus in Vol. 1, subtitled "an experiment in Christology," takes the author deep into the undergrowth of hypotheses about the period between Jesus' death and the gospels as we have them. It also takes him into some daring speculations about the emergence of the disciples, resurrection faith, which Schillebeeckx understands on analogy with conversion experiences. At times the detail becomes oppressive, but there is no evading it once the theologian is resolved to show that the Jesus in whom he finds salvation from God is none other than the historical man from Nazareth. It is not pursued for its own sake. Schillebeeckx is "searching (in faith and in a critical spirit) for possible signs in the historical Jesus that might direct the human quest for 'salvation' towards what Christian faith proposes as a relevant answer when it refers us to a specific saving action (identified by Christians) undertaken by God in this Jesus of Nazareth" (1, 104). This "pastoral intention" (1, 40) is clear throughout.

But the theologian's pastoral responsibility is a critical as well as a constructive one, and for Schillebeeckx that means going behind even the NT theological concepts (ransom, substitution etc.) to see whether they are appropriate: "As a believer, one is bound by whatever Jesus entails, not directly by those articulating concepts. . . The pro-existence or loving service which Jesus' entire life was, and (as historical and exegetical analysis indicates), which manifestly came to a climax in his death, may then have to be expressed for us in an articulation containing different emphases and distinctions from the interpretations in the NT, conditioned as they were by existing cultural and religious concepts" (1, 318f.). The implications of such a liberal catholic approach for indigenous theologies will not be lost upon readers of this Journal.

The Jesus whom Schillebeeckx finds in the earliest traditions was an eschatological prophet, and this reconstruction provides an easy bridge to the messianic definition developed by His first followers in the light of "the salvific character of their experience with the earthly Jesus" (1, 497). More elaborated christologies followed, but the "basic vision" is the same: "Broadly speaking, the NT is a true to

life (faith-motivated) reflection or mirroring of the historical role enacted by Jesus of Nazareth” (1, 515). And the Resurrection? “With him, who during his life had identified himself with God’s cause, the coming rule of God, God has now identified himself by raising him from the dead. . . .” (1, 543). Schillebeeckx’s view of the mechanics of this, in which the faith precedes the appearances, will surprise many readers, but only the most naive of curial theologians will impugn his essential orthodoxy. And many who find the classical formulations unintelligible will be helped by the account (for example) of “Jesus’ caring and abiding presence among people experienced as salvation coming from God” (1, 179ff.).

The building of detailed historical study into this renewal of Christology is intended to recall aspects of the NT witness which the classical (European) development of doctrine underplayed. Schillebeeckx’s concern for the historical foundations of Christianity reflect his conviction that only so can the reality of its claims be made visible and publicly tested, and thus taken seriously. Equally central is his emphasis upon experience, both that of the disciples and that of subsequent Christians. The two sides go together, because “to speak of God’s work of grace is to speak in the language of religious affirmation about the human mystery of trusting in someone. . . . and nobody can ever supply rationally cogent grounds for the confidence he has in someone else. Yet to be able to trust a person and not make relying on his trustworthiness a totally rash decision one must first have substantial information about his life, career and death” (1, 673).

These stories invite us to the “practice” of the Kingdom of God, without which our christology loses all credibility. The role of the Church in historically mediating Jesus’ unique universal significance receives powerful emphasis in both volumes as Schillebeeckx faces and accepts the challenge of the third world and the liberation theologians who have already recognized as their main conversation partner “no longer the unbelieving fellow citizen but the fellow man who is despised, oppressed and held in subjugation: the poor man (believer or unbeliever), the victim of our self-made systems” (1, 650). A fellow western theologian can only break out into a cold sweat, and agree. This orientation to a praxis rooted in the historical realities of Jesus’ life, recognized as bringing salvation and life, repeatedly

finds powerful expression: Within this as yet unfinished human history of suffering in quest of meaning: liberation and final good, Jesus of Nazareth presented himself with a message and praxis of salvation, as a fellow human-being who nevertheless through his new approach to the conduct of life and his innocent suffering and dying on the cross gave us a new reading of our old history that is a source also of renewal. Its effect is to reveal that the factor mediating between the historical person Jesus and his significance for us now is in concrete terms the practice of Christian living within our continuing human history. Apart from the churches' solidarity with the sufferer, whoever or whatever that may be, their gospel becomes impossible to believe and understand" (1, 622).

These quotations give some indication of the tone of Schillebeeckx's reflections on the meaning of the gospel today, and these become even clearer in the second volume where he is still guided by the NT texts but less tied down by historical hypotheses. As he explains in his introduction on "Jesus, the story of a new life-style" he is concerned here "to analyse the NT experience of grace and salvation from God in Jesus Christ as an orientation for what we might call a first attempt at a modern Christian soteriology" (2, 22). The diversity of the NT witnesses is not merely at the conceptual level. Experience and interpretation are so conjoined that the NT authors even experience the one and the same Jesus as salvation in different ways. That is liberating, laying upon us the challenge to interpret him from within new horizons of experience while remaining true to the apostolic traditions contained in the NT (2, 293). At the same time "a fundamentally identical experience. . . of salvation in Jesus from God" (2, 163) underlies all these witnesses and provides "formative structural elements . . . for formulating our experience of the decisive salvation in Jesus" (*ibid.*).

The Pauline corpus and John inevitably dominate the presentation but the other writings are carefully analysed, and Schillebeeckx has a special affection for Hebrews with its "demythologizing of the Jewish image of priesthood" (2, 254). His detailed analyses, however, are only preparatory to a powerful synthesis of "the experience of grace and its interpretative elements in the NT" (2, 463—538). The energy with which the NT vocabulary is thought through rather than merely repeated is most impressive. Parallels from the Jewish

background are drawn into the discussion, but always to fuel, never to replace, the author's modern theological thinking. The structure is sometimes cumbersome, but the message clear enough. The NT preserves in historically conditioned forms a permanent and normative experience of grace which can stimulate and guide new Christian social, moral and political options in changed historical circumstances.

Something of what this means is well illustrated in a brief chapter on "the life of grace and socio-culturally determined ethics in the NT" (2, 586—600). A Christian must integrate the human ethical norms from his society into his experience of grace, but that is not all. The NT never separates ethics from religion and Christian ethics has its own source of inspiration, as the Sermon on the Mount exemplifies. It is bound up with the person of Jesus who was able to break through the specific laws and ethics of his culture. The NT does not contain binding moral rules, but provides models which a Christian cannot ignore. We find here, although in historically conditioned forms, "an ethical sensibility which inspired by the Christian view of the grace of God, the faith and the disquiet of love, and driven by eschatological hope, becomes the realization of salvation in a lost world" (2, 597). And the religious perspective on ethics is what makes forgiveness possible.

The dangers of this approach are evident. They are best countered by the kind of saturation in the biblical and subsequent Christian tradition, critically sifted by public rational methods, brilliantly exemplified by Schillebeeckx himself. He refuses to look to the NT for ready-made ethical directives, insisting instead on discernment, i.e., the capacity to distinguish between the interpretation brought by the Christian experience itself, socially conditioned as even this is, and subsequent thematization and development of these Christian interpretative experiences. It is necessary boldly to reformulate the faith enshrined in the apostolic traditions in order to bring joy and salvation to modern man as well. Christian morality falls short of this, for example in the case of its attitude to divorce, if it refuses "to offer a future to those who have failed" (2, 593). Salvation is concerned with human wholeness and happiness. That is found in the experience of meaning and is based on a relationship with a living God who is concerned with mankind (2, 639).

The final part of *Christ*, on “God’s Glory and Man’s Truth, Well-being and Happiness” includes discussion of other religions’ and Marxism’s attitudes to suffering as part of its wrestling with the question of what humanity is, what it is to be a true and good, happy and free man. Schillebeeckx insists upon the priority of ethics in Christian talk of liberation and reconciliation, and is prepared to allow Christian self-understanding to be challenged and even informed by secularized ethics. Correspondingly, his account of Christian salvation gives full weight to its political dimensions without losing sight of the distinctively religious experience of the holy. The wholeness of mankind involves far more than either narrowly individualistic religious ideologies or purely political and social programmes. But it cannot involve less. Christian hope incorporates the human activity of political involvement in the effort for a better world, while providing through inner conversion a solution to the Enlightenment’s dilemma of how to persuade people of emancipation and existence for others.

The final appeal to Jesus in this account of Christian salvation is not a retreat to traditional dogma, though the relative truth of that is never denied. It is rather an appeal to the man for others, whose life ended—historically considered—in failure and fiasco. In this experience of failure our understandings of failure are corrected, and we are helped. Even where God’s presence and support are no longer experienced, in the dark night of faith, God is at hand. And what looks like failure is in reality not, as the Fourth Gospel’s account of the Passion aims to show (2, 825). The resurrection does not reverse a disaster. It is the hidden dimension of the cross, made manifest subsequently (2, 830).

“As God’s interpreter and one who practised a way of life commensurate with the Kingdom of God, Jesus . . . saw a distant vision of final, perfect and universal salvation—the kingdom of God—in and through his own fragmentary actions” (2, 791). His message and life-style provoked human resistance—inevitably. And he did not seek to escape the consequences. “Anyone who sets no limits to his sacrifice for the suffering of others will sooner or later have to pay with his life—even to-day” (2, 795). In the resurrection it becomes clear what Jesus was before and in his death. “The nature of God’s divinity has been revealed historically in Jesus’ life, which involved a furthering of good and resistance against all forms of suffering” (2, 796). God’s affirmation of the definitive validity of

this life is an identification with the person of Jesus, just as Jesus identified himself with God who is love.

Finally, "what history tells us about Jesus, what the Church tells and indeed *promises* us about Jesus, is that in this way of life, which is in conformity with the message of Jesus and the Kingdom of God, we are shown the *real* possibility of an experience of God" (2, 837). The final consummation of this which we celebrate and give thanks for in the liturgy remains God's mystery. Meanwhile there is the practice of liberation and reconciliation which can experience the nearness of God even in failure and suffering. God gives a future to all we do. "What, then, is salvation in Jesus from God? Being at the disposal of others, losing oneself to others . . . working through anonymous structures for the happiness, the goodness, the truth of mankind. This way of life, born of grace, provides a real possibility for a very personal encounter with God who is then experienced as the source of all happiness and salvation. The source of joy . . . a freedom which is actively reconciled with our own finitude, our death, our transgressions and our failure . . . Even if there is no human love in return, sometimes if there is even misunderstanding, the believer knows in his sovereign freedom, which is at the same time grateful humility, that there is love in return: God first loved us. Real redemption or salvation always passes over into mysticism: only here can the tension between action and contemplation be sustained. This is existing for others and thus for *The Other*, the wholly intimate and near yet 'transcendent God,' with whom Jesus has made us familiar . . ." (2, 838).

Stringing out a few quotations cannot hope to do justice to the million words of these two volumes. But it may give something of the flavour, and so provide some support for the initial claim that they could nourish Christian teaching and preaching on an ecumenical basis in the years ahead. The second volume in particular, fluently translated by John Bowden and published by the SCM Press in London, is one to ponder and absorb awhile rather than rush into critical debate with. The Church will want to live with this monument and test its proposals and new orientations through the experience of the faithful. But it is immediately apparent that the 1960s renaissance in Dutch Catholicism has produced a light for which many outside European Roman Catholicism will be grateful.

ROBERT MORGAN

Linacre College, Oxford