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BOOK REVIEWS

Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context

Brevard S. Childs. SCM, 1985. Pp. xvi + 255. £10.00

One of the most intensely debated contributions to Biblical Studies over recent years has been the canonical approach of Brevard Childs, Professor of Old Testament at Yale University. His *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979) and also its companion volume *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (1984) represent a crucial backdrop to the present volume. He has offered one way out of a crisis which he sees as threatening much biblical study, namely the failure of the historical-critical approach to relate the nature of the biblical literature correctly to the community which has treasured it as scripture. In his provocative corrective to "arid" analytical criticism, he pushes us back to the theological significance of the text of scripture, using the concept of "canon" as the central motif. Childs' contributions have given considerable stimulus to the study of these questions over recent years. They have also brought him under heavy fire from a range of distinguished critics, including James Barr, John Barton, E. P. Sanders and John Van Seters, and here he attempts to meet some of these criticisms as well as to break new ground.

Since theological considerations have long been central to Childs' canonical approach, one might expect that here in a work explicitly devoted to the *theology* of the Old Testament his perspective might prove more appropriate than his critics have judged it to be in his earlier *Introductions to Old and New Testaments*. This book is, moreover, particularly timely in that there is much current interest in the discipline of Old Testament theology. One thinks, for example, of recent historical and methodological studies of the discipline by Reventlow and also by Hayes and Prussner. There is today, it seems, a renewed awareness of the need to explore the *theological* dimensions of the bible text.

But what constitutes an appropriate basis for a theological evaluation of the literature? It is to this question that Childs attempts to offer an answer in the present volume. He writes, "It is my thesis that a canonical approach to the scriptures of the Old Testament opens up a fruitful avenue along which to explore the theological dimensions of the biblical text". For Childs, the object of theological reflection is the canonical writings of the Old Testament (that is, the Hebrew Scriptures which are the received traditions of Israel appropriated by the Christian church), and not the events or experiences behind the text.

Childs argues that much of the confusion in the history of Old Testament theology derives from a reluctance to recognize that it is a distinctively Christian enterprise: "To suggest that the Christian should read the Old Testament as if he were living before the coming of Christ is an historical anachronism which also fails to take seriously the literature's present function within the Christian Bible for a practising community of faith . . . The Christian canon maintains the integrity of the Old Testament in its own right as scripture of the church. However, it sets it within a new canonical context in a dialectical relation with the New Testament". Childs' position, then, is an

avowedly confessional one: "The critical process of theological reflection takes place from a stance within the circle of received tradition prescribed by the affirmation of the canon". Thus he defines the task of Old Testament theology as being to reflect theologically on one portion of the Christian canon, precisely as Christian scripture.

Childs sees the discipline of Old Testament theology not just as a description of a historical process in the past; the theology of the Old Testament is not a closed deposit, to be unlocked with a single interpretative key. Rather, each new Christian generation is called to a fresh and profound theological engagement with the text. He suggests that the discussion of the so-called "centre of the Old Testament" which has dominated many recent contributions in the field of Old Testament theology has in large part arisen from a concept of the discipline which views it simply as an historical enterprise. Childs himself gives prominence to the categories of revelation and response in his exploration of the theology of the Old Testament, but he is at pains to stress that he makes no exclusive claims for any one systematizing principle and that his canonical approach acknowledges "a dimension of flexibility which encourages constantly fresh ways of actualizing the material".

Childs is emphatic that it is with the final canonical form of the text that the theologian of the Old Testament must work. He claims that his canonical approach does not deny the theological significance of a "depth dimension" of the tradition (that is, he does not reject altogether the possibility of tracing different historical levels within the growth of the Old Testament literature), but he is at the same time insistent that features within the tradition which have been "subordinated, modified or placed in the distant background of the text" cannot be interpreted apart from the role assigned to them in the final form. This, he says, would be to "disregard the crucial theological intention of the traditions of the tradition, and to isolate a text's meaning from its reception".

There can be no denying the attraction of Childs' writing. A reader of his works cannot but be impressed by the phenomenal range of his reading, the breadth of his vision, and the seductive power of his rhetoric; but there can also be no denying the real problems raised by his presentation.

Childs has helped us to see again the theological importance of the finished canonical text hallowed by use in synagogue and church. However, in spite of his claim that his canonical approach takes account of the significance of the process which formed the text, one cannot help feeling that he fails to do full justice to the dynamic traditio-historical process, the "depth dimension" of the tradition. Moreover, the logic of Childs' position seems to lead him effectively to be blinkered to material outside the strict parameters of the canon. But why limit perspectives so narrowly? – what of the many rich continuities between the biblical texts and the other literatures of the Ancient Near East, and indeed of inter-testamental Judaism?

Childs tends to slide between historical and theological discourse in a somewhat confusing way, without ever seeming to do full justice to either. It may be suggested that greater clarity is needed with regard to the many historical questions raised by the canon of the Old Testament

before “canon” can be used too freely as a theological motif. These questions are, for the most part, not addressed by Childs. With regard to theological discourse, he can be disconcertingly cavalier. Thus, for example, on page 14 he speaks of the canonical process as that “process by which divine truth acquired its authoritative form”; or again, on page 15, he speaks of the modern biblical theologian waiting “in anticipation of a fresh illumination through God’s Spirit”. There is altogether too much theological shorthand – and too many massive theological questions are begged.

We earlier commended the breadth of vision which is a mark of the work of Childs, but the negative side of this is that the enterprise becomes too ambitious. His range is admirable (extending, for example, to the question, “Is the God of the Old Testament a male deity?” and to a discussion of “Male and Female as a theological problem”), but the overall result is, inevitably perhaps, disappointing. In his preface, he says that what is needed is “a new manner of theological reflection rather than once again rehearsing in detail the familiar lines of earlier research”, that is to say he admits that the work is of the nature of a programmatic sketch; but even so the result is less than satisfactory. It is a slim volume (just over 250 pages) for such a large undertaking – a tantalizing, but ultimately frustrating, piece of work.

A closely related problem is that of style. Childs himself declares, “I have chosen to develop my understanding of Old Testament theology in a less technical form than my earlier commentary and introductions”. But the work is not in fact very accessible – indeed, it is at points rather hard going and occasionally even a little cryptic. At the same time, whilst there are very useful bibliographies, and indexes of authors and of biblical references, one feels the lack of full footnotes, and at times the use of bracketed references to scholars gives an unfortunate impression of vagueness.

Childs makes frequent use of the phrase “the canonical approach to Old Testament theology”, as though this were a self-contained package with a life of its own. In fact it appears as the subject of many verbs; the canonical approach, we are told, “rejects”, “attempts to overcome”, “envisions”, and even “looks with suspicion”. This recurrent usage makes one feel that one is in effect encountering an ideology – and this is an impression that is borne out by the work as a whole.

Paul Joyce

Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century

John Rogerson. SPCK, 1984. Pp. xiii + 320. £15.00

If King’s College has the dubious distinction of having ejected F. D. Maurice – atonement has now been effected by the establishing of both a professorship and a course of lectures in his honour – it has also the merit of having acquired an Old Testament chair founded in the University of London in 1926 in memory and in honour of Samuel Davidson who was ejected in 1857 from his professorship at Lancashire Independent College. It was not only Anglicans who could be intolerant. The chair was, by agreement, rescued from the limbo of its

unattached position in the University and brought into King’s College in 1960, at a time when the full development of what was to become the present Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies was on its way. So it is pleasing to find a complete chapter in this book devoted to Samuel Davidson and his dismissal, and importantly to his contribution (as an Irishman!) to the development of Old Testament studies in England. And it seems proper to begin the review of Professor Rogerson’s book in the present context by expressing appreciation for that particular emphasis, and to note the comment at the end of the chapter that Davidson is the only 19th century scholar to have an Old Testament chair named after him in England.

But that is only one of the incidental merits of this book. In the two major sections, we have a review of Old Testament scholarship in Germany and in England – it is still not quite clear why the latter was not extended to include the remainder of the British Isles, though exceptions are made, as in the case of William Robertson Smith. In each of these sections, some account is given of the period before 1800, by way of introduction.

Much of the discussion takes the form of careful summaries of the major works, with full bibliographical information and in particular with indications of when English translations were available of German scholarship and of how far English scholars actually made use of German works. The section on Germany corrects and clarifies many of the generalised statements often made about individual writers; it also illuminates carefully the conservative opposition to radical views, elucidating the differences within the “confessional” areas of thought. The section on England traces both the cautious advances made and the hostility with which the more radical views were encountered, often with a blame attached to German scholarship which was less than well informed.

In a final survey of the last years of the 19th century, Rogerson sketches in the triumph of the critical method, though it is interesting to observe how often what then appeared to be radical now seems much more traditional and cautious in the light of later developments. He also ventures on some more general comments on the differences between German and English scholarship. In doing this, he notes – very vividly with his tabulation of academic posts in Germany – the much larger scale of activity in Germany compared to the modest position in England, where so many of our universities are of recent origin. Clearly this is an important element in the degree of scholarly work undertaken in Germany, though his final statement plays down English contributions perhaps rather more than is entirely just. Part of the difference is one of scale, but it is also one of style: there is little of the bitterness which has often characterised German work, and virtually none of the political interference; there is also very little in England of that dominance of scholars over their pupils which has so often created in Germany rather narrow schools of thought and has sometimes made real interchange of understanding difficult if not impossible. English scholarship has tended to be more individualistic and independent; it has also been marked by a much greater openness to what was going on elsewhere, whereas it has often seemed – though less so in more recent years – that many German scholars had hardly read an English book, let alone a French one. It

was said of a notable King's College teacher, W. O. E. Oesterley, that he never read any book unless it was in German; and though this was clearly a joke, it is the case that no scholar in any theological discipline would expect to operate without the ability to read German, as well as other languages.

But this last is a matter of emphasis. What Professor Rogerson has given us is a very readable presentation of an immense range of material, a very clear picture of movements of thought. And, what is more, he provides a significant context for considering some of the contemporary moves in the direction of heresy-hunting, even if these affect other theological disciplines more often now than that of Old Testament studies. We are given some important sidelights on the ways in which theological debate is sometimes conducted.

Peter R. Ackroyd

The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church, and its Background in early Judaism

Roger Beckwith. SPCK, 1985. Pp. x + 528. £35.00 hb

Anyone who thinks the Reformers were right to claim that Holy Scriptures is our sole authority for faith and morals is faced with the question which are the canonical books that are authoritative for the Church. In the case of the OT, is the Church to accept only those books which came to be regarded as canonical by the Jews, or should it accord equal authority to the additional books which Protestants (following Jerome) call Apocrypha and Catholics Deuterocanonical? On Protestant principles the former view has no sure basis unless it can be shown that the shorter list was regarded as normative by our Lord and the writers of the NT. This the learned author of the present book (Warden of Latimer House, Oxford) seeks to demonstrate.

Recently studies, based mainly on H. F. Ryle's *The Canon of the Old Testament* (1892), have argued that the Jewish canon was not fixed until the end of the first century AD; from which it follows that Christians need not be bound by a Jewish decision taken after the NT was written, but are at liberty to accept the wider canon which the Church came to acknowledge during the early centuries after Christ. Against this, Beckwith argues in great detail that the Jewish list was already settled in the second century BC, if not earlier, and was the canon known to Jesus and the NT Church.

After describing in Chapter 1 the various witnesses to the Hebrew scriptures, he considers in Chapter 2 what is meant by "canonicity". Even in the OT, and certainly in the NT, we find the sacred scriptures regarded as divinely inspired, authoritative, and infallible. The same reverence was shown by Philo, Josephus, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and books in the Apocrypha such as Ecclesiasticus and 4 Maccabees. Chapter 3 briefly describes the variety of titles given to the inspired books from the second century BC onwards. Chapter 4 reviews the evidence, from the same century, that the scriptures were arranged in three sections – law, prophets, and hagiographa. Beckwith contends that the assignment of

the books between the three sections was not due to accidents of history but was done on rational grounds. He accepts the speculative view that the prophets and hagiographa grew up as canonical together, and what happened in the second century BC (probably under Judas Maccabaeus) was not that the hagiographa were added to the canon but that they were separated off.

Chapter 5 considers, at perhaps needless length, the order of the canonical books, since if there were a settled order for the books this would imply that the identity of the books was known and that the canon was closed. Unfortunately for Beckwith's thesis, there is no evidence that the order of the books was settled before the second century AD. There is a full discussion of the reference to the killing of Zechariah in Matt. 21.34-36 and Luke 11.49-51. If this refers to Zechariah son of Jehoiada whose death is recorded in 2 Chron. 24. 19-22, and if in Jesus's time 2 Chron. was the last book in the canon, then this saying could have referred to all the righteous men murdered from the beginning to the end of the canonical scriptures; but there are too many ifs here. The saying reads oddly if the last of the prophets was murdered eight centuries before, in the reign of Joash; it makes better sense if the Zechariah alluded to had been killed not long before Jesus's day.

Chapter 6 considers the number of the canonical books and argues from later quotations that the Hebrew text of the Book of Jubilees, dating from about the second century BC, must have stated that the canonical books numbered 22, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It does not follow, however, that the canon was already closed, because by grouping books together a wide variety of books could be brought within the number 22.

Chapter 7 asks what conclusions to draw from the fact that some Jews, as early perhaps as the first century AD, doubted the inspiration of Esther, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Ezekiel. The conclusion is reached that these doubts would not have been felt as a problem unless the books were already canonical.

Chapter 8 considers at length the question whether the canon ever included more books or was open to expansion, and answers in the negative. The enlargement of Esther and Daniel and the addition of the Prayer of Manasseh to 2 Chronicles are questions of text, not of canon.

Does Beckwith prove his case? In this reviewer's judgment, he falls short of doing so. While it can be regarded as certain that the list of canonical books was practically settled by about the end of the first century AD, the previous evidence is inconclusive. The prologue to Ecclesiasticus is missing from a number of manuscripts and may be much later than the supposed date of about BC 130; even so, it says no more than that in the author's opinion certain other (unspecified) books beside the law and the prophets were worthy of study and translation. The NT refers to the scriptures only as "the law and the prophets", except for Luke 24.44 which adds the psalms, implying that these were the only inspired writings outside the law and prophets. Nothing outside the law and the prophets is quoted as sacred scriptures, except that at 1 Cor. 3.19 a quotation from Job is introduced by the words "it is written".

However, even if Beckwith has not proved his case, his book is of great value as a mine of accurate information about the attitude of Jews and Christians to the Hebrew scriptures in the last few centuries before Christ and the first few centuries of the Christian era.

J. M. Ross

The Bible and Christian Life

Charles E. B. Cranfield. T. & T. Clark, 1985. Pp. 248. £6.95

This volume is a collection of essays by Professor Cranfield, published in various journals or books over a period of years. They are characterized by the author's thorough and meticulous exegesis. A majority of them deal with the interpretation of the Bible: e.g. of whole books such as "The Message of James", or "An Interpretation of the Book of Job"; sections of the New Testament letters, e.g. "A Study of 1 Thessalonians 2"; or of individual verses, e.g. "Hebrews 13:20-21" and "Romans 8:19-21"; or even of phrases, e.g. "The Significance of *dia pantos* in Rom. 11:10" and "*Metron pisteōs* in Rom. 12:3".

The latter essay is fairly typical of Cranfield's approach. First, he addresses three basic questions to the text. (i) In what sense is *metron* used? (ii) In what sense is *pistis* used? (iii) What kind of genitive is *pisteōs*? He illustrates from the history of exegesis a great measure of agreement concerning (i); but despite this he applauds Michel for offering an alternative understanding. Cranfield then proceeds by proposing (1) to set out severally the various possible answers to these three questions; (2) to set out some, at least, of the possible combinations of these possibilities and (3) to consider which of these combinations is the most probable interpretation of the phrase. Having completed this exercise, his tentative conclusion is that *metron pisteōs* in Rom. 12:3 means "a standard (by which to measure himself) namely (his) Christian faith"; the true measure of this (faith) Cranfield considers to be Jesus Christ who is Himself therefore the Standard and Norm.

As the title of the volume indicates, a second group of these essays deals with Christian life, e.g. "The Christian's Political Responsibility", "The Preacher and his Authority", "Diakonia in the New Testament" and "Divine and Human Action: the biblical Concept of Worship". More ecclesiastical interests are reflected in the essay "The Church and Divorce and the Remarriage of divorced Persons in the Light of Mark 10: 1-12", in which Cranfield distinguishes between God's perfect will and the expression of His will in response to the consequences of human sin. In his final essay, "Unity and Love in the Light of John 17", the author considers the situation of the churches in England after the rejection of the Covenant proposals. He reaffirms the biblical basis for ecumenism, but in the light of its close connection with "agape", he suggests a "sabbath rest" from all reunion schemes in England for a considerable period for the good of all those involved.

Cranfield's careful and balanced exegesis might possibly lead some erroneously to conclude that biblical

exegesis has a timeless quality and is in no way influenced by contemporary currents of thought. If truly objective exegesis were possible, Cranfield would come closer to achieving it than most! It was this faithfulness to the text which led him in his 1964 essay to oppose most modern translations of *dia pantos* in Rom. 11:10 as "for ever" (meaning that the Jews are to bend their backs for ever), in favour of the "always" of the AV and RV and Knox's rendering "continually".

Typical also of Cranfield's balance is his essay, "Light from St Paul on Christian-Jewish Relations". Here he is not slow to emphasize God's judgement upon the Jew who is sure of his own moral superiority over Gentiles (Rom. 2) but he immediately adds "Much of what Paul says could be applied to many Christians"; he then links Jews and Christians together in their self-complacency.

A valuable addition at the conclusion of this collection is a complete list of the author's extensive publications from 1941 to his "Romans: a Shorter Commentary" and "If God be for Us: a Collection of Sermons" (1985).

W. S. Campbell

Christian Origins

Christopher Rowland. SPCK, 1985. Pp. 428. £12.50

In this follow-up to his *The Open Heaven* (1982), which now stands as the premiere study on Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, Christopher Rowland takes his investigations into the eschatological teachings of Judaism and Christianity a step further. This second book is divided into two halves, with a detailed study of Jewish belief, practices and ideas comprising the first half and an equally detailed study of Christianity comprising the second half. In fact, I am not certain whether stating the matter in that fashion would entirely meet with Professor Rowland's approval, since he takes great pains to demonstrate that Christianity arose from a Jewish milieu and needs to be so acknowledged before it can be properly understood. Rowland himself emphasizes two major theses which run through the whole of the book and serve as the glue which holds it together. These are the centrality of eschatology within both Judaism and Christianity and the critical importance of the Jewish world for understanding the New Testament and Christianity. If we can grasp these two points, argues Rowland, we are well on the way to discovering Christian Origins.

Part One deals with Jewish Life and Thought at the Beginning of the Christian Era and is sub-divided into 15 topical themes. These themes cover everything from "The Synagogue" to "The Interpretation of Scripture" to "The Expression of Hope". Most of these 15 sub-sections are only a couple of pages long each and thus serve as excellent introductions to the specific subject areas. The manner of discussion of each is straightforward and direct, while the material covered in each is very recent. Rowland's opinions I found to be judicious and well argued in the main. Although the 15 sub-sections are each individually excellent, as a group they are a bit dry and difficult to read one after the other. This first part of the book is not the kind of thing one would want to sit down

and read from beginning to end. It does however serve as an excellent catalogue summary of Jewish belief and practice for the serious student.

By contrast, the second section dealing with Christianity is much more stimulating and easier to digest. It is within this section that Rowland goes on to apply the knowledge gleaned from his study of Jewish belief and thought to our understanding of Christian belief and thought. The way in which Rowland sees Christianity as dependent upon Judaism is betrayed by the subtitle of the book as a whole – “An Account of the Setting and Character of the most important Messianic Sect of Judaism”. It is in so interpreting the origins of Christianity that Rowland makes his most distinctive contribution – and at the same time opens himself to the most penetrating criticism. Many scholars will no doubt find it difficult to accept that the rift between Christianity and Judaism was as late and imprecise as Rowland would have us believe. I for one would emphasise the distinctiveness of Jesus as a Messianic figure and would argue that simply to describe him as one among many is insufficient. According to Rowland neither Jesus nor Paul believed himself to be in the process of forming a religious system independent from Judaism. At least this is one way of re-asserting the essential continuity between Jesus and Paul but I have reservations about it being the correct approach. In short, I am not certain whether Rowland’s foundational point about the reliance of the Messianic sect of Christianity upon Jewish eschatological beliefs can bear the weight Rowland demands of it. It seems to me that the Christian proclamation of the *fulfilment* of those Jewish beliefs in the life and ministry of Jesus created far more of a disruption than we sometimes appreciate. In other words, I think that much of what Rowland has to say is true and right, but I would tend to see tension between Christianity and Judaism in terms of disruption whereas Rowland would see it in terms of dependence.

Nevertheless, his grasp of the essential critical issues of New Testament study is excellent. His explanation of the “Delay of the Parousia”, for example, is superb. It would be an excellent buy for those who would like a single book to keep them abreast of recent trends in biblical scholarship.

Larry Kreitzer

The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics. III Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles

Hans Urs Von Balthasar. T. & T. Clark, 1986. Pp. 524. £19.95 hb

Towards the end of this third volume, at the beginning of the chapter on Charles Peguy, Balthasar announces that Peguy “completes the circle back to our own point of departure, to Irenaeus” (p. 406). This statement immediately raises, for the reader, vital and difficult questions. We have been on a long journey with the author (nearly 1,000 pages) and what has been its nature? Has it been “circular” in the derogatory sense? Or have we “arrived where we started and knowing the place for the first time”? What has been the intention of the author

in going on this journey and conducting this vast survey of 12 thinkers? And has he succeeded in persuading us that he has achieved his intention? To find the answer to these questions we must first re-trace our steps to the introduction to the second volume of *The Glory of the Lord* where we find Balthasar looking down the long road curving away in front of him.

So once again the questionableness of any historical development in theology becomes clear: Each original form breaks out anew from the centre. It has its own *kairos* in its historical context, is, as an instruction for the Church, indeed of the Church, set into ways of thought and forms of speech of the epoch and it is in this way that it attains its uniqueness. (p. 29)

Balthasar thus disposes of the problem that troubled John Henry Newman, and continues to trouble us today: the problem of the development of doctrine. What Balthasar is not writing is “historical theology”; a demonstration of a continuous unfolding of an original revelation. Is he writing a “systematic theology”: a demonstration of the internal coherence and intellectual consistency of the structures of Christian belief? That is more difficult to answer; his movement, as he says, is circular; it does not go forward in logical sequence to a conclusion, it revolves around truth in an attempt to view it from different angles. Can we always be sure that it is the same truth that we are viewing? The words “an original form breaks out from the centre” are crucially important: Peguy and Irenaeus, we are led to believe, are viewing the same truth, but their views are quite different. So there is no “line” in theology for Balthasar; there is instead what he calls a “symposium” of thinkers. Historical change seems to represent no problem for him and he clearly expects us, in the 20th century to respond no less eagerly to the second century Greek than to the 20th century Frenchman. But we know the world of Hopkins and Peguy in a way that we do not know the world of Irenaeus or Augustine. This does not make their worlds opaque, or remove from them the power to illuminate our lives and inform our beliefs; but it requires a particular kind of imaginative effort, and I wonder if Balthasar takes enough account of this fact. It is not easy to see immediately the truth of his statement that in Peguy we have come home to our starting-point in Irenaeus. There is, of course, the concentration in both thinkers on the interpenetration of Nature and Grace, but the language of their approach is quite different, and I do not think it is obtuse of me that I should want a fuller explanation of their connection. I need to be shown, for instance, how Hopkins fits into the company of Anselm if I am to recognise the “symposium” that they belong to. It is as though, in these two volumes, the speakers at the symposium step forward, utter their piece, then relapse into silence. Where is the conversation between the members of the group?

I cannot help thinking that the lack of “coherence” is partly caused by the nature of Balthasar’s material itself. He has set himself an extraordinarily difficult task; within his vast span he has chosen to bring forward a fearsome variety of literary form and cultural context. They are not all susceptible to the same treatment. Balthasar is far too sensitive a man and brilliant a scholar not to be aware of this, but even he cannot quite manage all the material, and, more seriously, he cannot quite overcome the

endemic disease of the German critical tradition – i.e. the tendency to elevate the relatively simple science of hermeneutics above the more subtle process of literary criticism. A poem will not yield its secrets in the same way that a philosophical treatise does. It seems an obvious observation to make, yet there is, in Balthasar, as in so many theologians, an incorrigible desire to extract “meanings” from texts. A great work of art will range between several possible meanings, existing, as it does, not to give a message or a programme, but to tease us in and out of thought and feeling. A single (admittedly crass) example will demonstrate my point. On p. 48 of this volume Balthasar writes: “The *Comedy* begins with Dante being lost in the dark wood of sin”. To identify Dante’s condition as sin makes interpretation of the *Comedy* easier, but Dante nowhere says that the condition was a condition of sin; he merely says: *mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*. The “dark wood” is a complex image: it suggests, as well as sin, bewilderment, fear, loss, inarticulate grief, frustrated love. Balthasar is imposing theology on poetry here, and it does not work; the richness of the aesthetic vision evaporates under this kind of theological scrutiny. Perhaps what I am touching on here is the question of whether Balthasar, in the first volume, has really established the structures of a “theological aesthetic”, because when it comes to the application of the principles of this activity it seems as though theology dominates; the aesthetic achievement (*Divine Comedy*, poems of John of the Cross, etc.) is judged by a theological yardstick.

However, even when all that has been said, Balthasar provides us with more nourishment and genuine intellectual delight than any other living theologian. In a recent “sermon” Frank Kermode observed that “It is part of our experience of the past that we change it as it passes through our hands; and in changing it we may make it more puzzling in making it more our own”. A great deal of the past passes through Balthasar’s hands in this volume and much of it undergoes a remarkable change. Sometimes it becomes more puzzling (in the sense that Kermode intended); sometimes it shines with a brightness we had not expected before we read his words.

B. L. Horne

God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation

Jürgen Moltmann. SCM Press, 1985. Pp. xvi. + 365. £10.50

Jürgen Moltmann is now well established as a theologian on the world stage. This volume, the Gifford Lectures for 1984/85, represents the second in a series of five volumes intended to comprise a systematic theology. It follows *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, and is to be accompanied eventually by three further volumes on Christology, Eschatology, and the Foundations and Methods of Christian Theology. It is built upon the solid foundations which we have come to expect from Moltmann, of immensely wide reading and scholarship, combined with the characteristic rigour of German theological reasoning. Much of the Moltmannian methodology reappears in these pages. He reaffirms his roots in Ernst Bloch’s *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (now usefully available in an English translation). Hints of the “cruci-

fied God” are there, and all is rooted in the so-called “trinitarian history of God”.

There are, however, new points of departure. Moltmann is keen to learn from and utilise the “systems approach” to reality, popularised in the work of Fritjof Capra, whose writings he refers to in footnotes. Indeed, many of the insights employed in his approach to the doctrine of creation are reminiscent of the argument in Capra’s *The Turning Point*. Pre-eminent here is his stress on co-operation within the total process and ambit of creation. This forces him into a strongly theocentric attitude to creation which gives some stretches of his argument a Calvinistic feel. Moltmann is keen to demonstrate that creation and evolution are not opposed and this takes him on to the next, and perhaps most crucial, stage of his argument.

He argues, as indeed have others recently, that many of our present problems both theologically and philosophically, stem from René Descartes. The strict dualism which his thought implies, combined with a crude interpretation of the Genesis exhortation to humanity to “subdue the earth” (Gen. 1:28) has led to an objectification of nature alongside a subjectification of humanity. It is this that has led to the possibility and indeed reality of humanity dominating and exploiting the created order. The priority of a thoroughgoing theocentrism is the only means of avoiding this. Building upon this, Moltmann goes on to describe protological and eschatological elements within the doctrine of creation. The first refers to the divine act *ex nihilo*, and the second to the possibility of new creation through Christ in the Spirit. Creation is thus identical with God’s eternal nature, and automatically part of the concept of God.

The result of this is a concept of God who is deeply concerned with and involved in his creation, although Moltmann is keen to steer clear of any form of pantheism, by talking of a “trinitarian doctrine of creation”. At one point he writes: “The created world does not exist in the ‘absolute space’ of the divine Being; it exists in the space God yielded up for it through his creative resolve” (p. 156). There is thus a kenotic feel to his argument. Eschatological concepts as always are to the fore and again he writes: “The word ‘heaven’ is the term for the side of creation that is open to God”. This immediately leads him into a discussion of the human co-operation with the divine initiative and the “priestly” function of humanity. Human beings “stand before God on behalf of creation, and before creation on behalf of God”. They are, to use his terms, both *imago mundi*, and *imago dei*, they are both part of the community of creation but also hold a very particular role within that community.

It is not difficult to see in which direction this argument will take us. Domination of creation is not simply ruled out, but runs against the grain of the created order. Ecology and concern for the future of creation are part of the nature of human existence and destiny, working pneumatologically with God. The Sabbath and the restraint there implied becomes for Moltmann the “feast of Creation”.

The power of the argument here is to be welcomed at a time when the plant at Sellafield has been condemned by wide sections of the community for its anti-creative

effects, and when a large part of the Christian Church still struggles to see the effects of its teaching on birth-control on the total world community. In the face of these and other anti-creative threats, Moltmann represents ecology not as an enthusiasm for the few but as a demand upon all humanity. This in its issue cannot be gainsaid. Not all, however, will tune into, or accept his philosophical/theological critique. His Germanic style can often feel opaque and over-written for the Anglo-Saxon reader. Furthermore, he is strongest in his wielding of tradition, and in his critique of Descartes. He ignores some of the other challenges to both classical philosophy and classical Christian orthodoxy which are examined by a writer like Alasdair MacIntyre in his recent reflections upon "virtue". This need not discredit his thesis, although it may undermine some of the compulsion which the intensity of his thought at first seems to imply.

Stephan Platten

The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth

Stephen Sykes. SPCK, 1984. Pp. xii + 349. £8.50

From very early times, Christians have differed among themselves about key issues, doctrinal and practical. Much time and energy has been spent through many centuries in an effort to define what is essential to Christianity, and what sorts of beliefs and practices are inadmissible. Sometimes the debates have been open and generous; too often they have been conducted to the accompaniment of much mud-slinging. But always the ideal has been unity. In this work, Sykes examines this ideal of unity based on the idea of an essence of Christianity, and offers suggestions about the minimum conditions for the presentation of its identity.

By way of a prelude, Sykes offers a discussion of three important dimensions of Christian existence. In the first place, he considers the facts of plurality and controversy in the church, reaching back to the time of the apostles and deriving at least in part from ambiguities in the teaching of Jesus himself. Secondly, although the doctrinal dimension with its variations of interpretation is an indispensable part of the Christian inheritance, it is the inward experience of the believer that makes these doctrines personally significant and that therefore dialectically affects both the manner and content of their interpretation. Third, all of this takes place in the public context of the Church on earth, which means that there are structures and individuals of authority and influence. The theologian in particular, because of his or her acknowledged claim to interpret doctrine and experiences, is a person of power, all the more potent because it is often hidden behind a claim to say nothing of oneself but only to speak forth the truth of God.

The central section of the work presents the views of major modern theologians on the essence of Christianity. Schleiermacher roots religion in the feeling of absolute dependence; but it is in his view always "positive", that is, organised according to a content which sets its boundaries. The structural coherence of Christianity derives

from its inwardness which grasps or intuits its essential principle: this rests on the conception of the human person as a religious being – a conception which Schleiermacher takes to be pre-theological but which Sykes shows to be reciprocally related to this Christian doctrine of humanity. Nevertheless, his effort to develop a relationship between theology and non-theological disciplines, and his insistence that any inner grasp of Christian truth must be measured against actual historical material is of lasting methodological value.

Newman, by contrast, rejected the idea of a single graspable essence of Christianity, insisting that the urge to a systematization of Christianity under a "leading idea" is an illegitimate effort to make God immediately intelligible to the human mind. Nevertheless, Newman was concerned to show the continuity and development of doctrine, and suggested the inner apprehension of the mystery of the Incarnation as a central focus from which all Christian doctrine, practice and devotion could be viewed in an interconnected way. He is thus similar to Schleiermacher, despite all their differences, in his emphasis on the inward centre of Christianity and the need for a focus which enables Christianity to be seen as a whole.

Sykes next considers Harnack's enormously influential *Das Wesen des Christentums*, which saw dogma as a temporary, if characteristic phenomenon from which we need to be liberated by exposure to Christ and his practical love of God and neighbour. Loisy, by contrast, argues that the development of dogma perpetuates the Gospel. Both agree that there are distortions and corruptions, but whereas Harnack uses a metaphor of kernel and husk, seeing the teaching of Jesus as central, Loisy prefers metaphors of continuous organic growth through Christian history.

This dispute leads naturally to a consideration of modern historiography and its implications for belief, and Sykes uses a discussion of Troeltsch to pursue these problems. Any enquiry into history, and *a fortiori* Christian history, must be partial if it is to be of value; and yet no historical investigation can occur without the sympathetic perspective of the historian. Therefore any historical assessment of the essence of Christianity would involve a reciprocal interplay between the Christian position already held by the historian and the facticity of the past. Not the least consequence of Troeltsch's work was the recognition of the vast gulf between modern civilisation and the earliest Church, and therefore the difficulty of establishing any essence of Christianity that will do justice to both. He himself overcomes this by focussing on the figure of Christ, but as a powerful symbol of social adhesion rather than as a crucial dogma.

Barth, Sykes' final selection, sees the historical gap bridged in the preaching of the Word of God, by which the Church identifies itself with Jesus Christ. This simultaneously connects the present proclamation with the past, and stands as a radical challenge to the secular assumptions of the modern world. In order to hear and proclaim this Word, however, the theologian must attend to it as a gift of grace in obedience of heart. This means that Barth can be seen both as the apotheosis of the inwardness tradition, and also as the one who gives most power – albeit Christologically-derived power – to the theologian.

In the analysis of these discussions of the essence of Christianity, Sykes suggests that the theologians have three purposes: first, the provision of a simple statement or short formula of the actual nature of Christianity; second, a creation of priorities around this central focus which serves to deepen the grasp of the central matters of faith; and third, a method for tackling the problem of continuity of Christian doctrine. In each case, the inward reality of spiritual transformation is central, but is disciplined and understood by doctrinal consideration. Because of the disputes about the question of essence, reflecting the diversity of faith and practice throughout Christian history, Sykes suggests that the philosophical notion of an essentially contested question be brought into play. This is a question which all sides agree to be central, but to which varying answers can be given and varying methods of solution used. Sykes believes that Christology may be seen as the essentially contested question. The account one gives of the events of Christ's life and of the context of that life in his relationship to God is decisive for one's understanding of Christianity. The identity of Christianity lies in the interaction between one's internal experience of new life in Christ, related to the worshipping community, and the external forms of Christianity, both doctrinal and practical.

From this summary, it is clear that Sykes has made a significant contribution to theological thinking, not least in this theme of the interplay between inwardness and the external doctrines and forms of religion. It seems to me, however, that this could be pushed much more deeply. Sykes is clear that doctrinal considerations must be brought into play to interpret and evaluate inward experience. No doubt this is true; but it leaves unanswered the crucial question of *which* doctrinal considerations must be raised, and which are misguided – or, to use the old word, heretical. (Arius would have agreed with Sykes that Christology is the essentially contested concept in Christianity, and that identity of Christianity consists in the interplay between the external and internal dimensions.) Furthermore it does not tackle the question of the extent to which the inwardly apprehended “word of God” can be allowed radically to challenge (or even overthrow?) received doctrine and practice. Sykes' book is a work of solid but cautious scholarship. It helps the theologians to be aware of what they are doing; but it does not offer a position on the specific challenges which modern theologians seek to face.

Grace Jantzen

Theology on the Way to Emmaus

Nicholas Lash. SCM, 1986. Pp. 240. £10.50

Professor Lash's *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* is a collection of papers and letters written or delivered between 1982 and 1984, which seek to articulate Christian interpretation in the light of the parable of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. That is, Lash is concerned with the “way” or the “doing” of theology in such a manner that all aspects of life are engaged in a never completed theological interpretation of reality. As the disciples had to learn new ways of looking at things, ask different sorts of questions and finally recognise the risen Christ in a new context, so the task of Christian interpretation, for

Lash, must take seriously the various contexts in which theology takes place and in terms of which insights are gained.

The book is somewhat uneven, inevitably so perhaps, ranging from broad discussions about culture, metaphor, ideology, the Church's responsibility for the future of humanity, to chatty comments on contemporary social issues, Marxism and a rather technical, concentrated consideration of Aquinas on analogy. Lash's papers and lectures are to be welcomed for their intellectual honesty and for their concern to engage Christian categories with the struggle, ambiguity and often meaningless suffering of the human condition. Certainly Lash purges himself of sentimentality and illusion, but it is not always clear just how his vision of Christian interpretation addresses the human condition in a creative, transforming way. Lash speaks a lot about transformation but also of recognising limits, of a history of grace but also of so much light and no more.

If the book coheres in any satisfactory way, it does so, at least for this reader, in Part IV – *Human Experience and the Knowledge of God*. Here one senses that Lash is saying most clearly what he is hinting at elsewhere. For if one is to “do” theology “on the way” through life, the old fixed categories deriving from a two-world dualism, must be discarded. Lash wants us to understand the meaning of God, Easter and so forth, in this context. God, he says, is not to be found in any one particular “district” of our experience but in the limits of the ordinary (pp. 154–5). But exactly how or where God is found can never be precisely stated; to attempt such specificity would be to fall back into some kind of dualism. So Lash steers a course through all sorts of opposites, refusing to “stop” anywhere. In effect, what he is arguing for is a dynamic “play” between the apophatic and the cataphatic. Thus, to stop at the identification of God's creative spirit and the world, would be to end up in pantheism. To follow the path of negation, on the other hand, would lead to agnosticism, if we stopped here, and to stop at the historical givenness of Christian revelation and to absolutise it, would be to end up divinising the past. Instead, Lash believes we can never “stop the dance” of the dialectic of experience and say: *this* alone is what we mean by “God”, and *here* alone is his presence and activity to be discerned (p. 156). We can glimpse God only by allowing ourselves to be part of the ceaseless dance.

In his final section on Christian hope, Lash is rightly critical of Christian (or any other) theodicy. He reminds us that all theoretical attempts to harmonise the goodness of God with “tragic disorder” are harmful to people's sufferings and to the transformative reality of God. So he says, “Christian hope remains a form of tragic vision in the measure that it refuses to foreclose the question of the future by postulating, in the imagination, some resolution to past and present tragedy that, in fact, has not been resolved” (p. 214). It is clear that, for Lash, Christian hope is only to be found “on the way”, concretely, and that means as a response to and solidarity with the sufferings of human beings (p. 215).

Lash's book is certainly inspirational, critical and honest; it is only a pity that the style and content is frustratingly uneven.

Martin Roberts

The Faith We Confess: An Ecumenical Dogmatics

Jan Milič Lochman, T. & T. Clark, 1985. Pp. 274 + xiv. £14.95

Troeltsch described the construction of a dogmatics as “the specific ultimate theological problem”. “Ultimate” presumably because it presupposes extensive groundwork in biblical, historical and philosophical studies, as well as the development of the appropriate theological method within the discipline of fundamental theology. But why a “problem”? Writing a dogmatics is unquestionably problematic if we follow Troeltsch’s definition of dogmatics as “the exposition of a normative Christian religious system”. Leaving aside the tempting issue of what is meant by “system” in this connection, let us focus on the epithet “normative”. Dogmatics sets out to produce a normative account of the content of the Christian faith. It claims a certain authority. It purports to expound, not merely a point of view, but the true faith. How can this claim be justified? What is the source of this authority? If the work receives the imprimature of ecclesiastical authority and goes out with its blessing, that will commend it to some. But if, as in Protestant dogmatics, that route is not available, there are two further options. First, the normative status of the dogmatics may be derived from its faithfulness to some controlling focus, the central reality or essence of the Christian faith. But this too is a controverted area where lively debate continues. Moreover, as we see in Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Troeltsch, it requires extensive and sophisticated prolegomena. Alternatively, a dogmatics can seek, less ambitiously, to express a tacit consensus of scholarly conclusions concerning the fundamental truths of Christianity, limiting its assertions to what carries broad agreement, refraining from idiosyncratic interpretations and curbing the apparently innate tendency of dogmatics to superfluous polemics and inflated rhetoric. Such a dogmatics will be ecumenical by definition, for it is meaningless and retrograde to speak of a consensus that does not transcend particular traditions. But it will remain, in Troeltsch’s words, “a normative Christian religious system” – one of a plurality of interpretations of Christianity, normative as a valid presentation of a phenomenon that exceeds our human grasp, but not ultimate. As such, it will have a personal slant; its distinctive vision will reflect the narrative component of one theologian’s journey of faith.

Jan Milič Lochman’s *The Faith We Confess: An Ecumenical Dogmatics* is precisely such a work. It expresses a modern ecumenical consensus on the basic Christian beliefs enshrined in the Apostles’ Creed. The personal dimension is that of the author’s biography as a “mediating” theologian whose background stems from the Czech Reformation, who has worked in Christian-Marxist dialogue and now holds the chair of systematic theology at Basel. If “dogmatics” seems a little pretentious for a book that is compact, clear and a pleasure to read, it is because Karl Barth’s massive achievement has created the impression that a dogmatics has to run to an intimidating dozen or more solid volumes of small print. However, Barth’s work would be counter-productive if it paralysed the writing of more modest dogmatics that were constructive and serviceable but not works of genius. Lochman’s is a work of solid worth: sound,

edifying, enlightened and controlled, providing plenty of food for thought. Clergy will find it a rich source of sermon insights and a good companion for daily devotions. I hope it will be widely commended by those in a position to do so and taken up by Christians seeking to strengthen their grasp of the fundamental faith and by those teaching basic Christian doctrine. But for that to happen, a paperback edition at a modest price is essential.

Paul Avis

Divine Impassibility An Essay in Philosophical Theology

Richard E. Creel. CUP, 1986. Pp. xi + 238. £25.00 hb

Whether God can suffer, or rather can be passive – be affected in any way by anything other than himself – is an issue where the emotional relations of believers to their God engage with philosophers’ arguments about what the Divine attributes should be. It will lead into the opposition between, for example, the “Hebrew” conception of God as a larger and glorious human mind and the “Greek” pure activity without any potentiality, which cannot be passively affected, cannot change, and is outside time.

Professor Creel approaches this issue in the style of an “analytical” philosopher, taking points one at a time, and developing and responding to arguments; he is fertile in sharp examples directed against rhetorical claims about what a believer must feel. He displays an enviable knowledge of the recent literature on his topics. It is a great merit of his books that he presents the work of American “process” philosophers in a way accessible to an English academic philosopher.

But he may not be fully alive to the grounds underlying the conceptions of God in question. It is a mistake to proceed by taking for granted that there is some being which might appropriately be called “God”, and asking what it is like. Differing conceptions of God spring from different reasons for believing such a being to exist.

Besides, it is not wise to rely as Creel would on the argument that God must be worthy of worship, and to be worthy of worship a being must be thus-and-so. Creel sees that God is not subject to moral obligations, and so is not morally good: he is not to be praised for doing what he sees he ought contrary to his selfish desires. He will be worthy of praise of other sorts. However, the point can be generalized: what humans will find admirable may depend in untold ways on what they think really possible.

Creel distinguishes four respects in which a non-embodied mind might be affected by the world: nature, will, knowledge, and feeling. He sets aside God’s nature; all the literature agrees that this cannot be altered. Creel’s God has an impassible and eternal will, a passible knowledge and (almost) no feelings at all. In humans the feelings connect what one is aware of to what one chooses. Creel’s God is composed of an awareness and a will which have (almost) nothing to do with each other. For the religious emotions, the strength of Creel’s position will be the portrayal of God’s will as like a rock, and its weakness the denial of feeling.

Philosophy for Understanding Theology

Diogenes Allen. SCM, 1985. Pp. vi + 287. £9.50

There is a great need for a book of this type, which sets out to provide students of theology with a broad understanding of philosophy which they can relate to their theological studies. Unfortunately this book does not meet that need.

First of all there is a serious imbalance in the different periods covered in the history of philosophy. The book is heavily orientated towards classical and medieval philosophy, which together comprises slightly over half the book. Within this distribution there are further imbalances: by what priorities does Plotinus get 14 pages while Marx gets half a page? The author may reveal what he thinks about modern philosophy when he begins a discussion of the significance of Descartes' radical doubt with the hypothetical question, "What is the value of such silly thinking?" (p. 175).

Secondly, the author discusses the material within a conventional Christian world view. The difficulty with this is that philosophy's critical edge is dulled; it seems to be there to underpin faith, never to subvert faith's self-understanding. It may be significant here that the author says that his selection and presentation of the material has been guided by what is important for theologians, not by what is important for philosophers.

Even within this chosen approach there are startling assumptions. For example, we read that God created the world freely: "God is not incomplete without a world" (p. 10). This view is repeated later: "The Godhead is complete in itself . . . The trinitarian life is one of fullness and completeness, so there is no need to create or to communicate outside of it" (p. 85). But surely a loving God requires an object of love? The only hint Allen gives of a problem in this respect is in the context of a later discussion of process philosophy, which is more or less dismissed in a cursory two-page glance (pp. 146-48).

Incidentally, on p. 147 Allen makes a statement which occurs in several places in the book, namely that the Bible is not concerned with philosophical speculation about the true nature of the world. In a literal sense this is more or less true. But surely there are stories which reveal aetiological interests? And surely much of the Bible could be seen in terms of a broad quest for human self-understanding? Here, as elsewhere, Allen seems too concerned to safeguard the absoluteness of revelation. Bernard Lonergan (who is omitted from the book) would certainly have argued that the human search for ever greater knowledge creates the possibilities of divine-human communication.

Some parts of the book are unsuitable for students beginning to look at philosophy. For example, the account in ch. 5 of Aristotelian teleology and the scholasticism which drew on it tends to become bogged down in a morass of definitions, terms and essences. And while in a brief discussion of Wittgenstein in ch. 11 the author says that the latter saw meaning as use, the significance for religion of this seminal idea is never drawn out and the point rather lost. Students who want to consult modern

As regards knowledge, Creel embraces the view currently fashionable among analytical philosophers, that a timeless knowledge could not be adequate. Even if one could timelessly know the whole history of the world, one would not know which part of this history was taking place *now*; and one cannot know a free choice except after it has been made. Here we might supplement Creel by distinguishing passivity from mutability. If a being knew in advance every free choice that would be made, there might be no change in its knowledge. But still, if this were a knowledge to be likened to sight, it would be caused by the free creatures, and the being would be passive in this respect. *Impassibility* in knowledge would be saved if we held God to be acting in the free choices of his creatures. This idea probably cannot be sustained, but it is a pity Creel does not mention it at all.

With regard to the will, Creel makes the helpful point that where my aim remains fixed and my changing awareness of the facts affects only the instrumental means I choose, my purposes are not affected. But we should distinguish from that the case where I desire your good, and so am responding to what you want and choose. In this case my purposes are affected by your choices, and it is my basic character which remains the same. Creel, inclining towards the Greeks, finds it plausible that God should have willed in advance his responses to the results of every possible free choice, and so be at least *unchanging* in purpose and choice of means. He argues cogently against process thinkers that this knowledge of possibilities must be conceivable. But, as he concedes, knowledge of a possibility deals in properties which are universals, not in particular individuals. He does not remark that there seems to be a difference – brought out by recent philosophical work on sexual desire – between responding to an individual as a particular and responding to a set of properties, and that the religious believer might prefer to think of God as responding to him or her as a particular.

When we turn to feelings, we should separate sensations (which constitute the stream of our consciousness, but perhaps cannot be attributed to a mind which has never been embodied) from states such as desire and the dissatisfaction of knowing that what one desired has not happened. Creel's God is always entirely happy, and therefore cannot be grieved by human history. Creel does not evade the consequence that while God has a steadfast desire for our good in so far as we are willing to receive it from him, he simply does not care what actually happens to us. There is a tension here, which Creel does not really bring out, between the idea that our present griefs matter (to us, and therefore to God) and the idea of a consummation which they cannot mar (and the joy believers hope for, their God already possesses). The way forward is surely to try to think of a consummation which does not simply wipe away tears and replace them with joy, but is internally related to the memory of the events of mortal life. And once we hold that when God is aware of events, he is moved by them, it will be plausible to say this is the time when he decides how to respond to them.

On these and other topics, Creel's book contains much that will stimulate philosophers working on the Divine attributes. But he presents a collection of clever points which will provoke further thought and disagreement, rather than positions which will be found satisfying.

Robert Gay

philosophy because their faith is seeking understanding would be better directed to Roger Scruton's survey of the field.

Terry Tastard

Verus Israel. A study of the relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (A.D. 135-425)

M. Simon (translated from the French by H. McKeating). OUP, 1986. Pp. xviii + 533. £30.00

When *Verus Israel* was first published in 1948 it could be said that "the question of the relations between Judaism and Christianity . . . has been dealt with only rarely". This English translation appears in a vastly changed scene; the question of Jewish-Christian relations has become a lively topic of concern for biblical study, church history and systematic theology. The prime impetus has come from reflection on the Holocaust, now increasingly being explored through a number of disciplines; current interfaith dialogue and the need to come to terms with the existence of the State of Israel have fuelled that impetus. In this setting, "history of religions" questions no longer constitute the sole issue. It is not easy to escape the shadow of questions about the responsibility of the Christian church and its theology for the Holocaust – what are the origins of Christian anti-Semitism and how deeply embedded is it in Christian theology and even in the New Testament itself?

How does *Verus Israel* fare in this new climate? Simon is not concerned to trace the history of the separation of Christianity from Judaism nor with the NT roots of the question. What he does is to plot the complex course of the relations between the two religions between AD 135 and 525. The theological questions over which the modern debate agonises hardly surface. Even in the "Postscript" (1964) there is only a cursory rejection of any attempt to identify modern anti-Semitism with that of the early church or to see an inherent connection between the two. Yet this in itself does not render Simon's study obsolete. In today's context ideological or emotive forces too easily dominate the debate unless it is built on thorough analysis of all available sources in their original context. It is a model of such an approach which Simon provides, constantly warning the reader against generalisations or over-simplification.

First he establishes the setting – the consequences of the disasters of AD 70 and 135 for Judaism in Palestine and the diaspora, and the fortunes of Judaism and Christianity within the Roman world. Then he explores the explicit polemic between the two, the accusations made, the methods and arguments used; here Christian sources are far more abundant than Jewish ones but not, according to Simon, evidence that the polemic was one-sided or artificial. A final section on evidence of assimilation – Jewish Christians, Judaisers and Jews or syncretistic-Jewish magical practices being adopted by Christians – is seen to demonstrate the real attraction of "Judaism" to some Christian groups. Thus the recurring theme is the vitality of Judaism as an opponent and competitor to Christianity throughout the period. Simon was seeking to counter those who saw the Judaism of post-AD 70 as a

religion which had turned in on itself with no interest in the outside world and posing no threat to Christianity. If his views rightly carried the day we may now need to reconsider how often the arguments against "Judaism" do in fact represent the church's need to understand and define itself against the "Judaism" both of its own day and of the Old Testament, or even reflect intra-church debates about that understanding and that Old Testament. Moreover, the complexity and variety which appears in every part of Simon's study needs even more underlining, together with its consequences. There was no single type of Judaism, no single type of Christian response, and attempts to impose a chronological or logical order are doomed to failure – as apparent in Simon's own attempts, for example, to provide a framework for the Christian arguments about their unity with the Old Testament, or to describe Jewish Christianity as a coherent movement with a traceable history.

In other ways too the course of scholarship, prompted in part by Simon's work, has brought new evidence to bear or raised questions about old "certainties". Today we would need to bring in the implications of the Dead Sea Scrolls or Gnostic literature; we have been reminded of the enormous difficulties in using the Rabbinic material as direct historical evidence and warned against assuming that that evidence can then be used to understand the Judaism of the diaspora; we would be more cautious both in identifying the *minim* ("heretics") of Jewish sources and in the use of the term "semi-proselytes"; we would look to the Pseudo-Clementine literature far more in studying Jewish Christianity. But perhaps what the modern reader most misses is an awareness of the social dimensions of the problem. This is nowhere more marked than in the concluding attempt to explain the eventual success of Christianity and withdrawal of Judaism. The two religions too often remain bodies of ideas and practice devoid of any social setting or significance. The variety and complexity Simon reveals must in part be a reflection of the various geographical, temporal or social settings of the sources. Historical study of the relation between the two religions must focus on particular contexts before attempting a global picture.

Yet, while new questions are being asked and new methods and sources used, *Verus Israel* remains a classic, indispensable as a model of careful analysis and for the wealth of material it contains. If in its own time it marked paths for future research, it still suggests others. Its translation is long overdue and we must be grateful to H. McKeating for a smooth and highly readable rendering.

J. M. Lieu

Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China. A Historical Survey

Samuel N. C. Lieu. Manchester University Press, 1985. Pp. xiii + 360. £35.00 hb

The academic understanding of Manichaeism has been radically transformed over the last century due to repeated archaeological and textual discoveries. Slowly the picture has been drawn of a religion, no longer a

Christianity and War in a Nuclear Age

RICHARD HARRIES
Dean of King's College, London

How can we reconcile our Christian faith, whose ethic is a love ethic, with war? How does an ethic of the kingdom of God bear on present realities? How in a world of radically different perceptions, a world organized into states which pursue their own interests, is war avoided? Does the principle of noncombatant immunity rule out any use of nuclear weapons?

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Christian sect, flourishing for a millenium and more over areas as diverse as North Africa and South China, and yet retaining a true inner unity based on the religious experience and scriptures of its founder, Mani. Samuel Lieu's book breaks new ground, and has no rival in its scope as a history of Manichaeism. Much of the new material was scattered through (often obscure) journals, and in a multitude of languages. Certainly Lieu's book will stimulate specialists, but it is most important for its making available disparate information, and for its judicious sifting of the evidence. Few scholars have the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural skills necessary for such an overview.

The author's doctoral thesis was a comparative study of the diffusion and persecution of Manichaeism in Rome and China. The present work is more comprehensive, but still reflects this polarity. Thus Lieu begins with the life and teachings of Mani, and the context of the early church's origins in Mesopotamia and Sassanid Persia. He turns next to the expansion of Manichaeism through the Roman Empire, and the reasons for its persecution and eventual disappearance. The reader is then led along the Silk Road following the missionary progress of the religion, via its political successes in Central Asia, finally to the long twilight in China (until the 16th century). The extraordinary history of the Religion of Light in the Far East will be of most immediate interest to those intelligent readers still accustomed to regarding Manichaeism through the eyes of centuries of Christian polemicists.

Lieu acknowledges the above emphasis in his title, and himself makes the point that the later history of the religion in the lands of its origin still needs to be written. However, his tentative hints towards such a history (pp.

81-85) are themselves as concise as can be found anywhere, and should encourage a scholar competent in Arab and Persian studies to take up this unexplored area.

To return to the original influences upon Mani: Lieu makes great play of the vitally important *Cologne Mani-Codex*, which evidences Mani's upbringing in an Elchasaite community. However, this reviewer suspects that the present stress on the Jewish-Christian background, in the wake of the new text's discovery (signalled in 1970), is itself somewhat of a distortion; rather as the vogue earlier this century for an Iranian basis to Manichaeism certainly was. Two points may be made: Lieu goes too far in suggesting that the notion that Mani fused together Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Christian elements must be "decisively abandoned" (e.g. pp. 53, 56). Certain core Manichaean notions (e.g. the dualism, the two-tier community structure, the apocalyptic teaching) surely owe more to Iranian and Indian religions, and not just as mediated via Judaism, Christianity, or Marcionism. I expect that academic opinion will make a gradual return in this direction. Secondly, this reviewer cannot agree with Lieu in his scant attention to the links between Manichaeism and the predecessors of the modern Mandaean (pp. 30-31). Lieu himself is certainly aware of the studies by such as Säve-Söderbergh which prove (to my mind) textual links between the two communities. While there is no scope here for a proper exploration of the subject, suffice it to suggest that Lieu's comment about the anti-Christian nature of Mandaeanism (p. 30) may begin to be countered by reference to the figure of Anōš-'Uthra. Here is hidden a docetic Jesus most closely linked to that of Mani and Marcion, both of whom also polemicised against the Jesus of the Christians.

These more specific comments must not be weighed against this reviewer's great admiration for Samuel Lieu's precise and judicious handling of extremely difficult material. For instance: the detailed Chapter V on Augustine deals with the most widely known aspect of Manichaeism, yet Lieu's account of the appeal made by Manichaeism is the best available. It is to be hoped that the residual vilification of this most persecuted of faiths, still alive today, may at last be put to rest.

Finally, it is unfortunately necessary to mention briefly the many misprints in the book, due apparently to the short printing schedule. The author has made great efforts to trace all copies and supply them with a lengthy corrigenda. Unfortunately this is by no means complete; I casually noted down at least half as many misprints again. While this is a shame, it does not counter the excellent research presented in this much-needed book.

I. Gardner

Restoring the Kingdom. The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement

Andrew Walker. Hodder and Stoughton, 1985. Pp. 303. £5.95

Whether or not a particular Christian individual is interested in the House Church movement may depend to a large extent on matters of geography or denominational allegiance. Some will profess never to have heard of it, whereas others will find themselves invited to participate in its activities and may have noted the ways in which their own church services have been influenced by it. Certainly the more radical edge of Protestantism is being more subtly and deeply affected by it than are the more central streams of Church life. Baptists, Brethren and Pentecostals, along with Evangelical Free Churches are almost certain to have been caught up in it, while others will know next to nothing about it. In part it has developed as a movement within existing Churches and in part it has become a kind of "alternative" Church, dis-counting and repudiating the moulds and measures of all existing ecclesiastical institutions and claiming to offer the possibility of a return to the apostolic pattern of the early Christian Church of the New Testament. It regards the preaching of the Kingdom of God and the simple loyalties of Christian discipleship as all that may truly be expressed as the authentic message of Jesus and his Kingdom. It displays a number of striking contrasts, being at the same time intensely committed to the historical Jesus, and yet rejecting critical attempts to understand the historical setting of Jesus. It is committed to a rigid ecclesiology, while at the same time often repudiating all but the simplest definition of the Church as the followers of Jesus Christ. It contains strongly "this worldly" manners and fashions, while at the same time being decidedly "other worldly" in its hope and its ethical commitment.

Dr Walker does an excellent job in tracing the history of the movement from its origins in the Charismatic Renewal movement of the 1960's through to the present. For the most part it is an otherwise unchronicled story, save in the reminiscences of the various personalities involved and the broadsheets and newsletters which announced events and recorded their taking place. The many personalities involved, their characteristic emphases and inter-relationships are all set down with

eminent care and fairness. It is often not an easy story to follow since there have been many offshoots and by-forms. Much has taken place within existing Churches, but the great Dales Bible Weeks have become focal events which can more or less be considered in their own right.

In the second part of the study, Dr Walker looks at the characteristic teaching emphasis of the movement and offers some doctrinal, sociological and ecclesiological critique. The doctrinal emphases are fairly straightforward in their essentials: a strong emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit with the foremost sign of this being the gift of speaking in tongues. The Kingdom replaces the Church as the central embodiment of the human social response to the Word of God, and this carries with it a deep suspicion of all existing Church traditions as either moribund or deviant from the true New Testament pattern. In a sense, the "true" Church is understood to be no Church but a movement of Spirit-filled people witnessing to Jesus as their Lord. The apostolic ministry is regarded as a contemporary reality through the direct action of God's call. Along with this there goes a deep dissatisfaction with contemporary moral standards, as attested by such rallies as "The Festival of Light".

The appeal of the movement is undoubtedly very strong, and it is not uncommon to find many Christian ministers sincerely and deeply nonplussed by it. Some, so I am led to believe, go along with it out of a feeling that it is going somewhere and that it does represent a genuine grassroots movement of spiritual awakening. It is after all not all that different from earlier Revivalist movements of the mid-19th century, although it tends to go much further in establishing small fellowships of disciples, rather than showing a concern to shepherd them into existing Church communities.

I hope that this book will be widely read and pondered on. It provides a sound basis of factual history and evaluation, which is so often lacking for those who find themselves faced with a new, earnest, and apparently highly successful, Church movement of our day. Within contemporary Christianity it must certainly rank as one of the most powerful and effective developments that have taken place. Yet Dr Walker is rightly critical, and perhaps almost not critical enough, of a movement that purports to be newer and more radical than it really is. He notes that the essential features of the movement are to be found in the early 19th century with the work of Edward Irving and J. N. Darby, so that the movement marks a combination of features drawn from the early Brethren fellowships, the Charismatic Renewal movement, and not a little of the revivalist theology of C. G. Finney. Add to this the Kiergaardian slogan that "Christianity no longer exists" as a reason for setting aside the centuries of the Churches' history as a continuing witness to the work of God, and most of the features of the House Church Movement are to be found. Yet it is not sufficient to feel that one has arrived at some explanation for the popularity of the movement. It is a powerful fact of our time and is likely to remain so. That a greater balance and theological perspective is called for than is offered by it should be evident to the more discerning of Christians. They will have to work hard however if this fuller balance and perspective are to avoid the confusion and divisions that have so often coloured such movements in the past.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

John Ashton (ed.) *The Interpretation of John*. SPCK. Pp. x + 182. £3.95

P. Avis *Foundations of Modern Historical Thought from Machiavelli to Vico*. Croom Helm. Pp. 179. £19.95 hb

P. Avis *The Methods of Modern Theology. The Dream of Reason*. Marshall Pickering. Pp. xiii + 240. £12.95

H. U. von Balthasar *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics. III Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*. T. & T. Clark. Pp. 524. £19.95 hb

John Barton *Oracles of God. Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile*. DLT. Pp. xii + 324. £12.95

G. R. Beasley-Murray *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. Eerdmans/Paternoster. Pp. x + 446. £19.95 hb

L. Boff *Ecclesiology. The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*. Collins. Pp. viii + 115. £4.95

A. V. Campbell *The Gospel of Anger*. SPCK. Pp. x + 118. £3.95

R. P. Carroll *Jeremiah*. SCM. Pp. 874. £20.00

O. Chadwick (ed.) *John Cassian. Conferences*. Classics of Western Spirituality. SPCK. Pp. xv + 208. £12.00

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