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FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Four recent volumes offer a substantial introduction to Victorian religion:

> *Religion in Victorian Britain*: Vol.I *Traditions*, ed. G. Parsons, 328pp, £7.95; Vol.II *Controversies*, ed. G. Parsons, 308pp, £7.25; Vol.III, *Sources*, ed. J. R. Moore, 545pp, £12.95; Vol.IV *Interpretations*, ed. G. Parsons, 225pp, £7.95; Manchester University Press for the Open University, 1988.

Six of the nine essays in the first volume come from the pen of the editor. His introduction underlines the scale of religious sentiment, its vibrancy in terms of societal and literary activity, the importance of personal piety, the challenges to faith, but at the end of the day its vulnerability. He then seeks to introduce the several denominational traditions, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Dissenting. A large part of the last turns around an intelligent discussion of Helmstadter's 1979 article on 'The Nonconformist Conscience'. A separate chapter deals with the Presbyterian

establishment north of the border. Rosemary O'Day writes on the, mainly Anglican, Clerical Renaissance, Parsons himself on Revivalism and Ritualism, David Englander on Victorian Jewry, and James Moore authoritatively on the Impact of Darwin.

There are thirteen useful essays in the *Controversies* volume, loosely focused around the themes of 'Class, Religion and Society', 'Church, State and Society', 'Morality and Belief', and 'Secularization, Professionalization, Fragmentation'. The element of controversy is not altogether clear in all of them; indeed, some seem to be an extension of essays in the earlier volume.

The *Sources* volume reproduces almost a hundred carefully chosen documents. The first section, entitled 'the Church and its Creeds', is exclusively Anglican; 'Gender, Politics and Rome' adds a Roman Catholic dimension. 'Nonconformity and Neology' offers seven rather diverse documents in which historic dissent is represented by Angell James and Dale, the disruption of the Scottish Church is evidenced from two different sources: Samuel Davidson and Robertson Smith's forays into pentateuchal criticism are illustrated, and the conservative backlash they provoked, as also the historic liberalism of the Unitarians and the still more radical dogma-less dissent of John Morley. 'Evangelicalism and Ethics' contains nine documents which show that the outworkings of evangelicalism were far from uniform: the progress of history from Genesis and geology to Revelation and millenialism fascinated them as it became necessary to correlate the scriptural record with developments not only in the natural but also in the historical sciences; the Bible, 'whilst opposed to those spurious theories of progress, which are based on human pride', according to T. R. Birks, '. . . exhibits a progress of a different kind, [for] the successive acts of God's moral government must plainly be progressive.' By contrast, Grattan Guinness engaged in elaborate speculation employing solar and lunar time and his own principles for the interpretation of biblical numbers - the biblical system of sabbatic chronology - to provide a timetable for *The Approaching End of the Age*. This heady stuff is followed by more down to earth counsel on work, sex, family, and civic responsibility, whilst the topical preaching of Dr Cumming is seen through the pens of two observers, one of whom is an earnest and morally superior George Eliot. 'Missions and the Ministry' looks at the nature of Evangelical faith, and missionary activity in the countryside, in the towns, and among the poor, concluding with illustrations of three aspects of revisionism in evangelical strategies. Two further sections explore 'The Religion of Science' and the impact of the study of comparative religions and of non-Christian religions upon the Victorian religious scene.

The fourth volume, *Interpretations*, contains ten essays published since 1974 on aspects of Establishment, Nonconformity (including Recusancy) and the cultural Context of Victorian Religion, the sources of two of which unfortunately are not given.

At every stage any editor would have chosen differently and thereby highlighted different aspects of the Victorian scene. The selection here presented is, however, well-founded, perceptive, and trustworthy. The four volumes together provide a very useful collection of materials for the teaching and the understanding of Victorian religion.

The Journal of Regional and Local Studies, Vol.9, No.1, 1989, contains an article by C. J. Radcliffe on 'A Textile Workers' Chapel: A Study of the Membership of a General Baptist Church, 1837-1852'. The chapel concerned was Prospect Place, Tetley Street, Bradford, and the author clearly demonstrates its working-class membership by occupational analysis, showing also the large degree of working-class and female involvement in the running of the chapel.