

Book Reviews

Composition of the Book of Judges : by C. A. Simpson (Blackwell n.p.).

This book is really a continuation of the author's study of the Pentateuch published ten years ago. In the former book he claimed that the J material made familiar to most students by Wellhausen is not one homogeneous body of material, but can be analysed into three traditions, J1, written perhaps at Hebron in the reign of David, J2 written between 950 and 850, and E written about 700 B.C. He does not maintain that these are independent of each other, but claims that J2 at least was written in order to supplement and correct J1. This analysis is continued in the present book and applied to the Book of Judges, where, the author claims, exactly the same distinguishable traditions can be found. Naturally he also finds Deuteronomic and later redactional material in the Book as well. This analysis is most interesting, even to those who, like the reviewer, are not competent to judge its validity to any great extent, for, if it is accurate, it pushes much farther back than we have been used to the earliest continuous narrative in the Pentateuch. It also goes some way to counteract the extreme agnosticism displayed by the school of Noth about any events or persons before the Settlement of Canaan.

At the same time one cannot help voicing a perplexity as one reads the very carefully built up and detailed evidence for the author's conclusions. What are his canons of evidence? Certain broad standards emerge clearly enough, matters of vocabulary, for instance. To take a small example, one is ready to agree when Dr. Simpson claims that the use of the Niphal of HYH in Judges, chapters 19 and 20, indicates that the verses in which it occurs may be put in a class of their own, since an examination of a good Hebrew dictionary tells one that this usage is extremely rare in pre-Deuteronomic writings. But the rules of evidence are not by any means always as clear as this. Sometimes they strike one as purely subjective: e.g. in Judges 19:22 Dr. Simpson claims that the 'sons of Belial' must come from a different source from 'the men of the city' because 'such a gang could scarcely have surrounded the house'. Why should a gang of roughs not have surrounded a house? Your reviewer writes as one who has had the experience of being surrounded in a house by a gang of roughs, and can assure Dr. Simpson that they are just as capable of surrounding a house as any band of citizenry. If this is the

sort of evidence on which sources are to be detected, one cannot feel any great confidence in the conclusions arrived at. One's confidence is further sapped by the last fifty pages of his book, in which he engages in a most elaborate and technical argument with Professor Eissfeldt, who had apparently denied the conclusions of his previous book pretty thoroughly. It is no doubt entertaining for the experts to fight out their battles in print like this, but it is quite impossible for the spectators to decide at the end who has won. Small wonder that the mere student tends to shrug his shoulders and conclude that he must suspend judgement about the composition of the Pentateuch and the Book of Judges until some assured results have been reached. But is there any reason to believe that this happy state of affairs will ever come about, and is it fair to ask the man in the pew to suspend judgement indefinitely as well ?

Bangalore

ANTHONY HANSON

The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: M. E. Thrall, S.C.M. Studies in Ministry and Worship. 8s. 6d.
(Available from the Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 5 Russell Street, Calcutta 16).

Miss Thrall offers this study of the Biblical evidence concerning priesthood as 'a provocation to debate, in the hope that others may be induced to pursue the question further'. There are a good many women in the Church of England today who feel that the Church they belong to treats far too superficially a matter that is of deep personal concern to some of their number. If the present study does nothing more, it should convince sceptics and advocates alike that here is a subject to which little theological study has been given and which cannot be dismissed as unworthy of proper treatment. It is, after all, a new situation with which the Church in the West has not before been faced. At many times in the past there have been learned women, whose thought and spiritual wisdom has been recognized by men, but on the whole they have been exceptions, for the whole weight of probability regarding their chances of education and authority has been in the scales against them. Now there are a great number of women members of the Church whose educational level equals, and in not a few cases goes far beyond, the educational level of the clergy. This fact alone may explain some of the conservatism and hesitation about facing the matter seriously on the part of some men.

Miss Thrall deals in this study with the one aspect of priesthood, and naturally a good deal of the material is concerned with authority. She works out the theology of the Old Testament approach to the conception of priesthood, starting from the whole Old Testament attitude to the sexes as affected by the fall. She surveys some of the New Testament evidence, the historical

circumstances of the Incarnation, and has a chapter on the ordination of women priests in which she refers to most of the published literature on the subject. She exposes in this the utter failure of those who oppose the ordination of women to produce any theological case that can stand scrutiny.

I am not happy about the whole of the case which Miss Thrall herself presents, however. She handles the Old Testament much more in the manner of a Rabbi than of the Christian expositor. One cannot find the Christian doctrine of creation on the Genesis stories, for instance, using every detail as of allegorical significance and yet implying it is historic fact: God has not given us the perfect assurance on these matters such as we have when we rest our doctrine of sin and redemption on the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. We have to take more account of the origin of these Genesis stories, and recognize not only their magnificent and glorious testimony, but also their omissions. Their discrepancies must not be necessarily explained away or neatly reconciled.

Fundamentally, the criticism I would make of this work is that it is perhaps impossible to work within the limits Miss Thrall has set herself, when we are concerned with the Christian ministry. Our Lord Himself fulfilled once and for all and abolished the Jewish priesthood, and we do not find the New Testament writers concerned to assert that the Jewish priesthood passed from the Jews to them. Priesthood is used in their writings of our Lord or of the *whole* people of God. When one studies priesthood in isolation from the Christian conception of ministry, it is inevitable that much is lost by the need to concentrate on authority. I would not thereby imply that authority is unimportant, for plainly any properly constituted ministry must be a duly authorized one, but we miss a great deal if we concentrate on this one point. I think a good deal that is of significance in the New Testament has been actually missed in this study.

Here are some points which to me weigh in the question: what of the women who were the first witnesses of the resurrection and the first to announce it to others? What of the women in Romans 16 who are spoken of with the same word as Paul uses of his own ministry? Paul also allows women to speak in Church if veiled: what different circumstances had he in mind in the two contradictory passages? I would like to read more of these points, in which the practice of the early Church is some guide, for one cannot but feel that arguments from the life of St. Mary do not get us very far. Her part in the redemption of the world is unique and unrepeatable, however much her humility should be a model for both sexes alike.

Ultimately I would suggest that it would help the whole discussion if we should reword the question and translate it into different terms. Working as my husband and I are at the moment in a contemporary 'early Church', where these questions can be raised afresh and not meet vested interests on all sides, we

would say that much good can come from discussion of the question: 'What is the ministry of men and women within the Church, and how is it related?' It is just closing one's eyes to plain facts if one tries to maintain that in this life redemption does away with the differences between the sexes, any more than with the variety of gifts of the Spirit which distinguish individuals. The Kingdom of Heaven is no Welfare State which levels all to one monotonous uniformity, except in the realization that we are all sinners redeemed by God's amazing love. I am convinced that richness and diversity of function are part of God's pattern for the redeemed in this world, and to this diversity men and women should be contributing within the Christian ministry. I remember a very similar point arising in a discussion on the wireless between Laurence van der Post and his wife—both are writers, but the husband paid a most interesting tribute to the different approach his wife brought to their joint work and was in no doubt about the enrichment that he gained through it. Such experiences, common today in other spheres, the Church has largely ignored throughout its history.

There is far more at stake in this discussion of the ministry than just the ordination to priest's orders of a few individual women. I am convinced that if the Church once set out resolutely to tackle the wider question, the Holy Spirit would guide both the women concerned and the Church itself as to the right action to be taken. But for the few women who personally desire ordination to priest's orders, there are many who, like Miss Thrall, would wish to share in the ministry of the Word. Having held a Lay Reader's Licence in a C.S.I. Diocese, I can witness both to the conviction of vocation being compelling, and with thankfulness to the joy of being able to respond to the call with the blessing of the Church. I am not suggesting any limitation of the ministry of women to this one point, however, but feel that all aspects of Christian ministry should be fully reconsidered, with the expectation that we might after full reconsideration still find some differences remaining between the spheres of ministry of men and women. In the wider discussion, there should be no lines drawn among women on grounds of being married or single. Naturally at times the married woman may well be too much preoccupied for any ministry but that in her own home, but I am convinced that there are other times when the gifts of God to her there could be shared in a ministry in the Church.

Probably no book at this stage in a discussion could be completely satisfying. It is to be hoped, nevertheless, that Miss Thrall's book will be accepted in the spirit in which she offers it, and will stimulate others to join in the debate. We are in her debt for a courageous assault on an entrenched position.

Bangalore

E. M. HANSON

Militant Here in Earth: by Maurice B. Reckitt. Longmans, Green & Co. Pp. 160. Available at Orient Longmans Private Ltd., Calcutta. Price 9s. 6d. net.

For all who are concerned with the vital rôle that the Church should play in the regeneration of society this little book has a contribution to make by way of stimulating their thinking on the subject. The author attempts to make a realistic assessment of religious and moral conditions of life in the West in the post-war period and comes to the conclusion that 'we live now in a "post-Christian" age'. He also exposes the fallacies that dominate the culture of the neo-technic age in the West at the present time. The observations he makes on the Church in the process of his social analysis are such as would shatter self-complacency on the part of members of the Church who are able to discern the signs of the times.

The author's concern is to make Christians understand the true meaning of their Faith and its relevance to the conditions in which they live. Christianity being fundamentally a world-affirming religion, 'Christian humanism' according to the author 'is the only true humanism; and a Christian society must be the only authentic and workable society' (p. 90). As those who live 'between the D-Day and the V-Day of the Christian dispensation' Christians are called upon to take the prophetic function of the Christian Church seriously and prove to the world that salvation has reference not only to the individual soul but also to society in which God's will is to be worked out. The essence of the Church's duty to man and society, the author thinks, may be expressed in Chesterton's words: 'we must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it'.

The book is somewhat rambling but is a challenging one.

Serampore

C. E. ABRAHAM

The Vatican Revolution: by Geddes MacGregor, Rufus Jones Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Bryn Mawr. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., London. Pp. i-xiii + 1-210. 1958. Price 25s. net.

Not the least attractive feature of this book is the last section covering 58 pages and giving a series of appendices—one giving the text of the decrees of the Vatican Council (1870) in Latin with English translation and another a bibliography running into 13 pages. In the latter is provided a list of source books with notes and commentaries representing different points of view. It is well to make this point at the very beginning so that the unprejudiced reader may know that the author who happens to be a Protestant has attempted to give an objective assessment of the significance of a controversial subject in Church History.

The Vatican Council made history when it promulgated the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope. This event stands today as the Grand Canyon separating Roman Catholics from other Christians. The author deals with the subject from the point of view of an historian and points out an evidence that the decision was opposed by an influential, though not a numerically strong minority, notwithstanding political manoeuvring and lobbying on the part of the supporters of Pope Pius IX. On the decision itself the author's comment is as follows: 'Whether the victory was a legal one within the constitution of the Roman Church itself is highly questionable. No effort was spared to make it appear legal. . . Success may be, like possession, nine-tenths of the law; but it is not even one-tenth of the moral law' (p. 93).

One of the refreshing qualities of the book is that it is not written with an anti-Roman Catholic bias. The author is at pains to point out that in the Middle Ages there was a strong democratic tradition in the Church. While the idea of papal infallibility was popular in some quarters before the Reformation it was held in check by the principle of popular sovereignty, which the author claims, was an essential part of the medieval tradition. But this principle 'received its death blow', says the author, at the Vatican Council. In a chapter entitled 'The Flight from Democracy,' the author traces carefully this history of the imposition of this doctrine on the Roman Church, in which the part played by Jesuits was not an insignificant one. The author's discussion of this historical development should prove of great interest and value to students concerned with ecumenical relations.

The book has done signal service to historical truth by the objective manner in which a crucial historical event is discussed. It deserves to be read widely so that cobwebs which cloud ecumenical understanding in the Christian Church may be removed. It should serve to bring illumination to many and a certain degree of heart-searching to not a few.

Serampore

C. E. ABRAHAM

AN APOLOGY

Sister Carol Graham deeply regrets that at the end of her article on 'Women in the Indian Church', printed in the last number of *The Indian Journal of Theology*, she made some statements regarding the disabilities of women on account of physical impurity in the Orthodox Syrian Church which are incorrect. The information which she gave pertains to the Orthodox Church, for which she had chapter and verse, but not, it appears, to the Syrian branch of that Church. She offers her most sincere apologies for the mistake which did not appear in the first draft but was due to a subsequent mistake in typing.