

ISAIAH 40-66, by C. Westermann. *SCM*, London, 1969. 429 pp. 70s.

HOSEA, by J. L. Mays. *SCM*, London, 1969. 190 pp. 40s.

AMOS, by J. L. Mays. *SCM*, London, 1969. 168 pp. 40s.

It is frequently said these days that books of the Bible have a literary form and content peculiar to their time. It is certainly true of commentaries upon them. In the past, learned commentaries have sometimes consisted of a cold trickle of text above a mountain of footnotes. It was the hey-day of philologists, emendators and those professional puzzlers who treated the text like a loose box of jig-saw pieces. But in recent decades there has been a marked move towards synthesis and a handling of books and passages as wholes. This has greatly helped the new theological approach. All the volumes that have appeared so far in *The Old Testament Library* have printed large sections of the text followed by a sustained commentary that roves discursively over the whole. These three most recent additions give eloquent testimony to the new method. Both the commentators facilitate their task by assuming the general reliability of the text as substantially the prophet's own, arranged in the order he gave it. This allows the authors to press down the footnotes firmly to a minimum, and fill the page with open discussion not of the problems in the text, but in the mind of the prophet.

Westermann's great commentary on Deutero-Isaiah crowns a good many years' work on related fields in Psalms and prophecy in general. The great feature of this commentary is its range. The author vividly describes the historical crisis of the time, when Israel had been reduced to dispersion and captivity. This is what most Near Eastern peoples came to in the end, and their gods with them. But in this case there arose the remarkable prophet proclaiming that defeat was just what the God of Israel had foretold. He was not saying this to rub salt in the wound, but to prove that what Yahweh said really came to pass. As Westermann wryly remarks (p. 15), 'that a god should prove his divinity by telling his own people they would be defeated was something the

ancient world had never dreamt of'. It is, he says, 'the first move in human history towards the dissolution of the link between "religion" and politics'. Yahweh might be the Lord of hosts and God of victories, but the hosts might belong to Cyrus, and the victories those of Israel's enemies. Obviously such a startling interpretation of misfortune could not be caused by the historical event itself. At this point Westermann may seem to lean too heavily on current 'historical explanation' for everything. He does, however, continually show the deep roots and conservative nature of the prophet's mind, which were certainly necessary to sustain a man in a crisis like this. Second Isaiah is indebted not only to pre-exilic prophets, but to patriarchal religion as well, and he frequently adapts old psalms and lamentations to the new situation. Westermann allows room for discussion of select questions. Nobody can write on Deutero-Isaiah without entering into the complex question of the Servant. Westermann here is ingenious enough not to take sides. Who the Servant is, can never be answered because 'the cryptic, veiled language is deliberate' and much in the Servant songs 'was meant to remain hidden even from the original hearers' (p. 93). Westermann is inclined to believe that the identification of the Servant with Israel is due to later interpreters. He thus discounts the word 'Israel' in 49, 3 as a later gloss; a rather cavalier solution in view of the textual evidence. Of other details, it is interesting that Westermann accepts D. Winton Thomas' famous suggestion at 53, 3 where the translation has 'humiliated by sickness' (p. 254). A highly readable rendering of the original German text makes this volume good reading for any intelligent person without special knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures who simply wants to know what the prophet was trying to say.

The two commentaries by J. L. Mays are

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altogether slighter works. One might say Amos and Hosea are slighter prophets. Amos in particular can be tiresomely repetitive in his 'carte blanche' invective against any nation he can name. What can a commentator do? Mays at least seeks to put everything into its historical setting, for he states his general hermeneutical principle 'historicality is a key to their meaning' (p. 20). Mays points out that Amos was not of course as interested in history as we are, nor as concerned to get the facts right, but the historical situation does undoubtedly play an important part in this prophecy. That is not all, however. For there is a burning ethical concern throughout, in lashing the high and mighty, which transcends the particular time. In any case historical events cannot give the thing the prophets yearn for; 'Amos will have nothing with a mere salvation history, only a righteousness history' (p. 58). Mays' commentary is economical and seeks to explain the meaning from within the context. He is perhaps rather eclectic in detail. As a mere observation it may be noted how the footnotes refer to various works whose only common point is that they were written after 1960. Among these Mays has scooped up some interesting points from the shoals of Ugaritic suggestions flowing from Dahood and others (pp. 22 and 150).

With Hosea, Mays has a much more interesting subject. This prophet, like Amos, lived in the Northern kingdom and wallowed in doom. But he is far more variegated and creative; 'there is in his thought and speech an exciting combination of traditional and contemporary. . . . He was a provocative and creative figure' (p. 8). Mays brings out his daring in analysing the way the prophet shamelessly turns themes from fertility religion into 'the rubrics of history and covenant' (p. 11). Historical events, especially outside Israel, did not play nearly such a part in Hosea as in other prophets. He was much more moved by his own personal problems with 'the troublesome wife'. Mays stresses the realism behind the famous domestic drama of chapters 1 and 3: 'the very character of prophetic symbolism requires that the divine word be actualized in a representative event' (p. 23). There is something very attractive about so passionate a man, who blandly brings traditional anthropomorphisms even further down to earth, as in chapter 11 aptly called by Mays 'The divine Father' (pp. 150 ff.). Several Ugaritic ideas about the strange goings-on in

Canaanite religion are adopted in the commentary and some special suggestions of Dahood (pp. 46 and 147). I thought Mays might have been helped by Dahood's explanation of 'Adam' in 6, 7 as meaning 'land' or 'country' (p. 100).

All three volumes fall within the range of any intelligent reader. They stand at the opposite end to the handbook kind of com-

mentary which can only be used as a halting reference book. These volumes can be read fluently straight through. Experts may complain at the absence of evidence for particular readings and translations adopted, but the main purpose of discussing what the prophet means is finely attained.

ÆLRED BAKER, O.S.B.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN I-XII, by Raymond E. Brown. The Anchor Bible. *Doubleday & Co.*, 1966. 538 pp. 38s.

SAINT JOHN, by John Marsh. *Penguin Books*, 1968. 700 pp. 10s. 6d.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST JOHN, by J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin. *Adam & Charles Black*, 1968. 480 pp. 55s.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST JOHN, by Rudolf Schnackenburg. Vol. I: Introduction and 1, 1-4, 54. *Burns & Oates*, 1968. (First published in German, 1965.) 636 pp. 115s.

In an area where there are already so many commentaries it is inevitable that new ones will have to prove themselves against severe standards. Of the above books, I think only the Sanders and Mastin fails to do this satisfactorily. It is a competent work of the sort that one always *might* find something useful in, but it does not seem to be in any way particularly striking.

The other three interest me especially because of what I might call their different degrees of literary imagination. There does seem to be a law of inverse proportion operating in which increase of scholarly knowledge of background (and even of linguistic style and processes of composition) is accompanied by a decrease in 'feel' for the book as a whole. Where John is concerned this perhaps shows itself most clearly when typology and symbolism are being discussed. For there is in the last analysis no method of *proving* a type or a symbol: recognizing symbol is a similar activity to creating it, and is not done by rule. A commentator must display his scholarly caution, of course, but eventually he ought to recognize that the 'kind of book' that John is writing positively demands an imaginative openness to symbol.

It is for this reason that occasional remarks of these commentators on typology are very revealing for the quality of their commentaries as a whole. When Sanders says that there is no more reason for discerning a meaning in the Samaritan woman's *five* husbands than there is for discerning meaning in Cana's *six* waterpots,

I cannot help feeling that he has got himself too close in to see! The same happens in Schnackenburg's dogmatic remark against Boismard on the verse: 'After two days he came again to Cana of Galilee'. Schnackenburg writes: 'The time given so exactly can scarcely have a symbolical meaning. . . . No doubt Hosea 6, 2 says "after two days he brings us to life"; but this is still not the two days of John 4, 43.' Surely a mind truly attuned to the literary impact of the whole work could not be so sure, so confident that allegory must be ruled out.

Brown is much more flexible here, and must, I think, be adjudged the most balanced of these commentaries. But the one that appeals most to me is Marsh. He is often far too bold about accepting a typological explanation without further discussion, but I suppose this is to be expected in a book which is aiming at presenting St John to a wider public than will normally read biblical commentaries. And, in any case, what one gains in exchange is invaluable. For one gains a sense of the book as a whole: and this is not only useful for the immediate reader but a vitally necessary correction at the scholarly level. Schnackenburg's scholarship is in some sense too weighty, in that the gospel never quite escapes being a 'subject of study'.

One would therefore recommend Schnackenburg only to scholars (and here it is a *must*); Brown to serious students as well; Marsh to everybody.

TIMOTHY MCDERMOTT, O.P.

THE TESTAMENT OF JESUS, by Ernst Käsemann. *SCM Press*, 1968. (German original, 1966.) 87 pp. 25s.

Another book recently published on John I find repulsive. This is the recent translation of the great German scholar Käsemann's 1966

Schaffer Lectures on chapter 17 of St John. The author anticipates this reaction: the lectures, he writes, 'may perhaps appear