

meeting with the Warden was at Christmas 1954: I hated every minute of the party but Miss Beechey initiated me into the Dominican breviary and I could withdraw from the traditional games to read back numbers of *Blackfriars* and *The Life of the Spirit* in the quiet room – which is one reason that I am happy to be able to contribute to this special issue.

Reviews

THE BIBLE NOW. Edited by Paul Burns and John Cumming.
Gill & Macmillan 1981. £5.95.

Young Catholics today must think of the second Vatican Council as my generation thought of the Boer War: something that one reads about in books and occasionally hears mentioned, along with old-fashioned modes of dress, by one's parents. How do middle-aged people think of it? I suspect that they connect it with the disappearance of Latin from public worship, a shocking loss of liturgical dignity and decorum, and the "ecumenical movement"; and they have an uneasy feeling that the orderly and disciplined Church of their youth has become an anarchical chaos. They may easily overlook the fact that the Council, in principle, restored the Bible to its place in the Catholic scheme of things, and also removed the ban of genuine biblical scholarship. This book of sixteen essays by qualified experts or practitioners is a very valuable attempt to build some sort of bridge between the experts and ordinary Catholics. While warmly welcoming it and thanking the editors for the help they have given us, I also wonder a little what sort of a reception it will receive and how far it will help to clear up our difficulties. I think that the readers of the book, who will certainly learn from it that the Bible, far from being a monolithic book, is a compilation of a large number of very different and to some extent conflicting viewpoints, may retain the right to note that the essayists themselves are by no means all of one mind.

The book calls for some intellectual effort on the part of its readers. One advantage of a collection of essays by a number

of different authors is that one need not begin at the beginning and continue in orderly progression to the end. I think some readers might ease their way into the book, after reading the introduction, by turning first to the very readable and helpful essays by Doris Hayes: *Teaching the Bible* (with its horror stories to illustrate the dangers of fundamentalism) and Cecily Bennett: *The Relevance of the Old Testament for Christians*; the Old Testament is far more bulky than the New; and we get many extracts from it in the liturgy (rather a novelty, this, for Catholics; Anglicans have had the advantage of the "first lesson" at Evensong and/or Mattins).

Next one might read Brian Davies's very helpful piece on the resurrection of Christ (I particularly liked his treatment of the alleged discrepancies between the various New Testament accounts of, and references to, this; he points out that there are several early accounts of the death of St Thomas Becket, and that these accounts disagree with each other in some remarkable ways, especially over details concerning people, dates and chronology; "some of them also show signs of being affected in their narrative by theological reflections on Becket"; yet all these accounts "can be taken as recording the absolutely certain fact that Becket was murdered in Canterbury"). Davies has little use for the rather sophisticated academic suggestion that Christ's resurrection cannot be regarded as "historical fact" because it affirms something that has its real meaning in a supra-temporal sphere.

After reading Brian Davies on the resurrection, one might be ready for Fr Laurence Bright's essay: *On Reading the Bible*, and then for Bernard Robinson on *Inspiration and Revelation*. I confess, however, that this essay left me less than happy about inspiration. After telling us what inspiration does not mean (e.g. it does not mean that any particular passage of scripture is "verbally inspired or dictated by God, or that it is exempt from historical inaccuracies") it affirms that "there was a divine impulse behind the writing" of whatever biblical passage we may be studying, "that we are in a position to read this passage because God willed us to have it, and that if it is read in the context of . . . God's gift of Scripture in its totality, it has the power to make us wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus". Could one not say exactly as much about that celebrated best-selling novel *The Robe*, or even the novels of Robert Hugh Benson? I think we non-experts are justified in asking the biblical scholars for a little more help on the subject of inspiration. It used to be said that the famous Oxford philosopher, F. H. Bradley, once opined: "This is the best of all possible worlds, and everything in it is a necessary evil". We may have the uncomfortable feeling that we are asked to agree that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and everything in it is a *putidum mendacium*. Mr Robinson himself mentions his debt to Karl Rahner, and anyone who wishes to pursue the subject of biblical inspiration (and "inerrancy") may profitably consult Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith* (English edition, pp 369-378). Rahner's thesis here is that (a) the incarnation is the historical full and irrevocable self-disclosure of God; (b) that self-disclosure (and gift) is mediated to us through and in the Church; (c) this mediation had its first, divinely guaranteed, self-objectification in the Church of what may broadly be called the apostolic age; (d) the New Testament is the official and normative record of that initial objectification and partakes of its normative character; (e) while the New Testament thus points us back to Jesus

Christ, the Old Testament objectifies the particular religious history which provided the special disposing milieu for the incarnation, and this stream of pre-Christian history falls under that special divine providence which prepared the way for the incarnation; the authority of the Old Testament is thus an anticipatory and preparatory participation of the authority of Christ. Finally, Rahner would argue that the Bible's "inerrancy" is a quality of the Bible as a totality rather than of its individual books or individual "assertions".

Fr Henry Wansbrough is a very distinguished New Testament scholar, and his essay, *The Writing of the New Testament*, takes us on a rather breathless journey, compressed into ten pages, through the contents of that section of the Bible. I had better confess that my own stance, for what it is worth, is rather more conservative than Fr Wansbrough's. I have observed the course of biblical (mainly, for me, New Testament) scholarship for over fifty years. It is important to bear in mind that it is a course, a movement, a journey to no goal that scholarship itself can predetermine. There is, however, a danger and a temptation for scholars to assume that, at any moment in this course, the contemporary "majority view" is not only better than any of its predecessors, but also is substantially correct. Now it is true that each new generation of scholars builds on the work of its predecessor and has its own contribution to make towards the truth. But all is not progress, and what is "commonly agreed" at one time may be vigorously denied thirty years later. The "quest of the historical Jesus" is a case in point. In the nineteenth century there was optimism that critical scholarship would enable us to unearth "the historical Jesus" lurking beneath the unreliabilities of the Gospels. Later, in the present century, it was proclaimed that the quest had failed and failed for good and all; and Bultmann was there to tell us that this did not really matter, since faith did not need any contact by way of historical studies with Jesus. But more recently there has emerged a renewed "quest", and it is flourishing. It is obvious that anyone who put all his mon-

ey, at any one of these three stages, on the contemporary fashionable view, was liable to look rather ridiculous a few years later.

Catholic biblical scholarship is in a peculiar position. From the time of Pius X till 1943 it could hardly exist except as a barely tolerated, if not actually underground, movement (it is ironical that the great Lagrange felt the pressure of Rome so keenly that he turned from his own field of Old Testament scholarship to writing learned commentaries on the Gospels, as though in the latter area one could be both scholarly and honest, and yet avoid the fulminations of the Biblical Commission). After Pius XII's Encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), it was possible for Catholic scholars publicly to resume genuinely critical work on the Bible. But opposition was still strong and it was really the second Vatican Council that threw the doors wide open. By then, however, biblical scholarship in the Protestant world had made enormous strides. It seems to me that Catholic scholars felt it necessary to join in the game at the point which it had by then reached; in other words (if I may be forgiven a vulgarism) to jump on the band wagon. Unfortunately, the wagon, having lacked the stabilising influence that Catholic scholarship might have provided, was by then lurching in a radical and iconoclastic direction. Inevitably,

Catholic scholarship, now free, tended to identify the "best results of scholarship and criticism" with the state of things they found when they joined the band about twenty years ago. I think that we have not yet found a proper balance or a proper direction.

This review is in danger of exceeding all reasonable bounds of length. Let me, then, simply commend to readers Fr Timothy Radcliffe's essay on *Ecclesial authority and biblical interpretation*, Lionel Swain's lucid and magisterial outline: *The Old Testament in the history of Israel*, and Fr Winstone's piece on *The Bible, and liturgy*; with a final word to recommend Adrian Hastings's *The Bible, evangelisation and the world*. Fr Hastings, who writes with the authority of a notable scholar who has also had experience of Africa and the Church in that continent, is excellent on the subject of the potentially fruitful dynamic tension between the Bible and the Church, on the importance of the Bible as perpetually recalling us from any narrow identification of the gospel with the forms and attitudes of the institutional Church of a given time or place, and with the need of freedom in the Church in order that this tension may bear its positive and desirable fruits.

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SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: ALLIANCE AND CONFLICT edited by David Martin, John Orme Mills and W.S.F. Pickering. *The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980. pp 204.*

This important book is the outcome of a Symposium consisting of theologians (mostly catholic) aware of the importance of sociology to their work, social scientists sympathetic to Christian theology, and philosophers (also friendly). Given this mix the emphasis is more upon alliance than conflict, and rather more on theology than sociology. It is, after all, theology that is under fire, and the contributors seem all to be Christians who recognize the necessity of an intellectual dimension to their faith. Their expertise in, or at least familiarity with the human sciences enables them to identify areas which are already urgent for theology in the eighties.

If by the end we have not been taken very far this is because the collection records the introductory sessions of a continuing discussion. Certainly the seeds of significant developments are present and should be taken up far beyond the limits of this group. The publication of these papers is therefore to be welcomed as a useful stimulus.

The difficulty (for one reviewer, anyway) is that there are so many seeds. Each of the essays offers a challenge to hard thought and lengthy response from someone qualified in the philosophy of the social sciences. They defy summary, so beyond a brief indication of the contents I