

Within the historical paradigm that has dominated biblical scholarship for over 150 years, two emphases may be distinguished in twentieth-century research on the gospels. Analysis of the literature has concentrated on the history of *traditions* (especially form and redaction criticism). Other research has concentrated on the history of *religions*. The former is necessary, but is subject to a law of diminishing returns unless it breaks out from the historical into a literary paradigm. History of religions is a richer seam, reinforced by new discoveries of documents and archaeological evidence and refined by the addition of sociological questions and insights. It is the history of traditions approach that has dominated twentieth-century gospel criticism. Even the question of the historical Jesus has been bogged down in necessary but inconclusive arguments about the authenticity or original form of individual sayings and parables. E.P. Sanders' recent *Jesus and Judaism* (SCM 1984), reviewed in this journal by Christopher Rowland, represents a necessary shift to the alternative emphasis, showing for the study of Jesus what he had already shown for the study of Paul: the fundamental importance of a deep knowledge of first-century Judaism. Now Dr Rowland's own, fine work reinforces Sanders' achievement and extends this emphasis upon the Jewish context beyond the study of these two central pillars, in an outline sketch of first-century Christianity as a whole: 'The story of Christianity is part of the story of first-century Judaism; to compare primitive Christianity with Judaism is to view the former as if it were a separate religion at this stage. That would be anachronistic assessment'. (p. 6).

Whether the Messianic sect could conceivably have remained a part of Judaism while admitting Gentiles without requiring circumcision or food laws may be doubted, for all the diversity in Judaism in the first century. In that case it was essentially and theologically a new religion prior to Paul. But historically it can only be understood as *part* of Judaism, not merely against that backcloth.

Dr Rowland's presentation falls roughly into three equal thirds: Judaism, Jesus, post-Easter—about half of which is on Paul, whose letters provide the inevitable historical bearings for an account of the early churches. After a brief introduction the first major division is entitled 'Jewish Life and Thought at the Beginning of the Christian Era.' This is a brilliant and pedagogically outstanding digest of the author's specialist learning. It is divided into 15 short and readable chapters, each strongly rooted in the primary resources, with a minimum of discussion of alternative views, and with bibliographical indicators kept to the end. The book is worth possessing for this section alone, and it is here (where there is less competition) that it will be found most useful. But what follows under 'The Emergence of a Messianic Sect' is also powerful:

Section 2, on Jesus, invites comparison with E.P. Sanders' work. Both lay great emphasis upon the centrality of eschatology for Jesus and early Christianity, though Rowland goes further. He admits to a theological approval of this, and is willing to look at subsequent millenarianism in the hope of increasing his understanding of it. The major difference between Rowland and Sanders is that whereas Sanders is as sceptical as any German and concentrates on what he considers the critically assured minimum of historical information (which does not contain much of the teaching), Rowland accepts far more of the traditions of what Jesus said. To anyone brought up on history of traditions research he will seem far too ready to accept the authenticity of doubtful material. But he knows there is room for doubt and therefore never places too much weight on any particular saying. This maximalist approach, accepting (provisionally) anything which *may* be authentic is arguably less distorting than the more common minimalist approach. Several statements could be questioned and the part-chapter on the Son of man is disappointing, but any individual scholar's long-pondered synthesis on Jesus is worthy of respect.

The (shorter) section on Paul is also stimulating, especially the chapter on 'the

problem of authority'. The crucial question for Rowland's presentation is whether Paul's law-free Gentile mission was a possibility within Judaism. How far is our instinctive denial of that influenced by a knowledge of what Judaism became? The great merit of Rowland's discussion is that such issues are never closed. The reader is drawn into the historian's thinking, is made more sociologically conscious than before, and is challenged to reflect theologically by this early Christian history.

The same is true of the final section 'From 'Messianic Sect to Christian Religion', which strikes a neat balance between a thematic approach and the need to do justice to the historical particularity of the local churches dimly visible behind some of the documents. Worship, christological beliefs, patterns of ministry, provide nodal points, and the way into the future is mapped out with some discussion on Christians' gradual recognition that the world would continue.

Rowland is well aware that other historians will judge some matters differently, and other theologians evince different preferences. The material is fairly set out in a way which invites discussion rather than bullies the reader. Much of the book's verve stems from the author not concealing his own preferences. The Book of revelation is preferred to Ephesians because it sets out to show:

how God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. In so doing it refuses to allow the possibility of a fixed cosmology, in which earth and heaven are eternally polarized. Heaven cannot be seen as an escape from things on earth, at least as a permanent solution to the problems of humanity and theology. The controlling vision is the new creation; in it the dichotomy is swept away and the tension resolved.

A religious outlook which fossilizes the present contrast between heaven and earth as being of the essence of things is guilty of transforming the visionary idealism into mystical escapism. To make the pilgrimage to heaven the goal of the Christian discipleship is to accept the cosmos as it is, with its principalities and powers intact, and to treat the realm above as a haven from the world, whose end is destruction and nature evil. The end of this interpretative road is Gnosticism.

Rowland is more interested in social ethics than with doctrine or spirituality in isolation. The spiritualization of that early hope for God's kingdom on earth is seen as a temptation, leading away from the Jesus tradition. Such a stance is uncommon in New Testament scholarship. This highly intelligent and learned survey, attractively printed in an easily readable type-face, will prove compulsive reading for many who would not normally read a historical text-book on the New Testament, as well as for students.

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HUMBERT OF ROMANS: HIS LIFE AND VIEWS OF THIRTEENTH-CENTURY SOCIETY, by Edward Tracy Brett. P.I.M.S. 1984. pp. xii + 220.

A monograph in English on the fifth Master of the Dominican Order has long been needed, in view of his importance in the 13th century. In 1243 he was considered papabile by some cardinals and in 1274 it was his *Opus Tripartitum* which, of all the preparatory documents submitted, had most influence on the second council of Lyons. In between, as Master of the Dominicans, he gave their definitive structure to many of the Order's institutions. And his writings constitute far and away the most detailed picture we have from the 13th century of Dominican life, and some of them provided guidance for the Order almost continuously up to our own time.

Brett gives us a sensible, clear account of Humbert's life, his major writings and his main institutional achievements. He has not broken any new ground, so he does not give us any account of Humbert as a preacher (a few of his sermons survive, but have not been