

ESSAYS ON OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY AND RELIGION by Albrecht Alt, translated by R. A. Wilson: *Blackwell*. 42s.

The contemporary efflorescence of biblical studies, nourished by new discoveries, methods and interests, should always remain conscious of its debt to the great scholars of a previous generation. One of the most influential of these in the field of Old Testament was Albrecht Alt of Leipzig, whose work was of immense significance in the first half of the twentieth century. In this valuable collection five of his best known articles and monographs are translated, forming a history of Israel and of some aspects of its religion down into the period of the divided monarchy. The original essays appeared between 1925 and 1951 and were brought up to date when reprinted in the first two volumes of Alt's *Kleine Schriften* in 1953. The studies are the following: The God of the Fathers, The Origins of Israelite Law, The Settlement of the Israelites in Palestine, The Formation of the Israelite State in Palestine, and The Monarchy in Israel and Judah. Alt's work was noted for its

pioneering combination of form-critical analysis of the Old Testament records with extensive comparative use of extra-biblical materials throughout the Near East. From the point of view of illustrating his methods, these essays could hardly have been better chosen. Every student of the Old Testament will be familiar with, for example, Alt's now classic distinction between casuistic law, which the Israelites adopted from the Canaanite civilization in which they made their home, and apodeictic law, in form a direct commandment or prohibition, which he showed was of purely Israelite origin. This excellent translation should make it possible for far more students to read the magnificent essay in which Alt first set forth this distinction. That is only one reason why the book will be a very useful acquisition for anyone seriously interested in Old Testament history and religion.

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THE FOURTH SESSION by Xavier Rynne: *Faber & Faber*. 368 pp. 42s.

I remember during the 4th Session a car ride from the Council to the Beda in which I enjoyed the company of a charming, loquacious, and highly-intelligent Religious, who seemed to have his fingers on every pulse of Conciliar life. 'Who is that man?', I asked the prelate who was driving me. 'Why, don't you know,' he answered, 'that is Xavier Rynne'.

I felt I had missed many opportunities: for I had already enjoyed his books on the earlier sessions more than anything else I had read on the subject. 'The Fourth Session' is just as fascinating as the other three. It has captured so much of what transpired. And although it is essentially gossipy in tone, it is really an effective documentary. Future historians of the Council will doubtless derive many 'slants' from its perusal. Those of us who were present can recapture the excitements and uncertainties, the frustrations as well as the expectations, of many occasions. In the 4th Session, Pope Paul VI emerged unmistakably as a vital and committed element. The 'enigma', if there had ever really been one, was dissipated. He showed from the Session's beginning his deep belief in the Council and its decrees and his determination to see the latter implemented as soon as possible. He urged all the Bishops of the world to make sure that the

Decrees were carried out as effectively as St Charles Borromeo had implemented the Council of Trent.

Here all the Bishops of the world were with him. The progressives were satisfied that a revolution had taken place and the conservatives that the true tradition was fully safeguarded in the decrees. Such a remark may appear to be an over simplification of complicated events. But I think it is fundamentally true that the balanced implementation of the Decrees should satisfy all right-thinking people.

There was a tranquillity about the 4th Session which was a stabilising factor after the earlier and more hectic phases. I am convinced myself that this was the work of the Holy Spirit. If there was one thing of which we were conscious throughout, it was the Presence. And it is certainly not conveyed by Xavier Rynne. It seems important to recall that overall, about one third of the Council's time was given to prayer and spiritual and penitential exercises.

In a final chapter entitled 'Toward Vatican Council III' the author says: 'It has become something of a commonplace to say 'Nothing has changed, even though things will never be the same again'. . . . 'It is not difficult to make out that there have been few radical changes