

reminds us that Mansel, like Maurice—though for very different reasons—did not feel the full weight of the implications of biblical criticism. There are some interesting comments on F. D. Maurice, though surprisingly, in view of the importance attached to Maurice's family in the shaping of his theology, there is no reference to the work of Dr Frank McClain.

All in all it is the section on Jowett, who was critical of both Butler and Paley, which is the most interesting, perhaps because by a judicious selection of quotations Dr Swanston is able to show how frequently Jowett anticipated many of our contemporary theological concerns. One can instance his appreciation of the need for Indian Christianity to be expressed in Indian thought forms; his awareness of what the Christian theologian has to

learn from an understanding of the theological tensions in other religious traditions; his awareness of historical change, of the importance of context for theological meaning, and of the dangers of a constricting systematisation of the New Testament; his attention to the importance of New Testament words, and his sensitivity to the limitations of language: his recognition that theology has to be fashioned anew to meet the questions of a new age.

These things are all valuable, but it is perhaps unfortunate that Dr Swanston did not reflect a little more before writing this book, for then he might well have been able to draw out more fully the significance of the changing presuppositions of Anglican theology in the period from Hampden's Professorship to Jowett's Balliol. GEOFFREY ROWELL

PROPERTY AND RICHES IN THE EARLY CHURCH. by Martin Hengel. *SCM Press*, London, 1974. viii + 96 pp. £1.25.

It has its shortcomings, but this little book should interest anybody who thinks Christianity has something vitally important to say above social justice and the development of new ways of living. Too many politically committed Christians have relied on a handful of 'proof texts', drawn mainly from St Matthew or the early chapters of Acts, to hold together their Christianity and their socialism or their communitarianism. Here the author of *Judentum und Hellenismus*, the major study of Judaism's and Hellenism's interrelationship (recently translated into English for SCM Press), swiftly surveys attitudes to property and social justice in ancient Israel, in Jesus's preaching and in the church of the first three centuries. Dr Hengel says he was spurred into writing the book primarily by a conviction that 'in today's discussion of theology and ethics there is a need to rethink completely the fellowship and self-understanding of the early church in the earliest period', for even in a much altered world such a reassessment 'could be of exemplary significance for a Christianity which does not know which way to turn and which, in a minority status, must again reflect on its particular spiritual calling. Only by reflecting on its origin will it achieve sufficient authority also to be able to give convincing answers in social and political questions'.

How far, in fact, are we able to reflect on that 'origin' without reflecting on the total Christian witness through all the centuries between those beginnings and our own day? Catholics and Protestants still give different answers to this question. However, Hengel certainly cannot be accused of planting before our eyes a vision of life in the early church and commanding us uncritically to imitate it.

Admittedly, against those scholars who have attempted to spiritualise the bible's harsh comment on the human condition (by, for example, underlining the fact that the term *anawim*—'the poor'—had acquired a religious rather than an economic connotation in late Judaism), he produces abundant evidence to show that vigorous and at times radical social criticism recurs constantly both in Judaism's prophetic and apocalyptic strands and in primitive Christianity. But he is emphatic that 'an abyss separates us from the early church', an abyss we cannot ignore. Not only is it impossible to 'extract a well-defined "Christian doctrine of property" either from the New Testament or from the history of the early church', but his survey reveals starkly the differences both in outlook and in economic structure that separate the biblical world and ours—differences we must constantly hold in mind when we are interpreting biblical texts. The NT writers are solely concerned with consumption, with the fair distribution of what was available; the very idea of being able to control 'the means of production' was inconceivable to them. The profoundly different contemporary situation, when 'all over the world economic power and control is concentrated in the hands of a few "functionaries" or élite groups', clearly in Hengel's opinion obliges us to temper the radicalism of some of the gospel commands, which were addressed in the first place to people living in a society in which it was very much easier to keep oneself unspotted from the world, to 'be separate' and conform to the theonomous community ethic of one's local church. Quite a number of the readers of *New Blackfriars* will feel that, on the contrary, the structure of modern indus-

trialised society sooner or later is bound to offer opportunities undreamed of by the NT writers for the realisation of those commands. Hengel's pessimism, rooted in a deep sense of man's innate sinfulness, makes him cautious about the possibilities of radical change, whereas people influenced (albeit very indirectly) by the teaching on man and grace that is found in Aquinas are certain to be more optimistic. (Is it surprising that the Theology of Liberation, which owes so much to ideas advanced by some Protestant theologians, has put up its most promising shoots in a Catholic culture?) Moreover, Hengel, whose book had its origins in a lecture given in Bavaria in 1972, is primarily conscious of the dilemmas of the Christian living in an affluent society. The Christian living in Britain in 1975 may be equally conscious of the need for an answer to the question: 'What has Christianity to say to people grown used to affluence who will soon have to cope with a real decline in living standards'?

As is very rightly pointed out in this book, Christians of the apostolic age would not and could not wrestle with issues like these since, as far as they were concerned, the only possible 'transfer of control of the means of production', the only possible cosmic metamorphosis, would be that accompanying the Parousia—which was seen as an event so imminent that concern for property and status or for political freedom and social justice no longer made any sense, and already, so it seemed, there was 'neither slave nor free'. But Hengel, having (in those passages where he is differentiating the first Christians from us) said quite a lot about the place of eschatological expectation in the lives of the first Christians, says nothing about the central place hope must still have in the Christian life today. Yet, surely, without the certainty that the Kingdom is indeed breaking into this world, without that lively hope. Christianity becomes a cluster of good intentions? It is not, in the last resort, *we* (as Hengel says) who 'shall rob the "demonic" nature of property of its force'. Far too much

in the book's closing paragraphs is not specifically Christian, but could have been culled from the columns of almost any liberally-minded magazine. The journey through the book is very much more stimulating than the general conclusions proffered at the end of it.

The author has covered so much in a small space that complaints about detailed aspects of his account are bound to sound carping. The opening chapters in particular are full of interesting facts, but the apocalyptic texts cited do not in fact justify our thinking that apocalyptic was as hostile specifically to the rich as Hengel contends; on the other hand, not enough emphasis is given to the near-identification in Jewish thought of a person and his property. And there is one chapter I feel is strikingly weaker than the rest—that on the Jerusalem church of the Acts 'summaries'. This is little more than a summary of the views of the philosopher Ernst Bloch who, like Troeltsch, argues that there was indeed a 'primitive Christian love-communism' practised at Jerusalem, but does not meet adequately the criticisms of the exegetes who, on the grounds of inconsistencies in the relevant texts, deny that this was the case. In fact, recent sociological studies have revealed the variety and flexibility of forms of property-sharing and attitudes to property in modern communitarian projects: the 'inconsistencies' in the relevant sections of the Acts text vanish when rigid notions of the community structure are jettisoned. Hengel, having opted for a 'communism' in Acts of a kind only found in Britain today in a handful of self-actualising communes, inevitably exaggerates the difference in way of life of the Jerusalem church compared with the Pauline mission churches.

But flaws of this sort do not detract from what is most valuable about this book. For (quoting Hengel himself) 'There is an urgent need for a social history of early Christianity', and here is a beginning—a good glimpse of the overall picture, many parts of which have still to be filled in.

JOHN ORME MILLS OP

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO OUR CHILDREN? Faith-tensions in Christian families today, by Anthony Bullen. *Collins Fontana*. London, 1974. 188 pp. 40p.

In his latest book Anthony Bullen sets out to dispel the still too common misapprehensions about the fundamentals of the Christian religion, and particularly the Roman Catholic religion. The book is well written, in refreshingly simple language, but a parent whose concern extends to the search for enlightening literature on the faith-tension within his own family does not need to be told facts he must have considered long ago. The genuinely worried parent who buys Fr Bullen's book will find he has been misled by its title, for the question

raised is neither answered nor treated in any depth. The author admits himself that he 'offers no slick solutions, no ready-made answers'; neither, however, does he illuminate sufficiently clearly the cause of the present problem. The book is, in his own words, an attempt 'to lead the reader into a re-examination of his own understanding of Faith, a reappraisal of his own relationship with God through Jesus Christ'. In fact, yet another catechism, if somewhat more adult.

The mistake of inadvertently converting the