

if they are *not*, and if the raucous and brutal music only reveals the immorality of commercial exploitation by serving the contradictions in an alienated society, then we can safely switch off and certainly leave unread any more essays by social thinkers not so sure about what they are recommending that they can do without the intrusive 'probably' that

simultaneously hedges and discredits their arguments.

Where the Wasteland Ends is no worse—but also no better—than *The Making of a Counter Culture*. It made me want to go back and read Leavis.

FERGUS KERR, O.P.

THE LIFE OF JESUS CRITICALLY EXAMINED, by D. F. Strauss translated by George Eliot, edited by Peter G. Hodgson. S.C.M. Press. lviii+812 pp. £4.50.

'Whenever a religion, resting upon written records, prolongs and extends the sphere of its dominions, accompanying its votaries through the varied and progressive stages of mental cultivation, a discrepancy between the representations of those ancient records, referred to as sacred, and the notions of more advanced periods of mental development, will inevitably sooner or later arise'. Thus Strauss began his great work. He was eager to present the living Lord to those whose cultural schoolings had made them uneasy in the contemplation of the gospel narratives. He writes, he is convinced, within the evangelical tradition of the church, but he writes with a greater sense than any contemporary churchman of the recent success of G. L. Bauer's suggestion of mythological elements in scripture, and the recent failure of Paulus' suggestion that the New Testament was composed within a few years of the events it recounts.

Strauss makes nice fun of those commentators who got confused in the flurry of mythological fashion, and even of the great Bauer himself who supposed that he had distinguished within the myth of the Promise to Abraham the historical nugget of a patriarchal evening walk under the stars, and who had hoped to elucidate the angelic annunciation to Zechariah by references to a meteoric phenomenon, but Strauss' own acceptance of mythological assumptions in his exegesis contributed mightily to the prohibition of his Zurich professorship. Ordinary folk were convinced, he says wryly, that 'that which distinguishes Christianity from the heathen religions is this, they are mythical, it is historical'. Strauss therefore set out to examine every particle of christian evidence in the gospels. He went through the narratives bit by bit. There is in his work a simple concentration upon single elements, and he makes no attempt to distinguish the place of any element within the general intention of the evangelist. Large matters did not concern him. He was not, for example, despite his command of the relevant material, the least interested in the synoptic problem. His was a simple-minded procedure founded upon a

conviction that a story was believed simply because it held together consistently, and bit by bit he pulled each one apart, but his method is not to be dismissed as any more inevitably sceptical than that of those who deal in total gospel themes. These may bring a reader to happy confidence in overseeing providence, or they may equally encourage scepticism of the historical value of the texts.

Strauss, through a happy suggestion that belief in the star of Bethlehem must only encourage rascally astrologers 'thereby creating incalculable error and mischief', a recognition of the Ebionite character of 'Woe to you that are rich', a rejection of an 'explanation' of the wedding garment that was still being offered at Oscott in 1956, a splendid piece of fun at the expense of Nicodemus' simplicity by night, a tedious dissection of the passion narratives which made George Eliot herself 'Strauss-sick', and a final reference to Elijah at the Lukan ascension narrative, comes to the point at which he must, for his contemporaries' salvation, 're-establish dogmatically that which has been destroyed critically.' He has always held that 'the supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts'. His criticism is conducted with what he thought a scholarly *Kalt blutigkeit*, and which prompted Liddon to remark that 'his cold infidelity chills one's soul to the core', precisely because he was always warmly aware of the presence of his Lord. How was he to express this?

There is a famous anecdote retold in the otherwise dullish introduction by Professor Hodgson, of Strauss determining to find out if Hegelianism would do the job for him, and setting out for Berlin to consult the great man himself. But on his arrival at the university he met Schleiermacher first, and that great man told him that Hegel had just died, at which Strauss inconsiderately blurted out, 'But I only came here to see him'. Four years later, in 1836, Strauss had at least seen that he could not manage Hegel's christological ambiguities. In the 1st, 2nd and 4th editions

of his book he took up the Hegelian notion that the onward movement of the Christ idea would one day lead the community to shed the single Jesus and realise its own wider Christ character. In the 3rd edition he opted for Hegel's smoother notion that Jesus was the essential personal agent of the idea of 'the God-manhood' for all succeeding humanity.

But smoothness did him no good. He lost by this book all hope of parochial or professorial opportunity. He became, therefore, a theologian beyond the church, endeavouring always to communicate the sense of the vitality of Jesus which had driven his contemporaries to fashion a history from imagination.

HAMISH F. G. SWANSTON

COMMANDS OF CHRIST, by Paul S. Minear. *St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1973. 190pp. £2.*

The importance of Minear's work is that it is well-informed and springs from scholarship, but it is not confined to it; he actually thinks about the meaning of the teaching of Jesus. It is not a literary, jig-saw-puzzle examination with reflections appended, but is a serious attempt by a thinking theologian to reach a synthesis of New Testament thought on some of the most fundamental of the moral demands of Jesus. It is not a technical book, but a profoundly Christian one. At the same time, with a magisterial touch, the author makes firm criticisms of the short-sightedness of some technical experts, such as Bultmann and Perrin.

Minear takes chiefly the moral commands of the Sermon on the Mount, grouping them to give their general impact. Thus he brings out well the positive importance of integrity as conveyed by the commands which centre round Let Your Yes be Yes, and the basic demand for generosity without hope of reward which is basic to Christianity and is the theme of the commands to Love and Lend. The structural similarity between a number of these commands is used to underline the total, unrequited nature of this generosity, which are simply the outcome of the filial relationship to God our Father. Another interesting chapter is that on the series of commands to Become Last of All, the servant sayings, where Minear attempts to work back to the original of these sayings, which have been expanded and applied to so many aspects of life. One may of course question whether there was indeed *an* original; may not Jesus himself have made similar remarks on a number of

different occasions and on a number of related topics, all expressing the same attitude of service and disregard of self? But Minear does not indulge in the contempt, found in so many scriptural purists, for any formulation which cannot be traced definitively back to Jesus himself. Clearly he regards the primitive treatment of Jesus' words as having occurred under the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus. But a reason for putting the sayings back in their original form and context is to bring out their prophetic character, the fact that they proclaim a total reversal of the accepted values and standards of success. From the beginning Minear, in a passage of unusual optimism and realism for a theologian, points out that Jesus has never been so popular (a welcome contrast to the usual gloomy remarks about the rising tide of ungodliness), but also that the general enthusiasm for Jesus 'dulls the original outrage of his mission' (p. 10). In the last few chapters the meditative element predominates: the reflection on the other uses of the images Ask, Seek, Knock adds a new dimension to their use in the gospel saying; the comparison between the commands to Watch and Pray in the synoptic apocalypse and the failure of the disciples to observe these precepts so quickly afterwards in the story of the Passion is a striking idea.

Personally I do not find this book as striking and significant as the author's *Images of the Church* (1961), but it is a warm and enlightening book, combining scholarship and insight in an impressive manner.

HENRY WANSBROUGH

THE RISE OF THE MONOPHYSITE MOVEMENT: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, by W. H. C. Frend. *Cambridge University Press, 1972. xvii + 405 pp. £12.50.*

This expensive book, based on his Birkbeck lectures at Cambridge, is the author's third major study of the early Church. Like its predecessors, it deals with an area in which the history of the Christian Church is intertwined with that of the Roman Empire; and like his

first major work, *The Donatist Church*, it is devoted to a dissident movement. The Monophysite Church, like the Donatist, was a group that separated itself from the main current of Christianity which had become recognised by the imperial government and had penetrated