

A SKETCHBOOK OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, by Joseph Blenkinsopp. *Burns & Oates*, London, 1968. 148 pp. 25s.

This is a collection of nineteen essays, mostly very short, that have appeared during the last few years in the *Clergy Review* and other periodicals.

In his *Foreword* Mr Blenkinsopp presents these essays as providing points for discussion, 'some avenues of approach to the creative area of thinking to which the Christian scriptures are an invitation'. They are not a systematic survey of Biblical Theology, but 'as the title suggests, they are offered as thumb-nail sketches'.

So far so good. Mr Blenkinsopp is qualified to write essays of this sort, and entitled to collect them into a book. He has plenty of learning; he is, on the whole, easy to read; and he has the journalist's gift for striking presentation. This is specially marked in the openings of his essays. 'For many Christians there will probably be something rather odd if not amusing about being invited to read the Book of Deuteronomy.' That is the sort of sentence that makes you want to go on. 'The biblical figure of the lamb is a good example of the decay and death of images.' That is a real stimulus to thought: what is the point of these biblical images? And in particular, what is the meaning of this image of the lamb?

Mr Blenkinsopp is almost as good at concluding his essays. Where he lays himself open to criticism is in between.

Often he does not really get down to the problem presented. When I had finished reading 'The Lamb of God' I was no wiser about images than before, and about lambs I was more confused. In this essay, as in most, there were too many ideas. He usually gives us too much, moving jerkily from one thing to another, with a consequent lack of unity; there is too much irrelevant learning, too many sweeping statements. Let 'Deuteronomy' serve as an example. We find that this book has played a major role in deepening our understanding of the Church; that it is important for its influence on the N.T.; its real relevance is that it is a sermon to the laity (*sic!*); then in a monster paragraph we meet covenant renewal, Sinai, Shechem, Luke's description of Pente-

cost, Qumran, and Christian understanding of redemption in its social aspect ('this is one of the basic themes of this book'). This is followed by covenant ceremonies, including a reference to Hittite disparity treaties, the connection of Deuteronomy with Hosea, and much more besides. At the end of it all what is the ordinary reader supposed to understand about Deuteronomy?

On top of all this, the easy and chatty way of writing easily degenerates into sheer scrappiness and carelessness. 'In the context of the Jewish world of that time, Christianity emerged as from the start a lay-movement and Jesus as a layman who was set on by the priesthood and whose execution was on the score of an attack on the Holy in the form of a blasphemy against the temple than which nothing holier could be conceived.'

In fact, the whole book exudes an atmosphere of carelessness. This is increased by a number of misprints, and by the unfortunate start given to the collection by the first essay. This is an abridgement of a good article that appeared in the CBQ in 1944. Reading it now I was surprised at several curious statements, e.g. that the textbook treatment of the Passion and Death of Jesus 'is generally set out in seven theses', and I found the whole exposition lacking in structure and cohesion. On turning to the original article the explanation was obvious; the abridgement has been very badly done.

It is a pity that Mr Blenkinsopp did not take more trouble with the presentation of what he had to say. He has many good ideas, and some valuable insights into the meaning of Scripture and its relationship with our life today. In his *Foreword* he assures us that the essays have provided a useful basis for discussion groups. I hope this may continue to be so, but I would not myself like to see the book used except under the direction of an expert who could remove misunderstandings and clear up the confusions that will be inevitable if the book is left to itself.

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CONCEPT OF TRUTH AND THEOLOGICAL RENEWAL, *Theological Soundings* 1/2, by Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P. *Sheed and Ward*, London and Sydney, 1968, 212 pp. 30s.

'We affirm as a guiding principle that the essential content of the Christian faith is the same for all times, places and circumstances; but that in different times, places and circum-

stances the expression, interpretation, and application must grow out of, and meet, the actual situation, making such particular emphases as are called for.' This statement