

OLD TESTAMENT ISSUES, edited by Samuel Sandmel. SCM Press, London, 1969. 265 pp. 25s.

This collection of essays published between 1952 and 1966 by distinguished biblical scholars, mostly American with one German and one Scandinavian, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, falls into three sections. The first five essays are centred on criticism of the celebrated Graf-Wellhausen view of the Pentateuch, which was, in its day, so epoch-making, and still remains so important. Graf and Wellhausen made the first important steps in literary criticism of the Pentateuch, discerning in it four major strands, best known by the initials of their authors as J, E, P, D. The Pentateuch was held to be composed from these four documents, with some editing, and subsequent scholarship drove the analysis of them and the attribution of even single verses or parts of verses to the various sources to a fine art. The theme of the first part of the book is that this 'documentary theory' is inadequate. First comes an essay by George Ernest Wright, 'Theology as Recital', which attempts to pinpoint what is special about Israelite religion that gave it such dynamism and such power to produce religious geniuses (it is to find this *proprium*, rather than to follow through the history of the development of understanding about God, which is, according to the author, the prime task of biblical theology). This he finds to be the Israelite attention to history as the sphere in which God reveals himself. All the other religions of the Near East were concerned primarily with nature and natural forces; the Hebrew religion alone was concerned with human society and values. The essay has nothing much new to contribute (perhaps it was different in 1952), but is well expressed. The next three essays deal with the Graf-Wellhausen complex of problems: Frank M. Cross, 'The Priestly Tabernacle', Eduard Nielson, 'The Role of Oral Tradition in the Old Testament', and the editor on 'Haggada

within Scripture'. I find these essays unsatisfactory, in spite of the eminence of their authors, principally because they assume what they set out to prove, that the Graf-Wellhausen theory is inadequate, and then apply this to particular areas of discussion. There is a lack of hard arguing and proof here, much casual reference for proof to the work of other men. This is particularly dangerous in a book which is intended for students, for whom it is extremely deleterious to be confronted with such second-hand argument. Incidentally, the introductions to each essay are excessively patronizing—hardly the tone which the modern participant in Student Power is likely to enjoy; both these and the general introduction (unlike Professor Sandmel's own contributions) are couched in English which is so tortured, and so frequently ungrammatical, as to be almost unintelligible on occasion. Another fault in the production of the book is the extreme frequency of misprints, culminating in a double muddle on pages 250 and 251, where the phrases 'was Christian treibet' and 'was Christum treibet' occur; these are presumably intended to represent the German phrase quoted earlier, *die auf Christum treibet* (the reformulation with *was* should of course be *was treibet auf Christum*).

The second section of the book is certainly the most valuable. It consists of a most influential essay by Martin Noth, 'The Homes of the Tribes in Palestine', a superlative, careful piece of work setting out Noth's thesis about the origin of Israel as a single people, formed only after the settlement in Palestine of various nomadic groups over a considerable period. Working from the names of the tribes and scattered information about their habitat in Palestine, Noth rejects the impression given by the Book of Josue of a single triumphant movement of a conquering people from the desert who swept all before them. There follows

a lively essay by John Bright, 'The School of Alt and Noth', containing a respectful but sharp criticism of the historical method of these two scholars; this is a penetrating and valuable piece of work (dependent, of course, as so often with the work of *Albrightschüler*, on the leads provided by the master) which it would be foolish to summarize, but whose gist is that Alt and Noth are far too sceptical of the historical value of the early traditions.

Finally comes a miscellaneous section, containing a useful excerpt from Mitchell Dahood's introduction to the first volume of *The Psalms* in the Anchor Bible series; he points out that Ugaritic studies have shown that the text of the psalms is far more correct in Hebrew than was formerly supposed, and that many of the psalms should be dated far earlier than was formerly done. The essay by Robert Gordis, 'Wisdom and Job', is disappointing, consisting largely of a conventional introduction to the genre of wisdom literature, and showing that Job falls within it; there are, however, some interesting pages (229-232) on the upper-class presuppositions of much of the wisdom literature of Israel. Finally we are offered a symposium by the editor, Albert Sundberg and

Roland E. Murphy on the canon of scripture; of the three contributions Sundberg's is the most interesting, arguing for a return to the Catholic from the Protestant canon of scripture, which was forced on Luther as an escape from a tight corner about purgatory in 1519, and rests on the faulty premise that the canon of scripture of Jesus and the early Church was that imposed on Judaism by the Synod of Jamnia at the end of the first century A.D. There are some interesting remarks about the ecclesial dimension of the formation of the canon: 'the process of canonization is a community process' (p. 261), which fit well recent Catholic thinking on the subject (Fr Murphy quotes Rahner's important study, but does not discuss it or seem to appreciate its worth).

The essays in this volume are uneven in worth. This is nearly always the case in such a collection, which are often formed round a central nucleus which give a *raison d'être* for the whole. In this case the nucleus consists of the second, historical part, by Noth and Bright. It is worth having the book, despite its faults, for handy reference to these two articles.

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THE GOSPELS AND THE JESUS OF HISTORY, by Xavier Léon-Dufour, S.J. Translated and edited by John McHugh. Collins, 1968. 288 pp. 36s.

X. Léon-Dufour hardly needs introduction to students of the gospels. His work *Les évangiles et l'histoire de Jésus* which appeared in 1963 was universally well received. He did not address himself to specialists but simply set out to make available to students the results of recent scientific critical investigation in an area of primary importance.

The historical value of the gospels has been for centuries the focus of attack, but between the wars Form-criticism, with its insistence on the literary forms, formation and sources of the gospels and on the influencing faith which inspired their composition, gave new impetus to the attack and new and disturbing problems saw the light of day. If the gospels have their roots in the primitive preaching about Jesus and reflect an *evolved* stage in that preaching, if they are written by believers for believers, then historians must exercise caution in using them as sources to reach the 'Jesus of history' as distinct from the 'Christ of faith'. On the whole, Form-critics were excessive in their assertions and especially in their scepticism regarding the historical value of the gospels. They failed to distinguish between tradition and redaction,

stopped short of pursuing investigation beyond the primitive community of believers to the preceding period (i.e. the 'Sitz im Leben' of Jesus and his disciples) and of including research into the following stage (i.e. of theological re-interpretation by each evangelist of the existing tradition). The evangelists were regarded as mere compilers, not real authors who worked on a given tradition.

However, in the last two decades there has been a gradual healthy withdrawal from the sceptical position of the radical critics. Making full use of the Form-critical method and principles, yet renouncing all attempts at a biographical portrait of Jesus, critics believe that a scientific critical study of the gospels will lead us surely to the 'Jesus of history'. The idea of 'history' itself and of 'what is historical' has also been revised and the rationalist, positivist conception of the last century and of the Modernist era is no longer taken for granted.

Père Léon-Dufour's work is an invaluable guide in this investigation and one of major importance. It was the first comprehensive study of its kind from the pen of a Catholic, since few exegetes are of his calibre or have been