

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Apocalypse of John*. By Isbon T. Beckwith. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967. Pp. xv plus 794 including index. \$8.95. Reviewed by John Skilton, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pa.

This reprint of Beckwith's noteworthy study of the Apocalypse is an addition to Baker's Limiter Editions Library. The author, whose academic career included service as Professor of Greek in Trinity College, Hartford, and as Professor of the Interpretation of the New Testament in the General Theological Seminary, New York, brought exceptional learning and scholarly competence to the interpretation of the book of Revelation. More than four hundred pages of this work are devoted to introductory studies in which material still of value is to be found. Somewhat less space is given to the commentary proper, which is based on the Greek text and which takes account of textual and other problems of criticism.

The defects of Beckwith's approach to Scripture prevent his commentary from being altogether satisfactory. Cordiality to negative criticism is a grave deterrent to enlightened exposition. Truly successful exegesis of Scripture requires a Scriptural approach to exegesis. It is requisite, for example, that the interpreter of a book which contains predictive prophecy should have a right conception of such prophecy. This, among other things, Beckwith lacks. He finds that many of the predictions of the Old Testament prophets were not fulfilled (p. 296). He will not allow for a figurative or allegorical fulfillment of these prophecies nor will he grant that they may be fulfilled in the future (p. 298). For him they represent the limited foresight of the prophet: ". . . while his prophecy of the final outcome of God's will is infallible, his picture of future historic events in which he looks for this realization of the divine purpose belong to his circumscribed vision. The frequent failure of such historical predictions therefore cannot cause surprise, or raise real difficulty in the interpretation of prophecy" (pp. 299f.). He is likewise untroubled by the fact that, in his judgment, prophecies in the Apocalypse have not been fulfilled and will not be fulfilled (pp. 300f.) He finds indeed little practical value in certain eschatological particulars: "We have not sufficient data for affirming positively that Christian prophecy is wrong in attributing the final establishment of the kingdom to signal acts of God's intervention. In any event the question as to God's manner of working out a result in a future, which seems immeasurably remote, is not one of pressing practical importance" (p. 304).

Beckwith would take due account of the unity of the Apocalypse; he would view the book "not so much in its parts as in its unity, in the composition of which the author, after his own manner, not ours, has

chosen and disposed all the factors so as to bear nearly or remotely on the climax of his theme—the faithful people of God brought through all their conflicts, through all the assaults of Satan, triumphant into the everlasting kingdom” (p. 305). It is of course important to view any book of Scripture as a whole and to appreciate its unity, but it is also requisite that the parts which form the whole should be accurately evaluated.

Although Beckwith's study of the Apocalypse is not all that one might wish, it can very profitably be worked over and transmuted by discerning students.

*Theology of the English Reformers.* By P. E. Hughes, Eerdmans, \$5.95, 283 pp. Reviewed by G. W. Bromily, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif.

The Christian world must be grateful to Dr. Hughes for this little work in which he tries to present the basic doctrines of the English Reformers. His method is to follow the main line of their teaching in such matters as Holy Scripture, justification, and ministry. Copious quotations from the originals give authority to the exposition. Dr. Hughes believes that the men should be allowed to speak for themselves and make their points with a minimum of interference. He thus plays almost the role of an editor, selecting the passages, introducing the doctrines, and leaving the rest to the original writers.

This procedure gives the book its main strength. Readers are not merely told about the doctrines; they may make first-hand acquaintance, even though only in summary form. The student who does not have the time, or possibly the interest, to work through the voluminous works of the English Reformation for himself is here provided with a handbook which guarantees a solid basis of knowledge and understanding. Nevertheless, the value of a series of extracts of this kind depends upon the selection and arrangement. It is here that the author's profound knowledge and judgment make an indispensable contribution to the success of his work.

Two main criticisms will perhaps be brought against the study. The first is that there is inadequate evaluation, the second that the relevance of the doctrines to the modern student is not always apparent. The answer to both objections is much the same. Dr. Hughes is more concerned to give an authoritative exposition than to engage in theological analysis. The past presentation of a doctrine may not have an immediate bearing on modern problems, but it has the ultimate historical relevance of past to present. Indeed, now that changes are taking place in Roman Catholicism many of the old and established doctrines are acquiring a new point and urgency.

If there is a more legitimate criticism it is that this kind of selection does not allow for individual emphases or variations in the different writers. The doctrine of the Angelical Reformers can hardly be regarded as a unity to the same degree as that of Calvin or Luther. On the other hand, there is surely a place for introductory studies which present the main lines of thought or conviction in a specific movement. It is as a study of this kind that Dr. Hughes' work has its true justification and value.

*Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments.*  
By James Barr. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

Reviewed by Dr. J. Barton Payne, Graduate School of Theology,  
Wheaton College, Ill.

James Barr is an iconoclast, but he's "our kind" of an iconoclast. It is not always clear just what he is *for*; but in this latest book he comes out *against* a whole series of incongruities found in those new-look Biblical theologians who are the most appealing—and hence most dangerous—competitors that evangelicalism faces today. *Old and New Interpretation* consists of a revision of Barr's 1964 Currie lectures at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Texas. It falls into six chapters on themes ranging from the so-called tension between Greek and Hebrew thought, which he debunks, to the revival of typological study among those who deny any real prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament, which he designates as methodologically indistinguishable from old-school allegorizations.

Perhaps his two most significant discussions are those entitled, "The Multiplex Nature of Old Testament Tradition" and "The Concepts of History and Revelation," in which he arrays himself against the existentialist stance of neo-orthodox Biblical interpretation. Barr has little patience with such advocates of *Heilsgeschichte* as Walter Eichrodt, who would deny the historicity of the Pentateuchal myths and traditions and who would yet assert that they somehow describe actual occurrences, saving revelations of God in history. "We object that if God really acted in history," says Barr, "then the history involved must be not the history as the documents confess it but rather the history as it really happened"; and he flatly denounces the pet Barthian distinction between *Geschichte* and true *Historie* as "an artificiality" (p. 68). Again, his criticisms zero in on such "God Who Acts" theologians as G. Ernest Wright, who so stress certain divine deeds of redemption, e.g., the exodus, that they dismiss the accompanying divine interpretations, i.e., propositional revelation. With tongue in cheek Barr explains, "We think that we cannot imagine verbal communication between God and man, and we worry about terrible consequences which would ensue in the Church, and of serious damage to the rationality of our presentation

of Christianity, if it were admitted that such verbal communications is important" (p. 79), and then goes on to insist that just this is what is dominant in Biblical revelation.

Barr has reserved his digs at "Fundamentalism" to an appendix; but this too is enlightening—in its own uninformed way—as it points out the possibility of rejecting Biblical authority and yet retaining the mind-set and outward appearances of fundamentalism. Like it or not, we are the richer for *Old and New in Interpretation*.

*Set Forth Your Case*, Clark H. Pinnock, The Craig Press, Nutley, New Jersey, 1967, pps. 91, \$1.50. Reviewed by John Gerstner, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Beginning with a jeremiad concerning the contemporary decline of apologetics even among the orthodox, Dr. Pinnock moves on to a brilliant analysis of the cause. It is the "upper story" mentality which elevates religion and faith above the "lower story" of historical, empirical data or fact from which it is separated by an impenetrable "slab" (chap. I). This leaves men irresponsibly free to think and say what they please about God, Christ, Creation, Adam and Redemption (p. 15) since they all belong merely to the upper story. No one knows whether there is or is not a Christ or a God, or whether or not Naziism, for example, could qualify for the role.

About half way through the little volume (chap. VII) we begin the case for Christianity, the need of men having been poignantly presented. For Dr. Pinnock the starting point is the Bible, attested by miracle to be of divine origin. Although "Christianity is Christ" (p. 58) this statement is not met until chapter X, where our author says that it is only proper to begin with Him and in the next chapter the argument moves on to His resurrection. The historical approach is said to yield only probability but that is not "worthless" (p. 44) and in fact is essential as the objective basis of the Spirit's witness (pp. 43, 44) and of personal faith (ch. VIII). Faith without it is pure subjectivism. Here Dr. Pinnock gives another illustration of his mastery of satire. While describing fideism as "epistemological suicide" he goes on to speak of the contemporary hermeneutic "which compares existential temperatures and ignores what Christ and the apostles *taught*" (p. 50). The latter part of the volume moves interestingly but fairly conventionally through the consideration of manuscripts, apparent discrepancies and other items essential to Christian evidences concluding with an appeal to accept the Christ of this "consistent approach" (pp. 83f.)

*Set Forth Your Case* (an inappropriate title inasmuch as it was an appeal to the heathen, Isa. 41:2) is valuable in inverse proportion to its size. Nor should it be any longer—in fact it is slightly repetitious. As a short introduction to apologetics it has two great assets. First, it

introduces to the reading public a young Christian scholar of very outstanding ability. He may have come to the apologetic kingdom for just such a time as this. This little work is enough to show that God has given him a committed evangelical spirit, a wonderfully penetrating mind, cosmopolitan erudition and withal an intriguing, aphoristic style. Second, the book amounts to an academic tract one can give to harried intellectuals in or out of college without apology—in fact, with apology. It is too brief, too exploratory, too outlandish to resolve great problems but it will generate promise and hope which we trust this New Orleans Baptist will soon satisfy with a full-scale work.

We have a number of little criticism which we pass over but one is not little. It seems to us that Dr. Pinnock, while clearly extricated from the anti-rational stance of neoorthodoxy, and well on his way to classic orthodox apologetics is in some danger of becoming weary and settling down at a popular half-way house where many contemporary evangelicals are residing. We cannot, Dr. Pinnock, stop short of natural theology or seek to avoid its difficulties by a direct appeal to the Bible as the Word of God or even to Christ as the Son of God because we must first know and show that there is a God of whom Christ is the Son and the Bible is the Word.

*Jesus, Persons and the Kingdom of God* by Royce Gordon Gruenler, Bethany Press, 1967. 224 pages. \$4.95. Reviewed by Dr. J. D. Buswell II.

The author, a graduate of Williams College, and of the Reformed Episcopal Seminary, holds a Ph.D. degree from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and is now chairman of the Department of Religion at Hiram College, Hiram, Ohio. He seems to try sincerely to present his thoughts in terms of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. His theology is decidedly of the "liberal" variety.

He is quite familiar with modern philosophy, Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Hartshorne, Marcel, Polanyi, etc.

His attitude toward the historicity of Jesus as the incarnate Son of God is illustrated by the following quotation: "To the question of how it is even remotely possible to penetrate beyond all these witnesses, and beyond all personal involvement, to Jesus Himself, a person might conclude that it is hopeless and give up the quest. The fact is, however, that there is no Jesus *in Himself*, anymore than there ever was that *thing-in-itself*." (p. 19)

The author's liberalism although his Christology is "adoptionistic," is not as extreme as one sometimes finds, for he says "we choose the general reliability of the Gospel witnesses, doubting authenticity only when compelled by obvious inconsistency in the witnesses as in Mark's

interpretation of the parables, for examples. Our guiding principle is, "innocent until proved guilty, not the other way around."

The author rejects the Biblical account of the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus, "He rises again whenever He is proclaimed." (p. 130) Ignoring the work of such a New Testament scholar as A. T. Robinson, he says that the Gospel accounts are mutually contradictory. Commenting on Luke 24:36-43 he says "the Risen Jesus points to His flesh and bones and eats a piece of broiled fish. We detect in this and in the often beautifully detailed account of the empty tomb, a later tendency in the tradition to materialize the resurrection." (p. 131 f.)

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