

THE INFANCY NARRATIVES, by Jean Daniélou. Compass Books, *Burns and Oates*, London, 1968. 127 pp. 14s. (£0.7).

THE INFANCY NARRATIVES, by John Bligh, S.J. Scripture for Meditation I, *St Paul Publications*, Langley. 1968. 110 pp. 10s. 6d.

It seems to be true that, almost without exception, modern commentaries on the gospels of Matthew and Luke are at their weakest when dealing with the narratives concerning Jesus' birth and childhood. The assumption is that because the gospels are concerned principally with the events of Jesus' ministry and death that the Infancy Narratives, as they are called, can be dismissed in a word or two. Amongst some Catholic exegetes there seems to be a sense that these stories have been annexed for so long to the worst excesses in Catholic devotions that they are better left alone.

These two books are both an attempt to assess these passages in the light of modern exegesis and to give a worthwhile theological account of them. Both writers are united in the view that these passages cannot be simply dismissed as historical fabrication but neither, on the other hand, can they be treated as straightforward historical accounts. Cardinal Daniélou points out in his book that the purpose of these narratives was not to set out the biographical facts of Jesus' life since these were already known. The gospels, of course, are not biographies either, and so the mistake is either to see these narratives as historical sections 'tacked on' to the rest of the gospel or as fables without theological significance. Cardinal Daniélou in his excellent little book is concerned to show how the authors of the Infancy Narratives used the literary forms and techniques of the time: the *midrash*, the *peshet* and the *apocalypse*. These passages are seen as an expression of the view of history which has Jesus as its fulfilment. In this way these narratives are meant to be appreciated as an integral part of the Gospel. The author has written a most interesting and stimulating little book which not only contains some fascinating exegetical information which helps us greatly to understand these passages but

relates them in an instructive way to other major themes in the New Testament. While some exegetes might well want to quarrel with the author over what he regards as 'historical' in these passages, he nowhere evades the question.

John Bligh's book has much the same aim as Cardinal Daniélou's but it does not contain so much exegetical information. The way he approaches the narratives is different, however, since his aim is to use them for meditation. Indeed, I understand that his book started off as a series of conferences on these narratives to show in what way they are an important part of the Gospel message. In each section of his book, the author has given us one passage from the Infancy Narratives accompanied by another passage, usually from the Old Testament. A 'Reflection' then follows elucidating the text and mentioning any exegetical points of importance together with his own thoughts on what the text has to say to us. Each section concludes with a short prayer.

I think that what Fr Bligh is attempting in this book is very important, and that is to stress that the gospels speak to us of the message of Jesus and that we have to learn to listen to it. This is not always appreciated as much as it should be. I think that he has written a valuable book which many will find useful even though sometimes I felt he did not always say enough in his 'Reflections' and at others I was indignant because I disagreed with him in what he *did* say, mainly in cases when I felt that what he had to say about the way in which a particular text spoke to us, simply did not go far enough. But there is plenty to think about in what he has written.

Of the two books under review I think that Cardinal Daniélou's is more theologically and exegetically informative and better if you are interested in going into the problems and the theology of the Infancy Narratives in some

depth. The other will appeal more to those who wish to know only as much about the scriptural problems as is necessary to understand the text and who wish then to reflect and

think about the passages in a prayerful way and need a book to help them do it. There is a need for more books of this kind.

MERVYN DAVIES

**RELIGION AND CHANGE**, by David L. Edwards. *Hodder and Stoughton*. 1969. 383 pp. 50s.

Contemporary man swings uneasily between hope and despair. The changes which have been wrought in and around him by the unprecedented developments of science and technology in the twentieth century at one moment awaken in him the vision of a world which he can transform into a human paradise, at the next threaten him with the prospect of a hell on earth in which in grasping everything he has lost his own soul. The trouble lies not in chance or fate so much as in himself. His newly-won powers offer him both a blessing and a curse. There is no turning back. He has no choice but to go forward into the daunting world which beckons to him. He must work out his own salvation. This applies at all levels of human life. Individuals, societies and the whole human race are bound together by this challenge. There can be no salvation which he does not make his own, none that is less than universal. The world is one and the world has come of age. How man can attain to an adult maturity is the question.

Where does religion come in this situation? Is it a feature of man's childhood which will now vanish away? Are psychological and social developments destined to loosen its hold on man's thought and imagination and finally to destroy it? Or does religion contain within itself something essential to man's understanding of himself and his world, even though it may also contain features which belong to a bygone age and which will be radically transformed or even outgrown? Is it a childish dream or an adult reality? What will the twentieth century look like from the standpoint of the twenty-first—always supposing that there will be a twenty-first? We may be disposed to answer that only time will tell and to leave it at that. But any such answer is ruled out of court by a proper sense of human responsibility. Man makes history; history does not make man. Consequently he dare not leave the future to provide its own answer to his present questionings. He must take a hand in fashioning his own future. And in so doing he must come to terms with religion. Here and now he must assess its claims, make a stand and be counted among the believers or the infidels.

This is a colossal and frightening task. It is the distinction of this book by the Dean of King's College, Cambridge, an extended version of the Hulsean Lectures which he delivered in 1968, that he sets about it with sensitivity, understanding and insight. He describes the scene and suggests the next act.

To the first task he brings a range of learning which many must envy. More than that, he has the rare ability to communicate to his readers not only this or that particular feature of the scene in comparative isolation, but the interlacing pattern of the contemporary situation in all its depth and complexity. He draws together the findings of separate disciplines and covers a large canvas, thus enabling us to view the scene as a whole. In a sense this is an impossible task. Clearly we are dependent on the author's critical powers of selection and assessment. But the result has nothing superficial about it. It is possible to recognize the world which he describes as the world in which one actually lives, and the recognition is enriched by an enlarged understanding and appreciation.

The contemporary world is one of increasing secularization. Whatever the roots of religion, its worldly manifestations must be seen in this humanistic context. Mr Edwards is right, therefore, to pay especial attention to the social and psychological aspects of religion. Marxian and Freudian analyses of religion are of far-reaching, if not of determinative, significance. However, Mr Edwards claims that neither our new social nor our new psychological insights dispose of religion as such. There is no clear sign that man is outgrowing religion. It continues to survive, if not to flourish, in all sorts of unexpected places. The signs of the times are ambiguous. There is more than one road stretching away into the future. Technological culture, secular state, pluralist society may still provide a suitable setting for the renaissance of religion. 'A renewed Christianity would still have a chance.'

When it comes to the intellectual content of Christianity Mr Edwards agrees that we have witnessed the decline and fall of Christian dogmatism. Underlying the change in the way