

A HISTORY OF THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE: VOLUME ONE, FROM ANTIQUITY TO 1700. By David Norton. *C.U.P.*, 1993, pp.375, £50.00. Pp.xvi + 375, 19 plates.

This is a book intended for those whose education has denied them a heritage, and who come to the Bible as adults knowing little either about its form and content or its diffusive influence in every department of European thought and writing for two thousand years. At the same time, it contains scholarly treatment of a number of contributors to the story which is far from being meant for the beginner. Its prospective readership is therefore hard to assess. But that does not deprive the project of its value as a pioneering attempt to draw together the manifold ways in which the Bible has been literature.

The title of this interestingly-conceived study is misleading. The author is, at least in this first volume, primarily concerned with the streams of Biblical tradition which fed into the making of the Bible as literature in English. The King James version is seen as pivotal. Only the first fifth of the book is devoted to the story which lies behind, and here, although the coverage is clear and the balance on the whole just, and there are good insights, the author seems to depend heavily on such sources as *The Cambridge History of the Bible*. (The bibliography and notes would suggest that there have been difficulties in getting access to a library which would have made it possible to consolidate the foundations.)

In any study covering many centuries there are bound to be difficulties in finding a critical method which will work for different worlds of thought. There is some tendency in this book to avoid confronting these. For example, it is suggested that 'there is no firm evidence of literary awareness in the making of the Wyclif Bible', but there is no discussion of what such literary awareness would have amounted to for Wyclif, no account of the implications here of the *De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae*.

The strength of the book lies in its treatment of the tradition in English from the sixteenth century. Here perceptive questions are asked about the ways in which William Tyndale, John Cheke, Myles Coverdale and their successors thought about the choice of words for beauty and effect, and in a sense began to 'create' a new English as they did so. There is a chapter on 'presentations of the text', which deals with layout and size and the other physical considerations which go to make a book a pleasure to handle and use. The opportunity is missed here to discuss the implications of the shift from what we might call 'scriptures', the Bible in pieces, circulating in separate books, to 'Scripture', the Bible published characteristically as a physical whole and thus increasingly seen as a single entity.

There are strong chapters on the use of the Bible by George Herbert, Abraham Cowley, John Milton, John Bunyan, as containing 'the best materials in the world for poesy', on George Wither and the Psalter, on the whole process of literary assessment and developing literary consciousness in seventeenth century discussion of the Bible.

Certain themes run through the book: the tension between the pull of classical or other secular literary pleasures and the spiritual imperatives to which Scripture calls the reader, inspiration and eloquence, the Augustinian debate over the appropriateness of applying stylistic criteria to the interpretation and criticism of Scripture and its long-running aftermath. (We are given some useful reflections on seventeenth century discussion as to whether, far from fine style being compared with the Bible's style to its disadvantage, the Bible should be the writer's model for style.)

This reviewer would make three principal criticisms of this exploratory and often stimulating study. The balance of treatment chronologically gives a false impression of the contribution of the mediaeval millennium to the treatment of issues of language. There is somehow missing a 'feel' for the preoccupations and concerns of the periods dealt with, so that the critical comments often seem to come from outside. And it really does matter that we should not slip inadvertently into the implication that the story was leading naturally into an English-speaking world ('God is an Englishman'). Perhaps the second volume will put that right.

There is a pleasing set of plates and a useful appendix giving comparative texts of translations of eight passages.

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THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS, VOLUME XXIII, FINAL WRITINGS BY KARL RAHNER, translated by Hugh M. Riley (Chapters 1 to 7) and Joseph Donceel, S.J., (Chapters 8 to 19), *Darton, Longman and Todd*, 1992, pp. 228.

This book represents Rahner's articles and lectures in the three years preceding his death in 1984. Nearly all have been published in German periodicals or collective works. They show no sign of declining powers. The nineteen chapters are conveniently grouped under four headings: *Christian Life*, largely concerned with Christian conduct; *The Society of Jesus*, a respectful but vigorous protest against unwarranted interference by the Vatican with the Society's affairs, previously unpublished; *Piety*, mainly about the changes in Catholic devotional practices; *Sacraments*, their use and abuse.

The first chapter is an analysis, of the familiar rather heavy-going but rewarding kind, through which Rahner wants to dissuade people from regarding God primarily as a menace but at the same time to insist that the human condition must be considered one not free from the greatest of dangers. He refers, as on other occasions, to the Council of Trent's statement that Christians 'cannot be absolutely certain whether they are in a state of grace' (p. 11). But isn't conversion to Christianity, sometimes at least, the discovery of the truth, indeed of what truth is? The chapter which follows, about nuclear weapons, is Rahner at his most effective: 'Are those who are for nuclear armament for the purpose of preventing war entirely sure that they really reject this war under any and all

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