

It is in the University Library at Uppsala.

By contrast with the more complicated study of the New Testament text, R. M. Grant's article on the New Testament canon is much more straightforward and gives a clear and careful picture of the early evidence for the canon. It is refreshing to note that the emphasis here, as elsewhere in the book, is on discussion of the evidence rather than discussion of theories about the evidence. It is strange that an article on the canon of the New Testament should make no mention of the first reference to all our canonical books together in Athanasius' 39th Festal Letter. A clear and concise account of New Testament exegesis is provided by C. K. Barrett. The author successfully portrays it in relation to different types of Jewish exegesis, but he distinguishes the important influence which the Christian kerygma had on the attitude of the early Christians to the Old Testament. In that he sketches the beginnings of a specifically Christological treatment of the Old Testament, Barrett's treatment provides a useful bridge to the treatment of the Old Testament in the patristic period.

In the first article in the final section, which has to cover a great deal of ground, R. P. C. Hanson shows how orthodox exegesis of the New Testament developed from its specifically Jewish background in the face of the Gnostics' use of the Christians' sacred books. Hanson's

assessment of the exegesis of the early Fathers is admirable in its restrained criticism of their excesses and in its recognition of the needs that brought it about. A similar balanced view is also evident in the articles on Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia by M. F. Wiles. One is a little sorry that some of the stature of Theodore as a biblical theologian could not have been demonstrated at greater length, and that he had not been treated, even in this article, more on his own merits than simply as a 'representative of the Antiochene School'.

Granted the importance of Augustine as a figure of doctrinal significance, one wonders how distinctive is his contribution to our subject. In view of the extensive treatment of Origen, whose techniques he follows in some respects, the space devoted to Augustine might have been better filled with further investigation of the sub-apostolic period or Jewish-Christian exegesis.

In conclusion, one must congratulate the editors on the comprehensive nature of this volume, which is a worthy introduction to the series as it stands. One of the book's great virtues is the presentation of the results of academic debate on the contents, background and interpretation of the Bible in a form which is accessible to a wide variety of readers and which at the same time maintains a very high standard of scholarship.

CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND

**THE EPISTLE TO RHEGINOS**, by Malcolm Lee Peel. *S.C.M. Press Ltd*, London, 1969. 208 pp. £4.00.

The New Testament Library, like any series of serious New Testament publications, needs to include studies on Gnostic writings, partly because of striking finds in that domain and partly to assess yet more critically the work of those who tend to read Gnosticism into New Testament writings. In 1945, near the present-day village of Nag Hamadi in Upper Egypt were found thirteen papyrus codices written in Coptic and said to contain at least fifty-one treatises. Few have as yet been published, though this *Epistle to Rheginos* concerning the Resurrection has appeared already. However, Dr Peel's view is that it needs to be seen again with new eyes, the more so as it is a document wholly devoted to individual eschatology.

The present work is based on a University of Yale dissertation (1966) without the full Coptic and Greek text of the New Testament, except when these are essential to the comparisons made. A first section deals with the nature of

the document, its literary form, historical context and its use of the New Testament. A new translation of the original text is followed by a detailed and careful analysis which 'uncovers a rather personal *Sitz im Leben* for the Letter, the progression of the author's arguments reflecting efforts to answer certain objections to the Resurrection raised by Rheginos the pupil'.

In support of the translation and analysis there is a substantial section (pp. 51-104) of technical notes on the Coptic grammar and syntax of the Letter and on important parallels, not hitherto cited. Quotations and 'echoes' are noted in order to demonstrate their influence upon the thought of the author of Rheginos.

Section IV gives the teaching of the letter and consists of a full examination of its eschatology as being its focal concern. This is done by a consideration of the sphere, the means, the goals and the temporal dimension of the

Letter's eschatology. Among many fascinating subjects covered is a comparison of the Gnostic Redeemed—Redeemer myth as presented by Bultmann with a view of the Saviour in our Letter. Such a comparison yields important insights, and is done with the uttermost courtesy and the absence of anything suggesting polemic. However, all Section IV is preparatory to an investigation of the authorship of the Letter. This proceeds by a critique of the original editor's six arguments for holding that the *Letter to Rheginos* emanated from the Valentinian sphere of Gnosticism, and probably from Valentinus himself. Further to the same purpose is a brief comparison of the *Evangelium Veritatis* (which is usually held to be a genuine work of Valentinus, written in Rome c. A.D. 140-5) and our text *De Resurrectione*. The comparison all through takes the form of a sustained dialogue with the former editors of the text, and indeed the entire critical re-appraisal of

the Epistle to Rheginos is in terms of this dialogue. At the end comes the final parting of the ways. Five brief paragraphs lead up to the present editor's conclusion: 'In sum, on the basis of internal evidence from the letter, we would maintain that the *Letter to Rheginos* was written in the last quarter of the second century by an anonymous but revered Valentinian-Christian teacher'; and there has been a re-Christianization of his Valentinianism, 'beyond that our investigation will not permit us to go' (p. 180).

A bibliography and very full indexes of references in the *De Resurrectione* and in Scripture, Gnostic literature, Mandaeen and Manichean Writings, etc., all go to make the work a useful adjunct in a less well-known domain of study which, however, is relevant both to the New Testament and early Church history.

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

**THE SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION**, by Roland Robertson. *Blackwell*, Oxford, 1970. 256 pp. £1.8. (Paperback 90p.)

It is significant that this book is entitled the sociological interpretation, not explanation, of religion. Robertson's reasons for this (pp. 58-65) in part reflect a dissatisfaction with available explanations, which, while masquerading as sociological, turn out upon inspection to be psychological. Functional theories, for example, which focus upon 'anxiety' or 'uncertainty' in fact offer explanations of religious behaviour in terms of the properties of individuals rather than of social groups *per se*. And explanations at the level of sociology can prove to be unsatisfactory generalizations as, for example, when one postulates 'an ubiquitous and universal set of social processes which are products of religious phenomena' (p. 60). What is rather required is first that causal priorities are initially left open when investigating questions concerning the relationship between religion and society, and secondly, that one should offer an analytical framework against which explanations might be examined if only to spot their weaknesses and ambiguities.

In his own approach to analysis Robertson makes a basic distinction between 'culture' and 'social structure': the first refers to beliefs, values and symbols and the second to the social means by and through which they are mediated and expressed. The book then takes up the themes which arise from applying this distinction to the study of religion: organizations, beliefs and values in what is socially

designated as the religious sphere, the relationship between religious and secular culture, between religious culture and the social structure of the wider society, between the social structure of religious and secular culture and, finally, the relationship between social structure in the religious sphere and social structure in the wider society. Although Robertson does refer helpfully to anthropological work, he himself recognizes that most of the empirical data referred to relates to industrial societies, so that in practice by far the greatest emphasis is upon the Christian religion.

What the author does provide us with is a good over-view of a wide range of work. This includes, for example, a judicious critical survey not only of Weber's evergreen work on the Protestant ethic, but also of the issues and research continuities in that area. He takes the view that 'Weber was on the whole wrong about the Protestant Ethic, but right about the general contribution of Judaism and Christianity to the forms taken economically and politically by Western societies' (p. 181). He also offers an innovation in the approach to church-sect typologies, in an attempt to accommodate satisfactorily groups like the Salvation Army in Britain or the Mormons in the U.S.A. which, while they proclaim a message which is out of line with the dominant religious and secular culture, are also regarded as an acceptable part of the religious scene. It makes good sense to