

NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE, *Biblical Foundations in Theology* by J.D.G. Dunn & F.P. Mackey. *SPCK*, London, 1987. £7.95.

JESUS AND THE ETHICS OF THE KINGDOM, *Biblical Foundations in Theology* by B. Chilton & J.I.H. McDonald, *SPCK*, London, 1987. £7.95.

It is a commonplace that the modern period has seen the growth of specialization and a corresponding fragmentation of knowledge. The same forces have been at work in theology, or what one might now call the loosely connected group of disciplines which are treated as an entity for the purposes of educational administration and publishing. But, as every student learns, there is little which unites the theological disciplines; indeed students are actively encouraged to leave the making of connections between disciplines until some ill-defined later stage of their development which probably never comes. It is to meet this need that SPCK have launched the series, *Biblical Foundations in Theology*. Despite the title of the series, with its perhaps over-confident ring reminiscent of the ill-fated *Biblical Theology* movement, the major innovation in the series is the attempt to work in a collaborative manner. One of the major reasons for the fragmentation of knowledge has undoubtedly been the elevation of the single author with the consequent invitation to idiosyncratic position taking. By contrast, in this series authors are asked to collaborate with a colleague across the *Biblical Studies-Systematic Theology* divide. One result of this approach is that proper attention is given to the demands of at least two disciplines.

Dunn and Mackey, the series editors, provide an introductory volume. After chapters which outline the aims of their respective disciplines, their approach is to discuss two central issues of contemporary theological and ecclesiological interest in the form of a dialogue between their two specializations. In the chapter on NT christology, Dunn compares the wisdom christology of the hymn of Col. 1:15–20 with the trinitarian interpretation of this passage which goes back to the patristic era; summarizes some of R.E. Brown's work on the infancy narratives; and examines the apparently exclusive christological claims of John 14:6. From these brief expositions, Mackey chooses to take up the recent quest for a form of Christianity which does not make exclusive claims about Christ over against other religions. This central section of the book is the most successful: the exegetical sections discuss texts of real importance for contemporary theology and there is a genuine connection between exegesis and the following systematic reflection.

The second example, a discussion of church ministry, is less successful. This time the systematic theologian writes first, sympathetically exploring some of the tensions in the doctrine of priesthood of Vatican II. However, the same amount of sensitivity is not shown by Dunn who indulges in some (refined) anti-Roman polemic on the basis of the NT texts. This is not of course a difficult task but there is no attempt made to find out why early Christianity so quickly resorted to models of priesthood drawn from OT and pagan sources without criticizing them in the light of the gospel. Again the evidence of the Pastoral Epistles on ordination is played down and so the problem becomes a tension between Scripture and later tradition, rather than a problem within Scripture. One misses dialogue between Catholic and

Protestant scholars in this chapter.

Chilton and McDonald have written a more substantial book because they focus on one major theme, Jesus and the ethics of the Kingdom. The form of their collaboration is also different: instead of coming at their subject alternatively from a historical and theological angle, they both stay close to the biblical world but while Chilton plays the exegete, McDonald constructs an interpretation of the proclamation and activity of Jesus focussed on the notion of 'performance': 'The irruption of the Kingdom into history is accomplished through an agent who is essentially its performer. The performer articulates its motifs, conveys meaning and opens up issues. While articulating in words ... Jesus also gives performance to the Kingdom in dramatic action, which in turn opens up issues and possibilities for those involved.' (p. 61) Negatively an argument is conducted against christological interpretation of gospel material which comes from the lifetime of Jesus, a view which makes the mistake of merely repeating the evangelists' interpretations rather than getting behind them to the time of Jesus. Thus, with Rudolf Otto, the Kingdom brings Jesus, and not vice versa, and, against Jeremias, it is not the case that 'the Kingdom appears as that which discloses Jesus as the appropriate object of faith'.

The result is an attractive study of the Kingdom which builds on Chilton's own earlier interpretation of the Kingdom as 'God in strength' but which goes on to relate this to contemporary theological and ethical concerns. Crucial here is the rethinking of the question of whether the Kingdom is transcendent or immanent. A way is sought between the relevance of an exegetically-flawed social gospel and the abstractness of an emphasis on transcendence: Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom is indeed in the first place an announcement of God's dynamic rule, but as the Kingdom refers to divine action, it calls for cognate, human action (118f.). This ties in with the notion of performance which does not regard human beings in the abstract but as persons in action and interaction, development and growth. On this basis a much more comprehensive anthropological model for the interpretation of the gospel material is offered and in terms which have contemporary theological and ethical significance. However, two critical notes need to be struck. First, the transatlantic collaboration which produced this volume extends to the language in which it is written. Not that it is littered with Americanisms or, to be evenhanded, with Scottish dialect. Rather, particularly in the systematic parts, it is written in the new, soporific, technocratic, theology-speak. At one point a translation is provided by the authors themselves, showing that refreshing simplicity of expression is also available to them. Second, and more seriously, the question of the authenticity of the Jesus material is dealt with very unevenly. At some points authenticity is discussed either in the text or in the footnotes; elsewhere major Markan or Matthean themes (for example, the mystery of the Kingdom in Mk. 4) are introduced into the discussion without further ado. While scholars will differ in such matters, clarity here cannot be dispensed with, however abbreviated arguments or even the signalling of positions has to be. Nevertheless, this is a worthy substantive volume to this series and it is to be hoped that similarly central issues will be chosen for future volumes.

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