

further consideration of external evidence and of the compilation process, and finally Dr Thrall provides a survey of the major critical theories.

I know no discussion of the unity of 2 Corinthians that can be compared with this. Doubtless I am biased by the fact that on the whole Dr Thrall agrees with conclusions that I had myself reached, but the detail and depth of her argument are profoundly impressive.

It is impossible to follow Dr Thrall's discussion of the Interim Events; it is equally thorough, though she has not quite convinced me that the man who committed the offence (ὁ ἀδικητάς, 7.12) was a Corinthian rather than one who came from elsewhere.

The epistle is full of passages in which profound theology is hidden under notorious linguistic problems. I cannot recall a passage where I felt that Dr Thrall was running away from a problem, and very few where I have not found a new insight into the theology. For example: the sorting out of the images (βεβαιῶν, Χριστός, σφραγισμένος, ἀρραβῶνα) in 1.21,22; the use of triumph and odour in 2.14f.; the sustained exegesis of the notoriously difficult chapter 3; the treatment of Christophany (though I am not sure that that is the word that I should use) in 4.4–6; the treatment of building, clothing, and nakedness in 5.1–5 (especially pp. 356–370); the exegesis of the difficult (but surely Pauline) language of 5.21.

Summaries are impossible. Of this book I can only say, *Tolle, lege.*

C.K. BARRETT

WHO DID JESUS THINK HE WAS? by John C. O'Neill. *E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1995. Pp. 238, £49.*

This book is the fruit of many years study and contemplation of the identity of Jesus and the evidence for this in the Old and New Testaments and related literature. Its publication coincides with the last official teaching year of a dedicated and brilliant New Testament scholar.

The book is a direct challenge to the current NT orthodoxy that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation were later reflections on, and articulations of, the feelings engendered by the life and work of Christ, and that these doctrines are not to be found in their full bodied form in the NT. O'Neill spells this out in a clear and concise introduction. What gives his challenge particular force is that he was originally trained as an historian and brings his skills to bear on a subject where sound historical judgement is rare. O'Neill is clear about his task;

"This book is a historian's attempt to defend the truth of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. I shall try to show that Jesus, like a number of his fellow Jews at the time, believed God was Three in One and One in Three, and that the eternal Son of God was to be born, or had been born, in order to live a fully human life and to die for the sins of the world. As a

historian, I think I can show that these were Jesus' beliefs, and that he held himself to be that Son of God incarnate." (p. 3).

It is undoubtedly the case that such a project will receive polite but firm and frosty dismissal from the majority of NT scholars. In others it will induce either fits of choking rage or the desire to lie down in a darkened room with a copy of *Kerygma and Myth* pressed to the forehead. However, it is refreshing to find that a scholar steeped in the historical-critical method, to which he pays gracious acknowledgement, should decide in favour of the beliefs that ordinary Christians have held since the birth of the Church.

Methodology and result are clearly stated: "Radical criticism, but conservative conclusions that tend to show that orthodox Christianity is based on what Jesus himself held to be true."(p. 6). O'Neill is clear about the status of the NT writings. Having noted that practice in religious societies is normally traditional and inherited, he continues:

What is true for practice is likely to be true for the beliefs of the early Christians. They must have had a strong, well-worked out theology of the atonement, but there are no very clear compact statements of what that theology was — yet evidence lies scattered everywhere pointing to what it must have been, evidence discernible to those who know well the Jewish literature of the time and have enough historical imagination to make sense of the accidental indications that lie to hand. The tactic which argues from silence to the absence of the belief or practice in question is suspect. (p. 14)

This is an implicit rejection of the Reformation slogan *sola scriptura* and represents the triumph of historical thinking over ideology. Communities produce scriptures, scriptures do not produce communities.

O'Neill begins by challenging the basic assumption of many NT Christologies that Jesus was at some stage appointed Son of God, thus implying a previous lack of this status. The treatment of such passages where an uninformed reading might yield an adoptionist view is masterly and rooted very firmly in the imagery and thought of the OT (e.g. the enthronement of David), the very imagery and thought the NT writers would have *assumed*, for example:

"The passive *having been perfected* in Hebrews 2:10; 5:9 and 7:28 referred to the public honour bestowed by the Father at the completion of his mission, not to the reception of moral perfection by someone who before was morally imperfect." (p. 20 cf Lk. 13:32)

There follows a historical view of Jewish Messianic expectations before 70 AD, covering the key idea that the Messiah was to be hidden

until glorified by God (Chap 3). Chapters four and six are a treasury of inter-testamental works from Qumran, Philo and many other writings, and would serve as a fine introduction to these works for any beginner. The material examined in these Jewish texts offers evidence for the belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation. The intervening chapter links the NT texts concerning Incarnation and Trinity with the Jewish writings, to show how they are part of a coherent and widely held system of belief at the time of Christ.

Chapters three and seven are perhaps the most crucial. Here O'Neill advances the idea that at the time of Jesus there was a convention that the Messiah was not able to openly identify himself, but had to wait until he was vindicated by God. This was based on the story of David, who although anointed by God remained uncrowned and unrecognised as king, and who endured a time of trial until his vindication. The idea that the Messiah would be "hidden" is contained in much Jewish literature (e.g. see p42 for evidence from PseudoPhilo). Apart from the convention, on a more instinctual level surely our reaction to anyone making grandiose claims for themselves is to discount them. Jesus could not and did not claim to be the Messiah, the Incarnate Son of God, but knew himself to be and behaved accordingly. This develops an argument put forward not only by Origen (quoted on p. 118), but also by modern thinkers like Vincent McNabb, who wrote: "Our Blessed Lord is almost careless about *proving* His Divinity, or even asserting it". This gives O'Neill a basis from which to view sayings where Jesus openly claims to be the Messiah and those where he is ambivalent. While O'Neill regards the method of separating "authentic" from "inauthentic" sayings of Jesus as a possible method, he also believes it to be misguided: "We must in general look for inauthentic features rather than inauthentic sayings" (p. 140). His method is to assume a core of authenticity in nearly all the sayings, and to look, with the help of textual variants, for (often unconscious) scribal emendations or errors which appeared during transmission. This eliminates the need for elaborate and tendentious theories about the evangelists re-working early material to suit a particular "theology" of who Jesus was. It is built upon two historical facts, the obligatory silence of the Messiah, and the known customs and mistakes of scribes.

A chapter on John's Gospel, which would serve as a fine introduction to studying the gospel, emphasises the similarity of material to the Synoptics. It also deals with the peculiarly Johannine material, which O'Neill believes to be Jewish reflections on the role and identity of the Messiah. Thus the "I Am " sayings pre-date Jesus, but Jesus knew of them and believed them to apply to himself. Given the rule of silence by which he was bound, he could not have uttered them in his pre-resurrection life, but they have been placed there by the compilers of the gospel. (This does not rule out, in my view, the possibility that Jesus used the sayings in his post-resurrection earthly life).

This is an extraordinary book not only in the depth of its scholarship

and the range of its concerns, but also in the challenge it poses to received opinion. Much more could be said about it and the exegetical gems it holds. One might not agree with all the details of O'Neill's argument, but the basic assumption, that doctrine is early and full, rather than late and piecemeal, is supported by good evidence and sound argument. It is a welcome gift to those who wish to maintain the connection between the Christ of the Incarnation, the Church and the Scriptures.

NEIL FERGUSON OP

REVELATION REDEMPTION AND RESPONSE. CALVIN'S TRINITARIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIVINE-HUMAN RELATIONSHIP by Phillip Walker Butin, New York, Oxford, *Oxford University Press*, 1995.

Dr. Butin has produced a book that reminds the reader of the importance and challenge of good theology. In exploring the depth of John Calvin's trinitarian understanding of the divine-human relationship he provides a significant text for those concerned with Calvin's theological contribution, and for those concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity.

Butin distances himself from the vexed question of a central dogma in Calvin's thought. Rather, he presents his hypothesis in more restrained, and therefore more engaging terms. Influential interpretations of Calvin's theology have largely overlooked his distinctively trinitarian approach to understanding God's relationship with humanity. Through a historical reconsideration of how Calvin construed this relationship, Butin offers a challenging reassessment of Calvin's thought.

Alongside the historical reappraisal, Butin's study is motivated by systematic concerns. These focus around the role of the Trinity in Christian understanding of the divine-human relationship. In short, is the doctrine of the Trinity presented as the very ground and grammar of Christian theology?

Butin's basic line of argument is that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the intrinsic integrating paradigm for Calvin's understanding of how God relates redemptively with humanity. Of course this understanding reflects a fundamentally soteriological concern regarding the nature of this relationship. It is a matter of God's saving encounter with humanity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Butin demonstrates that Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity becomes an expansive way for setting forth the very basis, pattern and dynamic of the divine-human relationship, and for working out the implications of this relationship for Christian belief, worship and practice. The approach taken illumines the profound economic-trinitarian movement that constitutes the very heart of the Christian message. The trinitarian character of Christian existence emerges in a most vivid manner.

In the main part of the study Butin follows the structure of Books I-III of the 1559 *Institutes*. Here he carefully exposes the way in which the