

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE by Robert M. Grant. *A. and C. Black, 21s.*

This is a revised edition of a work first published in America in 1948 as *The Bible in the Church*. The present title is the more accurate description of the contents of the book, the earlier one a better indication of the author's theological position. Professor Chadwick is quite right in his foreword to draw our attention particularly to the last chapter of the book, which is a wholly excellent statement of what the author regards as 'the basic principles of historical and theological interpretation'.

He rises progressively to this pitch of excellence from a disappointingly weak beginning, in chapters 2, 3, and 4, on the interpretation of the old testament in the new by Jesus, Paul, and the other new testament writers. The substance of his remarks in these chapters is in general unexceptionable. But he fails to provide the really fresh and convincing hermeneutical categories which are urgently needed in this field, and still appears to be held captive by a number of the 'conventional clichés' of which he is so rightly critical in his last chapter, still in some respects to be in the grip of 'the petrified determination of nineteenth-century liberalism to express its theology in pseudo-historical terms' (p. 159). In this case his terms strike one not as pseudo-historical but as pseudo-literary or pseudo-critical. Thus he regards the attitude of Jesus towards the scriptures as 'paradoxical', because on the one hand 'he goes beyond contemporary Judaism and interprets the prophecies of the old testament in reference to . . . himself', and takes up 'a free attitude toward the Law'; and on the other he is 'represented as upholding a rigorous doctrine of scripture like that held by contemporary rabbis' (p. 11). The paradox is surely more apparent than real, created by the insufficiently criticised categories in which the attitude of Jesus is examined. These indeed lead Professor Grant to contradict himself, or at least to manifest a paradoxical attitude. On p. 9 he writes, 'With such an appeal to the religious content of scripture as against its merely literal or legal form (the reference is to our Lord's comments on the blood of Abel, David and the shewbread, etc.), Jesus sweeps away the accumulated dust of tradition'. On p. 24 having remarked on the rabbinic quality of Paul's exegesis in its outward aspect, he explains what he means by 'rabbinic': 'In the first place Paul takes great liberties with the original meaning of passages he cites'. Clearly the category of

'rabbinic', 'dust of tradition', 'contemporary Judaism', expressions which appear to mean the same thing, needs to be examined and discriminated.

The only substantial criticism to be made of the following chapters is that the author discusses the principles without sufficiently bearing in mind the practice of the ancient interpreters, whether Alexandrine or Antiochene, patristic or mediaeval. He himself is clearly aware of the difficulty, since he refers to a similar though not quite identical criticism which was made of his first edition. Clearly the scope of his book, which is only intended as an introduction to the subject, rules out any detailed examination of ancient interpretations and commentaries. But since he himself expresses doubts about either the possibility or desirability of a detailed hermeneutical system, he might have been better advised to look at Origen, for example, more in his commentaries than in the *De Principiis*, at Augustine in the *In Genesim ad Litteram* rather than in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, at St Thomas in the long articles on the old law in the *Ia IIae* rather than in the one article on the senses of scripture in the first question of the *Ia pars*.

He makes one or two shrewd observations in his chapter on mediaeval exegesis, of which the implications might well be pressed. Thus 'in the mediaeval claim of objectivity we find the beginning of modern scientific study of the scriptures'; this is so true that it is perhaps worth adding that the modern scientific study of the scriptures is liable to the same disease of unrelated intellectual aridity as has so often afflicted the scholastic study of theology. Again, the 'more important result of the late mediaeval insistence on the literal interpretation . . . was the rejection of the patristic theological method, with the (consequent) divorce of theology from exegesis' (p. 100-1). This judgment falls fairly on the disciples of St Thomas, especially the modern ones; but not quite fairly on St Thomas himself, because it is an exaggeration to talk of him, at least, *rejecting* patristic theological method; and if one is careful not to read the *Summa* through neo-thomist spectacles, I think one may justly conclude that his theology was still married to exegesis; though one must admit that it had ceased to be an ardent love match, and that the standard of respectable cohabitation of the spouses which St Thomas tried to maintain had in it the makings of the final divorce which Professor Grant is quite right to

blame, in general, on scholastic principles. But again the inference deserves to be pressed; it is at the hands of the fathers, whom neither party in their heart of hearts yet holds in very high esteem, that the modern theologian and exegete should seek a reconciliation of their disciplines.

So we come again to that excellent last chapter, from which I will only quote the very just observations made on demythologising. 'The trouble with this kind of interpretation is twofold. First it is assumed that there was a single ancient world-view which can be reinterpreted wherever it appears in the new testament; similarly it is assumed that there is a single modern world-view, and that this world-view

is correct. Second, the biblical texts undergo a kind of metamorphosis as their more obvious historical meaning is transmuted into something more closely resembling the intention of the existentialist exegete . . . But the major difficulty which arises out of "demythologising" is that it tries to force on the passages more than they will bear, or should be expected to bear. The Bible is not the sole source of Christian theology, though it may be a primary one . . . The locus of "demythologising", then, lies not in biblical exegesis, but in the systematic theology of the Church, of which "biblical theology" is only a part' (p. 164-5).

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THE BOY FROM THE LAKE, by Rosemary Haughton. *Darton, Longman and Todd, 18s.*

THE CARPENTER'S SON, by Rosemary Haughton. *Max Parrish, 25s.*

The role of the Bible in religious education has been subject to criticism recently in non-Catholic circles. It has become clear that a surfeit of Bible stories and an uncritical approach to the scriptures tend to stifle interest among children. Catholics, however, are very far from reaching any point of saturation with scripture and the urgent need is still to increase familiarity with the Bible. In spite of this difference in our situation we share with non-Catholics the need to consider carefully the relative merits and dangers of different ways of using the scriptures in religious education. Two different approaches are illustrated by two recent books, by Mrs Rosemary Haughton, who is well known as one of Britain's leading exponents of the biblical and theological renewal, both on the level of the child and of the adult. *The Boy from the Lake* is a valuable account of the coming of the New Creation as seen from the point of view of the young John the evangelist. It is aimed at the 8-11 year old age group and is absorbing and dramatic, and has vigorous black and white illustrations by the author herself.

She has the power of making readers feel that they are really there and involved in the incident described. While many adults could with profit read this book the style is suited to the needs of children without being over simplified. She keeps close to the scriptures while incorporating short explanations - without boring - where these are necessary.

It is, however, a pity that no attempt is made to deal with St John as an evangelist. It is very important that children should not be encour-

aged to fixate in a fundamentalist approach which appears as a natural stage in pre-adolescent years, but which must be outgrown if the adult Christian is to understand the word of God properly. The Fourth Gospel is a highly theological account and it is fruitless to attempt a chronological synchronisation with the synoptics: to say that 'later John could never remember in what order things happened' gives, by implication, a distorted impression of his gospel.

There is also a dubious identification of Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, with Mary Magdalen. This identification is not necessary for a proper telling of the story and theories without considerable backing from contemporary scriptural scholarship have no place in books for children.

Despite these defects *The Boy from the Lake* is an excellent means of handing on the 'good news' to children.

*The Carpenter's Son* is rather a puzzling book and quite unlike the author's other biblical works for children. It is evidently intended for children but although the style is often very simple its pace and subject is too heavy-going for most children of the 8-14 range, and the illustrations are dreary. In some respects it is an interesting book for adults, for it attempts to give both the background of Jewish life in the troubled times when Jesus was growing up, and also to describe the growth of wisdom and understanding of Jesus up to the finding in the Temple. As it entirely deals with the period not dealt with by the Gospels, between the return from Egypt and the finding in the