

B O O K R E V I E W S

McIntire, C T (ed) 1977 *God, History and Historians.*
 An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of
 History. New York: Oxford University
 Press. 477 pp R 6.65

Christianity and history inevitably belong together for more than one reason. Not only is Christianity an "historical" religion in the sense that its founder was an historical figure, that it gave rise to an historical tradition and that it lives by an historical document, which has been and is the object of intense historical investigation. Christianity has also an inevitable relationship with history because its message carries an eschatological dimension which has far-reaching implications for the understanding of history and the future of mankind.

In the development of a Christian understanding of history, two issues played a decisive role. The first was the discovery of the historicity of the Bible in the post-reformation period and which is linked with names like Semler, Strauss, Baur, Schweitzer, Westcott, Hort, Lightfoot, Bultmann and many others. The second was the phenomenon of history as such, which became a focal point in the thinking of (inter alia) Barth, Berkhof, Cullmann, Tillich, Niebuhr, Moltmann, Metz and Pannenberg. In the wake of these discussions an enormous amount of literature was produced.

In what is obviously meant as a source book for students, McIntire has brought together a wide-ranging and well-selected anthology of essays by prominent writers under the sub-title "modern Christian views of history". The contributions are divided into three sections: 1. The meaning of history; 2. The nature of history and culture; 3. Historians and historical study. In an introductory essay, McIntire (a Senior Member in History and Historiography at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto) maintains that one of the principal sources for the renewal of interest in a Christian view of history is to be found in a response to the catastrophes of our secular age and the search for an alternative view of human nature and human history (6). The upsurge in

interest in this problem in the post 1945 period acquired the proportions of a major movement of contemporary thought and all the essays collected here are drawn from the three decades following World War II.

The first section deals with the meaning of history and includes contributions by such diverse authors as Dawson, Latourette, Niebuhr, Brunner, Bultmann, Pannenberg, Gutiérrez, Tillich and Toynbee. The writers are allowed to speak for themselves, but the compiler provides the reader with a very useful though brief introduction to each essay, in which he gives a capsule orientation and characterizes the main line of thought. The reader should be well aware that he is dependent on McIntire's selection and his view of a specific writer. Nonetheless, on the whole the essays are well chosen and bring the reader into contact with the central issues involved.

The second section (the nature of history and culture) focuses on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Christian faith in history and on the interaction between religion and culture. In a post-Constantine era, this has been an evergreen problem treated by theologians, but McIntire did well to include the views of some non-theologians. The essays in this section come from Herbert Butterfield, Karl Barth, C S Lewis, Jacques Maritain, Herman Dooyeweerd, T S Eliot and concludes with a 1967 Faith and Order paper of the World Council of Churches on God in Nature and History. This paper was originally drafted by Hendrikus Berkhof and contains many of his ideas. To single out any of these contributions is difficult - South African readers might find it interesting to compare the views of Dooyeweerd with the position taken by the neo-Thomist Maritain. A very happy choice is the essay by Butterfield, an historian who excels in lucidity and common sense when drawing on his vast knowledge of and insight into the historical process and who does not receive the attention he deserves amongst theologians.

The third section deals with problems of historiography and focuses on the question: What relevance does a Christian view of history have for the actual writing of history by historians? The selection of texts comes from Harbison, Butterfield, Link, Marron, Floravsky and Cochrane - but why not something from Van Harvey? These are all historians, and theologians would do well to take note of what they are saying. A recurring theme is the danger of hubris in historical study and a clear awareness of the limits of historical research. At the same time, the christian perspective makes

a positive attitude towards the world and its history possible. For many reasons, the last section is the most rewarding of the book.

The end-result is a most useful and well-balanced source book which provides material for course work or for individual orientation. McIntire would be the last to suggest that the material can be used by students without supplementary guidance, but this feature makes the book even more versatile to suit different teaching situations. It also contains a useful bibliography for further reading. At this price (under R7 for nearly 500 pages), the book represents remarkable value.

B C Lategan

- Judisch, D 1978. *An evaluation of claims to the charismatic gifts*. Grand Rapids: Baker. 96 pp. \$3.95
- Kline, M G 1980. *Images of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker. 142 pp. \$6.95
- Schweizer, E 1981. *The Holy Spirit*. London: SCM. 138 pp. R9.45
- Vorster, W S (ed) 1980. *The Spirit in biblical perspective*, *Miscellanea Congregalia* 14. Pretoria: UNISA. 103 pp.

It seems that there is an endless demand for semi-popular booklets on the work of the Holy Spirit. There may be various reasons for the popularity of this subject, two of the principal reasons being the following:

- a. The appeal of the so-called charismatic sects to the members of established protestant churches. This probably corresponds with the rationalism and individualism of the post-Renaissance era. It also correlates with the growing secularization of modern society. In South Africa it also corresponds with the urbanization of the church, which until recently was adapted to the spiritual needs of an agricultural society (Vorster e a, p 64).
- b. On a deeper theological level, it also relates to a more intensified criticism of the pneumatology of the reformed orthodoxy from within its own ranks. In this regard the names of Van Ruler, Pannenberg and Noordmans are mentioned. Berkhof and Heitink are queried for their criticism of the traditional reformed definition of man in terms of sin and grace (Vorster e a, p 93 f).

The four books under review demonstrate an interesting spectrum of opinions occurring in the established protestant (reformed) community. The publication of *Vorster e a* explores the various problem areas of the pneumatology and is the result of a symposium on this subject. Each of the five papers is accompanied by a response, which enhances the usefulness of the publication.

Schweizer made a diachronic study of the Holy Spirit in the OT, intertestamental Judaism, Luke, Paul and John. He finds that John represents the last phase in a train of thought which is already present in the OT. In John he discovers "the radical concentration upon the one thing necessary: the Spirit who brings us to Jesus" (p 107). Therefore he observes only one miracle in John: the Spirit which gives the gift of faith in Jesus as the Son sent by God. Each of these historical phases is examined under four headings: the strangeness of the Spirit; the Holy Spirit in creation; the Holy Spirit as a source of knowledge; the Holy Spirit in the future consummation. The division into these categories however sometimes appears to be forced.

Judisch devotes himself to an evaluation of claims to charismatic gifts. His basic thesis is that all claims to the prophetic charismata are due to the self-deception of well-meaning Christians. In this matter he represents an extreme viewpoint of the reformed orthodoxy, viz that the prophetic charismata were unique in the salvation history and that they disappeared after the completion of the canon by the apostles. The book of *Kline* is concerned with a study of Spirit typology in the OT. In a stimulating study he seeks to demonstrate that the description of the Spirit in the creation and exodus narratives is an archetype for the description of the Spirit in the Bible. God appears in a cloud of fire and wind (His "theophanic glory-cloud"). With this concept of the cloud a multitude of other theophanic features are connected: within this cloud the heavenly throne-room and all the cherubim are enshrouded. Kline attempts to demonstrate that this glory-cloud finds its earthly reflection in man (as the image of God), in the tabernacle and temple (as the image of the heavenly Eden) and even in the investiture of the highpriest.

Two points of criticism may be lodged against this latter construction:

a. The Bible is seen as a synchronic unit with the result that an "illegitimate totality transfer of meanings" (Barr) is in-

evitable.

b. The whole problem of metaphor in the Bible is evaded - in the end the reader is left in the dark whether this "glory-cloud" should be understood metaphorically or otherwise. Nevertheless Kline's study illustrates the necessity of reading the NT pneumatology against its OT background.

In going through these works, the reader discovers the same problems recurring constantly - sometimes from different angles. This last part of this article is therefore devoted to a brief discussion of these problem areas. It would of course be unrealistic to expect the problems to be solved, but the advantage of studies like these, is that the problems may be formulated afresh - a process in which old distinctions may be transcended and new guidelines may be found.

1 By far the most general problem area under discussion is the amazing ease with which Christians with opposite opinions claim to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The established churches (including the Roman Catholic Church) may have institutionalised the Spirit, whilst the pentecostals have individualised the Spirit, though both claim to "have" the Spirit. It seems as if the Spirit is used only as a legitimation of the status quo in a specific denomination. In a discussion of this phenomenon the problem of the *analogia entis* - *analogia fidei* becomes relevant. For a historical view on this tendency of equating the work of the Spirit with the status quo, there is an interesting paper of Verryn (in Vorster, p 1 ff). He demonstrates that the sociological theories of social equilibrium and social conflict can both serve as models to describe this aspect of pneumatology.

Of course, the above problem not only applies to denominations but also to individuals and societies: Can any mythical or ethical experience be a legitimation of faith? Here we have to do with the problem of the *sylogismus practicus* (Vorster, p 98).

2 As easy as it is to point out the above problem, so difficult it is to solve. This difficulty can be grasped by introducing a further problem area: What is the relation between the Spirit of God and the human spirit? With regard to this question a development within the Bible can be observed. In Gen 2:7 God blew his Spirit into Adam and he became a living soul. In Paul we read that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit (Rom 8:16). Thus it seems that in Genesis the Spirit of God

and the spirit of man are identical, whereas a distinction is made in Romans. Schweizer maintains that the anthropology of the OT (soul and body are not opposites, but merely aspects of the same human being) was influenced by the Platonic dualism of body and soul during the intertestamental period. This contrast was adapted by Paul in his theology and came to be understood as contrasting spheres of power. The Stoic idea of an all-pervading spirit was implemented to describe the connection between the Spirit and creation. Various writers (especially Schweizer) emphasize the freedom of the Spirit, His strangeness, the fact that one never can claim to have the Spirit in an absolute sense. In this regard the Spirit must be seen as that which binds us to the Stranger who was crucified and arose on the third day and which makes Him a present reality in our lives.

3 A third problem area, corresponding with the one mentioned above, is the question as to how the Spirit manifests Himself in the life of the believer and the church. In this regard Schweizer represents the one side of the spectrum and Judisch the other. The latter champions the views of the reformers in an articulate and thought-provoking manner: He views "apostles" and "prophets" as synonymous concepts in the NT. He further differentiates between the extraordinary "prophetic" charismata, which was (according to him) only given to the apostles (2 Cor 12:12) and the normal charismata. In order to demonstrate that the prophetic charismata were only given up to the completion of the canon, he quotes 1 Cor 13:10, maintaining that *to teleion* refers to the completion of the canon. (He is of the opinion that *teleion* cannot refer to the eternal bliss because then faith and hope would not be operative, as apparent in verse 13). Judisch maintains that the Holy Spirit was only given by the laying on of hands by the apostles (Acts 8:4-25, v p 33). He also gives a stimulating explanation of the mysterious phrase in 1 Cor 14:21-1 that tongues are "a sign ... to unbelievers". From the OT he demonstrates that strange tongues were predicted as a punishment on the sins of Israel which would take effect in the last days. He therefore uses this phrase to underline the uniqueness of tongues in the salvation history.

Judisch's conclusions do not however answer all questions. In his thought there is a certain contradiction: On the one hand he reduces glossolalia to a supernatural phenomenon only given to and practised by the apostles. On the other hand he accepts that speaking in tongues is a general psychological phenomenon, e g in India and Tibet (vide p 15f). Is there really no rela=

tionship between the two phenomena?

Another problem with the view of Judisch is that he, together with so-called charismatics, identifies the tongues in Corinth with the languages in Acts - disregarding the difference between them, viz that the former is always in need of an interpreter. The consequences are inevitable: whereas the charismatics proceed to interpret the languages in Acts from what they understand about the tongues in Corinth, Judisch does exactly the opposite. To my mind there is a high probability that the tongues in Corinth could have been a continuation of the ecstatic mysticism of the pagan religions (in a more or less christianized form). The interesting point here, is that Paul did not forbid it completely, but tried to reduce it to the critical minimum (1 Cor 14:27, 39).

Should Judisch pursue his viewpoint to its logical conclusion, he would have to denounce contemporary glossolalia as the work of Satan, which I am not sure he would be prepared to do. On the other hand Schweizer represents the more moderate view. He maintains that there is no hierarchy of gifts. He views childlike spontaneity (glossolalia included) and normalcy as complementary to one another, and thus he opens the door for a (restricted) practice of the extraordinary charismata in the congregation, adding that the Spirit is free but does not act arbitrarily, ordinary but at the same time extraordinary. "Perhaps the most crude and surprising manifestation of this freedom occurs when a person no longer needs to shine in his religious life" (p 96).

4 A further problem which coincides with the above, is the question as to the precise relation between the Spirit of God and the human subconscious. One contributor mentions that astonishingly little has been published on this subject, probably because of the relative late discovery of the subconscious. Nevertheless this discovery was and is destined to have its effect on biblical anthropology and pneumatology. It can undoubtedly be said that the Holy Spirit has a purifying effect on the subconscious. Precisely in which way this happens or should happen, depends on the hermeneutical approach followed. This was demonstrated strikingly by the opposing opinions about speaking in tongues, discussed previously.

Several authors reveal a sophisticated insight into the speaking in tongues as a modern psychological phenomenon. Bryant is quoted on the therapeutic value of glossolalia, especially its use in liberating people from neuroses which they contracted

before the age of speech. Mention is also made that there are some emotions which cannot be expressed in normal rational language - for which tongues may be an adequate expression. That this is a function of modern glossolalia was proven by the research of Qualben who found that although charismatics who claim the gift of interpretation were consistently willing to "interpret" his tapes of "utterances in tongues" by other charismatics, no two "interpretations" of the same utterance agreed (Judisch, p 15). The thorny question remains however whether modern glossolalia can be equated with the tongues in Corinth.

5 A last problem area which is of importance in the ongoing discussion, is the extent to which the Bible is relevant to a study of pneumatology. In the publication of UNISA a whole article is devoted to this question, at the end of which the respondent still remains unsure as to whether Scripture is relevant to a dogmatic study of the Spirit. Most scholars would agree that the doctrine of the economic trinity has a biblical base, though this is not the case with the doctrine of the immanent trinity. Barth and Noordmans attempted to fuse both doctrines, but the question remains to what extent the Bible was relevant to this experiment.

On another level, a theologian's view of Scripture has influence on what he teaches about the Holy Spirit. This point is illustrated by the differences between the diachronic study of Schweizer and the synchronic studies of Judisch and Kline. It is an open question to what extent their vision of the Holy Spirit was influenced by their methods.

These are only a few of the many interesting and stimulating aspects discussed in these four studies. Without doubt it can be concluded that the present interest in the Spirit will continue. In the meantime we cannot search the Scripture intensively enough, nor be too original in our thinking about the Spirit.

J A Loubser

Robert C Walton (ed) 1980 *A Basic Introduction to the New Testament*. London: SCM. SBN: 334 00073 4 (First published as parts One and Four of *A Source Book of the Bible for Teachers*, edited by Robert C Walton, SCM, 1970). 17 x 20 cm, 237 pp, 13 illustrations. R8.40

The first one and a half paragraphs of my comments on the com=

panion volume apply to this volume as well. The aspects covered in the 11 chapters on the New Testament are the following: Jewish religious life and ways of thinking, Roman administration, the first three Gospels (the way they were written, and the message conveyed by each), miracles, the ministry and the message of Jesus, Paul (his world and his thought), the Gospel according to John, the early church (Acts, life in the early church, literature from the growing church).

In the case of this volume I would list the following as important emphases. The initial position of the chapter on Jewish religious life in the 1st century stresses the importance of understanding their attitudes towards temple, Torah and synagogue, and also their groupings and sects. The next chapter enables the reader to envisage the Roman scene (especially the roles of the Roman administrators) and the futile Jewish uprisings against Roman supremacy. Then, before the Gospels and their messages are discussed, there is a brief chapter on "Accepted Ideas in First-Century Palestine". The sequence of the following chapters emphasizes the importance of some clear thinking about the Gospels (only the first three, however) and miracles before surveying the ministry of Jesus. And only then does one reach the substantial (longest in the book) chapter on the message of Jesus. In Paul's case a similar arrangement is used: thinking and believing in the Graeco-Roman world, the life and ministry of Paul, the thought of Paul. John's purpose and thought are emphasized against the background of his Gospel, and in the light of its structure. In the final chapter various accents about the early church (Acts, events depicted in Acts 1-11, life in the early church, pastoral and catholic letters, Hebrews and Revelation) are grouped together. An interesting insight into the diversity of early Christianity is provided by this whole chapter, and especially by some of its data and quotations.

My comments on the lay-out and coherence of this volume (with, in this case, its 13 chapters, 185 sections, 8 authors) are almost the same as in the case of the companion volume. Obviously, however, chronological design has not been necessary here, while the various chapters could reveal a greater amount of independence.

As positive criticism I would offer the same suggestions (as in the case of the companion volume), with special emphasis on the first two. With regard to my second comment, about the emphasis on meaning, I must add that I was slightly disappointed with the number of loose ends in the crucial chapter on the

message of Jesus. I agreed with what is said (on p 135) about "a new way of life and a new kind of religion" which Jesus proclaimed, and about its negative side ("To reject the policy of preserving national identity by strict obedience to the Law"). When I then read that the question about the "positive message" may be answered by examining five elements of Jesus' message, I eagerly looked forward to what was to follow. On the next 18 pages I then found a very interesting variety, but no attempt to give the reader a single page insight into the salient features of the "positive message".

On the whole, however, I can strongly recommend this pair of basic introductions. They may certainly guide "students, clergy and other interested readers" towards a better understanding of the Old and the New Testament, and motivate their readers to keep on exploring the meaning revealed through the books of the Bible.

J C Malan

Anderson, Bernhard W 1978³ *The Living World of the Old Testament*. London: Longman. ISBN 0-582-48597-5; 0-582-48598-3 pbk. (Published in the USA by Prentice-Hall under the title *Understanding the Old Testament*. First editions published in 1957 (USA) and 1958 (Great Britain). In the 3rd edition some chapters have been "almost completely recast", while all the others have been revised.) 17,5 x 22.5 cm, xiv + 649 pp, 70 photographs, 17 maps, 10 chronological charts, as well as a comprehensive chronological chart, 12 key charts and tables.

For an illuminating understanding of the life-story of ancient Israel one has to enter imaginatively into the world in which their faith took shape. In a very effective way Prof Anderson (Old Testament Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary) guides his reader into this world, introducing him to twenty-one centuries of living and thinking, believing and communicating. The author has used the method of "interweaving the oft-separated elements of historical and archaeological research, literary criticism, and biblical theology." This may sound quite complicated, but he has succeeded in presenting a well-integrated explanation and discussion. If, here and there, the reader has to concentrate more intently, it is mainly due to the com=

plexities of the historical drama itself (for example, where the northern and southern kingdoms, external powers, and prophets are all involved in a certain situation or period). Although the author deliberately sticks to the historical approach in spite of contemporary propaganda for other methods (like structuralism), he does include significant references to linguistic issues (such as word choice, sentence and period structure).

The method of blending the findings of several fields of Old Testament research into such an interpretative account is, to my mind, of very special value. To me the reading of this book has catalysed a remarkable experience. I often felt transported into the ways of thinking and believing of the men and women of those ancient times. The method, wording and style of the book often caused me to sense the thrill of being *there*. In my imagination I participated in an event of covenant renewal. Or I envisaged the vacillation of a king confronted with a decision between apparent political opportunities and contradicting prophetic advice. For myself I have made a full-page list of the insights which interest me most - about the Exodus, the Sinai event and other events, about confessions of faith and relationships of faith, about outward appearances and inner convictions, to name only a few that can be briefly mentioned.

The six hundred pages of this volume are filled with a wealth of information and interpretation (while footnotes add still more interesting ideas that may be pursued). The eighteen chapters are arranged in three parts: The Covenant Community is Formed; Israel Becomes Like the Nations; The Covenant Community is Renewed. The chapters themselves have meaningful captions, like, for example: Covenant in the Wilderness; The Struggle Between Faith and Culture; The Rediscovery of Mosaic Torah. With numerous headings and sub-headings within the chapters, and a detailed subject index (as well as an author index), it is easy to find any particular section. The book is intended to be studied in conjunction with the Old Testament itself, and references are given in profusion (as well as biblical readings recommended at the beginning of each chapter). For further reading an up-to-date, topically arranged, annotated, "selected" bibliography is given, with no less than 415 titles!

Understanding of the living world of the various succeeding periods is facilitated by many photographs of good quality, each with several lines of accompanying information. Ten well-designed chronological charts are given at the appropriate posi-

tions in the text and at the end of the book these are combined into a comprehensive chart covering 5 pages. All the useful tables, diagrams and maps provide further valuable aid to the reader.

The volume is attractively and sturdily bound, and has a colourful and perspective-laden photograph of Mount Sinai on the front cover. The lay-out of the pages is well-planned, and with the interesting variety of units, illustrations, charts, tables and maps, it provides pleasant reading. For a book conveying so much in quantity and especially in quality the price is quite reasonable.

Although a reader may question some of the findings of historical and literary research, the author has a way of avoiding an offensive self-assurance. In various ways it seems as if he is reminding the reader that our reconstructions cannot be decisively proved. He does emphasize, however, how the (almost) generally accepted reconstruction of Israel's life-story and communication-story enables us to obtain most surprising glimpses into their ways of thinking and believing. And this can only contribute to our better understanding of the Old Testament - its diverse books and parts, and its total impact.

J C Malan

FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE QUEST FOR THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

Sandeen, Ernest R 1978 *The roots of fundamentalism. British and American millenarianism, 1800-1930.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Bookhouse. 328 pp.

Barr, James 1980 *The scope and authority of the Bible (Explorations in Theology No 7).* London: SCM Press, 150 pp.

In our complex and diverse South African society, theologians and church leaders seem to be increasingly at odds with one another as to whether the Bible has a clear and unambiguous message for our situation. I personally am convinced that we have here - in the face of an ever increasing cultural relativism - an urgent quest for what has become known to Christian scholars as the authority of the Bible.

The above two books, each in its own way contributing greatly to this important discussion, have recently been brought to my

attention. Both authors stress the importance of knowing the history of ideas that have shaped not only our religious lives, but also our theological thought. Sandeen's book does not analyse the problem of fundamentalism and the fundamentalistic view of scriptural authority, but instead gives an excellent historical account of the way in which the roots of all fundamentalism go deep into nineteenth century British and American millenarianism.

Professor Barr's book is a collection of papers, some previously unpublished, that raise important questions about the nature, use and context of theological study of the Bible. The dominant theme throughout is the important question as to whether the Bible still has any specific authority in our day. Other important related issues are also discussed, for example questions as to whether the Bible can be seen as a political document, and what the relationship is between historical criticism and theological interpretation. Barr also explores the place of story in biblical theology, the character of the Bible as literature and also takes further his well-known criticism of fundamentalistic thought.

Within this context it is, however, the inevitable and threatening spectre of fundamentalism when developing a theory of biblical authority, that eventually constitutes the main theme of Professor Barr's argument.

Barr clearly and rightly states that it is not fundamentalism to think that the Bible and its doctrine should be the absolute controlling authority of the doctrine of the church and the practice of Christians. However, fundamentalism begins when people start to say that the doctrinal and practical authority of scripture is necessarily tied to its infallibility and in particular its historical inerrancy (p 65). The centre of all fundamentalistic thought is thus rightly identified as the insistence that the control of doctrine and practice by Scripture is dependent on something like a general perfection of Scripture, and therefore its historical inerrancy. This always, of course, involves the repudiation of the results of modern critical modes of reading the Bible.

Professor Barr also - in an enlightening way - points out that fundamentalists normally associate themselves with 'evangelical' and/or 'orthodox' positions: but even if 'evangelical' or 'orthodox' is the desired identity, the *ideology* still remains the fundamentalist one (p 67). And the real threat of such an ideological position is that the doctrines of scripture and

scriptural infallibility easily become devices which ensure that Scripture will speak only in terms of this conservative ideology. Seeking to *protect* the authority of scripture, fundamentalist theologians in this way ironically impose on scripture a human religious tradition. Barr, in his own way, thus exposes the power of uncritical theory - formation in all fundamentalist thought.

Barr also, throughout this book, stresses the fact that the only way in which we could possibly recover the sense of Scripture today, is by asking what it *really means*: what the true nature and function of Scripture - according to its own character - is. In the final paper, entitled "The Bible as a document of believing communities", Barr gives a thorough and quite fascinating account of this. Only as a critical scholar of the biblical text can the Christian theologian hope to probe - in a provisional way - the true intended meaning of the written text.

In the important fourth paper, "Has the Bible any authority?", Barr therefore rightly accentuates that the important question is not *whether* the Bible has authority or not, but *why* it has authority and *how*: in what measure, for what purposes and in what relations.

In his constant opposition to fundamentalism, Barr correctly points out that the authority of the Bible does not depend on its historical inerrancy or so-called 'supernatural' character: the Bible has authority because its authority, in some form or other, is built into the structure of Christian faith and the Christian religion (p 52). One could also put it this way: the Bible, as a document of believing communities, functions and lives in the relationship between God and man. Being a Christian means - among other things - being tied up with the God of the Bible, with biblical ideas of God and traditions about him, with Jesus Christ, about whom almost our only source of guidance lies in the Bible as primary written source.

Barr therefore quite correctly points out that the Bible is involved in all this not, in the first place, as a 'true book which contains true information about God and other persons: the Bible primarily has a *soteriological function*, and Scripture provided for Jesus himself the intellectual framework within which he conceptualized his own mission and message.

Barr therefore is altogether accurate when he time and again stresses that biblical authority is part of a faith-attitude

(p 54), and that our acceptance of the authority of the Bible is one part of our faith in God. I personally feel that Barr could here have given a much clearer indication of the fact that as a result of this involvement in a faith-attitude, conceptualization and theory-formation are even at the most primitive level always playing a vital role in the construction of the idea of biblical authority. He does, however, clearly point out that the authority of the Bible does not rest upon any values or virtues perceptible from a vantage-point from outside that faith-relation (p 54). In this way the Bible can be seen as the instrument and the expression of faith, rather than the object of faith.

I can therefore only agree with professor Barr when he concludes: *the authority of the Bible lies in the meeting with Christ, which is mediated through these scriptures.*

Thus the authority of the Bible does not function in a too simple and inductive way. That means, we do not derive from the Bible information that in itself authorizes or gives the foundation for such and such a doctrinal or ethical position. Rather, our doctrinal and ethical positions have as their point of origin a total vision, a conception of what Christian life, action and society should be like (cf p 62).

Barr consequently also examines the concept of *inspiration*. He believes this term can be revitalized and used for our time (p 63f). If, however, this was to be done, it would have to be made clear that inspiration of this sort had nothing to do with the guaranteeing of historical accuracy or with any infallibility of a fundamentalistic kind. Today, he rightly points out, the concept "inspiration of Scripture" can only be a theological affirmation of the faith that God had been with his people in the formation of the thoughts, and memories and instructions which finally came to constitute our Bible. The dynamic possibilities of this is then worked out in the final essay, where the Bible in an absorbing analysis is typified as a document for believing communities.

W van Huyssteen

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

White, R E O 1981 *The Changing Continuity of Christian Ethics*
 Vol 2: *The Insights of History*. Exeter: Pater-
 noster Press. R13.39

At long last there is an encouraging trend in Biblical studies to accept a responsibility towards social and ethical issues. This

raises the problem of the availability of reliable and practical textbooks. R E O White's book answers both these requirements.

One of the most serious questions raised by the study of ethical issues is the question of relativity. Faced with the seemingly endless variety of responses to such issues one can easily succumb to a fully subjectivistic and therefore relativistic approach. Moreover, when the history of ethics is taken into consideration, such an approach seems to be the only logical one. Essentially this is the question to which White addresses himself. "The question that has confronted Christian ethics through nineteen hundred years is ...: 'How is it possible to change, so continuing to be relevant, while remaining the same, so continuing to be Christian?'"

Instead of embarking on a highly theoretical course, White proceeds to find an answer to this question by examining the insights of history. In so doing, he introduces the reader to an almost overwhelming amount of primary material. Amongst others the patristic writers, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin and a host of post-Enlightenment writers are discussed and, wherever possible, quoted extensively. All along White disciplines himself not to pay excessive attention to the theoretical and theological foundation on which the various exponents based their ethics. This leaves room for extensive coverage of the various opinions on special topics such as marriage, slavery, military service, wealth, usury, etc.

What renders the book rather fascinating is the fact that White seems to be able to find a basic coherence in all this. For a rather short exposition of this view on the essential continuity one has to read through more than three hundred pages. But long before the final chapter is reached it becomes evident that the writer sees more of a unity than a diversity in the history of Christian ethics. And what is more, he sees this unity in the entire history of Christian ethics - including people such as Erasmus, Kant, Wesley and Bultmann. No one is therefore singled out, either for reproach or for commendation - no one, with the exception of Fletcher whose situation ethics is vehemently attacked as the prime example of the relativistic approach.

The continuity and unity which White finds in the history of Christian ethics is the ever recurring theme of the *imitatio Christi*. This is not understood as an endeavour to duplicate the mind or life of Christ in a direct way. Instead ... "palaeological accuracy is not essential to Christlikeness -

because the *imitatio Christi* proceeds upon another level". What that level is, is unfortunately not expounded adequately. We will have to wait for volume 3 in this series.

The nett result indicates that White has accumulated a wealth of material, interspersed with a great number of comments on selected issues (although the intention was not to deal with special issues in their own right) and brought together on the assumption that almost all of it is relevant to our present era. It is a positive approach which should help to alleviate the present despondency with regard to ethical issues, due to the influence of a spirit of relativism. Given the nature of the subject matter - ethics as seen from the historical point of view but not with the aim of writing a history of christian ethics - this book is a remarkable feat. More so because the uninitiated will also benefit by studying it.

Johann Kinghorn