

REVIEWS

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY FOR TODAY. Edited by Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer. (S.C.M. Press; 18s.)

The title on the cover of this book needs correction by the words added on the title-page: 'A . . . symposium on "the Biblical authority for the Churches' social and political message today".' The publishers inform us that it was prepared under the auspices of the Study Department of the World Council of Churches. It includes seventeen articles by Anglicans and Protestants and two by Eastern Orthodox professors.

The first seven articles are on the authority of the Bible in general, and here there is a broad contrast between Dr Bratsiotis's statement of the Orthodox view and all the other contributions in this section. Dr Bratsiotis states the nature of Biblical authority and its relation to that of the Church in a way completely acceptable to Catholics. He of course identifies the true Church with his own Eastern Orthodox Church and to this extent contradicts Catholic teaching. But he makes the valuable point that 'the Orthodox Church unanimously rejects the "Branch Theory".'

It would be easy, and not very profitable, to point out that the non-Orthodox contributors to this volume, while they all differ from the Orthodox, are profoundly divided among themselves on the basic issues of Biblical authority. On the other hand, the interesting fact seems to emerge that the dogmatic theologians of the Protestant communions are more conservative of traditional doctrine (often the specific doctrines of their own tradition, whether Lutheran or Calvinist) than Protestant Biblical criticism and scholarship might lead one to expect. And there is a fairly general tendency to find the ultimate criterion not in human reason but in the internal witness of the Holy Spirit—a profoundly Catholic tendency, though lacking certain Catholic safeguards.

The Biblical scholars come into their own in Parts Two and Three. The former consists of a masterly survey of the present position in matters of scholarship and interpretation; this is by Dr Wolfgang Schweitzer, one of the book's editors. Part Three is enriched by a short essay from Dr C. H. Dodd entitled 'The Relevance of the Bible'. This is a little gem of interpretation and I find little to criticise in it except an apparent alignment of the Church's experiences with those of the Old Testament People of God as (only?) 'shadowings' of the Gospel, and a single phrase ('the symbolic myth of Doomsday') which may be meant to cover Mr Dodd's own (too thorough-going) theory of

'realised eschatology'. There is a consensus among the contributors that the whole Bible is to be read in the light of Christ, its climax, and that in seeking guidance from it on any point the right method is to start with the New Testament, to go back to the Old Testament, and then to revert to the New Testament again.

I am bound to admit that the volume's contribution to its specific theme (Biblical authority in the social and political issues of today) seems to me somewhat jejune. The reason is one of which the authors are more or less aware. The Bible is in itself a dead thing, a collection of books each with its own *Sitz im Leben* in the distant past, a dumb oracle for the particular questionings of successive ages. It proclaims in general the primacy of the spirit, the supremacy of God, the imperative of conscience and the 'law' of charity. But to apply such principles in the changing contingencies of history is the task of the Church through its members and its *magisterium*. There is one point, in conclusion, on which I should have welcomed clearer or more persistent emphasis. Man's social and political obligation are not in a sphere apart from that of his personal sanctification—as though I were called upon to be charitable in my 'private life' but just in my civic behaviour. Rather, charity is the 'law' of my whole activity as a man, and must therefore control my social, economic, political and cultural relations. The State and civil society are real only in the interrelated individual-persons whom they comprise, and it is dangerous, even unconsciously, to hypostatise the State as though it were a sort of human non-charitable Church. The only society which may be said in a real sense to transcend its visible and living constituent members is the Church herself, the Body of Christ indwelt by his Spirit.

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THE OLD TESTAMENT AND MODERN STUDY. Edited by H. H. Rowley.
(Clarendon Press; 25s.)

The Society for Old Testament Study has produced a volume of essays dealing with discovery and research in the last thirty years. The contributors are specialists of the front rank; but all belong to English- or German-speaking countries, and none is a Catholic. Each in his particular field gives a thorough, though very condensed, account of the new material that has come to light, of new methods of study, and of development or changes of opinion among scholars, at least Liberal-Protestant scholars, during a generation.

The bulk of the essays will be of use chiefly to specialists. Meanwhile, of greater concern to most of us is the editor's Introduction, a bird's-eye view of the whole field; the essay on 'Old Testament Theology' by Professor Porteous; and one might add the Epilogue entitled 'The Old