

demonstrates the fertility of such an approach, and in the history of interpretations the syntheses are the only ones which are remembered. So the studies of Fr Benoit are in some ways exemplary: if they date, they are not for that reason out of date. They even represent, from this point of view, a challenge to all those who attempt to re-read and to comment on the written witnesses to our christian origins.

The English translation is successful: accurate, while managing to preserve the limpid and fresh style of the original. Even so, it is worth knowing that 'en effet' in French does not mean 'in fact' but 'for, indeed' (cf. e.g. p. 23, n. 3). Moreover, it is regrettable that so many of the passages in Greek have been inaccurately reproduced (there are at least 7 mistakes on page 94).

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BUILT AS A CITY: God and the Urban World Today, by David Sheppard. Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1974. 380 pp. £3.25.

The Church of England has never had all that much impact in the working class areas of inner London. David Sheppard's concern is with why this should be so, and what should be done about it.

First he describes the development of inner London, particularly West Ham, which he knows, and the inequalities and insecurity in income, housing, education and employment involved. Against this he sets the history of the Church's concern. In the country and the suburbs it cultivated its own garden. In the city it ran Sunday schools, provided debilitating charity for the poor, and backed Sunday Observance and Temperance campaigns. Only the middle classes were considered capable of leadership. (Still the case—many parishes rely on middle class people even after they have moved out of the district.) Always, too, there were the bogies of socialism and communism.

Though the Church's efforts are not to be dismissed, the devastating comment of a letter written in 1859 from the Victoria Docks is inescapable: 'If those kindly disposed gentlemen who are trying to civilise us barbarians by means of schools and missionaries will assist us to get the drainage to which we are entitled, I think we could almost civilise ourselves'. It's a remark that explains well enough from one point of view why the working class has generally found something better to do than get involved with the Church.

The problem of a gospel 'wrapped up in a middle class ethic' is a problem for all the Churches, and not just in London. (The phrase itself is taken from a description of French Catholicism). It isn't only the Church of England that attracts the 'nicer' kind of people who are improving themselves. ('As a Christian you lose your identity', one reluctant working class lad is quoted as saying). As Sheppard points out, Methodism abandoned the working class long ago, when it deliberately went respectable—and Wesley himself never had any great following in London. Nor has the Catholic Church ever had much effect on the indigenous population.

What is to be done? Sheppard has his dream of equality and of the city being everyone's community. He argues that all schooling should

be embraced in one comprehensive system run by the state. He almost makes this the solution, but not quite. In fact on solving the problems of the city he is rather muddled. He cannot reconcile his talk of participation and partnership with his observation of the facts. So at one moment he is saying some people are powerless and others must lose some of their power. At another he calls on 'sectional interests' to take each other's insights seriously as partners, as if they were after all equally powerful. 'Attitudes are more important than structures', he says and in the end his proposal is for 'sacrificial political change' on the part of the better off.

The book is muddled because of its considerable length and discursiveness. It could well have been pruned. The author is a bishop of evangelical tendencies—he preaches somewhat and goes in for being understanding. (If people are frustrated he knows they lash out.) He rather goes in for jargon too. People are constantly doing such things as being stretched to think about their experience (with the right sort of enabling support) until ultimately they achieve the stretching experience of being bridge people.

Sheppard has his dream for the Church in the city too. Each local church should put its resources at the disposal of the district it is in (whether or not there is a church-going response) and match itself to the local culture and needs. This means team ministry and ordaining local people without imposing the present stereotype of clerical training. It also means people must refuse to give too much time to internal church activities and those who move away from an area should leave things to those who remain. The wider Church, for its part, is to see the urban areas as its priority and use its influence on their behalf—here are the beginnings of sacrificial change on the part of the better off.

However it is just a dream, both for the city and the Church. 'We are meanwhile to set ourselves limited aims. . .'. It's all safe enough after all. But until the Churches actually do something to show that they mean to make their dreams come true it is difficult to see why the majority of people should not continue to regard them as irrelevant.

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