

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT by Robert M. Grant. *Hutchinson University Library, 15s.*  
 HISTORICITY AND CHRONOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. *Theological Collections 6. S.P.C.K., 17s. 6d.*

The title of Professor Grant's book is to be taken quite literally: it deals, not with how the New Testament books came to be written or redacted, but how they came to form the collection which many Christians take for granted. The greater the role which the New Testament plays in establishing the authoritative basis of the Christian religion, the more crucial is the problem of the canon, i.e. the problem of understanding when, where, why and how these and only these books came to be regarded as sharing in the privileged status accorded to the Old Testament scriptures in the early Church. For many modern theologians – Protestant ones, for the most part, whose views were recently summed up by Kurt Aland in *The Problem of the New Testament Canon* – this historical question is only half of the real problem of canonicity. The other half is that of determining what attitudes the modern Christian should have to the various parts of the New Testament. Professor Grant does not treat this question directly, but he rightly sees that the two halves of the canonical problem are intimately connected. An understanding of the history is an essential basis for modern theological attitudes. For most Catholics the New Testament canon is beyond question, on dogmatic rather than historical grounds. But in these days of renewed interest in the Scripture and tradition discussions, now happily with an ecumenical orientation, Catholics should welcome this very readable account of the historical process and rethink its bearing upon their own acceptance of what is contained in the New Testament.

The formation of the canon is presented here as a study in the life of the early Church, and for that reason the book should not be thought a narrow investigation of a very limited topic. The major part of the book deals with the second century, a period in which Professor Grant is an undisputed authority. This was the main formative stage, although some questions were not settled until centuries later. The author emphasizes the role of the Gentile Christians, especially the Alexandrians, in the development of a collection of New Testament writings to rival

those of the Old Testament and even surpass them in authority.

The latest of the SPCK Theological Collections contains ten essays which describe or reflect contemporary views on the perennial problems of historicity and chronology in the Gospels and Acts. All but two of the papers (by Professor Nineham and Archbishop Ramsey) seem to have been written expressly for this volume, and they are by no means less welcome for that. Together they make the book a valuable survey of recent developments and present positions. Historicity seems to be an inevitable hurdle in modern discussions of the Gospels; the vast amount of recent literature referred to by the authors of these essays is a vivid reminder that it is a central and pressing question. And if there is any one thing on which most of them agree, it is that nineteenth-century historicism has no place in Gospel criticism today – the name of von Ranke and his notorious dictum 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist' recur in this book like the refrain in a choral ode. In many ways the most provocative essay here is that of Professor Nineham. From a historical survey of the question of the historical Jesus he moves through a sympathetic defence of Bultmann (without being a 'Bultmannian') to an avowal of his own convictions in relation to the 'new quest of the historical Jesus'. To many readers he may seem content with too little interest in the historical element, but there is much to be learned from the very personal way in which he relates his own quest to a living faith.

Historicity and chronology can be strange bedfellows. In a sense, to include discussions of the chronological problems of the New Testament, such as George Ogg's survey of the problem of dating the Last Supper, implies a fairly definite position in regard to historicity. But this is not a criticism. What gives a collection like this its value is the fact that it represents a variety of points of view. And in the matter of putting the minds of each generation at rest about what really did happen, or to what extent we can know it, there will probably always be sharply divergent points of view.

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