

assistant and took over the completion of the revision on his death in 1968, has, it would seem, conscientiously attempted in the bibliographies to remedy the imbalances I have mentioned in the articles, but for the all-round man, with limited academic antennae, these are inadequate remedies. If, then, the new edition of the dictionary is to be assessed according to the basic criterion of the revisers—that here should be a pool in which ‘lambs may walk and elephants swim’—it would be fair to say that the elephants have been served well:

the scholar checking on points of fact lying just outside his own field will be glad for what he is told about, say, *Biblia Pauperum* and will not need to worry about what is said or not said about either hermeneutics or Jesus people. The lambs, on the other hand, have not had quite such a good deal. But can their needs, perhaps, only be adequately met by a radically different type of dictionary—one not based on Oxford presuppositions?

JOHN ORME MILLS, O.P.

THE VIRGINAL CONCEPTION AND BODILY RESURRECTION OF JESUS, by Raymond E. Brown. *Geoffrey Chapman*, London, 1973. £1.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED? by H. J. Richards. *Collins Fontana*, London, 1973. 40p.

What *really* happened? What in reality took place at the Incarnation and the Resurrection? Both Brown and Richards are quick to point out the two-pronged nature of this question. For there are two aspects of ‘reality’ to be considered: the historical, biological, physical reality—the facts and phenomena which could have been objectively recorded; and, secondly, the theological reality which, though necessarily based on some fact or phenomenon, can often only be expressed in a non-literal, poetic mythologising (i.e. as theologumena). There is no difficulty in accepting that the Gospel writers are presenting a theological interpretation of the Incarnation and Resurrection, but there is currently great difficulty among scholars (and unease among the non-scholars, both lay and clerical) about how far the writers are also presenting an account which they believed to be literally and objectively ‘true’. That something is described primarily at the theological level does not necessarily mean that the account is wholly or in part a theologumenon and makes no claim whatsoever to literal accuracy. But what are the criteria for distinguishing between theologumena and historical events which *per se* have a theological meaning? To ask what really happened raises the larger critical issue of the interdependence of event and interpretation, an issue which both writers allude to but which neither adequately discusses.

The unease felt by many in the Church stems from a feeling that we do not, or should not, need to ask what really happened. The Church has consistently taken the Gospel texts at their face value for almost two millennia; to probe and question can be seen as tantamount to doubt and even (whisper the word) neo-Modernism. It is significant that Brown devotes a 20-page Introduction to a

review of the changing fortunes of biblical scholarship within the Catholic Church in the past seventy years, a change that has seen *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili* heavily qualified by *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), a statement by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1955 (the text of which may be found in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 18: 1956, pp. 23-9), and the Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*, 1965). Whatever the unease of the average Catholic, the magisterium has come to realise that faith is deepened rather than destroyed by asking what really happened. Nor is the Church’s teaching as clear as many people imagine it to be. Brown makes the valuable point that although the virginal conception, to take one example only, can ‘according to the usual criteria applied in Roman Catholic theology . . . be classified as a doctrine infallibly taught by the ordinary magisterium’ (p. 75), the criteria employed by theologians of the past in classifying doctrines as *de fide ex ordinario magisterio* are not at all clear. Moreover, ‘study of theological manuals over the last one hundred years suggests that the criteria used in judgements about infallibility are not easily applicable; for not only do theologians disagree among themselves on whether or not a doctrine is infallible, but also a doctrine commonly classified as infallible in one era of manuals may no longer be so classified at a later period!’ (p. 36). Both Brown and Richards make the further point (and here Brown quotes Pope John’s opening speech to the Council) that ‘the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another’. It is the meaning of the Gospel-writers and the meaning of magisterial teaching which is important rather than the words and thought-modes in which it is phrased. To ask ‘What

really happened?' is to ask 'What is really being said?'. To assert that one should not ask what really happened is to assume that one has no need to know what is really being said both in the Gospels and in the teaching of the Church. A critical examination of the NT accounts of the Incarnation and the Resurrection is incumbent upon the Church if she is faithfully to preach the Gospel in today's world.

Those who conduct this critical examination have a heavy responsibility to the Church at large. It is perhaps not surprising that much can be said and written in 'scholarly circles' which, when said more plainly and publicly, is condemned as misleading, dangerous speculation, or downright contrary to accepted Catholic teaching. The plain and public statement can too easily lose the important critical nuances of the theologians and biblical scholars. Such is the case here. Raymond Brown has produced a very scholarly study which requires close, thoughtful reading. Hubert Richards has, as he himself says, set out to make the fruits of biblical scholarship—the work of people such as Brown—available to the wider public. Though not perhaps most people's idea of a bed-side book, the short paperback he has written demands relatively little from its reader. Much that it has to say is a valuable and accurate popularising of what the biblical scholars have been saying for some years. However, in the last analysis the book must be criticised as too slick, too dismissive of historicity, angels and a biologically virginal conception. Important, essential, nuances have been lost and the result is misleading. It is a book that, consequently, created a mild flutter when it appeared a year ago. Though one might not agree with Fr. Ripley that we should 'pray for the author's soul'—or at least not pray for it for Fr. Ripley's reason—one can well understand the anxious concern aroused. It is a great pity that.

for want of a little more care, Richards should have jeopardised the impact of a book which does so usefully transform the Infancy Narratives from children's stories to relevant and mature theology for the layman.

It is Brown's painstaking study of the biblical texts and concepts which gives the lie to those who want to see the virginal conception solely as a theologoumenon. Why should the early Church, which fostered this account, have so soon forgotten that it was a theologoumenon (if that is all it was) and have literalised the imagery? Pace a number of scholars (followed by Richards), there is no clear parallel either in the OT or other literature for a virginal conception; it is not the image that would have most readily suggested itself; and there is reasonable evidence that Jesus was accused of illegitimacy during his lifetime. These are all factors which need to be weighed against the silence of the NT (Matthew and Luke excepted) on the virginal conception and the variety of christologies proposed in the NT. There is no weighing of these factors in Richards' book.

Brown is equally thorough in his analysis of the various and varying accounts of the Empty Tomb and appearances of the Risen Lord. Here he is possibly more speculative than in his treatment of the virginal conception, proposing the hypothesis that Jesus appeared to Peter in Galilee and then subsequently to the apostles in Jerusalem. This reverses the equally hypothetical but widely accepted 'solution' that the Jerusalem appearances preceded those in Galilee. Whatever the order and location of the Resurrection appearances, Brown is convinced by the scriptural evidence of a risen, physical Jesus whose nature transcends space and time. And since the Gospel hangs upon this, not upon the 'how' of the Incarnation, the worried reader can take heart that his faith has not been proved to be in vain.

RICHARD PEARCE

THE THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, by W. G. Kümmel. *S.C.M. Press Ltd.*, London (New Testament Library), 1974. 30 pp. £3.80.

STUDIES IN PAUL'S TECHNIQUES AND THEOLOGY, by Anthony Tyrrell Hanson. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1974. xiv + 329 pp. £6.50.

The Theology of the New Testament is the third major work by Professor Kümmel to appear in English in the last few years. His *Introduction to the New Testament* is already a standard work, and his more recent *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems* is a fascinating and invaluable source book. This third volume, in contrast to the other two, offers us Professor Kümmel's own interpretation, instead of sur-

veying the views of other scholars. It is, indeed, remarkably free from reference to previous work: there are no footnotes and few quotations, and on the rare occasions when Professor Kümmel refers to modern authors, he gives no indication of source beyond the scholar's name. There is no index of modern authors.

It will be clear that the book is intended for the general reader, rather than the scholar.