

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS by John Ziesler. *SCM Press, London, and Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1989. Pp. xv + 382. £20. Hb. £9.50 Pb.*

The Epistle to the Romans has always fascinated commentators. Between 1532 and 1542, no fewer than twelve scholars published commentaries on the epistle (T.H.L. Parker, *Commentaries on Romans 1532—1542*, 1966, pp. vii—viii) and the 1960's have been just as prolific. The bemused layman might well ask why the volumes continue to pour forth. One reason, of course, is the new perspective on Paul associated in particular with the work of E.P. Sanders (though others before him had argued a similar case). No longer can Paul be assumed, as by innumerable commentators in the past, to be arguing for God's free forgiveness and grace in opposition to a legalistic system in which salvation was earned by good works: his problems and Luther's were not the same. Not surprisingly, the abandonment of a hermeneutical approach which has dominated exegesis for centuries has led to a reappraisal of Paul almost as fruitful as that of the Reformation itself.

In spite of the claim on the cover, Ziesler's is not the first major commentary on Romans to take account of this revolution in Pauline studies; James Dunn's massive two volume *Word Biblical Commentary* (published in the United States in 1968) preceded it. But certainly it is the first English commentary to appear at this level.

Ziesler's aim is 'to get underneath the centuries of interpretation, and to hear as far as possible what the original Romans heard when the letter was read to them' (p. 1). He deliberately passes over 'questions about the message the letter has for us today', leaving such matters to the reader of the commentary to answer. Some readers may be disappointed by this approach: the epistle emerges as what it is—a strange document written by a first-century writer with cultural experiences totally different from our own, dealing with theological problems as far removed from the Reformation as from our own era. No doubt the commentaries of Luther and Bultmann were more appealing to their readers because their authors were not afraid to identify Paul's situation with their own: Ziesler attempts to reconstruct Paul's theology in relation to his own particular first-century problems, and does not assume that he necessarily has an answer to ours.

In his introduction, Ziesler discusses the question of the purpose of the epistle: was it intended to deal with problems in Rome, or was it written as a presentation of Paul's theology? Whatever answer we give (and Ziesler opts for both!), the context of Romans is found in the problem of the relationship between Jew and Gentile within God's plan of salvation. Paul is anxious to establish that Jew and Gentile alike are in the same predicament, in need of the same gospel; the Jews' 'boasting' is not in any self-righteousness before God, but in their assumed superiority over Gentiles because of their possession of the Torah. Not surprisingly, Ziesler lays far more emphasis on a social interpretation of Paul's words than on their application to individuals: thus it is peoples (not individuals) who are unrighteous in 3.10; the object of the attack in 4 is 'not Jewish self-righteousness, but Jewish claims to privilege' (p. 125). Obedience to the Torah (signified by circumcision) is no longer the distinguishing mark of the people of God: the only criterion of righteousness is faith in Jesus Christ. Ziesler's own distinctive contribution to the interpretation of Romans draws on his earlier 202

work; on his well-known study of *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul* (1972); on his interesting notion that the tenth commandment, quoted in 7.7, in mind throughout the whole chapter; on his suggestion that the wild olive shoots *could* be grafted into an old tree to re-invigorate it. On one question at least, he has changed his mind: he now interprets 7.14–25 of pre-Christian experience, having concluded that Paul's negative statements are inappropriate for Christians: he is surely right. But, like many other judgements in this book, this conclusion is adopted 'tentatively' (p. 194); Ziesler is all too well aware of the arguments on either side. He is a cautious guide, courteous and unaggressive in his judgements. Some readers may wish that he had been more decisive in his comments; he states every point of view so fairly that sometimes one is not quite certain what Ziesler himself believes on a particular point: one wishes that he had been asked to offer his own translation, instead of commentating on the text of the R.S.V., for the necessity to translate forces one to make decisions.

Nevertheless, the commentary is to be warmly welcomed, as an excellent introduction for non-specialists to the new scholarly approach to Romans. Just one niggling doubt remains: granted that Ziesler is right in his emphasis on the fact that Paul is concerned with communities rather than individuals; and granted that he is right in accepting Sanders' evidence that first-century Judaism was not concerned with the idea of acquiring righteousness through merit: is there not, nevertheless, something to be said for the truth of the traditional interpretation? Certainly God's grace was primary for Judaism, and the Law was seen as the people's response to God's grace. But is it not an instinctive human reaction to imagine that those who are obedient to God's demand deserve divine favour? Were first-century Jews exempt from a temptation which befell nineteenth-century Protestants as well as sixteenth-century Catholics, or those of any age who imagine that their (comparative) innocence gives them a hold over God? Ought we to exclude the idea of merit quite so firmly from the discussion? And does not Paul's insistence on faith mean that the role of the individual within the community takes on greater significance? Perhaps the shift from the traditional interpretation will prove to be less dramatic than it seems!

MORNA D. HOOKER

JESUS CHRIST IN MODERN THOUGHT by John Macquarrie.
S.C.M. Press, London, 1990. Pp. 454. £17.50.

The title of this book may lead one to expect that it is entirely devoted to a survey of modern christology. In fact the book has a wider scope. It is divided into three parts. In the first part Macquarrie examines the christology of the New Testament; in the second part he summarizes various attitudes to Christ and various formulations of christology from the eighteenth century until today; in the third part he offers his own christology. He states the conclusion of Part 1 thus on p 147. 'Within the New Testament we can see development in the understanding and interpretation of the material, from the early adoptionism which told of a crucified man being made Lord and Christ by God, to the later incarnationism which told of the divine Word living as a human being in the midst of the human race'. Although MacQuarrie provides evidence for such development, I think that he invalidly follows James Dunn

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