

YAHWEH AND THE GODS OF CANAAN, by W. F. Albright. *University of London, Athlone Press, 1968.* 250 pp. 50s.

W. F. Albright is the Grand Old Man of biblical archaeologists, having directed an important series of excavations in Palestine in the thirties, and produced a flow of publications both learned and popular since, and indeed before, then. He has initiated a host of theories which, though not always universally accepted, have become famous and important, for example the damping contention that the camel was not domesticated until the twelfth century B.C. (he has some hard things to say in this book about the 'notorious stupidity' of the camel). As a teacher, too, he has produced a school of biblical historians, unmistakable in their fidelity to their master, who have diffused his findings in systematic form.

This book contains a series of lectures in comparative religion, delivered at the University of London in 1965, but brought up to date by eight pages of addenda concluded in 1967. It has the value—and the limitations—of all semi-popular works of a great and long-established scholar. There is a wealth of 'asides' and passing judgements on disputed topics. These may let in a flood of light by cutting through the tangles woven by a century of scholarship with one single authoritative stroke, thus: the discovery at Qumran of a divergent text of the Pentateuch 'makes the minute analysis of the Pentateuch which became fashionable after Wellhausen completely absurd' (p. 25); it is no longer possible to divide short passages or even individual verses among the various strands of the tradition, JEP. But too often the author, perhaps unconscious that a point still requires proof because he has long since proved it to his own satisfaction, merely states, so that the less-informed reader must be content with the *ipse dixit* of the great man; e.g. in the Pentateuch E is the official version of J 'intended for the Northern Kingdom' (p. 26 note)—a view which is far from self-authenticating.

The title might suggest that the book concen-

trates on the struggle between the faith of Israel and the Canaanite religion of the country into which Israel came. There is comparatively little directly on this topic. The real subject of the book is made clearer by the sub-title of the original lectures: 'An historical analysis of two contrasting faiths.' On this subject there is a vast amount of material assembled, some summarized in masterly fashion from discussions spread over decades, some new results of Professor Albright's own work. This makes, of course, for rather uneven reading. When the author is demonstrating his well-known thesis of the early date of much biblical poetry, by means of a comparison in structure to early Canaanite verse (and using this to argue that many prose accounts of the Bible are guaranteed by the presence, embedded in them, of fragments of archaic verse), then he is crystal clear and intelligible even to the layman. On the other hand a more than elementary knowledge of semitic philology is required to follow his discussion of the pantheon of Ugarit. For this reason the book is hard on an incautious reader: the elementary rubs shoulders with the highly technical, and the novel jostles the long accepted.

The argument of the book does not develop continuously, but rather—as one would expect from a series of lectures—different aspects are presented in each chapter. The first (Verse and prose in early Israelite tradition) is largely taken up with a comparison of Israelite and the Canaanite repetitive style. The comparison is full of interest for the origin of Israelite verse structure, and the repetitions and parallelism which are so characteristic of it; but the argument that such a structure soon disappeared, and that consequently poems where it is used must be early, seems dangerously nearly circular as it is presented (such a veteran professor usually has more up his sleeve, however). Some of the individual datings given are surely impossibly early: the Song of Miriam



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in Exodus 15 can hardly date from the first quarter of the thirteenth century (p. 10), even if we are to accept the extraordinary argumentation for the date of the exodus as 1297, based on a sudden drop in delivery of wine jars to Egyptian Thebes (pp. 136-138—the Hebrews are supposed to form a significant proportion of the royal vintagers and vintners). The second chapter—the Patriarchal background of Israel's faith—contains a wealth of documentation which helps greatly to fill out the picture of those enigmatic people the Habiru-'Apiru-Hebrews before their sojourn in Egypt. One might have expected an acknowledgement of de Vaux's major contribution in this field (RB 1946, 1948, 1949, 1965) more generous than the fleeting reference in a footnote (p. 78). The third chapter, on Canaanite religion in the Bronze Age, in fact confines itself rather disappointingly to a discussion, most valuable of the various pantheons of Syria-Palestine. Here the author has his own erudite and authoritative contribution to make, but it is a pity that he refuses to fill out the picture by launching 'a frail boat of conjecture upon the treacherous seas of mythological plots and religious observance' (p. 131). The fourth chapter is similarly fragmentary (The struggle

between Yahweh and the gods of Canaan). It contains some very interesting work on the dietary and hygienic rules of the Pentateuch (pp. 152-158), showing how they incorporate proto-scientific observations on causes of disease. There is also some interesting documentation on the survival in the vocabulary of biblical Hebrew of the 'débris of a past religious culture' (p. 161) now shorn of any religious content. But here a fuller discussion of the struggle on the level of religious practice would have been welcome, and on the gradual degradation of the pagan pantheon into subservient spirits, especially e.g. in Psalms 82-89 (one sentence on p. 167). The relevance of the final chapter (Religious cultures of Israel and Phoenicia in periodic tension) to Israel is less than it is to Phoenicia; but there is a good treatment of Molok-sacrifice (pp. 203-211), and some fascinating hints on Phoenician influences on Israelite wisdom literature (pp. 227-228).

On the whole this is a scholar's book, full of points of great value, the conclusions of the researches of a lifetime. It will serve as an invaluable quarry for future students of the subject.

HENRY WANSBROUGH, O.S.B.

THE CHURCH, by Hans Küng. *Burns & Oates, London, 1967. 515 pp. 84s.*

Here is an understanding of the Church which might well establish itself as a statement of the ecumenical consensus.

Surveying New Testament studies, Dr Küng achieves his aim of a 'short and systematic investigation of the beginnings of the Church, supported by the sound opinions of representative exegetes' (p. 77). It would be hard if names were omitted to know which citations were from Protestants and which from Catholics, unless guided by words of Roman Catholic coinage like 'salvific'!

The one Church, local and universal, is seen in pilgrimage through the interim period of the last days; it is not the Church but the consummated reign of God which is the goal of creation. Yet the Church is not a compromise solution to the problem raised by a non-fulfilment of Christian hopes; the Church is the herald of the Kingdom.

The crucial question is whether the Church shows itself to be the community of the Spirit. When, for all its faults, the Church does manifest the signs of the Spirit, this is not cause for pride or exclusiveness. The free Spirit of God 'can pass through all walls, even church

walls' (p. 176). The awareness of the Spirit's freedom must restrain all hasty judgement of others, Christians or non-Christians, and lead to a fresh awareness of the charismatic gifts which may appear in any member of the Church (the largest number of Scripture references in the book is from I Corinthians). The active presence of Christ in the Spirit is the ground of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The name 'the Lord's Supper' emphasizes that recognition of the active presence of the Lord is primary and the theological description of how it happens secondary. The truth that the Church is the body of Christ must not obscure the Church's encounter with the Lord. Christ has not 'abdicated in favour of a Church which has taken his place' (p. 239).

The dimensions of the Church, one, holy, Catholic and apostolic are presented in an eirenic and positive way. The fundamental schisms, East and West, Catholic and Protestant, 'can no longer be categorized by the concepts Church and heresy' (p. 276); 'to claim to be the whole . . . is to be guilty in a different way of perpetuating the division in