

Wisdom.²⁵ This book fills a glaring gap in popular literature on the bible for English-speaking Catholics. The seven books are Psalms, Canticles, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach and Wisdom. The author's clear and brief expositions of the theological message of each are informed with sound and unobtrusive scholarship, and he has several new insights to offer—as when the seven columns of Wisdom's house are identified with sections of the text of Proverbs, 1-9 (p. 14). Fr Murphy rightly insists on the importance of the 'Gunkel categories' for the psalms, and gives a clear explanation of these. His comparison of the imagery in Canticles with Egyptian love poems is particularly striking. The highly sophisticated language and style of Canticles do suggest, however, that it derives from a more cultivated and cosmopolitan post-exilic milieu than appears to be suggested here. The impracticability of reading Sirach through from start to finish is frankly faced, and a plan for reading based on a division according to topic, as in *Introduction à la Bible I*, will be found particularly useful. In a final conclusion the author briefly indicates the projection of the sapiential tradition from the Old Testament into the New.

Welsh Opinion: Ecumenical Developments

The most useful way of classifying religious bodies in Wales is according to their organization as Churches. The first main division is between the episcopal and the non-episcopal Churches. The former class contains the Catholic Church and the disestablished Church in Wales, while among the latter we may distinguish the denominations that have authoritative bodies at a level higher than that of the individual congregation, and those that do not. Among the former are the Presbyterians (formerly the Calvinistic Methodists) and the Wesleyan Methodists, while the latter include the Congregationalists and the Baptists. This classification, while not being exhaustive with regard either to the numbers of denominations in Wales or to the differences between them, nevertheless yields a grouping that coincides with important theological differences and includes the most important bodies. Where a Church is concerned, a rigid distinction between doctrine and organization cannot be consistently maintained: the very existence of a hierarchy presupposes a certain view of the relationship between God and His Church. To be more specific: the organization of the

²⁵R. E. Murphy: *Seven Books of Wisdom* Bruce, Milwaukee, 1960; \$3.75.

non-episcopal Churches ('the denominations') is intimately connected with their doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Catholics, while appreciating the difficulties involved in ecumenical approaches to the Anglicans, may well tend to feel impatience or bewilderment at the continued existence of four large non-episcopal denominations. Welshmen, being familiar with the situation, are not bewildered by it: the theological and historical reasons for its emergence are plain enough. A vast number, however, take it for granted. This is not because the scandal of the position has not been many times emphasized. Quite apart from the theological (and logical) aspects of a position in which different organizations simultaneously claim that the Church is One, Holy, and Catholic, while holding contradictory doctrines, there are a number of practical consequences: the division of human resources among these denominations results in a general shortage of men who are morally and intellectually fitted to be ministers or lay-preachers; consequently, individual congregations may have to choose between having no service at all, or allowing into the pulpit men of second-rate intellect and heterodox beliefs. In 1955 a survey of three selected areas revealed that over a third of the Presbyterian congregations in them had no permanent minister. A consequence of the denominations' failure to provide informed teaching is the growth of the view that the pulpit is a place for the recounting of personal religious experience, and that doctrine is a matter of personal preference. Sincerity tends to replace knowledge as a qualification for pastoral duties. The financial burden of supporting the cause becomes heavier as congregations shrink; chapels that face each other on opposite sides of the street may be less than half-full.

At this point a Catholic might suppose that it was a strict regard for conflicting theological doctrines that kept the denominations apart. However, they themselves do not accept that this is a sufficient explanation. The Rev H. Wynne Griffith, writing in the Welsh-language journal of the S.C.M., stated in 1953 that the purely theological differences were smaller than was generally supposed, ignored by the vast majority of chapel members, and often surpassed by disagreements within the denomination itself. He was inclined to attribute the situation more to factors arising out of the existence of the denominations as historical and social entities. And in fact the actual trend is for theological differences to be more closely examined and defined *after* talk about ecumenism has arisen.

At a fairly low level, unity in Wales is held up because people have become used to a certain style of personality as a denomination. A further, and equally important, obstacle to unity is the feeling of chapel-loyalty. The Welsh Non-conformist thinks far more in terms of his local congregation than of his denomination. Being received into his denomination means being received into his local congregation; and supporting the cause means supporting that same congregation. I was told by one minister that it would be just as difficult to unite the two congregations in his care as it would be to unite all the denominations in the district. That this should be so is no accident: the great preachers who

founded the denominations envisaged each congregation as a community of the elect, each one with an internal life that was largely independent of the others, rather as they had conceived the Early Church to be organized. And although the form of worship varies little from one chapel to another, the content, at least in theory, varies according to the personal choice of the preacher. This is not to say that there is a deep opposition to the ecumenical idea: most people certainly think it is 'a good thing'; but up to now, detailed consideration of the practical implications has necessarily been confined to small groups.

The most definite ecumenical trend in Wales to-day is towards the reunion of the Presbyterians, the Wesleyans and the Congregationalists. In 1954 the question of reunion between the two Methodist denominations, the Wesleyans and the Presbyterians was discussed, but shelved for the time being by the Wesleyans. In 1958 a Collaboration Committee was formed, containing representatives of all three denominations. Besides initiating experiments, in which ministers hold services in the chapels of other denominations, the Committee has published a draft Constitution for a United Church, and a book, *Preparing the Way*. From the latter, a fair idea can be got, both of what the denominations consider to be the main doctrinal obstacles to unity, and of what the common ground is. The two main subjects dealt with are the nature of the Church and of the Ministry. All three denominations consider that the Church is the class of those persons who believe in Christ's crucifixion and ascension, and in His redemptive mission. This entails a conviction of personal sinfulness, and a faith in Christ's ability to save us from our sins, which is in its turn manifested by a desire to seek an association with Christ and His people in a Church. The Congregationalists, however, insist that each separate congregation is the Church; each congregation is in itself a catholic church, and to it were given the promises that Christ made to His Church. All authority is vested in the vote of individual chapels. The two Methodist denominations, on the other hand, have preserved a quasi-hierarchical system, in that they conceive of the Church as an association of congregations, organized into groups controlled by authoritative bodies; of the two systems, the Wesleyan is less 'democratic' than the Presbyterian. Both denominations repudiate the idea that there is any episcopal element in their organization, and lay opinion is strongly represented at all levels.

All three denominations accept the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers; consequently they reject the concept of the Apostolic succession and of the special character of the priesthood. For them, ordination is the choosing of a man to preach to the faithful and to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (or Eucharist). With the Congregationalists, it is the individual congregation that ordains, while with the Methodist denominations it is the supreme governing bodies.

In 1954, when the possibility of uniting the two Methodist denominations was discussed, one of the arguments used against reunion was that it would be better to try to revive the denominations as they stood; and indeed some people believe that Nonconformity's only hope in Wales to-day is another revival on

the lines of 1904-5. The argument was clearly based on the supposition that the ecumenical movement was a sign of weakness. One cannot help feeling that there is a certain amount of justice in such a view. If the denominations in Wales were vigorous, each one having good theological grounds for separate existence, it would be hard to imagine an influential ecumenical movement. At the moment the denominations are showing signs of moving towards a very loose kind of unity, which would take the form of a common organization and a common ministry, with a common theology yet to come. And one could argue that such a situation inevitably arises from the Nonconformist appeal to conscience as the final arbiter of theological belief. When two persons disagree conscientiously, they must either agree to differ or ignore the difference; but neither alternative seems satisfactory when they are at the same time determined to cooperate. They may then choose a third course and call the difference unimportant, which is what the attempted distinction between primary and secondary doctrines amounts to. There is an awareness in Wales of the dangers of unity at any price, or unity as a *quid pro quo*; but, given a situation where one supreme manifestation of our Lord's teaching authority is refused, it is very hard to see how unity can be achieved without some quiet shelving of outstanding theological differences. The danger is always that in the intellectual excitement of discovering common ground God's ideas about His Church and His priesthood will be forgotten.

If it really is the case that the most important obstacles to the unity of the denominations are non-theological or connected with teachings about the nature of the Church, then union should not be too far off. But doubts remain. What, for example, would be the relation of such a United Church to the Church that our Lord founded? What sort of Church did our Lord found? If the United Church is not of that sort, then has not all the ecumenical effort been turned in the wrong direction? Is lack of unity the basic reason for the decline of Nonconformity in Wales? These are the questions that must be considered in Wales to-day if Church unity is to be more than a pious disguise for doctrinal apathy and confusion.

JOHN DANIEL