

**THE COMMUNITY WITNESS: AN EXPLORATION OF SOME OF THE INFLUENCES AT WORK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMUNITY AND ITS WRITINGS**, by Hamish F. G. Swanston. *Burns & Oates, London. 1967. 230 pp. 35s.*

Hamish Swanston is already known as a readable popularizer of vexed biblical questions. He now modestly offers what he calls a 'Just so story' of how the New Testament came to have its shape; in fact, while intended for the general reader, it is more scholarly than this suggests.

The author establishes the theme which gives the book its title by observing that the 'community tradition' of Christians came before any writings in the New Testament, and made unavoidable demands on the writers (p. 28). At the same time, it is because the NT books do represent the traditional faith of the Christian community, and were recognized by that community as doing so, that they were preserved, while other candidates for the canon, not being necessary for the promulgation and preservation of the tradition, were lost.

But Fr Swantson goes further. 'Christ is himself the tradition' (p. 29), and it is in the tradition that Christians meet him. So that the gospels, which grew out of this tradition, are 'the meeting places of the Christian with Christ'.

The tradition has been handed down within the community until our own time. But simply because our faith is the faith of the first community, we must not assume that we are immediately able to appreciate the methods adopted by that community to put this faith across. Through making this false assumption, scriptural scholarship in the past has sometimes come to grief. We have to remember 'that though we come to the same Eucharist, we come to make our thanksgiving for vastly different worlds than those of the first community, and though we come to the same Lord, we are vastly different people'. But if we would understand ourselves, we must make the effort to understand the first community. Fr Swanston feels that to reach this understanding, three points are especially important. First, the OT

so affected the early community that the gospels are in many respects a 're-vitalization of the old images and concepts' (p. 33). Then, it was the resurrection that 'gave meaning to the OT scriptures' (p. 54) and that patterned the Christian view of human life in the community. Lastly, Christians expressed this life in the sacramental liturgy of the community, which was itself moulded and influenced by OT celebrations and events. The main portion of the book develops these three points in turn.

Fr Swanston analyses in some detail major themes of the OT, such as covenant and exodus, and shows how they are transformed in the language and liturgy of the New. This involves him necessarily in much discussed and disputed issues. Footnotes, he feels, would put the general reader off; on the other hand, he doesn't want to claim every opinion he puts forward as his own. He compromises by incorporating all references into his text, with varying degrees of exactitude, and this is the ground of the main criticism one can make against the book. The reader who is put off by footnotes will also be put off by the rather detailed discussion of some points from a learned work referred to simply by the surname 'Wilcox'. Presumably the work is *The Semitisms of Acts*, but it is not really fair to Dr Wilcox not to say so. Other authors are favoured with the titles of their books; having gone so far, it would have been simple to add the page reference. A list of selected reading at the end of the book would not have put anyone off, and it would have been the least that could have been done for those who might want to follow up the author's very interesting suggestions. Especially as one suspects that his enthusiasm may sometimes have led him to push his sources too far. There is an extraordinary case of this on page 74. Fr Swanston is very rightly stressing the importance of Exodus symbolism in the NT; but he has St Paul tell his converts, 'You must make an exodus out of this world' (I Cor 5, 10). In

fact, in this passage Paul is telling his readers that they *cannot* pass out of this world, and so cannot expect to avoid the company of non-Christian evil-doers. Again, the simple-minded may suppose that the 'greater and lesser lights' of Genesis 1 were inspired by the sun and moon rather than by the pillars outside the temple, as the author seems to suggest.

However, apart from a few such details, the

book is most illuminating. It takes us over some of the main points of discussion in today's NT exegesis, and it is especially recommended to those of the Christian community who would like to understand more of their heritage and the way in which the liturgy has preserved and transmitted the essential themes of the Bible. And it is good enough to have deserved an index. ALDHELM CAMERON-BROWN, O.S.B.

**WATER AND THE SPIRIT**, a study in the relation of baptism and confirmation, by Cyril E. Pocknee. Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1967. 125 pp. 9s. 6d.

The relationship between baptism and confirmation has been much discussed by Anglicans and Free Churchmen since the last war, and current ecumenical debate has made the question even more actual. The Reverend Cyril E. Pocknee is concerned at the present teaching and practice of the Church of England, which he considers neither scriptural nor patristic, but rather based on mediaeval misconceptions of the relationship of the two sacraments to each other.

Accordingly, in this book he seeks to put before his fellow churchmen the salient points of the teaching of the New Testament and the Fathers on Christian Initiation. Successive chapters deal with the New Testament teaching, that of the first four centuries, the catechumenate, the validity of heretical initiation and the rite for receiving former heretics, and the matter and form of confirmation in the primitive Church. The remaining chapters are more in the form of appendices; a note on the Sevenfold Prayer for the Holy Spirit is followed by a summary of Tertullian's teaching on baptism, the sections of Hippolytus' 'Apostolic Tradition' which are concerned with initiation, and finally a tiny extract from the Gelasian Sacramentary, and a larger one from the Sacramentary of Gellone. Incidentally, this final extract, which occupies three pages, has the order of the second and third pages inverted so one should read the third before the second.

It is rather difficult to summarize the author's thesis, since he is more concerned to summarize what the early Church did than to say what should be done today. Certainly he is opposed to any attempt to attenuate confirmation's significance, and he shows clearly that the Fathers saw this sacrament as bestowing the Holy Spirit. But he also shows clearly that baptism and confirmation were normally given together, followed by first communion. It would be interesting to know if the author

favours a return to this practice, and if so whether he would opt for the present practice of initiating infants with all three sacraments, or whether he would have infant baptism abolished, and a catechumenate restored for all candidates, even those who are children of practising Christians. But the author raises such questions only by implication, in his presentation of what the early Church did. If one's interpretation of Church History is that the early Church was a golden age, and everything since then has marked the disintegration of an ideal situation, then it is clearly enough just to describe what existed. But if one sees the history of the Church as marking, on the whole, a progress in the understanding of her faith, then surely some assessment of the relevance of early Church practice for today is called for.

Moreover, it is possible to disagree with the author's interpretation of historical fact. For instance, he considers that there is no evidence that the Fathers considered infant baptism either normal or particularly desirable. He points out that such men as St Basil, St John Chrysostom, and St Augustine were not baptized until they were adults, and ascribes the growth of infant baptism to Augustine's doctrine on original sin. In fact, the evidence we have seems to suggest that it was normal for children to be baptized at least from the beginning of the third century. The text of Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* mentioning the baptism of infants can be found on page 109 of this book. Cyprian (Epist. 64) says one should accept children brought for baptism soon after birth, without waiting for the eighth day on the analogy of circumcision. These points are taken from an article by Fr Camelot, O.P., in *La Maison Dieu* 88, and this writer points out that Augustine worked out his solution to the problem of infant baptism *before* the Pelagian controversy, and that in the said controversy the very existence of the practice of infant