

Book Reviews

The Nature and Function of Priesthood: by E. O. James.
Thames & Hudson, London, 1955. Pp. 336. 25s.
(Available from Orient Longmans (Private) Ltd., Post Box
2146, Calcutta.)

The book under review is not a theological, devotional or apologetic work but, as the sub-title informs us, 'a comparative and anthropological study' or, in the words of its preface, 'an anthropological and comparative inquiry into the nature and function of the institution of priesthood as an integral element in social structure'. Its author, E. O. James, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion in the University of London, is a serious scholar whose numerous books, *The Social Function of Religion*, *The Old Testament in the Light of Anthropology*, *Comparative Religion*, etc., have earned him an international reputation. His present work is the result of a long investigation, and incorporates the data collected on this subject on the occasion of lectures delivered in the University of Amsterdam in 1949 and subsequently in the University of Liverpool, as also the gist of papers contributed to the International Congress for the History of Religions.

Professor James starts his study with an attempt at determining the place and function of the priest's office in primitive society, clearly distinguishing this office from that of the shaman and the magician. In a second chapter, he describes the rôle played by divination and the mantic art in the social structure of the ancient world. He then considers the functions of the prophetic office in relation to priesthood with special reference to Israel and Arabia. The fourth chapter, on 'Kingship and Priesthood', examines in detail the crucial position occupied by kingship in the social structure and sacred organization of Egypt, Mesopotamia and ancient Israel. The following chapters analyse the different functions of the priesthood institution: its primary function which is the offering of sacrifice; the sacerdotal ministry of absolution from evil, sin and guilt; the rôle of the priest as a man of learning and the guardian of sacred tradition. In Chapter VIII, the juridical authority which has traditionally been conferred upon priests is investigated both in ancient and in modern religious societies. The last chapter sums up the conclusions of the whole work.

While Christian theologians and exegetes will at times disagree with certain interpretations and views of the author whose

treatment of the Sacred Scripture, though respectful and scholarly, is not free from a naturalistic and rationalistic bias, they may find in this book much precious material for their own work. The central notions of sacrifice and priesthood, essential to Christianity, have been admirably explored by Professor James and this exploration, both historical and anthropological, throws much light on the whole ecclesiastical structure of the Church.

'In Christianity the Founder . . . by virtue of his Godhead hypostatically united with his manhood, as priest and victim . . . is able in his own right and by his own redemptive power to reconcile man with God. This is accomplished through the remission of sins ascribed to his redeeming sacrifice on behalf of the human race, of which he is the divinely appointed head. But what has been wrought by a special divine intervention in time and space, at a particular moment of history, has to be made actual and efficacious throughout the ages. . . .

Therefore, the carrying on of the work of mediation became the *raison d'être* of the Christian priesthood and the primary purpose of its hierarchic organization. To this end its principal function always has been that of perpetuating the sacrificial act of redemption by the offering of its *anamnesis* on earth in union with its heavenly presentation by the eternal high-priest. Next to the Eucharistic oblation as the centre of Christian worship, it has become the duty of the priest, standing between God and the redeemed humanity, to absolve the penitent and so to effect the work of reconciliation as the duly commissioned agent of Christ, the redeemer and mediator. Moreover, in this capacity, the priest acts as judge since he is required to estimate the spiritual condition of the penitent and to pass judgment accordingly. This presupposes his having received the necessary jurisdiction to fulfil the office, be it either "ordinary" or "delegated" jurisdiction' (pp. 294 and 295).

The author rightly observes that a clearer understanding of the fundamental notions of priesthood and sacrifice may contribute to 'the removal of at any rate some of the causes of division on all sides':

'By common consent the Ordinal and the Liturgy, and all that lies behind them, constitute the crucial factors in the problem of the re-integration of a divided Christendom because priesthood and sacrifice always have been the unifying and stabilizing force in the ecclesiastical structure, and not least in that of the Christian Church in West and East alike' (p. 175).

It may be regretted that Professor James should have ignored some of the best anthropological and historical works of Catholic scholars, like those of W. Schmidt on *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, as also the monumental studies of Jungmann and de la Taille on the nature and meaning of the Christian Sacrifice. Though primarily anthropological, the present investigation often deals with difficult problems of scriptural exegesis and Biblical scholarship, the solution of which would have been at times more satisfactory if the author had followed the guidance of the best Christian students of the Bible. As it is, the book of Professor James is an important and valuable contribution to our understanding of the nature and function of priesthood.

The Word of the Cross to Hindus: by E. W. Thompson. Published by the C.L.S., Madras. Revised edition first printed in India, 1956. Pp. 175. Rs.4/50.

(Available from C.L.S., Post Box 501, Park Town, Madras 3.)

The treatment of Hinduism in this book is sympathetic and the attitude towards it is fair; the author is courteous, even kind, and yet frank and truthful.

Certain general comments seem called for:

- (a) In the Preface the author speaks of the Cross *against* the Indian background; it is better to speak of the Cross *in* or *with* the Indian background. It is true that the Cross is to the Jew a scandal, and to the Greek foolishness, but the Hindu is neither a Jew nor fully a Greek; he is a little different and has a distinctive attitude to the Cross.
- (b) The appeal of the book would have been enhanced if the Appendices had been omitted altogether. There are in them certain misstatements about Hinduism which might stifle response in the Hindu heart. For example:
 - (i) The author speaks of the way in which the Gita justifies ruthless killing; the Hindu will sit up on reading this. It is not ruthless killing but the place of war or the use of force under the Hindu social scheme (*varṇa dharma*) which is justified in the Gita.
 - (ii) The author equates the *Sambhava* of the Vedantin and the *Niskām* of the Gita with Stoic ideas which are not strictly parallel. *Niskām* is not action without desire (an impossibility); it means action without personal desire of fruit or hope of reward; it is doing one's duty as unto God. Of course philosophers are not the whole of the people but in China and in India their influence has permeated the masses.
- (c) It is unfortunate that the author has not made enough use of Hindu *tyāg* and *yajña* as a preparation for the Cross. In Hindu scriptures (especially in the earlier scriptures) there is a keen sense of sin. Hindus have all through purged their formal systems into principles of moral action. I wish the author had made more use of the points of contact while retaining the contrast between the Cross and Karma and Avatāra, etc.

Other points of interest may be noted :

- (a) The time has not yet come to speak of a rift between India's political preoccupation and the practical implications of the Advaita.
- (b) The author has made a very good point when he says (on page ix) that 'the teaching and example of Jesus have shown to us that there is only one right means of propagating and defending pure and undefiled religion . . . force of truth and goodness'. This will hardly be supported by the nature of the Christian enterprise in India.
- (c) Neutralism is not just tolerance ; India conceives of and works out the idea in a positive constructive way. It is not only impartiality to all religions but positive sympathy and helpfulness wherever necessary.
- (d) It is a healthy thought that nothing in Hinduism which is good and beautiful need be lost in the Church.
- (e) Converts have not always been respected within Hinduism, the main reason being their adherence to Western ways and not the offence of the Cross.
- (f) The statement at the bottom of page 116 about the acceptance of suffering is not correct. There are cases of suffering, voluntarily accepted for the good of others, even in historical Hinduism. Space forbids any reference to this ; even Radhakrishnan's meagre reference is significant (page 117, bottom note).

The book is worth study by Christians. The style is lucid and the thought clear. Though it contains certain inaccuracies, it is a fair appraisal of the Hindu and Christian verities.

Varanasi

R. C. DAS

The Old Testament in Modern Research : by Herbert F. Hahn.
S.C.M. Press, 1956. 16s.

(Obtainable from Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 5 Russell Street, Calcutta 16.)

An Old Testament scholar of a former generation is said to have remarked that since the problems of the Old Testament had all been solved, he would henceforth turn his attention elsewhere. A glance at this book will indicate that at the middle of the twentieth century we have reached a point at which new

problems are constantly having to be faced by those who seek to understand the message of the Old Testament. Dr. Hahn has evidently read widely and painstakingly, and he sets before us here the developments which have taken place in recent Old Testament research in such fields, among others, as literary criticism, anthropology, sociology, archaeology and theology.

It is inevitable that a work like this should prove somewhat disappointing to its readers. It is always less satisfying to read someone else's criticisms of a writer's point of view than to read the original arguments at first hand. A tremendous amount of work has clearly gone into this book, and it will be a valuable reference book for some time to come, since it summarizes so many of the discussions in which Old Testament scholars have been involved for generations. Nevertheless, there is a disadvantage in gaining a conspectus of any wide field study through the eyes of one individual alone. Though this book will to some extent supplement the composite volume of essays 'The Old Testament and Modern Study' published in 1951, it is a far from adequate substitute for it in the very field which it attempts to cover.

It is unfortunately (for non-Scandinavians!) true to say that nobody is really qualified to write a book on the present position in Old Testament studies who is not familiar with at least one Scandinavian language. Dr. Hahn shows no evidence of having read any of the numerous works of modern Scandinavian Old Testament scholars except those written or translated in English and German. This means that important books by Bentzen and Engnell, and Mowinckel's great book *Han som kommer*, published in Copenhagen in 1951, and recently translated into English, are entirely ignored. His neglect of Scandinavian material is also evident from the fact that Bentzen's *King and Messiah* is not even mentioned in its German original, although it was published as long ago as 1948. It is perhaps only to be expected that American contributions to Old Testament research should be emphasized at the expense of those from the other side of the Atlantic, but it is a little disconcerting to find on page 79 that an American writer is credited with a noteworthy discovery in a publication attributed, in a footnote, to the year 1938, while the next sentence suggests that a further step was subsequently taken in the same direction by the British writer, A. R. Johnson, in an essay published in 1935!

Too much attention need not be paid to a publisher's 'blurb', but the claim which is made for this book that 'an up-to-date bibliography with a complete author index makes it an invaluable volume for scholar and layman alike' is open to dispute on both points. The incompleteness of the author index is no doubt excusable, but the bibliography is by no means up to date, which detracts considerably from the value of such a book as this claims to be. Though it first appeared (in Britain at least) in 1956, the reviewer could not find more than two references to books

published later than 1951, and very few in that year. This compares unfavourably with the volume of essays mentioned above, in which there are a number of references to publications dated in 1949. There is, in fact, a considerably fuller treatment of the Dead Sea scrolls in the earlier volume than in this one, where they are relegated to an 'Additional Note' of less than a page. It is a pity that the 'Bibliographical Notes' in Chapter I could not have been continued throughout the book, as that would have enhanced its value considerably.

Serampore

B. F. PRICE

Premananda: the Autobiography of P. A. N. Sen. S.P.C.K.
(Obtainable from S.P.C.K., Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi 6, or from the Calcutta Diocesan Book Depot, 53A Chowringhee Road, Calcutta, 16.)

The writer of this autobiography, whom many readers must know, is anxious to tell them of his experiences in his quest for a living faith and of the wonderful ministry of Grace which gave him spiritual maturity and poise. Born in an orthodox Hindu family of affluent means, and reacting with hatred and opposition to his first contacts with the Christian faith, he yet became an ardent devotee of Jesus Christ. While on the point of burning down the preaching booth of some Christian missionaries from Kalna, a sudden change took place in his heart by the reading of the Gospels from a Bible which he had stolen from the tent. Conversion followed and accepting Christ by public confession and baptism, he advanced far into the mystic life, while at the same time he spent his life in the service of the sick and the underprivileged. His experience bears remarkable testimony to the effectiveness of the Written Word, the Bible, as an evangelist. He drew inspiration and direction from the Bible in coming to his religious faith, which was greatly helped and proved by the unselfish and self-giving way of life of missionaries and Christian laymen, both foreign and Indian, whom it was his good fortune to meet in times of material need and spiritual difficulty.

With an initial horror of leprosy and lepers, he began to work for them as a Christian duty, but one night God spoke to him through Mrs. X who said, 'Mr. Sen, when you come in the midst of us, we forget that we are loathsome lepers.' The founding by him of two leper dispensaries in Calcutta, now called 'Premananda' Leper Dispensaries, was the outcome of his self-surrender to Christ that very night when, before returning home, he lay himself prostrate before the altar in the Chapel attached to the Mission House where he was living.

The autobiography refers repeatedly to the close companionship and spiritual fellowship with his wife who shared to the full his care and solicitude for those in need and inspired

him to provide, after her death, the Anugrihita Sen Rest House at Ranchi.

The reader will meet the writer as a mystic and will profit by his 'meditations'; he will also find encouragement by his example as a social worker. He will find an interesting description of the Hindu joint family of fifty years ago and will be introduced to many of the leading missionary and lay personalities, Christian and non-Christian, of that time and later.

It is to be hoped that there will be a Bengali edition of this autobiography as it provides a most remarkable testimony to the relevance of the Christian Gospel for those who seek salvation through philosophy and the doctrine of works.

Calcutta

N. K. BOSE

Islam and the Gospel of God: by H. Spencer, Delhi. S.P.C.K., 1956. Pp. 122. Re.1/25.
(Obtainable from S.P.C.K., Post Box 1585, Delhi 6.)

The author of this interesting booklet is the principal of the Henry Martyn School of Islamics, Aligarh. With evangelical boldness he compares the central doctrines of Christianity with those of Islam for the benefit of Christian workers among Muslims. The study, based on numerous sources, will come as a revelation to many. Superficial contacts with Muslims and with Islamic literature may easily lead the unwary to interpret the religion of Islam in a Christian way: do not the Muslims believe in one God and in revelation, in sin and in the need of purification, in divine guidance and in man's destiny, in God's glory and love and grace? But, warns the author, if the theological vocabulary used by Muslims and Christians is often similar, the concepts connoted by the words are often very different.

The conception the faithful have of God's nature and 'character' necessarily dictates their attitude towards other religious truths. Now according to the author the Christian concept of the Divine Being stands 'in radical opposition' (p. 14) to the Islamic concept of Allah! Allah, we are told, was at first associated by the Arabs with the worship of the Kaaba 'along with such goddesses as *Allat* and with feminine Angels, with Satan and with the *Jinn*' (p. 3). The prophet Muhammad rid Allah of all these associated deities and eventually identified Allah with the God of the Bible. The attributes, however, which Muslim theologians gave Allah are not those of Jahwe, still less those of God in the New Testament. Allah, no doubt, is the Supreme Being, but so enclosed in His unconditioned omnipotence and majesty as to be inaccessible to the created mind and unknowable; He is the absolute and unique efficient cause of all things, good and evil, to the exclusion even of man; His divine ruling of the universe and of man is totally unpredictable.