

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Reviews

Religion without Explanation. D. Z. Phillips. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976. 200 + xi pp. £7.00

This is a fascinating book which develops the author's distinctive position stated in *The Concept of Prayer, Religion and Understanding, Faith and Philosophical Inquiry*, and *Death and Immortality*.

It is well known that Phillips abandons the reference theory of the meaning of language and, following the later Wittgenstein, adheres to the *use* theory. Religious statements do not refer to objects, not even transcendent ones. "Talk of God's existence or reality cannot be considered as talk about the existence of an object" (p. 174). Language on the lips of believers has its meaning in its use, in its expression of the role religious beliefs have come to play in their lives.

Phillips thinks that much contemporary philosophy of religion is "idle speculation" (p. 190) carried on between theoretical theists and theoretical atheists who respectively affirm or deny the existence of God. Both are equally confused, he thinks, because the existence of God is a matter quite unlike the existence of anything else, and to try to provide evidence for such a belief is already to mistreat it, as if God were one more object in a universe of objects. Christian philosophers of religion who tread this path are twice defeated, because Hume's criticisms of traditional factual theism are in any case decisive. An interesting consequence of his position is that critical sociological, anthropological and psychological accounts of religion are rendered vacuous because they too assume that religion is about a particular set of facts (which critical attacks on religion can purportedly explain away).

So religious beliefs have an *expressive*, not a referential character. Thus to believe in God *is* to engage in worship (p. 181), to participate in praise and prayer. Belief in "the reality of the dead" expresses "the status that the dead have among the living" (p. 132). Belief in the last judgment is not a belief in a future event but "a form of language which makes it possible to have certain thoughts about a completed life" (p. 144). To the charge that all this is hopelessly reductionist, Phillips answers that anyone who holds that religious language is essentially "referential or descriptive" is "confused".

Phillips is right to claim that "God exists" is not a statement about whether in addition to the beings we call "the world" there is another transcendent being named "God". Kierkegaard, Tillich, Macquarrie and countless others in this connexion have affirmed "God does not

exist" and they are right to do so. But it is one thing to draw attention to the expressive character of religious beliefs, and another to say that none of them is referential. On Phillips' view, not just philosophers of religion, but most religious believers are confused, for rightly or wrongly, they *do* affirm the referential character of their beliefs. But Phillips has produced another intriguing account of what it is to hold religious beliefs, and his undoubted influence on philosophy of religion I find stimulating and welcome.

ADRIAN THATCHER.

A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada. Robert T. Handy. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976. 471 pp. £9.50.

This is the first volume of an important new series to be called the Oxford History of the Christian Church, the editing of which is in the experienced hands of Professors Henry and Owen Chadwick. It is ultimately to consist of twenty volumes. Baptists, who have a special interest in the North American continent because of their strength there, must feel satisfaction that the series is inaugurated by one of their own historians and that a difficult task has been carried out with such skill.

Robert Handy is Professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary, New York. After serving as a pastor and a chaplain, he joined the faculty there in 1950. Many will remember the lecture on Walter Rauschenbusch which he gave to the annual meeting of the Baptist Historical Society in 1963 and which was printed in Vol. XX of this journal. Professor Handy's book on *The Social Gospel in America* (1966) quickly won acclaim and was followed five years later by *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*. He also edited with Professors Shelton Smith and Lefferts A. Loetscher two valuable volumes of documents on American Christianity published by Charles Scribner in the 1960s.

To survey in 400 pages the fortunes of the Christian faith in North America from the time of the Pilgrim Fathers to the emergence of the Jesus Freaks demands wide knowledge and careful judgment. The inclusion of Canada is welcome, though it complicates the task and raises the question whether the West Indies have not been so closely linked with the developments that they ought not to have had mention, even if only briefly. Those who know the earlier treatments of the subject by W. W. Sweet, Winthrop Hudson and Sydney E. Ahlstrom will find here much that is new and brings the story up to date. Useful footnotes direct attention to the special sources behind some of the paragraphs, while twenty pages are given to a carefully selected

bibliography. Church history has clearly come of age in the U.S.A. K. S. Latourette was a pioneer in the use, carefully followed here, of Roman Catholic sources. That his volumes find no mention is perhaps partly due to the fact that, writing in the early 1960s, he was able to feel more assured about the future than is Professor Handy.

Dr. Handy treats his subject chronologically. His main divisions are 1650-1720, 1720-75, 1775-1800, 1800-1860, 1860-1920. Four Canadian chapters are fitted into the scheme. A lengthy final chapter covers the two areas. It is entitled "North American Churches and the Decline of Christendom", thus reviving a term not often now used by European historians, perhaps because the authority of the main Churches has disappeared more swiftly and completely here than across the Atlantic and without the recurrent revivals which have been a feature of American religious life. There are of course differences as well as similarities in the fortunes of the Churches in Canada and the U.S.A. Canada, for example, has a much smaller black community, but a Roman Catholic one of much greater size in relation to the population and one able in Quebec to provoke serious political problems. Jehovah's Witnesses have been an embarrassment in both Canada and the U.S.A. A recent study by Professor M. James Penton portrays them, however, as "Champions of Freedom of Speech and Worship" in Canada and states that the Bill of Rights promoted by Prime Minister Diefenbaker—a Baptist—in 1960 was largely a result of their petitions. This does not find a mention.

A large number of names have to find a place, but Professor Handy's work is readable throughout. Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox and sectarian groups are all treated and their stories skilfully woven together and set in perspective. In view of this it may seem a little ungracious to point out that Barrow's name was Henry, not John, and to ask whether in view of some of the women who are named a place should not have been found for Jane Addams, of Chicago.

American religion has been as varied, pluralist and spontaneous as the peoples who now inhabit the continent. To the staid Britisher much seems superficial and commercialised, but the reaction of people in general to the issues of the present century would seem as truly "Christian" as that of most European nations. Some remarkable figures of worldwide significance have emerged. It becomes ever more important that we understand the spiritual attitudes of the great nations which now have so important a role in the future of humanity as a whole.

ERNEST A. PAYNE.

The Abolition of War: The Peace Movement in Britain 1914-1919.
Keith Robbins. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976. 255 pp.
£5.00.

Our sense of horror at the First World War is tempered by the recollection of that minority who opposed it and refused to fight, even when conscription was introduced. Indeed, because of their undoubted sufferings, the pacifists are liable to become unduly romanticized. Against the dark background of futile slaughter and the dubious peace which ensued, their stand takes on an angelic light.

This book is a highly useful corrective. It concentrates on the aims and tactics of main branches of the British Peace movement, such as the Peace Society, the No Conscription Fellowship, the Union for Democratic Control, the Independent Labour Party, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Society of Friends. The account of their interrelationships and the internal tensions within them, together with the prominent parts played by such figures as Clifford Allen, Bertrand Russell, E. D. Morel and Miss C. E. Marshall, has been very carefully researched. It makes for intricate reading in places, reflecting the complexities and confusions of the peace movement itself, and it is hard to avoid the melancholy judgment that "The peace societies preached the possibility of permanent unity and concord on a universal scale, yet on their own small scale exhibited few signs of co-operation between themselves" (p. 217).

They differed considerably as to the basis of their pacifism (socialist, religious or pragmatic), the degree of their opposition to war (absolutist, or prepared to undertake non-combatant service), and their view of the peace to follow. They could be blind to basic realities. Avowedly populist, they nevertheless seemed to ignore the fact that "the people" did go to war. Though they claimed to be the real democrats, some of their own policies would have required undemocratic means (not to mention force) for their implementation. Here are issues worthy of study by all concerned with idealism in politics.

But the final chapter—the most interesting to those approaching the subject from a more theological angle—argues that, while the peace movement did little to end the war or build the peace, it did leave a mark on British society. The anti-war atmosphere of the twenties and thirties owed much to it, and, if this in turn proved naive in the face of Nazism, the concern for the rights of individual conscience has never been erased from the public mind. The National Council for Civil Liberties, for example, originated as the Council Against Conscription in 1915. Had Professor Robbins' interest been extended to cover more directly the Churches' international activities, he could also have shown that the pre-1914 peace movement of European and American churchmen survived to become an important strand in the later ecumenical movement.

Architects of Dissent, Some Nonconformist Patrons and their Architects. C. Stell. 30th Friends of Dr. Williams's Library Lecture. 1976. 33 pp. 50p.

Mr. Stell in this lecture is only concerned with the more elaborate kind of nonconformist chapel which, possessing some wealthy patron, was able to achieve some architectural distinction. His account begins with the "patronage chapels" of such nonconforming squires as used their position to protect a continuing Presbyterianism after the restoration of Anglicanism in 1662. Although the element of patronage is clear enough in such chapels (as e.g. Great Houghton, Doncaster; Bull House Chapel, Penistone; St. Saviourgate, York; and the chapels of Rivington and Risley in Lancashire) the architects remain anonymous. Only with Wesley's New Room in Bristol as enlarged in 1749 is a suggestion of architect forthcoming. Pevsner has suggested that similarities of style indicate that George Tully, the Quaker architect of Bristol's Friends Meeting House, must also be credited with the New Room. Wesley was also to praise the Octagon Chapel in Norwich (architect, Thomas Ivory) as "the most elegant one in all Europe", thereby provoking the building of a number of more modest Methodist octagons. At much the same time the Countess of Huntingdon was adding chapels with Gothic detailing to her many residences as places of evangelical worship of some architectural qualities. Few congregations were able to command architects of national distinction: Brook Street Unitarians in Manchester secured Sir Charles Barry, and Henry Drummond for the Catholic Apostolic Chapel at Albury secured William Wilkins, architect of the National Gallery. But by the early nineteenth century nonconformity itself was producing architects of no mean ability, as for example Rev. William Jenkins, Methodist itinerant turned architect (Carver Street, Sheffield, 1804, Walcot Chapel, Bath, 1815), James Fenton of Chelmsford (architect of Stepney Chapel, King's Lynn) whose work at Wivenhoe reveals the disastrous result of munificent patronage, and W. F. Poulton (whose work in the firm of Poulton and Woodman at Westminster Chapel is familiar to all assembly-goers). Perhaps of greatest interest to Baptist readers will be Mr. Stell's description of Christ Church, Umberslade, near Birmingham, a squire's chapel built in 1877 for a Baptist congregation, much as Lord Leverhulme provided for the Congregationalists in Thornton Hough or the Fielden brothers for the Unitarians at Todmorden. The architect for this last venture was John Gibson who had built Bloomsbury Chapel for Morton Peto as one of his first commissions some 20 years earlier. Mr. Stell's knowledge of nonconformist architecture is encyclopedic and we will hope for more from his sensitive pen.

J. H. Y. BRIGGS.