

Reviews

THE PASSION AS LITURGY: A Study in the Origin of the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels by Etienne Trocmé. *SCM Press, 1983. pp ix + 116. £4.95*

In this book, which is an expanded version of Passiontide lectures delivered at Lincoln Theological College in 1980, Professor Trocmé demonstrates an exercise which is familiar to scholars but unfamiliar to lay people and (judging by sermons) to many clergy. He first argues that Mk 14-16 was added as a postscript to Mk 1-13, was pre-Markan, and was but slightly revised when incorporated into Matthew. By contrast Luke did not know Mk 14-16, but used an independent narrative which went back to the same archetype. The source of John's passion (which he surprisingly regards as Jn 11-20) was a continuous narrative with the same thread and limits, again deriving from the same archetype as Mk and Lk, but probably independent of them. He then considers the character of the archetype. Was it a mere record of facts? No, because it is a continuous and reasonably coherent narrative, arranged in an order dictated by the logic of narration and by the practical use to be made of it. Was the archetype (as some have suggested) a midrash on testimonia about the suffering of God's elect? Testimonia were certainly used. The narrative contains biblical allusions, but they are well integrated and not later additions. Clearly Psalm 22 was in mind when the story was told, and some features of the story have come from scripture. But he suggests (in a chapter which blows hot and cold) the evidence is too scanty and the testimonia are too scattered to indicate that the whole passion was midrashic. Nor was it created (as others have suggested) by accretions to the primitive kerygma, for one very strong reason among others: because the resurrection tradition which is dominant in the kerygma is far less evident in the Gospels, especially Mark.

Thus reassured, Professor Trocmé proceeds by critical discussion to approach the archetype. He first assesses the story-units which appear in all three versions

(Mk, Lk, and Jn) and thus gives himself a starting point. Of the units which appear in one version only, none in Lk and Jn belong to the archetype but a few in Mk do; and most of those that appear in two versions belong to the archetype. In this way he arrives at a list of units included in the original passion narrative – not surprisingly it is very similar to Mk. Why was such a narrative drawn up? From patterns and liturgical indications that can be observed in it, support is found for Archbishop Carrington's suggestion (though not for his fanciful development of it) that the Markan passion narrative originated as the *megillah* to be read at early Christian celebrations of the suffering and death of Jesus when Christians observed the Jewish Passover. So Professor Trocmé imagines the Jewish Christians, Jerusalem residents and pilgrims from elsewhere, reading the *megillah* at every pilgrim festival (but especially Passover) in the thirty years between the crucifixion and the beginning of the Jewish war. The evidence is too slender for the liturgy to be reconstructed (though some have attempted it); but it can be argued that the liturgy was in existence before AD 40. Such an early date is no guarantee that the narrative reflects correctly the historical and legal situation in Jerusalem at the time, but the main features of the story are historically sound. Moreover its profusion of christological titles, deriving from numerous allusions to scripture, disclose the efforts of the early Jerusalem church to account for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. 'Faced with that unregulated but high christology, Gentile Christians and second- and third-generation Jewish Christians had to build their own doctrine of Christ through a process of selection and organization, rather than one of creation.' (88)

If these conclusions are in general acceptable (and of course in scholarly circles they are rather conservative than radi-

cal), they make a considerable difference to the handling of the passion by teachers and preachers. It is no longer possible to construct a mosaic out of fragments from the individual Gospels. Each evangelist's perception may now be more clearly discerned, and allowed its own worth in relation to the archetype which exercises a guiding but not an excluding authority. In any case, the application of critical procedures can no longer be withheld. Only in recent years has strong historical scepticism about the New Testament taken firm hold in Britain. This book stands midway between radical scepticism which begins from the detection of theological motives in the story-telling and conservative historicism which finds excuses for divergence in the recital of events. Professor Trocmé's judgment that the main features of the passion are historically sound is sensible and welcome, but it is reached by contestable decisions. The absence of the sanhedrin trial in John, apart perhaps for a hint in Jn 18:28, is not to be quickly dismissed; nor

is it easy to limit the ability of Old Testament passages to act as catalysts in the precipitation of incidents. All this, however, may be beside the point if we are dependent on a liturgical text whose truth lies not so much in what happened but in the worshipper's participation in what happened. There are of course professionally interesting questions to be asked. For example, emphasis on the resurrection was certainly present in the primitive kerygma. How soon did reflection on the independent significance of Christ's death take place? According to Professor Trocmé it was already well formulated liturgically by AD 40; but it is scarcely visible in I Thessalonians, and seems to be still in the process of development in I Corinthians. In short, this book clears a good deal of ground, requires close reading (and preferably some knowledge of Greek), and deserves to be studied by all biblical teachers and students.

KENNETH GRAYSTON

SOCIETY AND THE HOLY IN LATE ANTIQUITY by Peter Brown,
Faber & Faber, 1982, £10.50

'There is a time for the evening under starlight
A Time for the evening under lamplight
(the evening with the photograph album)'
[T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*]

In the course of the years during which he taught in Oxford, Mr Brown gave many lectures which, in their academic excitement and their quality of discovery, seemed indeed 'evenings under starlight'. To see many of these lectures combined with his early published works together in this volume of his collected papers is to discover that it is now a time for the 'evening with the photograph album'. The first section brings together his inaugural lecture at Royal Holloway College, 1977, containing his early insight into the value of texts produced by 'the religious imagination', as a balance to that study of the past which is exclusively concerned with the 'discipline of the mind' (p 6), (a theme he has more recently expanded in *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago/London 1981.) with

his comments on historians such as Gibbon, and Pirenne. The second section begins with his critique of Robert Brownings's *The Emperor Julian*, and continues with various studies in the relationship of society to the holy, especially in the world of Late Antiquity which Mr Brown has made uniquely his own. Above all it contains that seminal lecture, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity' (pp 103-153). Other essays range from Mr Brown's understanding of the Mediterranean world as most deeply divided not by East and West but by different concepts of the locus of the holy 'Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: a Parting of the Ways', (pp 66-96) to his analysis of the place of the thaumaturgy of the dead in the world of Gregory of Tours ('Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours', pp 222-251) and the essay containing that brilliant change of perspective by which he applied his concept of the ancient world and its relation to the supernatural to the elev-