

maxim that the situation as it exists is unredeemable? It is vitally important to retain the conviction that something is possible, lest we leave the great mass of Christian workers like men without hope. We need, indeed, something of that robust spirit of St Benedict which led him to build the house of God on the very site where the pagan temples had formerly stood.



## REVIEWS

THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. By H. F. D. Sparks (S.C.M. Press; 13s. 6d.)

The idea of this very well-arranged book is to show, with the fullest documentation from the text of the New Testament itself, how in the first place each of the books came to be written, and then how they came to be placed in the series which became the 'Church's Book', the New Testament.

The first instances of the way in which the Christian message was given to the world after the Resurrection are to be found in the earliest sermons of Peter, as recorded in Acts, from Pentecost onwards. The first chapter analyses this message and sees it firmly anchored to the Messianic hope of the Old Testament. It was in this light that Christianity was first presented.

It is most frequently assumed that the first time the message was committed to writing was after the field had widened to include the Gentile world, and St Paul was writing to the Thessalonians. The next two chapters therefore deal with St Paul, and take his Epistles in chronological order, providing full arguments for their dating. The conclusions are orthodox (the Pastorals are genuine) and arguments against the Epistles are often discussed. The tradition, however, that Hebrews is by St Paul is 'certainly wrong' (p. 81).

With regard to the Gospels, which are taken next, the situation is less satisfactory. Since 1951 it is not easy to write about the composition of the Gospels, unless one has read Abbot Christopher Butler's book *The Originality of St Matthew*, for whether one accepts the proofs or not, the arguments of that book cannot now be ignored, and all one's readers who have read it will inevitably subject one's conclusions to its penetrating criticism. And since February 1953 the same thesis is presented more simply in the *Catholic Commentary*, where the arguments of Dom Bernard Orchard about the dependence of Thessalonians on St Matthew, hitherto only available in *Biblica* of 1938, are also made public. Professor Sparks, after discoursing aptly on the oral tradition at the beginning, is unfortunately still committed to the priority of St Mark, and the supposition that St Matthew was an expansion of St Mark made between A.D. 70

and 100. This notion is, as so often, taken as so axiomatic that 'expansion rather than the reverse' becomes a principle, and is applied for instance to the problem of 2 Peter and Jude (p. 134). The same axiom about the unoriginality of St Matthew, of course, also compels him to conjure up the old ghost Q which Abbot Butler so convincingly laid (p. 111); and St Luke thus gets the date A.D. 80-90, which for some years was fashionable. And this leads in the next chapter to difficulties about the dating of Acts, which the author would like to place in A.D. 63—the obvious suggestion from the text—but unfortunately cannot allow himself to do because of the dates of the Gospels. Nevertheless, allowing for the axiom of Marcan priority, it must be said that these chapters are exceedingly well argued. It is remarkable in fact how many difficulties are reduced if the traditional originality of St Matthew is once more accepted.

The traditional authorship of St John's Gospel is asserted, while the alternative theories are discussed (pp. 118-20), but with regard to the Apocalypse, although 'the attribution to the son of Zebedee has much to commend it', the author feels it cannot be sustained (p. 142), and the materials of the argument are, as in the other sections, most lucidly supplied.

The last chapter deals with the growth of the canon and the idea of a canon in the Church up to the end of the fourth century when it became fixed. In general, therefore, this is a most useful book. There is a mass of evidence in its short compass, highly compressed but extremely clear, and if we take leave to hesitate about the theories which colour the study of the Synoptic Gospels and cognate problems, we find much valuable information about the origins of the various books.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

A NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY FOR ENGLISH READERS. By Ronald A. Knox. Vol. I: The Gospels. (Burns Oates; 18s.)

Just as Mgr Knox's Version has qualities which make it quite different from other versions, so is this Commentary different. It is written, Monsignore tells us in the preface, for those who 'want to read the Bible for themselves without shirking the difficulties'. And there are difficulties, even in the Gospels, apparent contradictions, obscure sayings, parallel passages, variant readings. It is this kind of thing that Monsignore is attempting to elucidate. He is not going to discuss 'intricate problems of scholarship and of historical criticism'. For these things we can go to the more massive standard commentaries, as well as for questions such as 'How large was the Lake of Galilee?'—an example given in the preface of a question he is not going to answer, although in fact he does so, albeit *en passant*, on page 220 (on John 6, 15-25).

Yet this is indeed a work of scholarship. As in his work of translation,