

BOOK REVIEWS
 CHRISTIAN ETHICS
 by: DR. MAJOR J. JONES
 Abingdon Press, 1974
 pp. 205, \$4.50

I. Analysis

In this new work Dr. Jones provides the reader with a conceptual framework for understanding the meaning and function of Christian ethics for Black Theology. The structure and exposition, in terms of the author's desire to achieve theological and socio-historical continuity, are reflective in part of his previous volume, *Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope*.

In the quest for a viable Black Theology on the contemporary American scene, Dr. Jones believes that there is a lack of awareness, seemingly on the part of those who do theology from a black frame of reference, to be seriously concerned about adequate ethical formulations in the black struggle. Even in the black community's attempt to build a more *constructive* posture within the social system of the larger culture, it is the "ethical-burden" of Black Theology to demand that the "politics of God" and the "politics of liberation" be consistent and coherent in black theological discourse. So then, a central purpose behind writing such a book grows out of the author's deep concern for relating ethics to the corpus of Black Theology.

Descriptively speaking Part I, being divided into five chapters, contains a masterful survey of selected ethical themes of the Christian faith on the one hand, and the Black religious experience, on the other. These themes or ethical formulation — particularly the force of the "Ethical Imperative" — are critically related to Black Theology and the perennial struggle on the part of black people for liberation, political consciousness, recognition and self-respect in American society.

This section of the volume poses such pertinent questions as: "What does the Christian faith with its seeming inability to deal adequately with the problem of racism in America have to say about the current politics of liberation?" "What is the moral requirement of the Gospel in the light of the black condition of oppression and injustice?" "What can Jesus say to the black man in his struggle for freedom and full recognition in a pro-white society?" There are basic issues which the author seeks to illuminate.

Concretely, the basic problem raised by Dr. Jones in Part I, and I think rightly so, is the meaning and function of the "Ethical Imperative" in the life of the ex-slave,

oppressed black man, and his attempt to define the boundaries of his own identity as well as to *discover* new objects of value — over against the reality of the ex-slave master, the white oppressor!

Part II of this volume expressed two broad categories of concern from the vantage point of Christian ethics: (1) Category-One identifies some theoretical conceptual dilemmas in the black man's quest for a viable Christian social strategy for liberation and the search for an adequate ethical strategy for the politics of liberation.

(2) Category-Two poses the problem of revolution and the possibilities and expectations of hope in the modern world; and how we may ascertain an adequate Christian understanding of the concept. On the issue of violence or revolutionary confrontation with the enemy, the writer feels that an ethic of distress might be appropriate, which grows out of a situation of desperation and crisis, but such an ethic seeks no justification from the Christian faith.

II. Ethical Contribution

In terms of the importance of this work, Dr. Jones book, *Christian Ethics for Black Theology*, makes a contribution to the present discussion in two primary ways. First, by pointing to the neglected area of ethical formulation it becomes increasingly clear that a viable relationship between ethics and Black Theology should and ought to be an "established assumption", a functional prerequisite for meaningful reflection. Second, the author makes a valid case for the recognition that ethics and eschatology are essential to black political theology; and to an adequate concept of liberation. They share an interdependent character.

Moreover, the future of Black religion and the value of the Black Church may well depend on how black theologians come to terms with a *principle of correlation* between ethics and eschatology in the black experience.

In these respects this work is a credible document of theological-moral reflection, although controversial and at times provocative. It is a beginning in the right direction, especially its emphasis on an "assumed posture of freedom" rooted in the ethics of hope. But laying these points aside it is questionable whether the book provides the reader with a constructive ethical system — having the capacity to move the black community from a kind of "cynical despair" to a dynamic synthesis based on trust, respect for diversity, and

mutual understanding in terms of commonly defined goals and interests.

III. Critical Assessment

There are three principal problem-areas, as I see it, in this work.

Perhaps its main problem is that it depends too heavily, at least initially, upon James Gustafson's formulation of the ethical problem, namely, "What Ought I To Do?" I believe that while this ethical question is necessary for the black Christian to come to terms with—as an oppressed, de-humanized being—it is not, *in and of itself*, sufficient. It seems to me that the crucial question for the Black-American is not simply "What ought I to do?" but rather "What Ought We To Do" in this situation of continuous oppression, alienation, and exploitation by the larger socio-cultural system?

Second, Jones' Christian ethics for Black Theology tends to equate what is *moral* with what is *obligatory* in the black struggle for liberation and human dignity. Etymologically, the term "moral" comes from the Latin: *mos* or *mores* which means customs or manners; whereas the term "obligation" comes from the Latin: *obligatus* implying a binding claim upon the agent with reference to ethical discourse. Hence there is a latent tendency to exclude all virtues from what is moral because they are dispositions other than the one morally good dispositions, i.e., *agapeic love*, to fulfill obligations out of a sense of obligation! Put another way, ethical perceptivity begs the recognition that what is "moral" may not necessarily be *obligatory*. While we are morally obligated to love the oppressor and the oppressed under the rubric of Christian ethics, it does not logically follow that love is an indiscriminate principle of social conduct. Given the "dialectics of black oppression" in a pro-white society, real love must be both discerning and morally tenacious.

A third difficulty in Jones' ethical thought is the lack of specificity and theoretical clarity relative to the tasks of Black Christian ethics. If we accept, as a working assumption, that one of the tasks of Black Christian ethics is to illuminate the human condition by clarifying the moral values, religious beliefs, and ideals by which black people live, then it follows that this present volume by Major J. Jones is not only *axiologically* problematic but *metaethically* problematic as well. In the former, it does not sufficiently delineate many of the pragmatic and instrumental values by which black people live; in the latter, there appears to be an absence of a theory of values or criteria for

"hard-nose" decision-making in the Black community.

In the final analysis, ethical reflection in the black community must not become merely ideological but self-critical and self-corrective; if ethics is to do more than justify given positions, it must achieve a more reconciling spirit amidst the pluralism of the black experience.

Enoch H. Oglesby

UNDERGROUND MANUAL FOR MINISTERS' WIVES by RUTH TRUMAN

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974
pp. 173, \$4.95.

It is possible to avoid the real or imaginary pressures to which a ministers' wife is subject, and Ruth Truman describes how she has managed to do so. Viewing the ministry as more of an "ob-session" rather than a "pro-fession", the author focuses on various unique aspects of living in this kind of environment. The subject is handled on the basis that there is no other occupation that allows for such complete sharing in the life and events of so many people as does the life of a minister's wife and therefore she, too, is important.

The author speaks out on virtually everything from raising children to maintaining individuality in the shadow of the parsonage. Relating her own naivete and near collapse, Mrs. Truman prepares new comers for a role which has its traditional stereotypes on one hand and extreme non conformity on the other. For wives well seasoned in this role, the experiences will be reminiscent of personal errors and solutions.

The starting point is with yourself—the wife, very much in love with her husband and committed to the happiness and well being of both of you. The first problem emerges when demands are made which take away the privacy of this relationship. The wife is thrust into jobs to be done (or roles to be played) and frustration sets in; maintaining the home, doing emergency such frustrating as secretarial work, participating in so many church related activities, keeping a straight face—all within the same day.

Learning to cope begins with a search to determine who you are and what you want to be in this situation. The suggestions follow the usual recommendations for the mid twentieth century with an emphasis on a constant refurbishing of the spirit. "Peace Breaks" several times a day are required to help gain perspectives in the dailiness of life. Realizing, also that

you are supporting a man called of God, who struggles with his own capabilities, the role is quite an honorable one.

Ruth Truman is the wife of a Methodist minister and also works as a syndicated newspaper columnist. Her manual is written with warmth and humor and is quite readable as an autobiographical sketch of one facet of life. It would be of interest to a limited area of the population.

However, two factors make this book somewhat irrelevant as an "Underground" manual for ministers' wives: First, in an age when Women's Liberation is a much publicized fact of life, one wonders about the need for any "underground" discussion for any segment of the female population. Problems that exist and affect women can and should be verbalized openly. It is interesting that Mrs. Truman does not relate her role in connection with her own work, which would have been more practical for today's women. This is not to assume that all ministers' wives are now women's libbers, but it is an underestimation to assume that women of today are not affected by the climate and new direction of thought.

Secondly, a manual designed to deal with coping in the ministry could more appropriately be addressed to the "spouse" or "partner" since there is a growing increase of women in the ministry. There are at present a variety of sources for the wife which are still quite good when measured by the direction taken by Mrs. Truman in her *Manual*. If we are to remain relevant to our reading audiences, present trends must be considered.

Melva W. Costen

COMPETENT MINISTRY
(THE END OF THE MEANS)
COMPETENT MINISTRY
by MARK ROUCH, 172 pages
Abingdon Press, 1974
pp. 190, \$3.75

This book can conceivably fall into the category of "How To" books. Its sub-title not only classifies the book, but states that it is a "guide to effective continuing education."

Of particular interest is that the author, Mark Rouch, appears to be convinced of an increasing need for competency also in ministries other than pastors, Christian educators, and various professional church leaders.

Following the claim that competence is the primary outcome of effective continuing education, Rouch proceeds to explain that continuing education is a long-term

process with distinct events and episodes, linked together by strong continuing themes. Much of this process takes place in informal situations and groups, thus supplementing basic formal education.

He advances the concept that continuing education will not take place until and unless the individual can realize an intrinsic value in becoming competent in whatever he has chosen as his life career.

Suggesting that continuing education occurs in many and varied episodes, space is devoted to the explanation of how an individual can set up his own program for discovering where he is in his career, and how to plan for the continuing learning process throughout life.

Besides listing resources for learning, much of the book supports the notion of the professional's need of competency in order to become effective. Continuing education is skillfully linked to career development by determining the stages of a career and identifying the characteristics and crisis of each stage.

A most useful tool is the compilation of resources for continuing education found in Chapter 5. And, for anyone who will be fortunately pushed out of his lethargy after reading this book, Chapter 4 offers an excellent guide for taking some positive first steps.

This work of Rouch (as far as I can determine) can be a motivation in the attempt to release the "drive for competence" and can be effectively persuasive that continuing education is the means to an end.

Robert Earl Penn

TEXTURAL CRITICISM OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT:
FROM THE SEPTUAGINT
TO QUMRAN

by RALPH W. KLEIN,
Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

1974, pp. xii plus 84, \$2.75 (paperback).

Introductory works on textual criticism are notoriously difficult to write, especially in a time when one can no longer presuppose much if any knowledge of the ancient languages by the readers. Klein, a professor at Concordia Seminary in Exile, has attempted to produce such a work "for the college or seminary student."

This volume, in Fortress' Guides to Biblical Scholarship series, is not concerned directly with the whole area of OT textual criticism. His focus, as the subtitle ("The Septuagint after Qumran") on the title page suggests, is much narrower. His work is concerned with the use of the

Septuagint in textual criticism in light of the reassessment of the Septuagint following the Qumran discoveries.

The first chapter provides a history of the Septuagintal text to the time of Origen while at the same time surveying the important scholarly work on the matter prior to the discovery of the Qumran scrolls.

Chapter two provides a discussion of the impact of the Qumran scrolls on the history of the Septuagint. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, there are some Hebrew texts which have readings closer to the Septuagint than to the standard Massoretic text, other readings agree with the Massoretic text over against the Greek, and some readings are unique. Klein argues that, in light of this fact, none of the three text types (Massoretic, Septuagintal, and Qumran) are necessarily superior to the other. The variants in the Septuagint, in other words, may reflect the translators' use of a divergent pre-massoretic Hebrew text form rather than editorial and translation techniques. If this be the case, then the Greek texts offer invaluable aid in attempting to reconstruct the original form of the text as well as its recensional history.

Chapter three is an exploration of the importance of the Septuagint for textual reconstruction in the books of I Samuel,

Jeremiah, the chronology in I and II Kings, and the Chronicler's redactional use of Kings. In each of these cases, Klein demonstrates that the Septuagint text must be taken seriously and that in many cases superior reading(s) are found in the Greek.

Chapter four discusses the manuscript evidence available for the Septuagint and some of the problems involved in trying to reconstruct its original form. Chapter five introduces the reader to the practice of textual criticism or how the Septuagint can be used to determine the correct or better reading.

Klein's work, which is based on the extensive manuscript studies undertaken by Frank Cross and his students at Harvard, can be profitably used by the beginning student, even one who doesn't know Hebrew or Greek. In fact, it is the finest work of its kind available. Its only weakness is its tendency to provide a history of the Septuagint and its recensions and the assumed Hebrew types on which these were based which probably goes beyond the evidence. Is it really possible to speak of an original Septuagint text of the OT?

John H. Hayes
Visiting Professor of Old Testament
Interdenominational Theological
Seminary

