as a handbook for John's church are never contemplated. Needless to say, the attempts of the Jesus Seminar to assess the likely historicity of various sayings of our Lord are totally ignored. Benedict even rebukes the New Testament scholar Martin Hengel for offering 'an astonishingly negative, or (to put it more gently) extremely cautious, judgement of the historical character of the text' (p.228). But can a historian be blamed for drawing the conclusions that he believes are indicated by the evidence?
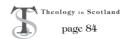
Of course the historical-critical method has its limits. It cannot give birth to living faith. But at its best it enables the faithful reader to discover how the books of the Bible enjoy a unity-in-diversity that resists all attempts at neat and tidy harmonisation. Even papal attempts to fuse the four gospels are bound to founder on the rocks that are the many witnesses of the New Testament. Indeed to be a non-fundamentalist Christian in the twenty-first century requires one to cope with the tension of having several conflicting New Testament voices bearing witness to the Saviour. By giving us such a collection of books for our spiritual enlightenment the Eternal One seems to be encouraging us to live with this tension. However this is one divine voice which Benedict XVI is unwilling to hear.

Denis Campbell,
St. Andrew's Church,
Blackrock,
County Dublin

The Witness of the Student Christian Movement: 'Church Ahead of the Church', Robin Boyd, London: SPCK, 2007, pp. xii, 212, ISBN 9780281058778. £14.99

Many surely remember or have heard about the "swinging sixties". Most people have strong opinions about these years: some romanticise the society that existed before the sixties and some want the radical spirit of the sixties to return. Most people surely agree that these years radically transformed the United Kingdom by bringing issues of social

justice to the centre of public discourse, strongly individualising society, and accelerating secularisation. It was also when the Student Christian Movement, a pioneering force in Christian witness and action in universities ever since its creation at the end of the 19th century as the Student Volunteer Missionary Union, nearly collapsed. Most of the SCM branches in British universities were closed and the highly politicised movement moved from its impressive headquarters in London to a mansion near Bristol. The SCM leadership wanted to transform the organisation into an alternative community away from the universities and to connect with other radical movements at the edge of society.

In *The Witness of the Student Christian Movement* Robin Boyd seeks to understand how the SCM had come to this point. In the first part of the book he examines the early history of the SCM, starting from the American Methodist John R. Mott's attempts to create a student movement for the evangelisation of the world. He also discusses the major influence of the SCM in early student politics in the UK (such as the creation of the National Union of Students), student relief aid in Europe after the First World War, and its influence on theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While the separation of more conservative students from the SCM at the time of the rise of theological liberalism was central to its early history, Boyd argues that the SCM still at no point lost its focus on engaging in Bible study, which he claims to be the heart and centre of the SCM. This centre was, however, lost during "the Storm" of the sixties as Risto Lehtonen has described in *Story of a Storm*. According to Boyd, the move from Bible study and centredness on God into centredness on political ideology was the reason for the demise of the SCM during the "swinging sixties". Essentially God had become a side issue and politics had become the centre.

The latter part of the book discusses the period after "the Storm" and the ways in which the SCM has sought to cope with much reduced resources and an increasingly secular society. Boyd argues that the SCM has returned to Bible study and active involvement in the universities. Despite its limited resources, through the people who have been part of the SCM, it has continued to have an important influence

on the Church and society. The World Council Churches, the United/ Uniting Churches in India and Australia and the Taizé Community in France (founded by a past Swiss SCM secretary) are, according to Boyd, obvious results of the work of the early SCM. In their life, he suggests, they reflect the spirit of the SCM: centredness on God, the central role of Bible study, openness to society, lay leadership, and willingness to challenge the status quo.

At the end of the book Boyd seeks ways to revitalise the SCM's witness in universities and as a catalyst for the wider Church. He sees closer relations between the Christian Unions and the SCM as being crucial to this. He points out that the past SCM leader, Lesslie Newbigin, who according to Boyd reflected the spirit of the SCM in his thought, is today an influential figure for many evangelical Christians. Boyd argues that this shows that past prejudices can be overcome.

This book is in many ways a result of Boyd's own soul-searching concerning his life in the SCM and "the Storm" that radically altered the SCM. Throughout he is somewhat naïve in his defence of the SCM and the ecumenical project. He is correct in calling for a student organisation open to all Christians, centred on God, and open to the world – in many ways he is describing the early SCM. However, it is not clear that the SCM could become this organisation again. This would certainly be impossible without critical engagement with its past. In this, Boyd's book is an important step.

Valtteri Mujunen,
Institut Catholique de Paris

Letters to God from the Wilderness, Ronald Beasley, Edinburgh: Shoving Leopard Productions, 2006, pp. 224, ISBN 9781905565092. £12.95

This volume, published posthumously, is the only work of a remarkable man: an Englishman who spent the greater part of his life in Scotland, first as a Senior Youth Worker with the Church of Scotland, then as