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# Book Reviews

## THE OXFORD ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

ed. John Manners

Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990 724 pp. £25

ISBN 0 19 822928 3

This is a magnificent volume, written by an impressive team of experts, profusely illustrated, exhaustive in its coverage, and frequently acute in its judgments.

As a teacher of church history, I have long been of the opinion that it is impossible to write a meaningful one-volume history of the Christian church: the subject is so vast and complex. *The Lion History of Christianity* achieved its remarkable success by taking soundings across the range of church history, complementing them by charts and diagrams which gave the feel of the whole, and using illustrative material. *The Oxford Illustrated History* has almost convinced me that a one-volume history can be successfully accomplished.

Of course, the attempt has not been made to give a condensed 'blow by blow' account. Instead, the task has been divided into nineteen sections, each of which is dealt with in a somewhat general fashion, commenting on trends more than events, including usually well-chosen examples, and firmly resisting the temptation to indulge in anything like narrative. Furthermore—and here I become apprehensive—while several of the contributions do full justice to the theological trends, the frame of reference is usually sociological, and some sections are almost pure sociology (notably the one on Latin America).

The book is organized in an interesting way. It is divided into three parts, entitled respectively: 'From the Origins to 1800'; 'Christianity since 1800'; and 'Christianity Today and Tomorrow'. The first part follows a broadly chronological sequence, with chapters on Eastern Christendom and Christianity and Islam tucked in. The second part has a geographical structure, with chapters on 'Great Britain and Europe'—written prior to 1992!—, 'North America', 'Latin America', 'Africa', 'Asia', and 'The Eastern Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe'. The third part is thematic, with studies of 'What Christians Believe', 'New Images of Christian Community', 'The Christian Conscience' and 'The Future of Christianity'. This third part may be said to break new ground in histories of the church, with its surveys of Christian beliefs, sociological interpretation of recent movements, Christian moral teaching, and even a peep into the future.

As a broad generalization, it may be said that most of the distinguished contributors write from a fairly liberal perspective. This comes out particularly clearly in one of the editor's own contributions—on the Enlightenment—(though in fairness it must be said that his other contribution, on the Expansion of Christianity (1500–1800), is one of the best in the whole volume). The chapter on 'Christianity and Islam' is remarkable for the amount it says about Islam (in a history of Christianity) and for its omission of any reference to Ramon Lull, the Christian strategist and active missionary to Islam in North Africa. The chapter on Latin America, with its heavy emphasis on sociology, does scant justice to the massive contribution of evangelicals to the development of Christianity. This is fairly generally true, throughout the volume. Maurice Wiles's account of 'What Christians Believe' is notable for two reasons: its high degree of objectivity (though radical

views come to the surface again and again); and its trinitarian summary of Christian beliefs in terms of creation, redemption, and transformation.

If only to show that the reviewer is no sworn enemy of sociology, Bryan Wilson's study of 'New Images of Christian Community', with its sub-headings, 'Christianity in the Context of Secularization', 'Religion and Secularization in the New World', 'Church Responses to Social Change', 'Extra-ecclesial Revitalization', and 'Christianity and Technological Change' is replete with insights. I particularly appreciated his analysis of ecumenism, and even his interpretation of the 'Charismatic Renewal' movement.

Special mention should also be made of the first and last chapters. Henry Chadwick's study of 'The Early Christian Community' is predictably good, doing justice to the theological developments—though I, personally, would not go all the way with him on his interpretation of the rise of the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon (for example, I am by no means convinced that there is evidence in the Pastoral Epistles for one man 'beginning to have a special position in both worship and charitable administration'). Again, it was no great surprise to find the concluding section by John Taylor on 'The Future of Christianity' so well informed and stimulating. Here, however, I confess to an instinctive mistrust of statistical projections.

It would need someone with more than my very limited insight into matters artistic to pay tribute to the illustrations. Their number is legion, and they include thirty seven colour plates, mostly page sized. They include paintings, woodcuts, photographs, and even cartoons. The contribution they make not only to the readability but to the impact of this superb illustrated history of the church is enormous. Incidentally, but not unimportantly, the size of print also contributes to readability. One small personal gripe is that I found it slightly irritating that some chapters carry sub-headings (occasionally to excess) whereas others omit them altogether.

It is a little difficult to forecast who is likely to use this volume, and for what purpose. It runs a slight danger of falling between the two stools of serving as a coffee table book (the text is too extensive) and meeting the need for a textbook for a church history survey course (if such monstrosities must be attempted!). I do not think I would feel able to recommend it as a general introduction to church history: for that purpose I would still recommend *The Lion History of Christianity*. But for anyone who possesses the interest—and the time—to deepen a superficial knowledge of the subject in a thoroughly enjoyable way, this is their book.

Do not be put off by the price—it is a bargain at £25. It is worth double (half for the illustrations, half for the text).

45B Haglane Copse, Pennington, Hants.

HAROLD ROWDON

### **THE NEW DEISM: Divine Intervention and the Human Condition**

**Richard Sturch**

Duckworth, London 1990 154pp. No price

ISBN 1 85399 152 X

The author, well-known to readers of *Churchman*, was formerly Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nigeria and is now rector of Islip, Oxford. He has written what is substantially a careful and reasoned reply to the position taken up by Prof. Maurice Wiles in his Bampton lectures of 1986 entitled 'God's Action in the World'. There Prof. Wiles expounded his thesis that God's action is limited to what may be characterized as 'the whole continuing creation of

the world', that is, to its creation and sustaining. God thus never 'intervenes' in the way of initiating particular events. This view is almost identical with the old deism, but the author eirenicly introduces a new term 'continuism' to distinguish it. He quotes the scientist-theologian A.C. Peacocke, who speaks here to the same point as Prof. Wiles, of 'the seamless character of the web which has been spun on the loom of time'; and *that* may fairly be said to sum up the idea behind continuism. Against this Dr. Sturch defends the position of the 'discontinuists', who believe that events have occurred (and still occur) which cannot be fitted into this 'seamless web'; events such as the Resurrection and other miracles, and even today's ordinary answers to prayer.

The author writes with admirable clarity, fairness and courtesy. There is no special pleading, and his points are well and skilfully made. The book is in two fairly equal parts. First comes a consideration of the phenomena (if that is the right word) of *Consciousness, Rationality, Ethics, Will and Religion*; these have all appeared in the course of the world's history, and can hardly be fitted into one 'seamless web' with purely physical forces. For instance, it can surely be reasonably maintained that acts of our wills influence the course of physical nature but are not part of it, and that the sense of right and wrong cannot be derived from considerations simply of matter and energy. So what of Dr Peacocke's 'seamless web'? Prof. Wiles might well concur in all of this, but it surely seriously challenges his position.

Next comes a short connecting Interlude: 'The Analogy of Human and Divine', in which the author makes some suitable points. 'Providence and Miracle', 'History', 'Prayer', 'Guidance', 'Grace', and 'Revelation' are the chapters which follow, and these oppose Prof. Wiles's position more directly than the first part does. Dr. Sturch argues cogently, and (as suits a liberal audience) for the most part without appealing to Scripture. I found him impressive. But then that may be because I happen to agree with him! Nevertheless, I am sure he has given us a book which constitutes a much needed, careful and considerable challenge to a good deal of influential present-day liberal thought. If it does not finally solve the problem of how we are to conceive of God acting in a world of natural law and creatures with 'free will', it does highlight the quite unacceptable consequences of the 'New Deism'. In a brief 'Conclusion', the author writes:

Unless God acts in His world, there is no meaning to history, no loving concern beyond that of a remote and self-sufficient Legislator. There is no hope for any who turn to Him in prayer, no reaching out of grace to those who cry to Him out of sin. God is neither the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ nor the Father of His people . . . all this may perhaps be true; but to call it Christian is most certainly false.

A fine book; I hope it will appear in paperback. An index would be an advantage.

Ivy Cottage, Grove, Wantage, Oxon.

DOUGLAS SPANNER

**CAN SCIENTISTS BELIEVE? Some examples of the attitude of scientists to religion** Ed. Nevill Mott

James and James, London 1991 182pp. £21 hb.

ISBN 0 907383 54 8

Sir Nevill Mott, F.R.S., who has 'put together' this book, is a very distinguished physicist, indeed a 1977 Nobel Laureate. He is now a confirmed Anglican, though

not one who can accept by any means all that is in the creeds. He feels 'repelled by the element of the miraculous' in Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, he feels the need for a religious belief since he is persuaded that there are forms of truth other than scientific truth. He has accordingly asked a number of religious fellow-scientists to discuss how they come to terms with the 'miraculous'. One of them is also a Nobel Laureate, the eminent brain specialist Sir John Eccles; and all have made their mark in the world of science. There are fifteen in all: seven are Roman Catholic, two Anglican, one American conservative evangelical, one conservative Jewish, and the rest not so easy to identify. What is the result like?

On the whole, it is disappointing. Sir Nevill, ('Christianity without Miracles?') defines a miracle as 'an act of God in which natural law is broken'. He seems to have two main objections to believing in miracles: *would God or could God, overturn His natural laws?*; and if the answer is 'Yes', why then did He allow the Black Death and the Holocaust? The faults here I suggest, are first that Sir Nevill has not thought out seriously enough conceivable relationships which might exist between God and the physical world other than a simple deistic clock-and-clockmaker one, which is what he seems to entertain; and second, that he seems to take it for granted that the human mind is qualified to assess the moral rightness or otherwise of Divine decisions; it can in effect pronounce judgment on them. Surely, Romans 11:33ff. should have warned us off that.

What about the other articles? Dr. Habgood, the Archbishop of York, writes a characteristically thoughtful piece on 'The Scientist as Priest' in which he draws parallels between the two vocations along three lines: the mutual representation of order, the evocation of worship, and the exercise of sacramental authority. Christopher Moss S.J., Dean of St. Edmund's, Cambridge, follows with the comparison 'Scientific knowing and the knowledge of God'. From a discussion of the commandment against graven images (which he interprets as a prohibition against attempts to objectify God, and which reminded me of Martin Buber's saying that 'properly God may only be addressed, not expressed') the writer moves to the important conclusion that both scientific knowledge and the knowledge of God share common characteristics of *both* objectivity *and* subjectivity. Both refer to what is real, but there are limits in both to the objectivity with which anything can be known. D.J. Bartholomew, Professor of Statistics at the London School of Economics, writes next on 'Probability, Belief and Truth'. This includes a very capable discussion (as one would expect from him) of the connexion between chance and the idea of Providence, following much the same lines as in his book *God of Chance* (S.C.M. 1984, reviewed in *Churchman* 1985-1). He ends with, 'ultimately the ground of belief must lie not in our ability to comprehend our creator, but in his comprehension of us'; that is well said. Many of the other contributions are rather inconsequential, but Sir John Eccles writes an interesting account of his theory of the mode of interaction of mind and brain in 'The Mystery of Being Human'; the evangelical Richard Bube, Professor of Materials Science and Electrical Engineering, presents a biblical view on the question 'How Can a Scientist be a Christian in Today's World?'; and Prof. Cyril Domb from Israel gives an orthodox Jewish account of 'Faith and Reason in Judaism'. For me, however, the most stimulating essay of all was the last, 'Faith and Mystery in Science, Reason and Scepticism in Religion'. This is by Prof. Francis Everitt of the Experimental Physics Laboratory at Stanford, California. He remarks that faith enters the lives of scientists at three levels: that of *conformist* faith, bowing to the teachings and beliefs of a community; that of *adventurous* faith, where one feels called to set out on some life-shaping spiritual journey; and finally, that of *puri-*

*fyng* faith, where one reaches a vision of truth to embrace which involves moral choice. There are parallels here with religion, he implies. Then he moves to 'mystery'. Mysteries in Physics are called 'principles', but they remain mysteries. But just as these two ideas from religion, 'faith' and 'mystery', are at home in science, so too the latter's 'reason' and 'scepticism' are at home in religion. I felt he was less sure-footed here, and rather overplayed the parallelism. He ends with a quotation from *Ecclesiastes*. I thought it was a pity he had not moved on to the *Nunc Dimittis*. Nevertheless, his is a stimulating essay.

This is a book for the sympathetic agnostic. It has a general index.

Ivy Cottage, Grove, Wantage, Oxon.

DOUGLAS SPANNER

**MADE IN HEAVEN Peter Chambers**

S.P.C.K., London 1988 178 pp. £4.95

ISBN 0281 04283 7

Most people would agree with the sentiments of Winefred Ashcroft that, 'Marriage is in big trouble today, one in three marriages in Britain finish in divorce and the number is rising.'

The truth of such a statement is the probable motivation for the publication of *Made in Heaven* and books like it. The family unit is the 'bedrock' of society, and anything we can do to prevent its demise is well worth the effort. Pre-marital counselling and marriage preparation is something concrete that ministers, pastors and lay counsellors can offer couples who come to us asking on the subject. However, this has either been too technical and detailed, or 'tabloid'. It has either gone over our heads or insulted our intelligence. *Made in Heaven* was written to fill a perceived 'gap in the middle'. This book is in fact intended to help those of us on the 'front line' of pastoral care to support couples more effectively, and to do so by learning 'step by step' from what we are already doing.

Chambers seeks to challenge those who are uncertain about the value of marriage preparation, and he does it by demonstrating how valuable it actually is. I wholeheartedly agree with his contention stated in the 'Preface'—page ix: 'That this ministry belongs in the ordinary course of life and learning'. And it only makes sense 'if the church's ministry is earthed in the ordinariness of family and human relationships'. I was relieved to see that Chambers affirms the 'superiority of Christian marriage over all other forms of co-habitation—page 10. Those 'deeper spiritual dimensions', indeed what is 'sacred' about it.

In essence, this book is a careful study of marriage by a skilled practitioner. It takes us from the initial contact—that first enquiry, to the ceremony itself. It also has something to say about follow-up. Chambers believes that how couples are treated from the outset, will effect their attitude for the rest of their lives. He sees the 'sacred union' embracing three dimensions or facets: the institutional, the relational and the familial. The way all three are viewed can help the recognition by the couple that their experience 'transcends human language and ceremonies'.

*Made in Heaven* is divided into three parts plus no less than six appendices. All this packed into a book of 178 pages. The result is that chapters are concise and tightly argued, the author can never be accused of waffling.

My main criticism is that Chambers has placed too much reliance upon skills and training, and does not recognize sufficiently the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, and his ability to equip the minister/pastor/lay counsellor for this vital aspect of pas-

toral care! I think the book tends to be too technical in parts, and some of the language and concepts will be unfamiliar to the average clergyman or lay-worker.

The book abounds with quotable paragraphs. For example on page 27 he writes: 'The minister will do well to hold together what he does as a person and what is provided by the rite'. He goes on: 'Too strong a sense of personal ministry will obscure the ritual action, too mechanical use of the rite will inhabit personal participation'.

I found his analogy to the theatre quite useful- the Shakespearean 'All the world's a stage' idea. He suggests that 'the ceremony' provides the means to act on and make personal what is eternal, so that participants come through the ceremony and carry away with them a new sense of who they are! If marriage itself is the drama of the man woman relationship, then the wedding may be the 'curtain up' with all the principal players coming on stage together for the first time. Our role is that of actor director and stage manager. And our main task is to help the other players discover and gain confidence in their roles.

*Made in Heaven* is full of sensible practical advice, with plenty of real interviews dramatically transcribed.

We who serve on the 'front line' or the 'business end' of pastoral care, should be grateful for this admirable contribution to the whole field of marriage preparation. The fact that, in my opinion the book is a trifle tedious and lacking in sparkle at times, is more than compensated for by its helpfulness. I will certainly keep it for reference on my bookshelf.

Emmanuel Church, Hastings, Sussex

PAUL O'GORMAN

### **THE GENETIC REVOLUTION Patrick Dixon**

Kingsway, Eastbourne 1993 253pp. £6.99pb.

ISBN 086065 871 6

Dr Patrick Dixon is a medical doctor who is well-known as the founder of A.C.E.T., the national and international agency for helping A.I.D.S. victims; he is also author and broadcaster on the same topic. He writes here as an evangelical Christian who is concerned at the speed with which the techniques of genetic engineering are developing and facing humanity with ethical and health problems about which most people are largely ignorant. It is not an alarmist book, though it deals with a subject which might well cause us alarm; in fact, the threats posed by the discovery of the new techniques are probably as serious, or more serious, than those posed by the discovery of nuclear power. What these techniques are, and why they present such menacing possibilities, the author sets out to explain to the intelligent layman. He writes in a non-technical style, and my only complaint is that his explanation of the mechanics of nuclear division and of the process by which the genetic material is passed on from one generation to another is hardly clear enough for lay readers to feel they are firmly grounded at the start. I would like to have seen those impressive elements of the image visible under the higher powers of the common microscope, the chromosomes, introduced a little more solidly. However, the main concerns come over clearly enough. What are they?

One of the first is the fact that foods from genetically-engineered plants and animals are already on the market, and unlabelled as such. Genes have more effects than just one; and there may be harmful ones beside that intended. Then there is the possibility of what is called 'cloning' producing many individuals of

identical genetic constitution—multiple ‘identical twins’ to order. This is already routine for animals, and ‘may have started (secretly) for humans’. Again, special animals for research have already been engineered: the ‘Oncomouse’, for instance—a mouse which regularly develops cancer, and which has been patented and is used for cancer research. Human insulin is now made by an engineered bacterium. This latter may be unexceptionable; but what about cows engineered to produce human milk? Farm animals have been produced suffering (like the Oncomouse) from painful complaints. Is this acceptable, especially when financial advantage is in prospect? That bacteria and viruses can be engineered is now common knowledge; but has it been widely realized that this presents a terrifying prospect: what if the products prove to be virulent pathogens? Here is a weapon for psychopaths very much cheaper to produce than nuclear bombs. Myxomatosis, and the suggestion (now discounted) that human immune deficiency virus (H.I.V.) might have been artificially engineered are two modern concerns that should convince us that this is not a mere alarmist suggestion, but one perhaps of even apocalyptic significance.

Of course, the techniques have beneficial uses too, but even these raise many profound ethical dilemmas. The author details these, and goes on to suggest what sort of urgent national and international action the situation calls for. He makes a good case for qualified Christians to become involved, and to promote a biblical response to them; this includes some valuable practical suggestions for ordinary readers.

This is an important book, and I hope it will be widely read. A future edition would benefit by adding a very simple description of cell structure, a short account of the chromosome mechanism including meiosis and a brief outlining of the methods by which the ‘genome’ is actually ‘engineered’ in the laboratory and with what instrumentation. This would help to maintain the reader’s intelligent interest in this very vital subject. There are five Appendices; the Christian Medical Fellowship’s Submission to the British Medical Association on Genetic Engineering (8pp.); Further Reading (2pp.); Useful Addresses (6pp.); a Glossary of Terms (5pp.); and Notes (26pp.); There is an Index of 15pp. The book is well produced.

Ivy Cottage, Grove, Wantage, Oxon.

DOUGLAS SPANNER

**THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN** John Stott

Inter-Varsity Press, London 1992 432pp £11.95

ISBN 0 85110 973 X

*The Contemporary Christian* is John Stott’s definitive and passionate plea to the church. Before we attempt to teach or evangelize, he urges, we must listen to God’s Word and God’s World. Only then will we be able to communicate the authentic gospel effectively.

The book is really a companion Volume to his *Issues Facing Christians Today*, which is also still in print.

This book is divided into five sections: The Gospel, The Disciple, The Bible, The Church and the World.

Under the first heading he seeks to deal with human paradox, authentic freedom, Christ and His cross, the relevance of the resurrection and Jesus Christ as Lord. When it comes to considering the disciple, Stott pleads for a listening ear, a right use of mind and emotions, the need to understand guidance, vocation and ministry, and consideration of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Treatment of the Bible, Church



and World is handled with the same thoroughness and in a detailed manner worthy of all we have come to expect from a pen of this illustrious expositor.

If *Issues Facing Christians Today* explores questions of social ethics then *The Contemporary Christian* relates to questions of doctrine and discipleship. John Scott is clearly correct in exhorting us to make the connexion between word and world—especially those of us who are preachers.

There is nothing dated about this material. It hits the mark of contemporary issues as the title suggests. It points up the very real secular challenges to the Church, argues for local church evangelism in the Decade, shows the folly of overt pluralism and the place of Christ's uniqueness in a multi-faith society. There is an extremely helpful Christology of mission which traces the incarnation as the model, the cross as the cost, the resurrection as the mandate, the exaltation as the incentive, the pentecostal gift as the power, and the *parousia* as the urgency. Much of this material could be sermonized and, perhaps better, could be utilized as Study Group fodder. In fact a Study Guide is added at the end of the book as a bonus—questions which cover each chapter.

Stott is tackling five key questions, and who can dodge them in today's world? What is the authentic gospel, what characterizes the obedient disciple, how can we relate the Bible with integrity to contemporary society, what is the Church's calling and how can she fulfil it, and what is the Church's mission in a pluralistic Society?

Of pressing interest is Scott's treatment of the new hermeneutic and, as we would expect, he is no Party's slave. He defines the old hermeneutic as concentrating on object and the new on subject and warns of the danger of polarization between the two. But he is also cutting in his criticism of the Church's unfaithfulness:

It has been influenced more by the world than by the Word. Instead of challenging the *status quo* with the values of the Kingdom of God it has acquiesced in it. Instead of resisting the encroachments of secularism, it has surrendered to them.

Quite so! This seems to be why the Church of England, and consequently the nation, is in crisis.

There is much here to inform, much to stimulate and fire, certainly much which will supply ammunition to our spiritual firearms, and some things that we shall not agree with. But the thesis is sound and the price is right. Buy it. Use it. Preach it and do what I did. Buy two copies and give one to your more Liberal Bishop!

Broughton Rectory, Brigg, Lincolnshire

BARRY SHUCKSMITH

**RELIGION IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991 Vol. 1 Ian Barbour**

S.C.M. Press, London 1990 299 pp. £15pb.

ISBN 0 334 02298 3

Those who have read Prof. Barbour's valuable earlier book, *Issues in Science and Religion* (1966) will have an idea of what to expect in this one - a fine systematic presentation of a multitude of divergent views and a beautiful clarity of expression in setting them out. Dr Barbour, who is Professor of Science, Technology and Society at Carleton College in Minnesota was asked to deliver the Gifford Lectures for 1989-91, and this volume is the first of two covering this assignment. He may not be one of the currently most original thinkers in the field he covers,; but he is

certainly one of the best teachers in it. His grasp of the subject matter is astonishing, and whether he is writing on theology, science, ethics or metaphysics his treatment is sure-footed and extremely well-informed. There can be very few books in this field which can be so warmly recommended to anyone who wishes to explore it as this one. It is a pleasure to read, and the subdivisions, paragraph headings, summaries of differing views with their pros and cons make it very easy to find one's way about. There is a complete absence of distorted or prejudiced presentation of views which the author does not like; and conversely, he does not hide objections to those he himself favours. All this is not to say that his views are such as to commend themselves to conservative evangelicals; it is the temper and sheer capability of his lectures which I am commending. The treatment is set out in three parts: first, 'Religion and the Methods of Science', then 'Religion and the Theories of Science', and finally 'Philosophical and Theological Reflections'. The first part has extended discussions on such topics as the relationship between science and religion the role of models and paradigms in both, and the different ways in which the two disciplines respond to history, absolutism, relativism and pluralism. In the second part the author deals very lucidly with the intricacies of modern physical theories and their suggested bearing on such topics as mind, life, freedom, eastern mysticism and God. He goes on to discuss very thoroughly the bearing of the Big-Bang theory, the Anthropic Principle, the role of Chance, Contingency and many other influential ideas on the biblical teaching of creation *ex nihilo*, eschatology and the future of man. Then comes evolution, the origin of life, the so-called Modern Synthesis, reductionism, emergence, purpose, consciousness, design and so on, all treated in an impressive way by a man who has obviously read widely and deeply. In the third part we move nearer to the central concerns of faith: human nature, the status of mind, the origin of religion, the rôle of Christ, and the future. Process Thought (which the author favours) occupies a fairly long and lucid section; few could complain that it is too packed with technicalities to be easily comprehensible. Finally the question of how to conceive of God's relation to the physical creation is taken up, and the various models proposed at different times examined carefully. The problem of evil and suffering is given a thoughtful consideration. There is a last section on Process Theism—God as Creative Participant, with a very fair statement of the difficulties of what, the author confesses, is the view to which he himself leans.

This is a book I would strongly recommend to the serious contender for the historic faith. Needless to say, it does not take a strongly biblical stance. Its position is that theology is 'critical reflection on the life and thought of the religious community', and the Bible is a very important source for this purpose—but by no means the only one. For the author, 'Christ as a person (not just as a body) was part of the continuous process which runs back through *Australopithecus* . . . to those atoms formed in primeval stars'. There is therefore no absolute distinction between him and other religious geniuses. It is this outlook, sincerely if mistakenly held, with which we have to do battle, thoughtfully and courteously, if we wish to see our culture won back again to 'the faith once delivered to the saints'.

There are twenty pages of notes; two pages giving details of British editions of books mentioned in them; and a six-page Index of Names. A very worthwhile addition in a future edition would be a good Subject Index. There is to be a second volume entitled *Ethics in an Age of Technology*. It will be eagerly awaited.

**THE HUNGER FOR SIGNIFICANCE R.C. Sproul**

Hodder & Stoughton, London 1991 279pp. £3.99 pb. ISBN 0 340 67830 0

This is actually a re-publication of a book published in 1983 under the title 'In Search of Dignity'. However the quest for self-esteem which forms the background against which this work was originally written is still there, and makes the book as relevant as ever.

Sproul is well known for his ability to communicate profound truths very simply. Here we have that gift deployed in making clear the significance of being human. The author starts by focusing on our search for value and worth. But he then goes on to examine what this means in particular contexts such as the home, school, hospital, prison, church and work. It is a volume that can be highly commended.

52 Elm Road, London E11

MARK BURKILL

**YOURS, LORD A Handbook of Christian Stewardship**

**Michael Wright**

Mowbray, London 1992 128pp, £6.99 ISBN 0 264 67275 5

Nowadays, a Diocesan Stewardship (Resources) Adviser is as likely to help a parish to build a vision as raise money. Michael Wright in this gentle book is concerned that his readers understand that 'Christian stewardship is a much broader and richer vision of glad responses to God for all creation. It is a responsible use of our many blessings, material and spiritual.

This book is the writing up of a 1992 conference of the Churches' Stewardship Network of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, who invited Michael Wright to write it.

The first half of the book sets out basic principles of stewardship. This section embraces much (every member ministry, money, mortgage repossessions, discrimination of different kinds, A.I.D.S. homosexuality, world problems, all get a mention) but necessarily it gets a grip on little. A good deal of attention is paid to what the Bible says, and helpfully so. All Bible quotations are written out in full. The second half of the book is more of a 'handbook', offering guidance on how to prepare a Mission Statement, to select aims, to help others change, to conduct personal appraisal and the like.

The book is pleasantly written, though we are given few examples of good stewardship in action. More seriously, the great gospel truths of salvation and redemption through Christ's self-giving hardly feature here as a foundation or motive for our glad and total response. I also missed any consideration of our stewardship of the gospel, as a deposit to be passed on 'to faithful people who will teach others also.' Would that in local churches we did see ourselves more as debtors to those around, with the gospel solemnly entrusted to us by God for the people we serve!

Perhaps the most effective setting for this book could be a church that has never faced any challenge of giving or stewardship before. And it might be suitable for someone wanting a not-too-demanding outline for a retreat or personal study.

But most *Churchman* readers will have read more inspiring and practical books on the stewardship of money and other talents, and would probably prefer books

by John Finney and Peter Brierley on vision building and leadership. Michael Wright does commend John Finney's book *The Well Church* (S.U. & C.P.A.S.), but disconcertingly he also commends Matthew Fox, the former Dominican priest, for his book *Original Blessing*, which, he says, 'challenges the notion that our spirituality should centre on the doctrines of the Fall and Redemption' and 'is a book which can be explored for a lifetime of growth in personal and spiritual relationships.'

Of the hundred and twenty-eight six are completely blank, and there are only a hundred and ten pages of actual text. The author expresses the hope that his readers will wear this book out themselves and buy a second copy to lend to friends. Optimistic, I would have thought.

St. Matthews Rectory, St. Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex

ROGER COMBES

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