REVIEWS

Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000[1]

Iain H. Murray

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2000; 342pp., £13.50; ISBN 0 85151 783 8

This major, carefully documented work is concerned to trace the fundamental shift of doctrinal distinctiveness among evangelicals, primarily in the Church of England, and also churches in North America. Murray's hypothesis is that this shift has been largely caused by a threefold influence: liberal theology, ecumenism and the desire among evangelical scholars for intellectual respectability. Prior to the mid-1960s, those evangelicals, who are the subject of the book, courageously stood firm on biblical principles in the tradition of the Reformers. Thereafter they have begun to lose their way as they have succumbed to the subtle temptation of wanting to extend evangelical influence within mainline denominations and be accepted by non-evangelicals as voices to be heard. In this review, after a brief overview of the main arguments of the book, I shall venture to make some tentative comments on the author's hypothesis.

Five main themes are dealt with. First is growth of liberal theology due to Schleiermacher's writings and his separation of objective truth from Christian 'feelings'. His teaching on religious 'experience' opened the way to serious loss of fidelity to the Scriptures, his corrosive influence spreading to theologians on both sides of the Atlantic.

Second, two chapters are given to the development of Billy Graham's thinking which is followed through (in the opinion of this reviewer) with accuracy and compassion. Murray's case is that while the evangelist continued to preach a message which had the Cross of Christ at its heart, he also pursued a deliberate policy of ecumenism, insisting that churchmen of all theological persuasions be invited to take part in his crusades, which inevitably led to serious questions about both the

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[1] This review also appears as an article in the current issue of the *Rutherford Journal of Church and Ministry* 8.1.

effectiveness and rightness of his ministry. Graham's regrettable naivety over the support American Presidents offered him is given honest yet gracious treatment.

Third, Murray detects 'an unconscious shift in ecclesiology' which he believes evangelical Anglicans adopted as a consequence of their experience of the high-profile Graham Crusades of 1954-56. The sharp difference of opinion between John W. R. Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the Evangelical Alliance Conference of 1966 is seen as a decisive event in the change in theological stance of evangelicals within mainline denominations, evidenced in the outcome of the Keele (1967) and Nottingham (1977) Anglican Congresses. Stott and Packer are portrayed as opting to work for greater influence of evangelicals within the Anglican Communion and for pragmatic reasons allying with Anglo-Catholics in the attempt to resist liberal influences in the denomination.

Fourth, 'Intellectual Respectability and Scripture' is another theme. The author has an impressive grasp of the issues involved and demonstrates that many who seek to make evangelical theology intellectually respectable invariably compromise the reformed understanding of verbal inspiration. For interested readers who want to follow up Murray's arguments, he gives a wealth of footnote references to a wide range of literature, mostly written within the past two decades.

A fifth major theme is 'the growing warmth between evangelicals and Roman Catholics' (p. 220) which ultimately found expression in 1994 in the document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (ECT). There are no prizes for guessing that in discussing the intense debate which followed ECT, Murray comes down firmly on the side of those who strenuously opposed this ecumenical rapprochement with Roman Catholics by leading American evangelicals. The reader is eloquently (again with impressive documentation) warned of the danger of tolerating error in the church for the sake of unity.

A sixth issue, which has not been far from the surface throughout the entire book, is the vexed question of ecclesiology and the 'one church' vision. While he maintains that his ecclesiology is that of the reformers, some readers will quickly realise his is in fact very much an 'exclusive' view of church membership, not the 'inclusive' view of the mainstream reformers.[2] Having already dealt with the importance of the question,

[2] Murray, according to James Bannerman's understanding of church membership, would seem to have adopted an Independent's stance on membership of the church, rather than the reformed (mainline)

'What is a Christian?', he develops his view of the church visible and invisible and the implications for the preservation of a faithful church.

The final chapter gives a helpful summary under six headings of the main conclusions the author has reached.

By any standards, this is an extremely impressive work and reformed Christians will be deeply indebted to Iain Murray for his immense scholarship, inexorable logic and clear passion for the purity of the church and the glory of God. However, I would respectfully suggest there are several areas in which many reformed evangelicals will beg to differ with him.

First must be the interpretation he gives to the Martyn Lloyd-Jones address in 1966. Murray cites the reporting of only two Christian magazines, both of which were controlled by the Billy Graham organisation. He thus clearly implies that the Graham ecumenicity engaged in biased, unfair assessment of the Doctor, portraying him as saying something he never said. However, the careful reader who takes time to go back to the Doctor's original address, as well as to the Christian media's many other reports, will find it impossible to accept Iain Murray's interpretation of Lloyd-Jones' meaning. Such a basic apparent inaccuracy does raise serious questions about the objectivity of the author's judgements elsewhere in the book.

Those evangelicals who have served a lifetime in mainline denominations without let or hindrance by liberal colleagues will be disappointed that Murray seems unable to understand or empathise with their position. Some of the 'mainline' giants of the past held views which certainly would not be acceptable to the author. Within the limits of this review, I have space only to cite two. Samuel Rutherford held a highly pragmatic and, dare I say, unbiblical view that the divine Christ was the true King of all Scotland, whereas the Incarnate Christ was King of the Church. So Rutherford could refer to the entire population of Scotland as 'Christ's flock'.[3] I cite this to illustrate the realism necessarily employed by evangelicals in mainline denominations.

Presbyterian stance. See James Bannerman, *Church of Christ* (1869, reprint Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1960) pp. 73ff.

[3] Readers interested to follow up this Christology which has been criticised as being Nestorian should read Gillespie's work, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, 1644, and the critique by W. D. J. McKay, *An Ecclesiastical Republic: Church Government in the Writings of George Gillespie* (Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 61ff.

In my long experience in a denomination with many 'liberal' ministers, I have to say that personally I have known few who would actually deny Paul's gospel; it is not just that they sincerely believe their own 'spin' on Paul, but also that they regard us evangelicals as putting our own 'spin' on him too. And it must be admitted that there are many 'orthodox' who seem as slow to reach out to the lost with Paul's gospel as those liberals.

The second example of a 'mainline' giant is that of J. C. Ryle who is alluded to and quoted with approval several times in the book. But what is not mentioned is the fact that, in the interests of fairness, Ryle followed the practice of appointing not only evangelical canons in his diocese but more than a balancing number of canons of very different theological views.[4] Murray unfortunately does not understand this kind of co-operation which freed Ryle to declare the truth faithfully and fearlessly, his integrity as a bishop widely respected within his denomination. In his day, no less than today, there were many clergy who hardly even paid lip service to their church's doctrinal standards. Not a few of Murray's statements in the book would come very near to condemning Ryle's position, despite the fact he is held up by him as a paradigm that modern Anglicans should emulate.

The book is implicitly critical of leading Anglican evangelicals who not only have never compromised the truth of God in their published works but indeed have stood firm as champions of sound biblical orthodoxy. One thinks, for example, of Stott's most excellent book, *The Cross of Christ*, perhaps the only orthodox work of note on the Atonement for at least a generation, yet the reader will search in vain for a word of appreciation of John Stott's outstanding contribution to the cause of the gospel, not least in his masterly strategy to support and develop theological education in Third World countries.

A further disappointment for some readers will be the astonishing selectivity the author chooses to exercise. The remarkable work of the Proclamation Trust over some twenty years, emanating from the ministry of Dick Lucas in St Helen's Bishopsgate, is surely a case in point. Apart from a note in the flyleaf, there is no mention of it in the book, and not a word about Dick Lucas, whose thirty-seven-year ministry in St Helen's has helped nurture hundreds of Anglican clergy who have not yielded one iota to the current ecumenical pressures and who continue to exercise faithful expository ministries building up the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.

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[4] See Eric Russell, *That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child* (Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2001), p. 145.

(Cf. also in the Anglican Church the movements, 'Reform' and 'Fellowship of Word and Spirit', which represent well over 1500 clergy committed to the reformed evangelical position; there is no mention of these.) Nor is there more than a passing reference to Scotland and to movements within a mainline denomination such as the Crieff Fellowship has fostered. In the period covered by the book, the number of reformed evangelical ministers within the Church of Scotland has risen from literally less than a handful to many hundreds who now bear witness to the evangel in virtually every part of the nation.

A final comment on the book must be the total absence in its pages of any mention of evangelism. We all know of churches and groups of churches which have been preoccupied with purity of doctrine and disciplinary procedures; this Iain Murray would applaud. But we have not noticed that they have been particularly concerned (far less fruitful) in searching out the lost and gathering in men and women to the fold of God. After forty years of ministry, I have observed that churches with an 'exclusive' view of membership can be almost entirely barren in evangelism. A far stronger biblical case can be made for an 'inclusive' view of church membership than Murray is prepared to allow, and it has been those holding this latter view who seem to me to have been singularly fruitful in reaching the unsaved for Christ.

Nevertheless, this important work carries solemn warnings for evangelical Christians at the start of a new century. May it revive our love for the church of Christ and lay a burden on all our hearts to take heed how and with what materials we build on the foundation and cornerstone, Christ Jesus, the King and Head of his church.

David C. Searle, Rutherford House, Edinburgh

Christ the Center

George A. F. Knight

Handsel Press, Edinburgh, and Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999; 88pp., ISBN 1 871828 38 4 and ISBN 0 8028 4624 6

This short study of the 'Theology of the Incarnation', by the renowned scholar and teacher of Old Testament studies and Semitic languages, is intended to show that the meaning of the Incarnation is found in the Old Testament, rooted in a Hebraic world view. Modern theology, according to the author, has been shaped by Greek philosophy in a disproportionate manner, especially in the dualistic outlook. The ancient Hebrews, by contrast, never accepted a dualistic worldview and it is important, Knight says, to allow our understanding of the person of Jesus to be controlled

by Hebrew rather than Greek thinking. The argument is presented in a thorough, detailed manner, and will only readily be followed by those who are students in this area or those who are highly motivated to cope with the many examples of precise exegesis. The author sets down a number of marvellous insights in these seven short chapters but sometimes, in this reviewer's mind, the thread of reasoning appears disjointed. Consequently it is not easy reading at times.

The fourth chapter, 'The Incarnation of Christ', is clearly the central one. Thus before dealing directly with the meaning of Christ's coming, Knight unfolds something of the Hebrew mind and its relevance for our understanding of the being of God and the Trinity. The author uses, throughout the book, the metaphor of a coin, with its two sides, to indicate the way in which the human and divine relate in the unity of God's creative and redemptive purposes for the world. The Hebrew concept of unity is helpfully explained in the opening three chapters, with particularly useful information being given on the concepts, 'being' (nephesh) and 'word' (dabar).

The connection between the prologue of John's Gospel and the opening chapters in Genesis is underlined and a very strong case is made for showing that the Greek word 'logos' is inadequate in itself for understanding the statement, 'the word became flesh', and its reference to divine being. Knight suggests an interesting link between the titles Son of Man and Son of David to show the sufficiency of God's salvation in Christ for the worst of sins, that is 'sins with a high hand' (Leviticus).

The last two chapters, on the resurrection and the church, followed by a short epilogue, provide further material supporting this thesis that the divine and the human are bound forever in Jesus and his body on earth, the church.

The author makes use of his considerable Hebrew and Semitic scholarship throughout and those who persevere with the closely argued text, will reap expository rewards, in due season! Knight's use of and perhaps dependence on Barth may irritate some conservative readers, but the references are not excessive. The setting out of some consequences of the contemporary context of postmodernism in relation to belief in the Incarnation was helpful. Inspirational was Knight's closing paragraph and his reference to his wife's faith in the Incarnate and Risen Lord as she courageously coped with the onset of terminal cancer. This ultimately is 'the victory (and the theology) which overcomes the world'!

Martin A. W. Allen, Chryston Parish Church

The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology

Gary Dorrien
Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2000; 238pp.; ISBN 0 664 22151 3

This is an able, well-researched, scholarly, book. It is helpful both for the student approaching the subject for the first time and also for the scholar who is already familiar with the matters raised. It reads well.

Dorrien, as he himself tells us, is not a Barthian or an advocate of any existing form of neoorthodxy. Yet he deals sympathetically, if critically, with Barth's theology. His aim is to show the relevance of Barth's theology for today.

Adopting an historical approach, Dorrien gives a clear account of the development of Barth's thought from his early days as a student, then parish minister, through to his years as a professor of theology in Göttingen, Bonn and Basel. Despite the liberal background of the period Barth become the foremost champion of the 'theology of the Word of God' and the pre-eminent theologian of his century.

Barth was the single figure that all other twentieth-century theologians had to deal with, if not define themselves against. The period through which he lived was theologically complex. Dorrien guides us through this 'tangled segment of twentieth century Protestantism', summarising briefly the theological position of Barth's contemporaries and showing us how each stood theologically in regard to Barth and he to them.

The book, in its critical appreciation of Barth, raises issues which are still vitally important today for biblical scholarship, and yet, I believe, are so little understood or acted upon. Contrary to Bultmann, and some of his contemporaries, Barth maintains that the Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Atoning Death and Resurrection of Christ are real historical events essential for faith. Yet they are not open to verification by secular historical methods. They may not be judged by criteria drawn from a non-Christian and pagan source. They are events which must be understood in their own light through the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is self-authenticating. That means, in Barth's view, that biblical scholarship must adapt itself to its subject matter and be true to the Word of God which it is studying.

On a more critical note, I personally do not like the terms orthodox and neoorthodox which are used so frequently in the book (any more than did Barth himself like the word 'Barthian'), no matter how useful these terms might be in a theological survey of the kind that is here conducted.

Every theologian is different and should be considered in his or her own light. Equally I would have preferred to see greater emphasis on the importance to Barth of the doctrine of Jesus Christ which for him is the starting point of any true biblical theology and likewise a greater emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity. The book, however, is a valuable contribution to the study of Karl Barth and 'the influences and the controversies that constituted his life'. I recommend it.

David W. Torrance, North Berwick

Solid Ground: 25 Years of Evangelical Theology

Carl R. Trueman, Tony J. Gray, Craig L. Blomberg (eds)
Apollos, Leicester, 2000; 319 pp., £14.99; ISBN 0 85111 465 2

The journal *Themelios* has proved to be of great value for evangelical students of theology and religious studies. It is now twenty-five years old, although this statement may be somewhat misleading as it had slimmer predecessors from the same publishing house and built on the foundation earlier laid by them. Of course, as most readers of this journal will know, 'foundation' is the meaning of the Greek word, *themelios*, itself.

This volume has been published to mark the journal's Silver Jubilee. It consists of sixteen essays, reprinted from the journal and selected from its whole history, plus 'two perspectives on the contemporary scene', one about Britain, by Carl Trueman, and the other about America, by Craig Blomberg. The essays are arranged under four headings: Biblical Studies, Hermeneutics, Systematic and Historical Theology, and Application.

They have been well selected, for although inevitably they bear the marks of the times in which and for which they were written, sometimes dealing critically with writers whose books have now disappeared from bibliographies issued to students, they are all still relevant. Any student reading the book would, however, be well advised to look at the original date of particular essays before reading them so as to set them in their historical context. Hermeneutics, for instance, is a fast-moving subject and the three essays under this general heading, published originally in 1975, 1989 and 1993, show how the main issues have altered over the years.

The essayists are almost entirely British, with Scots and others working largely in Scotland well represented by essays from Howard Marshall, Larry Hurtado, David Wright, John Drane and Carl Trueman. The two concluding essays, by Carl Trueman and Craig Blomberg show very clearly how different the British and American scenes are, for the former calls for a greater sense of accountability to the churches by

British evangelical scholars and expresses some concern about elements of theological slippage that he sees amongst conservative evangelicals, while the second is troubled at the way evangelical scholars can be shackled by the rigidity and extremism to be found in some church circles in America.

We can be thankful to God for the extent to which many evangelical scholars are now doing work of great value, and the fact that the value of that work is now much more widely recognised by others, but there can be no complacency, for what needs to be done still exceeds what has been done already.

If you know an evangelical student who is struggling with problems raised by some form of negative criticism or theological radicalism, why not give him or her a year's subscription to *Themelios?*

Geoffrey W. Grogan, Glasgow

Radical Orthodoxy

Edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward
Routledge, London, 1999; pp.xii+285pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 415 19699

This book, by mostly High Church Anglican and Roman Catholic – and mostly young – theologians claims that Radical Orthodoxy counters the secularisation of modern culture, 'reclaiming... the world' by situating the concerns of secularisation within a Christian theological framework. 'It visits sites in which secularism has invested heavily – aesthetics, politics, sex, the body, personhood, visibility, space – and resituates them from a Christian standpoint; that is, in terms of the Trinity, Christology, the Church, the Eucharist' (p. 1). Its orthodoxy is thus pre-Reformation orthodoxy, and its radicalism lies in a return to the roots of Augustinian illumination and participation and by this 'systematically to criticise modern society, culture, politics, art, science and philosophy with unprecedented boldness'. (p. 2) It will attempt these feats by accepting the secular demise of truth, and so by reconfiguring theological truth (p. 1).

This much is clear, or fairly clear. An ambitious programme, in all conscience. But after these opening words the reader is confronted with closely printed pages containing many sentences such as the following, taken more or less at random.

> It is this suspension of the created order between nothingness and the infinite which demands that its order be primarily a temporal and audible sequence, rather than a spatial and visible one. This might seem a paradox

> in that it makes time, which does not stand still, closer to eternity than space, whose permanence might more easily seem to mimic it. However, the whole point is that such mimicry risks a demonic substitution for eternity, or forced 'spatialisation'. By contrast, the passage of time continuously acknowledges the nothingness of realised being, and can become the vehicle of a desire for a genuinely infinite 'permanence'. (Catherine Pickstock on Augustine on music, p. 248)

> What does my faith make real? Faith in God, specifically in the God of Christianity, makes God real within the horizon of my 'I', which is to say faith in God makes me the horizon where God is made real and so expressed. (Laurence Paul Hemming on Nihilism, p. 92)

> I wish to argue that, since none of us has access to bodies as such, only to bodies that are mediated through the giving and receiving of signs, the series of displacements or assumptions of Jesus's body continually refigures a masculine symbolics until the particularities of one sex give way to the particularities of bodies which are male and female. (Graham Ward on Bodies, p. 163)

> Indeed it may be suggested that only when theology begins to think sexual difference starting from the homosexual couple as its paradigm of sexual difference will it be possible to think the difference not in crudely biologistic terms, as in so much of Balthasar, but in more properly theological ones. This thinking of sexual difference is indeed already present in both Barth and Balthasar as the relationship of donation, reception and return; but it needs to be thought more radically, as that which establishes sexual difference, as that whether it plays between Father and Son, man and man, woman and woman, or woman and man, it remains, as Ward argues, always constitutive of (hetero)sexual difference. (Gerard Loughlin on Erotics: God's Sex, p. 158)

Part of the problem may be that the book amounts neither to scholarly analysis of the many historical sources and movements which are alluded to, nor to a tract for the times. Unprecedented boldness appears to require the authors to sweep along through the ideas of, it may be, Kant or Ockham or Scotus or Barth, making judgements which, to say the least, call for scholarly reflection. This breathless dogmatism is an important failure because the fulfilment of the project must lie in appealing to sources and to precedents the convincingness of which must supplant careful reasoning, since 'reason' is allegedly a secular product requiring the reconfiguring of theological truth, whatever that means.

The book is full of oracular assertions because the authors' bold prosecution of their radical orthodoxy does not allow them to be held up by historical, philosophical or theological reflections and analysis. Surely, one may think, unprecedented boldness requires unprecedented clarity and convincingness. But the density, opaqueness and downright incomprehensibility of much of the language prevent all but the already converted from being convinced. Such language bespeaks an introversion, a self-indulgence and a preciousness which is utterly at odds with boldness. The book may be radical; it may be orthodox. But intelligible it ain't!

Paul Helm, Fifield, Oxfordshire

John Calvin – Student of the Church Fathers

Anthony N. S. Lane
T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999; 304pp., £16.99; ISBN 0 567 08694 1

Professor Anthony Lane is Director of Research at the London Bible College. *John Calvin – Student of the Church Fathers* is a book for researchers, or at least for those who are already reasonably well versed in the writings of John Calvin and interested in what other sources, besides the Bible, Calvin used in his works.

Lane himself having majored in patristics in his first degree and since then having become a leading Calvin authority in the English speaking world, has over many years pursued the use made by Calvin both of the early church fathers and of the later mediaeval theologians. Several of this book's chapters are based on articles, with some revision, already published elsewhere, but new material has been added and the whole moulded into a single work.

The most significant piece of additional material is the first chapter, *Calvin's Use of the Fathers; Eleven Theses*. Here Lane unfolds his methodology. At the heart of the theses lie the questions 'How did Calvin get his citations – directly from the authors, from anthologies or from secondary sources?' and 'How far was Calvin influenced by writers not frequently cited?' such as Bishop A. E. Steuchus, who, Lane maintains, was Calvin's chief source after Luther in the Genesis commentary. Lane also enters the debate as to whether Calvin was influenced by the Scottish theologian John Major and, if so, how far.

The eleven theses further maintain that citations are not footnotes, are not to be received uncritically, and are usually used to support Calvin's own position or else polemically in debate. They also indicate something of what Calvin was reading at any given time. Lane describes his own

approach as 'minimalism', adopting a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. He carefully defines a citation as a 'quotation of, paraphrase of or clear reference to an author or (portion of) a work'. There must be explicit mention of the authors of the works or else some objective proof that Calvin had them in mind. (p xii).

The scope of the book covers the fathers, Latin and Greek, and the mediaeval theologians. Special consideration is given to Bernard of Clairvaux and the use of the fathers in the debate with Albert Pighius regarding the bondage and liberation of the will, and also to further examination of the sources of the Genesis commentary. There are tables of references to citations, and indexes of writers, ancient, mediaeval and early modern to 1700. There is also a bibliography of modern writers relevant to the subject. As Professor David Wright quite rightly appraises, 'This impressive volume reflects the closest reading of Calvin's works and tireless pursuit of his patristic sources.'

Peter Cook, Alston, Cumbria

A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs

David W. Bercot (ed.)

Hendrickson, Peabody, Mass., 1998; xx+704pp., n.p.; ISBN 1 56563 357 1

By 'early Christian', David Bercot means specifically the pre-Nicene era of Church history. The reader will therefore search these pages in vain for many of the most famous and influential figures of the patristic age – Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great (and yet, oddly, Arius himself gets an article – why?). I do not point to the omission of these later fathers as a criticism, merely to warn potential readers as to the scope of the work.

The *Dictionary* provides thumbnail sketches of the lives of the pre-Nicene fathers, followed by representative quotations from their works under thematic headings. Heretics like Marcion and Mani also appear, as do some emperors like Marcus Aurelius, although in the latter case I am not certain of the criterion of selection (Aurelius is here, but not Trajan). The rest of the *Dictionary* is devoted to theological and ethical themes treated by the pre-Nicene fathers, consisting of quotations illustrating the theme, with no accompanying comments by Bercot. The overwhelmingly topical nature of the work makes it more useful than Henry Bettenson's justly renowned *Early* and *Later Christian Fathers* if one wants to get a general overview of the spectrum of pre-Nicene belief or practice in

specific areas. Bettenson, however, remains superior for individual treatment of the fathers.

Some of the most interesting entries are on moral and cultural subjects: almsgiving, burial and funeral practices, celibacy, cosmetics (some fiercely puritanical statements on this), dancing, divorce, entertainment, grooming (how many of us know the patristic doctrine of wigs?), music and musical instruments, procreation, prosperity, usury, wine and women (these last two being separate entries, one hastens to add). Clearly many of the early Church fathers espoused an austere ethical counter-culture in which most modern Evangelicals would not feel at home. Whether we or the fathers are at fault is a moot point.

One caveat must be uttered, not against this useful *Dictionary,* but against the theological use that could be made of it. It would be all too easy to look up various doctrinal entries and assume that one had then discovered what 'the early Christians' believed on this or that topic. My caveat is that it is not as simple as that. The documentary residue of pre-Nicene Christianity is tiny. Even what exists does not present monolithic consistency. Protestants have usually insisted (against old-fashioned Tridentine Roman Catholicism) that the whole idea of the theological 'consensus of the fathers' is dubious at best, deceitful at worst. That healthy scepticism should, I think, be borne in mind when utilising the *Dictionary.* All it can really tell us is what those fathers believed whose writings have survived. We must not assume that this is equivalent to a seamless and unchanging garment of belief which neatly clothed the entire body of believers in the first three centuries. Just comparing Tertullian with Origen should suffice to tear that mythological garment to shreds.

This is a very helpful one-volume reference work, which no theological library should be without.

Nick Needham, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

Evangelicals & Truth. A Creative Proposal for a Postmodern Age

Peter Hicks

Apollos, Leicester, 1998; 240pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 85111 457 1

Congratulations to Apollos for keeping quality, thoughtful up-to-date books like this one available when many 'evangelical' catalogues opt either for trading in tack or locking themselves in a time capsule. Peter Hicks has given us a timely, encouraging and robust evangelical response to today's crisis on the possibility of reaching truth. Any evangelical

presenting Christ in a hostile secular environment, or preparing Christians for witnessing today, should read this book. With a calmness rare among evangelicals, the author examines the track record of western thought in its struggle to find knowledge which is 'certain'. Two early chapters are devoted to the theme *Plato to postmodernism.* They lucidly summarise the story of certainty and the fatal role of 'rationalism' and 'empiricism' leading to exaggerated scepticism and relativism.

But what help could possibly come from evangelicalism? A bunch of anti-intellectualists aren't we? Yes, but only recently. Hicks is able to show that evangelical thinkers have frequently shown themselves well aware of the deep problems of epistemology and unafraid to plunge into the fray. He helps us to see the profound sharpness of such writers as John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and B. B. Warfield. Some theologians find themselves (unexpectedly?) to be evangelicals here (P. T. Forsyth, H. Thielicke), and with some justification, for the arguments deployed are in the evangelical tradition. This review of evangelical contributions is fascinating and re-credits lost brownie points to such as Charles Hodge, an unlikely hero in this tussle. It is warm, easy reading and an education in itself The inclusion of Forsyth and Thielicke, however, opens the author up to the complaint – and why not Karl Barth? His approach to revelation, for instance, has many points of contact with theirs. And Barth is now widely recognised as having anticipated some postmodern concerns. There seems a Barth-shaped hole in the history, though, admittedly, inclusion of Barth would have lengthened and slowed the account.

But to the book's main point. It is that evangelicalism deserves a hearing for its more creative approach to truth and knowledge. It challenges the polarisation between cold rationalism and chaotic relativism. Truth is not unassailable, cerebral, mathematical certainty. It involves the whole person and entails commitments, life-involvement, pragmatic discovery and religious exploration. The discussion has for too long been stunted by the rationalist exercise. And whilst postmodernism is unduly atomistic, yet it has opened the door for attention to the more rounded working knowledge supported by evangelical faith – a faith that unites heart and mind, a faith that has been around a long time. Ironically, Peter Hicks's approach outflanks postmodernism while playing it at its own game – demolition of narrow rationalist conceptions of knowledge. Not bad!

No brief review can do justice to the book. Read it. Enjoy it. Be encouraged in the hope that the whole idea of public truth is not dead yet.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff

T. F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography

Alister E. McGrath
T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999; 300pp., £24.95; 1SBN 0 567 08683 6

This biography of Very Rev Professor Thomas F. Torrance, former professor of Christian Dogmatics at Edinburgh University and New College, is an unusual and a challenging book!

It is unusual in that whereas many biographies focus on 'gossip' comments on the character, McGrath's comprehensive account of 'a career of unequalled distinction in academy and church' majors on Torrance as a 'man of ideas', one 'who has a passion for the life of the mind as it is encountered by the reality of God', and analyses his thinking, intending 'to demonstrate the coherence and significance of Torrance's conception of scientific theology'.

This easily read book, with its useful references of index and complete bibliography of Torrance's 633 published works, was written by the Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford, who concluded the introduction to one of his own books on apologetics with the words 'Let us begin by laying solid theological foundations upon which we can build...'. This biography traces the solid theological foundations Torrance has given to generations of students, e.g. dealing with the importance of the homoousion.

It .provides not only a fascinating record for former students of Professor Torrance interested in the history of the theological scene in Scotland pre- and post- Barth, but is also a valuable source book for future students wishing to trace the development of the interface between science and the Christian faith. McGrath comments:

> Perhaps one of Torrance's most signal achievements is to demonstrate that great-tradition Christianity continues to have the intellectual energy and vitality to engage the agenda developed and pursued by the natural sciences. His greatest bequest to the next century may well be a theological foundation, widely acceptable within orthodox Christianity, on which to build for the future.

But Torrance had a deep concern for people and for theological education to build up the church of God. It is hinted at in the example of Private Philips, but the stated aim of the book precludes an assessment of his pastoral evangelism. Yet his theology was not an ivory tower! It was lived out in the international scene, as the book appropriately begins and ends in a Chinese setting. And precisely because Trinitarian theology

links revelation and salvation it is gospel, a gospel shared in preaching and pastoral work in his parishes and amongst students.

In drawing our attention to the engagement of the Christian faith with the natural sciences and in the deep sense of call from God Torrance had to teach students, the book leaves one with a feeling of the exciting challenge to the church at the start of this new century to have a prayerful burden to produce similar pacesetters.

Sandy Gunn, Aberfeldy Parish Church

What Is Mission? Theological Explorations

J. Andrew Kirk

Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1999; 320pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 232 52326 6

The author is Dean and Head of the School of Mission and World Christianity at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, and earlier in his life served in Latin America. He describes this work modestly as just an introduction, not a textbook, though it includes chapters on overcoming violence and on the environment which are seldom found in standard mission textbooks. In the first section, on 'Laying Foundations', he takes the theology of mission to be a disciplined study of the questions that arise when people of faith seek to understand and fulfil God's purposes in the world, as demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He rejects the claims of postmodern culture, since these would make it impossible to critique particular theological stances, for example gnosticism, clericalism, or racism. Without 'settled views on central beliefs, the church's theology would be trivial and vacuous. Finally, there is no theology which is not missionary, whether it is about exposing idolatry or liberating the poor; and mission is not simply an activity of the church, it is the being of the church.

Dr Kirk explores with biblical balance the relationship between kingdom, church and world, giving a fair outline of views with which he disagrees. Following in the way of Jesus Christ is *the* test of faithfulness – and by that criterion those supporting an alliance of church and state today are as mistaken as the Spanish *conquistadores.* The first section ends with a superb restatement of the life of Jesus, which is thoroughly orthodox yet related to the theological concerns of today.

The main section of the book is about Contemporary Issues in Mission: evangelism as announcing good news, the gospel in the midst of cultures, justice for the poor, encounter with world religions, violence and peace, care of the environment, partnership. There is an ongoing,

fruitful but not uncritical dialogue with statements and practice of the World Council of Churches.

The final section is on Mission in Action, focused unashamedly on the church, with a postscript on the future, Whither Mission? There is a substantial bibliography and an index of scriptures and of topics.

An attractive feature of the book is the way the writer makes connections between the gospel and all kinds of practical issues, whether low-interest loans for small businesses, Star Wars, pesticides, animal rights, or house groups. The book certainly exhibits the conviction of the author that mission is the being of the church, not one activity among others, and it should be an inspiration to any follower of Jesus, not just the students for whom it is primarily aimed. And it is quietly gratifying that an evangelical theologian should be able so well to hold his own in the jungle of competing theologies today.

Jock Stein, Boat of Garten

Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary. Columbia Series in Reformed Theology

I. John Hesselink

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997; 244 pp.; ISBN O 664 22055 X

The book under review is actually in two parts. It begins with Ford Lewis Battles's translation of John Calvin's first Catechism, which was originally written in French in 1537 and then in Latin in 1538 (it is the latter version which is translated here); the bulk of this volume consists of I. John Hesselink's commentary on this early work of Calvin. If for no other reason, this study is to be commended for making available an English translation of this version of the catechism, which was composed between the first and second editions of the *Institutes* (1536 and 1539 respectively), and which preceded the better known 'Geneva Catechism' (French, 1541; Latin, 1545). As such, it is a valuable piece of evidence in plotting the development of Calvin's theological progress.

The aim of Hesselink's commentary, however, is less to provide an historical-theological examination of this catechism and more to treat it as a concise statement of the fundamentals of Calvin's theology. In so doing, he intends this book to offer an introduction to this broader subject that can be used as much by interested non-specialists in churches as by students in colleges and seminaries. He provides the reader with a discussion of what Calvin has written in this early work, drawing upon the *Institutes* and upon Calvin's commentaries for illustrative material to

flesh out the sparseness of the great Reformer's expression in the catechism, in order to show how the essence of his theology can be found in this short piece. Those looking for a synthetic statement of Calvin's theology will find this a helpful work; it is clearly written, with ample reference in the notes to the major secondary works on Calvin in addition to those of Calvin himself. On the other hand, those who hope to find an analysis of the catechism with respect to Calvin's theological development will be somewhat frustrated, for the discussion is a bit detached from the actual circumstances in which the piece was written, and the reader does not gain much of a sense of the place of this catechism in the movement from the 1536 *Institutes* to the later editions. But this would be to fault this book for something it did not intend to provide.

A few caveats are in order. On a number of occasions, Hesselink makes reference to the debatable distinction some have drawn between the theology of Calvin and that of the later Calvinists (for instance, on the question of Scripture, and that of total depravity – pp. 58 and 61 respectively). Granted, he makes only passing reference to this distinction, but it is so stated as if it were an uncontested point, which of course it is not. And with regard to the presentation of the sources, it is regrettable that the book is published with endnotes rather than footnotes, and further that there is no bibliography included.

N. Scott Amos, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews

Science and Homosexualities

Edited by Vernon A. Rosario
Routledge, New York, 1997; 308 pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 415 91501 5

In April 1999, newspapers reported a Canadian study under headlines such as 'Scientists cast doubt on "gay gene" theory'. The two researchers' results challenged the claims of Dean Hamer, who in 1993 published his discovery of a genetic basis for homosexuality. Hamer's name, along with that of Simon LeVay, who in 1991 claimed to have identified a difference in the brain of gay men, appear often in this interesting collection of essays. The writers are concerned with the development since the mid-nineteenth century of attempts to study homosexuality scientifically, and with the relationship between such study and 'social and political agendas'. Although they generally display an attitude of acceptance towards same-sex eroticism, their task is historical and social analysis. They write in a non-campaigning mode, and in a manner accessible to readers with no specialist expertise in the relevant sciences.

They recognise that the American Psychiatric Association's decision in 1973 to remove homosexuality from its listing of pathological behaviours was taken 'largely in response to growing pressure from gay activists'. They evince no consensus that a genetic, or at least biological, explanation of homosexuality would necessarily lead to the growing acceptance of same-sex behaviour. 'In today's context, claiming that homosexuality is genetic places it in the company of unabashedly pathological behaviours.' But which other pathological behaviours? What the book as a whole lacks is a comparative dimension – with paedophilia, for example, or bestiality. One contributor acknowledges the difficulty of studying paedophilia when it is more or less identified with child sexual abuse. But in the absence of a recognition of the norm of heterosexuality, isolating the homosexual alternative in this way tends almost to make it the only other norm – which would be myopic. Substituting 'inter-generational sex' for paedophilia, the same American Psychiatric Association has even published an article arguing for its acceptability. Where a norm is abandoned, no privilege attaches to any one option. The quest for a biologically determined account of homosexuality may only too clearly reveal the socially or politically determined temper of the questing scientists.

David F. Wright, New College, Edinburgh

Facing Hell: The Story of a Nobody: An Autobiography 1913-1996

John Wenham

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1998; 273 pp., £8.99; ISBN 0-85364-871-9

The name, 'John Wenham' will strike a chord in many memories but not always the same one.

For some, it will recall *The Elements of New Testament Greek*, which has been the textbook for most students of New Testament Greek during the past forty-five years or so. Although I learned Greek through its predecessor by H. P. V. Nunn, I used John Wenham's volume for many years in teaching and found it a model of clarity.

It will remind others of John Wenham as a doughty defender of a high doctrine of biblical inspiration, who wrote several valuable volumes on the Christian view of the Bible. His interests were particularly in the Pentateuch and the Gospels, the foundation documents of the two Testaments, but his work touched all parts of Scripture.

Yet others will know the work of two of his sons, Gordon and David, because of their expertise in Biblical Studies, one in Old Testament and

the other in New, and will realise that John and his wife had heeded the Deuteronomic injunction that the things of God were to form a major topic of conversation in the godly home.

Yet others will know that from his days as a student he held that the Bible teaches Conditional Immortality. This is the reason for the title of his autobiography.

Some will have known him personally and will know what a genuinely humble and unfailingly kindly man he was (but no 'nobody'!). Others who never knew him may have picked this up from some of the encouraging comments in the vocabularies of his Greek grammar, such as, 'at this point you have now learned one third of the words in the New Testament'!

All these features of his life and character come across in his autobiography, completed before his death but published a couple of years after it.

Several evangelical leaders have written autobiographies or surveys of evangelical history in the run-up to the new millennium. John Wenham's was clearly intended to focus on his Conditional Immortality views. He was first persuaded of this doctrine at Cambridge through Basil Atkinson, who also influenced others who were to become evangelical leaders. Some readers of the Bulletin will remember hearing John expounding the doctrine at a Rutherford House Dogmatics Conference in 1991. There is a chapter devoted to this conference. Towards the close of his book he deals briefly with arguments for and against this doctrine.

His deeply-felt views and well-argued case cannot be lightly dismissed by those of us who do not agree with him. Without doubt a good number of evangelicals have been re-thinking this issue, particularly since John Stott's views have become more widely known. The case for eternal punishment as traditionally conceived needs to be argued just as clearly and as courteously and with special attention to the main issues of biblical exegesis.

Geoffrey W. Grogan, Glasgow

The Burdensome Joy of Preaching

James Earl Massey
Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1998; 102pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 687 05069 3

James Earl Massey is a black American theologian and preacher, who was a friend of Martin Luther King during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and this book reflects 50 years of ministry in churches and theological colleges. The substance was originally presented as lectures,

and it retains the flavour of the lecture room, and includes a powerful sermon on 'The face of Jesus' from 2 Corinthians 4:6.

The title is one with which all preachers will identify, and Massey uses a mixture of personal observation and widespread reading to help his hearers stand back from their own involvement in preaching to look at the experiential aspects of their work. He begins with the inward aspects of the preacher's work, including a particularly helpful section on the call to preach. He then looks at the outward aspects, emphasising that preaching is not done in a vacuum, but among a people whose own 'part' in the sermon will only be enabled if the preacher's love for God and for them is transparent.

Next, he explores the role of preaching in achieving 'togetherness'. The preacher must be personal, and his life should be an instance of 'experienced grace', as through his life and words he seeks to draw people into community with God, with the preacher and with each other. Massey grew up in a country that treated 'African Americans' as outsiders simply because they were black, and one effect of this was the devel-opment of a strong community life in the black churches, and an evident interaction between the preacher and the congregation. He notes how Detrich Bonhoeffer was deeply moved by this while he studied in New York in the 1930s, and his fieldwork at Abyssinian Baptist Church both affected his preaching style, and influenced his understanding of community.

Finally, he explores the need for preaching to be eventful. In our world preaching is increasingly disparaged and ignored in favour of more modern methods of communication. However, there are many similarities to the first-century world, and like the apostles we must be gripped by the message and preach its truth to our own specific situations. The preacher must do more than pass on information, but bring people into the presence of God and enable them to respond to the questions and challenges of their everyday lives.

Massey's book comes from a background very different from our own, but his conclusions would be widely accepted in our Scottish Reformed Tradition. Preaching has always seemed foolish in the face of worldly wisdom and technique, but when it comes through a man who is on fire, it has the power to bring us to God, and to unite us to one another in a unique and profound way. As Massey concludes: 'When our lives are stirred by love, flavored by prayer, and saturated with the informing and revealing Word, we can excite the concern of people when they gather to hear it.'

Malcolm Duff, Glasgow

Fundamentalism and Evangelicals

Harriet A. Harris
Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998; 384pp., £48; ISBN 0 19 8269609

The author aims to demonstrate the pervasiveness of a 'fundamentalist' mentality in contemporary English-speaking evangelical approaches to Scripture. She contends that fundamentalist apologetic for the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture is highly rationalistic, that its attempt to use an inductive 'evidence-based' approach sits uneasily with the a *priori* commitment to an error-free Bible, and that such rationalism does justice neither to the way in which Scripture functions in the believer's life as a *locus* for encounter with God, nor to belief in the Spirit as witnessing to Scripture as God's word (as enunciated by earlier thinkers and confessions). While suggesting a possible alternative in the approach of Abraham Kuyper, she rules out the likelihood that evangelical appropriation of the discipline of hermeneutics will lead them away from a fundamentalist approach.

Harris examines how the 'fundamentalist' mentality has been formulated, the major philosophical influences upon fundamentalism, and the alternative epistemologies adopted by followers of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd. The work is intended for academic readers, and the treatment is correspondingly dense. I found the introduction one of the most opaque sections of the book, and readers may prefer to begin with the conclusion, which provides the clearest outline of the argument.

Although Harris studied under James Barr, and devotes a chapter to an extended analysis of his critique of fundamentalism and evangelical responses, her approach comes across as less polemical and more cautious than his. She handles an astonishing variety of material – historical, theological and philosophical – in a scholarly and judicious manner. However, I noted some shortcomings in the historical material: discussion of controversy between moderate and radical evangelicals in the 1820s is over-simplified, the issues at stake in the Downgrade controversy are not explained, and the author omits the main cause of the disagreement between CICCU and the SCM – the centrality of the atoning blood of Christ in the gospel – perhaps because of her focus on the doctrine of Scripture. Furthermore, those seventeenth-century thinkers who so stressed the Spirit's role in illuminating Scripture would have been committed to the kind of harmonistic hermeneutic which she deplores.

I would also have appreciated more thorough consideration of the sociological aspects of what it means to be a 'fundamentalist'

evangelical. The significance of particular institutions and journals for the maintenance or otherwise of a 'fundamentalist' mentality is not always given sufficient weight: London Bible College, Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship receive just one mention apiece, *Themelios* and Rutherford House none.

In spite of these criticisms, I found the book worth reading, especially regarding the varying concepts of truth found among evangelicals. I was also challenged by her contrast between the way in which we formulate our doctrine of Scripture and the way in which Scripture functions in our lives. She has provided a stimulating (if not always convincing) analysis of the first half of this contrast; I hope that she will now conduct an extended examination of the second.

Tim Grass, Horsham, West Sussex

A Guide to the Puritans

Robert P. Martin

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1997; xiv+532pp., £12:95; ISBN 0851517137.

The subtitle of this work by Robert Martin is a good guide to its contents: A topical and textual index to writings of the Puritans and some of their successors recently in print. This gives an accurate picture of the scope and limitations of the volume. On the one hand, the use of the word 'Puritan' in the title is a little misleading: the writers listed in the work might more usefully have been described as Reformed or Reformed and Evangelical, as the collection covers a wide chronological variety of authors: from William Ames to B. B. Warfield, Paul Helm and beyond. Thus, the volume is of rather more relevance to more people than its immediate appearance might suggest. On the other hand, those looking for a relatively thorough catalogue of what different Puritans said on different themes may, like myself, be a little disappointed: the editor has confined himself to reprinted material and thus the scholarly usefulness of the volume is somewhat restricted.

That said, providing the reader is looking for a good handbook to help with devotional/church orientated work in Reformed theology, or is an outsider to the field wanting a general orientation course, this is certainly a mine of information. The book contains a series of topical indexes of Puritan and Reformed literature which is of real use to those preparing sermons or simply wanting to sample Reformed wisdom on particular issues. Thus, there is a topical index, running from 'abortion' to 'zeal', and covering most points in between. This takes up the lion's share of

the volume, but is followed by a Scripture index, lists of biographical sketches, various types of sermons, letters and a catch-all miscellany, before a complete list of all the books cited.

It is hard to review a book like this – like a concordance, it is most definitely a tool rather than a read in and of itself. Yet, as a handbook to reprinted Puritan literature and a good bibliographical and topical guide to the field, it is a bargain at the price. In days when we need once more to recapture some of the godliness and the gracious thunder of the Puritans, a book such as this, which maps a path through the maze that so often is Puritan literature, is to be welcomed.

Carl R. Trueman, Aberdeen

Biblical Interpretation – An Integrated Approach

W. Randolph Tate

Hendrickson, Peabody, Mass., 1997; xxvi+276pp., £16.99; ISBN 1 56563 252 4

This volume is a revised edition of a book originally published in 1991 – It is intended to provide an introduction to the task of biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics. It therefore joins a rather large crowd of similar texts attempting to do much the same thing. So what distinguishes this text from the rest?

Tate seeks to present an 'integrated' approach, by which he means that he approaches the text from a number of perspectives, taking account of the significance of the author, the text, and the reader in the process of interpretation. Hence, the book is divided into three parts: The World Behind the Text, The World Within the Text, and The World In Front Of the Text.

The first part introduces the reader to background studies. Attention is given to both Old and New Testaments although the balance probably falls on the side of the New Testament.

The second part focuses on literary issues. There is a useful orientation chapter on literary genre, containing a helpful discussion of 'sub-genres' (such as 'hyperbole' and 'irony') which commonly appear in biblical literature. This is followed by the first of the two main chapters in this part, which looks at the literary character of the Hebrew Bible. A substantial section on Hebrew narrative is followed by brief sections on poetry and prophecy. A similar chapter looks at the New Testament, noting the way in which Hebraic literary forms are adopted and developed in the New Testament documents.

The third and final part examines the activity of reading. This is the most demanding section of the book, making frequent use of the terminology of modern linguistics. Yet Tate works hard to maintain comprehensible prose. Worthy of particular note in this section is a chapter which provides a worked example of 'integrated biblical interpretation' based on Mark's Gospel.

This book is clearly laid out, using sub-headings, bold print for important terms (which are also listed in a useful table at the end of each chapter), and summary paragraphs. There are also useful study questions for each chapter. These characteristics make this book well suited to the student.

The position Tate adopts might be described as 'studied neutrality'. His book provides an accurate account of various aspects of the task of interpreting the Bible, but I found little in these pages that gave me a reason to bother. It is useful, but not inspirational, and I would be inclined to look elsewhere (e.g. to Bray or Vanhoozer) for an approach to biblical interpretation that is more firmly rooted in the life of the church.

Alistair I. Wilson, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

What is the Gospel?

P. G. Nelson

Whittles Publishing, Caithness, 1997; 17pp., £1; ISBN 1 870325 32 X

This very short pamphlet, written by an author who is described on the cover as 'a scientist and lay preacher', argues that evangelical Christians have, at significant points, misunderstood the gospel. This is his attempt to correct those errors.

It majors on the notion that to teach justification by faith was fine in the context of the culture which formed the background to the Reformation but that today our emphasis may have to be different. In particular it is argued that there should be an emphasis on the fact that 'for a person to be saved, he or she must stop doing wrong things, and do right ones'. It also stresses what the author regards as two other vital components of the gospel, namely, that a person should receive the gift of the Spirit and that he or she should be baptised.

This is too short a pamphlet to deal adequately with these major issues and at many points it raises more questions than it answers. My hesitant conclusion, because there is inadequate material on which to base a firm conclusion, would be that the author may have failed to understand two significant elements of Christian theology: First, the integral and unbreakable connection between justification and sanctification; and

second, the fact that the new birth and the baptism with the Spirit are two descriptions of the same event.

A. T. B. McGowan, Highland Theological College, Dingwall

Let's Study Philippians

Sinclair B. Ferguson
Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1997; 136pp., £4.95; ISBN 0 85151 714 5

This is the first book in a projected series from Dr Ferguson which now includes *Let's Study Mark* and will include *Let's Study Hebrews* 'ere long. The aim of the series is to provide accessible study aids which combine explanation of the text with application to life. It lands somewhere around the level of IVP's *Bible Speaks Today* series, but is shorter and many might find it both cheaper and less intimidating. Detailed exegetical comments are absent; engagement with named scholars is avoided. The text is not broken up with constant parenthetic references and there are no footnotes. All the things that leave most ordinary Christians baffled or feeling stupid, and consequently discouraged in their desire to understand God's word, function in the background. Thus the reader is neither confused by scholarship nor patronised by a scholar. (See, for instance, pp. 52ff. for an excellent and concise unpacking of 2:13.)

To meet the aim of the book, the 27 short chapters begin with the NIV translation of the verses to be studied, then offer helpful comments with more or less detailed discussion. (The publishers might consider formatting this study series in a more user-friendly way, aiding navigation with such visual clues as are nowadays the stuff of typography and design.)

At the beginning of the book a brief and readable account of the Philippian Church is followed by an outline of the Epistle. Two very helpful sections at the end of the book provide a Group Study Guide, which gives useful comments on doing group study as well as 13 studies, and a short list for further reading.

The comments on the text are pitched perfectly. The blend of textual discussion and application overcomes the problems of trying to apply something that hasn't been understood, and leaving un-applied something that has been. Arguably, each without the other would be incomplete anyway. Experienced expositors and exegetes will be familiar with most of the points that are made; but they are made so helpfully, and with such an interesting mixture of allusions and references, that even those who

use the Greek New Testament for their Quiet Times will find the book a useful addition to their library.

Who else will benefit from this volume and from the rest of the series as it emerges? Certainly anyone who wants to study Philippians for their personal growth. It would enhance devotional Bible reading and give an excellent starter for a closer study of Philippians. Anyone about to start preaching from the Epistle would benefit from going through it with this book before launching into detailed textual study. Anyone called upon to give a Bible Study could 'borrow' from many worse sources and few better. Ministers could confidently recommend this or any of the other books in the series to their members, have it placed in their Church Library, buy multiple copies for a series of studies with congregational leaders or in other small groups (the Study Guide being especially useful), and use it in their own sermon preparation.

The book fills a significant gap, and provides a stepping stone to further study. The series is to be welcomed; it is only to be hoped that a volume on Revelation is not too far over the millennial horizon.

Dominic Smart, Gilcomston South Church, Aberdeen

Here Comes Your King – Christ, Church and Nation in Malawi

Kenneth R. Ross

Christian Literature Association in Malawi (CLAIM), Blantyre, 1998; 188pp.; ISBN 99908 16 10 7.

> Leap up my soul; leap up and sing;
> Take heart again, *here comes your King.*
> Redemption done by God's right hand
> Is breaking forth through all the land.

Using the vision of a Malawian hymn writer as its title, this fascinating book explores to what extent the King is influencing and has influenced the land of Malawi. It will appeal to readers with interests in African Christology or in recent and past Malawian history, as well as to others who have lingering concerns about the impact of missionaries and the gospel on Central Africa. Drawing on a wide range of interviews, surveys, personal contacts and other sources, Professor Ross' latest production gives deep insights into Malawian Christianity and its impact on society and politics. On the whole the book is easy to read and well presented. There is a good index and extensive bibliography.

The early chapters contain interesting studies of Malawian Christology and ecclesiology. These use contemporary surveys of Christians' beliefs and their understanding of their churches' roles. An underlying assumption of church unity is reinforced by a challenging statement from one Malawian that 'The church may be foreign but Jesus is not.' This underlines an important and reiterated point that Christianity is now indigenous: the church had such standing in 1991-92 that ordinary Malawians turned to it for guidance during the struggle for democracy.

Subsequent chapters describe the church's involvement in the enormous and mainly peaceful political upheaval that surrounded the remarkable change from dictatorship to democracy. The important question raised is whether there has been any change that affects the average Malawian.

The intertwining of the church and nation in past and present events shows how the political renewal of the state was set in motion by a church that has grown dramatically from tiny roots in only just over one hundred years. Its origins in the mission work of the church from Scotland through the later part of the nineteenth century explain its ongoing impact on politics. The early mission leaders made strenuous and often unpopular efforts to promote political freedom for Africans at a time when such moves were discouraged by the colonial government. What was once imported has now taken firm root and is indigenous. 'Jesus Christ [has become] a participant in the vernacular of an African community.' After exploring the role of the church in Malawi's nationhood, the book closes with a call to the nation to be changed for the benefit of its people 'to change the game, not just reshuffle the cards'.

This book is the product of careful research and much thought. It provides at least four challenges to its readers. Theologians are encouraged to look more carefully in African societies at the effects of Christian beliefs rather than the beliefs themselves. Secondly, there is a challenge to Christians everywhere to be part of a counter culture. In the Northern Hemisphere we tend to think of Christianity as the traditional culture with new ideas challenging it. In Malawi there is 'a sense of traditional culture being challenged by the life and values of the church [as it] pervades grassroots ecclesiology in Northern Malawi.' Here is great potential for Christian witness and lessons for those of us in other societies. The third challenge is to Malawian politicians to be part of a new transparent, incorruptible, vernacular democracy. Finally, for the church in Malawi, there is a call to continue to live out the gospel, using its heritage as

> a church of the people so grounded in the life of the poor that it finds itself at odds with any structures that promote elitism, domination or oppression.... It is able to draw on the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ to determine where it should stand.

Such is surely a challenge to any church in any nation as it witnesses about its King.

John Dorward, Eyemouth

Doing Theology for the People of God. Studies in Honour of J. I. Packer

Donald Lewis & Alister McGrath (eds)
Apollos, Leicester, 1996; 280pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 85111 450 4

Amongst evangelical scholars who could be more worthy than J. I. Packer of receiving, on his seventieth birthday, a collection of papers by such eminent writers? It is not meant to be just another *festchrift.* The writers were challenged to set out an agenda for evangelical theology over the next few decades. This was perhaps expecting a bit much since the world now changes so fast as to put futurists out of business. How did they fare with this task? The papers are mainly of a high standard, but, as in all such collections, some contributions stand out more than others as responding to the challenge issued by the editors.

David Wright *(Recovering Baptism for a New Age of Mission)* delivers an authoritative, brave and candid reconsideration of the practice of infant baptism, borne of prolonged reflection. The result is a generous and ground-breaking contribution to convergence of thought between pedobaptist and credobaptist approaches. It should stimulate much constructive discussion.

John Stott had the most spot-on title: *Theology: A Multidimensional Discipline.* We find him in form – clear, erudite and fruitful. Although not especially agenda-setting this time, he writes a beautifully balanced, and desperately needed, summary of the nature of spirituality. It is worth reading the whole book just to find the sentence: 'Sunday worship services are valuable to God only if they are a distillation into an hour or two of the dedication of our whole life to him.' I hear the sound of balloons bursting.

Roger Beckwith *(Toward a Theology of the Biblical Text),* provides much welcome light on biblical textual criticism and the so-called quest for the original form of the text. William Dumbrell gives a highly competent and illuminating account of the Johannine Prologue through

the key idea of revelation. Colin Brown (*Christology and the Quest of the Historical Jesus*) puts the quest for the historical Jesus into a wider framework with new and fruitful directions. Christology, he argues, has two poles: the quest and our ongoing human experience. He argues that we need to pay attention to both.

By selecting these tasters the review is not intended to disparage the other contributions.

There is a high standard, on the whole, throughout. With contributions from such as I. H. Marshall, Bruce Waltke, Kenneth Kanzer and Mark Noll, there is no danger that the reading of this book will be anything but time well spent.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff

Reminiscences of an Octogenarian

Bruce M. Metzger

Hendrickson, Peabody Mass., 1997; 242 pp., n.p; ISBN 1 56563 264 8

Bruce Metzger is a well-known American New Testament scholar, of Mennonite German extraction, belonging to a family which settled in America in the eighteenth century. He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church, and taught at Princeton Theological Seminary for 46 years. Now in his eighties, he has written this interesting account of his life – a life spent almost exclusively in academic pursuits.

Either he has an amazingly retentive memory, or he has kept very careful records over a great many years. He can tell you not only who taught him but what courses they taught him, not only what lectures he gave at conferences but what lectures he heard there, and everything has a date and is chronologically arranged.

Those who have met him know what a learned, gracious and orthodox scholar he is. Primarily a linguist and textual critic, he has a great deal of information on a great many other subjects, and all that he knows he is ready to communicate and to apply to the benefit of the church.

The same qualities appear in his writings, which are referred to at appropriate places in his narrative. Perhaps the most important of these are *The Text of the New Testament: its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (1964), *The Early Versions of the New Testament: their Origin, Transmission and Limitations* (1977) and *The Canon of the New Testament: its Origin, Development and Significance* (1987). The second of these includes signed Contributions by others, who are experts on particular ancient translations.

To describe these three as the most important of his writings is not to disparage his other writings, which have much to offer. And it takes no account of his leading role in various co-operative works of editing and translation, which bulk large in his narrative. The best known of these are the Revised Standard Version, the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, and the New Revised Standard Version, the first of which is probably the most successful venture of the three.

The RSV, though it indulges a little in conjectural emendation of the text, is in the historic tradition of English Bible translations, being a revision of the Revised Version (or strictly of its transatlantic counterpart, the American Standard Version) and not a new translation. The Revised Version was itself, of course, a revision of the Authorised (King James) Version, just as that was a revision of the Great Bible of Tyndale and Coverdale. The RSV retains much of the stylistic quality of its predecessors, and it continues their method of rendering the original as literally as possible, unlike most modern translations. It also has a uniquely wide ecumenical acceptance. As the *Common Bible*, it has been endorsed by the Roman Catholics and the Greek Orthodox, as well as by Protestant churches. The NRSV, with its 'inclusive language', is not so widely accepted, and the UBS *Greek New Testament* has attracted a lot of criticism recently by its curious method of assessing different readings.

One would not want to end on a critical note, so may I repeat that this is an excellent book by an excellent author?

Roger T. Beckwith, Oxford

Unemployment and the Future of Work: An Enquiry for the Churches

CCBI

Delta Press, Hove, 1997; 298 pp., £8.50; ISBN 0 85169 238 9

This extended report brings together discussions by various English church bodies, focused by an enquiry begun in 1995 under the auspices of CCBI with Bishop David Sheppard as the prime mover. Lady Marion Fraser and Erik Cramb represented Scottish interests, and one of its five residential meetings was held in Scotland. Consultations were held with many organisations ranging from the CBI to EA.

Parts One and Two of the book analyse work and employment today, and Part Three examines what the Churches can do.

The book notes the radical changes in the nature of work which have taken place, but argues that paid work should remain an attainable goal for everyone. Unemployment is unjust. On the basis of the incarnation, a

Christian response must go further than simply stating principles, and leaving 'experts' to work out how they apply. So the book argues for a minimum wage as a 'sign of justice', and accepts that taxes may have to be raised. To achieve the latter would mean a change of heart among the electorate today towards a 'high doctrine' of taxation.

There is an annex by Peter Sedgwick on 'Christian Teaching on Work and the Economy', with a useful summary of Christian views held throughout the ages, but a rather deficient opening section on 'the Biblical Teaching'. This – strangely – understands 1 Cor. 7.20 as referring to work rather than slavery, and fails to recognise work as that which people do to sustain and enhance human life, so that (by implication) the unpaid work of women and men in a household is devalued. There is in fact one paragraph in the main report which understands unpaid work positively, but this is nowhere developed, as it might be for example in small Christian communities today. In general, the report is over-reliant on past models of work, and chooses to discount the radical vision of people like Charles Handy – not on biblical, but pragmatic grounds!

Overall, my feeling is that the book is excellent as a summary of policy and practice to date in the field of work and unemployment, but fails to recognise the realities of the postmodern world. Because of this, the remedies suffer from a failure of imagination. For Eric Cramb, it is the remembered social cohesion of the tenement staircase that 'still shines for [him] like a beacon'. The book is useful but not inspiring. Like the institutional church it represents, it is thoroughly 'modern' – neither radically biblical nor radically futuristic.

There is an excellent bibliography covering over three hundred titles, and a number of appendices on the theology of work, low pay, the work ethic, guaranteed wage, social security, the spirituality of work and theological method.

Malcolm Brown in the last mentioned discusses how the working basis of social theology has moved from the 'middle axiom' approach of John Baillie (credited to William Temple in this book) to either (a) postmodern pluralism where different presuppositions are acceptable provided they are spelt out, or (b) a confessional approach there the task of Christian theology is simply to apply the Christian meta-narrative to modern conditions. He has many helpful insights, e.g. 'all structural solutions tend towards their own distinctive sins'.

While the book includes several pages on the experience of the Republic of Ireland, it is strange to find no direct mention of the European Union and its influence on work and the economy. Even back

in 1995 the European dimension was important, and one wonders if this omission reflects the 'Englishness' of the debate – since the continental European attitude to work is actually closer to much of what this book is arguing for.

There are many good points made, not least that local churches should reflect work issues in their prayers.

Jock Stein, Boat of Garten

The Universal God: Justice Love and Peace in the Global Village

James E. Will

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1994; 280pp., $26; ISBN 0 664 25560 4

The opening sentence of this book contains a clear indication of what is to follow: the author describes his central concern as 'God as our existential ultimate concern and the ontological and ultimate reality'. This statement makes clear that the following discussion is in the realm of philosophical theology and the language of the discourse is highly specialised, technical and difficult. Not only does James Will employ terminology which requires some knowledge of the Western tradition (the opening chapter is entitled, 'The Spatiotemporal Rationality of Creation') but he ranges far beyond this, engaging with the traditional thought of Africa, the categories of understanding within Asian religions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, and with Islamic beliefs. It may fairly be said therefore, that this is a volume for specialists with a knowledge not only of Christian theology but also of Western philosophy, cultural studies and the modern study of religions.

Having sounded this warning note, the subject under discussion here is crucially important. Put simply: How can we speak of God and the human experience of the divine in a world of diverse cultures and radically contrasting approaches to the understanding of reality? The missiological implications of this question are obvious, and many Christians working cross-culturally, while unfamiliar with the language Will uses, are perfectly well aware of the problems and challenges discussed in this book. Needless to say, a discussion such as this enters controversial areas and challenges some fairly basic theological assumptions. In his introduction the author is explicit about his own faith commitment: 'I desire no other spiritual center than I have found in Jesus as the and my Christ, nor do I hope to become anything other then a better Trinitarian theologian.' Nothing in the text casts doubt on the sincerity of this

confession of faith but it must be said that the theology developed here takes a radically pluralist form which excludes absolute claims being made for Christ and removes the necessity of conversion to faith in him. Will agrees with John Hick that non-Christian religions are authentic responses to the one God from 'within different though related strands of the one human story' and he repudiates mission as evangelism because our 'complex, interreligious world has long had too much religious imperialism'.

Language of this kind confirms evangelical suspicions that this book advocates an unbiblical universalism. Nonetheless, there is much in this study that is challenging and informative. Who could fail to be moved, for example, by the discovery resulting from dialogue with a Japanese Buddhist that the West is perceived as 'a massive superstructure of brilliant, scientific achievement strung precariously over a chasm of meaninglessness...'. We may have well-founded doubts about the route this author takes toward what he describes as 'the ethos of a planetary culture for our emerging global village' but the reading of this book left the reviewer wondering how many evangelicals are capable of constructing a theology which, while faithful to the full biblical tradition, grapples with the real and urgent issues arising in a religiously plural world with the depth of knowledge and empathy shown here? Perhaps to ask this question is also to identify one of the great agenda issues for evangelical theology in the third millennium.

David Smith, The Whitefield Institute, Oxford

The Old Testament: Text and Context

Victor H. Matthews & James C. Moyer
Hendrickson, Peabody, Mass., 1997; 308pp; ISBN 1 56563 168 4

In writing a book on the Old Testament 'for the beginning student', the authors have set out with a worthy objective. This book seeks to introduce 'the literature, history and social context of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and is designed not only to keep the student's interest, but to also say something about why studying this ancient material is relevant, and why it is essential that it be studied today.' The authors (and publisher) in trying to achieve those ends, have produced a book which is accessible and user-friendly. Indeed, they have included a section within the introduction on 'How To Use This Book' which describes the Insets, Maps, Glossary, Study Questions and Indexes that are helpfully included in the text, together with photographs. For this they are to be heartily commended.

However, when turning to the content of the book, the same cannot be said. The authors seem to have accepted the current liberal view of the composition of the Old Testament. For instance, they say that 'we have chosen to begin our survey... with Genesis, because we find students respond best to a linear approach based upon the Bible itself. Since Genesis *purports to describe* the beginning of the universe, it is a natural beginning for us as well.' (Italics mine) Already the alarm bells were ringing but worse was to come! Just a few lines later we read:

> The material in the book of Genesis was not compiled or edited until the latter part of the monarchy or the early Persian period (ca. *550* BCE). Genesis describes the political and religious foundations of the nation of Israel, rather than offering a scientific picture of the origins of the earth and the human race.

At a stroke the authorship of Moses, the accuracy of the Bible's account of Creation are flatly contradicted. There is no discussion, no questioning the grounds for such statements; there are simply bald statements of 'fact'. The 'beginning student' may well feel confused, even bewildered or threatened, by such an introduction, but there is no respite. Throughout the book it is the historical and social context which governs the understanding of the text of Scripture: Comparative religion is king – almost to the extent that one might say that, for the authors, the controlling, authoritative 'scripture' is *Ancient & Near Eastern Texts!* The authority and trustworthiness of the Bible is called into question, if not undermined. As such I could not recommend this book, particularly to a 'beginning student'. And that is sad, because there is a real need for a contemporary introduction to the Old Testament, especially one which is equally accessible, readable and so well laid out, and which interacts with its historical and social context; but one which holds to the reliability of the biblical record.

Alan Macgregor, Banff Parish Church

Truth is stranger than it used to be. Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age

J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh
SPCK, London, 1995; 250pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 28104938 6

Amongst the plethora of books on postmodernism this one has already become oft-quoted, and it is easy to see why. For one thing the joint authorship brings a breadth and inventiveness to the handling of a heavy

subject. In addition, the book connects with the New Testament work of N. T. Wright whose quote on the front cover tells us that 'all thinking Christians should read this book'. Furthermore, the approach is one of the early 'popular' advocates of so-called 'critical realism' which tries to steer a path between free-wheeling scepticism and over-exuberant confidence.

There are many fine sections. For example the opening chapter brings a devastating critique of the 'progress myth' of modernity in which the future is allowed to dominate the western imagination. That era, the authors judge, projected a world which was founded upon ourselves and our exaggerated autonomy – in other words on a fake idolatrous faith. The ensuing sociological analysis produces astute observations, for example, that non-commitment in relationships today springs in part from the multiple-self that modernity demands of us. The authors then produce a fascinating extended reading of the creation story through the eyes of exiled Israel in Babylon. It looks as though they accept the Babylonian provenance for the creation story but this is not essential to appreciating their insights.

The writing style fits the subject matter perfectly, with lots of images deployed to make the point: skyscrapers, El Conquistador, carnivals, circuses, shows, rafts at sea, dancing on a dragon's jaws, mirrors, prisms. It is all very stimulating and memorable, The book also offers the challenging image of the Bible as an unfinished plot and Christian living as an ongoing improvisation faithful to the known plot.

We have here an honest and creative attempt to contextualise Christian thinking and action in the postmodern world. Whilst some may think it too concessive to postmodernity, most of it is in the best tradition of Christian creativity as found in the early Fathers and ever since. All the same, perhaps it is not quite severe enough on the postmodern outlook. Take a parable. Ravers wake up one morning, each to the terrible discovery that an experimental drug has sent them blind. Separated well apart in rooms of a huge building surrounded by unfamiliar objects, they each think they are on their own as they struggle with perceptions of space and direction. Assuming that they are on their own and unable, therefore, to work together to find their way out for help they flail about individually, finally causing the destruction of their strange environment. The sole survivor eventually realises to his horror that, after all, they were all in the same building and merely needed to find each other and pool their insights to escape. But it is too late.

Can postmodernists guarantee that this parable does not predict the destiny of western humanity under postmodernity and the idolisation of

private opinion (apart from the handicap that postmodernity eschews all guarantees)? A sense of the full severity for corporate human life of postmodern thinking might, perhaps, have enhanced a very fine book even further.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff

The Radical Evangelical: Seeking a Place to Stand

Nigel Wright

SPCK, 1996; 144pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 281 04952 1

This is a lucid, accessible and intelligently written theological contribution from a Baptist pastor who previously lectured in Christian doctrine at Spurgeon's College.

Wright is motivated by a concern that some of the emphases in evangelical theology and popular attitudes are *excessively* negative. Examples include a pessimistic evaluation of human nature and the world, the view that only a minority will be redeemed, and that eternal destinies are determined this side of the grave. Although Wright does not wish to eliminate all negative elements of doctrine, he contends that they can only be weighed correctly within a reconstructed theology which he labels 'radical evangelicalism'.

For Wright, it is the doctrine of the Trinity, especially its emphasis on 'personhood achieved through relations' that constitutes the foundation of Christian faith. He therefore proceeds to develop a trinitarian theology of creation, redemption and consummation and to distil its doctrinal implications.

A central development is the notion of hopeful universalism. Although the salvation of all cannot be guaranteed due to free will, the theological possibility should not be excluded as Christ's work is for all humanity. Regarding those who have never heard, there is the larger hope of post-mortem evangelism, for Christ can give opportunities for faith after the point of human death.

With respect to Scripture, Wright rejects inerrancy as unhelpful. The primary function of the Bible is that of providing a reliable witness to God and his acts of creation and redemption and a divinely inspired interpretation of their meaning.

A penultimate chapter draws helpful distinctions between a conservative and a radical evangelical approach to the political sphere. The book is completed with a call to reject the self-righteous, oppressive and unlovely attitudes that can afflict evangelicals. Instead, firm convictions should be combined with a generous and compassionate spirit

that respects the dignity of others and sees the world hopefully and positively and engages with it effectively.

There is much here for many to disagree with. I shall contribute just two comments. First, despite the clarity of the exposition, this reviewer at least remains unsure how to define a radical evangelical. And second, the trinitarian model outlined in the early chapters is applied only infrequently thereafter, leaving unclear the fruitfulness of this theological framework.

Ian Smith, St Andrews

The Post-Evangelical

Dave Tomlinson
Triangle, London, 1995; £5.99; ISBN O 281 04814 2

This book explores the cultural roots of the disillusion and frustration that some evangelicals feel with their own tradition. Particular sources of irritation noted by Tomlinson include dogmatism in belief, theological censorship, narrow-mindedness in social attitudes and behavioural norms, and the tendency to confuse middle-class respectability and taboos with Christian holiness. For those who identify with postmodernity, the traditional evangelical sub-culture will naturally feel constricting. According to the book we have entered the postmodern age where truth is subjective and people construct their own set of beliefs and ethics, drawing on a wide range of different sources.

A Post-Evangelical is, therefore, a postmodern evangelical who wishes to explore new possibilities in her faith. In terms of spirituality, she is open to the symbolic and contemplative traditions of the Celts and Eastern Orthodoxy. Theologically, the post evangelical, recognising that truth is provisional, places much less emphasis on doctrinal correctness and more on sincere searching. Although, for example, she may follow Karl Barth in holding that the Bible is not in itself revelation, but rather testifies to the revelation of God in Christ, and although she may reject penal substitution in favour of an interpretation of the cross in terms of the loving example of Christ, the post-evangelical still values much in her evangelical heritage. The emphasis on the importance of salvation, the centrality of the gospel, mission and respect for the Scriptures remains. But it is augmented with a creative openness that engages positively with the world. An example is the rather unconventional form of church initiated by Tomlinson and his friends which meets weekly in the lounge bar of a London pub. People worship, study the Bible, drink beer and discuss their faith in the informal atmosphere typical of a public house.

Much of what Tomlinson writes is clearly a reaction to the perceived excesses of his own strict background in the Brethren and charismatic movement. He is particularly critical of those who are fixed in the immovable certainties of their theology and morality and who insist that others conform in even secondary matters of belief and practice. Such believers are identified as occupying the conformist stage of personal growth, characterised by behaviour that is compliant, immature, and uncritical. The evangelical environment readily accommodates people at that stage of spiritual development but is too constraining for those moving beyond to the next level of inquisitiveness, creativity and experimentation.

The book has attracted much critical debate. I will note two concerns. First, Tomlinson's starting point is dubious. It is unclear to what extent Western society is experiencing a shift from modernity to postmodernity as he asserts. It is true that rapid social change characterises the late twentieth century, but it is not obvious that this represents a fundamental shift in the cultural context. Tomlinson's repeated emphasis, for example, on the provisional nature of truth is actually a thoroughly modern notion rather than a postmodern innovation as he seems to suggest. The influential philosopher of science, Sir Karl Popper, stressed in the 1930s that scientific truths are actually properly described as our best guesses given the current state of knowledge.

Tomlinson defines postmodernity rather vaguely in terms of rejection of dogma, attention to emotions and symbols, and the tendency to mix and match in a pluralistic and relativistic age and so forth. It remains to be demonstrated, however, that any of this typifies the 1990s more than, say, the 1890s. Much better would be to focus on readily identifiable social changes such as the growth in married women's participation in the labour market and to discuss the significance of these observable factors for the church's mission and ministry.

Second, much of the dissatisfaction seems to apply to charismatic piety and taboos more than other sectors of evangelicalism. The inadequate attitudes and outlooks he describes cannot be applied in a blanket fashion to criticise a diverse movement across many denominations. The evangelical mainstream may be far less vulnerable to the weaknesses that he identifies. Even those supposed weaknesses should not be too easily dismissed. A range of churches with different emphases, practices, constituencies and appeal is desirable and healthy. Given the large variations in people's tastes and needs, variety in church styles (including the strict and the very strict) provides greater opportu-nity for people to find a suitable niche, even one for the post evangelical.

To sum up, while *The Post-Evangelical* is stimulating and worthy of serious reflection, it is based on the dubious premise of a postmodern age and applies criticisms of strict forms of evangelicalism too easily to the whole movement.

Ian Smith, St Andrews

The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology

Richard Lints

Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1993; 359pp., $20.00; ISBN 0 8028 06740

Richard Lints teaches theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts. Lints' work is just what its title says, a *prolegomenon*. He is offering a word to Evangelicals, both a positive and a negative word as to how evangelical theology can move ahead in largely postmodern times. Lints claims that Evangelicals have too often ignored important methodological questions, and evangelical theology will be crippled until such questions are faced squarely. Lints argues that fundamental questions of theological method must be engaged: 'What is theology after all? What is a theological vision? How do theology and culture relate? How does the construction of dogma relate to the biblical text? Where does one's religious tradition fit in? What principles of organization (*e.g.* historical, philosophical, cultural) ought to be used in theology? How might one go about finding principles to determine which principles ought to be employed (the metamethodological question)?' (p. 8). Of these methodological questions, the central question for Lints concerns one's 'theological matrix' or 'theological framework'. By this he means something like one's 'conceptual framework', frame of reference, or one's 'way to think about the world'. Lints writes: 'My driving concern in this volume is to elucidate the process by which the theistic matrix is derived and to illuminate the significance of that matrix for the remaining matrices [vocational, leisure, etc.] of a person's noetic structure.... [I]t is to ask how one should construct a theological framework and how a theological vision ought to arise from that framework' (p. 19). Lints wishes to emphasise the overarching framework of the theological task. He laments that 'evangelical theology tends to deal with each component part individually, at best stitching things together after the fashion of a patchwork quilt'. Indeed, 'there is no pattern that holds the quilt together overall, other than its diversity. Evangelical theology tends to be as

haphazard in assembling individual doctrines as television is in assembling individual images: there is no encompassing framework or intrinsic consistency' (p. 261).

Lints affirms two principles, the 'realism principle' ('Individuals normally know the world pretty much as it really is') and the 'bias principle' ('Individuals never know the world apart from biases that influence their view of what really is the case'). Unless one recognises both of these principles one's theology will be skewed. It is necessary to affirm that one can know things (the realism principle), but that at the same time one's knowledge is influenced by one's background and culture (the bias principle). Lints is particularly concerned to relate these principles to the interaction of theology and culture. In short, Evangelicals must recognise that theology shapes culture and culture shapes theology. Each influences the other. If only the realism principle is recognised one will be blind to the harmful effects of one's own biases, and one's own biases may come to prevail as if they were 'the truth'. If only the bias principle is affirmed, all quickly becomes relative, and there is no ultimate truth accessible to human knowledge.

Lints' work is divided into three parts. Part 1, 'Theology: Texts and Contexts', contains: *prolegomena* (ch. 1); a brief survey of Evangelicalism (ch. 2); an introduction to Lints' own suggested theological matrix – the Bible presents the history of redemption, and this history of redemption should be the overarching framework for the theological task (ch. 3); an exposition discussing how Scripture – the divine witness to and interpretation of God's redemptive activity in history' – is appropriated by the believer through the three 'filters' of tradition, culture and reason (ch. 4).

Part 2, 'Theology: Past and Present', contains: a brief summary and recommendation of the theological 'frameworks' of the past – the Magisterial Reformation (Luther and Calvin), the Reformed scholastics, Jonathan Edwards, and Geerhardus Vos (ch. 5); an introduction to postmodern theology and the relation between evangelical theology and postmodern theology (ch. 6).

In Part 3, 'Theology: Frameworks and Visions', Lints offers some preliminary suggestions 'for constructing a theological framework and appropriating a theological vision'. This part contains: a detailed discussion of the theological nature of the Bible; it is the redemptive nature of the Bible, in the sense of both what the Bible *accomplishes* and what it *witnesses to* that is important (ch. 7); a discussion of how to move from the biblical text to a theological framework, a move that

focuses on three horizons – the textual horizon ('the immediate context of the book (or passage)'), the epochal horizon ('the context of the period of revelation in which the book (or passage) falls'), and the canonical horizon ('the context of the entirety of revelation') (ch. 8); a discussion of how a theological *framework* (which is constant) might be turned into a theological *vision* (which changes with the culture), a task that requires theology to enter into a rigorous discussion with the church, popular culture, and the academy (ch. 9).

Lints writes from within evangelical convictions and his book is good reading for several reasons. First, it is necessary for church leaders to think theologically and biblically, and this book walks through some of the first things in helping Christian leaders to do that. Lints calls for making both the *content* and the *form* of one's theology to be grounded in both the *content* and *form* of the Bible. Thus, it is no surprise that he continues to appeal to the Old Princetonian Geerhardus Vos as a helpful model in the ongoing task of theological work. (Indeed, Vos' *Biblical Theology* appears to be always close in the background of this volume.) Lints' own theological framework is largely modelled along Vosian lines: redemptive history, redemptive revelation, and redemptive theology are the keys to a sound evangelical theology.

Secondly, Lints is familiar with many contemporary trends in theology and philosophy, and can help introduce the busy Christian leader to such issues. Perhaps particularly helpful are the 60+ pages of chapter 6, where Lints deals with postmodern theology. He does an admirable job of both being fair to the postmoderns, but yet offering a strong warning that ultimately evangelical theology and the vast majority of postmodern theology are simply two different (and contradictory) projects.

Thirdly, and perhaps of particular interest to readers of this journal, Lints is articulating a theological vision which manages both to allow the Bible to be the determining force in the theological task, and to mine the riches of the best of Reformed and Lutheran theology as examples of theological movements which have engaged in the very project which Lints is recommending, and which can provide role models for contemporary Christians.

I know of at least one evangelical seminary professor who uses this volume as a text in his 'Introduction to Theology' class. As a graduate student, I found it to be a particularly helpful introduction to the often bewildering world of contemporary theology. It is refreshing to see Lints move from Scripture to Calvin and Luther, to Warfield and Vos, and then to contemporary theological issues. Lints' work is no light read,

and it is a dense work. But it deserves close attention, and a thorough read will be well worth the effort.

Bradley Green, Jackson, Tennessee

Booknotes

The Meaning of the Millennium (Grove biblical series 5)

Michael Gilbertson
Grove, Cambridge, 1997; 24pp., £2.50; ISBN 1 85174 354 5

The debate about the Millennium and Revelation 20 is dogged by extremism and controversy. This clearly written booklet aims to avoid both by stressing the Millennium's theological importance for today's world as expressed in such key scriptural themes as the triumph of God, the Lordship of Christ and God's commitment to transform the earth. A helpful stimulus for biblical reflection and relevant preaching on a timely subject.

David J. B. Anderson, Glasgow

New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of Christian Hope (Grove biblical series 11)

N. T. Wright
Grove, Cambridge, 1999; 24pp., £2.50; ISBN 1 85174 397 9

This booklet is a concise and stimulating statement of Christian Hope. A merely individualist, escapist notion of salvation is roundly rejected in favour of a broader biblical perspective. Authentic Christianity is shown to be both world affirming, offering a great incentive for radical Christian engagement, and cosmic in scope, involving ultimately the total integration of God's creation in a new heaven and a new earth. A timely booklet that will raise challenging questions for every thinking Christian.

David J. B. Anderson, Glasgow

Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism

Peder Borgen
T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996; xi+376pp; n.p.; ISBN 0 567 08501 5

This volume is a collection of twelve essays (most of which have been previously published) exploring the interrelationship of early Christianity and Judaism and the interaction between these and the wider Graeco-

Roman environment. The essays are grouped into four sections. In Section 1, Jews and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World, Borgen discusses the participation of Jews and Christians in pagan cults, Jewish methods of proselytism and Christian mission, and Judaism in Egypt. In Section II, The Gospel of John, he deals with the Sabbath controversy in John 5:1-18, the relationship of John to the Synoptics, the independence of John's Gospel, and tradition and interpretation in John 6. In Section III, Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Letters, Borgen discusses vice lists and the apostolic decree, and Christology and Spirit-reception as bases for a cross-national model of community. Finally, in Section IV, The Revelation of John, he treats anti-Jewish polemic in Revelation, and in two essays examines the ascent theme in Philo and Revelation. The volume is both scholarly and accessible. In the course of these twelve essays, Borgen sheds valuable light on assimilation, boundaries, mission and community self-understanding in emerging Christianity and late Second Temple Judaism.

Edward Adams, King's College London

BOOK REVIEWS