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# Book Reviews

## **THE HISTORICAL CHRIST AND THE JESUS OF FAITH**

**The Incarnational Narrative as History** C Stephen Evans

Oxford: OUP 1996 386pp £40.00 hb ISBN 0 19 823382 1

£12.99 pb ISBN 0 19 826397 X

This is a remarkable book by a professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Unlike most works of its kind, it is written by a philosopher who has dabbled in Biblical Studies, not (as is so often the case) the other way round. The result is a profound and moving defence of the need to ground the life and work of Jesus in what would be recognized by others as 'history'.

Dr Evans lays the blame for our current plight squarely at the door of the Enlightenment, which created an intellectual climate ill-disposed to regard anything 'supernatural' as factual. Once the miraculous is ruled out, the New Testament cannot be taken at face value, because at its heart there lies the greatest miracle of all time – Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead. Of course, it would be an exaggeration to say that nobody doubted this event before the late seventeenth century; there were plenty of people in New Testament times who refused to believe it, and even the Apostle Paul had to defend the Resurrection as the keystone of Christian belief to a potentially doubting Corinthian church!

After examining all the various possibilities regarding such matters as 'truth claims' and so on, Dr Evans concludes that the Gospel narratives are true history, though obviously they were written from a particular standpoint and were designed to promote one version of the events – the one we now recognize as Christian. However, as Dr Evans cogently argues, this does not make them any less true. After all, we do not doubt the historicity of the Holocaust just because most of its chroniclers are spiritually committed to attacking it as an unforgivable evil. One may easily recognize the bias of these people, but that does not diminish the factuality of the events they deal with.

In the end, Dr Evans comes to the conclusion that no argument, however cogent or profound, will of itself persuade a person to become a Christian. Faith in Christ is something more than mere assent to 'facts', and Christian apologetics has always been an activity conducted by believers for believers, whatever claims may have been made to the contrary. In the same way, what Dr Evans has done will confirm believers in their faith and give them rational grounds for holding it, without persuading unbelievers

to change their position.

Dr Evans' reasons for saying this are rooted in his own Reformed theology. Faith, to him, is the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts at a level which goes deeper than mere reason. This belief makes him ultimately dissatisfied with every sort of 'proof' for the truth of Christianity, however cleverly grounded (or even right) it may be. It is particularly interesting to see how he relates to Professor Richard Swinburne of Oxford, a man who clearly shares Dr Evans' basic convictions about Christ, but who does not come from the same Reformed camp. Dr Evans shows enormous respect for Professor Swinburne's arguments, and appreciates both their subtlety and their modesty. But in the final analysis, he regards them as basically beside the point; convincing to those who are already disposed to accept them, but unattractive to others.

Those of a basically Reformed outlook will be inclined to share Dr Evans' views, and it is refreshing to see that Oxford University Press was prepared to publish them. The paperback version is well within the reach of the average person's pocketbook, and this volume would make an excellent Christmas present, even for a professed unbeliever! It certainly deserves to be widely read and studied in evangelical circles, where Dr Evans' robust convictions will warm the hearts of many. He is to be congratulated for producing such an outstanding work in a field which he admits is not his own. Let us hope that it has some impact in the world of Biblical Studies, where it is urgent that conservative scholars should come to see the importance of philosophical presuppositions for the work that they are doing.

GERALD BRAY

**FASHION AND STYLE**    **Mike Starkey**

Crowborough: Monarch 1995 254pp £5.99 pb ISBN 1 85424 238 5

Say 'It's a Laura Ashley church' and the average British Christian responds with immediate understanding. 'Fashion statements' are made within any culture by the garments each person chooses and the way they wear them, communicating our conscious or unconscious view of who we are and who we want to be seen to be. As our choice of clothing is part of that communication process called 'silent language' by cultural anthropologists, it should not be regarded as irrelevant for the outgoing people of our outgoing missioning God.

We have come a long way from pietism when a clergyman's CV can include an MA on the ethics of fashion rather than the eschatology of Hebrews. Mike Starkey has refashioned his dissertation in a relaxed, humorous and readable contemporary style. From surplice to gilet so to

speak. But is the rag-trade, and our response to its offerings, a worthy preoccupation? Does the Church as Graham Cray suggests, wrongly consider such issues 'too trivial for consideration and too dangerous a temptation to vanity'?

In Part One Starkey describes and analyses the resistance to fashion and stylishness among Christians both past and present by way of Isaac Watts, Calvin and Ronald Sider. Too often 'church is a fashion black hole', where 'dowdiness and godliness' are equated and 'the height of your sole reflects the state of your soul'. In a survey of the biblical material, clothing is seen as a symbol of human dignity and a vehicle for creativity. God who makes Adam and Eve 'suede tunics' and 'robes them for office' is also the one whose worship was to be conducted in the true magnificence of colourful priestly garments. This affirmation of humanity's creativity does resonate, Starkey feels, with the majority of people within the Church who are by nature introverts not extroverts and so predisposed against colour, vibrancy and style. He is clearly not thinking about the vibrancy of African-Caribbean Christians !

In Part Two the dangers and difficulties associated with style and fashion are expounded with equal skill, humour and appropriate biblical material. From 'Fashion Victims' and 'Dying to Be Thin' the book proceeds to the ethical issues of consumerism, and the exploitation of people who produce clothing where 'Fashion production... gives a whole new meaning to the term *sweat-shirt*'. It is suggested that appreciating fashion, creativity and style in dress is ethically and spiritually desirable, and need not be narcissistic, expensive or exploitative of others.

In his desire to provide a good biblical theology of persons valued and creative, redeemed to freedom in Christ, Starkey's exegesis is sometimes doubtful or shallow. He seems to espouse a hermeneutically hair-raising, literalist eschatology of the new heaven and new earth. However this does not destroy the wisdom, wit and broad usefulness of this most enjoyable book. The cover is an inept attempt at a women's magazine type image, off-putting especially to men. But the book is a good resource for house and discussion groups, for young and old, men and women and for preachers in search of snappy quotes. It leads unthreateningly and by a rather indirect route to a biblical presentation of the value and glory of God's redeemed people: 'a life lived honouring God and loving one's neighbour, including the poor of the world... a people secure in their identities as children of God, obediently and creatively fulfilling their calling to fill the earth and subdue it, including the ways they dress'; making this physical world, as Calvin said, a 'Theatre of Glory'.



is most surprising that in this essay there is no mention or discussion of Calvin. In addition, his presentation here seems weakened by the fact that there is little discussion of whether the 'freedoms' he lists are all virtues which should be desired. Another helpful contribution considers 'A Christian Interpretation of War', and the essay is significant as it is no mere theory – it was written in the context of a crisis which demanded important theological reflection. The only way in which this material has dated is seen in Niebuhr's discussion of 'objectivity' in approaching the matter, and the way in which he ostracizes 'retribution' as a dirty word. Unfortunately Niebuhr does not take further his discussion of how theology, or rather of how God, meets the sufferer in the depths of despair when it seems, to all appearances, that the price of a life involving war is too much. A final essay in this section provides some helpful insights into the doctrine of original sin.

The work is rounded off with some samples of Niebuhr's sermons. The main critical question to be raised in this material, especially pertaining to the sermon on the Cross, is that whilst we affirm with Niebuhr that the Cross brings a new beginning, we need to ask how this change has come about?

As a collection of essays this book has much to commend it. The writing style is a pleasure to read, and this reviewer can only wish that more theology was as eloquent and masterful in its use of language. There is a helpful introduction to the life and work of Niebuhr, and this is required so that the reader is not left in a historical vacuum – something Niebuhr himself would never have intended. The only failing that this work has is one it shares with other collections of essays – that is, here we have bits and pieces of great theology, rather than a unified thesis. The positive side of this is that it will drive people on to tackle the rest of Niebuhr's work.

TONY GRAY

**JOHN BIRD SUMNER: Evangelical Archbishop**

**Nigel Scotland**

Leominster: Gracewing-Fowler 1995 193pp £12.99 pb ISBN 0 85244 246 7

In an age which proliferated in lengthy pious biographies it is surprising that Sumner, unlike his brother Charles of Winchester but in line with a similar curious omission of his successor at Canterbury, C T Longley, was not so honoured. Nigel Scotland's account is therefore more than welcome.

Sumner was part of that coterie of evangelical families which was so prominent in the early nineteenth century. He was a cousin of Wilberforce

through the Bird family. (Why incidentally does Scotland so often and so irritatingly refer to him as 'John Bird'?) After Eton and King's, where Simeon was a Fellow, Sumner returned to his old school to teach and then moved to the valuable living of Mapledurham, acquiring in the 1820s even more valuable preferment in the form of a prebendal stall at Durham. His *volte-face* over Catholic Emancipation, first opposition and then support, coincided with Wellington's own change of position and probably played some part in Sumner's elevation to Chester in 1828, just as two decades later his criticism of the liberal views of R D Hampden, muted by comparison with those of most of his fellow bishops, may have helped to persuade Lord John Russell of Sumner's suitability for Canterbury. Whether that was so or not, his primatial promotion, like that of some others, saw him past whatever may have been his best.

Scotland, be it said, does not see it quite like this. Indeed his criticism is, more questionably, centred on Sumner's allegiance to Malthusian social and economic philosophy. (Malthus gets a bad press, but is not most of third-world poverty proof of the validity of his theories?) Scotland's chapter on 'Sumner in Parliament' is, nonetheless, together with his account of his subject's prolific, if not very profound, theological writings and – a new light on Sumner – 'Archbishop of the Colonial Church' – among the best things in the book. Scotland is aware of views of Sumner less sympathetic than his own, whilst David Bebbington in his commendatory preface notices the archbishop's 'toleration' and 'moderation'. These qualities, the 'measured approach' in Scotland's words, are particularly in evidence during the Canterbury years, in which Sumner had to deal with ecclesiastical cases across the spectrum from Gorham decrying baptismal regeneration to Denison condemned for preaching the real presence. It remains a fascinating but irresolvable conjecture as to whether decisiveness might have been better for the Church in the long run than what Sumner feebly offered. To have provoked these comments is itself a recommendation of Scotland's book. It is a pity that it is marred by annoying minutiae such as misspelt names, eccentric capitalization and, in one or two cases, incorrect, incomplete or missing words.

ARTHUR POLLARD

**AFTER DEATH – What happens when you die** Alec Motyer  
Tain, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications 1996 159pp £5.99 pb  
ISBN 1-85792-170-4

Well received and appreciated when first published in 1964, this book evidently merited republication in its present revised form. On reading it through we can confirm the decision to republish.

Nowadays the subject of death is not one for polite conversation. In my youth the older folk in my family could often be overheard asking each other 'Where would you like to be buried?' But even then the more important unasked query was, 'Where d'you think you'll go when you die?' This is the vital question that confronts us all, and in this book Alec Motyer provides an excellent guide to finding the answer.

Motyer starts with the 'Love that drew salvation's plan' and carefully sets aside false alleviations offered by some interpreters of Scripture to deal with the dread of death. Universalism and conditional immortality are examined closely in the light of Scripture and their slender fabric of speculation is exposed. An anodyne conception of the love of God may support subjective expectations and offer false hopes concerning the final future state of humanity; but Motyer shows that the Bible presents no such inadequate view. There may be an apparent contradiction between the love and the wrath of God, but this is contrast rather than contradiction. Motyer states that,

The character of God seen in the Lord Jesus, is a complete unity; there is no warring of the attributes. We must never imagine that the existence of love and wrath in the same nature is evidence of a split personality, but only evidence that God is greater than can be grasped in our finite logic. (pp 39-40)

The author's inversion of the oft-quoted lines of Patience Strong adds colour to his treatment:

The surge of the flood for a pardon,  
the roar of the storm for mirth;  
One is nearer God's heart in an earthquake  
than anywhere else on earth. (p 38)

This is typical of the Motyerish humour with which we are familiar and which we appreciate! However, he is making an important point. God is revealed in judgment as well as in mercy. This brings us to the question of punishment which has recently been well-aired by evangelical writers, notably John Stott. According to Motyer, annihilation does not necessarily provide a theodicy for those who have difficulty with the idea of sustained eternal punishment. His advice is to stick to what God actually reveals and not to indulge in speculation. This holds also in treating the question 'What about those who have never heard the Gospel?' Motyer states that, 'Ignorance on one point does not justify abandonment of revealed truth on another... What is not revealed in Scripture we cannot know'. (pp 80-1)

Motyer gives reasonably satisfying treatment to other relevant questions



such as Purgatory, Prayers for and Communication with the Departed, and Reincarnation. But his most encouraging and exhilarating writing comes in the last chapters on 'Snapshots of Heaven' and 'Jesus Christ our Lord'.

One of the main features of the book is the author's frequent careful recourse to relevant passages of Scripture. This is an excellent book to use for Group Bible Study but is perhaps not appropriate for use in bereavement visitation! It is a book for those who are facing their own death and that means all of us!

There are useful appendices giving authors quoted, topics and extensive Scripture references.

OWEN THOMAS

## **ROMANTICISM AND THE ANGLICAN NEWMAN**

**David Goslee**

Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press 1996 357pp hb np  
ISBN 0 8214 1126 8

When reading this book it is important to bear in mind that Professor Goslee is a professor of English Literature and as such this is not a theological examination of Newman's thought. On the contrary, as the title suggests, this book is more an investigation of Romanticism and its consequent impact on Newman rather than a doctrinal evaluation of either Anglicanism or Newman.

Nevertheless Professor Goslee has done a service to theologians wishing to understand the contours of Newman's thought. No theologian writes in isolation, neither can he expect his theology to be completely unaffected by the age in which he lives, as Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* so graphically demonstrates. The Victorian age of which Newman was so inextricably a part was an age of such turmoil and intellectual unrest it makes the twentieth century appear almost passive by comparison. In the 1830s science was still considered a form of witchcraft, the Oxford Movement appeared to be sweeping all before it, it was assumed that poverty and plenty followed a pattern of 'natural law', the House of Commons was peopled by the House of Lords, morality was a matter of biblical law, and according to Tennyson 'the poetic word is mightier than the sword'. By the 1890s all these deeply held assumptions had not only been questioned but also rejected. By the 1890s scientists were being praised and lauded, God the Father had been indicted and God the Son mythologized. The fundamental assumptions of the welfare state had gained acceptance, England had become a modern democracy, morality a matter of private judgment and Oscar Wilde was contradicting Tennyson

by roundly and confidently asserting 'All art is quite useless'. Given this situation it is hardly remarkable that there is reflected in the Victorian Age a strong Romantic impulse that looks backwards for its inspiration and finds its rest, not so much in primitive Apostolic Christianity, but rather in the high Romance of the Middle Ages. As Newman declared, civilized English Christianity was almost satanic. 'Our manners are courteous; we avoid giving pain and offence....benevolence is the chief virtue, intolerance, bigotry, excess of zeal are the first sins.' What Newman wanted was a 'vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce religion'. Shoring up the fragments, Newman thought he could find this religion in the Church of Rome.

All this and much more is carefully and systematically analysed by Professor Goslee. It will be read with profit by all Newman's devotees and by all those who wish to understand one of the nineteenth century's most subtle and profound thinkers.

NIGEL ATKINSON

### **THE INTER-FAITH MOVEMENT: The New Age enters the Church**

**Herbert Pollitt**

Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust 1996 214pp  
£6.95/\$13.99 pb ISBN 0 85151 6807

'See where it leads' wrote Augustine of the uniquely British heresy of Pelagius.

Herbert Pollitt gives a similar warning about the Inter-faith Movement. His message is *caveat emptor* – as he renders it, not just let the buyer beware, but do not buy it!

Pollitt is a highly qualified teacher, now retired, and has researched thoroughly for this timely book. He subscribes to the *big names* theory of history, since he focuses his analysis on a few specific individuals and organizations. However, I confess it was his pursuing behind the scenes of big events that helped me. Events such as the Canterbury Festival of 1989, or the 1990 Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster which attracted nearly seventy thousand signatures in protest, or the twenty-fifth anniversary of the World Wildlife Fund with its novel (rather than new) Rainbow Covenant, or most recently, the Creation Spirituality of Matthew Fox, which seemed to lie in the background of the demise of the Nine o' clock service in 1995.

In his charting of the Inter-faith Movement's direction and his analysis of its kindred spirit in New Age, Pollitt substantiates the charge of

syncretism. One type of syncretism would take the best of each religion to make one world religion, while another would see all religions as inadequate and no revelation as final. The former Archbishop of Canterbury seemed to take this position in his Younghusband Memorial Lecture of 1986. In suggesting we focus more on God rather than on Jesus, Bishop George Appleton is shown as paving the way for severing Jesus from God and ultimately elevating creation over the Creator. Experience is counted for more than revelation.

Pollitt's analysis moves up a gear when he turns to the pluralist and syncretist theologians. Of the former John Hick is seen as typical. All religions are historically conditioned and true only for their particular community. To say 'Jesus is God' means Jesus is tribal God for the Christians. Raimundo Pannikar's idea of Christian-ness is mentioned here, but I would have liked more. While not a thoroughgoing pluralist, Hans Kung (in his book *Global Responsibility*) only just survives Pollitt's treatment. Kung identifies four positions with regard to Inter-faith: fortress strategy, play down the differences, embrace or self-criticism; he survives by opting for the last.

Of the latter the Benedictine Dom Bede Griffiths and the Trappist Thomas Merton both come under the spotlight. Both were deeply influenced by the East, Griffiths by Hinduism and Merton by Buddhism and both end in a more Eastern than Christian mysticism. Indeed, Merton wanted to re-Christianize the West through the East and contemplation; both end up marginalising Christ.

The chapter on the Churches, notably Roman Catholic and Church of England and the World Council of Churches reveals how bewitching, but how damaging, a certain sort of biblical exegesis is. The Church of England's 1992 guide *Multi-Faith Worship?* seems to ignore the Fathers and the early formation of doctrine. Their world was every bit as pagan and pluralistic as ours; indeed perhaps we are only just getting back to that environment after centuries of Christendom. Maybe we can learn from those early centuries how to handle texts like John 1:9 or John 16:13. At the heart of all Inter-faith is the conviction that we worship the same God. The WCC has pursued dialogue rather than proclamation ever since Uppsala in 1968. It would be horrified if *its* dialogue led to the uproar that *Paul's* did in Athens, yet Acts 17 is a favourite hunting ground.

Pollitt sees New Age and the Inter-faith Movement as bedfellows. With Martin Palmer and Matthew Fox New Age has entered the Church. He is clearly concerned how easily an ill-informed Christian could become a New Ager. He even has some sympathy with New Age: 'It represents in part a genuine search for truth on the part of men whom the Churches have

long abandoned to a spiritual vacuum. In the prevailing attitude of present-day Christendom towards Biblical authority, there is a famine of hearing the words of God' (p 183). However, New Age is the new paganism and, unlike the Christian mystics who emphasized scriptural authority and salvation by free grace, New Agers deify man and divinize nature.

Pollitt is in overdrive describing Palmer's and Fox's ideas and the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin's theology of evolution. Palmer looks to the Noahic Covenant as foundational, a covenant for creation as a whole, not merely for humanity. Fox looks to native American traditions rather than to the East for his inspiration, but his now less than pure Creation Spirituality has substituted pantheism for transcendence and is at a loss to make anything of the Incarnation and Cross of Christ. For him, God has a new name and is always feminine. Pollitt comments that, in matters of sexuality, Fox and Griffiths could do with a dose of Bonhoeffer's common sense.

New Age is as much the target as Inter-faith. It claims to be a valid and relevant restatement of the Christian faith. In this critique, as the reader will have seen, many leading individuals or movements are tarred. If Robert Runcie, George Appleton and Hans Kung do not survive scrutiny on Inter-faith, maybe Celtic Christianity and the Greenbelt Festival had better be careful with New Age. The combined programme of New Age and Inter-faith does seem to be a supersession of Christianity by a new world religion. Yes, indeed *caveat emptor*.

Herbert Pollitt's research and analysis are impressive and his warnings clear and persistent. He loves his Bible, but also realizes that good exegesis is necessary. After all the description and analysis, I found the epilogue of just four pages (out of a text of 192 pages) unsatisfactory. 'The claims and all-sufficiency of Christ' is a fine way to end – indeed it permeates the whole, but its brevity left me feeling it was mere assertion. As ever probably another book is suggested. The thrust of this book is warning and much evidence is gathered to indicate that such a warning is necessary and timely. Seeing how much is now taken for granted in high places in the world Church I wonder if the warning is even too late.

DAVID BANTING

**GOD, CHANCE AND NECESSITY Keith Ward**

Oxford: Oneworld 1996 212pp £9.99 pb ISBN 1-85168-116-7

Professor Keith Ward holds the Regius chair of Divinity in the University of Oxford, having previously occupied the chair of the History and Philosophy of Religion at King's College, London. Earlier still, with intellectual problems after his conversion, he became a lecturer in logic.

With this background he is well-prepared to challenge the convinced scientific atheist, such as Richard Dawkins. Three of his previous books have been reviewed in this journal (see issues 1990-1, 1992-2, 1993-4), and it may be recalled that Professor Ward seems to have had some rather fluid convictions (at least Christologically). But he is a careful writer, an acute thinker, and not given to thoughtless discourtesies towards those from whom he differs. As in his other books referred to above, his approach is not explicitly biblical: in fact your reviewer recollects only one biblical reference in this one. This may be an advantage when dealing from scratch with antitheistic writers like the Oxford chemist Peter Atkins (*Creation Revisited*), neo-Darwinists like Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker*), and philosophers like Michael Ruse (founding editor of the journal *Biology and Philosophy*). What Professor Ward sets out to show is that

a theistic interpretation of evolution (which he accepts) and of the findings of the natural sciences is by far the most reasonable; that the specific arguments of Atkins, Darwin, Dawkins and Ruse... are often fairly weak, and that it is the postulate of God, with its corollary of objective purpose and value, that can best provide an explanation for why the universe is as it is.

I have quoted his own words to give an authentic account of what he is setting out to do. How well does he succeed? I think fairly well. Occasionally his science is a little inexact, and now and then his expertise in strict logic does not quite convey the warm conviction it might otherwise do. But to a certain class of reader (such perhaps as another C S Lewis) his approach may be very effective as a 'starter'.

What kind of arguments does he muster? They centre on such considerations as the mystery of *consciousness*, the significance of *values*, the intimations of *purpose* seen everywhere in nature, the fact of the expressibility of physical nature in *extraordinarily abstract mathematical* terms, the inability of Darwinism to account for *progress*, the rising complexity of life forms (progress being a concept on which Darwin himself was very double-minded), and by contrast, the almost glib readiness with which Darwinism 'with the aid of hindsight' can explain absolutely anything. (This latter is well said.) He argues that the majority of deep thinkers who have reflected on the universe have felt that it is not self-explanatory; it points beyond itself to a transcendent reality of intelligence and power. He goes on to deal carefully with two particular spheres of discourse. The first embraces the claim that modern physics and cosmology have shown 'God to be at best superfluous and perhaps even to be an irrational construction'. In this connection he examines the 'superbly written book' *Creation Revisited* and shows that in it Dr Atkins has made

many philosophical mistakes and that when these are removed the thrust of his arguments seems actually to be turned round! He does this in three chapters: *The Origin of the Universe*, *Something for Nothing: A Dubious Deal*, and *Is there any Point? Where is the Universe Going?* The second sphere concerns the question of biological evolution: how does it take place? Is it dependent on blind chance or on divine providence? His sparring partner here is Richard Dawkins. This takes six chapters: *Darwin and Natural Selection*, *The Metaphysics of Time*, *The Elegance of the Life-Plan*, *Evolution and Purpose*, *Brains and Consciousness*, and *The Future of Evolution*.

A final chapter, *Suffering and Goodness*, faces Dawkins' trump card: the universe just is not the sort of universe one would expect if there were such a God as theists hypothesize. 'The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference' – the words are Dawkins'. How does Ward face this? It is of course a hard task. 'Does the universe exhibit pitiless indifference to value, or is it essentially directed towards the free realization of truth, beauty and goodness?' Ward asks. 'There is surely something to be said on both sides' he admits. Inevitably the free-will defence is invoked. 'The best hypothesis seems to be that the cosmos has a goal of great intrinsic value, and that the pursuit of this goal has a necessary cost.' Only if we really think, in full knowledge of all the facts, that 'it is better never to have been born' will we be able conscientiously to reject the idea of a divine purpose for creation. Ward goes on to suggest that the goal of creation is eternal life (for all) in harmony with the Creator. Does not that mean that the suffering was worth it? If eternal happiness for all is to follow, no rational agent surely would refuse to choose the existence of the universe! 'Wishful thinking; begging all the important questions' he thinks Dawkins would reply. But Ward has his answer: Dawkins' belief that the universe is blindly indifferent is wishful thinking too. 'It panders to the wish to be independent, free from a prying, manipulating Big Daddy in the sky', to be free to live as one likes without moral constraints, and to cock a snook at religious authorities. So finally he concludes, Darwinism is 'a speculative and dogmatic hypothesis which leaves most aspects of mind, value and intentionality wholly unexplained. The hypothesis of God is superior in explanatory power'. One of his points which came with a new force to the reviewer is worth concluding with. All the authors Ward criticizes accept that the universe is a contingent one; it could have been different. Innumerable other possibilities exist that have never to our knowledge been actualized. But they nevertheless *exist as possibilities*. Yes, but *where* do they exist? Are they floating about discarnate in some sort of metaphysical nothingness? That will not do! The atheist has no satisfying answer. The theist has; they exist as *thoughts*, probably infinite in number,

thoughts in the Mind of an infinite God. We are back with Plato.

This is at times an intellectually demanding book, but the style is easy and it has some keen thrusts. It will probably strike most uncommitted readers as fair-minded. It is one which might be useful for a puzzled enquirer. The quotations it uses are all referenced. There is a Bibliography of three pages, and an Index of five. It is well-produced.

DOUGLAS C SPANNER

**THE 'I AM' SAYINGS OF JESUS Frank Lyall**

Fearn: Christian Focus 1996 171pp £9.99 pb ISBN 1-85792-153-4

How can the treatment of a topic which has received much attention from expositors be 'utterly faithful to Scripture' and at the same time be 'original', as Eric Alexander's endorsement maintains? The answer is that here is a professor of Law devoting his skill as a sifter and weigher of evidence at a depth that has not always been employed in studying the 'I am' sayings. I was struck by the way his approach demonstrates the authenticity of the fourth Gospel as an eyewitness account. As he puts it, if 'John the elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1) was not John the Apostle, then John the Apostle must have fairly hammered the message into him'.

We are given a very detailed account of the contemporary use and Old Testament background of the word-pictures Jesus used and, at the same time, are reminded that their impact would be different from today. Thus Jesus spoke of himself as the light of the world when artificial light was of poor quality. Bread was a basic diet, simply produced, and without the alternative attractive foods we enjoy today.

A fundamental point in chapter One is that a first century Jew would apply Old Testament ideas by a process Professor Lyall calls 'leaping logic'. This seems closer to free association than rigorous thought and could include a similarity in the sound of two words carrying the mind from one idea to another. This applies especially to 'I am'. To our ears it seems innocuous enough, but the very sound would remind Jesus' hearers of the name Jehovah, as his encounter with them in John 8:52-8 demonstrates.

Lyall notices significant details that are often missed. For example the fact that Jesus never said the exact words attributed to him in John 6:41 suggests that the discussion may have extended over a few days. He also raises interesting questions about the tone and inflection in people's voices which will affect our understanding (eg the exchange between Jesus and Martha in John 11). I also found helpful the way he brings the sayings

together in his final chapter.

This is altogether a useful contribution and it will be beside me next time I revise my sermon notes on these sayings of Jesus.

KENNETH PRIOR

## **BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION PAST AND PRESENT**

**Gerald Bray**

Leicester: Apollos (IVP) 1996 608pp £24.99 hb ISBN 0-85111-768-6

On the dust-jacket David Wright from Edinburgh commends this book as 'A highly able work with no real rival that I am aware of'. That is high praise but it is fully justified. Looking at the contents page one might be deceived into thinking this is a superficial trot through hermeneutical history; it is not. Gerald Bray has a great gift for succinct analysis and concise expression. While this book is well written and simple to read, the subject matter is treated in depth and with considerable insight. No student minister or lecturer will fail to profit from this work. The reader may think he is familiar with certain parts of the history of biblical interpretation, but he will soon come across original ideas and reflections which will stimulate.

Biblical interpretation can be defined in a narrow modern fashion in which the philosophical influences on the study of the Bible are discussed. However while those influences are inevitably part of the story, thankfully Bray has not restricted the work in this fashion. This is a history of the way the Bible has been studied and expounded. It therefore forms an important assessment of the development of Christianity as a whole. Systematic theologians are not included but they cannot be kept out totally because of the way in which many also expounded the Scriptures. Thus the great dogmatician Barth is not omitted since his commentary on Romans was so influential.

The work is organized in three parts. The first covers the period before the emergence of historical criticism in the eighteenth century. Many Churchman readers will be familiar with the figures who appear in the Reformation period; but even within that chapter interesting snippets are found which should not be missed. Nevertheless what is particularly helpful about this part of the book is the understanding of patristic and medieval interpretation which it gives. Liberals and Evangelicals are liable to dismiss the products of these periods far too readily. Here we are given a fair analysis of what these interpreters were trying to do and we are particularly reminded of their strengths where these show up modern weaknesses in hermeneutical method.



It is not surprising that part Two on the historical-critical method takes up a large, but not undue, proportion of the book. Here the reader is thankful that the author has a clear sense of direction to guide him through the complex twists and turns which biblical studies took during this period. Any student commencing a theological course would be well advised to read this part of the book as it gives an excellent orientation to the subject. Through this you will be able to understand the way source criticism developed and its impact on studies of the Pentateuch (remember J, E, D & P) and the Gospels (beloved Q). You will also appreciate the role of form and redaction criticism. Sometimes the evangelical reader will be impatient with the knots which liberal critics tied themselves into, but it is worth following the story carefully.

The final part is a look at the contemporary scene. Bray notes how biblical studies has become separated into three strands which are increasingly divorced from each other. He identifies these strands in contemporary interpretation of the Bible as academic, social and evangelical. Many will find the author's comments on evangelical trends in interpretation particularly interesting. He is not partisan but fairly identifies its current strengths and weaknesses. His discussion of the topic of inerrancy is especially enlightening.

A further important feature of the book is the way each chapter is structured. Across the three parts there are thirteen chapters and each starts with an overview of the particular period being covered. This is followed by mini-biographies of major people who feature at that time. These alone make the book a substantial reference work. There are innumerable pieces of information here which help to illuminate the overall story. Within the chapter on modern evangelicalism I would have liked to have seen some mention of Australian interpreters, if only to indicate the increasing influence of Moore College in Sydney.

After these summaries the chapter looks at the particular issues and methodologies which dominated the study of the Bible at that time. The final feature of each chapter is the excellent idea of looking at a case study in interpretation which highlights those important issues and methodologies. Thus the patristic case study looks at Genesis and that for the medieval period looks at the Song of Songs. This is particularly helpful in exposing some weaknesses of modern interpretation. Unsurprisingly the Reformation case study is Romans. In later chapters, it is Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms, the Gospels, Acts and Revelation which feature. All these case studies are fascinating and assist the reader in seeing the implications of what he has been learning about. Each chapter also has a fine bibliography for the case study as well as for the period under consideration.

This book is an original and comprehensive piece of work. It deserves to be read by a wide audience. The student will find Bray an excellent guide into this complex and important subject, yet ministers and college lecturers will find much here that informs, enlightens and challenges. It is not a book which should be missed by anyone who is concerned that God's people today should submit to the authority and direction of the Scriptures.

MARK BURKILL

**WORSHIP AND THEOLOGY IN ENGLAND: Vol 1 From Cranmer to Baxter and Fox (1534-1690); Vol 2 From Watts and Wesley to Martineau (1690-1900); Vol 3 The Ecumenical Century (1900 to the present)**

**Horton Davies**

Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans 1996 482+592, 355+390 and 494+286pp £35 per vol pb ISBN 0 8028 0891 3 (0892 1 and 0893 X)

Originally a five-volume work published in the 1960s by Princeton University Press, this classic study has been updated with what is effectively a sixth volume, and the whole work has been published as three by Eerdmans. Anyone who was inclined to believe that worship in England meant Cranmer until Gregory Dix set about demolishing him, since when we have had liturgical chaos, will need to read these books carefully.

Dr Davies takes us through the broad sweep of post-Reformation English Church history, considering hymn-writing to be as important for worship as the Prayer Book. And rightly so, since hymns have become the standard form of worship for most people who only go to church occasionally, or watch religious services on television. But in spite of the uniformity imposed in 1662, there has been a great deal of experimentation with forms of worship over the years, and it is good to have it all recorded here.

The second edition has been greatly enriched by the sixth volume, which covers the period since 1965 – living memory for most of us! Unfortunately, not everything in this period can be welcomed with equal enthusiasm, and Dr Davies takes his readers through some of the controversies which have arisen, even as he points out the growing sense of ecumenical convergence which there has been.

The Eucharist understandably occupies a major part of this last volume, and Dr Davies shows how there has been increasing agreement about it across the different denominations. Protestants have made it more central to worship, but in fairness, Catholics have also made more room for preaching, bringing a new balance between Word and Table which has spread across the

churches. In theology, Evangelicals have continued to resist any suggestion that the people 'offer Christ' in the Eucharist, and this has had a certain dampening effect on ecumenical convergence, but the shift away from an atonement-centred rite to one which celebrates the eschatological banquet in the heavenly kingdom has made that issue seem less important to many. Dr Davies is sympathetic to this shift, though it is precisely here that most conservative Evangelicals will part company with him.

The other chapter which will be read with interest is the one that deals with linguistic controversies. Dr Davies deals with these in two compartments – controversies arising from feminism, and controversies arising from the use of contemporary language. He repeats all the standard objections to both of these, and points out that the Church of England has been noticeably more conservative than other Christian bodies around the world. However, he is basically in favour of change in this area, and once again, conservative Evangelicals will find themselves dissenting from his conclusions.

The one chapter where Dr Davies lets us down is the one dealing with hymns and church music. Here there has been a veritable explosion of activity since 1965, much of it from the Spring Harvest wing of the Church. This gets a passing mention in the person of Graham Kendrick, but it is not treated in depth. On the other hand, the hymn-writers whom Dr Davies does analyze will be unknown to many churchgoers – this reviewer did not recognize a single one of the many hymns which he quotes! Perhaps it is because he is writing from the USA that Dr Davies simply does not get the chance to visit enough churches in Britain to see what is really going on. Certainly, this chapter is the great disappointment of the book, and the Christian musical scene which it describes will not be recognizable to most regular worshippers.

Having said that, Dr Davies must be congratulated for an amazing achievement. His synthesis is one which may provoke disagreement at various points, but this is usually because the dissenter will disagree with current trends in the Church, not because Dr Davies has got it wrong. He could perhaps have been more critical of some developments, but the historian has to preserve some objectivity and cannot lose all sympathy with what he is describing. Those who do not like some of what he has to say (and this includes the present reviewer) cannot blame him for it; the answer lies in changing the current mood of the Church. But that is a story for another generation. In the meantime, we must thank Dr Davies for his erudition and devotion, and study what he has to say as we look for a more biblically-based series of reforms in the years ahead.

GERALD BRAY

**JERUSALEM I: From the Bronze Age to the Maccabees**

**Graeme Auld and Margreet Steiner**

Cambridge: Lutterworth Press 1996 112pp £10.99 pb

ISBN 0 7188 2901 8

This is a further and welcome addition to the Lutterworth Press series on cities of the biblical world. However the problem with this volume on Jerusalem which covers the period down to 200 BC is the paucity of the material available. Jerusalem is a city that is still inhabited to this day, and religious susceptibilities over sacred sites mean that very little large-scale excavation work has been possible. This difficulty is not helped by the scepticism with which the authors treat the biblical text.

Nevertheless Auld and Steiner have done their best with the limited information at their disposal. This book is as good an introduction as any to the current knowledge of Jerusalem's remoter past. Here the reader will find the latest conclusions on such matters as the location of Jerusalem's walls, the site of the Temple and the royal palace etc. There is a description of life and death in ancient Jerusalem and an account of the history of excavations in the city.

The most useful features of the book may be the excellent bibliography which has been assembled and the final chapter called 'Visiting Ancient Jerusalem'. A modern tourist is thoroughly equipped by the latter to locate the main features of ancient Jerusalem which are accessible today. The route described has plainly been tried out and is not just a hypothetical one. The worst feature of the book is its price. No doubt it is designed to conform to a series, but the publishers can only be admired for their brazenness in asking this price for such a slim volume. There are plenty of good photographs and illustrations, but it is to be hoped that the second volume on later Jerusalem will represent better value for money.

MARK BURKILL

**AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY From the writings of John Stott**

**Timothy Dudley-Smith ed**

Leicester: IVP 1995 424pp £9.99 pb ISBN 0-851 1 1-155-6

**JOHN STOTT A Comprehensive Bibliography**

**Timothy Dudley-Smith ed**

Leicester: IVP 1995 156pp £9.99 pb ISBN 0-851 1 1-156-4

*Authentic Christianity* is a wide-ranging collection of gobbets from the writings of John Stott. Stott as pastor, teacher, evangelist, Bible expositor, preacher, apologist, thinker and leader are all represented in this selection.

The sheer range of subject matter demonstrates the range of debt which the church owes him.

The sixty-seven short chapters comprise topics on doctrine, Christian maturity, issues of church life and social responsibility, including eight chapters on the Bible and its use. Timothy Dudley-Smith is to be congratulated on his selection (surely a massive task). The quotes have been kept brief, usually just a paragraph or two, and they succinctly take us to the heart of the matter and of John Stott's thinking on it. It is all very orderly and clear, as one would expect, and it is easy to find one's way around the book with its full table of contents, list of sources and index.

At first sight it seems to be pithy bedside reading, and it is cheering to see again extracts from books read years ago. (How good that some are now being published again, eg *Christ the Controversialist* IVP). But it is more than that. It is worth having as a practical reference book. Not only is it instructive to look up what John Stott has said on (say) 'should one love oneself or deny oneself?' or heaven and hell; but one has here useful and thought-provoking quotations of one man's careful biblical thinking on vital topics; a suggestive resource for the outline and content of many a short talk!

Timothy Dudley-Smith has done us a valuable service in making John Stott's thinking available to us like this, and with a sure touch. What we do not have here is Stott the letter-writer, Stott the world church statesman, or Stott the Anglican incumbent; but that makes us all the more eager for the biography by the same author.

Also received is *A Comprehensive Bibliography* of John Stott's writings, again compiled by Timothy Dudley-Smith, which is presumably published for libraries and researchers, but is surprisingly interesting nonetheless. We learn, in passing, of poems and hymns by Stott, articles by him for the *Nursing Mirror*, annual talks for Chicago TV, and that Stott was the editor of the *All Souls* magazine for his first eight years as Rector of All Souls. Ninety-five pages of this book list John Stott's writings in books, articles and periodicals.

ROGER COMBES

## **THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

**Alan Wilkinson**

London: SCM 1996 370pp £14.95 pb ISBN 0334 02669 5

This is the reissue of a volume first published in 1978 by a past principal of Chichester Theological College.

It is a quite fascinating read and is well written and planned. One would imagine that no better account of the Church of England in that first major conflict will ever be written. Unfortunately the writer is totally dismissive of Evangelicals and especially of Bishop Taylor Smith who cared for the forces. Indeed one would think that the positive evangelical contribution to the life of the Church of England in those days was almost non-existent if one were to believe this writer. He is also exceedingly critical (as has become the fashion) of that remarkable man, Winnington Ingram, Bishop of London, who had such a remarkable common touch – a gift not usually to be found among bishops in those days.

In many ways it is a sad tale of failure and compromise. The church did not know what to do about war and had failed to embrace fully the concept of the just war, being somewhat ashamed of the Bishop of London who did, even if he held it in a rather simplistic fashion. The failure to hold any adequate doctrinal position on the dead led to the widespread introduction of prayers for them, based on a sentimentality with which we still have to contend. The writer betrays his lack of clear theology when he writes, ‘What did the resurrection of the body mean to the soldiers who cleared and buried the rat-eaten pieces of flesh from the barbed wire?’ If more of the chaplains had really believed the revealed faith, it might have meant a great deal and the growth in the doctrine of purgatory would not have arisen to undermine the faith of thousands in the Church of England.

But whatever may be our judgment on the success or failure of the Church of England in that war, we must recognize that this is a most able study. The tragedy was that, well before the war, the working people of England had abandoned the established church and therefore had no spiritual resources with which to face the cataclysm.

JOHN PEARCE

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