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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

REVIEWS

No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?

David Wells

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993; 336pp., £18.99; ISBN 0 8028 3713 1

This is an excellent book. Focussed on the situation in the United States, it provides a devastating indictment of an evangelical culture that has capitulated alarmingly to secularity and modernity. It has lost theology. That, someone may say, does not matter so much as long as we have not lost God. David Wells explodes that claim. In losing theology we do lose God; loss of theology is both a way of losing and a sign of the loss of God. This volume sustains the point in a wide-ranging and penetrating critique.

The tone of the book is not irenic, nor should it be, if the author's contention is correct. For this would be to cry peace where there is no peace. Neither is it bitterly polemical. It is a straightforward address. The author achieves this in extremely well-written prose, never obscuring the message by its performance but clothing it to good effect. Until the end of the book, the reader may be worried on one important score, namely that it is negative, indicating the problems but touching only in the most general way on what is positively required. However, the author takes care of that worry by announcing that he has set out to be diagnostic in this volume and will follow it up with constructive remedies in the next. To say that a reader should look forward to the next volume is not to take David Wells seriously enough; *we need* the next volume.

If the analysis is sound – and it is compellingly offered – there are two noteworthy points on which one might raise questions or dissent. The first is whether the Calvinistic tradition, considered in its socio-ecclesiastical and not just theological development, bears any responsibility for the loss of theology. I am not saying that it does, so much as saying that the question naturally arises. Wells emphasizes his allegiance to the Reformed faith. But one wonders whether he allows that proud and censorious attitudes or chilled dogma, provoking counter-emphasis on experience, played their role in discrediting theology. The second is whether it is right to say that we need reformation and not revival. Wells associates revival with a turn from sufficient concern for true reformation under the Word of God and he has the legacy of Finney especially in mind. But despite some early reference to pre-Finney revival, he tends to generalize as he comes to his conclusions and it is somewhat dangerous to play off reformation against revival as he appears to do.

If modernity had not debased the word 'prophet', one could use it for this book. If reviewers had not said so many times: 'This book is a *must* for anyone concerned for theology and the Church', one could say it of this book. I hope it is widely and penitently read by those of us who think differently, not just by those of us who think alike.

Stephen Williams, Union Theological College, Belfast

So You're Looking for a New Preacher

Elizabeth Achtemeier,

Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1991; 62pp., \$5.99; ISBN 0 8028 0596 5

Achtemeier's job is to 'teach preaching' (she is Professor of Bible and Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, USA) and she offers here to help us find 'good preachers / quality preachers' and to avoid those who are 'duds in the pulpit'. Preaching we are told 'carries the church'. What the minister preaches will 'determine the whole tone and direction' of the congregation's life, either feeding them with the Bread of Life or starving them spiritually and mentally; either enabling growth, or leaving people dead and stunted. Reflecting the Reformed background of the author, the term 'preacher' here is uncritically elided with 'minister' and associated with a traditional monopolistic doctrine of ministry. The 'New Preacher' will have to be a Jill/Jack of all ecclesiastical trades.

Achtemeier sets herself to tackle the question 'What is Good Preaching?' since 'in order to call a good preacher, you need to know what preaching is supposed to be and do'. Preaching is a means of grace like the sacraments, God's action, through which he works immediately on a Sunday morning in the lives of his gathered people. It is only this when it is formed by and comes out of the Bible; only then do words of the preacher become God's Word, God's speech and action to us. Otherwise, they remain just human words. Good preachers should be orthodox, in terms of the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. Good preachers are also widely read in good literature; we are offered the improving statement that 'there is nothing that develops a preacher's imagination, creativity and style of speech so much as delving into fine prose or poetry'. Personal piety and integrity are crucial and Achtemeier supplies a list of questions for examining these. Sermons should be well crafted but preaching is not a performance.

Achtemeier encourages congregations not to rule out calling single people and notes the difficulties they often find in being called to a church. She treads cautiously on the subject of divorced clergy. She suggests 'basic criteria that separate good sermons from bad': contemporary relevance, focus on the work of God, a realistic treatment of human sinfulness, logical structure, pace and ability to hold the

interest of hearers, warmth and practicality. Pulpit stance and delivery are to be energetic and engaged – would their voice and gestures drive you mad if you lived with them week after week? The preacher is also envisaged as sole worship leader in Achtemeier's model, doing everything including reading the Scriptures in person.

Perhaps the most disappointing thing about this guide is that it was written in 1991. Its focus is thoroughly traditional, its theology is orthodox, its models of church and ministry middle-of-the-road. The equation of preacher with minister with worship leader betrays her lack of interest in new forms of ministry, and the liberal sprinkling of worthy gem-quotes appears completely comfortable with the traditional sermon format as a model of communication. The irony of this booklet in a UK context is that those most likely to warm to its contents are also those most likely to experience discomfort over the fact that it was written by a woman.

Doug Gay, Glasgow

The Autobiography of C.H. Spurgeon

Edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1993; 256pp., £6.99;
ISBN 0 340 57778 9

Spurgeon's *Autobiography*, first published in four volumes in 1897-1902, was an edited version of his personal records and reminiscences, supplemented by extracts from sermons and narrative accounts by his widow and friends. The volume under review, one of a series of *Spiritual Lives*, has been further edited down to its present size.

Here we have a well-selected storehouse of anecdotes, told with pungent common sense and not a little humour, fascinating in their human interest, and characterised in their telling by practical Christian wisdom. They give us a vivid introduction to the personality and character of a great Christian. We can quote only a few words of wisdom:

I have found, in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit.

Let every man called of God to preach the word be as his Maker fashioned him. The good and evil in men of eminence are both of them mischievous when they become objects of servile imitation.

You don't want dying grace in living moments, but shall have dying grace when you need it.

If you cast out the poor, you cast out the Church's strength, and you give up what is, after all, the backbone of the Church of Christ.

The story moves naturally forward through Spurgeon's conversion and early preaching, his rural ministry at Waterbeach and London ministry at

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Park Street Chapel, and on to the building of the huge Metropolitan Chapel in 1856.

After this point the narrative flags a little: the canvas has become too large to cover chronologically, and a topical approach is adopted. Spurgeon's effectiveness as preacher, evangelist and pastor was numerically impressive: he admitted 14,691 people into fellowship at the Tabernacle, and probably as many more were converted through hearing and reading his sermons. A chapter on 'Enquirers and Converts' deals with some twenty instances in an individual and personal way. Mrs Spurgeon's reminiscences point to something of the sacrificial cost that such a preaching ministry demanded of both husband and wife. An interesting chapter on 'Mr Spurgeon as a Literary Man' gives an account of the extent of his library and the breadth and depth of his reading.

The concluding chapters, as now edited, are scrappy and inadequate. In the one on 'The Growth of the Institutions' one misses any reference to the 1864 controversy on baptismal regeneration, which led Spurgeon to break with the Evangelical Alliance. The 'Downgrade Controversy', the upshot of which was his leaving the Baptist Union, is simply referred to without explanation. The chapter on 'The Last Illness' opens by referring to Spurgeon's 'return from the sunny south', but reference to a sojourn there has been edited out. On p. 254 we read 'Towards the end of the week', but the week is not specified.

Minor criticisms: the book is printed in rather harsh black type; it needs an index; on p. 148 the date should be 1856 not 1956.

†*William G. Young, North Kessock*

Christian Theology: An Introduction

Alister E. McGrath

Blackwell, Oxford, 1994; 510pp., £12.99; ISBN 0631 16078 7

This book by Alister McGrath is the most significant theological textbook to appear for some time. Its success is guaranteed, primarily because of its scholarship and general excellence but also because it fills a gap in the market, namely, a one-volume introduction to the whole discipline of Christian theology. It is almost certain to become the standard text for first-year theological students. Readers of this *Bulletin* will be particularly delighted by the fact that it has been written by one of our most prolific evangelical scholars.

The book is divided into three sections. The first is an historical overview of Christian theology, divided into four parts (Patristic, Middle Ages and Renaissance, Reformation and Post-Reformation, Modern Period) looking at the key theologians, theological developments and ideas within each period. The second section deals with sources and methods, covering important questions of prolegomena, including the

nature of faith and the existence of God, as well as the nature and significance of religious language. Most of the section is given over to a discussion of the various modes and concepts of revelation. The third section is an overview of systematic theology, largely following the traditional breakdown: God; Christ; Salvation; Human Nature; Sin and Grace; Church; Sacraments; Last Things, *etc.* In addition there are two sections entitled 'Faith and History' and 'Christianity and World Religions'.

Above all, this is a book for students. One of its great advantages is that it repeats the main lessons as you move through the various sections, so that what you learn is reinforced and built upon. There can be little doubt that anyone who masters this book will be well equipped to begin a deeper and more sustained study of the whole discipline of theology.

As well as reading the book for the purposes of review, I also used it as a seminar text during the 1994/95 session with a mixed-ability class of first-year students, some of whom were completely new to theology. Their response was significant – they found that it was easier to read than some of the more 'popular' books on the subject which they had been asked to read as 'preparation' before coming to McGrath. This is principally because McGrath is a superb teacher who presents the material in a most readable way and never uses a theological word or expression without explaining its meaning.

It seems churlish to make negative comments about such a fine book but there are a few points where the book could be improved:

1. It seemed to be utterly inappropriate to begin a study of the doctrine of God by asking if God was male. This is surely pandering to the feminist agenda. It may be that such matters have to be dealt with, given the theological climate today, but this is not the place. The self-revelation of the self-contained Trinity must surely be the starting point for any orthodox doctrine of God.
2. Given the increasing prevalence of Unitarianism in its denominational form and as a phenomenon within the mainstream denominations, it is surely odd that McGrath does not mention it as a heresy when dealing with other Trinitarian heresies, such as modalism and tritheism.
3. It is particularly disappointing to find that the book adopts American spelling. It is surely absurd for an English writer based in Oxford and with an Oxford publisher to concede to cultural imperialism in this way (whatever size the American market might be).
4. As a Scot I was very disgruntled to see that the map of 'Centres of theological and ecclesiastical activity at the time of the European Reformation' contained Oxford, Cambridge and London but made no mention of Edinburgh and St Andrews. This is particularly irritating when we consider that Scotland had a genuine Reformation whereas England had only half a Reformation!

5. Despite the generally fair and objective tone of the whole book I sensed a somewhat negative attitude every time he referred to 'Calvinism' – by which he clearly means those who hold to the federal theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Despite these comments, however, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Those who want to grapple with systematic theology must begin here.

A.T.B. McGowan, Highland Theological Institute, Moray College, Elgin

Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin

B.A. Gerrish

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1993; 210pp., £12. 50; ISBN 0 567 29233 9

This suggestive and sympathetic study originated in the Cunningham Lectures delivered in New College, Edinburgh in 1990. Its starting-point is Charles Hodge's inability in the mid-nineteenth century to stomach Calvin's catholicizing doctrine of the Lord's supper as expounded by J.W. Nevin. In the circumstances of the Lectureship, it is surprising - or perhaps a signal act of *pietas* - that the author, who teaches historical theology in the University of Chicago, fails to mention William Cunningham's similarly low estimate of Calvin's doctrine of the supper: 'perhaps the greatest blot in the history of Calvin's labours as a public instructor'.

But only two of the book's six chapters are devoted to Calvin's theology of the eucharist, which is set in the context of a comprehensive interpretation of the Reformer's thought that focuses on the fatherly generosity of God as the fount of all good things and the response of gratitude as the sum of true piety. For Calvin, father, here often without an initial capital, is more a characterisation of God than a name. To it belong the images of the church as God's family, of the faithful as his sons and daughters, of baptism (to which a whole chapter is devoted) as the symbol of adoption, and of Christ as the heir, for us, of all God's goodness. The outcome is a wonderfully attractive exposition of Calvin's theology, which will be an eye-opener to those reared on caricatures of the dogmatic fatalism of the Genevan despot.

Not that Gerrish avoids the offence of Calvin's predestinarianism. 'Free adoption is the citadel of Calvin's faith; double predestination is a defensive outwork' - which had the effect of damaging the whole edifice. I doubt whether this can remain a wholly satisfactory account - in respect of either the ancillary role of predestination (too much is made to rest on the mere sequence of the 1559 *Institutes*) or, on this interpretation, Calvin's failure to discern its disastrous implications for the heart of his

teaching ('he risked making humans more benevolent than God'). Nevertheless this is a powerful corrective to many presentations of Calvin, grounded in a lifetime's study of the Reformer and the Reformed tradition. The case is built up with abundant quotations that display a rare sensitivity in translation, and in continuing comparison with Zwingli, Luther and Bullinger - but never Bucer, remarkably enough.

Gerrish discerns the distinctiveness of Calvin's view of the supper in what he calls symbolic instrumentalism: the reality that the signs point to does not merely simultaneously accompany the signs (symbolic parallelism) but is given (through the Spirit and received only by faith, to be sure) by and with the signs. What is this reality? Nothing less than the whole Christ, not merely his benefits, or his divinity separated from his humanity. More specifically, it is his body and blood, given once for all for us on the cross and, on the basis of that one sacrifice, given ever anew for our lifelong nourishment. In a concluding attempt to clarify what Calvin means by this true partaking of Christ's flesh (which is not an oral partaking), since Christ's risen and glorified body is in a single place in heaven, Gerrish argues that it is communion in its power or influence or efficacy through the radiance of the Spirit.

I would be surprised if the readership of this *Bulletin* were unanimously persuaded that Gerrish has drawn the sting of Hodge's and Cunningham's bewilderment. In the last resort Calvin's teaching retains an elusiveness not shared by the gross simplicities of Zwingli and of Luther. But this volume is a contribution of the first importance which no student of Calvin or the Reformed doctrine of the supper dare ignore.

David F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

Towards a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith

Wolfhart Pannenberg

Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1993; 166pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 664 25384 9

This is not really a new book, but a collection of seven previously published articles. Four have appeared in English. Three come from the early 1970s - 'Contingency and Natural Law' (1970), 'Spirit and Energy' (1971) (both previously available only in German) and 'The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature' (1972). Three come from the early 1980s - 'Theological Questions to Students' (1981), 'Spirit and Mind' (1982) and 'God and Nature' (1983, previously only in German). Only one chapter takes us into the late 1980s - 'The Doctrine of Creation and Modern Science', first issued in 1987, and, in an expanded form, in 1989. There is the suggestion that some more material

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

will be forthcoming; its tentative title is *Laying Theological Claims to Scientific Understanding: Pannenberg in Dialogue with Scientists*.

This volume also has a readable and helpful editor's introduction, written by Ted Peters (whose introduction to Pannenberg's *Theology and the Kingdom of God* is also well worth reading as an insightful introduction to his theology). Reading Pannenberg is very heavy going. It is made a bit easier by starting off with this introduction from Peters. Whether or not he whets your appetite for more from Pannenberg, he will give you the gist of what he says. Pannenberg poses theological questions to natural scientists. He 'criticizes the scientific vision of nature as incomplete', challenging 'scientists to consider incorporating the idea of God into the picture they paint'. He 'asks how theology might become more scientific and how science might become more theological'.

Charles M. Cameron, Burnside Presbyterian Church, Portstewart

The Shadow of the Galilean

Gerd Theissen

Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987; 212pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 8006 2057 7

The recent scholarly interest in the life and teaching of Jesus understood against the background of the religious, social and economic situation of his day has brought forth many weighty volumes of historical analysis. Rather than follow this trend, Gerd Theissen has written a piece of 'narrative theology' by which he intends to introduce us to the scholarship of 'life of Jesus research' in a digestible form.

In this historical novel, Theissen introduces us to a fictional character, Andreas, an educated, wealthy and fairly liberal first-century Jew from Sepphoris (the major city in Galilee, about an hour's walk from Nazareth). Andreas, through being in the wrong place at the wrong time, is arrested and manipulated into acting as a spy for the Roman authorities. In the course of executing his task, Andreas encounters various members of Palestinian society including the separatist Essenes (of Qumran), some oppressed peasants, a tax collector and Barabbas (who is portrayed as one of the 'freedom fighters', often identified as 'Zealots'). As Andreas learns more about the various people and groups, the reader also gains insight into the sociology of first-century Palestine.

Throughout his travels, Andreas never meets Jesus, but he does encounter, again and again, the effects of his teaching and life. The key elements of Jesus research are confronted such as Jesus' attitude to the law, his teaching, his miracles, his association with 'the least, the last and the lost', and his attitude towards the Temple. The closest Andreas comes to Jesus is when he looks from a distance at the cross on which Jesus is crucified and, as the sun sets behind Golgotha, Andreas realises that he is standing in 'the shadow of the Galilean'.

The story kept the reviewer interested, though some dialogue is a bit contrived in order to teach history, and Theissen does succeed in introducing many details of New Testament background in an accessible format, attempting to set them in real life.

The fundamental question concerning the book (which Theissen himself raises) is, how can the reader tell what is fact and what is fiction? Theissen's response is that the detailed footnotes will supply the necessary authority for statements of fact. The problem is that several times the beliefs of 'critical' (read, sceptical) scholarship are presented in the text, giving the impression that everything will be justified in the footnotes, whereas many 'facts' are simply a reflection of the author's attitude to the historicity of the gospel narratives and have no other authority. (This problem is exacerbated by the notes being at the end and by the 'novel' genre. These factors make constant reference to the notes less likely.) Consider the statement that represents Mark 15:33: 'the sun did not go dark.... It was a normal day and the darkness was only in me'. I found no endnote to corroborate this statement! As a presentation of Jesus research, Theissen's book introduces the reader to the important issues on the scholarly agenda, but it also accurately reflects the unwarranted historical scepticism of much (not all) contemporary scholarship in the field.

Though the book has some value for getting a feel for the time in which Jesus lived, the critical stance taken towards the biblical narratives and the inclusion of non-historical events is likely to mislead, unless the reader already has some familiarity with the relevant material. I would instead recommend the more dependable work of E. Ferguson on background and N.T. Wright on Jesus.

Alistair Wilson, Free North Church, Inverness

Nature, God and Pulpit

Elizabeth Achtemeier,

Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992; 206pp., £12.99; ISBN 0 8028 3706 9

The publisher announces this as treating one of the subjects most neglected in US pulpits in recent years. Chapters 1-6 were the 1992 Payton Lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena. Professor Achtemeier's aim has been to draw together and interpret for the church's preachers the biblical materials having to do with the natural world and God's relation to it.

The book's eight chapters deal with the subjects of: our contemporary hunger to reconnect with the natural realm; revealed versus natural accounts of the cosmos; the purpose of creation; biblical anthropology; contingency and providence; sin and the corruption of creation; eschatology; and homiletic applications. Placed through the text are seven

sample sermons preached by the author in different contexts. There are indexes of Scripture quotations and of names.

Achtemeier's central concern is to insist that a theology of creation must flow from a theology of redemption and not vice-versa. 'In and of itself, nature gives no true knowledge of God'. Her main targets are liberal and feminist proponents of natural theologies and the various species of process thinking which flourish in their work. She takes seriously the contemporary desire to renew a relationship with nature and asserts that the disconnection experienced by people today is 'partly the fault of the church's partial theology' failing to move on from its focus on redemption to articulate a biblical understanding of creation and God's relation to it. The resulting void is, she believes 'vulnerable to inrush of alien faiths – whether aboriginal, New Age or feminist pantheism'.

We are called to understand the full dimensions of a biblical theology of creation, which encompass not just the beginnings of the cosmos, but how it continues and how it will end. If the transcendence of God is to be safeguarded, the contingency of the universe must be insisted on, against the assumption inherent in process theology that God needs the world. Creation exists through and for Jesus Christ. Its proper vocation and final destiny is to praise its Creator. While rejecting contemporary green mysticism, Achtemeier repeatedly stresses the importance of responding to the ecological crisis. In her first sample sermon, she characterises the polluting activity of human beings as 'the gagging of creation's praise'. There are no new thoughts, either profound or theologically speculative on *imago Dei* – we are just 'gloriously like God' and this should be 'rhetorically opposed to every other cheapening definition'. However, biblical anthropology should lead us to a proper care for creation and action to prevent ecological devastation. Serious attention is devoted to Ian Barbour's proposed metaphysic of the natural order, but the tensions with Scripture Achtemeier sees in this cause her to distance herself. The romanticisation of nature is given short shrift; we have to consider the ravaging effects of sin – 'nothing is *natural* any more' and suffering and death are ultimately unnatural enemies rather than just natural and neutral processes. But in her sample sermon preached at Harvard on Transfiguration Sunday she manages to be both sternly anti-utopian and glowingly hopeful for the transfiguration of creation in Christ. In the final section she gives preacherly exhortations to let the marvellous metaphors of nature flourish in the window-box of the pulpit.

Achtemeier writes elegant, warm and lucid prose, even if her style is slightly pompous and pious at times. She displays a towering command of the Scriptures, and one of the most impressive features of the book is its judicious and extensive use of biblical quotations, drawn widely and aptly from both Testaments. She is a writer who knows her Bible better than most and one who believes firmly in the possibility of biblical theology.

With a good range of references to recent literature, this is a worthwhile read. It is both conservative and contemporary, even if it is more concerned with holding old lines than breaking new ground.

Doug Gay, Glasgow

The Journals of George Whitefield

Edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1993; 256pp., £6.99;

ISBN 0 340 57777 0

John Wesley's Journal

Edited by Robert Backhouse

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1993; 256pp., £6.99;

ISBN 0 340 5774 6

These two books are the newest additions to the publishers' Spiritual Lives series. Its aim is to provide challenge and inspiration from Christian greats of the past, drawing on acknowledged autobiographical and biographical classics. Surely the inclusion of the writings of these two leading Christian figures requires no real justification. Of John Wesley, Birrell writes in his appreciation, 'No single figure influenced so many minds, no single voice touched so many hearts.' At the funeral of Whitefield, John Wesley said that history records none 'who called so many myriads of sinners to repentance'. The publishers are to be congratulated for these two attractive, new editions.

Wesley's original Journal amounted to twenty-six volumes, which Wesley himself edited to four volumes. In 1920, P.L. Parker published his own abridgement of Wesley's four-volume edition. This present volume is itself an abridgement of Parker's single volume. It also contains H.P. Hughes' original introduction, together with A. Birrell's appreciation, both from the 1902 edition. Both provide helpful insight into the life and work of Wesley. It must be said that the contents section of this book is extremely detailed, increasing its usefulness.

Wesley began his Journal in his youth and continued making entries until shortly before his death at the age of 88. Through this book one hears from Wesley himself, of his remarkable country-wide preaching tours, of his break with the Church of England and of his experience of God.

George Whitefield originally wrote seven Journals, together with an account of his life up to his ordination. He tells us that he wrote them specifically for publication, both for the glory of God and to help raise funds for the orphanage in Georgia that he founded. In 1756, he himself revised, corrected and abridged them into a single volume. Backhouse's

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

edition follows the text of Whitefield's own corrected edition of 1756 and also retains Whitefield's original Preface.

Whitefield was clearly one of the greatest itinerant preachers in Protestant history. He would regularly preach to enormous open air gatherings for between forty to sixty hours per week. As he records, 'Preached nine times this week, and expounded something like eighteen times, with great power and enlargement.' This is his dramatic life-story in his own words.

Of necessity much detail is omitted from the original Journals, but what is retained is presented in a lively, active style. What has been omitted seems to consist of more routine entries.

Perhaps all this is lacking is a brief chronology at the start of the books, placing the men and their writings in an historical context. With respect to both volumes, one can only agree with the words of Edward FitzGerald (as recorded in the editor's note): 'If you don't know it, do know it'.

Michael D. McMullen, University of Aberdeen

The Prophecy of Isaiah

J. Alec Motyer

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1993; 544pp., £19.99; ISBN 0 85110 647 1

Although on his own acknowledgement IVP have spent over thirty years anticipating Alec Motyer's commentary on Isaiah, the publishers cannot but feel, along with the Christian public at large, that it has been well worth the wait. This new publication will surely become a standard work on the shelves not only of conservative scholars and preachers, but of every serious theologian and student of the Old Testament.

This book is the fruit of a lifetime's labour. Here is a man who, through diligent and reverent study, has faithfully and painstakingly trampled the grapes of the Isaianic vine; and the long years of growing familiarity with, and reflection on, this literature have given to the wine of this commentary a richness and maturity which is always thoroughly satisfying and at times well-nigh intoxicating!

Motyer's commentary is, first and foremost, a manifestly *scholarly* work. He himself identifies 'three main thrusts in commentating: explanation (what the text means), encyclopaedia (the course of specialist debate), and exposition (the continuing reality of the text as God's word today)'. Of these, he decided 'to major on the first while by no means forgetting the last', but, there is no doubt that, at least in the sense in which he means it, his work has an encyclopaedic thrust as well.

His references to the course of specialist debate are largely confined to the concise – but not cursory – 22 page introduction and the detailed

footnotes, intruding into the main body of the commentary only as they have a bearing on the meaning of the text. Precisely this is his approach, for instance, in regard to the contentious question of authorship, where the main points of his argument are presented in the introduction, while ‘the possibility that the whole literature is pre-exilic and the product of one mind is tackled in detail, as appropriate, throughout the commentary’.

On this crucial issue of authorship Motyer argues the case for the unity of the text fully, cogently, and quite unashamedly. He speaks of, and illustrates, ‘a literature bursting with internal evidence of its unity’. Combining linguistic, manuscript, theological, historical, and logical arguments, he demonstrates why the whole literature can and should be attributed to the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem. His argument makes compelling reading, especially for those who might otherwise be awed by the apparent complexity of the ongoing debate. A second notable feature of this commentary is, as one has come to expect from this author, its marvellous *lucidity*. A full and helpful table of contents outlines the basic structure of the whole book of Isaiah, as Motyer sees it, a structure ‘built around three Messianic portraits: the King (chapters 1-37), the Servant (chapters 38-55), and the Anointed Conqueror (chapters 56-66)’. The introduction then fleshes out the skeleton, while throughout the commentary each new section is prefaced by further introductory comments, in such a way that the reader is well prepared for the detailed exposition, and well rewarded by the discipline of study. But that, surely, is a classic mark of the gifted teacher that Motyer undoubtedly is – the ability both to inform and to inspire the student by incisive insights presented in a down-to-earth and readable style (*e. g.* “justification by faith” is not a “Sunday” truth bearing only on our relationship with God, but also a “Monday” truth for the conduct of life in all its challenges”).

Other features that promote this lucid user-friendliness are the consistent adoption of the NIV as the working translation (though regularly his own illuminating rendering is given), the transliteration and explanation of the Hebrew words cited, and a regular reminder of the structure of the text.

For the academic purist, it is perhaps regrettable that there is no index, and that the select bibliography is so selective that it excludes, for instance, O.T. Allis. But these flaws are ultimately insignificant and (presumably) easily remedied.

No review of this new commentary, however, would be complete without brief mention of a third feature characterising the book: it is always and evidently a deeply *reverent* work from the pen of one who clearly strives to combine the pursuit of academic excellence with the spirit of ardent worship. As a result, the serious student of Scripture will find this a book that both engages the mind and inspires the heart, giving depth and substance to his praise, point and passion to his mission: a

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

book to be read and used with the same patience and eagerness that the publishers themselves have shown in awaiting its completion!

*Jeremy R.H. Middleton, Davidson's Mains Church of Scotland,
Edinburgh*

Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World

Edited by Trevor A. Hart and Daniel P. Thimell

Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1989; 387pp., £14.95; ISBN 1 55635 009 0

This is a collection of essays presented to the Revd Professor James B. Torrance on the occasion of his retirement from the chair of Systematic Theology in the University of Aberdeen. It is also the twenty-fifth volume in the Princeton Theological Monograph series.

After an 'Appreciation' by Professor Alasdair Heron, the essays are grouped into three sections: Christ and the Reconciliation of the World; Christ in the History of Christian Thought; and Christ and Salvation in Christian Theology. There are essays by former students, by colleagues, by scholars who shared his concerns and by members of his family (brother and son).

As one would expect from such a volume, it picks up and discusses many of the themes which were at the centre of Professor Torrance's own ministry (which is how he views both his teaching and preaching). This is most obvious in the essays supplied by the editors: Hart on Irenaeus and Thimell on John McLeod Campbell.

As one would expect from the title, most of the essays have a Christological focus. Ray Anderson, for example, argues that the unresolved dilemma between orthodoxy and orthopraxis can be settled by changing the focus to Christopraxis, and John Thompson, recently retired himself from Union College in Belfast, offers a discussion of Barth's Christology.

A number of the essays are controversial. Some, including this reviewer, would want to question James Houston's argument that the separation of dogmatics and spiritual theology combined with an Augustinian rather than an eastern doctrine of the Trinity has led to 'academic theology' separated from a real participation in inter-trinitarian relationships. Similarly, Jeremy Begbie's critique of the Dutch neo-Calvinist position (Kuyper and Bavinck) from a Barthian perspective (the perspective of most of the essays) should not go unchallenged.

It is a tribute to the editors (and to the respect in which Professor Torrance is held) that they have been able to persuade so many fine scholars to contribute essays to the volume. Eberhard Jungel's discussion of the phrase 'God is love' and Howard Marshall's argument against

universal salvation are notable contributions. There are too many essays to comment on them all individually but the overall standard is high and this is a volume well worth reading, especially for those who share the same theologians' concerns as J.B. Torrance. It is a worthy tribute to a scholar who has an undoubted passion for theology born of his deep commitment to the living God.

A.T.B. McGowan, Highland Theological Institute, Moray College, Elgin

Systematic Theology, vol 1

Wolfhart Pannenberg, translated by G.W. Bromiley

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991; 473pp., £27.95; ISBN 0 567 09597 5

Pannenberg brings together many of the ideas previously suggested in a series of essays and articles in this rich first volume of his systematics. Like the Christmas cake on the sideboard in January, it needs to be partaken steadily and appreciatively; ministers desiring a substantial reading partner for several months may well find this good value in many ways. The publishers did well to recruit Geoffrey Bromiley as translator to ensure a clear and readable product.

Pannenberg is perhaps still best known for his work on the doctrine of revelation, and the opening chapters fill out the method of approach developed then. Pannenberg desires synthesis, he wants to blend ancient and modern, philosophical and biblical, analytical and experiential. The first chapter explores the grounds Christian theology has for talking about God. Having reviewed proposals ancient and modern, Pannenberg insists that we need to abandon the claim to any prior guarantee of Christian truth, and to make this claim to truth itself a theme of theology. Theology has to make sense of reality, to show its own coherence as a creditable interpretation of how things are. The fact that God is debated and contested in the world 'is part of the reality of the world which dogmatics has to consider as God's world'. This is the opposite of a dualistic approach or of purely kerygmatic theology.

Chapters 2 and 3 treat the concept of God, philosophically, and the experience of religions. 'God as the mystery of the world', to steal Jungel's phrase, might serve to sum up Pannenberg's explorations here. God is already there; before we ask the question, we somehow know something of the presence. Even polytheistic religions presuppose a world unity beneath their pantheons. An unclear presence of God is felt, preconceptually, and often distorted by what we make of this perception, as Paul tells us in Romans 1. The treatment of religions is especially fresh and challenges orthodoxies, conservative and radical. Pannenberg argues that a purely anthropological account of religions fails to get near the essence of religion since religions intend to focus on God. This raises questions of conceptualising God and of truth, the self-demonstration of

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

the coherence of the religion's God historically. 'If the history of religion is not just a history of human ideas and attitudes, if the issue in it is instead the truth of divine reality in the deities of the religions, this is because the history of religion can be read as that of the manifestation of divine reality and the process of criticism of inadequate human views of this reality.'

It is interesting that the category of religion has again assumed such a prominent place in a Christian systematic theology, and perhaps even more so that it leads into the next chapter's theme, revelation. Pannenberg thinks that there is an increasing unity of view among religions, and that this itself reflects divine revelatory activity in history. Just as in his earlier essays revelation had a complement in history and reason, now this complement includes religion. Indeed he criticises Barth for dissociating revelation from religion, since received revelation will issue in some form of religion, although Barth is right in wanting to give priority to God and revelation in discussing religion.

The fact of the unclear prior perception of God plays a key role in the interpretation of revelation and biblical revelation. God was not discovered *de novo* in the experience of the figures of the Old Testament, for example. They had knowledge of some deity, which was then clarified by the revelatory experiences in history. Content was given by revelation rather than new discovery. Revelation happens in all kinds of ways, but indirectly through the historical and natural so that form can be given and can be mentally understood. The kerygmatic idea of self-revelation does not commend itself to Pannenberg, who wants to reappropriate cognitive content into the experience. Again we rub up against one of Pannenberg's interesting features: he appeals to both conservative and liberal wings, often for reasons neither likes! Revealed content sounds a conservative notion, but it is wholly cut loose from an inspired Bible by Pannenberg.

Furthermore, Pannenberg criticises the category of 'story' as a substitute for history; historical reference has to be maintained if the revelation of Jesus is divine self-demonstration of lordship. The focus on the resurrection of Jesus in this account of revelation is far less prominent than in *Revelation as History* and *Jesus God and Man*. Jesus' life and his teaching provide the base for the following chapter on the Trinity. We begin with the prayer of Jesus and the self-differentiation of Jesus from the Father; this theme was present in *Jesus God and Man* and was further developed in some untranslated essays, but now it becomes a major focus.

Pannenberg makes the doctrine of the Trinity central to his whole theology, and his exposition is typically refreshing. He uses Athanasius' doctrine that the Father is the Father of the Son in mutual reciprocity, and criticises the Cappadocian stress on the originative relationship of Father to Son. This fails to state the real mutuality sufficiently. The Trinity is not, with Barth, best seen as a single subject in three modes of

being, but as reciprocal relations interdependent and mediating one another. Pannenberg uses the model of a force field, a context or environment which is Spirit and love, the essence of God who exists in the three persons. Pannenberg has some good words to say of Augustine as well as the standard criticisms: the authors of *The Forgotten Trinity* take note!

Pannenberg continues to stress the historicity of divine presence and action in the world, and holds that there is a sense in which the divine identity depends on the outcome of history. The history of salvation, the economic Trinity, is real for God and therefore the immanent or essential Trinity. But we are told that God is not therefore becoming in the historical process, and 'The eschatological consummation is only the locus of the decision that the trinitarian God is always the true God from eternity to eternity'. I have called this a theology of the 'future perfect' in an effort to explain Pannenberg's attempt to have his historical cake and eat it; that is, God will be seen always to have been this – without prejudice to the reality of the free history of the kingdom and human response. God relates to the world by acting creatively upon it and this is the context of explaining his trinitarian omnipotence. The incarnation is the reassertion from the creaturely side of divine monarchy and the ending of autonomous rebellion.

This theology gives much stimulus in its systematic, very German, outworking. Pannenberg seeks to revise the traditional doctrines along modern lines and remains scriptural as well, displaying massive continental learning in philosophy and dogmatics. He remains convinced that the orientation of reality and truth to and from the future can solve the difficult question of divine immanence and sovereign transcendence; he wishes to retain divine eternity and monarchy, but through the Sonship as well as Fatherhood of God. The Trinity is his key and provides the real interest and importance of the book.

Tim Bradshaw, Regent's Park College, Oxford

Say One for Me: The Church of England in the Next Decade

Wesley Carr and others

SPCK, London, 1992; 126pp., £7.99; ISBN 0 281 04556 9

The Church of England: What It Is and What It Stands For

R.T. Beckwith

Latimer House Oxford, 1992; 18pp., £1.25; ISBN 0 946 30785 7

Restoring the Vision: Anglican Evangelicals Speak Out

Edited by Melvin Tinker

Monarch, Eastbourne, 1990; 286pp., £8.99; ISBN 1 85424 048 X

On the surface, these three books would appear to be of little interest to anyone outside the Church of England, but a closer examination reveals that they are dealing with issues of equally deep concern in the Church of Scotland. Moreover *Restoring the Vision* contains a sufficient number of articles to make it of value to Evangelicals at large. Meanwhile, all three books are principally evaluating the opportunities and responsibilities afforded to an established church.

Wesley Carr's *Say One For Me* (the non-churchgoer's passing remark to a friend on his way to church) does not come from the pen of Evangelicals, but it is addressed to one of the most prominent of them, the Archbishop of Canterbury (and, of course, through him to the Church of England at large). Wesley Carr is the Dean of Bristol; together with a team of other prominent Anglicans from different walks, he pleads that the Church of England should not allow itself to be pushed into sectarianism, but should hold fast to and exploit for the gospel those advantages with which it is endowed by being the established Church. By and large, the people of the land regard it as being their Church, even if they do not go, and they harbour a whole variety of expectations of it. (The regard in which it is held was underlined by the announcement of George Carey's appointment to Canterbury as the first headline of the one o'clock news.)

People are to be engaged where they look to the Church; *i.e.* baptisms, weddings, funerals and other special services, on the 'common land' of the parish church (whose buildings at least they are prepared to maintain, especially in country areas), as well as in the 'alternative parish' – the media, where the Church's viewpoint gets a ready ear – and in the cathedrals, which have recently taken on a new significance, drawing literally millions of visitors each year. The Church must engage with the people on the fringe, even at the cost of having ragged edges and much of

its ministry ephemeral. Who can measure its success? The ministry of the church is 'incarnational'; its job is to interpret the gospel to the market place, and the minister must be given plenty of opportunity for contemplative meditation if he is to be efficient in his task.

Roger Beckwith in his *Latimer Briefing* also warns that the opportunities available to the established Church should not be lightly discarded, although his approach is rather more academic and not without a hint of the archaic. Beckwith wants the Church of England to be true to itself and return to its great Reformation heritage, which for him is the yardstick of genuine Anglicanism. Not everyone would agree with him: perhaps the majority of Anglicans would prefer the *via media*, but Beckwith wants the Church of England to manifest the marks of a true church – a biblically directed church. His booklet also is dedicated to George Carey, 'an old friend', albeit 'sometimes outspoken on the other side of contemporary questions from the side which you are thought to favour'. Dr Carey's regard for Beckwith is sufficient for him to have awarded him a rare Lambeth D.D. – commendation enough for all his work at Latimer House!

The 'other side' referred to by Beckwith is that of the 'classic evangelicals', as they are coming to be known, as they begin to marshal themselves together through unease with the newer Evangelicalism. Their stance is given much fuller expression in *Restoring the Vision*. Melvin Tinker, formerly Chaplain of Keele University and now Vicar of All Hallows Cheadle, has gathered contributions from thirteen prominent conservative evangelical Anglicans, together with a foreword by the Bishop of St Albans and imprimaturs from Dick Lucas and Michael Green.

The symposium addresses itself to questions being widely asked in their circles such as 'Are evangelicals unwilling to hold fast to their convictions in a period in which they are paradoxically gaining their ascendancy?' and 'Has evangelicalism become so broad that it has lost its focus?' David Holloway sets the scene by considering a definition of Evangelicalism, and in calling for Evangelicals not to revert to a former partisan attitude but rather to 'evangelicalise' the Church at large, thus making itself true to its roots. All the contributors argue for a restoration of genuine biblical principles in addressing contemporary issues, which include the ministry of women; a reassessment of evangelism and how people become Christians (Gavin Reed); inter-faith dialogue, which must be sensitive but never allowed to displace the uniqueness of Christ (Chris Wright); Evangelicalism and ecumenism (Beckwith again); culture and Christianity – while culture is the necessary medium of the gospel, it in turn must be changed by it (Melvin Tinker) – and so on. Who better to guide us in finding out what are 'genuine biblical principles' than Jim Packer in a characteristically lucid essay on 'Understanding the Bible'?

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

All three books emphasise the need of the church to engage with people where they are. There is little that is original, but they crystallise much thinking over the last twenty-five years from their own standpoints and make a considerable contribution towards restoring confidence and vision for the gospel in England in the Decade of Evangelism. And they are bold essays in antidisestablishmentarianism!

Peter Cook, St Andrew's Church, Cheadle Hulme

The Supremacy of God in Preaching

John Piper

IVP, Leicester, 1990; 119pp., £5.50; ISBN 0 85110 695 1

This book is intended for preachers, would-be preachers and those concerned about the vital significance of preaching. It is based on lectures given at Gordon Conwell Seminary and Wheaton College.

In the preface, the author, who is a well-known writer and the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, states that people today are 'starving for God'. This is an assumption, which is made without reason or analysis. However, it becomes the basis for a very powerful appeal for preaching which encompasses a 'God-entranced world view'. Piper indicates that his thinking has been greatly influenced by studying the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Part 2 of the book examines Edwards' contribution with regard to the centrality, sovereignty and supremacy of God in preaching. The first part of the book deals with the reasons for a God-centred approach, which he outlines in terms of the glory of God, the cross of Christ and the power of the Spirit. Much of what Piper says has to do with the style, manner and mood of the preacher who is controlled by the vision of God. His thesis is set out in a measured sentence. 'Gladness and gravity should be woven together in the life and preaching of a pastor in such a way as to sober the careless soul and sweeten the burden of the saints.' He lists seven practical suggestions for cultivating this gravity and gladness in preaching. These seem to me to focus more on gravity than gladness, especially 'direct your mind often to the contemplation of death'!

Piper highlights helpfully two crucially important insights from Edwards on the nature of true faith. First, faith arises from a spiritual taste, love of God being the main thing. Second, saving faith is persevering faith. These two truths carry great implications for preachers, according to Piper. In particular preaching must not only enlighten the mind but stir up holy affections. Also, true preaching must have as one of its chief aims assisting the saints to persevere. Piper explores these implications in a challenging way in his final chapter.

This is a short book. However, it is a book to read slowly. It demands thought, self-examination and prayer. It is the kind of book that a

preacher might want to pull out on the 1st of January every year in order to humble, inspire and clarify his goals. There are several memorable quotations, for example, 'all genuine preaching is rooted in a feeling of desperation. You wake up on Sunday morning and you can smell the smoke of hell on one side and the crisp breezes of heaven on the other.' Piper identifies with the anxiety felt by the preacher moments before the sermon and outlines five steps for focusing the mind on God's strength at that time. The steps are contained in the acronym APTAT. If the reader wishes to find the formula, buy the book!

Martin Allen, Chryston Parish Church

Eastern Orthodox Christianity. A Western Perspective

Daniel B. Clendenin

Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1994; 208pp., \$ 14.99; ISBN 0 8010 2588 5

Daniel Clendenin, with roots in Protestantism and strong ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, shows that Orthodox Christians and evangelical Protestants have more similarities in common than they are aware of. This volume is designed to be read in conjunction with *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Grand Rapids, 1994), the two together aiming to introduce major aspects of Orthodox history and theology to Protestant Christians who might otherwise not have encountered Eastern Christianity.

This volume focuses descriptively on four theological themes in Orthodoxy – apophaticism, icons, Scripture and tradition – making contrasts and comparisons between Orthodoxy and Protestantism, and occasionally referring to Roman Catholicism. Clendenin makes the point that, whilst Orthodoxy has operated with a degree of anonymity because of its confusion with Catholicism, Orthodoxy tends to see Protestants and Catholics as opposite sides of the same coin in their juridical frameworks and their appeals to external theological authorities (Scripture alone for Protestants and the papacy for Catholics). Clendenin shows similarities between Catholicism and Orthodoxy in their sacramental and liturgical frameworks.

Clendenin lifts the curtain on Orthodoxy, dispelling myths and at the same time setting Orthodoxy in its rightful place amongst other denominations. He points to one of its unique features – a fusion of the aesthetic with the theological, both in relation to its concept of God and the way in which, for Orthodoxy (unlike Christianity in the West), art and theology are inseparable. Another important feature is the way in which Orthodoxy 'affirms unequivocally the primary position of

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Scripture', the only theological authority for Orthodoxy being 'a charismatic authority grounded in the assistance of the Holy Spirit'.

Clendenin's Protestant background enables an excellent introduction of the two faiths to one another, as he considers what Protestants can learn from the spirituality of Orthodoxy. He draws a conclusion that, by 'practising a hermeneutic of love' and emphasising the essentials of Christian teaching, Protestants and Orthodox Christians will then be able to move forward together to witness the gospel to the world.

Janet L. Watson, Glasgow Bible College

The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem

Willem Van Gemeren

Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1988; 432pp., \$24.99; ISBN 0 310 23130 2

Biblical theology is a central discipline among Christian studies, for it lies between exegesis on the one hand and systematic theology on the other. Those who work in both would benefit greatly from time spent in its study. The exegete's preoccupation is often with the minutiae of textual study, set perhaps in the context of Near Eastern studies for the Old Testament or of Palestinian and Hellenistic studies for the New. He can easily lose sight of the larger dimensions of biblical truth. The systematic theologian, on the other hand, may be taken up with contemporary theological or philosophical literature. In so doing he may neglect the biblical roots of the Christian faith.

The dust jacket of this volume summarises its main theme: 'The underlying thesis of the *Progress of Redemption* is that as long as our Lord has not come in glory, believers in all ages must live with the dialectic tension between alienation and blessing, creation and redemption, promise and fulfilment, Israel and the nations, the people of God and the kingdom of God, and God's love for his creation and his love for the saints.' Among those the author mentions with gratitude as influencing him are Geerhardus Vos and Edmund Clowney. To claim to stand in such a tradition is to promise much, and in terms at least of his work here on the Old Testament he does not disappoint us. From a somewhat different perspective, he has also been influenced by Brevard Childs, whose canonical criticism has contributed in no small measure to a rebirth of biblical theology, although his doctrine of Scripture is that of Vos and Clowney rather than Childs.

The author develops his work on a redemptive-historical pattern, dividing redemptive history into twelve periods. Interestingly, he includes church history as well as biblical history. 'Each period is distinct and

relates organically to the previous and succeeding epochs. Each period reveals elements of continuity and discontinuity and contributes to a greater appreciation of the overall plan of God.' Is this a new version of dispensationalism? Not really, for it places greater emphasis on the elements of continuity than is usually the case in the dispensational approach. It does, however, recognize the element of truth in dispensationalism, that God's dealings with his people down the ages have been characterized by variety without inconsistency (for the character of God is the consistent factor throughout) and that there is therefore profit in the study of Bible History era by era.

There are so many helpful insights within these pages that the present reviewer hesitates to express dissatisfaction. The Old Testament material is certainly satisfying (after all, the author is an Old Testament professor), but it occupies two-thirds of the book, leaving just 160 pages to cover the inter-testamental period, the New Testament and the history of the church. Inevitably, the coverage of these suffers from superficiality from time to time, especially when compared with the larger treatment of the Old Testament. So, for example, a survey of Parts 5, 6 and 9 shows that the space given to the life and work of David falls little short of that devoted to the life and work of Jesus. Yet it is so helpful, in a book of this character, to be constantly reminded of the importance of the spiritual life, and to find a stress on the practical bearing of each part of Scripture and on the lessons we need to learn from the history of the church. This gives vitality and warmth to the study.

G.W. Grogan, Glasgow

The Vicarious Humanity of Christ and the Reality of Salvation

Christian D. Kettler

University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1991; 338pp., \$28.00; ISBN 0 8191 8273 7

'A memorable month in 1981', when Kettler served as teaching assistant at Fuller Seminary to Thomas F. Torrance, stimulated him to explore further 'the profound evangelical and ecumenical implications of Torrance's doctrine of the vicarious humanity of Christ'. This study – originally a Fuller Ph.D thesis – is, however, much more than a study of Torrance's theology.

Kettler begins with an analysis of the doctrine of salvation in the teaching of John B. Cobb Jr., Leonardo Boff, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Hick and Hans Küng. Identifying these theologians as 'anthropocentric', Kettler uses Karl Barth's teaching on the 'humanity of God' as 'a telling critique of the dangers of the

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

anthropocentric tendencies in modern theology'. From the importance of Barth's teaching that 'God himself in Jesus is the foundation of true humanity', Kettler moves on to the teaching of Torrance – 'To see the humanity of Christ is to see the revelation of who God really is' – and J. McLeod Campbell – 'not only is there a revelation of the Father in the Incarnation, but there is also the gracious atoning response of obedient, faithful humanity'.

Kettler then considers the doctrine of 'the vicarious repentance of Christ' with special reference to the teaching of McLeod Campbell and Barth. He stresses that this 'vicarious repentance of Christ' is 'absolutely needed because of the inability of humanity to provide a perfect repentance'. He emphasizes 'the total obedience of Christ' as 'the basis of vicarious repentance'. Discussing Barth's doctrine of vicarious repentance, Kettler writes, 'God in Christ undertakes to do himself "what the world cannot do"'. He commends Barth's exposition of the atonement in terms of 'the obedient Son of God ... taking the place of sinners and ... becoming "the one great sinner"'.

Those less at home in the field of systematic theology may be interested in the two biblical studies offered by Kettler on 'The Exalted Humanity of Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews' and 'Humanity Restored: Christ as the Last Adam and the Church as the Body of Christ'. Other helpful features of this book are its lengthy bibliography and indexes. These aids to study will appeal to those who may wish to 'dip into' this difficult and demanding book without attempting to read it from cover to cover.

Charles M. Cameron, Burnside Presbyterian Church, Portstewart

An Interpretation of Religion

John Hick

Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989; 432pp., £15.99; ISBN 0333 39489 5

Do all religions lead to God? The orthodox Christian answer has always been either 'No', or at most 'Well, some may, but (except in the case of Christianity) this happens only by accident'. Nonetheless, there has long been pressure to say something convincing about other religions, pressure which can only grow in this present age, in which the knowledge that religions have of each other and religious intolerance seem, disappointingly enough, to be increasing simultaneously. Thus the pressure is on Christians now, as it often has been before, either to show that although all the adherents of other religions are eternally damned, this is somehow all right (Augustine, sometimes though not always); or to show that other religions are in some way back-doors to heaven, and to account for that (C.S. Lewis); or to come right out and renounce all

claims to a Christian monopoly on the truth, in which case the question is to be raised whether one has not given up Christianity altogether.

Ever since his 1973 book *God and the Universe of Faiths*, John Hick has been an articulate advocate of the third option, to which one recent influential convert has been Keith Ward. In *An Interpretation of Religion*, based on his Edinburgh Gifford Lectures of 1986-7, Hick takes up this theme again. The book has five parts. In the first Hick addresses the question 'What is essential to religion (or the great religions)?', and comes up with the answer that it is the idea of human transformation through the idea of the transcendent. In Part Two, 'The Religious Ambiguity of the Universe', we are invited to assent to the proposition that deductive and evidential argument can get us nowhere if we want to be sure of God's existence. In the third part, Hick lays a different foundation for the knowledge of God as he conceives God, namely religious experience (by which Hick means the experience of the world 'as' the locus of religious value). In Part Four, Hick gives us his central hypothesis, that (*e.g.*) 'the Hindu Krishna and the Jahweh of Israel are two personae of The Real', *i.e.* of God. In Part Five, Hick discusses the question: What makes the difference between a good religion and a bad one? In brief his answer is that it is not doctrine, but moral goodness, that marks a good religion.

Hick's book contains much fascinating material, comprising sympathetic and perceptive comparative accounts of, in particular, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist religious experience, about which I do not feel qualified to comment. But there are two points I do worry about.

The first worry is what I may call the Esperanto question. It is a well known phenomenon of human life that, in the attempt to systematise and unify disparate and incompatible elements, one often ends up furnishing others with just one more disparate and incompatible element. So a perfect and logical new language is invented to supersede all those messy, inconvenient, and grammatically / morphologically perverse old languages; but no one except a few rationalist-minded folk seem to want it; it may be a very handy language, the others say, but it is not our language. For all his learned and accurate reportage of Hindu, or Muslim, or Buddhist practice, we may want to ask: is John Hick giving us a faithful account of how it is with the religions which already exist? Or is he inventing a new religion, the status of which is (presumably) no more or less favourable than that of any one of the old religions?

Perhaps the acid test here is whether adherents of the old religions take it that the Hickian view is indeed, as it claims to be, an *interpretation* – perhaps a revealing one – of their own positions; or rather think of it as (at best) a *reinterpretation*, or (less hopefully) a *misinterpretation*: as not something that they can recognise as *their* religion at all. Obviously reactions here are going to vary. For my own part I find Hick wanting to say that what I think is deep truth, the deepest there is – that Yahweh is

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

God – is in fact only one way of understanding something much deeper: that our use of the word ‘God’ actually refers to something called by Hick ‘The Real’, and that this is what, in our own poor stumbling way, we are really worshipping. Now this I find unconvincing, as a factual claim, and unattractive as a religious appeal. It simply does not seem to me that what orthodox Christians (or Muslims, or Jews; Eastern religions are a different matter) mean when they say ‘God’ is best spelled out – ‘interpreted’? – by calling it ‘The Real’. If Hick’s thesis is meant as a claim about the real meaning of the word ‘God’, it simply strikes me as false. But if Hick is rather saying that we should revise what we mean by the word ‘God’, so that it means what he means by ‘The Real’, then I am not attracted by the proposal. I feel plenty of inclination to worship God. None at all to worship ‘The Real’.

My second worry is like unto my first, and is about religious experience, on which Hick relies a good deal to make his case. Hick wants to say that there is a common core to all, or all important, religious experience, which is experience of the Transcendent Real; and that if we understand religious phenomena properly, we will be able to abstract away those elements of religious experience which are determined by our culture, and extract the jewel at the heart of it all – experience of The Real. There is one question here about whether any such core is in fact extractable at all. Experiences seem to be necessarily experiences of what they are of and not some other thing. It is a constitutive, essential part of any experience that it has some particular intentional content, which is not readily reducible to anything else – unless one is prepared to say that the experience in question is illusory.

There is a second question about whether, if such a core can be extracted, it proves to be of much interest or worship-worthiness. (Might not what such experiences all have in common be of such extreme generality and vagueness as to have no interest?) Further, just as I doubt whether believers would be interested in worshipping The Real rather than in worshipping Allah or Vishnu or Christ (*etc*), so I also doubt whether they will value their experiences in the same way if they discover that all along they have been under a benign misapprehension about the object of their experiences. For to believe that Yahweh is God is to believe that nothing could surpass Yahweh or experience of Yahweh; if one comes to take it that one’s supposed experiences of Yahweh are actually veiled experiences of something much greater, The Real, then one has by that very token ceased to believe that Yahweh is God. In short, one has changed one’s religion.

There is absolutely no doubt that, in an age when Ayodhya and Pat Robertson and the Ayatollah Khomeini are all unpleasantly real possibilities, attempts to mediate between different extreme positions, and find what is good in the various religious traditions, are absolutely imperative for the good of the human race. John Hick is to be

REVIEWS

congratulated for the boldness and imagination of his project. But there is room for doubt about whether what he offers as an interpretation of 'religion' (all religion?) might not turn out, in the end, to be a misrepresentation of any particular religion – or perhaps the creation of a new religion.

T.D.J. Chappel, Merton College, Oxford