

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

# Book Reviews

**PAUL, THE LAW AND JUSTIFICATION** Colin G Kruse  
Leicester: Apollos 1996 320pp £14.99 pb ISBN 0 85111 441 5

The debate launched by E P Sanders in 1977 concerning Paul's relationship to Judaism and the Law of Moses shows no sign of subsiding, and to date it has produced a massive body of scholarly literature. Sanders' original thesis which is that Palestinian Judaism was a kind of covenantal nomism, whereas Paul's religion was more eschatological in nature has undergone any number of modifications at the hands of other scholars, but the main outlines of his argument continue to dominate the discussion. Certainly it is now true to say that no scholar in the field can afford to overlook what first-century Jews said and thought about their faith, and this has made much of what Christians have traditionally thought about Judaism seem inadequate, even to the point of being a caricature.

Modern scholars have also discovered that the doctrine of justification by faith although it is undoubtedly present in the Pauline corpus, is not the 'centre' of Paul's theology in the way that Lutheranism (for example) has traditionally maintained. It appears that Martin Luther distorted Paul's emphasis, even if he did not misunderstand his basic teaching, because of sixteenth century circumstances and limitations. A more balanced appreciation of Paul's thought will find a place for justification by faith without making it the 'article of a standing or falling Church' in the way that Luther did.

Dr Kruse takes up these arguments and gives us a good survey of current thinking on the subject. He arranges his material chronologically according to scholar, taking things back to the beginning of this century and showing clearly that the debate about the true nature of Judaism antedates Sanders by several decades. Most helpfully, he takes us through recent writing on the subject, some of which will be unfamiliar to non-specialists in the field.

The main body of his book is devoted to a careful study of Paul's writings, taking them in chronological order as well. This is a more hazardous enterprise of course, since we cannot be certain of Pauline chronology, but it can be said that Dr Kruse remains within a broad scholarly consensus. Galatians comes first, then 1 and 2 Corinthians, and finally Romans. The other Pauline writings are treated more briefly in a concluding chapter. By going through the major Pauline epistles in this way, Dr Kruse is able to refute the more extravagant claims of some

modern scholars, and in particular to reconcile passages which some of them have regarded as contradictory. He is also able to show that the notion that Paul changed his mind as time went on is inadequate to do justice to the data. It appears rather that Paul adapted his way of speaking to the different situations which he had to deal with, and that it is this, rather than any change of mind, which explains apparent differences in his writings.

Most importantly, Dr Kruse demonstrates that justification by faith was important to Paul even when he was not dealing directly with the question of the Jewish Law. Judaism was not an issue in the Corinthian Church, yet justification forms an essential part of Paul's message in the two epistles which he addressed to it. This, argues Dr Kruse, shows that for Paul, justification was a vitally important doctrine, even if we cannot call it the 'centre' of his whole theology.

If the book has a weakness, it is that the scholarship reviewed in the first chapter is not referred to directly in the ones which follow. Dr Kruse deals with the problems which have been raised, but the reader needs to keep going back to the first chapter to remind himself who said what and when. It would have been helpful if, at each point where he deals with a matter of current controversy, he had reminded his readers who had originally raised the issue and what had been said about it, quoting sources as appropriate. At the same time, it is only fair to point out that the footnotes are extremely rich in other ways, and direct the reader's attention to a number of books and articles which are not mentioned in the introductory chapter. Perhaps his survey of the literature should have included some of them as well?

Having said that, this book will be of immense value to pastors and teachers who want a clear and authoritative guide to the issues, and to what Paul actually teaches in his major epistles. The step-by-step approach is ideal for students, and will be of great help to preachers who need to get a handle on a particular epistle.

On other matters, the book is clearly and attractively presented, with a full bibliography and index at the end. There is also an enormous number of subheadings, which makes it easy to find one's way around! It should also be said that the book is virtually free of typographical errors, which is a rarity nowadays! On the other hand, the publishers have succumbed to the blight of 'inclusive' language, inventing words like 'kinspeople', for example, which merely spoil the reader's enjoyment. The sooner we are delivered from this plague, the better! Dr Kruse has given us a most serviceable study of the subject, and one which is readily accessible to the non-specialist. For this he is to be congratulated, and it must be hoped that

his book will receive the welcome which it surely deserves.

GERALD BRAY

**THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES** Translated by Everett Fox  
London: The Harvill Press 1995 1024pp £25hb ISBN 186046142 5

Although the weary writer of Ecclesiastes could claim that 'of the making of many books there is no end' the same could also be said with regard to new translations of Scripture. Because there are now so many translations and paraphrases and more seem to pour off the presses every year, each new venture is forced to justify its existence by claiming that it alone possesses a unique quality that will enable any serious student of Scripture to gain valuable new insights which would otherwise be missing. The same claims are made with the present book under review. Hence we are informed that Everett Fox's new translation ('the result of twenty-five years work') 'brings the modern English-language speaker closer to the authentic, living voice of the Bible than has ever been possible before'.

This is indeed a high claim to make and by the plethora of ecstatic support that the translation has received (including from Ted Hughes the poet laureate) I began to wonder how I had ever managed to obtain any significant understanding of the Pentateuch until Fox's translation emerged into the light of day. However it is a relatively simple matter to put these high claims immediately to the test by turning to Genesis 1:1 and by noting that Fox abandons the traditional rendering of **בְּרֵאשִׁית** (*barashith*, 'in the beginning') for 'at the beginning'. To be sure, Fox is aware that he has forsaken the traditional rendering, even inserting a footnote informing us that he has chosen instead to follow 'several medieval commentators, and most moderns'. *Why* he has chosen to do so we are not told, even though the interpretation of *barashith* has been a matter of some fierce dispute. Basically the prefix **בְּ** can be interpreted either as a preposition of place and time (in) or as a preposition denoting nearness (at). Amongst Hebrew grammarians the dispute has turned over whether *barashith* should be regarded as being in an absolute or construct state. This may all sound terribly academic but in fact the decision one reaches greatly influences further reading of the text. If *barashith* is deemed to be in the construct state this makes Genesis 1:1 heavily dependent upon and related to the two verses which follow. The arguments advanced in this case are based upon lexical statistics (all other examples of *barashith* are in the construct state) and upon the absence of the article, **הַ**. However, just because all other uses of *barashith* are in the construct state this does not imply it should be read as a construct here. In order to clearly indicate the construct state in Genesis 1:1 the writer could have positioned *barashith* differently but there is no other construction available to the Hebrew writer in order to indicate

the absolute state. In other words he had to place *barashith* where it is in order to indicate an absolute state. Moreover, time designations do not need to take the article, so the fact that the article is missing here sheds no light on the matter at all. Furthermore it must be borne in mind that all the ancient versions (as Fox reluctantly admits) construe Genesis 1:1 as being an independent clause initiated by *barashith* in the absolute state. This clearly shows, not that Genesis 1:1 is dependent upon verses 2 and 3 but rather that it is a *summary statement* of the whole of Genesis 1:2-2:25. In short Genesis 1:2-2:25 epexegetes Genesis 1:1. If this is accepted Fox's looser 'translation' opens up interpretative fields not envisioned by a traditional interpretation of *barashith*.

Having said this however Fox's remarkable achievement must not be allowed to pass unrecognized. The difficulty I have with this book is not that Fox is unable to bring out some of the force of the original Hebrew's crashing cadences, rhythms, rhetoric and word play; for all this and more is admirably and notably achieved. In doing this Fox has uncovered some of the Pentateuch's great literary devices which would undoubtedly otherwise be missed. In this sense it would be true to say that Fox does bring the reader closer to the Hebrew 'authentic voice'. But in so doing accuracy in translation is at times glossed over. One has to ask whether such an enterprise is worthwhile? Certainly for the literary minded Fox's feat needs no further justification. But despite the fact that it has been produced as if the publishers expect it to be read in Church or Synagogue I would think that very few attempts will be made to use the translation in public.

NIGEL ATKINSON

**WAR IN THE HEBREW BIBLE** Susan Nidditch  
New York: OUP 1993 180pp £7.99 pb ISBN 0195098404

We are often troubled when reading Old Testament accounts of war. It is difficult to come to terms with the commands and practices of war which destroy men, women and children. Susan Nidditch's book seeks to draw together all the Hebrew Bible's texts on war and other violent acts. Apart from biblical studies various disciplines have sought to understand the subject of war, and Nidditch provides a brief survey of various theories put forward by other scholars. In her turn she looks at the many facets of warfare and violence revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Subjects dealt with in this book include: 'herem'; the question of people and goods 'devoted to destruction' and therefore offered in sacrifice through war, war as a means of sacrifice, 'bardic traditions' revealing a code of honour in warfare, tricksterism in the conduct of acts of aggression and warfare as a matter of expediency. Finally, she considers the question of non-participation where God's miraculous intervention keeps people out of

war, or where texts like Amos 1–2 are used to condemn acts taking place in warfare.

These various ideologies suggest that people have always found war difficult. There seems to be something deep within the human psyche which has to explain such acts. The various ideologies of warfare in the Hebrew Bible seek, for Nidditch, to give meaning to what is taking place, even to provide justification. For example, the ‘herem’ theme sanctifies the killing by valuing that which is destroyed and offered to God.

Susan Nidditch asks us to take these texts seriously and understand what is behind them. Many scholars side-step the difficulties by suggesting that they reveal an ideal which emphasizes exclusiveness rather than something which actually took place. Nidditch, in common with a growing number of scholars these days, examines the text as it stands. The text refers to real events in the Israel of the Hebrew Bible. These texts may be uncomfortable, but what do they say to us of the nature of warfare? Whether we agree with her conclusions or not Nidditch’s work is challenging and stimulating. This is a useful book for anyone interested in the ethics of violence and warfare.

GEOFF ANDREWS

**ATONEMENT TODAY** John Goldingay (ed)

London: SPCK 1995 285pp £17.99 pb ISBN 0-281-04894-0

Note that revealing title: what is it about ‘Atonement’ that is qualified by the word ‘Today’? Is it that Evangelicals should never assume their theology but continually revisit Scripture to clarify and communicate? That is, presumably, why evangelical theology is still thought, taught and published – but it is not why this book exists. It is a collection of essays arising from a symposium at St John’s College, Nottingham, published to coincide with the college’s twenty-fifth anniversary, and behind the symposium lies a letter from Tom Smail to John Goldingay, the college principal, and this book’s editor. Smail writes of the need to articulate a God-centred Gospel, ‘(b)ut we shall not do it simply by expounding the scriptural teaching, the way evangelicals often do without ever taking up the theological problems as to how Christ’s action can vicariously be effective for us, and what kind of contemporary model can make the whole notion of atonement accessible to people. The biblical ones alone will not do it’ (p xi). Now that little word ‘Today’ has meaning: these essays are not here principally to clarify biblical material (although that is tackled), nor question whether earlier theologians of the cross (Anselm, Calvin, Warfield, Stott) are creatures of their cultures and if there are new questions raised by other cultures (although those issues too are

addressed), but because the very nature of 'Today' means that the category 'Atonement' needs new content. The biblical material is unable to communicate with clarity.

The two most important essays are by Goldingay himself, doing the biblical ground work. The first is an analysis of sacrifice, the second of sin. They are valuable in showing the variety of biblical terminology, but their common and massive fault is Goldingay's assumption that he can choose his own interpretative keys from a quite arbitrary mixture of biblical and sociological theses, thereby omitting the paramount and unifying point that the sacrificial system is God's initiative, and that God has described what sin is and what sacrifices do, within a covenantal framework. In God's theology 'uncleanness', 'sin' and 'curse' are not incompatible pictures to be selected from or added to, but interrelated and irreplaceable. Goldingay bizarrely separates law and worship into non-related chambers so that punishment (legal) can have nothing to do with sacrifice (worship). None of the sacrificial material has a substitutionary note, he argues, and 'Isaiah 53 (misread) and Hebrews form a restrictive prism which has dominated Christian thinking about the atonement.' (p8). He is right to make us question whether we have misread Isaiah, because Evangelicals should always re-examine their shibboleths. However Goldingay also states that Hebrews correctly understood is restrictive – and here his thesis is clear and important. He is not saying we have misunderstood Hebrews (as Stephen Travis' essay argues we have misread Paul) – he is saying that Hebrews *correctly understood* is wrong. He is not saying that penal substitution by sacrifice is absent from Scripture but that it is there and it should not be. The question is not how we explain penal substitution to postmodernists, nor whether the Reformers read penal substitution into Paul, nor many other questions that could be and are asked in the book, with varying degrees of clarity in the question and answer, but simply whether the concept communicates, and if not what replaces it. Just as with sacrifice, Goldingay fails to address the issues of whether God has given us the interpretative keys to his Son's death, and whether they are normative.

Of course, neither Goldingay's methods nor his conclusions are new, and only the theological novice would lose sleep over this book – except that from the book's first sentence Goldingay is writing as an evangelical theologian. The fact that he reaches conclusions that are not traditional for Evangelicals is not in principle a problem because evangelical reflection on crosscultural mission frequently yields surprises, as does serious interaction with the biblical text. Nor is it inconsistent for his method to yield such a wayward result – but I question his right to call this method 'evangelical theology'. Evangelical theology is essentially submissive, committed in advance to obeying what it discovers Scripture teaches. It

seeks to yield its shape and priorities to the form and order of biblical revelation. It is an obedient discipline. At the point that Goldingay moves beyond analysing the text into imposing his priorities and (inferentially) creating his canon, he has ceased to do submissive evangelical theology.

On the other thirteen essays only selective comments are possible – although one assumes the contributors are happy with Goldingay’s revisionism. A reviewer for this journal would be expected to dislike the Dodd-like theology of wrath, the displacement of eschatological salvation from the centre to the very fringe, and the preference for expiation over propitiation. These are familiar battles, although the lack of interaction with Leon Morris’ main contribution to those debates (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*) is surprising and damages credibility. Penal substitution is in general unwelcome, although Christina Baxter gives a ‘very carefully refined penal idea’ (p72), which would have been improved by engaging with Packer. Tom Smail’s trinitarian essay on substitution is basically Barth via Gunton, but marked by surprising false antitheses: ‘Christ’s relationship to our sins is not one of legal imputation but rather one of real and costly identification’ (p81). Well... Michael Alford makes postmodernity more accessible than most. Sally Alford surveys feminist theology with impressive clarity, raising some new issues, but making the volume’s typical assumption that theology is our invention rather than God’s. Stephen Travis’ essay has been published before. These and other surveys show an admirable desire to understand and communicate with our culture, but time and again they do not let the biblical agenda control their answers or questions – which means, in this reviewer’s opinion, they mishear God’s questions and answers.

This century opened with Evangelicals divided over the centrality of substitutionary atonement to the Gospel. Here we go again.

CHRIS GREEN

**PROPHECY AND THE APOCALYPTIC DREAM: Protest and Promise**  
D S Russell

Peabody (Massachusetts): Hendrickson 1994      136pp      £7.00 pb  
ISBN 1 56563 054 8

Through a number of publications over a period of thirty years, Russell has gained the reputation of being a distinguished expert on apocalyptic literature and thought. With this little book Russell makes part of his knowledge of the field available to a wider audience. Yet, *Prophecy and the Apocalyptic Dream* does not simply summarize on a popular level the results of a long-standing research interest in apocalypticism, it also attempts to address popular issues. More specifically, the author’s aim is to

counteract an arbitrary and speculative approach to apocalyptic literature (described in chapter 3), firstly by describing in two chapters the form and content of apocalyptic literature in its historical setting and secondly by exploring in a final chapter the meaning apocalyptic literature (especially Daniel and Revelation) can have for Christians today at the turn of the second millennium.

As the subtitle indicates, Russell regards two aspects as constitutive for apocalyptic thought: protest and promise. He identifies three 'pressure points' which gave rise to protest: a corrupt society, the encroachment of Hellenism, and the experience of oppression and persecution, especially under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This protest against evil however was linked with the promise taken from the prophetic word that God would nevertheless fulfil his purpose. Thus, under intense pressure the prophetic hope became the apocalyptic dream. In this apocalyptic dream greater emphasis is laid upon the universal rule of God and upon the supernatural and supramundane nature of the world to come, which is seen in strong opposition to the present world, and an increased, although by no means exclusive concern with the destiny of the individual is visible.

Seeing apocalyptic literature in its historical context, Russell emphasizes, that it is the setting and insight of apocalyptic literature which is relevant and powerful for today, not its symbolism and imagery. The 'literalist/fundamentalist' approach of interpreters like Hal Lindsey is contrasted with the approach in the New Testament itself, which takes history seriously, embraces the whole panorama of biblical revelation and focuses on Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of Scripture. Consequently, a fourfold piece of advice is given; firstly, to interpret apocalyptic literature in its historical context; secondly, to interpret it not in isolation, but as part of the whole of biblical revelation; thirdly, to read it in the light of the New Testament, and fourthly to look at it in dynamic terms as a paradigm for God's action rather than in static terms as a timetable for the future. Read this way, apocalyptic biblical books still proclaim a powerful message concerning the sovereignty of God and the final victory over evil.

The nature of the book is such that it does not allow for much discussion or differentiation. While Russell is of course aware that not all who assign an early date to Daniel adopt the 'literalist' approach described by him, he does not give a voice to such conservatives. Thus, the alternative presented is one between mainline scholarship and sensationalist fundamentalism. This book is nevertheless a useful and readable introduction, recommended to all those looking for guidelines in interpreting apocalyptic literature.

THOMAS RENZ

**MONTANISM: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy**

**Christine Trevett**

Cambridge: CUP 1996    297pp    £37.50 hb    ISBN 0 521 41182 3

Of all the different sects that emerged in Early Christianity, few have exercised the enduring fascination that has attached to Montanism. From Tertullian, who was a younger contemporary of the prophets associated with Montanus through people like John Wesley, who regarded the Montanists as the last of the truly Spirit-filled New Testament Christians, to modern feminists, the sect has attracted generations of believers who have more or less made it over in their own image.

The truth is that hardly anything is known about Montanism for certain. It is even doubtful whether Montanus played the leading role in it which its name would imply; he seems to have shared the limelight with a number of others, especially the prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla. Later, in the second or third generation of the sect's existence, there appears to have been another prophetess, Quintilla, who repristinated the original prophecies and may have added such features as millenarianism to them.

There has been no book on Montanism in English since 1872, so Mrs Trevett's work is long overdue. She has been able to make use of the latest archaeological and epigraphical discoveries to pinpoint Montanism in its Anatolian heartland as well as in other parts of the Roman Empire. After sifting the available evidence in the greatest possible detail, she concludes that we are unable to identify the site of Pepuza, the Montanist New Jerusalem, though it must have lain somewhere in one of the plains of Phrygia! It seems unkind to say so, after the amount of work Mrs Trevett put in to reach this conclusion, but is this not what most of us knew already? Somehow, Montanism does not readily yield up its secrets, even to the most painstaking investigator.

One of Mrs Trevett's hats is 'women's studies', and we are not surprised to learn that the role of women in Montanism was one of the things which motivated her to study the sect. However, it can safely be said that she does not go overboard on feminism, and keeps the women's contribution well within the bounds of the available evidence, which is in any case quite considerable. This is to her credit, since the obvious temptation for a feminist (as for a charismatic) is to pump Montanism for all it is worth – and more besides.

Most important of all, she recognizes that Tertullian was not a typical Montanist, and that his evidence for the sect must be treated with extreme caution. The present reviewer wrote a book on Tertullian some years ago in which he made precisely this point, which Mrs Trevett is good enough

to acknowledge, and to accept in broad outline. However, she persists in regarding Tertullian as a heartfelt Montanist in his later years, and this produces a curious contradiction in her book. For if Tertullian really had been a convinced Montanist, why would his testimony be so suspect? He was an intelligent man and close to the original prophecies, even if he was separated from them geographically. The truth is that Tertullian aligned himself with the Montanists to the extent that they agreed with him – he was not ‘converted’ to their point of view. It was the fact that he remained within the Great Church at Carthage that enabled his writings to be accepted by people like Cyprian and Augustine, which they surely would not have been if he had been an open schismatic.

The existence of a group of Tertullianists in the fourth century proves nothing – like the Methodists after them, they could easily have broken away from the Church after Tertullian’s death. In any case, there is little sign that their beliefs were identifiably Montanist.

Mrs Trevett has written an interesting and important book. Much of what she says is inevitably in the nature of hypothesis, and may well be overturned by further research. Even as it is, her material is often open to other interpretations which are sure to surface before long. Nevertheless, she is to be congratulated on having brought an obscure corner of early Church life into the light once again, and made us aware of just how little we really know about this fascinating sect.

GERALD BRAY

**DARWIN’S DANGEROUS IDEA Evolution and the Meanings of Life**  
**Daniel C Dennett**

London: Allen Lane 1995 587pp £25 hb £9.99 pb

ISBN 0-713-99090-2

Daniel Dennett is currently the ‘Distinguished Arts and Sciences Professor and Director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University’ in the US. He is the author of several books on themes related to this one, such as *Consciousness Explained*. As is customary, the jacket carries several appreciations of this work: Richard Dawkins (author of *The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker*) writes ‘I am positively inspired’; ‘a surpassingly brilliant book’; ‘where critical it is devastating’. Other tributes include ‘a stunning book’; ‘twinkling wit’; ‘fully worthy of Charles Darwin’. I have nothing to say against these estimates, except that I wouldn’t call its critical antitheism ‘devastating’. But clearly it is a book to be reckoned with. It is exceedingly clever, very wide-ranging, anything but hackneyed, excitingly written, and well-calculated to grip the attention of any intelligent reader. The author has read widely, is thoroughly conversant

with his subject and others related to it, and knows how to present it in highly seductive language. Yet I think his argument has fatal flaws, which I will try to state later.

What is his thesis? Briefly, it is that the principle Darwin unearthed, that of natural selection, is 'a universal solvent capable of cutting right to the heart of everything in sight'. It is a 'universal acid', with the potential of eating through many of the longest-cherished and most strongly-held beliefs of mankind, in particular those relating to the world of transcendence. Natural selection as Darwin saw it depends on three things: the great fecundity of living organisms, the variability among their offspring, and the consequent struggle for existence that this entails, a struggle in which the 'fittest' are by definition those most successful in leaving viable descendants. The variability depends on *chance*, the hereditary factors which a given individual inherits (the genes) being *randomly* taken from what the parents have to offer, and being themselves subject to *random* mutation even before they get there. Thereafter the *directive* action of natural selection proper takes over. Both the random and the directive elements must be considered together. Dennett therefore insists that the randomness impresses an inescapable character on the course of evolution, which must accordingly be understood as having no relatedness to any ultimate objective: there is no purpose, no final goal, no end in sight to be associated with it. And the natural selection process itself, blind and heartless, favours exclusively those individuals reproductively most successful; nothing higher than that interests it.

How does Dennett develop this theme? He starts 'in the middle' where Darwin started – with living things. But then he goes beyond Darwin. He draws on computer theory and the advances in Artificial Intelligence to draw the conclusion that consciousness and mind and language arise out of material systems in the ordinary processes of Darwinian evolution, just as eyes and hands and brains do. They all thus belong equally to what he calls a single unified 'Design Space'. This is a highly abstract multidimensional geometrical conception of which he makes great use; evolution is regarded as exploring this space by its random and selective strategy. With the arrival of language comes *culture*, and evolutionary change is vastly speeded up. Natural selection operates on both this new feature and the original biological one. The new *cultural* elements to be selected alongside the old were named by Dawkins 'memes' (to almost rhyme with 'genes'). These are clever ideas such as 'the wheel', 'cooperation', 'the social contract' and even such things as the ingredients of man's ethical consciousness. All this can be accommodated by Darwin's Dangerous Idea: nothing lies outside its competence! Evolution proceeds at a vastly increased rate due to culture, and its results (in the moral sphere too) are everywhere doing so apace. But Dennett goes backwards in time from

Darwin too, though terminally with rather less self-assurance. Thus, life originated spontaneously from simple atoms and molecules; these came from stars; stars from gaseous clouds; and finally our whole universe itself sprang into being from black holes (*ex nihilo* perhaps?), all without any help from 'outside'. What about the Anthropic Principle then: that the great physical constants (the gravitational constant, the speed of light, the charge on the electron, etc) had to be tuned together with the minutest precision for the universe ever to become physically and chemically suitable as a stage for life? How does Darwin's idea accommodate that? Simple; he falls back on the 'many universes' theory of some cosmologists. There exist multitudes of other universes (or cyclic repetitions of ours) with physical constants differing randomly from ours, and invisible to us. All the time new universes are being born, perhaps out of black holes from existing ones. By chance one such universe sprang into being just right for the Anthropic Principle; and of course by simple logic (and chance) it fell to be selected for life. So here we are! It's as simple as that, Darwin's Dangerous Idea all the way.

All of this Dennett works out with a great deal of ingenuity; he obviously has pondered deeply on what he so confidently articulates. He ranges through a wide area of topics and approaches, some intellectually very demanding, such as Godel's Incompleteness Theorem, the nature of algorithms, Game Theory, Chomsky's Theory of Language, Penrose's Quantum-Gravity Computer, and so on. Incidentally, some of these eminent and indeed world-famous theoreticians take views irreconcilable with his – Godel, Chomsky and Penrose all do. Nevertheless, he confidently dismisses them.

It is time to draw this review to an end. How can I sum up this book? There are certain characteristics of its style which jar. It can be flippant, facetious, and pretentious by turns. In some contexts this can be inoffensive. However, in the present setting, relative to matters so infinitely vast, mysterious and terrifying, and with which some of the profoundest minds of our race have wrestled for long, such frivolities are out of place. The Greeks would have called it *hubris*. I think Dennett in this way often queers his own pitch and loses respect. For instance he loves he says, the King James version of the Bible (I imagine for its literary qualities). He must know therefore such passages as the opening verses of Psalm 90, or Paul's address at Athens about the God 'in whom we live and move and have our being'; yet any suggestion that an infinite personal Being has anything to do with nature or history is met with contemptuous dismissal. 'That would be a skyhook for sure', he comments. Such pretentious nonsense is continually cropping up (very often in fact), and I gained the impression that (in default of a cogent argument) Dennett throws it in to shame any opponent into silence. Preachers have a saying, 'Point weak,

shout louder'; Dennett's recipe seems to be, 'Point weak, say skyhook'! He is so convinced that he is right ('gloriously right', as Dawkins might say) and that 'there are no forces on this planet more dangerous to us all than the fanaticisms of fundamentalism', that any stratagem, however second-rate, is justified if it can strike a blow against it. Is there a possibility, I wonder, that he may be on the verge of fanaticism himself as a Darwinian fundamentalist?

My last point is a pivotal one. Dennett has a chapter *Controversies Contained* in which is a section *Three Losers: Teilhard, Lamarck, and Directed Mutation*. The first two he deals with reasonably in rather over three pages; the last he dismisses (wisely, I think) almost apodictically in a few lines. He quotes approvingly the biologist Mark Ridley: 'theories of evolution by directed variation... are in fact wrong', full stop. His *whole antiatheistic case* however, hangs on this single thread: the variation which feeds natural selection is *random*, that is, quite unrelated to any end or purpose or final outcome. Whichever others of his postulates can be surrendered, this crisp requirement is a *must*, or Dennett's Dangerous Idea is doomed. But what is the standing of this 'randomness'? Dennett is at least right in this: 'ever since Darwin' he writes, 'orthodoxy has *presupposed* that all mutation is random; *blind* chance makes the candidates' (the italic *blind* is his). Its standing therefore is that of a *presupposition*, nothing more; and such a presupposition as is utterly unprovable by any conceivable method! Consider a surely valid analogy, simple numbers such as pi or the square root of 2. Each is represented by a digit followed by a decimal chain that goes on for ever. Imagine a fair length of the chain for pi taken from an unfamiliar region to the right of the decimal point. Show it to a mathematical colleague. 'Looks like a sequence of random digits to me' he would unhesitatingly say (unless he smelt a rat). A fair enough guess, and at any other time it might be right (even for this very same sequence); but *ex hypothesi* here it is wrong! It isn't a random sequence. Every digit is calculable and predictable, and each successive one leads progressively nearer to the chosen end-point, in the case of pi, the exact ratio of circumference to diameter. Now in the same way *events* can appear convincingly due to pure chance, but (even in everyday affairs) it can be a disastrous mistake to bet your life on it. This corresponds to the Bible's understanding of history (see Proverbs 16.33), enunciated two and a half thousand years before Darwin. The fact is, it is *quite impossible* to establish the Darwinian postulate of randomness (or for that matter its opposite) by either empirical means or mathematical logic. Everyone has to make a free personal decision: either history is pointless and purposeless, going no one knows where (Dennett's position); or it is under the control of Divine Providence, moving to a chosen climax (the Bible's). Neither philosophy nor science can tell us, for as Pascal remarked, God has other methods for imparting truth – 'The heart has its reasons that

reason knows not of'. We must conclude therefore that the massive Temple of Antitheism which Dennett (and others, such as Dawkins) have laboriously been erecting is after all built on sand.

A useful feature of the book is that each chapter ends with a brief summary of its results, and then a sort of *hors d'oeuvre* for the next one. This adds continuity and helps the reader to keep stock of his progress! There is a Bibliography of 26 pages, and a very worthwhile Index of 36.

DOUGLAS C SPANNER

**EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS TOGETHER: Working  
Towards a Common Mission**

**Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (edd)**

London: Hodder & Stoughton 1996

236pp

£9.99 pb

ISBN 0340665076

Reaction to the statement *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (ECT), released 29 March 1994, has been intense. Many from both sides have welcomed it enthusiastically as an answer to prayer and a further indication of 'a major reorientation in relations between Protestant Evangelicals and Roman Catholics' (Noll p100). Many others, mostly Evangelicals, have protested that key elements of the gospel have been at best evaded, at worst compromised. Their alarm has been heightened by the endorsement of the statement by such prominent figures as Bill Bright, Os Guinness, Mark Noll, and Jim Packer. The present collection of essays is a response to many of those criticisms as well as a restatement of the context and content of the original document.

The historical context of the ECT statement is prominent in most of the essays. However, this is the particular focus of the contributions from Colson, Weigel, and Noll. The few theological comments they include are less than profound. It is clear that this enterprise arises from 'cobelligerence' in what are repeatedly described as the 'culture wars' (surrounding such issues as abortion and education) that are a feature of contemporary America. Yet the ECT statement represents a call to go further. It calls upon Evangelicals and Catholics everywhere to explore the possibilities of 'theological cooperation and not merely political cooperation' (Colson p38). As all acknowledge, it is this extension of the relationship that has aroused most concern.

Amongst the most important theological reservations expressed by Evangelicals are questions about the nature of the church and the Christian mission, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the propriety of

evangelizing Roman Catholics. Contrary to its intention, this volume provides good reasons for their concern. Avery Dulles provides the most extensive discussion of the church, though those familiar with the work of Alan Stibbs and Donald Robinson will find his presentation of the biblical material unconvincing. It is surely significant that Dulles and Neuhaus repeatedly affirm the importance of 'the Petrine ministry instituted by Jesus and continued in the ministry of the bishop of Rome' (p214). Jim Packer's interpretation of the ECT's concerns in terms of 'parachurch cooperation in Christian mission activities' (p148), while still leaving some questions unanswered, might be more helpful.

There remains confusion about the extent to which agitation for social reform can be described as 'the mission of the church'. That is not to say that such social action is unimportant. It may indeed be a most legitimate implication of the command to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. Yet no matter how important that activity, and despite the fact that it need not be opposed to gospel proclamation, does not the example and teaching of the New Testament prevent us from confusing the two? Let us be involved in social action, but let us not call that 'the mission of the church'. In the historical and literary context of the ECT statement, however, its explicit acknowledgment of the priority of the gospel is swamped by the summons to battle in the 'culture wars'.

Much attention is given to the statement's affirmation that 'we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ' (p xviii). The problem of omitting 'alone' or 'without works' is heightened by the omission of any mention of the issue of justification by faith alone in the list of 'points of difference', even if that list is described as 'by no means complete' (p xxi). This is all the more worrying because Richard Neuhaus reveals that '[t]he *solas* are conspicuous by their absence, and it is not by accident that they are absent' (p200). He goes on to explicitly deny that this is the article by which the church stands or falls and insists that 'it is the Church that judges the adequacy of theological formulations, and not vice versa' (p207). One is bound to ask whether this includes the Bible's own theological formulations, among which 'justification by faith alone' must be numbered by any plain reading of Romans 3. Jim Packer (who ends his article by insisting that he still stands by the ECT statement) believes that sufficient is said in the document about Christ as the proper object of faith and the necessity of conversion to allow shared evangelistic ministry. He holds that 'it would seem simply untrue to say that the result of [Catholics] holding to Augustine's theory of justification ... is that they have no gospel' (pp168-9). However he also includes in his contribution the observation of another statement (which he helped to draft and which was published in June 1994): 'we see justification by faith alone as an essential of the Gospel on which radical disagreement continues' (p158).

Perhaps the most controversial issue is the statement's insistence that 'it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community' (p xxx). In context this affirmation is qualified by the concerns of strategy: there are so many more people to evangelize who belong to neither community. Nevertheless, it does deny any 'theological legitimacy' to the evangelical practice of evangelizing Roman Catholics. There is, we are told, no danger in remaining in a denomination which many would insist teaches error (eg the sacrifice of the mass) and practices Mariolatry. Mark Noll's response to this criticism actually goes further than the ECT statement and is almost frightening in its lack of discernment: 'Most responsible Catholics and evangelicals recognize that it is at best dubious, and at worst simply wrong, for Catholics and evangelicals to proselytize across the Catholic-Protestant border in situations where believers are coming close to the finest standards of either faith'. Jim Packer's later statement (ie the CURE statement) moves in the opposite direction: 'we deny that it is advisable to imply that whether one is in a church where the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly (that is, biblically) administered is no longer important' (p159).

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the book will prove to be its exposé of the extent to which the American judiciary have reinterpreted the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. In a nation which prides itself on its democratic heritage, this constitutional amendment by stealth is a serious matter which deserves much more attention. George Weigel's chapter both analyses the trends and provides a constructive alternative to acquiescence.

The godly intentions of those who drafted the statement and those who have defended it in this volume should be acknowledged. Yet, this book is not the landmark that was promised. Most will be unconvinced by its defence of the ECT statement. What is more, this kind of statement and the debate surrounding it is far from unique. The German equivalent, exemplified in Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg's *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* (ET 1990) and the response by the Theology Faculty of the University of Göttingen, *Outmoded Condemnations? Antitheses Between the Council of Trent and the Reformation on Justification, the Sacrament and the Ministry – Then and Now* (ET 1992), as well as an earlier volume by the present Archbishop of Canterbury, *A Tale of Two Churches: Can Protestants and Catholics Get Together?* (1985), help to provide a degree of perspective and raise questions about some of the hype surrounding the release of the ECT statement and this defence. Nevertheless, the book is worth reading as a stimulus to further serious thinking about the gospel of Jesus Christ. For without a clear and unambiguous exposition of the biblical gospel and a rigorous application of its implications, any unity that

results will inevitably prove fragile and indeed illusory.

MARK THOMPSON

**THE DISCERNING READER – Christian Perspectives on Literature and Theory**

**David Barratt, Roger Pooley and Leland Ryken (Edd)**

Leicester: Apollos 1995 320pp £9.99 pb ISBN 0 85111 445 8

There is no such thing as ‘a Christian reading of a text’. However Christians do read literature and their responses are important. The introduction states that the aim of this book is to encourage Christian students of literature who sometimes feel ‘embattled as they are called upon to adopt theories and practices that seem, at least, to be hostile to their beliefs’. Christians are further urged ‘not to retreat into silence or sloganizing’. The book contains fourteen chapters, each written by a Christian academic in the field of English Literature. The first seven chapters concern themselves exclusively with the theoretical side of literary criticism while the second half of the book consists of seven case studies of literary texts. Although the book does have an overall shape and the writers obviously worked together in its production, each chapter is highly individual and there appears to be no obvious agenda except the one outlined in the above quotation.

The first few chapters attempt to discuss critical theory at a very basic level. What is literature? What does literature do? What makes a classic? Although these questions produce more questions than answers much of the material is both interesting and stimulating. Donald T Williams begins his chapter *Christian poetics, past and present* by stating that, ‘the story of Christian poetics – is the tale of a movement struggling almost in spite of itself to come to grips with its own doctrine that human beings are created in the image of God’. Later he asserts, ‘people are most like God the Maker when they create a world and people it with significant characters out of their imagination’. Leland Ryken in his chapter *The Bible and literary study* suggests that ‘the literary nature of the Bible itself strongly affirms the legitimacy of the literary enterprise. If God did not wish us to have literature in our lives, he would not have given us a literary Bible’. As someone whose nightly reading habits are often witnessed by a spouse who is invariably reading a much ‘worthier’ book (with a superior expression to match) I found these words encouraging, almost affirming!

Several writers urge Christians not to be ignorant about feminist and marxist literary theory, deconstruction and postmodernism. Some writers go further and urge us to ‘plunder the Egyptians’ and suggest that many aspects of these theories have much to teach us. While it is true that

Christians must endeavour to understand and talk intelligently about these sometimes complex theories, suggestions such as Elizabeth Jay's in her thought-provoking and well-written chapter *The woman's place* that 'Marxism's resistance to the impotence generated by an obsessive concern with the individual, can usefully be harnessed to provoke a practical and compassionate awareness of other's needs' are a little alarming. Do we need to study Marxism to arrive at this conclusion when it is in the Scriptures that the Christian learns about compassion? How far are these theories 'compatible with and illuminating of Christian purposes'? How much time should we spend finding out? For me a working knowledge of the basic tenets will suffice. Many writers celebrate the more traditional approaches to criticism and especially the need to have a sense of history. U Milo Kaufman in his chapter *Reading Paradise Lost* warns us against 'temporal provincialism' and adds 'we dare not spend our lives in the village of our own century alone'.

*The Discerning Reader* is a useful introduction for Christians to the complex world of modern critical theory. Having emerged at the end of the book interested to know more I found the last chapter entitled *for further reading: a survey* to be the most helpful. Although the book as a whole considers literature and theory from a wide Christian perspective there are many books suggested in the last chapter which would interest readers from a Reformed background.

CAROLINE ATKINSON

### **SPEAKING GOD'S WORDS – a practical theology of preaching**

**Peter Adam**

Leicester: IVP 1996    173pp    £12.99 pb    ISBN 0-85111-171-8

'I'm an enthusiast for this book' – so begins Dick Lucas' appetite-whetting Foreword and so ought to be all those who have a concern for the promotion of 'Word ministry' in our generation. Many bemoan the fact that the Word of the Lord is rare in our day, but comparatively few offer any help, and not many seem to want to be helped. For those who want encouragement and practical advice Dr Adam's book – as well as the collection of essays 'When God's voice is heard' to which he is a contributor are musts. People will only give themselves to the hard work, the long hours and the emotional drain of a Word ministry if they have a very high view of Scripture as God's Word written. Dr Adam therefore rightly begins with the doctrine of revelation – 'God has spoken', and then the doctrine of inspiration – 'it is written' before addressing his third foundation truth – 'Preach the Word'. Lest we should imagine that the only ministry of the Word is preaching, beginning with Moses and continuing through to the Apostles Dr Adam makes it clear from the Scriptures that

there are several different Word ministries, and preaching sermons is by no means the only one.

This is further illustrated from Church history not least by extensive quotes from John Calvin – probably too many for even the most ardent admirer of the theologian from Geneva. Dr Adam also points out very forcefully that preaching isn't to be seen as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. 'We must be absolutely committed to teaching and preaching the Bible, but to describe our ministry as "teaching and preaching the Bible" is to describe it in terms of its means, not its end. The purpose of our teaching and preaching the Bible is to explain and commend the good news of God, the gospel of God's grace, the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.' The point is well made. The second half of the book contains many very helpful practical suggestions as to how we should set about the task – again with many illustrations from Geneva. What is emphasized from John Calvin and indeed the Puritans as a whole is the extreme importance of application, but only after we have heard the text accurately. Perhaps because I find other people's methods illuminating but not always the ones that I can easily follow, it was the theological arguments that challenged me most, and have confirmed that the ministry of God's Word must be my top priority. Without that conviction I shall never stick to the task which is indeed impossible apart from the grace of God and an iron will.

JONATHAN FLETCHER

**THE LAST WORD** Wallace Benn

Tain, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications 1996 180pp £5.99 pb  
ISBN 1-85792-079-1

Any Bible teacher or preacher concerned to be faithful to Paul's charge to Timothy to 'rightly handle the word of truth' will find great encouragement from this first book from Wallace Benn. The challenge to any modern expositor is to rightly handle both exegesis and application of the text in a way that encourages the obedience that comes from faith. This exposition of Jesus' final upper room discourse with his disciples in John 13-17 achieves that difficult balance. It is written with the clear thinking of a Bible scholar, the voice of a gifted preacher and the heart of a pastor and so addresses both head and heart in seeking a faithful response to God's Word.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters, grouped in five sections, and is accompanied by a series of study questions, which allow the book to be used for personal or group Bible study as well as a rich resource for a preaching ministry. It is written in a style that is accessible to all, with many illuminating illustrations and anecdotes, but with a depth beyond its

length, flowing from the conviction that in these chapters lies 'the essence of all that Jesus wanted his disciples to know' (p8). The book addresses many foundational issues for the life of the church: issues of loveless orthodoxy, paralysed questioning, powerless faith, true fruitfulness, Christian unity and joyful obedience. Permeating through the whole exposition is a concern for faithfulness to the truth and real love and joy in the expression of faith, which is lacking from some other expositions.

Benn handles controversial areas of the text with gentle clarity, he is not afraid to show where his exposition would not be received by some in the wider evangelical community. In expounding John 14:12 'He will do greater things than these...', he addresses those for whom this refers to greater miracles, with a genuine respect, but appeals with pastoral sensitivity: 'Even if you disagree with my explanation, please think it through, because I believe the issue is very important' (p66), having implications for the deity and uniqueness of Christ; he then takes this as a reference to the greater extent and clarity of the disciples' gospel ministry.

Once or twice I was left wishing that the author had had more space with which to explore some exegetical issues. In discussing the pruning of the vine, this was implicitly connected to experiences of suffering through which God deepened people's ministries, and he didn't open up the difference between God's providential care through suffering and the remedial judgement of a father's discipline. However the focus on what true fruitfulness means, Christlikeness in character and in mission, maintains the balance of the text's concerns.

I can heartily recommend this as a stimulating book for preachers and people alike. It is both a good model of biblically sound, pastorally concerned exposition, but it also brings a powerful message to today's church, providing a clear exposition of our Lord's counsel on many foundational issues of faith and life.

ROB MUNRO

**THE NIV THEMATIC STUDY BIBLE** Alister McGrath (General Editor)

London: Hodder & Stoughton 1996 1953pp £29.95 hb  
ISBN 0-340-56708-2

The New International Version has established itself as a major and widely used modern translation of the Scriptures. One sign of its wide acceptance is the appearance of a variety of editions, including those designed to aid the personal study of God's Word. The serious Bible student who is thinking of making a purchase in this area is faced with a wide choice.

Those who are acquainted with the NIV Study Bible will want to know why this Thematic Study Bible has been published. This reviewer therefore approached this volume with a certain caution as to its real usefulness. However his scepticism has been laid to one side. This edition of the Bible does fill a real niche and the considerable effort involved in producing it has surely been worthwhile.

This Thematic Study Bible should not be confused with the Study Bible which has been around for nearly a decade. It has no cross references and no explanatory footnotes. Here each book of the Bible has a brief outline and introduction. The distinctive feature of this Thematic Study Bible lies precisely in its organization of the Scriptures into themes. In the text's margin the reader will find verse numbers that indicate the associated themes. There are also occasional feature panels in the text which introduce major themes.

The 2000 themes which are indicated are listed at the back of the book in a four digit numbering system. These themes are grouped according to main subjects such as God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Creation etc. The groups of themes are then subdivided into lesser categories. Each theme listed in the Thematic Section has a brief description and then lists Scripture passages which relate to that particular theme. As an alternative to starting in the biblical text there is also an index in which one can look up a subject and discover the number allotted to that theme.

The controlling idea for the Thematic Study Bible is the vital principle of good interpretation whereby Scripture should interpret Scripture. This edition therefore largely avoids the charges of theological bias that can be directed towards Study Bibles which have extensive notes to aid the reader's understanding. The only possible source of bias in the Thematic Study Bible would be in the selection and arrangement of themes. Once the reader is orientated to a particular theme then understanding is gained through comparing the relevant Scripture passages.

This edition of the Bible would be most suited to someone who finds it difficult to handle cross references to verses and yet wishes to engage in serious study of the Word of God. It is probably easier to use than the better known Study Bible. However the Thematic Study Bible will also assist those preachers and group leaders who, willingly or unwillingly, have been directed to speak on themes rather than from a particular passage.

Eleven maps with a small gazetteer are provided and the entire book has been attractively laid out. The publishers are to be congratulated upon this work and it should be carefully considered for purchase or as a gift to any