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Book Reviews

C OF E: THE STATE IT'S IN

Monica Furlong

London: Hodder & Stoughton 2000 418pp. £8.99 pb ISBN 0-340-74635-1

Monica Furlong provides a passionate and frank account of how the Church of England looks through the eyes of a Liberal. This is the story of a church in 'intelligent turmoil' (p. 9), of financial disasters, spin, party struggles, declining attendance, the demise of freehold, 'management gobbledegook' (p. 186) and the 'Synod holocaust' (p. 189) resulting from the Turnbull Commission. It portrays the life of the secluded cathedral cloister and the struggling inner-city congregation, with numerous interviews of unknown clergy who bring a humbling element of humanity to the subject.

Furlong views the church with a mixture of fondness and frustration. She lambasts the bishops for attempting to silence dissent, and terms them 'lily-livered' fence-sitters in the mould of John Bunyan's 'Mr. Facing Both Ways' (p. 253). It is only a policy of 'sheer woolly-headedness and fudge' (p. 356), Furlong believes, which prevents the church moving more quickly in a Liberal direction. She applauds the radical doubting by David Jenkins and Don Cupitt, and thinks it a pity that Hindu and Muslim leaders have not yet been made 'lords spiritual' under Labour's reforms of Parliament's Upper House. In almost every chapter there are appeals for women and men to be granted identical functions within the church (Furlong is a self-styled Christian feminist and a former Moderator of MOW) and for practising homosexuals to be openly ordained.

Furlong appeals for a healing of the rifts between divergent theological streams in the Church of England, and acknowledges that some of her own prejudices have been challenged by visiting different congregations in research for the book. She admits that Evangelicals are the only growing constituency in the church, and has high praise for their recent successes in propagating 'tabloid Christianity' (p. 333). Ironically, however, with one breath she chastises Evangelicals for their arrogance, and with the next patronises them for their naiveté, likening them to an over-enthusiastic puppy (p. 331). Reform is termed a 'brutal' and 'blackmailing' organisation, 'breathing fire

and threats like Apollyon' (pp. 327, 337), while the Thirty-Nine Articles are a 'thorn in the flesh' which 'extreme Protestants' have the habit of inconveniently remembering (pp. 57, 78). Furlong's work is primarily an apologia for Liberalism, that 'centrist' *via media* between the so-called extremes of Evangelicalism and Anglo-Catholicism. Liberals, we are told, are 'quintessentially Anglican' (p. 327), reflecting a love of moderation so characteristic of the British mindset. It is remarkable that such *passé* polemic can still find its adherents.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

AMERICAN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY: AN INTRODUCTION

Mark A. Noll

Oxford: Blackwell, 2000 320pp. £15.99 pb ISBN 0-631-22000-3

Mark Noll is in the front rank of historians of evangelicalism in North America. Here he brings together a number of disparate essays previously scattered throughout other publications, to show that U.S. evangelicalism has been quick to adapt to trends and ideologies in the national culture, such as consumerism, republicanism or therapeutic individualism. Evangelicalism, he concludes, is the premier example of 'culturally adaptive biblical experientialism' in the whole history of Christianity (p. 2).

The definition of evangelicalism is a thorny problem for any historian and is often thus conveniently overlooked, but Noll has courage to tackle it by surveying the themes of evangelical hymnody and by comparing the doctrinal bases of evangelical denominations and parachurch agencies. He examines the geographical, racial and socio-economic distribution of evangelicals, and their different attitudes to issues of gender. However, in a work about trends rather than personalities, disproportionate attention is given to Billy Graham, who is praised for having 'traded angularity for access' (p. 50). This reveals Noll's own priority, which is to propagate a form of evangelicalism which is intellectually respectable and moderate, accommodating rather than combative.

The central chapters survey changing attitudes amongst American evangelicals to Roman Catholicism, science and politics, with dispassionate analysis mixed explicitly with the author's personal opinions. He is grateful

place to go for a first introduction to the life of the Reformer, but if one has already dipped into Beza, Wendel, Parker, and McGrath, then Cottret might be the next place to go for a different perspective.

LEE GATISS

THE GOSPEL TO THE NATIONS: PERSPECTIVES ON PAUL'S MISSION

Peter Bolt & Mark Thompson (eds.)

Leicester: Apollos, 2000 xiv + 429 pp. £16-99 pb ISBN 0-85111-468-7

This is a collection of essays commissioned in honour of Peter Thomas O'Brien, the Vice-Principal of Moore Theological College, Sydney and distinguished Pauline scholar. The list of contributors is suitably awe-inspiring, including (amongst others) Paul Barnett, Peter Bolt, Don Carson, William Dumbrell, Graeme Goldsworthy, Peter Jensen, Edwin Judge, Andreas Köstenberger, Richard Longenecker, I.H. Marshall, Ralph Martin, David Peterson, Donald Robinson, Moisés Silva, David Wenham and Bruce Winter.

The book opens with a short appreciation of O'Brien by Peter Jensen. The rest of the book is structured around the themes of 'Paul's Mission in Biblical Theological Perspective', 'Paul's Mission...', '...To The Nations', and 'Paul's Mission and Later Developments' with several essays presented under each heading. Most of the articles interact in a significant way with O'Brien's work not merely to flatter the recipient of this festschrift but, one suspects, because his own work in these areas has been so stimulating and significant over the years.

Particular highlights for this reviewer were Shead's essay on the new covenant; Peterson's article on maturity, where he focuses on Paul's reference to maturity as the goal of his mission and the consequent ministry of proclamation that he adopted; Kruse's examination of 'Ministry in the wake of Paul's mission'; Köstenberger's judicious treatment of Pauline practice in regard to women which looks at both narrative passages and doctrinal teaching, concluding that women were 'thoroughly integrated in the Pauline churches' and had a vital role with significant, but not ultimate, responsibility; Bruce Winter's fascinating article on the logistical difficulties and personal dangers involved in Paul's mission, where he concludes that

'there has never been an "ideal" age where society found the Christian message one that was amenable to its aspirations' (p. 294); and the excellent example in Thompson's final essay, of what I would call 'integrated theology', where biblical, doctrinal, and pastoral concerns are related in a learned yet powerfully relevant way. These are only highlights: almost every contribution was a joy to read.

It would be nice to have the footnotes at the foot of the page (where they belong!), and I was surprised not to find a complete bibliography of O'Brien's works at the end of the volume, but these are minor quibbles which it is almost churlish to mention. To sum up, this is a thoroughly nutritious twenty-four course meal which is both a delight to the eyes and food for the soul, containing a balanced diet of meaty scholarship, refreshing insight and tasty application. Being cheaper than a three course meal in an average Italian restaurant (only £16-99!) this is a book which every scholar and pastor can store on the shelf and nibble at when in need of spiritual sustenance.

LEE GATISS

THE FIRST AND SECOND LETTERS TO TIMOTHY

(Eerdmans Critical Commentary)

J.D. Quinn & W.C. Wacker

Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000 lxxvii + 918 pp. £35-00 hb
ISBN 0-8028-2443-9

This is the inaugural volume in a prestigious new series of commentaries from Eerdmans which aim to provide 'expert insight into the background, interpretation, and contemporary application of the Scriptures'. This first volume is strange in that one of the authors, Jerome Quinn, died some twelve years ago. Before then, however, he had not only written the Anchor Bible Commentary on Titus but also the first draft of this present work, which is similar in format to the Anchor series with fresh translations followed by sections of notes and comments. William Wacker was Msgr. Quinn's last student at the Roman Catholic St. Paul Seminary in Minnesota, U.S.A. and has co-authored this work in a complicated manner, the full explanation of which is best left to his own preface. Given the Roman Catholic authorship,

the book comes complete with *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* stating that nothing contrary to Catholic doctrinal or moral teaching has been found within it – something which may cause readers of *Churchman* to be suspicious rather than reassured!

This is a massive work with over fifty pages of bibliography and three indexes of nearly eighty pages. It is full of detailed interaction with scholarship both ancient and modern, is fully conversant with the major issues of authorship, style, grammar, and background, and gives great attention to philological detail. This will ensure Quinn and Wacker a place among the heavyweights of Pastoral Epistle studies for many years to come. As far as the preacher is concerned, there is perhaps too much of an emphasis on word studies at the expense of theology, and the explicit promise of contemporary application seems for the most part illusory. For the scholar, it is a puzzle why a serious heavyweight commentary like this one should be afraid to write Greek words in Greek letters (compare the NICNT series which transliterates in the main body of the text, but uses Greek in the footnotes). Headers on each page showing chapter and verse numbers would assist the reader to navigate this thick tome, in which it is easy to get lost and difficult to find precisely what one is looking for. The lack of footnotes also makes it difficult to see the forest for the trees.

It would take several pages to discuss the noteworthy points made in such a large commentary, but readers may be interested to know that the Pastorals were not written by the Apostle Paul, 1 Timothy 2:12 is about Christian wives ‘bossing’ their husbands around, 1 Timothy 6:11-16 is an ordination charge from the second Christian generation (*cf.* Käsemann), and the ‘evil desires of youth’ in 2 Timothy 2:22 include ‘the sexual excesses to which youths may be particularly inclined but also to impatience, self-assertion, and self-indulgence...not to mention the hunger for novelty; the contempt for routine; the obdurate, implacable intransigence; the agitation verging on violence [and] the lack of prudent measure...which mark the immature’. On this last point, the commentary notes that such qualities are not the monopoly of the young but are also abominable in ‘a dirty old man’, and hence this verse does not mean that the letter was necessarily directed to a man under forty! So, all in all, there are some stimulating points here if one is

prepared to wade through nearly 1000 pages of detail. The busy pastor-teacher will perhaps want to look elsewhere for help on these crucial epistles.

LEE GATISS

REFORMATION: YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW

Carl R. Trueman

Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, Ontario: Joshua Press 2000 99pp pb £4.95
ISBN 1 85049 175 5

In the contemporary church supermarket, the Reformation tends to be treated like cheese near its sell-by date: relegated to a distant corner, occupying marginal space for minimal return, of interest to just a handful of assiduous scavengers, soon to be thrown out altogether. The idea that it has anything useful to contribute is scarcely imagined – not least in Anglican circles. But the Reformation is striking back. The stature and courage of the Reformers are unarguable, their historical legacy unavoidable. More importantly, their theology still has much to say to us, because they were such penetrating teachers of scripture. This short paperback is a welcome addition to the recovery of their insights.

Trueman's goals are both modest and ambitious. This is not a comprehensive survey. Rather, in a series of four lectures originally given at the Evangelical College of Wales' annual 'Word and Spirit' conference, The author aims to demonstrate the continued relevance of the Reformers' biblical insights in three distinct areas: the cross, the Bible, and assurance. His sights are set on British evangelicals. Our churches, he argues, have lost their theological bearings. Whereas the Reformation placed 'God as he has revealed himself in Christ' at the centre, today we have lost this objectivity, and are increasingly in thrall to the subjectivity of the dominant culture. We need to recover the biblical priority, and the Reformers can help.

Trueman, who has published substantial works on Luther's influence in England and on John Owen's trinitarian theology, and now teaches at Westminster Seminary, is well placed to write this study. Urging that we do not idolise the Reformers, but rather learn from their scriptural insight, he

measures current trends in the churches against their teaching. Thus, the chapter on the cross first explains Luther's dynamic distinction between the 'theology of the cross' and the 'theology of glory'. It captures the immediacy of Luther's insights, and expresses them without jargon. The chapter then examines how this understanding of the nature of revelation and of God's action should shape discipleship: our expectations of the Christian life, our understanding of suffering and weakness, the allure of popular techniques promising church growth, and so on.

Trueman's grasp of the theology of the reformers is sure, and accessible. Contemporary application is never far away. His case is occasionally weakened by a tendency to make sweeping generalisations about the current scene – specific exemplification would have helped – and by his reluctance to take prisoners in prosecuting his argument! Some judicious editing would improve a future edition. However, a breezy style makes for a readable, provocative and heart-warming introduction to some of the key issues. A good book for a study group to read and discuss together, and a useful demonstration that the knowledge of God rediscovered in the sixteenth century is never past its sell-by date.

PETER ACKROYD

**GOD OF GRACE AND GOD OF GLORY: An Account of the
Theology of Jonathan Edwards**

Stephen R. Holmes

Edinburgh: T&T Clark 2000 £24.95 312pp hb ISBN: 0-567-08748-4

T&T Clark (recently taken over by Continuum International Publishing) must be congratulated yet again for having had the courage to publish a reworked doctoral thesis on a subject of perhaps somewhat limited interest in Britain. Jonathan Edwards was, of course, a great divine of the post-Puritan school and a leading intellectual of his time. He embarrasses many Americans who are forced to accept that he was a learned, rather than an ignorant 'fundamentalist', and Dr. Holmes shows how this bias has prevented a full appreciation of the man in his native land. He also shows that conservative exponents of traditional Reformed orthodoxy have tended to limit their interest in Edwards to that, thereby short-changing him in other areas of his very fertile mind.

Having said that, the perceptive reader will soon realise that Dr. Holmes has his own agenda, which has clearly been shaped by the ethos of King's College, London, where he did his doctoral work. He is a Barthian with an interest in Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Jonathan Edwards which he offers us is reshaped in that image. In one sense this is quite refreshing, because it brings out aspects of Edwards' thought which have been overlooked by those with other approaches, and it is important to recognise this. At the same time, there is no way that Edwards was (or could have been) a Barthian with orthodox leanings, and whatever points he may have in common with that line of thought must be carefully balanced against the overall context of his theology.

This comes across very clearly when the subject under discussion is reprobation, and Dr. Holmes does his best to play this down. When he cannot avoid the evidence, he labels it a weakness, even an inconsistency, in Edwards' theology, and ends up wishing that he had been more thoroughly logical. Unfortunately for this thesis, Edwards was a child of his time and he accepted the traditional Reformed positions on such matters as election and damnation, even if there are signs that he may have nuanced them to some extent.

The book is very full of detail, and covers Edwards' theology quite well, though the author's bias must make the reader cautious as he tries to evaluate what is, in effect, a revisionist position on Edwards. As such, the book is more likely to stimulate than to convince those who engage seriously with it, but that is no bad thing. If it helps to encourage a revival of interest in Edwards himself, it will have succeeded in its aim, and the whole Christian world will be in Dr. Holmes' debt. At the very least, he has set a new agenda for Edwards's research, and it can only be hoped that there will be others who will take up the challenge and do justice to one of colonial America's greatest theological minds.

GERALD BRAY

APOCALYPSE HOW? Baptist movements during the English revolution.

Mark R. Bell

Macon: Mercer University Press 2000 \$35.00 299pp hb
ISBN: 9-780865-546707

Mark Bell has set himself the task of trying to explain how it was that the

Baptists, originally just one (or a group) of many different sects in seventeenth-century England, managed to overcome the weaknesses of such sectarianism and survive as an independent denomination into modern times. He reveals just how deeply the first Baptists were affected by millenarian and apocalyptic tendencies, and demonstrates that it was only as they spiritualised and then abandoned these that they were able to transform themselves into a lasting presence on the English (and later on the American) scene.

His description of Baptist origins is very clear and sound. He reminds us that the first English Baptists had only vague links with continental Anabaptism, and cannot really be understood as English Mennonites. He also shows that the General Baptists, who were of more Arminian tendencies, were soon eclipsed by the Particular Baptists, who were Calvinists and lacked even the marginal links with Anabaptism which some of the first General Baptists had. His approach throughout is theological, and he places great emphasis on the emerging Baptist confessions as pointers to their thought. This is an unusual approach in Baptist circles, but one which is faithful to the seventeenth-century background and which desperately needs to be recaptured, particularly in American Baptist circles.

The book purports to show how closely the different Baptist movements were linked to contemporary politics, but this is not what, in the end, comes across most strongly. Rather we are left with a basically theological treatise which is none the worse for that. Theology set the political agenda in the seventeenth century, and Dr. Bell quite rightly concentrates on it.

The book starts with the emergence of the first Baptist congregations in the early seventeenth century and ends with the restoration in 1660, and so does not cover what most British people regard as the 'English revolution', *i.e.*, the so-called 'glorious' revolution of 1688. By then of course, Baptists had shed their millenarian roots and were ready to accept toleration as an independent denomination. To get there, they had had to distance themselves from both the Levellers and the Fifth Monarchists, as well as from the so-called Seventh-Day Baptists. It was a difficult and sometimes painful journey, but in the end it paid off. Baptists are still with us, when these other groups are merely historical curiosities. That was their real achievement, and Dr. Bell explains

how it happened as clearly as anyone can. This book is an excellent introduction to its subject, and should be read by every student of the period, as well as by Baptists and others who want to know where that church came from, and what it went through in its formative years.

GERALD BRAY

TOWARD A SURE FAITH. J. Gresham Machen and the dilemma of Biblical criticism, 1881-1915

Terry A. Chrisope

Fearn: Mentor 2000 240pp. £9.99 pb ISBN: 1-85792-439-8

It is now two full generations since the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s rocked the Presbyterian Church in the United States and led to the 'reorganisation' of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1929. That seminary had become renowned for its orthodox Calvinism, but it was an increasingly lonely conservative outpost in the twentieth century, and it could not survive the pressures from within the denomination to 'modernise' its curriculum and emphasis. As it turned out, the leading exponent of the traditional position at that time was J. Gresham Machen, and so it fell to him to found a new institution, Westminster Theological Seminary, which would carry on the position and principles of old Princeton.

That much is familiar to most students of twentieth-century evangelical thought, but few people realise the extent to which higher critical ideas had challenged even Princetonians well before 1929. It is the great merit of this book that it traces Machen's intellectual development through his formative years, and shows how his reaction to modernism was very much a measured, learned and intellectual response, which was taken seriously by the very critics he sought to oppose.

Like many Americans of his generation, Machen had a great admiration for Germany, and he was very fortunate to have been able to study there with some of the leading liberal minds of the age. Some of them impressed him and others left him indifferent, but he felt the powerful attraction of liberalism throughout his student days, and it was only after considerable inner turmoil that he came to rest on the solid conservative foundations of his youth.

Dr. Chrishope brings all this out very clearly, and shows how Machen's great studies of the virgin birth of Christ and the 'religion' of the apostle Paul came out of his own personal struggles. At a time when many biblical scholars are tempted to join the liberal mainstream for the sake of their careers, Machen's story deserves to be told again and again. It was the tragedy of the American church that his brand of learned conservatism was never very widespread, being replaced by an unthinking 'fundamentalism' from which Machen always distanced himself. This is a book which should be read by every evangelical student, both as a reminder of what can happen to those who do not wrestle seriously with the issues posed by liberal scholarship, and as an encouragement to hold fast to the faith once delivered to the saints. Machen saw very clearly that liberalism was another creed, fundamentally alien to the Christian gospel, and it is this insight which needs to be recaptured in our own generation. Dr. Chrishope has done us all a great service, and we must be grateful for his sympathetic and detailed treatment of a man and a period which remain in so many ways paradigmatic for students and scholars today.

GERALD BRAY

ENGAGING UNBELIEF

Curtis Chang

Leicester: Apollos (IVP) 2000

£9.99 pb

ISBN 0-85111-472-5

This is a book written by an evangelist who works in some of the most difficult intellectual territory for Christian witness – Harvard University and its sister institutions in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is a world in which scepticism and unbelief are taken as the norm, and where believers are virtual outcasts. Curtis Chang draws comfort in his unenviable task by going back to an earlier time in the history of the church, when great Christian thinkers arose to challenge and ultimately defeat the unbelief of their time. In particular, he focuses on two men and two great books which they wrote – Augustine of Hippo (*The City of God*) and Thomas Aquinas (*Summa contra gentiles*).

The first of these books was written to combat the pagan accusation that Rome fell to the barbarians because it had abandoned its ancestral gods. The second was intended as a Christian response to the challenge of Islam. One does not have to be a historian to recognise that Augustine succeeded in his

aim in a way that Aquinas did not, but that does not by itself detract from the value of his *Summa contra gentiles*, which incidentally must be distinguished from his much longer and more famous *Summa theologiae*. In reality, Aquinas was confronting pagan learning, this time in the form of Aristotelian philosophy and science, which he sought to capture and subordinate to the claims of the Gospel. In this he was more successful than in the crusade against Islam, and Thomism continues to be an important influence even today.

Reading Mr. Chang's book, one is struck mainly by his plea to Christians to take learning seriously. He admits that he had read neither of these classic works until after he graduated with a theological degree, and indeed he had not even heard of Thomas' *Summa*. Such ignorance is sadly all too common and increasing, and we must be grateful for any attempt made to reverse this unfortunate trend. At the same time, it has to be said that this emphasis rather obscures the professed aim of the Mr. Chang's book, which is to find a way to repeat Augustine's triumph against paganism in the modern context. Mr. Chang knows that we cannot simply regurgitate past classics, but he does not seem to know what the way forward is. Studying Augustine and Aquinas is certainly an education worth having, but the risk is always that we may fall back into a new kind of fundamentalism, aping the masters in a context which is no longer appropriate. Mr. Chang sees this danger, but it is not clear that he has managed to avoid it adequately. This book clears the ground and sets the agenda for a Christian apologetic which engages seriously with the post-modern world, but does not itself embark on that engagement. For that we must await another volume.

GERALD BRAY

PAUL MISSIONARY THEOLOGIAN

Robert Reymond

Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus 2000 640pp £19.99 hb ISBN 185792-497-5

Those who know Dr. Reymond's *Systematic Theology* will not be disappointed by this magisterial study of the Apostle Paul. The book started life as a series of lectures for seminary students and an adult Sunday School, and would be an excellent textbook for first or second year undergraduates. The first part consists of an overview of Paul's career, based on Acts. At the

appropriate points there are clear and concise outlines of each letter, (invaluable for anyone planning a sermon series). The second part is a systematic study of Paul's theology. This is comprehensive, clear, well reasoned, and generally convincing. Dr. Reymond is unashamedly Reformed and Presbyterian – this is very much Paul as seen through the Westminster confession. Far from this being a drawback, Part Two is an excellent example of how a confessional tradition can help illuminate the text of Scripture, and a good example of integration between biblical studies and systematics. It is a joy to find a systematician who loves the text of the Bible, and is at home with the minutiae of exegesis – the comparison that springs to mind is Warfield. His chapters on the Person of Christ and Justification are particularly valuable. The latter chapter argues for the classical Reformed position, and is a very good response to the 'New Perspective'.

The jewel in Reymond's crown is the final chapter – 'Lessons from Paul's ministry for Today's Missionaries'. As the book's title suggests, it is not merely a study of the Church's greatest theologian, (or its greatest sociologist, as some modern scholars seem intent upon making him). It is a study of the greatest missionary of them all. Reymond tells us that his hope and prayer is that his students will 'follow Paul's example in the world mission program which he launched, the purpose of which was to evangelize and to Christianize the entire world'. Someone who spent his first sabbatical on the mission field in Korea and Japan, who takes students on cross-cultural missions to Jamaica, and has written with the needs of mission agencies in mind, is ideally qualified to understand Paul. His reflections are challenging, (he states that theological students should offer themselves as cross-cultural missionaries before looking for a pastorate at home), and deeply moving. The lessons he draws are of value not only to missionaries, but also to all pastors and evangelists. Reymond clearly shares Paul's love for the lost.

Reymond does not mince words in his polemics, and most readers will have their eyebrows, if not their hackles, raised at some point, (rather like reading Paul himself). His defence of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews will be particularly controversial. I was not convinced, but he has made a good case, and it would be a shame if anyone dismissed the book on these grounds. However, the book does have its shortcomings. Whilst his criticisms of other

writers are usually justified, occasionally he descends into a form of ‘guilt by association’. So for instance he attacks the statements “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” and “The Gift of Salvation”, and rightly so. Yet, he fails to notice that many of those who signed the latter did not sign the former; so to speak of ‘the writers’ of both as if they were one group, and to accuse them of having betrayed the Reformation, is to unfairly tar the signatories of GoS with the brush of ECT. Here, as elsewhere, one feels that we have moved away from a study of Paul into a wider systematic theology. Furthermore, although he acknowledges his debt to previous Christian scholars, (especially F.F. Bruce, Franzmann, Ridderbos, and John Murray), there is not enough interaction with more recent Christian scholarship. So, although he has a very good defence of the *Tertius Usus Legis*, he is a little thin on the place of the Law before Christ. Here, more interaction with the work of Thielman, Westerholm, and Schreiner is needed. Likewise, he assumes the classic Protestant interpretation of δικαιωσθαι τῆσθ far too quickly, without considering the views of Käsemann, S.K. Williams or Seifrid. The chapter on ‘The Church’ badly needs a consideration of the work of Peter O’Brien.

However, these criticisms aside, this is an excellent and inspiring book, and will probably become a standard work. It should be on the shelves of every minister, theological student, and missionary.

STEVE WALTON

GOD **James Byrne**
 London and New York: Continuum 2001 £16.99 hb 170pp.
 ISBN: 0-8264-5169-1

INSPIRATION **David R. Law**
 London and New York: Continuum 2001 £16.99 hb 234pp.
 ISBN: 0-8254-5183-7

It is unusual to find books whose authors’ names are longer than the title, but that seems to be the hallmark of the New Century Theology series which has just begun to appear from Continuum. It is altogether appropriate that the series should be launched with studies of the two most foundational themes in theology – the substance of the discipline itself, and the method by which we come to know about it. All the rest, it can fairly be said, is an appendix to

these central issues, and the series editors are to be congratulated for having had the good sense to start at the beginning.

The books are, it must be said, very short for the subjects with which they are dealing, and this inevitably leads to a highly selective treatment of them. The reader will notice this particularly in the book about God, which claims to be interested mainly in the problem of how to confront modern atheism. Can a case for God still be made in a post-Enlightenment universe? This vast theme cannot possibly be covered in depth in 150 pages or so, and Dr. Byrne does little more than scratch the surface of the great issues involved. His book is stimulating and occasionally provocative, but it is unlikely to persuade atheists, or even Christians, that its approach is the right one to take. Curiously, for a writer who is deliberately trying to eschew traditional approaches, there is a lot of tradition in his arguments. In particular, he often returns to the great Christological debates of the fourth century, and discusses the Cappadocian fathers and Athanasius in ways which presuppose some knowledge of them. Among other things, he argues that the triumph of classical orthodoxy was an accident, dependent on contingent historical events rather than on some transcendent will of God. Athanasius comes across as a bigot, and Arius as merely unlucky, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is not a very persuasive argument. Even if there had been no Athanasius, or if Arius had had a better run of luck, it is hard to believe that the latter's inherently inconsistent theology could have triumphed in the long term. Historical contingency may have its place, but it cannot explain everything, especially where deep theological issues are concerned.

Dr. Law's book on inspiration is very different, and most readers will probably find it much easier to get into than Dr. Byrne's. There are three main chapters, the first dealing with 'word-centred' theories of inspiration, the second with 'non-verbal' theories of inspiration, and the last expounding Dr. Law's own theory of inspiration, which seeks to transcend the inadequacies of the other two models which he discusses.

It must be said that Dr. Law has read widely, especially in the literature devoted to a defence of biblical 'inerrancy', and that he does his best to understand where the authors of such literature are coming from. This is so

unusual in modern theology that it deserves a special commendation, particularly as it is clear that Dr. Law is not sympathetic to those whose positions he attempts to describe. Some of his objections are trivial and easily countered, but others are more substantial and deserve to be taken seriously by conservative theologians. The meaning of 'inerrancy' depends entirely on the way in which we understand 'truth', and too few of the defenders of the former have given much thought to the substance of the latter.

On the other hand, Dr. Law is able to point out that alternatives to verbal inspiration also have serious weaknesses. By stressing the 'substance' or 'meaning' of a text over – and even against – its verbal form, these non-verbal theories of inspiration can and do fall all too easily into a deep subjectivism which corrodes the very text they are trying to defend and interpret. Unfortunately, although Dr. Law's critique of existing theories is often incisive and valid, his proffered alternative is worse than any of them. What he wants is a theory in which it is not the text which is inspired but the reader! The dangers of this are so obvious that it is surprising to see such a position defended at all, and it can be said with complete confidence that Dr. Law's 'solution' to the problem of inspiration died before it began. This does not mean that conservative theologians do not have a case to answer – they do. But at the same time, they do not have to worry that Dr. Law has found a way of defeating them. On the contrary, when all is said and done, they can still claim, on the basis of this book, that verbal inspiration, in spite of its many difficulties, is the least objectionable of the theories on offer so far.

How this series will develop remains to be seen, but the first two volumes are best described as essays on theological themes which will stimulate, but probably not convince, most of their likely readership.

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THEOLOGY THROUGH PREACHING

Colin Gunton

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Does anybody nowadays dare to preach the Gospel? The answer to this question may seem obvious to most readers of Churchman, but a little

reflection will tell us that the question is not as simple as it may sound. No doubt there are many evangelists who continue to preach for conversions, but how many go on from there to offer a systematic, theological exposition of the biblical text? All too often, what churchgoers get is a lecture on morality, or a time of 'sharing' in which the preacher delivers another chapter of his (or her) autobiography. Serious engagement with the deeper meaning of Scripture is rare, and it is probably true that there are now few congregations which can absorb it.

A decade or so ago, Colin Gunton set out to buck this trend, and the thirty sermons printed here are part of the fruit of that attempt. They range in date from 1990 to 1998, but they are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. This may give us a somewhat distorted picture of their *Sitz im Leben*, of course, because we can read in an evening what the original hearers spread out over several years, and in a different order. Whether they appreciated the systematic approach as much as we are invited to do is doubtful, and given the attention span of most people nowadays, it is unlikely that many of the Brentwood congregation to whom these sermons were mostly given could have recalled even one of the earlier ones.

Nevertheless, what Professor Gunton has attempted is so rare nowadays that he deserves high marks for effort. Whether we like or agree with the content of what he has to say, we must at least appreciate what he has tried to do, and accept that the point which he is making is indeed a valid and necessary message for today's church. Having said that, it remains the case that the sermons are all very short, and this brevity does not allow for the kind of in-depth theological thinking which the programme of sermons purports to offer. Professor Gunton cannot be blamed for this – if he had taken the time necessary to develop his themes, most of his congregation would have fallen asleep, or even gone home. But it does serve as a reminder to us of how difficult theological preaching is in an age where the sound bite is the preferred form of communication.

When it comes to the content of the sermons, readers must be alerted to the fact that Professor Gunton does not accept the traditional view that the Bible is the verbally-inspired Word of God and so, although he takes his themes

from Scripture, he feels free to digress and even to contradict the text when his own theological perspective so dictates. This is most obvious – and most irritating – in his approach to Paul’s attitudes towards women. His basic premiss is that Paul was forever learning new things, and that in the course of his exposition of women’s place in the church, he did a radical about turn, so that his earlier remarks on the subject are cancelled out by his later ones. In practice this means that any reference in Paul to women as being subordinate or obedient to men must be regarded as a first attempt which turned out badly, whereas talk of equality and complementarity represents his final, mature understanding. Elsewhere, we are treated to an interpretation of the adolescent Jesus in the temple which claims that he was a wilfully disobedient twelve-year-old, and that it was only after he submitted to his parents that he began to ‘grow in stature, and in favour with God and man’. Suffice it to say that other interpretations of these and similar passages are not only possible – they are also more probable.

In sum therefore, the average preacher is unlikely to be helped very much by the content of this book. It is the idea which Professor Gunton is promoting which retains our attention, and which (we must hope) will bear fruit in the ministry and writing of the next generation of preachers.

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