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Book Reviews

MARTIN BUCER: Reforming Church and Community

D F Wright ed

Cambridge: CUP 1994 195pp £35.00hb

ISBN 0 521 39144 X

As the editor of this collection of essays so understandably laments, there can be few if any figures in Church history who have been more undeservedly neglected than Martin Bucer. Less colourful than Luther and unluckier than Calvin, Bucer has faded into the background. Yet as these essays show, his was a seminal mind and presence which did much to influence the development of Reformed thought in England, the country which adopted him shortly before his death.

Bucer was one of the few men who could be a Lutheran to the Lutherans, a Calvinist to the Calvinists and even (with reservations) a Zwinglian to the Zwinglians, as well as keep an open door to Rome should attempts at reunion ever come to anything. He had a great deal to say; too much indeed, even for the more prolix taste of his own age, but he must have been a good listener too, to have been able to develop the kind of mediating theology which he did.

In eucharistic terms he stood halfway between Luther and Zwingli, and bequeathed his position to Calvin. Thanks to his friendship with Cranmer, he also shared his insights with the English Reformers, and many of them were incorporated into the Prayer Book of 1552. In this respect, Calvin and the BCP are half-brothers, with Bucer as a common parent.

In ecclesiastical affairs, Bucer was a strong defender of Church involvement in society, an involvement which for him was closely connected with infant baptism. Bucer said more about this than any other Reformer, perhaps because Anabaptists were a more direct threat to his ministry. But this interest gave him a particular empathy with the Church of England, whose peculiar situation he seems to have understood well. His departure for London (and then Cambridge) in 1549 was his own deliberate choice; he could have gone to any number of places where he might have understood the language and made a more direct contribution to events. But it was England which he chose, and into whose life he integrated more quickly and more successfully than any foreigner before or since. It is not every immigrant who becomes Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge within six months of arrival, or who leaves an influence on liturgical revision which is still apparent after nearly 450 years!

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This collection of essays by leading scholars in the field is a fitting memorial to this great man, and will be a valuable introduction to his thought for students of the Reformation. It certainly makes us regret that not more of Bucer's works have been published in modern, accessible editions! Perhaps this book will stir research students and others to undertake this important task. Unfortunately, the one criticism which must be made of this book is its colossal price, which will restrict ownership to libraries and specialists. A cheaper, paperback edition is desperately required!

GERALD BRAY

THE BOOK OF ACTS IN ITS FIRST CENTURY SETTING

Volume 1: Ancient Literary Setting B W Winter & A D Clarke edd
Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1993 479pp £24.99hb

ISBN 0 85364 563 9

This is the opening volume in a projected six volume series relating to the book of Acts which has been organised through Tyndale House in Cambridge. It is plainly a work whose primary audience will be scholars. Yet although the material is weighty and detailed the articles here ultimately have their impact on ordinary Christian life and ministry. There is much in this book which helps to establish the reliability of Acts as part of God's Word in the face of critical attack. There is also much information which, when distilled, assists the preacher in understanding the text before him.

As the title to this first volume suggests, many chapters use classical material to shed light upon the world in which Acts was written. The opening two chapters (Palmer, Alexander) look at the question of the genre of Acts as a whole. Others look at particular features of Acts against the background of the classical corpus. Thus Hillard et al look at the way in which letters and biographies relate to one another in famous classical figures so as to provide a background for looking at the relationship between the Pauline epistles and the figure who appears in Acts. Gempf takes a fresh look at the way in which the speeches found in Acts are to be understood. Satterthwaite looks at the conventions of classical rhetoric prevailing amongst contemporaries of Luke.

Other chapters are devoted to ensuring that the relationship of Acts to the rest of the Bible is not neglected in interpretative studies. Rosner looks at the influence of the Old Testament on Acts, especially emphasising the formative role which Old Testament historical narrative plays. Peterson looks at the theme of fulfilment in Acts and what Luke meant by that. Marshall contributes a compendium on the views which are taken on the relationship between Luke's gospel and Acts. Wenham makes a study of

the points of contact between the Pauline material in the New Testament and the references to Paul in Acts. This provides a most helpful answer to those who contend that at some points these two sources are irreconcilable.

Further contributions come from Bauckham, Nobbs, Scott Spencer and Head. Bauckham's is an important piece which compares and contrasts the apocryphal Acts of Paul with Luke's work. It provides a careful response to those who would seek to blur the boundaries of the Scriptural canon today. Nobbs looks at the way in which Acts influenced the composition of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History. Scott Spencer gives an account of the way in which modern literary theory is making an impact on studies in Acts and warns of some of its dangers. Finally, Head has written an appendix which looks at the factors lying behind the important textual variants found in those manuscripts of Acts which are extant.

The foregoing survey of this volume's contents will demonstrate the depth at which it tackles questions relating to the literary background of Acts. The material is of the highest quality and one can only hope it will be widely recognised in the world of the academy. While it may take considerable time and effort for preachers to quarry the important information which is found here and put it to work for the edification of the Christian community, it is to be hoped that this task will be done in due course.

MARK BURKILL

QUARKS, CHAOS AND CHRISTIANITY

Questions to Science and Religion John Polkinghorne

London: Triangle SPCK 1994 102pp £4.99pb

ISBN 0 281 04779 0

John Polkinghorne is the eminent physicist turned Anglican priest who has produced a range of influential books on the relationship of science and Christian faith, the major one being his Gifford Lectures, *Science and Christian Belief* (1994). In this slim volume he speaks to a less sophisticated audience on rather more general issues. His chapter headings are: *Fact or Opinion?; Is There Anyone There?; What's Been Going on?; Who Are We?; Can a Scientist Pray?; What About Miracles?; How Will It End?; Can a Scientist Believe?* The author often has something weighty and worthwhile to say, and he says it well. But I have grave reservations about the adequacy of his position. For instance, two things he says convince him of what we may summarize as *the life of the world to come*: one is the Resurrection of Jesus (belief in which depends on historical evidence which as always is 'open to rational assessment and if necessary to reassessment'); and the other is the 'deep human intuition of hope'. Since he rejects revelation in the

traditional sense these form a rather frail foundation for ultimate belief: 'absolute certainty' in matters of religion is ruled out! But for what then do martyrs die? Is their sacrifice muddle-headed? Again, he thinks that 'very similar thought processes are involved' in the formation of both scientific and religious beliefs: he comments that he 'doesn't change gear in some strange intellectual way when he moves from one to the other'. There is *some* truth in what he says here no doubt; but it is very superficial. When one moves from the 'I-it' of science to the 'I-Thou' of faith in Christ what does one expect but a profound change in the character of one's intellectual activity? Our Lord's challenge in John 14:11 (see REB) pinpoints a very significant either-or in this connection. The author says nothing I can remember relevant to the question of the *righteousness* of God and man's relationship to it; and as a consequence he has little to say about the significance of the Cross. The almost entire neglect of these central matters is surely a serious omission in such a work of introductory apologetics.

On the whole a disappointing book, but it might be of use to awaken someone hitherto a self-satisfied sceptic.

DOUGLAS C SPANNER

THE MESSAGE OF MARK: The Mystery of Faith Donald English
Leicester: IVP 1992 254pp £7.95pb ISBN 0 85110 968 3

A couple of terms ago I asked a class of students (from a dozen different nationalities) to read through Mark's gospel and for each story to express what they felt was Mark's purpose in including it, and how they would apply it to life today. The results made fascinating reading as we collated the ideas into our own 30 page 'class commentary'. It was from that context that I agreed to review Donald English's contribution to *The Bible Speaks Today* series, a series which has the similar aim of expounding the text and applying it to contemporary situations.

The author has a number of objectives. He seeks to clarify the *flow* of each story and of the gospel as a whole; to explain phrases and ideas which might puzzle a modern reader; and to compare Mark's account with those of the other synoptics. Generally he handles his material with wisdom and skill, and usually arrives at fairly traditional conclusions. (However see pp 98f for an unusual perspective on the parables.) Much of what he says is set very much within a Western cultural framework (eg that dealing with the miraculous), and this might limit the cross-cultural usefulness of the volume. But, in particular, within his chosen framework he manages to neutralize possible scientific objections to conclusions with which most conservatives would readily agree.

Comparison with the parallel synoptic passages is naturally not expected to the same degree here as in a specifically exegetical work; but many reasonable scholarly insights are presented to lay people in a helpful if unpretentious way. Sometimes, however, this leaves the more serious reader feeling a little frustrated, as when the author remarks on an apparent disagreement with another gospel that '[Mark] is making a point far bigger than matters of detail' (p 69) and passes on at once to the theological lessons of the story. This may strike some as ducking the historical issue: what actually happened on this occasion? Who is right? It is usually not too difficult to suggest in passing some perfectly reasonable solution which would avoid leaving an honest but puzzled reader unsatisfied.

Suggestions about applications for today are always bound to have to a noticeable degree the stamp of the author's personal interests. Donald English's ideas are generally sound and helpful; only occasionally do they seem to miss relevance. He makes less of this feature as the book proceeds; it would be an improvement if he emphasized it at least equally as Mark reaches his great climax: the Bible does really *there* Speak Today!

Overall this would be a good book for new Christians wanting to dig a bit deeper into the story of Jesus Christ. The study guide at the end and the practical applications suggested (especially those concerning faith and discipleship) would be especially helpful for them, and I would also expect preachers or homegroup leaders to find many good ideas here. Theological students as such would probably also want something more academic. There are few typographical errors; 'Esther' on p128 should be 'Elijah', and 'commanded' on p82 should presumably be 'commended'.

RICHARD JOHNSON

THEOLOGICAL LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Ceslas Spicq trans and ed James D Ernest

Peabody MA: Hendrickson 1994 3 vols 1786pp hb

ISBN 1-56563-035-1

Only very occasionally does one come across a work of such immense erudition that even superlatives seem to be inadequate to express the magnitude of the achievement. The late Fr Spicq was well known for his careful and exact scholarship, and over the years he produced a number of outstanding lexical studies which have retained their authority in a field which is constantly being augmented by new discoveries. Towards the end of his life he was persuaded to collect these studies together and publish them. The first French edition appeared in 1978, and the second, revised and augmented, in 1991. The present work is a translation of the second edition, though it has been considerably edited for the benefit of the English-speaking reader.

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James Ernest is a research student, but he has produced a *magnum opus* of translation and editing. Bearing in mind the needs of students who have little Greek, he has consistently transliterated Greek words, without abandoning those features of the text, such as quotations from epigraphic sources, which scholars find so valuable. The third volume contains 170 pages of indexing, giving full references to all the many sources quoted in the main body of the work.

Spicq's labours stand out in the field for two main reasons. First, his lexical interests are always plainly theological, and he concentrates on that aspect to the exclusion of more technical matters. In this respect, his achievement is much more even and of a generally higher standard than that found in Kittel, even if it is usually less exhaustive. Second, his knowledge of ancient parallels is probably unequalled anywhere, and he provides a full range of comparative material from classical, Hellenistic, Jewish and epigraphical sources to illustrate how particular words were used in antiquity. It is true that there are omissions; readers wanting enlightenment on the use of *kephalē* (head), for example, will be disappointed! But on the matters which it does cover, Spicq's *Lexicon* is unlikely to be superseded for a very long time, if ever. It will be widely used by NT scholars and theologians, and should prove to be an invaluable complement to Kittel, as well as to Colin Brown's *New International Dictionary of the New Testament*.

GERALD BRAY

TEXT, CHURCH AND WORLD Francis Watson

Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1994 366pp £24.95 ISBN 0 567 09700 5

The flow of volumes on hermeneutics shows no sign of abating, and it is not easy to decide which should become required reading. A work like this which first carefully and comprehensively discusses previous masters of the subjects before proposing its own way forward must have a claim to be on the list, just as Anthony Thiselton's *The Two Horizons* had. The present work is occasioned by the marked change in emphasis in biblical studies. Historical criticism is still active, but it is now overshadowed by the newer literary criticism. As is well-known, this is focused on the text as it now is rather on the question of how it has come to be what it now is. This is 'a hermeneutical shift with an immense potential for the development of an interpretative practice orientated from the first towards theological concerns'. Serving up and enjoying a meal is, after all, more to the point than studying its prior heat treatment!

Interpretation however is still unavoidable. This takes place (for the Hebrew scriptures) in the synagogue as well as in the church, but the author concentrates on the church and on the whole of what it calls the Bible. The accepted theological creeds define the limits within which exegetical preaching is expected to move; but the author recognises that exegesis and theology are constantly interacting with each other by way of mutual refinement and correction. Another fact he draws attention to is that just as the biblical text functions *in the church* as its context, so the church functions *in the world*. Also, the Bible is studied in the university as well as in the seminary.

The main body of the book is divided into four parts each of four chapters. In Part 1 the author seeks to defend his commitment to the text *as it now stands* in relative indifference to questions of how it came to be. Here he assesses the important work of Hans Frei and Brevard Childs, in part positively and in part negatively. He points out, for instance, that Brevard Childs works with an idealized community of faith and practice, and that this is a context rather isolated from the world.

Part 2 is much the most difficult section of the book, and demands considerable familiarity with modern literary theory. The author is concerned to combat the view that there can be no way from text to reality, one of the latest manifestations of an epistemological scepticism common among philosophers since Kant. This apologetic section is clearly important; without it the author would have left his main contention (that the Bible has real significance for theology) highly vulnerable to flank attack.

Part 3 consists of a valuable engagement with the various feminist approaches to Scripture. One of the notable features of the Bible which he points out is the frequency with which it interweaves material which might be thought to glorify the male with material which does the precise opposite. This is especially so in the narrative passages; sometimes the contrast is only implicit, but at other times quite explicit. Anyone interested in the feminist encounter with Scripture should study this.

In Part 4 the author attempts to formulate a hermeneutic for theology in more systematic fashion. Here he wrestles with such issues as the relationship between Christology, Trinitarian theology and the hermeneutical task, and encourages us to take seriously Luther's view that, for the Christian, Scripture should be viewed as *liberating gospel* rather than as *oppressive law*.

The author is aware that his work will face criticism. This will be all to the good if it means that it receives serious appraisal. He illustrates his points by extensive examples, many of which afford fresh insights into

familiar passages of the Bible. This exegetical material is good evidence that his general approach is of real value, not only to the biblical scholar and the academic theologian, but also to the preacher. There are a few cases of ambiguity of style where in evaluating the work of others he follows his criticisms with remarks calculated to restore balance; but whether the remarks are his own or his victim's is not made clear. In a second edition it would be helpful to have such ambiguities eliminated.

GEOFFREY GROGAN

THE SERPENT AND THE CROSS

Religious Corruption in an Evil Age Alan Morrison

Birmingham: K & M Books 1994 638pp £12.00 pb

ISBN 0-9523041-0-4

This is a challenging book and I believe a very important one. The author Alan Morrison is the pastor of Crich Baptist Church in Derbyshire, and as is explained on the dust cover, before he became a Christian he was deeply involved in occultism, mysticism and the New Age Movement. This has given him an insider's knowledge about these things which is evidenced on every page. His claim that this is an 'encyclopaedic *exposé*' of the historical development of a New Gnosticism seems well justified as one notices his abundant referencing. This must have involved hours of laborious research, and one can readily believe his statements to this effect. He has addressed what he has written not to academic scholarship, but to a readership of ordinary well-educated believers; his style which at first struck me as a little sermonic, soon settles down into something weighty and impressive. I ended up feeling that the author had a message of great urgency. What is it all about?

Theological liberalism has today widely succeeded in reducing weighty biblical themes to a level of scant significance. An instance of this is the theme of God's providential sovereignty over universal history – how far this has been scaled down from the majestic statement of the collect for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity should be obvious to anyone. Another and related theme is that of the activity of the great enemy, Satan. Ironically, in some quarters this has been both over-emphasized and trivialized; but theological liberalism has in others almost abolished it. This theme provides the background for the present author's concern. Is Satan a being of so little power, intelligence and skill that he has devised no overall strategy for finally ruining the human race, but is confined to using only *ad hoc* stratagems? 'No', the author replies. 'Satan has indeed devised a powerful overall strategy which he applies with historical consistency.' The clue to it is provided by the bold lies presented to Eve in the Garden. If she and her husband ate of the forbidden fruit they would

become like God (or gods); they would attain unconditional eternal life; and wisdom over and above their natural endowment would become theirs. These same promises, the author maintains, have historically again and again been dangled before the human race. They appear for instance in the notorious early heresy of Gnosticism as Irenaeus describes it. Later came Hesychasm, medieval Mysticism, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Evolutionism and Teilhard de Chardin, not as simple repeats but as real advances. They are reappearing today in the teachings of the New Age Movement, dressed up and with different progressivist emphases of course but clearly related. It is very difficult in a short review to do justice to the immense amount of labour Alan Morrison has expended in making his case, but I felt very impressed by it. He casts his net widely, and some of his conclusions will be widely resisted. For instance, he challenges much of the teaching and practice of the Charismatic Movement, and relates phenomena such as 'slaying in the Spirit' to hypnotism, and the repetitive singing of simple choruses to the chanting of *mantras* (cf Hesychasm and the 'Jesus prayer'). He shows effectively how many of the present day charismatic phenomena (such as speaking in tongues) are not unique to Christianity but have correspondences in other religions. He has a lot to say about techniques (so fascinating today) for altering states of consciousness; he deals trenchantly with the practices of the various modern schools of psychotherapy; he is highly critical of appeals to Jungian psychology; he has some disturbing criticisms of the teaching on various practices (such as 'visualization' for example), all of which have found their way into evangelical circles – the latter for instance into such a recommended book as Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*. A lot of this needs to be said, and nothing but good can come from a careful reading (even by those disposed to disagree) of this thoughtful and wide-ranging criticism of today's fashionable and light-hearted practices which claim to be biblical in their ethos.

After a long and intriguing journey through the story of how the practices and tenets of eastern religions and of the mind sciences have insinuated themselves into even mainstream evangelical circles, the author ends with an examination of the rise and 'hidden agenda' of the Ecumenical Movement. Again he has some damning things to say, and there is weight behind his punches. I can only recommend my readers to get hold of this book and perseveringly read it. It presents a mountain-top view of the devious course of Satan's master strategy. It may not always carry the reader with it, but it will acquaint him with a great array of arresting historical facts. It will enlarge his vision of the task the church has always faced, but faces today in a measure intensified by the enormous pressure of the media; and of the snares and pitfalls in the way.

The book is well produced. It has a Bibliography of 20 pages; an Index of Authors and Names of 7; and an Index of Subjects of 18. Apollyon is misspelt on p15, and the reference at the top of p520 should be Matt 4:4 and not Lk 4:8.

DOUGLAS C SPANNER

UNCLE ALBERT AND THE QUANTUM QUEST Russell Stannard
London: Faber & Faber 1994 143pp £3.99pb ISBN 0-571-17344-6

HERE I AM Russell Stannard
London: Faber & Faber 1994 154pp £3.99pb ISBN 0-571-16829-9

Russell Stannard is well known as the Professor of Physics at the Open University who is also a keen apologist for the Christian faith. These two books (and other companion ones) are in a new series for older children (say 12 to 14), and are written in a style very well calculated to attract them. It owes a great deal to Lewis Carroll, and something too to C S Lewis! The first is about the mysteries of Quantum Theory and ultimate particles, which the niece of Uncle Albert (who is clearly Einstein) is able to explore with his help by using Alice's trick of growing *very* small. Gedanken (her name) is typical of today's youth – argumentative, self-assured and not afraid of authority, even Uncle Einstein's! The result is an exposition of modern physics which can be worthwhile even for adult scientific illiterates.

More interestingly for *Churchman* readers, the second book centres on theological themes. The central character, Sam, is a young teenager who is playing with the family's computer. He gets a bit bored and taps the keys distractedly. Suddenly the screen goes blank and after a moment up comes a message HERE I AM! What's up? he thinks. He wonders if he has picked up a computer virus – or if a hacker has got into touch with him. A sort of dialogue follows in which the 'hacker' claims to be God. Sam does not believe him, until suddenly the screen comes alive with a very vivid picture of the starry skies and he finds himself caught up into it and hurrying away from the earth through space and into distant galaxies, the 'hacker' giving him a commentary as he journeys. Sam is not easily convinced, and thinks up all sorts of objections to the Voice being God's. He enjoys arguing with the 'hacker', often quite rudely, and in the course of the dialogue all sorts of reasons against believing in God are voiced and patiently answered – 'science explains everything', suffering, moral problems, the devil and hell. The discussion is wide-ranging, but Sam does not give in; and in the end the 'hacker' says he must go. As a parting gift he gives Sam a list of questions, and then the computer falls silent. Sam

types in the command I AM – but alas! there is no response. All he is left with is the list of questions.

This is a thought-provoking book, and it speaks in the language of much modern youth. The author is not evangelically conservative, and he does not do much to stress the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, or to direct attention to the Bible. He leaves Sam wondering whether God is he or she, if either. Another disappointment is that the style does little to inculcate any sort of reverence for the Creator, should there be one; and the impression left at the end is thus not as ‘serious’ as it might be. But then I am not a modern teenager! It might well serve to awaken interest in one of today’s bored, blasé or purposeless young persons.

DOUGLAS C SPANNER

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