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1, 2, 3, John  
Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 51  
Stephen S. Smalley  
Word Books, Publisher, Waco, Texas, USA  
pp. 420. U.S. \$19.95

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The volumes of the Word Biblical Commentary that have been published so far maintain the high standard for which the editors are aiming. The book under review is no exception. The intention and format of the series have already been described (details in EAJET Vol. 3 No. 2 1984).

The series differs from most others in that the commentaries do not begin with many pages of introductory material; the interested reader is directed to those commentaries which survey the findings and opinions of other scholars on these matters. In his introduction the author covers what is essential and provides a "statement of the basic working hypotheses ... about the life setting of the letters of John"; the reasons for his position are found as he exegetes the text.

Smalley writes on the assumption that 1, 2 and 3 John were written after the Gospel, that the "presbyter" wrote 2 and 3 John, that the "presbyter" or someone very close to him wrote 1 John, and that we don't know who he is. Even allowing for the considerable difficulties in the apostle John's authorship of the Gospel and the Epistles, and in spite of the strong external evidence in its support, Smalley himself is unable to go further than to say "it is not unreasonable to suppose that the inspiration ... came from John the apostle".

Two thirds of the introduction deal with the situation behind the letters; this is very useful. The themes which are outlined here are referred to time and again throughout the commentary. Four groups are identified within the community: orthodox believers, two heretically inclined groups (Jewish and Hellenistic), and secessionists. The problems grew from the two groups of believers whose theology was unbalanced, particularly in the areas of christology and ethics. The Jewish Christians had a low christology which found it hard to accept Jesus as God, coupled with a legalistic over-emphasis on the Law. The Hellenistic Christians with their high christology had difficulty accepting the humanity of Jesus, coupled with an indifference to righteousness and love. John's purpose is twofold: to encourage the faithful and to counter these heretical tendencies by providing a balanced christology and refuting ethical error. A progressive deterioration in the Johannine community is traced as one moves from the Gospel to the third letter; the divisions deepen, and John's appeals seem to remain unheeded.

The letters are dated in the last decade of the first century. 2 and 3 John are clearly letters, while Smalley sees 1 John as having more the nature of a "paper", with an underlying unity for which he argues strongly. The sections headed "Notes", which deal with textual matters, give well argued reasons for the preferred readings. Though there is rarely a full discussion, the witnesses selected are adequately representative to support the chosen text.

The Form/Structure/Setting sections begin with a statement of the subject of the passage under discussion, together with an explanation of the point being made in relation to its place in the letter, the situation and problems facing the Johannine community. There is often a brief review of the ideas of one or two other scholars at the end of this section. It does not meet the editors' aim of giving information on the state of modern scholarship, however, there is continual interaction with other writers in the body of the commentary. The "explanation" sections are short summaries of the main points which draw out the application of the teaching for today's life.

The real value of the book lies in the detailed exegesis of the "comment" sections which is frequently related to the situation in the community. There is a helpful discussion of the Gnostic influence on the community, while recognising that at that time these were no more than pre-gnostic tendencies which were to develop later into full-blown Gnosticism. Even more interesting is the way in which he shows how the teaching of the letters is related to that of the Gospel (especially the farewell discourse of John 13-17) by correcting the less orthodox groups' distortion of that teaching.

Smalley digs deeply to draw out the meaning of the text. Although his exegesis is from the Greek, there is always an English translation when needed so that, even if a knowledge of Greek would enable a greater benefit to be gained, the points he makes are clear enough to allow the discussion to be followed. He gives a wealth of detail without losing the thread of the argument. However, he has the habit of putting his explanatory sub-comments, related ideas, scripture references, and references to other literature in brackets in the text. This avoids footnotes, but it does interrupt the flow, severely at times; on occasions I found myself rereading such a sentence, ignoring all the brackets, in order to pick out what he was saying.

He regularly draws attention to the significance of John's frequent use of the present tense which is helpful. Less helpful is his tendency to translate Greek aorists as English perfects, so blurring the distinction between the Greek aorist and perfect. As an example, the aorist (*exelthon*) 2 John 7 is said to be literally "they have gone out" instead of "they went out"; this word and the perfect (*exelsthasin*) in 1 John 4:1 are both rendered "[they] have defected" in his translation.

John's oscillation between the singular and plural is noted and our attention drawn to the integration of individual and corporate aspects in John's thinking which reflects his Hebrew background. Another illustration of this is his love of chiasmus which occurs at all levels in phrase, sentence, and paragraph.

It is a characteristic of John's style to present his ideas and teaching in groups of three; these are pointed out as they are reached, though some that Smalley discovers are rather forced. So it is surprising to find the trilogy of 1 John 2:16 treated as a general point and two definitions that describe two of its possible aspects. Is he just seeking to be different from other commentators?

On controversial questions many commentators argue for one side against the other. Smalley presents both sides, and then often looks for a way to combine them into a new position either by synthesis or by an attempt to hold them in balance. His discussion of *hilasmos* (propitiation/expiation, pp. 38-40) is a good example of his method. When he looks at the phrase "the love of God" p. 49 he suggests that the three senses all belong (subjective and objective genitive, and genitive of quality). This may be good practise for a mediator, but one is sometimes left with the impression that somehow there is a way to make the text mean whatever one wants it to mean.

There are four short sections where he gives a brief note on sin, love, Christ, Son of God. Many similar topics are dealt with during the course of the "comments". In his note on "love" he agrees with L. Morris and others that no sharp distinction should be drawn between the two Greek words for love *agapan* and *philein* (a strong case for holding to a distinction is given by W. Hendriksen in his commentary on Ch. 21 of John's Gospel).

One of the strengths of this commentary is its continual relating of the teaching to the situation and problems in the Johannine community. Theology and ethics, right faith, in God and right behaviour are woven together throughout. The teaching, with its roots in the Gospel, is a powerful counter to the Jewish and Greek groups with heretical tendencies and a strong encouragement to the orthodox believers. Smalley draws out the significance for the original readers and goes on to make clear the implications of the underlying principles for Christian living today. This is why the "explanation" sections can be brief. Another theme which is picked up in this commentary is John's pastoral concern for his readers. This comes out in many ways not least in his concern that they love one another and that they be sure of their Christian confidence.

A few errors slipped by the proof-reading. *hoprao* for *horao* p. 8; *ekomen* for *echomen* p. 28; *huuin* for *huion* p. 116; the heading on p. 169 note on "Son of God" is repeated on p. 171 and 173; the aorist *edoken* p. 212 is called a perfect; "this is love.." fourth paragraph on p. 326 should read "this is the command.."; "and will not remain..." on p. 332 third paragraph, should read "the one who remains..".

Smalley ends with the reminder that these letters "contain the logical, ethical and practical truths which are fundamental to the Christian position in every age: that Jesus is one with God as well as one with us; that love and righteousness are indispensable...that unity, however flexible, is a demand laid upon the Church at all times".

Smalley has given us a fine commentary that wrestles clearly with the meaning and impact that these letters had on their first readers as well as giving valuable insights into their background. Strongly recommended for Bible college libraries, its price will put it out of reach of most African pastors.

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*Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*  
 edited by D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge  
 (Inter-Varsity Press, 1986)  
 pp. 468 + xii, 9.95

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Carson and Woodbridge have already produced a valuable collection of essays on the subject of Biblical authority entitled "Scripture and Truth" and published by IVP in 1983. The volume presently under review is a continuation of that work and, like its predecessor, it deals with questions being raised by recent scholarship on the nature, authority, and interpretation of the Bible. Some of the nine contributions develop themes already raised in the previous work; others broach new issues. They are wide-ranging in both subject matter and approach, each self-contained and with little continuity between them. They are, however, united by a strong evangelical perspective on their subject, vigorously argued at a scholarly level and documented throughout by copious notes.

Carson's opening essay serves as something of an introduction to the whole volume. He reviews recent developments in the doctrine of Scripture under eight headings, and if one did not already know why such a book as this is necessary this survey would be most enlightening. Inevitably a lot of ground is covered in a very short space which results in compression and occasional lack of clarity, but in general it is a fine condensation and ample notes enable the reader to pursue particular areas further. The final section of the essay is especially timely, diverting attention from the academic debate over Biblical authority to the decline of that authority at the level of Church life.

Most essays in the collection cover well-worked areas of discussion but the second, by Vanhoozer, is an original contribution in which he considers the semantics of Biblical literature. His purpose is to respond to the "New Biblical Theology", represented particularly by James Barr, which denies the significance of the proposition as "the basic vehicle of religious truth" (p. 55) and insists that evangelicals do violence to the true nature of Scripture in using it as a source of propositions while neglecting the literary categories to which they belong and so attaching "the wrong kind of truth values" to biblical sentences (p. 56). Vanhoozer argues that propositions may legitimately be drawn from Scripture but accepts that to see it solely as a source of propositions is to impoverish it. Thus, drawing on the categories of linguistic philosophy he maintains that a "speech act" consists not only of a "locutionary act" (the sentence's meaning) but also of an "illocutionary act" (what we do in saying something p. 86). In other words in the Bible as in normal speech the goal is not only to affirm propositions but to *do* something with the words we use, whether commanding, promising, warning, or whatever. A

doctrine of Biblical authority must take account of both aspects of the "speech act". Vanhooser therefore proposes that Scripture be regarded as infallibly accomplishing its illocutionary purposes (i.e. God's commands and warnings do not fail) and as being inerrant in its propositions, for God is never wrong (p. 98). The essay is certainly hard work for the reader, more so than the rest of the book, and demands careful concentration. At times in the development of the argument more pointers are necessary to show the direction in which one is being led. It successfully demonstrates, however, that an evangelical approach to the Bible does not entail insensitivity to its diverse literary forms.

The next three essays discuss exegetical problem areas for the doctrine of inerrancy. Silva's brief contribution, based on two case studies, considers the problems involved in historical reconstruction of the events and background of the New Testament. First he considers the discrepancy between the NT view of pharisaism and the conclusions of modern scholarship and goes on to suggest solutions. Second he discusses Baur's view of first century Christianity and compares it with that of Lightfoot. The direction of the argument in this second part is not altogether clear and the discussion of historical objectivity thin. In conclusion Silva argues that unnecessary polarisation between evangelicals and liberals should be avoided but points out that the basic conflict will continue as long as the approach of the latter is shaped by Kantian presuppositions.

Blomberg's essay deals with the problem of alleged contradictions in the Biblical text. It is admirably lucid and helpful, one of the best in the collection. The approach adopted goes far beyond the often despised "additive" method of harmonisation; eight tools for tackling individual discrepancies being explained include the use of some higher critical methods which, according to the author, may be used "in the service of a high view of Scripture" (p. 174). Blomberg demonstrates the value of each of his tools by tackling some of the most problematic discrepancies of the NT and a few of the OT also. He also establishes their legitimacy by showing their use in resolving discrepancies in ancient secular historical literature. In the third of this group of essays, entitled "Sensus Plenior", Moo considers the way in which NT writers sometimes appear to misunderstand or misapply their quotations from the OT. Five possible approaches to such quotations are considered, none of which alone can explain every case. However, Moo concludes that in general the NT authors are legitimately drawing a fuller meaning out of an OT text in the light of the context of the whole revelation. Nevertheless, at times NT authors operate on a "revelatory" basis, finding meanings in the OT which, while not inconsistent with the original text, cannot be proved exegetically to be there, but derive from the inspiration of the Spirit.

Frame's essay, "The Spirit and the Scriptures" discusses briefly the Spirit's role in revelation but more fully his illumination of the reader of the Bible. He addresses himself to three points of controversy. First he gives a critique of Barth's view which according to Frame denies the objective inspiration of the words of scripture and locates inspiration in the Spirit's sovereign enlightenment of the hearer of Scripture thereby destroying the distinction between inspiration and illumination. Second he discusses Berkouwer's ideas concerning the objects of the Spirit's testimony attempting to draw out the precise difference between

Berkouwer's definitions and the traditional evangelical position. And finally he considers the relationship between the Spirit's testimony to Scripture and rational evidences. Important issues are raised in the essay, but the treatment is really too short to be satisfactory.

Woodbridge discusses "Misconceptions of the Impact of the 'Enlightenment' on Scripture" It is a fine review and critique of recent attempts to prove that an inerrant view of Biblical authority is a relatively recent development which does not belong to the central tradition of the Church. Woodbridge shows that such arguments are really attempts to rewrite history in the interests of modern scepticism. In fact the central tradition of the church has always been to affirm the truthfulness of Scripture in all matters on which it speaks including nature and history. Nor did the doctrine of "accommodation" as held by Augustine and the Reformers allow for the presence of errors in the Bible; it concerned simply God's condescension in the use of human words and concepts.

Bromiley surveys the views of Barth on the authority of Scripture considering his early statements, dogmatic, presentation, and practical consequences in preaching, dogmatics, and counselling. The survey underlines Barth's insistence on the primordial authority of Scripture, but in his conclusion Bromiley also points out certain features of his position which effectively undercut this authority as well as positive aspects of his thinking. Finally Dunbar contributes the longest study in the collection, a contribution to canonical studies which reviews the evidence on the formation of both OT and NT canons and considers theological issues that surround the question. Dunbar concludes that the evidence does not support the Warfield position whereby the church received the NT writings as inspired documents on the same level as the OT writings from the apostles. Rather he affirms the providential direction of the Spirit in guiding the Church to recognise but not to determine those writings which are authoritative.

Overall Carson and Woodbridge have edited a weighty academic contribution to the current debate on Scripture from an evangelical standpoint. As such it is to be warmly welcomed, especially as the evangelical position is often seen as obscurantist and hidebound. Nevertheless the scholarly nature of the work inevitably determines its readership: academics, theological teachers, and theological students looking for help with the problems they come across in the course of their studies. Some essays, for example those on harmonisation or *sensus plenior*, do address questions that will concern any alert and intelligent reader of the Bible and will thus be more widely useful. But at no point is this a popular book; throughout it demands intellectual effort and a reasonably high level of theological awareness. The style inevitably varies from one essay to another; some are very well and lucidly argued — Blomberg's and Woodbridge's for example. Others are heavier and sometimes lacking in clarity. While one does not expect a theological work to read like a novel some of the language employed is unnecessarily obscure and even ugly: for example "distanciation" and "asymptotically" p. 41, "assertorical" p. 67, "repristinative" p. 338. Nevertheless the book is well produced and structured. The list of contents gives a brief resume of the subject matter of each chapter; there are indices of persons, subjects, and scripture references. Eighty-four pages of notes provide thorough documentation and enable the reader

to pursue further the subjects under discussion, and there are helpful subheadings within each essay. The printing is clear and this reviewer found only two misprints. Finally, while not cheap, the price is not unreasonable for an academic work of this quality.

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*Evangelism on the Cutting Edge*  
by Dr. Robert E. Coleman  
Fleming H. Revell Co., 1986  
pp 156 \$8.95

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"Something must be done to accelerate the evangelistic outreach of the Church." With this statement, made by Robert Coleman, most evangelicals would agree. There is little space for argument against it. The question, however, is "What is it that must be done?" without giving all the answers to this, the author/editor brings together some thought provoking words from nine of his colleagues at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and by adding his own essay he joins with them in focusing the attention of the readers on issues critical to evangelism today.

The design of the editor is stated well in his introduction: "to sharpen the reader's understanding and appreciation of the global task before us", and "to help someone (the reader) sort out the temporary fads from the permanent realities and get with the action of God's Spirit in the world." The challenge before the reader is to remember that "the ultimate triumph of the Gospel is never in doubt", and that "someday the Great Commission will be fulfilled, Jesus Christ will reign as Lord of all, and to Him every knee shall bow."

Coleman's book "is a collection of essays that confront the major issues that are hindering the work of the Great Commission," and the ten essays not only identify these issues, they give the Biblical answer to them as well.

Addressing the problem of religious pluralism Kenneth Kantzer in his chapter "The Claims of Christ and Religious Pluralism," shows how liberalism's acceptance of all religions as a means of bringing people into a proper relationship with God has been embraced by many within the World Council of Churches and has been influential in moulding the theology of Neo-orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, and beyond this it has diluted the adherents of some evangelicals to the doctrine of man's lostness. Since individuals are saved through faith in the atoning work of Christ the challenge is for those who know Him as Saviour to bend every effort to share the biblical gospel with men and women everywhere.

Arthur Johnston writing on "Church Unity and the Mission of the Church"

states that "unity in truth and personal godliness are the solid foundations of world evangelization." He indicates how churches in their quest for unity have experienced a compromise of truth and a lessening of biblical evangelism. Churches within the World Council of Churches are classic illustrations of this. Today even evangelicals are ravaged by explosive issues: the battle for the Bible, the mission of the Church, and the question of the Kingdom. Faulty conclusions on these matters could lead evangelicals to consider evangelism to be irrelevant.

The importance of believing and obeying the Word, made meaningful by the Holy Spirit, are brought into focus in Wayne Detsler's chapter "Biblical Integrity and Revival." History establishes the fact that when Christians disregard the Word and are insensitive to the Spirit their only hope is revival. It has come in the past; it is needed today. Its principles are spiritual relationship — the prayer of God's people, repentance — a turning from sin, restoration of the backslidden to rejuvenated fellowship, and a spontaneous reaching out to the lost. Revival and evangelism go hand in hand.

Because of years of ministry in Central America William Taylor is the logical one to write "The Cry for Justice and Liberation." This cry out of Marxism coming primarily from the two-thirds world is championed by Protestants and Catholics and even by some evangelicals. Though definitions of social justice and liberation vary and though the application of such lead to differing strategies, the author appeals to evangelicals of America to become aware of the crises related to these matters, to study the issues from a Biblical perspective, to give attention to our priorities, and to commit more of our resources to meet these needs always remembering, however, our mandate to preach the Gospel to every creature.

The frequently discussed issue of contextualization is treated by David Hesselgrave in the "Contextualization of the Gospel." Though coined by liberals the term has been defined by evangelicals to mean that careful adaptation of the message of Scripture that makes it meaningful to people who are being "mothered" in a culture that is different from that of the communicator. Warning of the dangers in this task, over simplification or a downgrading of the importance of culture and over-sophistication or an undercutting of the authority of the words of Scripture, he challenges Christian workers to preserve a Biblical contextualization that will make the Gospel clear and relevant including the invitation. Any contextualization must stand on two certainties: neither God's Word nor His plan will fail.

Christians today need to be prepared for spiritual warfare. Any efforts they make in the work of evangelism will bring them into conflict with Satan and his demonic forces. Such statements are made and illustrated in Timothy Warner's chapter, "Power Encounter with the Demonic." Whether the devil attacks the Christian or the Christian through his life and ministry invades the devil's territory, the Christian must demonstrate the appropriation of Christ's power through the use of God's armor and prayer. God's servants must resist the devil and become good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

"Self — Esteem and the Pursuit of Fulfillment," treating psychology as a



popular new religion is what Gary Collins pursues in this chapter. He shows modern psychology as the champion of self - esteem and self - fulfillment, but exposes its weakness in its de-emphasis of sin and its lack of emphasis on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He appeals to Christians to use the teachings of psychology as a tool to show people that though helpful they do not give the final answer. That answer is Christ. Collins concludes with this advice as a Christian's response to psychology: don't ignore it, try to understand it; don't squelch it, try to learn from it; don't be enamoured by it, keep it in perspective.

It is most fitting to find a segment of this volume on "Preaching for Decision" by none other than Lloyd Perry, the pastor's pastor. His thesis is that "evangelistic preaching will always be crucial in reaching souls for the Saviour." Such preaching to be effective must be empowered by the Holy Spirit and must be characterized by good style and by a clear call for decision.

The author/editor, Coleman, contributes to this collection of essays by writing on "The Great Commission Life-style." Emphasizing the task of making disciples, defining the disciple as a learner, he says that disciples must live by the rules which govern Christ's life, a Christian life-style produced by the Spirit. Such a life-style was exhibited by the early Church but disappeared until the time of the Protestant Reformation and the Evangelical Awakening. Today it may be seen in the Christianity coming out of China. It is the challenge facing Christians today, and when it is accepted it will heighten evangelistic endeavour.

The final chapter, "Leadership for Evangelism in Theological Education," is written by Walter Kaiser, and in it he affirms that the Great Commission must occupy the central focus of all evangelical theological education. He appeals to theological schools to provide training in evangelism and disciple-making for all students, even though there may be difficulties in so doing because of pluralism, universalism, separatism, passion for academic respectability, and peculiar emphasis upon the gift of evangelism that persists. The difficulties can be overcome through a genuine revival, through an emphasis on cross-cultural ministry, and a commitment to evangelism on the part of our theological leadership.

Any reader will discover that this is not a book on evangelism and discipling techniques; however, anyone committed to the fulfillment of the Great Commission will appreciate what is said in these essays and will want to reflect upon the significance of each one of them. To assist in this exercise each of the ten issues considered in this volume is followed by a series of questions to help the reader move into a full comprehension of the thrust of each chapter. Added to this the brief biographical sketch of each contributor which precedes the chapter he wrote serves to make each reader wish that he could sit down with each writer and do a little more picking of his brain. It is to be hoped that this book will build a framework from which to launch many more Christians into deeper involvement in the business of world evangelization.

Evangelization leaders and those training for ministry in evangelical contexts will want to read this book and then take time to read it again and again.

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*The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*  
by Craig Blomberg  
(I.V.P., 1987)  
pp. 288 6.95

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This is the book I have been waiting for. Up to now I have relied on Howard Marshall's excellent volume *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* to provide a non-New Testament specialist like myself with a sure evangelical guide through the tangled jungle of Gospel Criticism, hacking through the thick undergrowth of Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism and all the rest. But I gradually became aware that the safari was not over. Beyond the clearing loomed the luxuriant foliage of Midrash Criticism, Structuralism and Post Structuralism. I was badly in need of a new guide book. And then along came Blomberg who has recapitulated and updated the subjects so ably discussed by Marshall, while adding useful summaries and critiques of more recent developments.

But I still had problems. There were the apparent contradictions among the Synoptics (well, were the disciples allowed to carry a staff? Matt. 10:10 c.f. Mk 6:8) and the highly distinctive character of the fourth Gospel where, for example, the very gradual perception of Jesus as Messiah found in the Synoptics seems to be replaced by a Gospel where men discern Jesus as both Messiah and Son of God before the end of the first chapter. Again Blomberg has come to the rescue with his in-depth study of these problem areas and the title of his book states his convincingly argued conclusion.

Perhaps your problems are different to mine. But if you are concerned about the apparent lack of sufficient corroboration for the Jesus tradition in other ancient writings both within and outside the New Testament, or the peculiar problems, both philosophical and scientific, associated with miracles, this is the book for you too.

In order to avoid the charge of question begging, Blomberg supports the reliability of the Gospels purely on historical grounds without recourse to appeals to inspiration or inerrancy. As an historian he reminds us that two of the canons of historiography are that an ancient record of an event is assumed to be reliable unless there are good grounds for doubting the veracity of the account, and secondly that the attempt to harmonize two slightly different reports of the same event is acceptable practise. It is astonishing, therefore, that so many New Testament scholars seem to assume that the Gospel stories are unhistoric unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary and that they dismissively deride such

tentative attempts at harmonization as the suggestion that Jesus could have cleansed the temple twice; once at the beginning of his ministry (Jn. 2) and once at the end (Mk. 11).

Although Dr. Blomberg is obviously an impressive scholar in his own right, his book pulls together the labours over ten years of an international team of scholars engaged in the Gospels Research Project at Tyndale House, Cambridge, England. For the specialist, the team published from 1980 to 1986 a series of six volumes entitled *Gospel Perspectives* (Sheffield, JSOT Press). We must be sincerely grateful to Blomberg for his digest of the exciting insights gained by this team which has entered into dialogue with critical scholarship at the highest level and concluded that the Gospel records are indeed historically reliable.

If, before buying the book, you want a sample of what awaits you, have a look at Blomberg's article "Synoptic studies; Some Recent Methodological Developments and Debates" in *Themelios*, January 1987.

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*The Bible and Islam*  
by Rev. Bassam M. Madany  
*Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education 1987*

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This 80 page paperback comes from the pen of a pioneer radio missionary. He writes out of a context of 23 years experience preaching the gospel in the Arabic tongue to the Arab world. Madany's theme is how to share God's Word with a Muslim. The first section is an exposition of Romans chapters 1-8, Matthew, and Isaiah showing how to use these key books in reaching the Muslim mind and heart. The second section gives an historical explanation of the Church's failure to reach the Arab world, a synopsis of the 20th century Arab's worldview and ends with samples of Muslim response to the gospel broadcasts.

The Gospel according to Paul (Romans 1-8) follows Reformed theological interpretation and contrasts this with Islam's high view of man's ability to find salvation through good works and seeking the will of God. There is no doubt but that the argument of Romans 1-8 is the clearest presentation of the work of the Cross, and Madany shows how to use this crucial portion of God's Word without offending a Muslim audience. Abraham's faith—righteousness is the connecting link with the next chapter, the gospel according to Matthew.

Madany details how to use the genealogy, birth narrative, baptism, temptation, sermon on the mount, last supper, and the crucifixion accounts to dispel Muslim misconceptions about the person and work of Christ. Then follows a

chapter on the gospel in the Old Testament with a sketchy treatment of Isaiah chapters 1, 6, and 53. Islam's hatred of idolatry, their low view of sin, and misunderstanding of the cross are points argued from Isaiah.

Lessons from Church history are pressed home stressing the fact that although ancient versions in Itala (Old Latin), Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Gregorian, and even Nubian were made by the sixth century, yet the Arabic critique of Islam written in a popular style by a Marxian from Damascus forshadows the degree of secularization reaching into the Arab section of the Muslim world.

The heart of the matter is that Islam is the only major religion which is definitely anti-Christian at its core. Since its rise in the 7th century Islam has spread mostly at the expense of Christian lands starting with Africa. It is a post-Christian religion, and the Quran has many references to biblical personalities from both Old and New Testaments. Therefore we are thrust into apologetics and polemics, and we cannot avoid theology or doctrine. We believe the bible to be the Word of God; they believe the Quran to be the eternal and uncreated Word of God. We believe in one God who is triune; their doctrine of God is unitarian. The Quranic Messiah is not the Biblical Messiah. They say "Christ was not crucified". Islam teaches that man's sin is ignorance of the divine will.

Since there are 800,000,000 Muslims in the world today and Islam has immense political and economic power, this challenge to Christianity is greater than ever. While lacking documentation and a bibliography, this book will instruct your mind and challenge your heart to the task of reaching out to the Muslim world around us with the glorious gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

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*Spirits and Power: An analysis of Shona Cosmology*  
by Hubert Bucher  
(Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980)  
pp. 231

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Leader	"Jesus!"	Group	"Power!"
	"Jesus!"		"Power!"
	"Jesus!"		"Power!"
	"Power!"		"Jesus!"

This chant which I heard at an evangelistic meeting in a friend's house is a reminder of the importance of spiritual power for the people of Africa. The words which I saw recently on a poster pinned to a tree are another reminder:

**"THE GREAT GOSPEL MIRACLE FESTIVAL"**

The Lame walk, The Blind See, The Deaf Hear, The Dumb Speak, and the sick are receiving their healing."

That is certainly one form of "Christian" power being offered to the people of Africa today - "signs and wonders" evangelism. Another form of power is the so-called "prosperity gospel": "God will use his power to give you the things you want in life, health, wealth, and happiness." Both these forms have come to Africa from the West. But there is a third form of "Christian" power, indigenous to Africa, which is more important for the church in Africa than these other forms. That is, the "Christian" adaptation of traditional African beliefs about power. Hubert Bucher talks about this adaptation in his book *Spirits and Power*.

In this article I want to summarise the argument of Bucher's book, and then to develop his conclusion and apply it for the church in Africa.

*The Shona World View*

In the first part of the book Bucher analyses the traditional religion of the Shona peoples of Zimbabwe. He sees their beliefs as the integration of two sets of symbols which fit together to make one worldview. These sets of symbols are, firstly, symbols of the social order, and secondly, symbols which deal with the perennial problems of human existence<sup>1</sup>

These two sets of symbols though are more than merely symbols. Those who make up the social order are real people: chiefs, spirit/mediums, diviner/healers, people accused of witchcraft activities. The problems of human existence - death, illness, misfortune, illwill from one's neighbours - are facts of life which people really experience.

For each problem area of life for the Shona there is an explanation in terms of personal spirits: spirits of the land, ancestral spirits, avenging spirits, "strangers spirits" and witches. There is also someone whose role it is to supervise this area and use spiritual power to help overcome the problem. So, for example, the chief is the "owner of the land", the living representative of the territorial spirits who are the original owners of the land. He is responsible to act against the problem areas of lack of rain, lack of fertility, pests, and disease.

Another problem area is the unpredictability of life. Death, illness, or misfortune may strike at any time. This is believed to be the work of ancestral spirits or avenging spirits concerned about their authority or their property. These spirits must be appeased or "kept away" in order for a person

to avoid misfortune.

Some other problem areas are: frustration with one's own unimportance in society, envy of the skills or gifts of other people, the strange behaviour of underprivileged people in the community, outbreaks of discord in a community. In each case the spirits are symbolic representations of the powers involved, and there are mediums and diviner-healers to help people deal with the spirits and the problems they bring.

Bucher draws two main conclusions from his analysis:

- i) Concern about power is the main feature of the Shona world view. Power is all-pervasive. "The world is an enormous field of power." He quotes the Shona proverb: "Every power is subject to another power".
- ii) This power is *ambiguous*. The same power can be used as power to harm or power to protect. The thief and the policeman use the same power, but only the policeman has legitimate authority to do so. This is why the diviner-healer has an ambiguous status for the Shona. He is the policeman of the community, but he uses the same power as the witch does.

#### The 'Churches of the Spirit'

In the second part of his book Bucher turns his attention to the Shona "Churches of the Spirit". These are the most popular of the two major types of Independent Churches in Shonaland, originating in the 1920s. Bucher looks particularly at the Zion Christian Church of Samuel Mutendi and the African Apostolic Church of Johane Maranke. He devoted one chapter to their doctrine and ritual and one to their healing practices.

As he looks at these "Churches of the Spirit" he concludes that they have an identical view of spiritual power to that held by traditional Shona society. The founder of the church is the equivalent of the founder-ancestor, and he owns the church. In theory all the power in the church comes from the Holy Spirit, but in practice the power belongs to the founder of the church in his own person. It is stored in him like "grain in a farmer's cooperative". As in traditional society, this power is ambiguous; it can be used for good or evil. For example a Zionist witch is believed to use the "spirit of Mutendi" to do his work. Mutendi himself has no ultimate control over how his power is used.

Prophetic activities in these churches are a "Christian" substitute for diviner-healer practices. The prophet "sees" through the Spirit the spiritual causes of his client's troubles. He deals with spiritual powers in the same way as traditional specialists dealt with them in the past.

In these churches a complete alternative community has been set up.

Converts are taken out of their natural family and brought into a new all-embracing family. The congregation takes over from the next of kin. In this new community converts find a complete substitute for the forces which protected them in their traditional past.

This explains the appeal of these churches: they focus on those aspects of the Christian Gospel which meet the Shona people's traditional preoccupation with spirits. Converts have transferred their allegiance from traditional to new sources of power, but they have not changed their views about how these powers work.

From this Bucher comes to his main conclusion that these "Churches of the Spirit" are not faithful to the Gospel. God comes to the Shona (and to us all) from *outside* a people's own worldview. He makes a total claim upon people that they leave their old ways and follow Him, that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But the "Churches of the Spirit" do not confront the Shona people in this way. They evade the claim of the Gospel and remain within the Shona worldview. They "Shona-ise" the Gospel to meet people's needs. They are like Simon Magus in Acts ch. 8, happy to use Christian spiritual power for their own benefit but far away from a true understanding of the Gospel and the salvation which it brings.

#### Power Encounter

Now I believe that this conclusion is very important for Christians in Africa. It should make us think very carefully about power in the Church of Jesus Christ. When a person leaves traditional religion to follow Jesus Christ we often talk about the need for them to experience a "power encounter". In this "power encounter" they discover that Jesus Christ is more powerful than all the powers which previously troubled them<sup>2</sup>.

But what do we mean by a "power encounter"? Is it a "straight fight" between powers, like two boxers stalking each other round the ring? One will overcome the other because he has greater strength and skill, and the winner is the one who is left standing at the end. Is that what we mean?

It seems to me that "signs and wonders" evangelism does see the fight between the power of Christ and other powers in this way: "Because Jesus is Sovereign Lord, people will be physically healed as lesser powers are defeated". So does the "prosperity gospel". "It is God's will for every Christian to be rich and healthy; only your sin or lack of faith can prevent this. African Independent Churches like the Shona "Churches of the Spirit" try to assemble enough prophets and powers to be able to defeat hostile powers.

On a cosmic scale when God in Christ disarmed the powers triumphing over them, He did so *by the cross* (Col. 2:15). The powers opposed to God were defeated by the *death* of the Victor! And at the level of personal experience the Lord Jesus Christ said to the apostle Paul, "My power is made perfect *in weakness*". To which Paul replied, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly

about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

The Gospel tells us that God's power is known in our weakness. Victory takes place in the midst of apparent defeat. We need to understand why this is so.

#### The Use of Power versus the Presence of Christ

The "Churches of the Spirit" have to see the struggle between different powers as a "straight fight" because for them *the essence of life is the successful use of power*. They look at the work of the Holy Spirit in a man-centred way. The Holy Spirit makes God's power available for them to "switch on" and use. Their view of power is the same as that of traditional Shona society. If you can't use power successfully and come out on top then you are defeated; and that is that.

But to think of the Holy Spirit in this way is not true to the Gospel. J. I. Packer explains this very helpfully. He writes about "the distinction between manipulating divine power at one's own will (which is magic, exemplified by Simon Magus [Acts 8:18-24]), and experiencing it as one obeys God's will (which is religion, exemplified by Paul [2 Corinthians 12:9, 10])."<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to this, for the Christian *the essence of life is the presence of Christ*. And the work of the Holy Spirit is to make known the risen reigning Lord Jesus Christ in and with the Christian and the church. As the Holy Spirit does this three things happen in the lives of Christians. They experience personal fellowship with Jesus. Their characters are transformed into the likeness of Jesus. (This is where power fits in says Dr. Packer - by the power of the Holy Spirit we "move beyond our natural selfishness into the Christlike path of righteousness, service and conquest of evil".)<sup>4</sup> And they have a Spirit-given assurance of being children of God.

Every Christian in Africa must surely long to see more of God's power at work in the church, in society, in his own life. But the power we need is not the power of instant success or triumph in every situation. Such guarantees about the successful use of power are not true to life as it really is. Poverty, illness, war, and famine are a major part of the experience of many, perhaps most, Christians in Africa. And we all wrestle with the fact of sin, our own sin and the sin of other people.

Rather we need the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ who keeps us close to Christ, who makes us holy like Christ, and who assures us that we belong to Christ whatever our outward circumstances may be. The Christian who is chronically ill, crippled, or mentally disturbed will know that the power of Christ is at work in him as he becomes more like Him even in his sickness. The husband and wife who are unable to have children do experience Christ's power as they get to know Him better even in their childlessness. Christians caught up in the violence of civil war are kept safe by the power of Christ, whether in life or in



death.

May God grant the Church in Africa to truly know much of this power.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>p. 17, 188 Bucher here draws upon the work of the social anthropologist, Abner Cohen.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Lausanne Occasional Papers, *Christian Witness to People of African Traditional Religions* (Wheaton: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, 1980) p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Packer, J.I., *Keep in step with the Spirit* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984) p. 26. Dr. Packer discusses the whole question of the relationship of power and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit on pages 21-27.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p. 49.