

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

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

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



Buy me a coffee

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



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ajet-02.php

BOOK REVIEWS

Ephesians: Power and Magic. The Concept of Power in Ephesians in the Light of Its Historical Setting

by Clinton E. Arnold
Cambridge: CUP, 1989

During a recent term I read through Arnold with three of my MTh New Testament students at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. And I can report that this text "works". First, it works as an example of a proper British PhD thesis done at Aberdeen under Howard Marshall (1986). Reading the book was certainly helpful for students who were wondering about doctoral studies, since they gained a feel for the scope and level of the research required.

Secondly, the book actually breaks new ground. The students got to see research making its case and establishing a new position. Arnold argues that the current "consensus" that Ephesians was written to combat problems of Gnosticism at Ephesus is incorrect. He argues in detail in his first chapter that Ephesus was a centre for magical practices, citing the "*Ephesia Grammata*" consisting of six magical words which "seem to be laden with apotropaic power, that is, in the warding off of evil demons." They were used "as written amulets or spoken charms". When my students, from three different parts of Africa, read this section, they all began to speak at once about its relevance to what their grandfathers knew! Which meant that a third objective of reading Arnold had also been accomplished.

Arnold links the magic of Ephesus with the spirit world, using evidence from the Greek magical papyri of Egypt, which he argues is linked to Ephesus. The focus of Arnold's research is not the secret knowledge of the intellectual elite (i.e. the Gnostics), but the common knowledge of ordinary people. Arnold here reflects the influence of Berger and Luckmann's *Sociology of Knowledge* (not cited), with their concern for "common knowledge." Both the *Ephesia Grammata* and the evil spirits find a locus in the Ephesian Artemis (Diana). So a fourth point emerged from reading Arnold: the importance of sociological tools for investigating the background of the biblical text. The final touch to this syncretistic soup is the astrology bit; all of this was taken as a way of

manipulating the "powers". For me, this was the most stimulating part of Arnold's study, fulfilling his sub-title: "The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of Its Historical Setting." And it would have become even more relevant for the African context if he had explored the nature of animism.

The phrase "Power and Magic" in the title gives the focus of the book as a whole. Chapters three through five provide a detailed and sometimes tedious exegesis of the key texts in Ephesians concerning "power". Chapter six brings the exegesis together in a biblical theology of Ephesians concerning Christology, cosmic powers, eschatology and ecclesiology. Arnold fulfils his stated goal: "The goal of this book is to acquire a more complete understanding of the nature of and motivation for the inclusion of the power-motif in the epistle by studying the author's development of the theme against the backdrop of the spiritual environment of western Asia Minor in the first century AD" (p.2).

Arnold interacts with those previous interpreters who have grappled with the definition of "powers" in Paul: MacGregor (astral spirits); J Y Lee (Jewish apocalyptic [fallen angels behind the state] and the Gnostic astrological point of view [astral spirits]; Benoit (the term cannot be defined!); Carr (pure angelic hosts surrounding the throne); Wink (a demythologised view of "powers", first presented by Schlier and Berkhof). Against all of the views that take the "powers" as "structures" rather than as "evil spiritual beings", Arnold makes the telling point, based on what he has already demonstrated, that the Ephesian reader "would think of evil spiritual beings" when reading Ephesians and not of social structures (p. 50).

One agrees with his defence of this position; but what of structures? Arnold returns briefly to the topic in connection with his exegesis of Ephesians 2:2-3, stating that "it is precisely at this point that the question of structures of existence, institutions and -isms should come into the discussion" (p. 134). Holding firmly to the existence of "personified evil spiritual powers", he admits that "nevertheless, these created entities [i.e. institutions] can be considered 'demonic' since they have been inspired by the spirit 'power'." Then amazingly he declares, "At this juncture I have broached a hermeneutical topic extending beyond the scope of my purpose" (p. 134). I for my part have been helped by the explanation given by S C Mott in *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), who argues that the evil spiritual beings have captured part of the universe and converted it into "cosmos", social institutions organised in opposition to God. That is to say, evil spiritual beings do have a relation to social structures. Or, more bluntly, a cause of poverty is the working of evil spirits!

Arnold's study would be useful as a text for a course on the cultural world of the New Testament, illustrating a skilful use of background materials. It could also serve a course in Greek exegesis, offering detailed exegesis of key texts in Ephesians. A New Testament Introduction course would find useful its argumentation that Ephesians is Pauline. It could also function as a model for doing biblical theology based on understanding a book as a whole interpreted in light of its background. And certainly it would make a useful textbook for a "Power Encounter" course that needed a theological grounding.

Chester Wood, Ph.D.
Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology
Nairobi, Kenya

African Nonformal Theological Education Research Project

by Fremont and Sara Regier

North Newton KS: Commission on Overseas Mission of the
General Conference Mennonite Church, 1994

This publication is a 64-page report (plus 16 unnumbered pages of appendices and endnotes) prepared for the Pew Charitable Trusts in the United States. The stated purpose of the research project was "to study the state of the art in non-formal [theological] education" in Africa and "to suggest implications of these findings." More specifically, "the study was designed to assess various educational models . . . to explore ways to encourage different kinds of integrated and regional projects . . . and to make recommendations for the development of effective and self-sustaining non-formal programs for Christian leadership education" (p.2). The study was intended to concentrate "mainly on adult learning processes other than formal education" (p.28). Chapter headings and some subheadings include pithy one sentence quotations; for example, "In Africa information is not given but related."

Ten percent of the content is taken up with a review of literature on adult education. However, most of the literature quoted is dated, and Western in its orientation. The authors bemoan the meagre reference to African educational writers (p.10) and that "no where did we observe situations where serious thought had been given to the specific question of how Africans learn" (p.28). If they had given attention to this, which was their stated focus--"adult learning processes"--the report could have been a major significant contribution to theological education in Africa.

The social environment (political, economic, social, religious) in which theological education is being done in Africa is very briefly described. The greatest impact of non-formal education, such as TEE, is "the change in personal lives" (p.21). The material on programmatic priorities of non-formal education is worthy of note, (though other publications give greater in-depth analysis, such as Holland and Snook). Financial sustainability of the programmes, acceptance of the programmes by the church, contextualization of methodology and content, and obtaining published materials are major issues facing TEE programmes in Africa today. The suggested ways to solve these major issues, listed in Chapter 9 for the churches and TEE programmes and in Chapter 10 for donor agencies, are helpful. One wishes that concrete examples had been given of how these issues could be addressed at the practical level. Administrators of TEE programmes are, for the most part, keenly aware of these issues, and they are seeking practical help on how to overcome the difficulties represented.

The overall assessment of this book must be that the research done does not match the quality of, nor go beyond, current literature on TEE. It is a non-formal way of describing non-formal education in Africa. Normal methods of collecting and analysing data were not evident. While reading many of the statements made in the book, one asks where is the data or evidence for making such a statement. For example reference to a source is not given for "900 Christian non-government organisations in Kenya," or that the AIC churches are the "fastest growing churches in Sub-Saharan Africa." The denominational bias of the authors can be implicitly detected; for example, the Maserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia is mentioned four times in the report. An implicit emphasis is indicated by the constant positive reference to African Instituted Churches, "the least educated and the most ridiculed and feared of the church groupings," and negative remarks about TEE programmes of evangelical churches (AEA's TEXT-Africa project is belittled by comparison to AIDS programmes). Though the Church of Christ in Nigeria's TEE programme is named in the report, no description is given of this outstanding model of African administered and church financed TEE programme of over 2,500 students. If clear answers were given to the nine "questions addressed by the ANTERP study" in annex B, the book could have been of great value to TEE personnel in Africa.

The list of abbreviations in the preface does not include all the acronyms used in the text. References cited in 36 endnotes are not listed in the bibliography. A number of errors were detected. Contrary to what is stated, for example, ACTEA has not accredited any TEE programmes as yet (p.34); ACTEA was established in 1976 (p.46); the Christian Learning Materials Centre (CLMC) in Nairobi was established in 1980, and CLMC does not prepare TEE material nor conduct TEE staff training courses (p.46). This reviewer would concur with the authors' concluding chapter that the beneficiaries of the project were the authors themselves by their exposure to non-formal education in Africa.

George Foxall, D.Miss.
Formerly ACTEA Administrator
Three Hills, Alberta, Canada

The Message of Proverbs

by David Atkinson

Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996

As Atkinson observes in the preface to this addition to 'The Bible Speaks Today' series, the themes dealt with in Proverbs are of continuing relevance in every age: 'It puts a mirror up to our behaviour and says, "Are you like this? Is there a better way to live?"' However he also draws attention to what he sees as the difficulty any commentator on Proverbs must encounter, that of bringing 'its apparently disorganised mass of material into some sort of accessible form'. In dealing with this problem he refrains from employing a simple verse-by-verse commentary and tries instead to shape the structure of his exposition to the particular literary characteristics of the book of Proverbs itself.

In an introductory chapter Atkinson stresses the relationship between the Wisdom portrayed in Proverbs and Christ, the supreme revelation of God, and then briefly considers the authorship, intended readership, literary forms and purpose of Proverbs. In the subsequent exposition, which constitutes the bulk of the book, he distinguishes two principal sections in Proverbs. The first is chapters 1-9 where Wisdom is personified and portrayed; and then in chapters 10-31 what he describes as 'Wisdom's Values', the moral teaching of the book, are to be found. Thus the first two chapters of his exposition, which he calls Part 1 and Part 2, deal with Proverbs 1-9, and Parts 4-6 treat Proverbs 10-31.

His exposition in the first two Parts, on Proverbs 1-9, does not follow the arrangement of the text found in the book of Proverbs itself but adopts a more thematic approach. Thus in Part 1 he identifies a number of 'sketches of Wisdom' found in the first nine chapters and comments on them: 'the town crier (1:20-33)', 'Wisdom needs to be searched for (2:1-9)', 'A winsome personality (2:10-15)', 'Wisdom celebrates life (3:13-18)', and so on. In Part 2, which he entitles 'Wisdom's instructors and Wisdom's detractors', he returns to the same section of the book and looks at the messages Wisdom conveys. In the first section he identifies and briefly discusses 'Ten fatherly talks', all of which follow a more or less similar pattern in their communication of moral instruction. The second section passes to 'Wisdom's Detractors' and discusses the warnings given in this part of the book against gang violence, sexual promiscuity, laziness and so on, many of which are themselves drawn from the 'fatherly talks'.

In Part 3, entitled 'Wisdom's methods', Atkinson deals with 'some

questions about how its [i.e. Proverbs'] writers go about their work'. The chapter is of an introductory nature but he places it in the middle of the book rather than at the beginning as he sees it as an introduction to the second half of Proverbs, although some of what is said here is applicable to chapters 1-9. In an initial section he identifies the dominant philosophy of Proverbs 10-31 as one of 'learning from experience' and seeks to establish links between such a methodology and that advocated by liberation theology and some recent educational and pastoral approaches. At some points in his discussion he seems to risk making experience an autonomous source of knowledge; as in some other passages of the book there is a certain ambiguity as to what exactly is being said. As he himself notes later however, Proverbs insists that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'; experience can therefore only be rightly interpreted in the light of all that Scripture reveals of God's character and works.

Sections 4 and 5 both deal with chapters 10:1-22:16 and are organised thematically. Section 4, entitled 'Wisdom's values: Foundations', seeks to 'uncover the moral values on which [the] practical teaching is based'. Atkinson identifies three such values, the fear of the Lord, love and justice, and shows how they persistently recur in the aphorisms, or *gnomes*, of this part of Proverbs. The point briefly discussed towards the end of the chapter, that experience sometimes seems to contradict the assertions made by certain proverbs, is an important one and should perhaps have been treated in one of the introductory sections. Part 5, 'Wisdom's values: The practical dimension', looks at the particular practical concerns of Proverbs 10:1-22:16, including family, marriage and parenthood; diligence, creativity and hard work; health; security and safety; material sufficiency; the importance of appropriate speech, and a few others.

A final chapter, Part 6, 'Wisdom's values: The words of the wise', deals with the remainder of the book, no longer using a thematic approach but dealing with the text section-by-section. The comments here are brief as many of the ideas found in this part of Proverbs have come up earlier and already been discussed, although in this chapter Atkinson quotes most of the biblical text itself at length. He understands the conclusion of Proverbs, 31:10-31, as not only a portrait of the ideal wife, but also a representation 'of what the life of Wisdom herself would look like, were she to manage the home'. Finally in his own concluding chapter, 'Godliness in working clothes', he stresses the ordinary, everyday nature of the Wisdom that Proverbs communicates, and goes on to point out that for the Christian it is in Christ that Wisdom is found, and that it is communicated along with the power to live it out through the Spirit.

Careful study of *The Message of Proverbs* will undoubtedly enrich the

reader's appreciation of the book and of its continuing relevance, as well as draw attention to some of its profounder resonances which are not so obviously apparent on the surface of the text. Some of the applications made are more relevant in a western, specifically a British, context than in an African one, as when Atkinson discusses the British national lottery, although the principles involved can often be extended by the reader to his own situation. The author quotes from a wide variety of sources, some of which are more illuminating and appropriate than others. The structure he has adopted for the book does however entail certain drawbacks. While the author's use of a thematic approach has its advantages, and particularly in the exposition of such a book as Proverbs, it limits the value of his work as an aid in the systematic study of the biblical text. It also means that the book of Proverbs is not interpreted in its own terms, in the form which its editors gave it, and in consequence Atkinson's own preoccupations may at times impose themselves on the exposition and shape its direction more than is desirable. Moreover his arrangement of material can be difficult to follow; simply finding where he discusses a given passage or text of Proverbs is not always easy. Indeed he occasionally discusses the same passage twice under different headings; an exhaustive Scripture index would enhance the usefulness of the book. In general the expository comments on particular texts are relatively brief and more attention to straightforward exposition might have been expected, although the author does give greater attention to what he identifies as key sections of Proverbs. However the reader who is looking for detailed explanation of the text and the clarification of obscurities will frequently be disappointed. The structure of 'The Message of Proverbs' means that it is best read right through, rather than treated as an occasional work of reference. It is perhaps more a book about Proverbs than an exposition of Proverbs, and those wanting straightforward commentary or exposition really need to look elsewhere.

Keith Ferdinando Ph.D.

Institut Supérieur Théologique

Bunia, The Democratic Republic of Congo