

Book Reviews

THINKERS OF OUR TIMES – C S LEWIS Philip Vander Elst
London: The Claridge Press 1996 114pp No price pb ISBN 1-870626-98-2

‘Of the making of many books there is no end’, observes the preacher in Ecclesiastes and concludes that, ‘much study is weariness of the flesh’. While the first part of the text would be true in respect of Cyril Staples Lewis, the second part most certainly is not. Some thirty years after his death, there is a continuing and growing interest in Lewis’ writings from a large cross-section of people on both sides of the Atlantic.

In his book Philip Vander Elst touches on several reasons for Lewis’ enduring popularity. Lewis was not only a bright intellectual from Oxford, the son of highly intelligent parents, who was rigorously educated by an atheistic free thinker, but he also became by conviction and conversion a professing and practising Christian, able to articulate his faith in a popular and interesting way. The fact that he had emerged from an ardent atheism enabled him to answer the questions that were being asked by all sorts and conditions of people in a way they were able to understand.

The period during which Lewis wrote as a Christian was, as Vander Elst explains, a time of aggressive atheism based on evolutionism; to hold any other view was intellectually unacceptable. It is with that background that Lewis was able to repudiate atheism. There is an interesting line in the film about C S Lewis, starring Anthony Hopkins, where in the senior common-room Lewis is asked sarcastically whether he was still giving easy answers to difficult questions. In fact he was giving simple answers to difficult problems which were balm to the spirit for many. Vander Elst aptly quotes from various works of Lewis that there is a reasonable answer, and that the philosophy of the despair of mankind and of its hopes being buried in a crashing universe, which was proclaimed by Russell and others, was by no means the only word, or even the last word.

Vander Elst demonstrates from Lewis’ writings that he was no systematic theologian, although this does not mean that he was atheological. Theology was not his precise discipline and it is clear that Lewis’ fertile imagination was not bound in the same way as that of an orthodox preacher who is careful to draw out the doctrines from the Scriptures. Lewis approaches theology from a more apologetic stand. He is keen to bring the truth home to his readers and this makes him less concerned for orthodoxy. Perhaps it would be kinder to say that eisegesis rather than exegesis was his strength. Sometimes this enables him to make wonderful points but at other times it leaves the orthodox reader more

than a little uncomfortable. For example, his writings on the Trinity and the Fall are most helpful but his comments on the creation of man make a very large hole in Paul's teaching of the first and the second Adam (pp 37-79).

In that same section Vander Elst quotes from Lewis' *Mere Christianity*:

...the Christian is in a different position from other people who are trying to be good. They hope by being good to please God if there is one... But the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good but God will make us good because he loves us... (p 63).

In the sense that the Christian's life is being transformed by the power of the indwelling Spirit this is true. The problem is that Lewis does not seem to tackle the biblical teaching of free justification by grace through faith and therefore leaves out of the reckoning the imputed righteousness of Christ. There is no reference to justification in the index, nor did I find any reference to it in the book. This is not entirely surprising once we recognize that Lewis is an apologist.

In the area of politics and culture Lewis is biblically at home because as Vander Elst shows, he has a grasp of the fallen nature of man and the world in which we live. In Lewis' theology this enables the Christian to function away from a total immersion in this world's agenda of seeking to change social and political structures as if these were the real enemy. However, Lewis encourages him to be involved in the fight against evil on every front. Lewis is politically and culturally conservative because of his understanding of biblical truth.

What of the *Chronicles of Narnia*? I must declare an interest; for having spent nearly four weeks at the age of thirty-five house-bound with chicken pox, I raided the children's bookshelves and read all the stories in that short period. One of the delights was to try to trace Christian truths of a God of Love who is creator and redeemer, of temptation and rebellion and final loss, being written into the story line. Vander Elst is helpful in showing us that the stories are not like *Pilgrim's Progress*. They have their own life and are not dependent on a sustained analogy but can be read in their own right without a knowledge of the Scriptures.

The book is made up of five chapters with two appendices regarding recommended reading and a note about biographies. There is also an index. Vander Elst writes sympathetically about someone whom he obviously admires and as one who shares many of Lewis' biblical

presuppositions. There is no doubt that Lewis was a great Christian thinker and apologist. For all the vast learning of Oxbridge there can be relatively few who created such interest in their lifetime and are more popular after their death than in their life. Lewis still has much to say today, even to our postmodern society. This book is a good analysis of Lewis' thinking and will be helpful for anyone approaching Lewis for the first time. It is also a good summing-up for the Lewis admirer who has been through nearly all Lewis' writings. It is strongly recommended.

DAVID STREATER

MANUSCRIPTS AND THE TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: An Introduction for English Readers Keith Elliott and Ian Moir
Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1995 111pp £5.95 pb ISBN 0-567-29298-3

Sooner or later every reader of an English Bible will come across footnotes which speak of variations in the manuscript tradition, whether a large problem like the ending of Mark or the passage about the woman caught in adultery in John, or a small variation signalled with a footnote, 'other ancient authorities read ...' This short paperback (revised by Elliott after Moir's death) aims to meet the need for a simple introduction to the textual criticism of the New Testament for students and general readers who have no knowledge of Greek.

The book is very tightly written, with each paragraph containing a wealth of information and a lot of ground is covered in a short compass. The manuscripts are introduced briefly and clearly along with the process of editing a Greek New Testament, with some helpful photographs illustrating both chapters. The book concludes with a historical survey of NT textual criticism. The biggest chapter of the book is given over to a consideration of various textual problems highlighted in modern English versions (the authors declare the NRSV to be the translation with the fullest set of notes). The problems are organized topically: additions/omissions, substitutions, theological alterations, changes of proper names, harmonization, grammatical changes, word order, punctuation etc. This covers a large number of passages very rapidly, and does a good job of introducing readers to the sorts of questions that textual critics ask. It might have been more useful for the general reader to treat fewer problems more fully and in a more discursive manner. I suspect that the overall impact on a reader might be somewhat disconcerting as the discussion often poses more questions than can be answered without appealing either to the Greek or to the particular manuscripts which support alternative readings. Of course this raises fundamental questions about the extent to which the text-critical processes can be *understood*, rather than observed, without *any* knowledge of Greek. Nevertheless, the authors are to be

congratulated for making the attempt and packing in so much information on the way. With a bit of luck it may even encourage readers to learn some Greek.

PETER HEAD

THE DICTIONARY OF CLASSICAL HEBREW, Volume II: א—י

David J A Clines ed

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1995

660pp

£65 hb

ISBN 1 85075 544 2

The modern English-speaking reader of the Old Testament floats happily in a sea of lexical tools which would have been unimaginable only a generation ago. The *DCH* (*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*) contributes usefully to the modern upsurge of philological activity. The volume under review is the second of eight projected volumes. In all, three of these are now in print, encompassing words from *aleph* to *tet*.

The *DCH* breaks new ground on two fronts. The first of these concerns the sources it canvasses. The second involves its approach to assigning meaning to Hebrew words and the presentation of this material.

First then, to the sources. This is a dictionary of *classical* Hebrew. Prior Hebrew dictionaries have usually identified themselves as lexica of the *Old Testament*, though this has always been understood to require rigorous attention to the field of wider Semitic language.¹ The *DCH* self-consciously avoids such limits. Its editors have not wished to create a dictionary of the Hebrew language as it is encountered in the Old Testament, though the Bible necessarily remains their principal source. Rather, they present the words found in all Hebrew literature from the earliest date down to about 200 years after the dawn of the Common Era. The dictionary has four sources: the Hebrew Bible, leaving aside the Aramaic passages; Ben Sira; the Hebrew manuscripts from the Judaean Desert (Dead Sea Scrolls); Hebrew inscriptions. That published editions of many of the scrolls are seeing the light during the period in which this dictionary is under way means that treatment of those sources is immediately incomplete. However, this is an unavoidable accident of history, and will surely be put right in future editions of the *DCH*.

Secondly, the *DCH* is exclusively a *Hebrew* dictionary. It parts company

¹ Eg the well known 'BDB': F Brown, S R Driver and C A Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford 1907); and the volumes which are currently being released in English such as L Koehler and W Baumganner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden 1995—).

with the tradition of providing information regarding the historical development of Hebrew words. One will find in this work very few references to cognates from the non-Hebrew Semitic languages. Similarly, the editors eschew any attempt to assign particular words or forms to 'early' or 'late' stages of the language. Essentially, Hebrew is treated synchronically as a unitary phenomenon.

It is Hebrew words *in their context* which are the concern of this work, and these are presented in admirable detail. For example, a word like **נִבְרָא** is first identified as a masculine noun, together with its principal meaning ('man') and the number of its occurrences in each of the four sources. This basic information is then elaborated in greater detail, so that one finds citations of occurrences where the word designates man 'as distinct from woman', 'from God', 'assoc. with childlessness', etc. However, this is only the beginning. The concern with *words in their context* means that we are next treated to a list of occurrences where **נִבְרָא** occurs in different relationships with surrounding words; as the subject of a verb, in a noun clause, as the object of a verb, in construct, in apposition to another noun, in combination with adjectives, etc.

The value of this accumulated data may not be clear to the reader who seeks only a quick, workable definition. However, the attempt to provide the reader with a variety of angles from which to arrive at his or her own conclusions yields a storehouse of information for which the student of the Bible and other Hebrew literature must be grateful. An index of English translations appears at the end of each volume.

The *DCH* has been criticized for jettisoning the comparative tradition which seeks to place the Hebrew of the Bible within its broader Semitic context, for its sometimes indiscriminate lists of data, and for certain inconsistencies of method and presentation.

This reviewer considers that some of these criticisms are blunted if measured against what the editors have actually set out to achieve.

For the student who will own just one Hebrew dictionary, the *DCH* may not be the most prudent investment possible. However, used alongside the traditional Hebrew dictionaries, the *DCH* deserves an appreciative response from the serious student of the language who seeks a better understanding not only of the Hebrew of the biblical authors and editors, but also of their Hebrew-writing cousins of the several centuries which straddle the beginning of the Common Era.

DAVID BAER

THE CHURCHES IN ENGLAND FROM ELIZABETH I TO ELIZABETH II **Kenneth Hylson-Smith**

London: SCM Press 1996	Vol I (1558–1688)	348pp	£19.95
		ISBN 0-334-02638-5	
	Vol II (1689–1833)	398pp	£19.95
		ISBN 0-334-02668-7	

The author of these volumes is a Fellow and Bursar of St Cross College, Oxford and has already laid us in his debt with his histories of Evangelicalism and High Churchmanship. His latest work covers two-thirds of a trilogy dealing with the fortunes of the various churches in England over the past four centuries. The first volume ends with the Glorious Revolution and the end of the papist threat presented by James II. The succeeding work then covers what we have to come to regard, particularly since Jonathon Clark's *English Society, 1688-1832*, as the 'long eighteenth century'.

In that work Clark argued for the Anglican predominance within that period. Hylson-Smith presents no such challenging thesis. Indeed, one does not look in his output for anything original. His great strength is that of a synthesizer of the first order, a writer with a tidy and well-organized mind who arranges his topics under clear headings and summarizes with consummate skill. Thus in the first volume he has four major themes – the transformation from Catholicism to Protestantism, the emergence of nonconformity, the relation of the churches to society, and the beginnings of secularism. The second volume has six themes – the increasing complexity of the religious scene with the appearance of different parties, the reaction of the churches to industrial and urban change, the Evangelical Revival, the contribution of the churches to the idea of Britishness, the beginnings of missionary work overseas, and the increasing impact of various brands of secularism.

Hylson-Smith usually begins with the Church of England and follows this with the Free Churches, the Roman Catholics and, finally, the non- or anti-religious aspects of his topic. He has read very widely and his bibliography, though not always accurate ('Hugh, Evan' for 'Hopkins, Hugh Evan' on Simeon is one example), is itself a useful guide to the subject. Moreover, by contrast with some similar works, he pays attention to others than the Church of England. Sometimes his treatment of them looks a little skimpy, but it is good to have it as part of a larger picture. Likewise, it is good to see him making use of detailed studies of particular areas, whether passingly, as of Margaret Bowker's work on the secular clergy of the Lincoln Diocese in the early sixteenth century (and incidentally Hylson-Smith is well acquainted with recent forceful Catholic revisionist theories of the immediately pre-Reformation period), or a little

more fully, as with Mark Smith's study of religion in industrial society based on Oldham and Saddleworth from 1740 to 1865.

The range of these volumes is impressive and their very scope might have made for difficult reading, but Hylson-Smith's style is as clear as his mind. When completed, this work should become a standard source for the study of its subject. If I have a criticism of substance, it is the failure to start at an earlier date. The introductory chapter does cover the events of Henry VIII's reign, but insufficiently for their significance. This is even more the case for that of Edward VI, as a result of which Cranmer receives inadequate attention. I also found the last chapter of the second volume with its telescopic view down to the present day a little jarring and probably, when the final volume appears, unnecessary. Sadly I cannot end this review without referring to my exasperation at the careless proof-reading and in one or two instances at what looked like the author's own inelegance in such a word as 'routinised' and his simple error in repeatedly using 'lead' for 'led'.

ARTHUR POLLARD

DEUTERONOMY (New International Biblical Commentary)

Christopher J H Wright

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson 1996 350pp £7.99 pb
ISBN 0-85364-725-9

It is relatively rare to find a commentary that one can recommend wholeheartedly to the widest range of readers. Chris Wright has produced such a volume on Deuteronomy. It is a marvellous piece of work – warm-hearted yet marked by a deep scholarly integrity; applied yet paying due attention to all the main issues in Deuteronomical studies today; clearly written yet full of profound insights into the theological message of this book. This work is set to be the standard medium-length commentary on Deuteronomy, for both preacher and theologian for many years to come.

The relatively short introduction provides a concise orientation to the increasingly complex world of Deuteronomy studies, and sets out the distinctives of Wright's approach. He majors on the 'missiological significance' of the book, largely on the basis of 4:5-8. This welcome approach takes the 'dynamic' character of the book, addressed to a people on the move into a new land, much more seriously than many other discussions of the text. If, at times, the introduction of a missiological dimension seems a little strained (eg on 1:8), this does not detract from the force of Wright's overall argument.

Such is the quality of Wright's exegesis and explanation that it is almost

invidious to single out particular sections of his work for comment, but his treatment of the Decalogue within the redemptive context of the book is masterful. He repeatedly stresses that the law was not intended to be a means of achieving salvation but rather the appropriate response to salvation already received. In addition, he offers a delicately nuanced and sensitive discussion of the legislation for war in chapters 7 and 20. His exposition of chapter 15 (first set out in *God's People in God's Land* (Exeter 1990)) is enormously helpful. This reviewer did, however, feel that the exposition of 30:11-20 somewhat downplayed the problem of Israel's sinfulness, but that is a minor point.

Overall, the author writes with a wonderfully light touch, which makes this book a joy to read. Its accessibility will make it a hugely valuable resource both in the Church and in the academy. Perhaps its greatest strength lies in the way in which Wright builds up a clear picture of 'Deuteronomistic theology', and then goes on to show how this basic theological framework has been developed elsewhere in the canon, making this volume even more useful to those seeking to bring the teaching of this wonderful book to bear on the life of the Church. If one only possesses one commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, I would have no hesitation in arguing that it should be this one. This is evangelical scholarship at its relevant, gracious, passionate best.

GARY MILLAR

THE STORY OF ATONEMENT

Stephen Sykes

London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1997 177pp £9.95 pb
ISBN 0-232-52213-8

This is the first volume of the *Trinity and Truth* series of which Stephen Sykes, formerly Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge and now Bishop of Ely, is editor. As he admits, the book covers many more topics than the word 'Atonement' suggests. To clarify, the main topics include forgiveness, 'theories' of the Atonement, narrative, sin, justification, merit, other religions, and evangelism. There are two literary interludes, one on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and another on G E Lessing's parable of the ring in *Nathan the Wise*. The main theological positions adopted by Sykes include an objective (but ultimately not penal) atonement, the redefinition of sin in terms of societal poisoning, an inclusivist view of other religions combined with a denial of universalism, and an argument that the primary motivation for evangelism is the praise of God, rather than either fear or love. So many are the topics covered that there is much to agree with, for example in the criticism of reducing God to a character in a narrative, in the 'reconciliation' of James and Paul, or in the denial that the doctrine of justification was alien to the teaching of Jesus.

Breadth, however, is also the problem. The reader is suddenly (and often too briefly) plunged into the deep and disorientating pools of varying topics, for example causal determinism or the anthropological analysis of sacrificial systems. These detours combine with the relative brevity of the book to reduce the attention paid to more pressing arguments. An example comes in the alarmingly abrupt rejection of the doctrine of penal satisfaction which largely relies on asking: 'Do you have to break the leg of someone who breaks your leg?' (p 34). This totally overlooks the subtle articulation of the ontology of divine justice and of the distinctions between divine, personal and governmental justice which have such a strong pedigree throughout the history of the Church. Brevity also produces misleadingly curtailed accounts of the views of others. Sykes claims that the Reformation doctrine of penal satisfaction is 'different in emphasis from earlier attempts at explanation' (p 52), ignoring the explicitly penal emphasis in Hilary of Poitiers and Gregory the Great, to mention but two. John McLeod Campbell is cited as the first writer to offer moral criticism of the penal doctrine (p 148), but this tradition can be traced back at least to Faustus Socinus. Sykes infers from the general action of God that he could not intend to condemn people who have not encountered historic revelation or the witness of the Church 'for that reason alone' (p 141). Has anyone ever held this view? The culpability of such people has only ever been held to stem from their sin and rejection of the general revelation which they *have* received, not from their *not* having heard.

Apart from such specific quibbles, the most significant question concerns a remarkable internal tension within the work itself. In the earlier chapters Sykes defends a doctrine of the Atonement which endorses its objective character, and yet in his treatment of other religions he allows salvation outside Christ without offering any explanation of how this can be compatible with his belief in an Atonement accomplished only through Christ. Sykes may not consider this to be an insurmountable problem, but it so sets at odds the earlier part of his argument with the latter as to leave a serious fissure in the edifice he attempts to construct.

GARRY WILLIAMS

UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH

David Jackman

Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications 1996 196pp No price
ISBN 1-85792-257-3

This welcome reprint of David Jackman's series of biblical expositions which bear upon the nature and work of the church (first published by Kingsway in 1987) deserves a place on every pastor's shelf. The author is convinced that the Scriptures provide the agenda for church life and that

this agenda is neglected only with the most serious consequences. 'Start to study what the Bible has to say about the church and its place in God's purposes', Jackman insists in his introduction, 'and one's whole perspective changes' (p 7). This is a vital reminder in an age overwhelmed with advice on the nature and function of the church drawn from everywhere but the Word of God.

The expositions cover material from the Gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Unfortunately the collection does not contain a study of the Old Testament material which bears on the subject, or Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. However, what we do have is rich in biblical insight and clear, effective application. David Jackman's well-known gifts as a teacher and a pastor are everywhere apparent.

The book explores God's idea of church growth; the making and maturing of disciples following the pattern of the church in Antioch (Acts 11), Thessalonica (Acts 17), and Ephesus (Acts 19). Along the way important questions are raised about the biblical motivation for evangelism and appropriate methods. Jackman then looks at the practical priorities of a Christian congregation, taking as a critical text Acts 2:42, 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer'. He provides a study of the way the gifts God has given should be used within the congregation and another on the character of life which God calls on us to exhibit, especially in our relationships with one another. Other topics he explores include the attitude of service, church discipline, suffering and persecution, and ongoing challenges to unity, to progress, and to leadership. The book concludes with a call to recognize 'the bottom line'; the 'first love' of which the risen Jesus speaks in Revelation 2.

David Jackman has not intended to provide us with a detailed theological study of the doctrine of the church and those seeking such a study will undoubtedly be disappointed. The material in this book retains much of its original character as a series of sermons and addresses. However, for precisely this reason it is every bit as valuable as the more theological approaches of Alan Stibbs, Donald Robinson, Peter T O'Brien and Edmund Clowney. In a clear and simple style he tackles head-on some of the difficulties faced by congregations throughout the world and brings the Word of God to bear upon them. In summary, David Jackman's book represents a call to return to biblical priorities in an age when many are confused about the corporate identity and mission of Christian people. If you do not yet own a copy, take the opportunity afforded by this reprint.

MARK THOMPSON

**THE NATURE OF SALVATION – THEOLOGICAL CONSENSUS
IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 1801-73**

Robert W Prichard

Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press

1997

\$29.95 hb

ISBN 0-252-02309-9

The history of nineteenth-century Anglicanism is usually thought of as a political struggle between two theological parties, the Evangelicals and the Tractarians, each of which was contending in its own way with a third force, variously termed liberalism, modernism or simply 'broad' churchmanship. This picture is now so familiar that it is difficult to imagine any alternative, but Professor Prichard has set out to provide us with one. In a book which in some ways is reminiscent of Peter Nockles' *The Oxford Movement in Context*, Dr Prichard sketches what he calls a consensus theology, which dominated American Episcopalianism from the beginning of the nineteenth century to about 1875.

As Dr Prichard sees it, the newly independent American Church faced a crisis of identity at the end of the eighteenth century. It had revised the Prayer Book in a rationalist direction, largely under the influence of Enlightenment thinkers in England and their American disciples. One of these, William White, became a bishop in 1787 and gradually moved towards a more conservative theology. Looking for a classical kind of Anglicanism which would avoid theological extremes without falling into religious indifference, White rediscovered the latitudinarians of the late seventeenth century. In particular, John Pearson, the author of the famous *Exposition of the Creed*, and Gilbert Burnet became White's spiritual mentors. From them, he developed a theological position which managed to avoid the damaging division between Calvinists and Arminians which was splitting most other Protestant Churches at the time. He also discovered a doctrine of assurance rooted in the covenant theory of baptism and confirmed by an experience of personal commitment in adulthood.

This particular blend of ideas helped the Episcopal Church to contain both its Evangelical and its High Church wings. The former emphasized the experience of renewal, without denying the importance of baptism, whilst the latter concentrated on the importance of the sacrament, without denying the need for adult commitment. White, who lived until 1836, managed to get on with both of these groups without becoming a member of either, and as such he was generally accepted as the theological patriarch of the American Church. When the Oxford Movement began to make an impact in the 1840s, most of those affected realized that they had no business remaining Episcopalian and left for Rome. That realization, says Prichard, was a tacit compliment to the solidity of White's achievement and the essential theological unity of the Episcopal Church.

Unfortunately, that unity could not last. Politically speaking, the Evangelicals lost ground within the Church and began to feel that their interests were not adequately represented. The extremes of the Oxford Movement had called certain things into question, which had long been accepted, if not fully understood. Foremost among them was the notion of 'baptismal regeneration'. As long as everybody agreed that an explicit adult faith commitment was necessary for salvation, Evangelicals could live with this expression, even though they might not like it. But when the Tractarians began to assert that no adult transformation was necessary, and that moral renewal was given to infants in baptism, Evangelicals revolted. In England, the Gorham case allowed them to remain within the Church, but things were more complicated in America. There, the bishops tried to maintain the old consensus as elaborated by White, but after 1870 they could no longer do so. Tractarian views, while never dominant, came to be accepted as a valid alternative within an increasingly pluralistic Anglican identity, and this drove a number of Evangelicals into schism. The formation of the Reformed Episcopal Church in 1873 marked the final breakdown of White's synthesis and the emergence of the modern, pluralistic Episcopal Church.

Dr Prichard's book is an important contribution to our understanding of the development of modern Anglicanism, and English churchpeople would do well to read it carefully. Of course there are differences between England and the USA, but what comes across most strongly here is the sense of an underlying similarity in theological developments in the two countries. Charles Simeon could have come to terms with a William White, but neither would have got on with John Henry Newman, or even with Pusey or Keble. Here, Dr Prichard's book needs to be supplemented by Dr Nockles' work, because the latter leaves us in no doubt that the Tractarians were revolutionaries who virtually destroyed the old 'High Church' party and polarized tensions which an earlier generation of Anglicans had held together. In the end, of course, it was the liberals who reaped the benefit, and who ended up controlling the Church, as they still do. Whether a more determined resistance to Tractarianism on the part of the old 'High Churchmen' would have prevented this is hard to say; for all its good points, the latter failed after 1840 to convince a younger generation of its validity, and as a result it virtually died out. In England, defeat over Irish disestablishment was probably the final blow, and that came at almost exactly the same moment as the final bust-up in the American Church. There is much food for thought here, and Dr Prichard is to be congratulated for having written a stimulating guide to American Episcopalianism during its formative years.

GERALD BRAY

A VISION FOR THE CHURCH – STUDIES IN EARLY CHRISTIAN ECCLESIOLOGY

Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B Thompson edd

Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1997 264pp £22.50 hb ISBN 0-567-08573-2

This is a collection of essays by former students and colleagues of John Sweet, a noted teacher of New Testament at Cambridge over the past generation and a great inspiration to many scholars of very different backgrounds and persuasions. Dr Sweet (he received a Lambeth doctorate for his services in 1994) is a man of wide sympathy who has commanded universal admiration and respect, and this book is a fitting tribute to him. It takes its title from the Book of Revelation, on which Dr Sweet has written a well received commentary, and considers the whole issue of ecclesiology in the NT and in early Christian writings.

The contributions have been carefully ordered so that they cover virtually the whole of the NT text with very little overlap. A curious gap is the absence of any detailed treatment of the Pastoral Epistles, no doubt because the contributor on Paul (Andrew Chester) did not think it was part of his brief to look at them. This is a regrettable lacuna, because so much of the discussion of ecclesiology, both with respect to the NT and to the modern Church, is connected with these writings. But otherwise the volume is quite comprehensive and in many places very illuminating.

Dr William Horbury starts off with a comparison of selected passages from the Septuagint with the NT, and points out the extent of the continuity which one finds between them. In particular, the idea that the church is a gathered community of believers within a wider 'people' which is in some sense chosen by God, is a recurring theme. Michael Goulder seems to think that it was invented by Matthew, but Dr Horbury and Dr Barclay both, in their different ways, point away from that to something more fundamental to the nature of both Judaism and Christianity.

Some of the contributors admit that their appointed subject does not offer great scope for their labours, but even so they have managed to produce some interesting and important work. Morna Hooker on Mark, for example, and David Seccombe on Luke, have both demonstrated how superficially unpromising ground can be made to yield fruit in abundance. Naturally not all the contributions are of equal standing, and some will be questioned by other scholars. Christopher Tuckett has written extensively on the ecclesiology of Q, and has attributed this to a very early, pre-Matthaeian Christian community, but obviously that conclusion is open to question and will be questioned by many. There will also be doubts about the assumptions of John O'Neill's piece on John, a gospel which he

regards as effectively pseudonymous and relatively late.

One of the difficulties in a book like this is that there is no opportunity for synthesis – can one conclude, on the basis of what is written here, that there is such a thing as a NT doctrine of the Church? Or do we have to suppose that each NT writer had his own autonomous perspective which was determined by his own outlook and circumstances? The difficulty here is that the Church was a fact with which all the NT writers had to live, if only because they were members of it. They were therefore theorizing about an existing institution which was still small enough for one part to feel itself in touch with most, if not all, of the others. That in itself ought to argue for a more unified approach than anything found here.

Another difficulty, which is common to works of ecclesiology, is that the various contributors oscillate between different definitions of the Church, with the result that it is not always clear whether we are talking about an essentially spiritual or an essentially sociological phenomenon. This has important consequences of course, especially when we come to ask who the ‘members’ of the Church were and how discipline was exercised. That aspect of the matter is downplayed in these essays, perhaps not surprisingly, although several contributors are honest enough to admit that the NT proclaims a more exclusive vision of Christianity than the one which they themselves prefer.

A book like this is clearly intended for scholars, and non-specialists are sure to find it heavy going. But those who persevere will be rewarded, and the editors are to be congratulated on having produced a fine volume which is sure to find its place in the wider discussion of NT theology in the years ahead.

GERALD BRAY

CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM IN THE FOURTH TO EIGHTH CENTURIES

Ramsay MacMullan

New Haven: Yale University Press 1997

272pp

£21 hb

ISBN 0-300-07148-5

This is a very curious book. Professor MacMullen has begun with the assumption that virtually every scholar and church historian until the early to mid-1980s believed that Christianity triumphed in the time of Constantine in so total a way that paganism simply disappeared. Such scholars were the unwitting victims of Christian propaganda and centuries of dominance by a Church whose priorities lay elsewhere. The fact that monks could (and often did) erase unique works of classical writing in order to reproduce yet another Christian commentary seems to him to be a

wicked distortion of reality which has succeeded in fooling almost everybody until the day before yesterday (or at least until Professor MacMullen started to study the subject and published on it – in 1984).

One can understand Professor MacMullen's desire to appear original, but it is hard not to feel that he has gone much too far this time round. Everyone has always known that paganism did not die overnight – Augustine would never have had to write *The City of God* if that had been the case. There were survivals of pre-Christian cults for centuries, and in some places they can still be found. Rural people, in particular, had a way of assimilating the old into the new, often with the result that their Christianity is little more than baptized paganism. This is widely recognized by people of many different kinds, and has often been written about, so how is it that Professor MacMullen has been passed by? Surely he must know that his thesis is not a new one!

On the broader issue of paganism versus Christianity, it is less than totally honest to suggest that paganism was a healthy, coherent religion with every right to exist in society, and that Christians were unacceptably intolerant in their attempts to get rid of it. For a start, much pagan religious practice was severely criticized by pagan intellectuals, even before the rise of Christianity. Not everybody in the ancient world regarded animal sacrifice as a worthwhile social activity, nor was there universal approval for the bloody and almost invariably pointless circus 'games' and the like. Pagan temples were often run by corrupt cliques for their own profit, and were denounced accordingly. Once the state embraced Christianity it was inevitable that paganism would become 'illegal' though quite what that meant in practice is often hard to say. Openly pagan rites were generally suppressed and there are one or two cases of pagans (like the philosopher Hypatia) who lost their lives for their beliefs, but the scale of persecution which pagans had to endure was much less than that which had been inflicted on the Christians during the first three centuries of the Church's existence.

As for the assimilation of pagan practices into Christianity, this was a widespread problem which the Church tried to overcome, though with limited and varying success. Sir Keith Thomas, in his famous book *Religion and the Decline of Magic* has shown that it was not until the spread of popular Protestantism in the seventeenth century that this problem was dealt with, and even today there are people who continue to consult astrologers and the like.

Does all this mean that Constantine achieved nothing, and that Christianity did not really win the day in the fourth century? No, because in spite of all the problems, what happened at that time was that the seal of

legitimate, public truth passed to the Christian Church. After AD 400 those who objected to Christianity were clearly on the defensive and were undertaking a counter-cultural campaign. The Church still had a long way to go in changing popular practices, but the initiative lay with it. Getting a pagan education was still possible until the closure of the philosophical schools in 529, but it led nowhere. Examples of conservative resistance can be found among the social élite as well as among the peasants in the countryside, but these are exceptions to an increasingly general rule.

The generation of Augustine and Jerome claimed the cultural high ground and their successors maintained it without serious opposition until the late seventeenth century. Even then, it was usually the rational achievements of the ancient philosophers, not paganism, which appealed to those who rejected Christianity. Neo-paganism has admittedly been tried on occasion, but it has never got very far, and the reason has to be that it was supplanted by something which was (and is) intrinsically superior to it. One does not have to admire or approve of everything the Church has done to recognize that basic fact. Professor MacMullen's revisionist approach to the late antique period ends in obfuscation, not in revelation. It may comfort and even embolden a few armchair atheists, but it will not make a serious impression on real scholarship, nor is it likely to alter most people's perception of what actually happened during those centuries.

GERALD BRAY

2 CORINTHIANS (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series)

Linda L Belleville

Leicester: IVP 1996 357pp £9.99 hb ISBN 0-85111-679-5

Whatever is IVP doing in producing yet another commentary on 2 Corinthians when they published Paul Barnett on the same letter in the *Bible Speaks Today* series as recently as 1988? The answer is that Linda Belleville's book is longer (357 against 188 pp) and therefore more detailed, different in style, with what the publishers justifiably claim is a unique combination of solid, biblical exposition and helpful explanatory notes (the latter printed clearly beneath a line on each page), and insights into situations where they feel that the NIV text, on which this series of commentaries is based, does not adequately or correctly represent the original Greek. There is thus much more opportunity to consider in detail the exegesis of individual words and phrases as, for example, *thriambeuo* in 2:14, while on page 150, in dealing with a key text on the atonement (5:14) the author is able to consider the significance of the apostle's use of the preposition *hyper* rather than *anti* – a point which is not even considered by Barnett.

All students of the New Testament will be aware that the structure and integrity of this letter is a minefield of differing views. Linda Belleville handles all these ideas with careful consideration, examining the arguments for and against each possibility with courtesy and clarity, but coming down firmly in favour of the traditional conservative defence of the unity of the letter as it stands. As well as a section examining these arguments in the introduction (pp 23-33), she returns to the subject with further insights in the context of each disputed section.

As befits one who is both an associate professor of biblical literature at a seminary in Chicago and a minister of the Evangelical Covenant Church, the author combines careful scholarship with many helpful pastoral insights, and these are introduced by a section on Paul's pastoral ministry in the introduction (pp 41-44). She is also outspoken in seeing the relevance of the letter to our own day in the ministerial challenges that plague many of our churches, and highlights the kind of problems that are sadly only too familiar in the West:

an emphasis on individualism, narcissistic attitudes and values, a need to be the best at everything and a focus on externals. At the core is a spiritual arrogance and a materialistic orientation that becomes evident in the importance placed on such showier gifts of the Spirit as tongues, knowledge and healing. It reveals itself in our judging others by how they look, rather than by what they say and do. It colors our expectations that the Christian life should bring health, wealth and prosperity. It surfaces in the glitz and stage performance of many worship services. It expresses itself in the mentality of 'bigger is better' – the more members, programs, committees and the like, the more successful we think the church is. And it seeks power – power evangelism, power preaching and power spirituality. (pp 44-5)

Her insight into the derivation of Greek words sheds much light on the text (eg *panourgia* on p 271) and she is at home with a variety of translations, quoting with approval J B Phillips on 9:13. There are several references to the Cotton Patch Version (pp 191, 194) which will not be familiar to English readers, and a reference to where this might be obtained would be helpful. However, an anecdote from C H Spurgeon (p 112) helps to redress the transatlantic balance. There are frequent references to the modern 'signs and wonders movement', where the author identifies their New Testament counterparts with the party who were opposing Paul at Corinth. Thus on page 92 she says with reference to 3:1-3 'His critics boasted ... of the presence and power of the Spirit in their ministry. But for them it was the Spirit's presence manifested in and through the working of signs, wonders and miracles (12:11-12). Paul, on

the other hand, looked to the inward change of heart as the primary evidence of the Spirit's presence. It is changed lives, not sensational feats, that are the true sign of a Spirit-directed ministry.' Again, reflecting the American context of the commentator, the prosperity gospel comes in for well-merited criticism.

In a commentary on a letter which contains two key chapters on giving (8 and 9) we are given a sound pastoral consideration of the principle of tithing, and in keeping with the aims of sound exegesis Belleville is not afraid to expose the inadequacies of the NIV translation. It would be a particularly diligent proof-reader who could not let any mistakes slip by in such a full and detailed work, but two of significance are on page 102 in the footnote where 3:15 refers not to the *unveiled* but to the *veiled* heart of the Jew, and on page 267 where a strange reference to 1 Kingdoms 2:10 probably refers to 1 Kings 20:11.

These are carping criticisms of a commentary which for many years to come will provide a valuable resource for preachers and teachers who want to relate this letter and its contents to the needs and situations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Christian congregations.

DAVID WHEATON

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