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Book Reviews

FUNDAMENTALISM AND EVANGELICALS

Harriet A Harris

Oxford: OUP 1998

384pp

£48

hb

ISBN 0-19-826960-9

Observers of the religious scene are well aware that the most prominent single development among Protestants since 1945 has been the astonishing rise of the Evangelical movement. Opinions differ, but it is probable that in most parts of the world, declared Evangelicals now make up a majority of the Protestant population, and in some places (notably in Latin America) they have made deep inroads into the Roman Catholic community as well. Oddly enough, however, this phenomenon has not been recorded in print as much as one might think. There have been a few histories of Evangelicalism, and there is a sizeable body of polemical literature dealing with 'fundamentalism', but until now there has been no serious attempt to analyse the movement from something approaching a dispassionate, objective standpoint.

To some extent, this is not surprising. Evangelicals are a varied group, and even if they appear to be much the same to outsiders, they are rent by internal divisions which to many of them are far more immediate and meaningful than the broader distinctions of traditional Christianity. It is also the case that their commitment to evangelism is disconcerting to those who do not share it, and who in one way or another find themselves on the receiving end of their preaching. Obviously anyone who calls for conversion does so because he or she believes that others need to hear this message, and this is bound to lead to charges of arrogance from those who reject it. It is also likely to produce hostility from the same people, which can easily manifest itself in biased reporting based as much on personal reactions as on any sort of objective fact.

Dr Harris enters this minefield with the intention of elucidating what it is that makes fundamentalists and Evangelicals tick, how they are related to each other, what distinctions can validly be made between them, and what their abiding strengths and weaknesses are. She writes as an outsider, but notes that she has received full co-operation from a wide range of fundamentalist-evangelical sources, which is good to hear, not least because it is a little surprising in some cases. She does not deal over much with the historical background, though she points out that modern 'fundamentalism' emerged as a kind of coalition between holiness and dispensationalist movements in the latter part of the nineteenth century. What really got things going though, was the need to combat theological liberalism in the churches, especially after 1918, and this led to a curious

alliance between holiness dispensationalists on the one hand, and conservative Calvinist academics, many of them based at Princeton, on the other. Friction between these two constituencies continued to surface from time to time, but on the whole, the uniting power of a common enemy was enough to overcome most reservations, and to create what we now recognize as modern Evangelicalism. The extent to which the word 'fundamentalist' can legitimately be applied to the offspring of this union is a tricky issue, and Dr Harris discusses the matter at some length. Her conclusion is that while there is a 'hard-line' Evangelicalism which is separatistic with respect to other Christians and therefore undoubtedly 'fundamentalist' in a sense which does not apply to others, when it comes to basic beliefs *all* Evangelicals share a basically fundamentalist perspective, which is largely defined by the high place which they assign to the Bible as the written Word of God.

As her guide to this, Dr Harris selects Professor James Barr, whose approach to 'fundamentalism' she largely accepts, even though she recognizes that Evangelicals are unhappy with Barr's definitions. Here she has confined herself to the writings of those Evangelicals who have undertaken responses to Barr, and she has discovered that more often than not, they appear to miss the point of Barr's criticisms. This is doubtless fair enough, but if she had dug a little deeper she would have discovered that Evangelicals have good reasons for distrusting Barr's judgment. First of all, anyone who engages in controversy is under an obligation to treat his adversaries with the normal courtesies, and this Professor Barr has conspicuously failed to do. If someone were to write a book about Roman Catholicism entitled *Popery* (and then follow it with a sequel called *Escaping from Popery*), claiming that calling Catholics 'Papists' was to be preferred as a more accurate expression of their theological views than the word 'Catholic', even if the people thus described found it offensive, most observers would surely think that the books in question were biased to the point of unreliability, even if many of the statements contained in them happened to be true. Evangelicals feel this way about Barr's writings, and because of that very few are prepared to take them seriously.

Another problem with Barr is that while he criticizes 'fundamentalists' for their bias and lack of objective scholarship, it is quite clear that he is not engaging in the latter himself when studying them. Those with long memories remember that Professor Barr was once the secretary of the Theological Students' Fellowship at Edinburgh University, and was therefore to be numbered among the people he is now condemning. They not unnaturally suspect that much of what he has to say is motivated by personal animus, rather than by any desire to get at the facts. Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with people trying to demonstrate that what they believe is true, as long as they are prepared to be guided by what they

discover along the way. Columbus believed that he would get to India by sailing west. Things worked out somewhat differently, but without that initial belief he would never have set out at all. Catholics, Jews and atheists all seek to demonstrate the truth of their convictions by research – why should Evangelicals be singled out for special condemnation in this respect? Professor Barr's basic (and pre-critical) hostility to his subject is only too clear, and for that reason he is an unsafe guide to it.

Moving on from him, Dr Harris concentrates mainly on the philosophical roots of modern Evangelicalism, and this explains what might otherwise appear to be a somewhat odd selection of material. She recalls how the old Princeton theologians were influenced by Scottish 'common sense' philosophy, even though that was not particularly conservative (and certainly not Evangelical) in its origins, and contrasts this with the alternative model developed in the nineteenth century by Abraham Kuyper and carried on since then by the Free University of Amsterdam and various Dutch offshoots in North America. She is gracious enough not to point out that Kuyper's ideas provided a marvellous underpinning for *apartheid* in South Africa, even if that was not what Kuyper himself intended, but she does show that its separatistic tendencies have had a hard time of it in the English-speaking world. British Evangelicalism has been particularly resistant to it, not least because British Evangelicals are inextricably mixed up with the establishment in Britain. For example, the idea of starting a 'Christian' university along Kuyperian lines would never appeal to those keen public schoolboys whose main aim is to get to Oxbridge, where they can join a flourishing Christian Union, so that even if something like that were tried, it would get nowhere. The American scene, with its great diversity, is more open to that sort of thing, but it cannot really be said that Kuyperianism (in whatever form) has been more than a marginal influence on evangelical life in English-speaking countries.

The philosophical bent of the book also explains why the more recent period has been dominated by such figures as Cornelius Van Til and Anthony Thiselton, both of whom attract a great deal of Dr Harris' attention, but neither of whom has had much impact on Evangelicals as a whole. She even finds the space to devote a paragraph to Stephen C Perks, who is the founder and director of Christian reconstruction in Britain. After being ordained in something called the Chalcedon Reformed Church, Mr Perks established a congregation in Whitby, but even Dr Harris has to concede that it 'currently comprises only his family members' (p 268). By no stretch of the imagination can it be said that someone like that represents anyone but himself, and it is not presenting a fair picture of Evangelicals to give them such prominence. Another example given by Dr Harris is that of College House in Cambridge, which

is supposedly a centre of Kuyperian thought in that city, even though it is totally unknown to most local Evangelicals and is not even listed in the telephone directory!

Dr Harris cannot overlook such figures as John Stott and James Packer, though neither of them really belongs in the company just mentioned, and whatever philosophy they have is derived (and abridged) from elsewhere. This has not made them any less effective as pastors, evangelists and Christian communicators, but it is a reminder that Evangelicalism is an essentially different kind of animal from what is being presented here. Two chapters on Dutch neo-Calvinism but not a single word about the Alpha course (for example) provide a strange picture, which no British Evangelical and few American ones will recognize. Those who read her book will learn a great deal from it, but they are unlikely to see themselves in it.

Having said that, it must be remembered that this book is a pioneering effort in largely uncharted waters. That it takes a certain line is perhaps only to be expected, and within the parameters which Dr Harris sets for herself, she has done a remarkably good job. There was a time in the early 1970s when Kuyperianism in some form might have taken over English-speaking Evangelicalism, and Dr Harris' perception that modern Evangelicalism is a coalition of disparate elements cobbled together for a basically negative purpose (combating modernism) is surely accurate. The same must unfortunately be said for her assertion that Evangelicalism has not moved on from that to produce a valid apologetic which can hold its own in the marketplace of ideas, a failure which puts it constantly at the mercy of some form of anti-intellectual fundamentalism. All Evangelicals who care about their faith, and who believe it to be true, should read this book and grapple with the issues which it raises. It is not by any means the last word on the subject, but it surely deserves to become the first word in a new debate about who we Evangelicals are and where we are going.

GERALD BRAY

THE PROTESTANT FACE OF ANGLICANISM

Paul Zahl

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998 112pp £12.99/\$19.00 hb
ISBN 0-8028-3775-1

This book is good in parts. Zahl's main thesis, that the Anglican Church has a Protestant dimension, will not be as 'virtually unknown' to readers of *Churchman* as is suggested on the book's dust-cover. Nevertheless, any realization of this heritage is to be welcomed. In particular, Zahl attacks the *via media* view of the Anglican Church that dilutes doctrinal distinctives. His potted accounts of English and American Anglican

history usefully support this stance.

Yet Zahl's positioning of this Protestant dimension raises problems for his overall argument. As the title suggests, Protestantism is, for Zahl, a 'face' of Anglicanism. It is located in a Janus-like relationship with an opposite 'Catholic' face. Two problems present themselves. First, his dismissal of liberalism as a force in its own right within contested Anglican identities later serves to blur its interaction with the 'Protestant' face in an unsatisfactory manner. Second, his Janus-like construction constrains his restoration of Protestantism. By his own admission he is not replacing the Catholic face, nor even seeking to place it under its Protestant counterpart. Instead, he asks the restricted question: 'What contribution does the Protestant ethos within Anglicanism have to make?' (p 7). By settling for a Protestant ethos, Zahl comes dangerously close to succumbing to his own later critique of ethos-based Anglicanism (cf p 35).

The overall effect is a reasonable and provocative internal argument about Protestantism but a limited and counter-productive external assessment of its place in the 'wider' Anglican identity. Although appeal is made to the Thirty-Nine Articles (their 1801 American version forming an Appendix), the foundational realization that their original form *is* historic and normative Anglicanism is never quite stated. One is left asking whether it is truly accepted, but the author's internal argument is sufficient to allow a charitable assumption to be made.

Serious questions nevertheless remain regarding Zahl's internal argument. The linking of the Enlightenment with Protestantism appears too close for comfort. Zahl laments a focus on method rather than content (p 67), but still brings feminist, liberation, process and gay theological agendas virtually under the banner of 'Protestantism' (p 57).

Given its price, the book might fare better in the UK in a cheaper, paperback formula. It rewards a thoughtful read, but is not the book I had hoped I could recommend to a (hypothetical) fellow ordinand who is wandering from evangelical roots. It is, perhaps, more a book pitched at a 'broad church' needing to develop some Protestant sympathies.

MATTHEW SLEEMAN

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS (New International Commentary on the New Testament)

Paul Barnett

Cambridge: Eerdmans 1997 xxx+662pp £30 hb ISBN 0-8028-2300-9

We have already been blessed with an exposition of 2 Corinthians by

bishop Paul Barnett in the *Bible Speaks Today* series. His latest offering however is a full-length technical commentary on that same letter in the *NICNT* series, as a replacement for one by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes. The reader will quickly notice the difference between this and Barnett's earlier work. There is more attention to the Greek text, lively interaction with recent scholarship and a thorough treatment of historical issues. Barnett weaves doctrinal comment into his exegesis and always has an eye on the broader biblical theology into which 2 Corinthians fits.

Particularly welcome is the attention paid to connectives throughout the letter; too often commentaries leave the preacher wondering whether the Apostle Paul had an ounce of logic in him, but not so this commentary. Paul's line of thought is carefully traced from paragraph to paragraph with a meticulous eye for detail. It can be exhausting (every $\delta\epsilon$ and $\gamma\alpha\rho$ is subjected to close scrutiny) but rewarding for those who see the text as more than a series of unconnected 'thoughts for the day'.

Dr Barnett gives a thorough defence of the letter's unity. There are, he declares after reviewing the arguments, 'several good reasons for upholding the unity of 2 Corinthians and no conclusive arguments for rejecting it' (p 24). Not least among these good reasons is the overarching logic to Paul's argument throughout the letter, the recurring theme of which is 'power-in-weakness'. However, the case is not overstated: there may be no *conclusive* arguments against unity but there are some, a fact which is taken seriously. The bishop is no pious obscurant, secretly wishing for a return to the 'good old days' when such issues were never discussed. Rather, no weak argument goes unanswered.

Infuriating for the preacher who desires more certainty, Barnett is always cautious when attempting to reconstruct the situation in Corinth. He has his own ideas and can mirror-read the text with the best of commentators ancient and modern. He even offers us some tantalizing speculations. What he resolutely refuses to do, however, is to base his exegesis completely on speculation. Commenting on 10:1-6 he claims the details of the historical situation are 'impossible for us to reconstruct at this distance', but that, 'Paul gives his readers an important teaching that does not ultimately depend on whatever historical context existed'. It would be nice to know more, but we can preach the message of the book without it.

As an aid to preaching, this commentary has much to commend it. Greek is kept to the footnotes, but the more one has, the more one will benefit from Barnett's insight. The footnotes are remarkably educational, explaining most of the many technical terms used. One does not need to read cover-to-cover; much of what has gone before is summarized at the beginning of each section and there is a plethora of footnotes which repeat

and refer the reader back to previous discussions. This makes it useful to those who may only be 'dipping-in' to preach one or two sermons. The *NIV* is used as the basis for comment (helpful if that is what your congregation is reading!) although it does not escape criticism. Each section contains some useful comments on application, which go some way towards bridging the hermeneutical gap. However, consonant with Barnett's insistence that 2 Corinthians ranks alongside the Pastoral Epistles as a book for the Christian minister, the applications are too often directed solely at the minister or missionary. This is also true of his *BST* exposition. Notwithstanding this small complaint, I warmly commend this commentary as a solid, reliable and thought-provoking guide to the text of 2 Corinthians.

LEE GATISS

DANCING ON THE EDGE

Richard Holloway

London: Fount/HarperCollins 1997 200pp £8.99 pb ISBN 0-00-62 8041-2

Richard Holloway is the Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Episcopal Church of Scotland. He writes about 'Faith in a post-Christian age' (this book's subtitle) in order to reach out to those on 'the edge of Christianity' (Introduction, p ix). The book has three sections: Making Sense of God, Making Sense of Ourselves, and Making Sense of Community. There are striking chapter headings such as: 'Is God a Fundamentalist?'

We start with faith: 'The opposite of faith is not doubt but certainty' (p 3). This is not the same as the verse in Hebrews that 'faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' (11:1). Certainty is a bad thing in the author's eyes. Of this he is quite sure.

The authority of the church is also discussed: 'The New Testament is the creation of the Church' (pp 50-4). This is not the same as the verse in James that God gave us 'birth through the word of truth' (1:18). But the author pursues substantial reinterpretation of the ancient text.

Holloway writes that Jesus teaches 'the provisional status of all human systems, including moral systems' (p 53) because he said that 'the Sabbath was made for man' (Mark 2:27). Further, 'when Jesus was asked to describe the most important moral commandments he answered with a generality so sweeping that it gives us little precise advice in specific situations, but if we lived by it our behaviour would be radically altered' (p 58). An alternative view is that a vague Christ produces vague Christians.

The chapter on suffering brings sharp analysis and empathy with life's victims. But the comforts of Scripture are absent. We are not told that the issue is faced in the book of Job, that God experienced pain at the Cross of Christ, and that under God's sovereign hand, trouble is always purposeful. Instead we read that the atrocities of this century require a new theology.

I looked up the author's Bible references and was a little puzzled by his use of some of them. He claims that 'there is more than a hint that sex is a consequence of the Fall' (p 12) yet the verse 'they shall be one flesh' (Gen 2:24) precedes the Fall. (From this he argues that Christians have often seen sex as a disease.) He also says that 'all parts of creation are pronounced good or completed by God, except humanity' (p 108). Yet the 'very good' of Genesis 1:31 includes the people whom God has created.

The central claim of the book is that 'all human systems and theories, secular as well as sacred, were made by us and can be altered or abandoned by us. We do not have to accept any system if we do not like its consequences' (p 176). Apparently we do this a lot: 'Even a superficial knowledge of human history shows how often we have changed our minds' (p 177). However the church 'may yet resume her role as one of the great spiritual teachers and guides of humankind' (p 192). It is a curious idea that the world is supposed to listen to a church which does not know what it believes.

The book is not orthodox. We are not taught the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the sacrificial love of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, the call to patient endurance or the judgment to come. Instead, 'Jesus warned us that by holding on to things we would run the risk of losing our very souls' (p 195). This is not the same as St Mark: 'For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever wants to save his life for me and for the gospel will save it' (8:35). Jesus gave us something to hold on to: him and his words. How sad that the bishop should offer us something less.

JONATHAN FRAIS

GREGORY THE GREAT AND HIS WORLD

R A Markus

Cambridge: CUP 1997 241 pp £14.95 pb ISBN 0-521-58608-9

Professor Markus is widely known for his writings on the subject of ancient Christianity, and he has long specialized in the transitional period from the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Gregory the Great, who was pope from 590 to 604, is the archetypal figure of this transition, being Roman enough to understand and share in the heritage of

the classical past and yet at the same time being forced to adapt to new realities. The world he lived in was going through serious long-term changes which had no precedent and which were leading in a direction which to contemporaries could only appear to be disastrous. The ancient unity and prosperity of Italy was rapidly being destroyed, and Gregory was the first statesman who had to deal with a peninsula divided into rival sovereignties and allegiances. It was to become a long-running theme, and despite the nineteenth-century reunion of the country, there are signs that it may not be over yet, but to Gregory it was both new and undesirable, as his many attempts to deal with the resulting problems show only too clearly.

Dr Markus guides us through Gregory's voluminous correspondence (though probably only a fraction of the original deposit survives), and his major writings which concentrate heavily on ascetic themes. Gregory was a monk who became a bishop against his will – he felt he had neither the talent nor the inclination for high ecclesiastical office. But although his spiritual concerns always remained at the forefront of his activities, he nevertheless became a very effective administrator and strategic planner, so much so that subsequent historians have often reckoned that the medieval papacy began with him.

By taking a global view of Gregory's activities, Dr Markus shows us quite clearly what the opportunities and the limitations of the papacy were in his day. Basically, if the secular rulers were against him he could not do much for the church. In Spain, for example, he was deeply involved in the Byzantine province in the south, where Roman authority was upheld, but had little or nothing to do with the Visigothic kingdom which dominated most of the peninsula. Similarly in northern Italy, he was powerless in the Lombard kingdom, where it seems that schism was deliberately fostered in order to create an independent church establishment. On the other hand, the Frankish kingdom accepted his spiritual primacy and opened the way for him to undertake the mission to the English, for which he is best known in this country. Dr Markus does not dwell on that episode any more than he must in the overall context of Gregory's life, but he shows us clearly what the spiritual and political context was which made it possible for him to sponsor the work of Augustine of Canterbury.

Dr Markus has undertaken a survey of one of the greatest popes of all time, who has been curiously ignored in the English-speaking world for nearly a century. He has succeeded in giving us a credible portrait of the man, both as a spiritual leader and as a church administrator. Set against the background of his troubled times, his achievement is all the more remarkable, and deserves to be studied more closely than it has been of late. We are in Dr Markus' debt for having made this easier, and his book

will no doubt become the standard reference work on the subject for the foreseeable future.

GERALD BRAY

THE BIBLE AND THE MODERN WORLD

David Clines

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1997 116pp £9.50 pb ISBN 1-85075-841-7

For some years now Dr Clines has taught a course at Sheffield on what he calls the Bible 'in the modern world'. By this he means the way in which the Bible is read and used outside the academic community, and even outside the church altogether. He has noticed, for example, that biblical themes occasionally feature in advertising, and that references to Scripture are fairly frequent in the press and elsewhere. What does this mean? How do ordinary people understand the place of the Bible in our society?

To answer this question, Dr Clines got his students to undertake various surveys at different times, and he publishes the results in this book. Perhaps the most surprising result is that churchgoing in Sheffield seems to be much higher than it is elsewhere in England. About 20-25% of those surveyed went to church weekly, which is double the national average, and Bible knowledge among them was remarkably high. In general women knew more than men, and old people more than young ones, but the differences between the sexes and ages are not great, which suggests that in spite of all the talk of secularization, there is still a widespread interest in, and knowledge of, the Bible in our society.

Rather more oddly, about half the people surveyed believed that the Bible was 'myth' but many of them nevertheless believed that it was of great personal comfort. Dr Clines does not suggest why this is so, though perhaps the reason is that traditions of popular piety have withstood the onslaught of modern biblical criticism better than one might have thought. The latter remains theoretical as far as most people are concerned, but when the chips are down, they look instinctively to the sacred text for reassurance. Probably too, the passages they turn to are not in themselves mythical – the Sermon on the Mount, for example, or the twenty-third psalm.

The chapters of this book were given as Didsbury lectures at the Nazarene College in Manchester in 1993, and they read in a popular and engaging style. Perhaps the most surprising thing about them is that they have been published as a book, since they come across more like articles that one might expect to find in a magazine such as *Third Way*. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to find at least one academic who is aware of the world outside his faculty, and Dr Clines is to be commended for

undertaking this project. In the end it is probably his students who will benefit from it most, particularly those who will be going out from the halls of academe to minister to the very people who have provided the substance of these surveys, and hence of this book.

GERALD BRAY

THE CRUCIBLE OF CREATION: The Burgess Shale and the Rise of Animals

Simon Conway Morris

Oxford: OUP 1998 242pp £18.99 hb ISBN 0-19-850256-7

Anything which touches on the subject of Creation and Evolution is bound to raise interest among conservatives who bow to Scripture as normative, 'God's Word written'. Modern Evangelicals may not be so concerned, mainly for two reasons: Scripture has been eclipsed to an appreciable extent by an emphasis on a contemporary working of the Holy Spirit which acts to supplement or even bypass it; and the one-sided publicity in the media for expert neo-Darwinian protagonists which creates a widespread impression that all is over bar the shouting, and we might as well therefore soft-pedal our biblical convictions. Added to these of course is the fact that knowledge of the Bible (except through public caricatures) is now quite minimal even in educated circles. All this gives interest to a book such as this, in which the author, elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1990 and occupying the prestigious chair of Evolutionary Paleobiology at Cambridge, discusses the remarkable disclosures of the Burgess Shale of Western Canada.

The Burgess Shale, 'the most wonderful fossil deposit in the world', was discovered in 1909 by the American geologist Charles Walcott in British Columbia. The shale is of mid-Cambrian age, about 500 million years old and similar formations have since been found in other parts of the world. The mud from which the shale was formed was very fine, and something about its chemistry prevented even the soft parts of its embedded fauna from decaying. As a result its abundant fossils contain a wealth of internal structure, marvellously preserved and accessible to minute dissection; and not only have forms already known from mineralized parts become better understood, but many others with soft parts only have been preserved for study. The author describes and illustrates photographically a large number of the highly interesting forms found. Naturally most of this is material for the specialist (though there are four vivid colour plates of some of these strange new creatures of interest to all).

However, concern here will be in a more theological direction. The author takes strong issue with the well known palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould

who had in his prize-winning book *Wonderful Life* (1990) commented on the shale fossils as indicating that the range of forms there was so vast compared with what there is now that the course of evolution could only be regarded as 'one colossal lottery'. In other words it seems (to the present reviewer) as if Gould (who is a Marxist) was implying that this new evidence indicated that even if we allow that God had designed the fundamental laws of physics he could not have been sure that evolution would eventually have produced man. He could hardly therefore be said to have *purposed* him. God would himself have been at most a sort of 'retainer' of chance, waiting to see if it would in the end offer him what he wanted.

Morris opposes this view on the evidence of the shale itself, on which he (unlike Gould) has spent years working. He argues that Gould has forgotten the phenomenon of convergence – that diverse distinct lines often tend to converge to the same end result, and he instances (p 203) the sabre-toothed tiger and the very similar sabre-toothed South American marsupial, both with a striking peculiarity independently developed. Morris' argument does not go very far towards meeting the biblical position, but it goes a little way, and is welcome as coming from a palaeontologist of his eminence. Gould's assessment of man as an evolutionary accident 'leads us into a libertarian attitude' which leaves us responsible and free 'to mould our destiny to our desire'. This sounds like the Serpent, though I am not sure how far Morris would go in agreeing with that.

This is a book which is of importance especially to those who feel called to work in this significant area of biblical apologetics. If we are to engage in this it is important to know how leading biologists are thinking. Our author's first chapter, after all, opens (almost) with the query: 'Evolution: why no consensus?' That should be a spur to those who entertain the idea of transcendence, as Morris himself does.

DOUGLAS SPANNER

LOOK TO THE ROCK: An Old Testament background to our understanding of Christ

Alec Motyer

Leicester: IVP 1996 205 pp £9.99 pb ISBN 0-85 11 1 – 1 68-8

The regrettable 'assured result' of liberal scholarship is a lost confidence in the Old Testament (OT) among Christians, compounded by widespread ignorance of its contents. Motyer is passionate about the OT, and his conviction that the Bible is a whole book which finds its focus in Christ gives for a lively exposition of themes central to the OT's messianic hope.

Each theme shows the OT to be a book which from the earliest chapters is always 'going somewhere'. Thus King and Kingdom, first introduced in Judges, hold up the ideal of God's king – an ideal looked to in history books and Royal Psalms, but achieved by no one in the OT. So too the triad of covenant, grace and law find their 'better' fulfilment in Christ. The priority of grace over law (ie what the Lord *does* always precedes what he *demand*s) is shown to run through the whole OT.

Two chapters on 'Christ as Revelation' examine the image of God and the word of God. In this context, 'teaching' is seen to be more helpful than 'law' as a translation of *Torah*. In a thrilling exposition of the 'word of God' theme, Motyer takes a careful look at what the text *does* affirm about inspiration and the role of the prophet, and rescues the effective word of God from impersonal, mechanistic models.

Sin and death grow and spread from the 'emergent history' – Motyer's translation of the 'generations' formula (*toledoth*) found several times in Genesis. Death itself, and the assertion that in the OT 'the dead are alive', is followed through several key texts, although ultimately the conundrum of harmonizing what the OT affirms is left unsolved until the NT and Jesus.

In a final chapter, history, creation, time and truth are all shown to be teleological. Time in the OT is understood in the shadow of the 'Day of the Lord', a consciousness shaped by the Exodus 'Day'. Because successive stages of revelation build on, rather than overwrite, what has gone before, OT truth is 'cumulative'. Each of the eight chapters ends with a short section of 'avenues into the New Testament', which points to relevant NT themes. A ten-page bibliography, and author, biblical reference and subject indexes are provided.

Three features about the way the book is written stand out. The lively style is not afraid to call Jeroboam a nincompoop (which he was), and saves this from ever being a dusty tome. Second, the exposition itself works at two levels: a coherent argument running through each chapter is peppered with illustrative exegetical gems. These are a delight, and show how apparently obscure passages (eg Leviticus 19) and individual Hebrew words are vividly relevant to Christian thought when the bible is read as a whole book. Finally, the notes deserve a mention, not for their length (41 pages) but for their fascinating detail and content. If anything could be changed, this reviewer would wish for an index of Hebrew words, and for notes to be printed on the same page as the text (although a spare bookmark can serve the same purpose).

This is a valuable book for those wanting to put the OT together,

especially ordinands and ministers who have (had) to reckon with liberal theological education. Readers who are already familiar with the themes and coherence of the bible as a whole will certainly enjoy the many insights offered on the way to expounding the major themes. Anyone wanting to understand Christ better through the OT should want to absorb this book.

ED MOLL

MINOR PROPHETS I (HOSEA – MICAH): New International Biblical Commentary (Old Testament Series) No 17

Elizabeth Achtemeier

Peabody Mass/Carlisle: Hendrickson/Paternoster 1996 372pp + index
£7.99 pb ISBN 0-85364-809-3

Achtemeier has written a warm and accessible commentary which eases the reader into six very different biblical books. Her enthusiasm that the voice of these prophets be heard in Christian churches today and her experience as a teacher make for a readable and encouraging exposition.

The sovereignty of God, the seriousness of sin and the faithfulness of God are themes constantly aired in the exposition, as is their fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. Space is given to the NT quotations from these minor prophets, and also to issues which arise in the course of teaching these OT books. All this is achieved within an explanation of the historical background which is clear and to the point, which it must be in such a short book. There are no footnotes, but some references to other authors, and occasional endnotes elaborate on questions of detail.

The New International Biblical Commentary (NIBC) series is written from a perspective labelled 'believing criticism'. Rejecting pre-critical and anti-critical approaches, contributors make use of the full range of critical tools, while still retaining the 'highest regard' for the biblical text. In this particular volume, concessions to critical orthodoxy remain peripheral, and irritate rather than substantially interfere with interpretation. Commitments to a late final date for Deuteronomy and to a pre-Mosaic tribal league, for example, are over-ridden by the perceived strength of the Exodus and Covenant traditions among the prophets. Textual emendations and editorial glosses are kept to a minimum, and Achtemeier aims to follow Brevard Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as a Scripture* in acknowledging that the commentator's responsibility is to the whole text as we now have it. Occasionally this is not carried through: Hosea 14:9, Amos 5:25-7 and 9:11-15 are seen to be the work of later hands and are read separately from their contexts. The *RSV* readings are frequently preferred to those of the *NIV*, on which the commentary series is based: in addition to greater accuracy, they allow verbal plays (especially

prominent in Hosea and Jonah, also in Micah) to be exposed. I was surprised to find a distinction between the advent of the Spirit (to the pre-classical prophets) and of the word (to the 'writing' prophets): such a separation requires Micah 2:8 (which links word and spirit) to be a 'late addition'. Also a reference to the Spirit as 'it' (pp 149-50) was puzzling, but these are the exception rather than the rule, and should not be allowed to spoil an otherwise clear read which illuminates too often neglected texts.

ED MOLL

THE READING AND PREACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Hughes Oliphant Old

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Volume I: The Biblical Period

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Volume II: The Patristic Age

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These are the first two (and very substantial) volumes in a series which will bring the history of Bible reading and preaching down to modern times. The publishers do not say how many volumes there will be, but if Dr Old continues at this depth, it is hard to imagine that there will be fewer than six at least, and possibly as many as eight by the time he is finished. This may seem to be a lot to get through, but it can be said with complete assurance that the first two volumes are worth every word of their text. Dr Old writes fluently and with great perception about the early church, bringing to our notice as he does so a number of things which have been forgotten in modern scholarship.

In the first volume, Dr Old seeks to cover the ground from the time of the Davidic monarchy to the death of Origen, slightly after AD 250. It is a broad sweep, and one which is made more difficult by the special place which the main evidence – the Bible – holds in the life of the church. He has to extract from the biblical material information which it gives only incidentally, even though it is clear that what Dr Old is looking for was of the utmost importance to the original writers and copyists. Obviously the Scriptures were read in the synagogue as they were later in the church, and Dr Old is fully aware of the links between Judaism and early Christianity, but we know very little about precisely how they were read. Was there something approaching a lectionary, or did the rabbis and preachers of the early church select their texts more or less at random? How extensive were the readings, and what sort of preaching did they give rise to? Again, we know enough to know that there were a lot of sermons in the first Christian congregations, and that they must have been directed primarily towards the exposition of

Scripture, but precisely what they consisted of eludes our grasp.

The difficulties become greater when we try to assess the preaching role of the Old Testament prophets, for example. In what sense were they preachers of the 'Word of God'? Did they bring it directly to the people, or did they read it out of existing Scripture and merely expound what was already revealed? Clearly they did a bit of both, but to the extent that what they said and wrote was divine revelation, it distances them from the modern preacher, for whom the Word of God has a fixed, objective quality which was lacking at that time. This becomes very clear, as Dr Old points out, when we look at modern attempts to prophesy in the manner of Amos, for example. There have been any number of preachers of late who have denounced the ills of our society in a prophetic vein, but they have lacked authority and failed to achieve their purpose, precisely because they were attempting the impossible. God was not speaking through them in the way that he spoke to the ancient Israelites, and Amos remains unique as an example and an authority for us, who cannot be imitated in so direct a manner.

When we turn to the New Testament, it is not altogether clear how we should categorize much of the text. The Sermon on the Mount, for instance, was hardly a 'sermon' in the modern sense, and it gives us only hints of what Jesus' preaching was like. Yet obviously Jesus was a great preacher, and Dr Old does not hesitate to claim that he provided the model for the way in which his disciples later read and interpreted the Scriptures. The apostle Paul must also have been a considerable pulpit orator, but we have almost no way of assessing what he actually said and did when he was in front of a congregation. We have an idea of the content of at least some of his messages, but know next to nothing about how he prepared them and nothing at all about their delivery. Faced with such recalcitrant material, Dr Old does a magnificent job of highlighting what we can know, which is that the reading and preaching of the Bible was the central act of Christian worship in the early church.

This point has been obscured in recent times by scholars who have had quite a different agenda. Many of those who have studied early Christian worship have been more interested in liturgy and the sacraments, and have tended to think of preaching as a sideline. Dr Old corrects this misapprehension most effectively, and demonstrates that in fact it is the opposite which was the case. The liturgy and even the sacraments were tailored to illustrate the ministry of the Word, not the other way round, and it is this note which is sounded throughout.

The second volume takes up the story with the legalization of Christianity early in the fourth century, and carries on from then until the

time of Gregory the Great (d. 604). Once more we are subtly reminded of the lack of evidence for so much of the earlier period. The time between the death of Origen and the conversion of Constantine was one of rapid church growth and must have been an age of great preachers, but as we know next to nothing about them, two of the most important generations of church history are passed over in silence! With the emergence of Christianity as a legal, and later as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the nature and scope of Christian preaching inevitably changed. The expository style suited to believers who knew their Bibles had to make room for what were in effect evangelistic sermons, even if many of them were preached to people attending church services. There is a noticeable tendency in the fourth century towards thematic expositions, concentrating above all on the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, and it is to this period that we owe the development of systematic lectionaries.

Dr Old points out that although there was a tendency towards schematization, which narrowed the range of biblical texts which were actually read in church, there was nevertheless an attempt to maintain the systematic reading of biblical books. This in turn facilitated the type of extended expository preaching which went through a text verse-by-verse. The great homilies of John Chrysostom are excellent examples of this method, which remained popular even as other types of preaching became necessary as well.

Dr Old gives us a magnificent overview of the different schools of biblical interpretation which helped to shape preaching style and content, and his homiletical interests make him more sympathetic to allegorical approaches than is usually the case. Of particular interest is the attention which he gives to the Syriac church, which has been sadly neglected but which has treasures to reveal to those who are able and willing to find them.

One important feature of these books which the reader will not miss is that Dr Old is constantly concerned to relate his findings to the current situation in most Protestant denominations. He pays lip-service to modern biblical criticism but is clearly not happy with it, and in practice he dispenses with it as much as possible. Most of it is simply irrelevant to his concerns, and he is obviously most at ease with the canonical approach to the Bible advocated by Brevard Childs, in particular. At the same time, he is deeply concerned to insist that the preaching ministry is a professional vocation, and that it has suffered immense harm from the assumption that anybody can do it. Many preachers put little time or effort into their sermons, with the result that few people want to listen to what they have to say. But as Dr Old points out, there is little reason for having ordained ministers at all if they cannot preach, and the loss of this dimension is at the heart of the crisis of modern Protestantism.

What Dr Old will have to say in the remaining volumes of his work we cannot yet know, but there is no doubt that every serious preacher, theologian and Christian thinker will have to buy and ponder these important volumes. Dr Old has done the church an enormous service in bringing this aspect of our heritage back into the prominence which it deserves, and it can only be hoped that his message will be widely heard and heeded in the days ahead.

GERALD BRAY

THE WALDENSIAN STORY **Prescot Stephens**

Lewes: The Book Guild 1998 375pp £16.95 hb ISBN 1-85776-280-0

Many will have heard of the Waldensians but few of us will know their story in any detail. This book is an excellent way to remedy that deficiency. The author has plainly read widely amongst primary sources and is also thoroughly acquainted with the secondary literature, yet alongside this knowledge he also displays a personal commitment to the Waldensian church and the truths for which they suffered so much. The history of this 800-year-old Christian movement is told in an attractive and readable style.

As Prescot Stephens recounts the Waldensian story we become aware of the key moments and challenges which occurred: the need to distance themselves from extreme protest movements in the Middle Ages; the decision to change and join the Reformation; the fateful response to French persecution; the subtle dangers of toleration in the nineteenth century. Little known features of the Waldensian story also receive attention, such as the emigration to form colonies in South America. By the end we realize that it is not easy to tell whether the Waldensians today place a greater pride in their cultural identity or in their commitment to a biblical faith.

This perhaps indicates a feature of the book that some will find frustrating. The author attempts little analysis of the movement and only hints at lessons for today. Of course he may have deliberately eschewed such reflection, but if we are to learn from the Waldensians then it is essential. It would have been good to see some assessment of the Waldensians within the overall pattern of medieval Christianity. It would have been instructive to consider when and why it was that the cultural commitment to Waldensian Christianity began to overtake the commitment to the gospel itself. It would have been interesting to compare the fruits of the Waldensians' initial pacifism with their later willingness to take up arms to defend themselves. And surely some vision for the Waldensians' role in the evangelization of Italy today would have been welcome.

Churchman

Nevertheless, even without this element of reflection within the book, this is undoubtedly the place where ordinary Christians will want to start in order to learn about the spiritual descendants of the man from Lyons called Valdes.

MARK BURKILL