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Book Reviews

THE PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH – Growth Without Compromising Your Message

Rick Warren

Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995 399pp £7.99 pb ISBN 0-310-20106-3

The author is the pastor of Saddleback Community Church in California, a church he founded and which now has a five-figure membership. Why is it that British churches rarely grow beyond 500 members? What can we learn from ministers like Warren, whose large congregations would break a British pastor? I believe British Christians have a blind spot. Expressions such as: 'I'm not into the numbers game' or 'Be faithful and leave the results to God' sound spiritual but they mean that we do not like to apply theology to the 'How' questions of ministry.

The Purpose Driven Church is theologically rooted in mainstream evangelicalism. Saddleback has Southern Baptist affiliation. Warren reflects on 20 years spent leading this church, and his personal story is moving. He evaluates his own ministry and the wider church scene. Rather than offering a standardized package to apply universally like a McDonald's franchise, he bases his view of ministry on the application of biblical principles.

Warren addresses questions such as: What is the pastor's leadership role? Is the pastor clear about his purpose and Christ's purpose for the church? How are those purposes implemented in practice? What drives your church? Do we understand the people we aim to reach? How does our church lead people from attendance, to salvation, to membership, maturity and ministry?

Warren set out to establish a healthy church, not a big church, because healthy churches grow. He explores the nature of healthy growth and describes some of the myths about ministry that create guilt or frustration.

The book carries no padding. His arguments are concise. He has an analytical mind and a talent for the memorable summary: 'We count people because people count.' It would be trite to dismiss these as sound bites. Like many Americans, he is so good on 'How To', convinced that we only believe what we implement in practice.

It is difficult to do justice to Warren's argument in the short space of a review. His scholarship is lightly worn. His intellectual framework extends far beyond California. I hear him quoted by English Evangelicals who have found him to be a front runner in his field.

Warren addresses the felt needs and frustrations of clergy who have never been trained for leadership. If a British church enjoys growth, it is likely to reach a plateau where clergy exhaustion equals congregational frustration. Warren demonstrates a model of leadership which functions when demands increase, without leader burnout and frustration.

KEITH HORSFALL

JESUS IS DREAD – Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain

Robert Beckford

London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1998 194+xii pp £10.95 pb
ISBN 0-232-52241-3

My interest in this book arises from a simple question: 'Why does the gospel seem to have failed the Black community in Britain?'

A visit to most inner-city churches will show that Christianity plays a major role in many Black people's lives. Yet the Black community seems characterized by high levels of criminality, underachievement, single parenthood and other features of 'social exclusion'. Robert Beckford, a tutor in Black theology at Queen's College, Birmingham, clearly shares something of the same concern since he describes himself as 'a Black Pentecostal Christian ... seriously concerned with Black liberation' (p 1). It is also clear that Beckford would answer my question by pointing to White racism, particularly that evidenced by *Christians* in mainstream churches.

Insofar as Beckford is on the receiving end of something which most White people in this country rarely experience, he deserves a hearing. Nevertheless, I found much about this book unsatisfactory (including its lack of an index). First, Beckford takes a 'Black and White' view of everything. And whilst acknowledging faults in his own community, he generally equates Black with Good and White with Bad.

Second, for Beckford race is definitive of personhood in a way which (I suspect) most White English people have never experienced. However, this identifying of the person with race and race with colour is questionable both as to its validity and its helpfulness, particularly since Beckford's concept of Black is defined by a 'golden triangle' connecting Jamaica, Britain and the USA (p 138). Many Black Christians would have considerable difficulty with this, not least those from Africa or from other Caribbean islands. Indeed, Beckford seems curiously insensitive to the fact that most of his models of Liberation come from American sources. Thus a list of 'Black nationalist traditions in Britain' includes 'the Black Panthers, Race Today Collective, Rastafari and the Nation of Islam' (p 134). Yet the first and last of these originated in America, whilst even

Rastafarianism gestated in an American milieu during Marcus Garvey's time there.

The ultimate difficulty with Beckford's approach, however, is that he makes theology the servant of racial advantage. Beckford observes that theology cannot be neutral: 'all theology is ideological – it is either siding with, or working on behalf of, a particular group' (p 149). However, problems surely arise when theology is derived from the needs of that group.

In his chapter 'Jesus is Dread', Beckford writes: '... a Black Christology must underpin the dual task of resisting systems of White supremacy, as well as developing a political and social structure which is capable of challenging the domestic, neo-colonial situation faced by Black British people' (p 146). 'Naming Jesus Dread' is thus a deliberate appropriation of Jesus to the goal of Black Liberation: 'A Dread Christ equips Black folk to face and destroy all structures of oppression. [...] In short a Dread Christ is a Black Christ participating in Black lives and Black struggles' (p 146).

But Beckford is able to travel this route because he is a Liberal at heart – albeit a Pentecostal Liberal – shown by the way in which his critique of the Black church is focused on its perceived classism, sexism, heterosexism and disregard of disabled people (pp 27-30). But here again he reveals the selectiveness, and Americanization, of his own approach to 'Blackness' when we compare the stance of the African bishops at the recent Lambeth Conference. No doubt Beckford would blame this, as he tends to blame other ills, on White influences (cf pp 42, 70). However, those bishops have already begged to differ when others have made a similar accusation.

Ultimately, I am not even sure Beckford fully comes to terms with racism, for this is not just a sin of White against Black. Racism is endemic to *all* human beings and is something which even the gospel can barely root out (cf Acts 6:1). In the end, our true liberation cannot depend on change taking place in others.

JOHN RICHARDSON

THE ONE PURPOSE OF GOD

Jan Bonda

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998 278pp £16.99 pb ISBN 0-8028-4186-4

Listed as an answer to the doctrine of eternal punishment, this work of systematic theology is grounded in an exposition of Romans. A deceased Dutch Reformed pastor, Bonda argues for a hopeful universalism of a sort favoured by theologians such as Rahner, Küng, and Robinson. This is a case which bases itself not on some radical pluralist agenda (as with the

work of Hick and others), but on the acknowledgement that the gospel, Christ's victorious conquering of sin, is made for all.

After a powerful and important introduction to the moral problems of belief in eternal punishment, Bonda presents a brief history of both those who have refused to acquiesce in the face of the doctrine of the damnation of the majority of humankind, and of the teachings of the early church on the doctrine of hell. In particular, Augustine and his understanding of predestination does not receive a warm endorsement.

The main body of the thesis is an extended exegesis of Romans, clearly driven by the presupposition that God's character is utterly against the damnation of any of his creatures (an ironic fact, for Bonda accuses those who have accepted the traditional position of being driven by presuppositions). Despite Bonda's use of commentaries, his lack of attention to the context of many of Paul's statements means that his case is swiftly proven. A more helpful analysis of Romans would have been provided had Bonda interacted with those who have tried to pay attention to such detail – for example, Wright's article 'Towards a Biblical View of Universalism', *Themelios* 4 (1979), pp 54-8.

There is no doubt that the doctrine of eternal punishment presents particular pastoral and theological difficulties, which are not easily swept away. However, Bonda has fallen into the trap of which he accuses others, by forcing too much from the text. Whilst he is careful not to empty the biblical text of the severity of its warnings concerning judgement, Bonda has also left the issue of human free will in difficulty – are some forced into heaven? And even if salvation can occur *post-mortem*, the difficulty of a predestinarian God, which he found so abhorrent in Augustine, returns.

In summary, Bonda has provided an excellent statement of the Christian case for universalism, but not many will be satisfied with his arguments.

TONY GRAY

BEYOND CHAOS – LIVING THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN A WORLD LIKE OURS

Chris William Erdman

Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans 1996 160pp No price pb
ISBN 0-8028-4130-9

'America is not a Christian nation. It's quite possible that it never was.'

The above statement, from page 133 of *Beyond Chaos*, may seem obvious to some. However it is the thesis of the author, a Presbyterian

pastor in Pennsylvania, that it would come with the status of revelation to many. Politicians of both liberal and conservative hues have hijacked biblical thinking and made it serve their competing ideologies. A large proportion of American citizens continues to attend church; but the dominant values of the day are those of materialism, pluralism, and an increasingly intolerant tolerance. With the fragmentation of society and the shattering of family life both well advanced, the surrounding culture can no longer be expected to prop up the church or Christian values, and an anaemic, risk-free Christianity will be increasingly irrelevant in a society which prefers shopping to church-going.

What some might call a disaster, Erdman looks on as an opportunity, much like the days of the Babylonian exile. If he wrings his hands, it is for the state of the church, rather than of the nation, whose inhabitants are 'doing their best with the information they have... The gospel is good news, not common sense' (p 84). This book is an invigorating wake-up call to the church, to live out that gospel and demonstrate its relevance to a sceptical generation. Authentic discipleship, in which ordinary people live extraordinary lives, can be and is being rediscovered.

Although Erdman stresses the central role to be played by the Christian home, 'where real life is lived somewhere between the rigid and the chaotic' (p 108), he refuses to idolize the nuclear family, and does not call for a return to the 'nuclear bliss' of an unreal past: 'Americans will learn to become families only by learning to become the church' (p 12). It is baptism, not marriage, which is the way in.

I enjoyed this book. It is written in a fresh, semi-popular style, with penetrating observations, pithy turns of phrase and numerous real-life examples. The author calls for passion and integrity, and writes with both. However it is self-consciously addressed to an American readership, and your reviewer is left wondering how much it will be read over here. You do not have to be American to benefit from it; but if you are, it probably helps.

GILES WALTER

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH – A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15
Andreas J Kostenberger, Thomas R Schreiner and H Scott Baldwin edd
Grand Rapids: Baker Books 1995 334pp £14.99 pb ISBN 0-8010-2020-4

Many books have been written to help chart a course through the dangerous waters of hermeneutics. However, as Howard Marshall comments: 'discussions on biblical hermeneutics have given us a fair amount of guidance on how to elucidate what the text said, but have not done a lot to help us make the passage from what the text said to what the

text says' (p 159). This scholarly but practical book fills precisely the gap Marshall noted. This is clearly a controversial (and often painful) subject to take as a test case, but great care is taken to ensure fairness. Although some readers will assume that predetermined conclusions motivated their exegesis of these verses, at least one of the eight contributors seems honestly to have desired the conclusions to have been otherwise when he was a student (p 106). But careful work on the text proves to all eight that to come to more radical or progressive readings for the role of women in the church requires at the very least a 'leap over the evidence of the text' (p 106).

But there is certainly no room for an accusation of obscurantism here. From the start, the three editors (all associated with Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) were determined to use all the tools and evidence available to modern scholars (such as use of the IBYCUS system – pp 72, 91), as well as a desire to keep their hermeneutical integrity (p 10). Since this subject requires treatment from a range of different academic disciplines, these are represented in the various contributions. Chapters are individually devoted to the historical background of Ephesus, genre, semantic and syntactical studies, as well as the core hermeneutical and philosophical debates. While the intricate details of the semantic and syntactical debates in particular will not perhaps be of interest to everyone, they are surely vital inclusions. Such detail prevents skewing of evidence, when for instance *all* the possible meanings of the word *αυθεντεω* are provided (pp 78-9).

However, while this book provides a useful worked example for hermeneutics generally, its value extends far further. The topic is one of the presenting issues for debates over the authority of Scripture. If this text does mean what it plainly seems to mean, and has been understood to mean for centuries, then it surely is dangerous to dismiss it without solid exegetical and hermeneutical grounds. It is ironic then that there is frequently broad agreement over the signification of the text (as opposed to its significance – p 157) between (often 'post-Christian') feminists and those who take the historic view (p 107). Paul does seem to have prohibited women from exercising teaching authority in the church over men (which of course hardly precludes the vital role of teaching women and children). This is entirely consistent with the rest of the Pauline corpus, including Gal 3:28 (see chapters 6 and 7). As all the different studies in his book eloquently demonstrate, the various theories of the likes of Catherine and Richard Clark Kroeger, Krister Stendahl, F F Bruce and Kevin Giles all require a considerable 'leap over the evidence of the text' itself (p 106).

In addition, this is a scholarly book with clear pastoral concern. The

contributors may not all agree on the fine details, but they are all motivated by the concern to contend for a secure trust in scriptural authority as well as what they regard to be the positive benefits of a biblical role for men and women. They are concerned to defend those who seek to take a historical position against the charges of chauvinism and 'doctrinaire reductionism', or of being betrayers of the feminist cause (if they are women) (p 211). They are certainly not seeking to endorse a chauvinistic subjugation of women through their traditional conclusions, and this explains Robert Yarbrough's aim for a 'progressive "historic" hermeneutic' (pp 190-6).

This is not to deny that there will inevitably be difficulties regarding the precise applications of these verses, and this is not the book to help with those (p 210). But for a sane, careful and thorough examination of all the hermeneutical problems surrounding Paul's teaching on the role of women, this is hard to beat. It is a book to lend to those on all sides of this debate with confidence.

MARK MEYNELL

SPIRITUALITY AND THEOLOGY: Christian living and the Doctrine of God

Philip Sheldrake

London: Darton, Longman and Todd 246pp £12.95 pb ISBN

This author's quest is very worthwhile. His intention is to bridge 'the historic divisions between love and knowledge in the human approach to God'. Theology often seems to be merely an attempt to define terms while much modern spirituality 'amounts to little more than uncritical devotion quite detached from the major themes of the Christian faith'. There is no doubt that such is precisely the case, but whether or not this writer really bridges the divide or gives us a key to the bridge is another matter.

The reality is that his knowledge of Protestant and evangelical devotion is limited in the extreme, although he does wisely say that 'Luther's *The Freedom of a Christian* and Calvin's *Institutes* are fundamentally essays in spiritual theology'.

What is revealing is that, in his case studies, alongside Ignatius Loyola and Julian of Norwich he chooses for his Protestant none other than George Herbert, the friend of Nicholas Ferrar and Lancelot Andrewes. Herbert was a godly man but hardly characteristic of the vast Protestant and evangelical tradition of the church.

The volume consists of three chapters setting out the problem and suggesting a way forward. He rightly points out that 'a theology that is not

related to spirituality inevitably becomes abstract, disengaged, rationalistic and tends towards an exclusive preference for philosophical language'. This is well said and expresses the reason why there is so much suspicion of theology amongst Evangelicals. But it is certainly also true, as he goes on to say, that 'spirituality cut adrift from theology ... risks becoming uncritical devotionalism'.

There follow two chapters of case studies in which we again encounter Julian's maverick theology – a perfect example of the latter danger, in spite of being a holy and profound person.

There is then a chapter on 'place' in religion which sits uneasily with the rest of the book. However it is in many ways the most fascinating section of all – not least in what he says about the city.

The book ends with a concluding chapter but what we miss is any kind of emphasis on the controlling character of the Word of God as the test of all true spirituality. One suspects that a year spent with Oswald Chambers would help in this!

JOHN PEARCE

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE – The New International Commentary on the New Testament

Joel B Green

Cambridge: Eerdmans 1997 xcii+928pp £32.99 hb ISBN 0-8028-2315-7

This is a wonderful, rich commentary – it is everything a commentary ought to be, in that it makes one read and reread the text with a growing fascination and new understanding. Joel Green has produced a massive work based on a careful and coherent close reading of the final text of Luke, and it more than replaces Geldenhuys' inaugural volume in the first NICNT series. His purpose is to pick up the signals of structure and vocabulary that Luke used to convey his message, and to show how through the Gospel he preaches the gospel to us. This work is the product of a first-rate linguistic scholar (whose vocabulary outreached mine on a number of occasions) who turns his expertise to clarify Luke rather than to display his prowess.

Salvation is, of course, central to Luke, and Green is determinedly *theological* (his emphasis) in his reading. He keeps a Palestinian flavour to the Gospel rather than muting it in its church setting, and there is continuous high drama in his retelling of Jesus' inversion of social norms over a person's status within acceptable relationships, for example, or the fierceness of the political realities of the day. But simultaneously he is informed by his placing of Acts alongside Luke which gives Luke an

ecclesiological, missiological and apologetic core. Green's understanding is that a Christian who has been gripped by the wonderful work of God in saving humankind through the cross of Christ will be prepared to face huge opposition to play a part in God's continuing salvific purpose. Luke wrote to encourage us to announce God's plan.

Such a careful reading demands to be carefully read, and this is the kind of commentary that should be worked through rather than kept for consultation. Green's fine distinctions are easily missed. For instance, he carefully distinguishes at the outset what he calls the 'co-text' from the 'context', the former being the literary setting of surrounding verses, paragraphs and whole Gospel, the latter the cultural worlds in which Jesus lived and Luke wrote. Those who do not notice that will possibly misunderstand Green later on as a result. Skimming this commentary might be a frustrating business, but it is well worth investing the time to read through with pencil in hand.

It is difficult to convey how refreshing it is to work with this serious commentary which pays minute attention to the text and then pulls back to the entire picture, zooming in to the surprising contrast, pulling back to put a scene in relation to the whole. Green frequently uses the language of the theatre to describe what is happening in the text, and the reader is often left with a vivid sense of the tension of the unfolding plot. This commentary is a dream for the preacher.

Not everyone will find it so useful. Those interested in form- or source-criticism will find little to work on here, neither will the person concerned with the minutiae of manuscript tradition. Green implies that there is more than enough available elsewhere. More surprisingly, and perhaps more damagingly, there is little reference to the historicity of Luke's material. Green explains in the introduction that he has not tackled this issue, because the Gospel was not fashioned to defend the assumption that events happened as reported. There is, of course, a gap between contemporary historiography and what would have been acceptable to Luke (and as large a gap between either party and nineteenth-century positivism) but nevertheless, Luke begins his Gospel with a claim to have researched and assimilated accurately, and an attention to his agenda must take that seriously. Green does take 1:1-4 seriously, so it is rather odd to find no mention of the historical problems surrounding Quirinius' governorship and the census on chapter 2. He is to be applauded in sticking to the main road through Luke, but such historical problems lie on the main road and cannot be ignored, for they potentially subvert Luke's purpose. Indeed, not to address them leaves the damaging Jesus of history/Christ of faith dichotomy potentially wide open.

The appealingly thoughtful approach and fresh conclusions are similar in style, though not necessarily in conclusion, to N T Wright, so it is odd (at least to an English mind) that Wright should figure only twice in a work of this size, on both occasions merely alluded to in a footnote. It is good for us to realize that not everyone is obsessed with our giants, but, like all foreign travel, it is slightly disconcerting until you get used to it. It is consistent with Green's method, though, that interaction with other commentators is minimal and kept to footnotes.

The result of Green's tunnel vision is a commentary which will make anyone who has to tackle the text do so with fresh eyes. No one could possibly agree with all the conclusions of a book of more than 900 pages, but here is vast and deep knowledge waiting to be used. I find it difficult to praise too highly. Buy, buy, buy!

CHRISTOPHER GREEN

PRAYER BOOK AND PEOPLE IN ELIZABETHAN AND EARLY STUART ENGLAND

Judith Maltby

Cambridge: CUP 1998 xvii+310pp £35 hb ISBN

This book began life as a PhD thesis and still smells a little of the lamp. Nevertheless, it is an important study, proving how widely the *Book of Common Prayer* had come to be accepted before the outbreak of the Civil War. The case is supported by detailed evidence from several parishes in the 1640s. The elaborate tables in the appendices are the most obvious relics of the dissertation, but they provide the necessary support for the commentary in chapter 5, where Dr Maltby draws her overall conclusions, notably that there was no especial link between class and particular ecclesiastical allegiance or liturgical preferences.

Given that the liturgical iconoclasts, the Puritans, remained a thorn in the side of orthodox Anglicanism throughout the reign of Elizabeth and then were ever more actively opposed in the early Stuart period, it is important that the contours of the religious situation should be mapped out, if only to help to understand the mercifully brief years in which iconoclasm triumphed during the Commonwealth. It is interesting that the Roman Catholic revisionists of our own day on the Reformation (and Dr Maltby mentions them) emphasize the residual loyalties to the old religion among the general population in the sixteenth century. Judith Maltby, moving on 100 years, shows how the Prayer Book had gained the almost universal assent of the public by that time. This is all the more important because, as she rightly says, 'liturgy is the expression of a community's beliefs, as well as a shaper of them' (p 4). I cannot help observing that it might not be a bad thing if some of our current liturgical revisers realized

this and ceased their meddling with the time-honoured forms of the Prayer Book.

Dr Maltby's second chapter is a fascinating examination of the records from church courts, not least for the information these provide of clerical failure to conduct services or wear appropriate vesture, or any at all, as required by the Prayer Book. Especially notable are the instances in which parishioners persisted, as at Risely in Bedfordshire, where a quarter of a century's neglect by the incumbent failed to quench their attachment to the Book, or again as at Tarporley in Cheshire where they quickly reacted to the failure to use the Book by the newly intrusive Puritan vicar and curate. Then there were the petitions, 35 of them, produced by the counties in support of episcopacy and the Prayer Book on the eve of the Civil War. In her third chapter the author considers this type of information in the broad national context. She rightly distinguishes anti-Puritanism from Laudianism; indeed, she points out that many of the petitioners were as concerned to defend episcopacy and the Prayer Book against the Laudians as they were against the Puritans. They were not in Dr Maltby's own words 'proto-Anglo-Catholics as nineteenth and twentieth century high Anglican myth makers have sometimes presented the "Caroline divines"' (p 103).

Prominent among the orthodox in the ominous years 1640-42 was the Cheshire knight, Sir Thomas Aston, 'an important player in a doomed cause' (p 130), to whom most of chapter 4 is devoted. He and his kind, Anglicans *par excellence*, looked back to the church of Elizabeth and James. He was opposed by another Cheshire knight, Sir William Brereton, whose own pro-Puritan petition, allegedly with 12,000 signatures (twice that of Aston's), was printed and circulated in London and 'probably never seen in Cheshire'! (p 148). We are given a vivid account of the ways in which Aston's petition gained support. Besides this, however, he also engaged in controversy, most notably in *A Remonstrance against Presbytery* (1641), which was not just anti-presbyterian but also pro-episcopacy and pro-Prayer Book, calling in the process of its argument on biblical and patristic authority and additionally on a number of Continental Reformers, amongst them Beza, Bucer, Calvin and Melancthon, as well as some near-contemporary English bishops. When argument ultimately failed, Aston not surprisingly took up arms on the King's side as major-general in Cheshire, facing his old antagonist, Brereton, unsuccessfully in a number of skirmishes and finally meeting his death in one such near Bridgnorth in November 1645. Aston's career illustrates the fact that the *via media* can sometimes be the most difficult path to follow.

By what she says of him and with the rest of her impressive array of evidence Dr Maltby makes clear that there was an immense number, many, of course, in the usual silent majority, who aligned themselves with Aston

and opposed the fanatic extremes of both Puritanism and Laudianism, altogether a characteristic example of English moderation.

It is a pity that in a book from a learned press one should have to notice 'principle' misused as the adjective (p 104), 'siege' and 'co-terminous' (pp 179 and 171) misspelled and 'occupation' used for 'occupancy' (p 198).

ARTHUR POLLARD

IS THERE A MEANING IN THIS TEXT? THE BIBLE, THE READER AND THE MORALITY OF LITERARY KNOWLEDGE

Kevin J Vanhoozer

Leicester: Apollos (IVP) 1998 £14.95 hb ISBN 0-85111-463-6

Few thinkers have caused a greater stir in recent years than Jacques Derrida, the French deconstructionist who is idolized by some and denounced by others, but ignored by very few. Whether Derrida's radical scepticism is viable or not, there is no doubt that it has provoked furious discussion in many quarters, even among evangelical Christians. Kevin Vanhoozer's book is an attempt to answer the challenges to a biblical faith which deconstructionism poses. The first part of the book is really an explanation of what Derrida is all about, and the second part offers a positive alternative which seeks to integrate the genuine insights offered by deconstructionism into a conservative-evangelical framework of biblical interpretation.

The first thing which must be said about this book is that it is eminently readable, and that it manages to explain Derrida's position in a way which is seldom encountered elsewhere. Basically what Derrida has done is to show that all philosophical constructions are relative to the context in which they have been elaborated and that they can be torn apart or replaced with completely different presuppositions. To take a very simple example, we may be so used to the decimal system of counting that it is hard to imagine anything different (let alone better), but a duodecimal system is just as good, and perhaps even superior. We find this hard to imagine only because it is foreign to our experience, not because it is untrue in any objective sense. Similarly, very different ways of looking at the world are possible and may be just as valid as philosophies based on the Graeco-Roman tradition – it is only our lack of experience (and imagination) which prevents us from seeing this. In this sense, Derrida's work is a liberation, allowing us to observe our universe from angles of which we have never before dreamed.

Dr Vanhoozer treats his subject under three main headings – the author,

the text and the reader. He shows how modern literary theories have affected each of these by 'abolishing' the author, casting doubt on the text and giving freedom to the reader to come to whatever conclusions he or she wishes to. In the second part of the book he recapitulates these three themes, attempting in the process to show how each of them can and must be rescued from such scepticism. 'Authorial intention' has long been a mainstay of conservative biblical interpretation, but if we confine ourselves to Scripture's human authors we are in for trouble. In many cases we do not know who they were, and it is often quite impossible to determine what their intentions may have been. Even when they are stated, as at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, it is by no means certain that the resulting text fulfils the original intention in any very clear or satisfactory way.

The texts and their meaning, or meanings, is another problem, though perhaps this issue is not as serious as the deconstructionists make out. There may be many layers of meaning in a given text which have some kind of validity; the real question is to know where the boundaries lie and what interpretation(s) can legitimately be applied in any given instance. Take, for example, the Magna Carta, which is frequently referred to as the foundation of freedom and democracy in the English-speaking world. This was certainly not its original intention, and the authors, if they were alive, would not have understood what was being said about it. Does this invalidate the historical tradition which has grown up around it? The modern approach must certainly lead to a distorted view of the past, but if it is being applied to the present, then there is a legitimate strand of historical development which leads from the Magna Carta to freedom and democracy, although the intermediate stages cannot be omitted without leading to incoherence.

Our use of the Bible is somewhat similar to this. The original contexts may or may not be relevant to us today, but there is a definite continuity between what was revealed in ancient times and what is lived out in the experience of believers now. This is called 'tradition' by theologians, and it is preserved in the life of the church. This life has two basic aspects – that of the preaching (*kerygma*) and that of faith. These two go together. Unless the Word of Scripture is preached in the power of the Spirit, there will be no faith, and if there is no faith there will be no meaning or application of that Word for today. It is extraordinary that in a book of evangelical hermeneutics preaching is never mentioned. The hearer of the Word is replaced by the 'reader' – not at all the same thing! Dr Vanhoozer has done a good job of answering the deconstructionist challenge on its own terms, but it cannot be said that he has presented a truly biblical alternative to it. What the Bible 'means' is revealed to the church through the gift of Spirit-inspired preaching which remains fundamentally the same across all barriers of time and space. The modern Christian sees his own experience

mirrored in that of men like Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley, and instinctively feels himself to be at one with them on the main issues which lie at the heart of our faith, even if there are many differences of idiom and culture. This is the communion of saints, which continues to thrive today across the boundaries erected by nationality, class, age and gender. It will survive deconstructionism as it has survived every other philosophy, anti-philosophy or ideology which has arisen to contest it. Dr Vanhoozer should take courage and say so, so that long after Derrida is forgotten we may have a word of encouragement to guide us in the ongoing task of hearing God's Word speak to us, and applying it in our lives.

GERALD BRAY

TERRITORIAL SPIRITS AND WORLD EVANGELISATION?: A BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF STRATEGIC LEVEL SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Chuck Lowe

Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications 1998 191pp £9.99 pb
ISBN 185792399-5

We might not have encountered 'strategic-level spiritual warfare' (SLSW) as a full theory and practice for evangelism, but elements such as 'territorial spirits' and prayer 'marches' that seek to 'claim the ground' for evangelism are increasingly common elements within the charismatic sections of the church. This book is a useful examination of these beliefs and practices.

Lowe performs the useful task of critiquing SLSW in a faithful and considered way that also teaches and reinforces what he terms 'a Biblical and effective alternative'. Having introduced SLSW, his concern to remain within the limits of biblical revelation is demonstrated by his studies of the passages in Ephesians and Revelation to which advocates of SLSW make claim. Then, by bringing a critique based on the intertestamental period and church history to the bar of Scripture, Lowe adds further weight to both his method and his arguments. A later chapter comparing SLSW with animism provides a particular missiological comparison which perhaps illustrates rather than adds to his earlier arguments. More useful is Lowe's sober consideration of the empirical evidence brought forward by SLSW's advocates. Here is a book I would willingly give to a thoughtful supporter of SLSW-style approaches to prayer and evangelism.

Lowe wants to provoke Evangelicals to further thought concerning spiritual warfare. He concludes that SLSW is popular, despite its fundamental errors, in large measure because it is characteristic of 'populist evangelicalism' (p 143). By this he means 'a typical evangelical

piety toward Scripture, coupled with a familiar evangelical tendentious appeal to Scripture' (p 145). Here lies Lowe's challenge, a call for an increasingly thought-out evangelical theology applied in practice, rather than SLWS, or any other, 'pre-existing practice in search of justification' (p 145). After all, this '[self-justifying] methodology is not unique to SLSW. It is more typical, than atypical, of evangelical innovation as a whole' (p 146).

MATTHEW SLEEMAN

THE MESSAGE OF NEHEMIAH: God's Servant in a Time of Change
R Brown

Leicester: IVP 1998 256pp £9.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-580-2

There is much more to the Book of Nehemiah than the tale of a man who builds a wall. Instead, Scripture tells of God's servant leading God's people towards the promised restoration of God's city. Secondly, the walls run around Jerusalem, the capital which points to God's heavenly city. An exposition with two such foundations reveals the Book of Nehemiah to be neither an outdated archive nor a management handbook, but God's word to his people in all ages. In this welcome addition to the Bible Speaks Today series, Raymond Brown demonstrates the relevance of this Old Testament book to current Christian living.

Brown's first section, 'Rebuilding the walls' (Nehemiah 1-7), is dominated by Nehemiah the man, and his qualities as a leader and a man of God are subjected to careful and detailed analysis. A judicious selection of historical and contextual details places the man in his setting, but we never quite escape the suspicion that God's help comes only because of Nehemiah's exemplary skills. Such suspicion can only be allayed by reference to the wider background.

It is in the remaining chapters, concerned with 'Reforming the community', that the big picture comes to life. Larger themes, touched on by Nehemiah 9-13, are developed and applied: the Word of God, the character of God, covenants, worship, and disobedience. This is the better section, and makes the deepest impression in application. The last chapter, for example, which deals with the disintegration of Nehemiah's reforms as the community drifted away from God's Word and from the covenant they made (Nehemiah 13), shows what a surprisingly familiar note Nehemiah rings alongside contemporary Christianity. Incidentally, J I Packer's *A Passion for Faithfulness* (Hodder 1995) is recommended as a good companion to Raymond Brown's exposition. In summary, *The Message of Nehemiah* lives up to the usual high standards of the series in which it appears.

ED MOLL

RICHARD GREENHAM – THE PORTRAIT OF AN ELIZABETHAN PASTOR**John H Primus**

Mercer University Press 1998 240pp \$35.00 hb ISBN 0-86554-578-2

Not every book is worth writing or reading, but this life of Richard Greenham, Puritan Anglican minister from 1570 to 1594 should have been written, and should be read. John Primus has produced an interesting and informative historical and theological study of the life, ministry and influence of Richard Greenham, one of the quiet heroes of the early Puritan movement in England. Greenham is important because he attempted to apply godly Reformation principles in a very ordinary if not unpromising parish near Cambridge for 22 years. It was this kind of grass roots ministry which made England a Protestant nation. This book gives a fascinating account of the shape of that ministry done by one of its most godly and able clergy.

Primus is writing about theological Puritanism, though still aware of its political and social context. He paints a vivid picture of Greenham and his ministry. The context of that ministry was of widespread ignorance of true Christianity and indifference to matters of religion. It was a secular or 'prophane' age. Protestant Christianity was novel, culturally remote, and relatively inaccessible to Greenham's parishioners, most of whom, including his churchwardens, were illiterate. Greenham also faced two groups of opponents; Papacy, and the Family of Love, a perfectionist cult based on the writings of Heinrich Niclaes, who claimed a new revelation of Christianity. Greenham created a new model of ministry, based on trinitarian Christianity, obedience to 'the Library of the Holy Ghost' (the Bible), godliness, prayer, preaching, and intentional personal conversation as a form of edification and encouragement (what we might call 'discipling'). He showed great practical and godly wisdom in helping people with 'afflictions of the mind', a ministry of biblically informed counselling. Greenham also provided a 'nursery for young preachers', training up young ministers in godliness and good ministry. Greenham's theology was practical rather than systematic, but Primus demonstrates the shape of his theology. As we would expect, he has an orthodox theology of God, of Christ, the Spirit, and of the way of salvation. He has a high view of Scripture, and a determination that 'where Scripture hath not a mouth, we ought not to have ears' (opposing the claims of both Papacy and the Family of Love). He uses Luther's 'law-gospel' distinction as his interpretative key to the Bible.

Of special interest is his developed theology of 'means', the help that God provides for growth in faith, including sermons, prayer, sacraments, affliction, and self-discipline. The Sabbath is 'The means of the means',

God's provision for us to be able to make use of all the means. In addition to Greenham's expertise in practical pastoral theology, his most significant and influential theological contribution was a detailed and sophisticated defence of the Sabbath as a Gospel Provision.

My only quibble with Primus' book is his assumption that the 'Church of England' was a creation of the sixteenth century. *Ecclesia Anglicana* was reformed in the sixteenth century, but existed well before!

In all this, Greenham is working hard to bring people to the obedience of faith in Christ, and his writings reflect this great evangelistic and pastoral aim. There are two reasons why you should read this very instructive account of pioneer Reformed and biblical ministry. First, we live in similar times, when many are ignorant, indifferent, biblically illiterate, and culturally far removed from Christianity. Secondly, Greenham was an example of a 'co-operative Puritan', who worked within the church in an irenic but principled way. An informative, challenging, and instructive book.

PETER ADAM

INTERPRETING GOD'S PLAN R J Gibson (ed)

Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1998 130pp £12.99 pb ISBN 0-85364-881-6

Many will be aware of the considerable interest in biblical theology that has been aroused amongst Evangelicals in recent decades. Many are also conscious that this welcome development has been in large measure due to the influence of teaching staff at Moore College in Sydney. This volume comprising papers read at the 1996 Moore College School of Theology should therefore find an eager readership elsewhere. Such readers will not be disappointed. The book is small and painfully expensive but that must not be allowed to deter anyone from purchasing it. It contains an enormous amount of stimulating material for those engaged in pastoral ministry and any form of leadership training.

The book opens with an account by Donald Robinson of the way in which the biblical theology course developed at Moore College. Naturally this makes interesting reading from the purely historical point of view, but it also makes clear the reasons why it was necessary. To this reader those reasons are as compelling today as they ever were. The following paper by Graeme Goldsworthy is a justification of the viability of biblical theology. To do this he has to interact with other ideas of what biblical theology involves, as well as responding to challenges at the philosophical and practical level. There are helpful reviews of the work of Bright, Vos and VanGemeren. Goldsworthy concludes that it must be the apostolic gospel which is the proper starting-point for biblical theology. That can appear

deceptively obvious but he shows how this defines the structure of the Bible.

In the next paper Barry Webb demonstrates how this gospel-centred biblical theology is essential to the formation of an evangelical hermeneutic. He takes Mark 1:14, 15 as a key text for this. The vital feature of the gospel is that it establishes the theological coherence of the Scriptures. Since many recent evangelical disagreements about the Bible have centred on the supposed diversity of the New Testament and the stance one should adopt towards the Old Testament, it will be readily appreciated that this provides a key to the resolution of evangelical hermeneutical tensions. In the remaining papers Peter Jensen looks at the relationship between biblical theology and doctrine and urges pastors to preach doctrinally. Michael Hill urges that ethics be shaped by biblical theology. He contends that without this our understanding of morality is distorted. Finally Goldsworthy enters the fray again to assert that biblical theology is essential for sound pastoral practice and gives some practical hints for the application of biblical theology with the pastoral ministry. It rounds off a volume of immense value to any who are willing to think about the evangelical ministry they are engaged in.

MARK BURKILL

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (Vol 3) **Wolfhart Pannenberg**
Edinburgh: T and T Clark 1998 713pp £34.95 hb ISBN 0-567-09599-1

This is the third and final volume of Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Systematic Theology*, which began to appear in English in 1992, about the same time as this final volume was being written. It contains four chapters (one of which is extremely long) and covers the controversial subject of ecclesiology. Pannenberg recognizes that this has not always been regarded as a proper ingredient of dogmatic theology, but he makes the very reasonable point that as the church is basic to Christianity our faith cannot be understood without it, so that it must be treated within the bounds of systematics. He begins his discussion with a consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit, which sets the tone for everything that follows. The church is fundamentally a pneumatological reality, brought into being by the Spirit who brings the body of Christ to life in the world. Theologically, the church is a manifestation of the Kingdom of God (without being identical with that concept) and historically it has always constituted a society governed by law, whether this law has been sanctioned by the secular state or not.

The second chapter (numbered 13) takes up most of the volume and is an extended exposition of the relationship between the 'Messianic community' and the individuals within it. Pannenberg puts the faith of the

individual first, for without that there can be no community, but he is careful to balance this individualism with the doctrine of the body of Christ. As believers we are united in Christ's love, which is the fruit and fulfilment of faith, and that love brings with it love for our fellow-believers. After grounding the church in the faith, hope and love which the Spirit pours out on individual believers, Pannenberg moves on to the signs of the New Covenant – baptism and the Lord's Supper primarily, but also the ministry which gives effect to their administration and is responsible for maintaining the unity and coherence of the church as a whole.

Here Pannenberg goes over the classical Christian divisions, pointing out that the Council of Trent frequently condemned Luther because it misunderstood him, and that the different branches of Western Christendom have more in common with each other than they often realize. He does not neglect Eastern Orthodoxy, but in the nature of the case the issues there are different.

In sacramental matters the East stands over against the West as a whole, and not simply against Roman Catholics, Lutherans or Reformed Protestants as individual groupings. Here it has to be said that neither Anglicans nor Baptists or Pentecostals get much attention. This is a pity, because Anglicans have often prided themselves on having found the *via media* between conflicting Catholic and Protestant tendencies, and also because Baptists and Pentecostals are currently setting so much of the theological agenda, especially where ecclesiology is concerned. No doubt we are dealing here with the limitations of German-speaking culture, where Lutherans and Reformed have long struggled with each other (and with Catholics, of course) but where the other branches of Christendom are barely represented. Unfortunately, when a work such as this is translated into English, such omissions appear to be major gaps, and many readers are liable to wonder how Pannenberg's conclusions relate to their own very different circumstances.

Chapter 14 deals with the thorny subject of election, and here too Pannenberg gives primacy to the individual, even as he accepts that collective election is the norm in the Old Testament. He is aware of the way in which this doctrine has been abused, not least by secular politicians seeking to reinforce some particular nationalism, and he tackles that issue head-on with an outright rejection of all such tendencies. The final chapter, which deals with eschatology, emphasizes the reality of Christ's return and the final consummation of all things, regarding this as the logical and inevitable conclusion of the Christian revelation. The main weakness in these chapters is Pannenberg's reluctance to deal with the thorny question of reprobation and eternal damnation. He has to admit that these themes have been important in the past, but he does everything he can to avoid

facing them in the present. He is not a universalist in any dogmatic sense, and leaves open the possibility that there will be those who will refuse salvation in Christ, even at the last judgment, but he does his best to insist that salvation for all is and will remain an option right up to the end. Here he is in conflict with the Augustinian-Calvinist tradition of Reformed theology, and Evangelicals within the Anglican Communion will not be able to follow him. Anyone who has preached the gospel knows that there are those whose hearts are hardened when they hear it, tragic though that is. Reprobation may be unpalatable, but like cod-liver oil, it exists and cannot simply be wished away. Here we need to think more deeply about the reality of sin, and about the terrible responsibility for it which we have as free human beings, created in the image and likeness of God but in wilful rebellion against him.

The translation, by Geoffrey Bromiley, is generally of a high standard and it reads well, although there are few concessions to those who are not familiar with theological language and debates. There are numerous footnotes and a number of passages are printed in smaller type, indicating that they are expansions on the general theme which can be skipped by those in a hurry, though it would be a pity if this were done. Many of these apparent digressions contain extremely valuable historical and exegetical information which forms an important backdrop to the overall argument. Those with a good knowledge of the subject may know much of what is written here already, but it does not hurt to refresh one's memory, particularly when Pannenberg is integrating this information into the overall development of his thought. His learning is massive, his desire to reconcile different Christian traditions is impressive and his fundamentally positive approach to perennial theological difficulties is to be welcomed. No doubt everyone will find something to disagree with somewhere in these pages, but that should not be allowed to obscure the author's magnificent achievement. This volume, along with its two predecessors, is a great contribution to our understanding of Christian truth and a model for us all to follow as we seek to penetrate the mysteries of that truth ever more profoundly.

GERALD BRAY

CHURCH ON FIRE: The Story of Anglican Evangelicals

Roger Steer

London: Hodder & Stoughton 1998 484pp £8.99 pb

The blurb claims that this book is a 'major new survey of the Church on both sides of the Atlantic'. The Church indeed – so what of the subtitle? And 'both sides of the Atlantic' – with only some 90 of its near 500 pages devoted to America! And as for 'major' it is difficult to imagine how a work at times sketchy and at others unbalanced can merit such a

description. It covers (if that is the right word) the nineteenth century in a mere 36 pages and then devotes nearly 200 to the twentieth, having earlier in a single chapter run from Wycliffe to William and Mary, all of four centuries, with the whole lot described as the 'Church on fire with reforming zeal'. Whitefield is summarily treated in a brief space and Simeon gets a mere three pages, whereas Grimshaw, one suspects on the author's acquaintance with a former rector of Haworth (whom incidentally I also have the pleasure of knowing), is given the grand treatment. Among the irrelevant curiosities to which we are introduced are Hooker (a dubious Evangelical)'s statue at Exeter with a pigeon sitting on its head and the fact that John Stott is an avid bird-watcher. Visions of Stott in the close at Exeter observing the pigeon?! Likewise the author's service to the Bible Society, commendable though it may be, is just so much unnecessary gossip in a so-called history.

This is not a scholarly work. Such value as the book possesses derives mainly from its longest section, Part Five: 'Church on fire in twentieth-century England', though even here the first half of the century gets only five pages. Max Warren receives some notice, John Stott and Jim Packer rather more. Archbishop Carey is considered with my own former student, Stephen Trott, (not a canon, incidentally, however deserving of that dignity he may be) quoted as finding him 'a disappointment. We expected a more traditional Evangelical, but as Archbishop he's been Evangelical in no obvious way' – a pretty perceptive judgment, and coming from a confessed Anglo-Catholic. In this part of his work Steer also traces Evangelicalism through Keele, Nottingham, Caistor and the AEA in 1995, as well as considering such figures as David Holloway, Hugh Williamson, and James Barr as an anti-fundamentalist. I suspect the last-named's views hardened during his contact with his fellow Scot, F F Bruce at Manchester. Bruce managed to combine Brethren allegiance with total scholarly integrity, something that Barr may have found difficult to understand. Bruce is accorded only passing mention, even though his scholarship was both prolific and profound among evangelical writers of the post-War period. Interesting as much of this part of the book is, like the rest it lacks the rigour and method that one has a right to look for in a volume that makes the claims that this does. Anyone interested in Evangelicalism in this period would do better to go to David Bebbington's magisterial *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* or for Anglicans exclusively, Randal Manwaring's *From Controversy to Co-existence*, even though neither of these goes beyond 1980.

In a final section Steer looks into the twenty-first century with a discussion of evangelical emphases and most notably justification by faith, for which he draws on Jim Packer and, even more, on Tom Wright. Though not history, it is in some ways the most thought-provoking section

of the whole of this vexatious volume.

ARTHUR POLLARD

LEGEND David Rohl

London: Century 1998 454pp £20.00 hb ISBN 0-7126-7747-X

David Rohl's first book, *A Test of Time*, is a best-seller and has been made into a TV series. This work is the next volume in this project which essentially involves a fresh look at Middle Eastern archaeological and historical evidence, particularly insofar as that evidence is linked to the biblical record.

Rohl is a trained Egyptologist and cannot therefore be written off as an eccentric ignoramus, even though some academics would probably like to do so. His project emerges from a conviction that the biblical record should be taken more seriously, and that the peer pressure of academic respectability has prevented researchers from questioning the basic assumptions on which their discipline is built. His comments in respect of the latter on pp 48-9 need to be heard.

In *A Test of Time* the author sought to adjust Egyptian chronology to make a better fit with the evidence and with what the Bible says. In *Legend*, he seeks to place the earlier chapters of Genesis into a historical framework within Mesopotamia. He believes the Garden of Eden can be located and that the names of antediluvian figures and places may be related to the historical evidence. His discussions also involve a reassessment of the link between Mesopotamia and the origins of Egyptian civilization.

The way in which Rohl uses the Scriptures may betray a mediocre understanding of the message the Bible wishes to convey, but that does not discount all the points he makes in this reappraisal of the historical evidence. Many will be surprised to find him speculating that the remains of Noah's Ark may still be found and many will be unconvinced by some of his philological arguments, but much of what he has to say makes considerable sense. His work on the location of the Garden of Eden and his revision of the development of Sumerian civilization make cases which cannot simply be ignored.

Of course a proper assessment of Rohl's arguments has to be done by those who are very well acquainted with the evidence. Yet that very necessity has often been used by scholars to shut themselves off from other ways of thinking and from challenges made to their basic assumptions. The closed shop found in much of the academic world needs to be freed from its timidity and prejudices, especially where the Bible is concerned.

Rohl may have made a number of errors but his bold suggestions need to be heard and properly evaluated rather than arrogantly dismissed. His approach is refreshing and the discerning Christian will find much that is stimulating, sensible and helpful in these pages.

MARK BURKILL

ORIGINAL SIN – ILLUMINATING THE RIDDLE

Henri Blocher

Leicester: Apollos (IVP) 1997 158pp £10.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-514-4

There is no Christian doctrine which has come under greater attack, but which is at the same time more fundamental to our understanding of salvation than that of original sin. Psychologists, biologists, anthropologists and theologians have all weighed in against it. The plausibility of a historical Adam has been dismissed as scarcely worth considering, and the question of inherited human guilt (as distinct from an innate tendency to go wrong) has provoked enormous anguish from people who regard it as unfair, immoral, and so on. Even conservative Christians, who are committed to defending the traditional position, have found it expedient to weaken the impact of the Augustinian doctrine by relying on various substitutes for it which remove the horror of eternal damnation as the destiny of the entire unregenerate human race, including newly born children.

In this climate of opinion it takes courage to restate the traditional position with conviction, but this is precisely what Henri Blocher has attempted in his short but profound study of the issue. Dr Blocher is fully conversant with modern discussion in the many fields which bear on the subject, and he uses this knowledge to great effect in his arguments. He maintains, for example, that belief in a historical Adam is an essential part of biblical anthropology, and that this can be defended in a way which is consistent with modern biological and anthropological knowledge. Those who dismiss the opening chapters of Genesis as 'myth' have spoken too soon. They have confused the literary style of the narrative with falsehood, a fundamental error of method which makes it impossible for them to develop a coherent doctrine of creation and the fall. Dr Blocher demonstrates that it is not possible to affirm the present reality of universal human sinfulness whilst at the same time denying its historical origins – if Adam did not choose what was evil, then the only option is to conclude that the latter is part of creation, a monstrous doctrine which goes against one of the most basic affirmations of Scripture. Evil is not part of nature, but a denial of it, and if we opt for the former solution we have no reason to hope for rescue from our current plight. The goodness of God and the meaning of our salvation in Christ depend on the historical reality of the sin of Adam to a degree which even orthodox Christians may often fail to appreciate.

In the course of his argument, Dr Blocher deals with the views of a wide range of theologians, including Karl Barth, Søren Kierkegaard, C S Lewis and Paul Ricoeur, as well as classical voices such as those of Blaise Pascal, Jean Calvin and Augustine, who receives the ultimate praise (or blame) for having elaborated the basic structure of the doctrine in the first place. Dr Blocher makes no attempt to underestimate the significance of Augustine's contribution, but he shows how it relies entirely on the evidence of Scripture, especially of Romans 5:12. This highly controversial verse is discussed in full, and related to the rest of the Pauline corpus, as well as to the wider teaching of the entire Bible. Far from being an isolated aberration, Paul's statement in Romans is shown to be both consistent with the message of Scripture and the ultimate foundation of its anthropological teaching.

The importance of this for the preaching of the gospel is plain to see. If we do not understand what is wrong with the human race, and if we are not persuaded that the evil is too deep to be cured by human efforts, the message of Christ's salvation will not be heard in its deepest meaning. In effect, we shall bypass our salvation and lose out on the blessing of God. For original sin, terrible though it is, can never be understood apart from the destruction of its power by the cross of Christ. Dr Blocher brings this out in his concluding chapter, which shows us very clearly what that atoning sacrifice really means.

This is not an easy book to read, in spite of its short length. It tackles difficult and controversial subjects in a clear and illuminating way, but it must be pondered and absorbed if it is to be fully understood and appreciated. Dr Blocher has performed a magnificent feat of biblical exposition which the Christian world desperately needs to take to heart. If his words are heeded, then there is a chance that the spiritual flabbiness which currently dominates our society may be tackled and overcome, to the glory of God and the extension of the kingdom of Christ.

GERALD BRAY

EPHESIANS – International Critical Commentary

E Best

Edinburgh: T and T Clark 1998 686pp £39.95 hb ISBN 0-56708565-1

Professor Best's contribution to the ICC series of commentaries is a superb example of thorough, workmanlike scholarship, which manages to combine massive learning and attention to detail, with a scattering of down-to-earth, and at times, witty comments. It is also a commentary with the sensitivities of a modern readership in mind. We should not therefore be surprised when we find Best drawing our attention to the purely

masculine depiction of the spiritual battle in Ephesians 6.

There is an extensive introduction which contains a comprehensive discussion of the issues of authorship and the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians. In addition, the commentary includes significant notes on: The Heavens; In Christ; The Powers; The Body of Christ; Israel and the Church; The Haustafel. At the end are two longer pieces: one on the Church, and the other on the Moral Teaching in Ephesians.

On the vexed question of authorship, Best concludes that Ephesians was probably not written by Paul, and throughout the commentary he designates the author as AE, for 'author of Ephesians'. He considers Colossians to be the work of another hand, although he thinks that both authors belonged to a Pauline school.

Best's espousal of non-Pauline authorship will not please those who are looking for a scholarly commentary that defends the traditional view. However, his handling of the subject is both thorough and even-handed. In fact, throughout the commentary, he is refreshingly dismissive of those rather doctrinaire and often flimsy 'evidences' that are all too frequently trotted out as indicators of non-Pauline authorship. For example, commenting on the way that Isaiah 59:17 is used in Ephesians 6:17, Best remarks: 'It would be wrong ... to conclude from these variations [from the way Paul handles them elsewhere] ... that Paul did not write Ephesians; authors have the right to modify their metaphors if it is necessary to express what they want to say in a different situation...' (p 602). As to the literary form of Ephesians, Best opts for a homily: 'It seems best ... to think of AE as intending to write a homily but, realising that Paul normally wrote letters, deliberately disguising his homily as a letter. It is consequently of mixed genre' (p 62).

On eschatology, Best prefers to speak of a 'fully realised soteriology' rather than the more usual 'realised eschatology' (p 52). When it comes to the change to the first person plural in 1:11, Best, like Schnackenburg and Lincoln, does not see this as a shift from 'you' (Gentiles) to 'we' (Jews). However, on the use of $\alpha\lambda\acute{\omicron}\nu$ in 2:2, Best, over against Lincoln, takes this to refer to 'an evil personal power'.

Overall, Professor Best tells us that Ephesians presents a coherent argument: '[T]he first half sets out teaching on the unity of the church and its relation to Christ; the second half instructs believers how they are to live with one another within their Christian communities ... All this is set within a supernatural or cosmic framework from which through recollection of their election and baptism and through prayer and worship

believers receive the love and strength to grow' (p 74).

Are there any reservations about Best's handling of Ephesians? Well, here are a few:

He has a tendency to set the author of Ephesians over against Paul and to treat some of the arguments in Ephesians as falling below Paul's standards.

Best considers that the principalities and powers, though hostile, are capable of redemption. It is not clear that such a view would have met with the approval of the author of Ephesians, and indeed Best himself recognizes the difficulty of reconciling his own position with the way Ephesians describes the conflict between the believer and the powers.

The spiritual conflict in Ephesians 6 provides Best with other difficulties. For instance, he struggles to discover a relationship between chapter 6:10f and the material that has gone before. 'No clear connection exists', he writes, 'between the behaviour of the members of the household ... and a struggle between every believer and the superhuman powers...' (p 585). This is rather unsatisfactory: it causes verses 4:1- 6:9 to sit uncomfortably in the text; it also ignores the possibility that verses 4:1f, *including* the Household Code, provide the setting for the spiritual battle in 6:10f.

Finally, at certain key points, Professor Best raises significant doubts about the relevance of Ephesians to a modern setting. For example he considers the Household Code to be inadequate – 'pastorally unrealistic' and 'defective' (p 527) – even within a first-century setting. This makes its application to a modern setting even more problematical. However, there are good reasons for thinking that Best is being unfair to the intentions of the author at this point, and that the form of the Household Code in Ephesians, far from being inadequate, has been carefully crafted to fit the overall argument of the letter. If so, the material cannot be dismissed so easily. Indeed, we may need to allow that such teaching speaks as sharply to the modern context as when it was written.

Despite these reservations, it must be said that Professor Best has delivered a commentary that is likely to become a standard text on Ephesians, and anyone wishing to find their way through the minefield of scholarly literature must be grateful to him for the wise and skilful navigation he provides. That said, impoverished ministers may conclude that at nearly £40, this commentary is too scholarly a work for their normal purposes.

THE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE DEBATE. A PLEA FOR REALISM

D A Carson

Leicester: IVP/Grand Rapids: Baker Books 1998 221pp £9.99 pb
ISBN 0-8010-5835-X

This book is a balanced and detailed study of one of the odder controversies of our time. The English language is unusual in that it has reduced grammatical gender to sex, and then only allows it in the third person singular – ‘they’ does as the plural form for ‘he’, ‘she’ and ‘it’ without distinction. Unfortunately there is no similarly gender neutral word in the singular, and much of Dr Carson’s book is preoccupied with this problem, for the simple reason that very often the Bible uses singular forms (almost always masculine) in cases where the gender is really unimportant. How should such things be translated?

For a long time, the tendency was to use the masculine gender in English as well (eg ‘Everyone must eat *his* dinner’), and this is still regarded as formally correct by the traditional guardians of our tongue. Yet popular usage has been moving away from this, either by adding ‘or her’ after ‘his’ or by substituting ‘their’, which in this case becomes technically singular, even though it refers in principle to more than one person.

Dr Carson points out that problems of this kind are not new and that different solutions to them have been adopted for a very long time, largely without anyone noticing. Sometimes it is a case of having to choose between ‘sons’ or ‘men’ and ‘children’ or ‘people’, but even the Authorized Version of 1611 was inconsistent about this, using whatever form seemed to be more ‘natural’ to the translator at the time. Here a problem has been created by the modern urge towards consistency of usage, even if that is not found in the original Hebrew or Greek texts of the Bible. Modern translation has acquired a socio-political dimension which did not plague earlier generations, when only a minority was literate and the rest had to accept whatever they thought was right. Nowadays there are demands for different translations to meet the needs of different sub-groups within our society, and gender-inclusive language is one of the factors which has to be taken into account by those seeking to find something broadly acceptable to more than one group.

Dr Carson does an excellent job of putting this issue in its broader context, showing quite clearly how one man’s meat can be another human being’s poison, and he is to be congratulated for having achieved a degree of objectivity about it which is all too rare. In the end, most people object to gender-inclusive language only when it produces something inelegant (like the dreadful ‘humankind’) or when it is forced on those to whom such usages are unnatural. At the moment, there is evidence to suggest that

recent Bible translations have erred too far in the direction of gender neutrality, and Dr Carson points out instances where retention of the traditional masculine forms would be better. But he accepts that there are many instances where gender is irrelevant, and then efforts should be made to reflect this in translation. Even so, we still come up against the he/she problem mentioned at the beginning of this review, and there is no fully acceptable solution to it. To use both pronouns is cumbersome, but to put 'she/her' instead (eg 'Everyone must eat *her* dinner') is just as gender exclusive as the masculine form, and has the added disadvantage of drawing unnecessary attention to itself. It seems that our language forces us to live with this one, inconvenient though it may be in some cases. But in so far as a way forward can be found it appears that Dr Carson has found it, and open-minded readers of varying persuasions will surely find themselves in agreement with him more often than not.

GERALD BRAY

THE PREACHING WORKBOOK **David Day**

London: Publisher Links/SPCK 1998 152pp £9.99 pb ISBN 1-901443-15-0

This book on preaching, by the just retired principal of St John's College, Durham, is as the title describes. It is a workbook and it needs to be both read and done, and the author is right in suggesting that both parts are essential in order to benefit from it.

I, and I am sure readers of this Journal will, appreciate the way in which David Day sets out the aim of preaching like this:

In this book I want to argue in favour of Bible-based preaching. I have already tried to indicate that, whatever one's personal understanding of biblical exploration and authority may be, the Bible contains the primary documents of the faith. The Church is formed by scripture. Scripture ought to be at the heart of every piece of distinctively Christian communication.

One of the pieces of work recommended is to react to this statement, and it would not do us any harm, whether we read the book or not, just to do this!

There is some good material on text, structure and shape in sermon preparation as well as a whole range of useful tips, including the use of visual aids. For someone who majors in communication, there is some much needed material on the balance between the responsibilities of speaker and hearer. In the church context, the latter are described as 'the word-processors in the pew'. I liked very much David Day's constant appeal that Christian communication needs to address mind and heart and

will. Again, I believe readers of this Journal will appreciate his warning about what he describes as 'frisky theology' in chapter four. Certainly he is right that much theology that is preached is far too dependent on generalities rather than the specifics of text, passage and the particular biblical book that is being handled. Dick Lucas's constant reminder that we should not preach from the framework seems to accord with Day's concerns here, and I believe that much of the weakness of contemporary preaching is due exactly to this, that hard pressed and busy preachers rely on their fund of knowledge and notes rather than draw fresh material from the living and abiding Word for the particular situation and congregation they are called upon to address.

There is some helpful discussion on the relationship between words and the Word, but I sense that at this point the book is not at its strongest. Certainly, when we come to the section on the Good News in chapter five the content is quite thin. If gospel certainties are meant to be taken as read, this is a great pity in a book which in other areas is so helpful. I hope that I am not reading a book which at the end of the day majors on communication while at the same time minimizes the content of the communication. I hope that this is not the case but, for this reason, would not recommend this book by itself for would-be or current preachers. It certainly needs to be supplemented by John Stott's *I believe in preaching*, and in a lesser compass J I Packer's excellent *Aspects of authority* (Orthos booklets number 9). Having said this, there is much good material here for us all and, provided that it is put in the wider context, both of the Word of God and of the wisdom of other preachers, then today's preachers could learn much from it.

TREVOR PARKIN

THE LAW OF THE PARISH CHURCH (7th EDITION)

Dale

London: Butterworths 1998 223pp no price pb ISBN 0 406 89777 8

This excellent introduction to and essential summary of the powers, rights and duties of the clergy, churchwardens, parochial church council and parishioners first appeared in 1932. Since then a new and updated edition has appeared each decade. As there have been many changes in the law since the sixth edition of 1989 (the ordination of women being the most obvious) this new revision of 1998, which incorporates those changes, is most welcome.

In the space of some 13 chapters both general and particular information is imparted. This is supplemented by tables, an extensive appendix and a comprehensive index. Taken together, both substance and supplements make the volume an invaluable reference source for all who either need to

know or are interested in the law as it affects the parish church today.

All clergy should furnish themselves with a copy of this book. Indeed, an argument can be made that all ordinands should be encouraged to purchase, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest its contents as it may enable them to approach the parochial ministry with a greater degree of confidence. I wish I had been introduced to the fifth edition back in 1975. As it is, for almost 22 years I have exercised a parish based ministry in two dioceses and three parishes ignorant of its existence.

Over the years I have discovered that legal matters are never that far away in parochial life. For example, in these days of managed decline within the Church of England, issues relating to pastoral reorganization are increasingly becoming questions of pressing concern for some. Clergy and church officers as a matter of routine face requests for baptism and marriage. Furthermore all parochial church council members regularly find that issues relating to synodical government demand attention. You will find compressed into succinct chapters the essential information you need on these and other matters.

Note 1 on page 97 should either be numbered note 7 and placed on page 96, or the bottom line of the text on page 96 moved to the top of page 97. Apart from this error the notes and references given throughout will aid those who need to explore further.

This volume is useful for another reason. As well as gaining an overview of where the Church of England is at present, you also begin to appreciate the enormity of the task facing those who want to see that august body reformed under and according to the Word of God. To discover that 'reservation is permissible' (p 45) in a church that is supposed to uphold the Protestant Reformed religion established by law is somewhat discouraging, to say the least!

GEORGE CURRY

CASSIAN THE MONK **Columba Stewart**
 Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998 286pp £46.00 hb
 ISBN 0-19-511366-7

The name of John Cassian (c360-c435) is little known today, even among students of theology, despite the fact that few men have exerted a greater influence on the spirituality of Western Europe. Cassian was a Latin-speaking monk who spent many years in Palestine and Egypt at a time when monasticism was in its greatest flowering there. The heroic age of the founders of the desert cells had already passed, and Cassian saw himself very much as the preserver of a legacy which was in danger of being forgotten. He

was fascinated by tales of the miracle-working monks of a bygone era, and by seeking to interpret and hand on the principles which made them great, he was determined to preserve their heritage for future generations.

Cassian was a theological descendant of the great Origen, to whom he owed his basic spiritual orientation. Following the master, he believed that the highest form of the Christian life was the single-minded pursuit of perfect tranquillity, which was to be found in the knowledge of God. This knowledge was not merely intellectual; it was also a life-changing spiritual experience which set those who had it apart from the world. For Cassian this was the ultimate justification of monasticism, and his main concern was to develop a pattern of life in which every thought and action would be consecrated to prayer in the presence of God.

In achieving this he was greatly indebted to Evagrius Ponticus and to Diodochus of Photice, and possibly also to the unknown writer who goes by the name of the pseudo-Macarius. These links were largely hidden from view until the twentieth century, because in Cassian's own day the theology of Origen and Evagrius had come under suspicion of heresy and it was not safe to refer to them openly or to appropriate their teachings too obviously. Cassian himself got caught up in the debate over Pelagianism which was raging in early fifth-century Gaul, and the author of this book shows clearly how uncongenial strict Augustinianism was to someone of Cassian's type. Here too it was necessary to be diplomatic and to conceal as much as to reveal, though it is probably fairest to say that Cassian sought a middle way between what appeared to him to be the two extremes of Pelagius and Augustine - a middle way which was to be very fruitful in the subsequent development of medieval spirituality and which has unfairly been labelled 'semi-Pelagian'.

Columba Stewart has written a magnificent study of this little-known figure, giving us a good overview of scholarly opinions regarding his life and putting him in the wider context of his time. He reminds us that Cassian was the only Latin monk to have been included in Greek anthologies of monastic writings, and one of the very few Latin writers to have been honoured with a Greek translation of his works during his lifetime. Cassian was a real bridge between East and West at a time when such ecumenism was becoming rare, and for that reason alone he deserves more attention than he has been given. This study will become the definitive work in English for the next generation at least, replacing Owen Chadwick's *John Cassian* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1968) in that capacity. Particular attention should be drawn to the notes at the end of the volume, which are extremely rich and take up nearly half the length of the book. For scholars they provide a rich feast indeed, and they have the added advantage of leaving the main text fully accessible to the non-specialist reader. This

book is a must for anyone interested in medieval monastic spirituality and reading it will provide a fresh insight into the development of Western Christendom from Augustine to Luther.

GERALD BRAY

KNOWING WHERE WE STAND: THE MESSAGE OF JOHN'S EPISTLES (Welwyn Commentary Series)

Peter Barnes

Darlington: Evangelical Press 1998 160pp £49.95 pb ISBN 0-85234-414-7

Martin Luther said of 1 John: 'I have never read a book written in simpler words than this one, and yet the words are inexpressible.' The aim of this popular level commentary is to turn the inexpressible profundities of John's three epistles back into simplicity for the benefit of clergy and lay-people alike. Using the New King James Version text, the minister of Nambucca River Presbyterian Church in New South Wales focuses on the three tests of right belief, love, and obedience found in 1 John. He is constantly aware of the modern danger of down-playing absolute truth, and encourages us that there are such things as right and wrong where doctrine is concerned. He is concerned to apply the Bible's message in a provocative and challenging way, not content to leave applications broad and ill-defined. Several 'false-prophets' are named and shamed in the course of the book, including Barbara Thiering, Robert Schuller, Oral Roberts and Kenneth Copeland. There are scathing criticisms of C H Dodd and William Barclay too, as well as thoughtful critiques of John Stott, David Jackman and others who have written on 1 John from an evangelical perspective.

Barnes can be pastorally insightful in his applications. I particularly liked his comment that 'we are usually very ready to believe that other people are sinners, but we must test ourselves first' (p 69). Occasionally he is in danger of forgetting this himself, as he applies the message of 1 John to the New Age, Buddhism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, liberal 'Christians' and even 'professing evangelicals' (by which he means those who claim to be evangelical but who fail to meet his criteria of approval). I would have appreciated a more sustained critique of positions closer to home. Barnes never pulls punches, however, and for that he is to be commended.

They say that it is possible to reconstruct most of the New Testament from references in the early church Fathers. Buy this book, and the multiple cross-references on every page will make patristics redundant! If you find yourself running low on quotations to sprinkle around in your sermons then why not plunder this book – there are about ten in every chapter, along with the obligatory hymn to illustrate the point, sometimes quite unnecessarily. On page 127 we are treated to four lines by Daniel Webster Whittle, which do nothing but regurgitate 2 Timothy 1:12. Other hymn citations leave the

reader with the distinct impression that English hymnody must have nothing very substantial to offer post-Wesley.

The real weakness with this book is that it is not really an exposition of John's epistles at all, but a handbook of traditional evangelical dogma expounded with the use of evangeli-jargon, copious proof-texts and old hymns. It starts off in 1 John, but never stays there very long. The cover claims it is 'a thorough, stimulating and informed study of these epistles'. It is certainly informed, if by that we mean that the author has read a great deal and the footnotes look impressive. It is occasionally stimulating. It is by no means a thorough study of John's epistles, which are treated more as a collection of pithy proverbs than as epistles. This is not the place to go for an exegesis or interpretation of John – but for polemic, quotations and doctrinal framework, it is harder to fault.

LEE GATISS

THE IDEA OF THE POSTMODERN – A History

Hans Bertens

London: Routledge 1995 284pp £12.99 pb ISBN 0-415-06012-5

'Postmodernism' is a word which one comes across increasingly in articles today. It is not an easy term to define, but perhaps it would not be far wide of the mark to call it a complex reaction of scepticism to many of the established certainties of the past – the relatively recent past, that is. Such certainties still have considerable sway and no doubt will continue to do so especially in the case of the hard sciences (such as physics), but even here the movement is not without considerable influence. Postmodernism is highly influential in most of the arts. It is perhaps in epistemology that its impact concerns the evangelical theologian most; for as D A Carson has emphasized, with the loss of certainty that there is an infinite personal God *who knows everything* (and of whose knowledge our human knowledge is a minute subset), a foundation for absolute objective truth no longer clearly exists. Everything has become relative; nothing is 'truth for ever', something timelessly *given*. This obviously challenges the very foundations of what the Bible teaches; hence the importance of a study such as this, disappointing though I found it to be, at first.

Let me explain my qualification. Professor Bertens is Professor and Director of American Studies at the University of Utrecht. He has given us a very able 'first introductory overview of postmodernism', a 'witty and accessible guide for the bemused student', the cover advertisement says. This raises our expectations; but the trouble is that the 'overview' does not start from ground level. Many of the key ideas and personalities are assumed to be already familiar. Thus, here is a characteristic passage about 'dance'; it occurs in a paragraph headed *Postmodernism as radical self-reflexivity*:

This movement towards complete self-reflexivity constitutes another postmodernism of the 1970s. Not surprisingly, it manifests itself primarily in those artistic disciplines where modernism had not been self-reflexive, or not sufficiently self-reflexive. In its initial stage, it usually takes a Greenbergian form, that is, it is anti-representational without being interested in the problematics of representation and asserts the autonomy of art. After the mid-1970s, its anti-representationalism is seen in deconstructionist terms, as engaged in an interrogation of representation, of language, of the subject and of the underlying liberal humanist ideology in general.

I would not say this is incomprehensible without a previous term's introductory study, but it is certainly not user-friendly for the average reader. Nor does it fulfil the promise flamboyantly displayed on the cover: 'At last! Everything you ever wanted to know about postmodernism but were afraid to ask.' Furthermore, in line with this Journal's interests, matters which could remotely be called 'theological' are conspicuously absent; the only reference I found in the Index was to 'New Age spirituality', and this referred the reader to the very last chapter, *Conclusion*. However, this chapter was for me a redeeming feature; it would have been worth working through the whole book to find it. Here is the substance of an extract from it.

In the novel *Ratner's Star* by the American author Don DeLillo a fourteen-year-old boy, Billy Twillig, a Nobel Prizewinner in mathematics, is flown out to the desert to join an international team trying to decipher a message coded in numerals which has come in from cosmic outer darkness. It might contain the key to the universe itself! But so far all attempts to unravel it have failed. It has even driven the famous mathematician Endor over the edge and into the desert where he spends his days in a hole, meditating, eating worms, and uttering strange things. Billy succeeds in cracking the code; but disappointingly at first, the result is only to indicate a time. But suddenly it connects with the theories of a fantastic scientist, Mohole, who claimed to have discovered that there are zones in the cosmos where the supposedly universal laws of physics do not apply. Modestly, he named these zones after himself, and pointed out that in a mohole the laws of physics vary from one observer to another, a feature that is at odds with every notion of the universe that displays a faith in nature. It turns out that the time decoded by Billy pin-points the moment when the planet Earth will enter a mohole. Apparently the message had been sent out from Earth itself by an enormously sophisticated previous civilization that aeons ago had been destroyed by a mohole; and using some celestial body as a reflector, had desperately tried to warn a possible future generation against a similar fate. But wait! The time the message reveals is actually at hand! The novel ends with Billy and his fellow scientists at the research centre scrambling in

all directions to avoid the imminent catastrophe, heralded incidentally by a theoretically impossible and so quite unforeseeable total eclipse of the sun. Billy guesses that Endor had deciphered the message long ago and had withdrawn into his mystic visions for that very reason, and he heads frantically on a tricycle (the only vehicle he can grab) to find Endor's hideout. Alas! he is overtaken by the eclipse... When the Earth enters the mohole all forms of representation, even those offered by that flagship of the sciences, physics, come abruptly to an end.

I think the reader will see what Bertens is getting at in quoting this novel's scenario. 'A good many theoretizations [*sic*] of the postmodern suggest that for some time now we have been finding ourselves in the middle of a moral, political, and cognitive [he might have added, theological] mohole and, indeed, may never get out on the other side.' 'As in DeLillo's novel, the end of representation – the postmodern mohole – has sent us scrambling in various directions', and he suggests some being advocated now. 'In fact', he says 'the whole New Age movement itself is a response to our representational crisis, just as are the various forms of fundamentalism' (later he mentions Ernest Gellner's half-ironically-named Enlightenment Rationalist Fundamentalism, which does incidentally seem to succeed in validating the results of scientific enquiry as real knowledge, in spite of postmodernism! I would like to add Clifford Longley's Liberal Fundamentalism and Richard Dawkins' Darwinian Fundamentalism). There are more valuable insights in this last chapter, but it would take too long to discuss them. So I will close with this appraisal: this is not a book that can be absorbed at a sitting, or late at night, but it is one which will reward anyone grappling seriously with the current theological crisis of pluralism. The postmodernist deconstructionist idea that it is impossible to find and 'represent' objective truth with any adequacy in words, but that the use of language can only be a game, will not do; but neither will the modernist idea that it is possible to ground real knowledge on rationality. This goal of modernism has been defeated by self-reflection on itself; ie by postmodernism. But now postmodernism is being defeated by the same process – self-reflection: 'The reflexivity that is at the heart of the modern project is ultimately its undoing since it reveals to us that reflection, in the form of reflection upon reflection, is always the starting-point of an infinite regression.' I find myself left with three Bible verses (Deuteronomy 29:29; Ecclesiastes 3:11; and Proverbs 9:10) and with the conviction that what our race needs is a return to that foundation of all true human knowing, the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of the Holy One.

Each chapter ends with a page or so of Notes; there is a Bibliography of 15 pages and an Index of 20. The book is well produced.

DOUGLAS C SPANNER