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## Book Reviews

### BUSTLING INTERMEDDLER?: THE LIFE AND WORK OF CHARLES JAMES BLOMFIELD

Malcolm Johnson

Leominster: Gracewing 2001 210pp £14.99pb ISBN 0-85244 -546-6

‘Awesome in his industry’; ‘The most marvellous power of despatching business’; ‘He entered every part of national life, sacred and secular’; but ‘not much of a spiritual guide’. If anybody had quoted those phrases to me and asked me to guess the prelate they referred to, I think that I would have chosen Geoffrey Fisher. In fact, they are all from this book and I refer to Charles James Blomfield (1786-1857), who, like Fisher, was Bishop of London but for a much longer time (1828-1856) and for most of that period, in Sydney Smith’s witty phrase, ‘the Church of England here on earth’.

It was a time of great change for the church, especially after 1832 when the post-Reform Act Whig Government intervened extensively in church affairs. Blomfield, as the pragmatic church politician, worked with it in that decade which saw the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Commission and the abolition or modification of many of the anomalies in clerical duties and payments. He supported, for example, the Dean and Chapter Bill (1840) which ironed out some of the differences between rich and poorer cathedrals ‘on the grounds of expediency, necessity and urgency’ (p 79). Right as this was, Blomfield received, like many another politician, more brickbats than bouquets for his part in it.

Blomfield was essentially a practical man, a master of the art of the possible, stretching opportunity as far as it would go, as all such masters do. He was not popular, but he always placed duty, doing what had to be done, before applause. Indeed, one historian, Geoffrey Best, suggests that he was one of those men who doubt whether they are doing their duty unless they make themselves unpopular (p 77). The bishop’s fiercest critic was Disraeli, who cast him as the episcopal ‘Arch-Mediocrity’ in his novel *Tancred* (1849)—but then Blomfield was also a good friend of another of Disraeli’s *betes-noirs*, Peel! It is from that pen-portrait that Johnson takes his title, but adding also the important question-mark. In one regard Disraeli is manifestly wrong in asserting that Blomfield withdrew when he found that any of his proposals were unpopular, but his other remarks, though unsympathetic in their inference, are accurate in their description—

He combined a great talent for action with very limited powers of thought. Bustling, energetic, versatile, gifted with an indomitable perseverance and stimulated by an ambition that knew no repose. With a capacity for mastering details and an inordinate passion for affairs. He could permit nothing to be done without his interference....

The energetic usually interfere. It is the result that matters. Blomfield had four years at Chester before moving to London. He saw there the social effects of the Industrial Revolution in the often far from pleasant burgeoning of the population in places such as Liverpool and Manchester. He came to the capital to find another city growing at least equally fast and outstripping the social provision for the vast numbers then living there. Over the next nearly three decades he oversaw the building of two-hundred new churches, but he was equally concerned about secular matters such as the administration of the new Poor Law, factory legislation, the employment of children, public health, the drink problem, burials and education. Johnson quotes Mark Twain to the effect that 'Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are far more deadly in the long run' (p 128). There is, therefore, really nothing surprising in Samuel Wilberforce's surprise when, on arriving to meet Blomfield, he found the latter about to depart for a meeting to discuss the kind of soap to be used in the new bathhouses (pp 5-7). There is something also a little amusing about this episode, for who better to take to such a meeting than the man who was known, though for other reasons, as 'Soapy Sam'? A glance at the admirably full index will show the extent of Blomfield's social concern, but all that for Disraeli was interference.

Johnson treats church reform, social reform and London at length, but he also has a chapter on Blomfield's role as 'Bishop of the Empire' with several colonial sees established during his time at London. (Incidentally, Timothy Yates in his too little known *Venn and the Victorian Bishops Abroad* (1978) exemplifies Blomfield's sympathies with, and help to CMS, especially with some of its African problems.) London being then, as for most of the time since, inclined to Anglo-Catholic developments, Johnson also considers Blomfield's response to Tractarianism, incipient ritualism and the Gorham Judgment. He quotes another scholar, PJ Welch, to the effect that Blomfield had no, or at least no discernible, theology and that he originated the 'tradition of impartiality and comprehensiveness' which Johnson claims, continues in London today. Blomfield required his clergy to observe historic Anglican practice, which his

successor, Tait, found in some instances not to be the case. Perhaps this was because Blomfield felt that the law could not prevail against encroaching innovations. By contrast with the two archbishops, he also gave his opinion against Gorham in the Privy Council judgement. Without necessarily interpreting the words of the evangelical periodical ‘The Record’, as harshly as it intended, there is much truth in the view that, however vague his theology, Blomfield ‘differed from the Evangelical in principle [and from] the Tractarians only in degree’ (p 139).

It is strange that for one who did so much and who was so influential there has been no full-length study since the hagiographical volume of 1863. Malcolm Johnson has done a fine job in remedying this neglect. His treatment is comprehensive, scholarly and fluent. There are a few misprints and I was a little surprised to see the poetic fables read by the young Victoria ascribed simply to ‘a Mr. Gay’ (Gay was quite an important member of the early eighteenth-century circle around Pope and Swift), whilst ‘Mr. N.W. Senior’ on the Poor Law Commission was none other than Nassau Senior, the important lawyer-economist who wrote its report. These are minimal criticisms. The work itself deserves the Bishop of London’s commendation in his foreword—‘This is an enjoyable book but also one in which justice has been done to one of the great reformers of the nineteenth century’ (p xii).

ARTHUR POLLARD

### **CHALLENGING CATHOLICS. A Catholic–Evangelical Dialogue** **Dwight Longenecker and John Martin**

Carlisle: Paternoster Press 2001 205pppb £7.99 ISBN 1-84227-096-6

This is a book which still has me in two minds—and not just because it is a dialogue between two ‘converts’, Dwight Longenecker (from American fundamentalism to Roman Catholicism) and John Martin (from Australian Presbyterianism to Anglicanism). My problem is I still can’t quite make my mind up as to how useful the book is, or exactly to whom it might appeal.

The dialogues were apparently designed to be turned into a programme for Premier Radio. However, this is where the problems begin, for a live discussion inevitably loses something in a written presentation. Live discussion makes an immediate impact through people’s reactions, expressions and body language

which all supplement the impression made by their words. In a book, we look for reasoned consideration and reflection and we lack the supporting tone of voice or shift of posture.

Of course, the use of dialogues, real and imaginary, has an honourable history in Christian theology. Nevertheless, such dialogues have usually been a literary device rather than reportage. Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?*, for example, is a clearly an artificial conversation on which is hung a substantial theological tract. We do not know how much editing was done on *Challenging Catholics*, but the impression is of a genuine and largely verbatim conversation. The strength of this is that it retains the 'live' feel of the radio show. The weakness is that the subject matter is not always dealt with in depth or in a systematic way.

Nevertheless, the range of topics is impressive and helpful—from authority, through particular doctrines to the future of the Church—and the protagonists certainly fight their corners.

The reader who has never heard the opinions and arguments of a reasonably well-informed Catholic (or Protestant!) would find the exercise of reading it worth the effort. Yet at the same time, another limitation with this book is that the better-informed reader desperately keeps wanting to join in. Sometimes it is over what is said, sometimes (perhaps more often) over what has not been said by either contributor.

And this, again, is a result of the book's format. Where dialogue is used as a literary device, the writer naturally tends to anticipate the questions a reader might ask and also has an intention to inform or persuade. John Cleese and Robin Skinner's *Families and How to Survive Them*, for example, uses a 'question and answer' dialogue to educate the reader in some of the ideas of 20th century psychology. Another difficulty with *Challenging Catholics*, however, is that no-one has or gains the upper hand and therefore the book neither aims at nor reaches any conclusions. (This may, incidentally, be because—as Premier know to their cost—the rules regulating religious broadcasting in the commercial sector very strictly regulate the criticism of the religious views of others.)

My own conclusion is that this is a useful, though not indispensable,

contribution to an important debate. It is important that dialogue continues between Roman Catholics and Protestants, particularly as the United Kingdom faces absorption into the European Union. (Incidentally, the book's eschewal of the adjectival qualification of 'Catholic' is another quibble). In that debate, this book might be a useful starter for absolute beginners, or a thought-provoker for those with a caricature view of the 'other side'.

JOHN P. RICHARDSON

**JONATHAN EDWARDS' RESOLUTIONS AND ADVICE TO YOUNG CONVERTS** ed. Stephen J. Nichols

Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing 2001 37 pp \$2.99 pb  
ISBN 0 8755 21894

This booklet well displays a side of Jonathan Edwards that unhappily has not always been remembered. In popular thinking Edwards is primarily pictured as a hellfire and brimstone preacher. There is little doubt that he was well aware of his responsibility as a Christian minister to warn his fellow inhabitants in this sin-soaked world that they must repent of their sins and believe in Christ or face a future of wrath and woe. His most famous sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God', preached during the Great Awakening of the 1740s, is more than adequate proof of this fact. However, when many are first introduced to his writings they are surprised by the winsomeness and beauty of his spiritual vision. Nourished as he was by Puritan spirituality, Edwards is indeed a spiritual mentor par excellence.

In the two works of Edwards reprinted in this small booklet, we see at firsthand the depth and maturity of his spirituality. Their value has long been recognized—witness the numerous reprints of them during the past three hundred years. The first text is his youthful Resolutions (1722-1723), in which, at the outset of his ministry, he drew up a list of seventy guidelines to help keep him passionate in his pursuit of God and his glory. Though young when he wrote these resolutions, they bespeak a mature understanding of genuine piety and the way such piety should be evident in all of life.

Advice to Young Converts, the second text, originated as a letter to a young woman named Deborah Hatheway (1722-1753). A member of the Congregationalist church in Suffield, Massachusetts, Hatheway turned to Edwards for advice about how to live the Christian life during a period of time

when her church was without a pastor. Edwards wrote to her on 3 June 1741, little knowing that by 1875 at least 328,000 copies of this letter would have been printed. The letter has nineteen pieces of advice, most of which centre upon growth in humility and holiness, and the cultivation of a deep sense of gratitude to God for forgiveness and salvation. Edwards advises her,

In all your course, walk with God and follow Christ as a poor, helpless child, taking hold of Christ's hand, keeping your eye on the mark of the wounds on his hands and side. From these wounds came the blood that cleanses you from sin and hides your nakedness under the skirt of the white shining robe of his righteousness (No 18).

Editor Stephen J Nichols, an assistant professor at Lancaster Bible College and Graduate School, does an excellent job of introducing the two texts and setting them in their historical context.

MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN

## THE CALL

Os Guinness

Carlisle: Spring Harvest/Paternoster 2001

249pp    £7.99 pb

ISBN 1-85978-429-9

This book has done me good. Subtitled 'Finding and fulfilling the central purpose in your life', it is a rousing summons to single-minded, lifelong following of Jesus Christ. It expounds calling as a powerful biblical metaphor for the life of faith, and aims to restore this understanding to our distracted and dissatisfied generation.

Guinness's method is compelling. Each short chapter analyses one aspect of his subject, concluding with questions to stir the reader's response. Each is packed with penetrating observation and analysis of the contemporary scene. Each is peppered with pungent examples, drawn from literature, history and personal experience, of men and women, inspiring and tragic, whose lives were made or marred by the objects of their ambition. One case is the Scottish-born industrialist Andrew Carnegie, America's 'King of Steel', who early in life sensed that money became an idol, yet despite his generous philanthropy remained insatiable in pursuit of wealth. Another is the boxer George Foreman, who said, 'Preaching is my calling. Boxing for me is only moonlighting in the same way Paul made tents'. Such illustrations are enlisted



To those at the other extreme, it was a golden age of faith and culture, when the great institutions and buildings which still grace the European landscape took shape. Somewhere in the middle is the broad consensus of modern scholarship, which has exploded in both breadth and depth over the past generation. This encyclopedia is a brave attempt to synthesise this consensus and make it accessible to a wider public. It has been published in three languages—French, Italian and English—and it can be said with complete objectivity that the English version, which is the last of the three is also the best. The main reasons for this are first, that it contains more articles than the others, especially on British subjects, and secondly, that every article is provided with a bibliography, which is not true of the other editions.

Having said that, it remains the case that the primary inspiration for the encyclopedia was French, and this origin is reflected in many of the articles. It is particularly obvious in discussions of church affairs and the like, where continent-wide phenomena tend to be illustrated with examples which are primarily Gallic. For English-speaking readers this is actually a bonus, because it opens up perspectives of which many of us are unaware, and the earlier lack of emphasis on things English has largely been rectified by Barrie Dobson and Michael Lapidge, both of whom were associated with the English edition. There are occasional slips of course—for example, the article on Pope Nicholas IV says nothing about his English tithe census of 1291, although it is mentioned in the article on convocation (which rather pointlessly cross-references Nicholas IV), but such slips are rare.

It should also be said that the contributors have been drawn from over thirty countries, and the coverage is very widespread. Considerable attention is paid to Byzantium and the remoter outposts of Eastern Christendom, and there is also a generous helping of Jewish, Muslim and pagan studies. The coverage is not complete enough to satisfy the needs of scholars and students in those areas, but for those whose main area of specialisation is the Western Middle Ages it is both adequate and highly illuminating.

The bias of the encyclopedia is towards the ecclesiastical, which means that theology, religious art and philosophy, canon law and church administration are given full coverage. This is particularly important for Anglicans, since so much of our church structure remains firmly medieval in origin. Here you will find articles on benefices, the cure of souls, convocation, the difference between

rectors and vicars and so on—things which we all live with but which few know much about. Ceremonial vestments are dealt with one by one, as are various liturgical phenomena. If you want to know about maniples and tiaras, trentals and rosaries, this is definitely the place to look! Beyond that however, there is a wealth of biographical articles dealing with practically every prominent ruler, cleric, writer and saint, and each important medieval city or bishopric is also treated in detail.

The articles are generally strong on the origins and development of their subject, but surprisingly weak when it comes to telling us what happened to them later on. No doubt this is partly because examining the entire history of any given place or institution would take us well beyond the closing date of 1500, and in many cases bring us up to the present, but the disadvantage of saying nothing is to leave the impression that it was all very long ago and mentally (at least) far away. This is a pity, because the reader does not immediately grasp just how foundational the middle ages are for society today, even though the preface states that that is one of the encyclopedia's aims. At times, indeed, this sense of 'pastness' can be quite disconcerting—for example, when we are told that the archbishop of Canterbury was the primate of all England, and that Canterbury was the chief English see. Have these things changed since 1500?

Another difficulty with the periodisation is that it appears to be somewhat uneven at the beginning. The tables at the back of the second volume start around AD 600, although the preface states that the encyclopedia is meant to cover a full millennium, from 500 to 1500. The post-Constantinian Roman Empire is of fundamental importance for the middle ages, but here the treatment is patchy and sometimes hard to explain. There is an article on Jerome, for example, but none on Augustine (although Augustinianism is treated). The second council of Nicaea (787) is given detailed coverage, but there is no article on the first (325), despite its enormous importance for the medieval church. Somewhat disappointingly, there is nothing on Virgil, whose literary influence was paramount for centuries, as any reader of Dante will attest. These things matter, because the medieval world was addicted to the authority of the ancients, whose presence was felt in a way that it is not today. We cannot really understand Petrarch or Aquinas unless we realise that for them, Plato and Aristotle were not just names. They were teachers, and as time went on, dialogue partners in the quest for truth, even if direct access to their

original works was limited by linguistic and technological barriers. In this connection, there is no article on the Greek language, or the extent to which it was known in Latin Europe before the time of Erasmus.

There are thus gaps here and there, but these should not be allowed to detract from the astonishing wealth of information which the encyclopedia contains. It is also well and often beautifully illustrated, with a number of colour prints alongside the more numerous black and white ones. This is a book which will be read and consulted over and over again, to the great profit of all who make use of its vast and generally reliable scholarship.

GERALD BRAY

## CREATED OR CONSTRUCTED?: THE GREAT GENDER DEBATE

Elaine Storkey

Carlisle: Paternoster 1999 119+10 pp £8.99 pb ISBN 0-85364-983-9

By her published work and her broadcast journalism, Elaine Storkey has won for herself a wide hearing among thinking people inside and outside Christian circles who will read a book like this one: it seeks to interact with recent Biblical scholarship and with mainstream theory on gender and society. As she expresses it, the fundamental question is 'From what basis do we try to understand what it means to be a human male or female, and how should we express those differences in our relationships?' All readers will agree with her that the question is important; some readers from both audiences will find her answers more problematic. In particular those wanting to know what the Bible says on the subject will be frustrated: for Storkey the Bible is 'a powerful basis', and yet also powerless, since 'the New Testament does not tell us how to be feminine or masculine at all'. There is puzzlingly little of the Bible in this book: partly, perhaps, because it aims at a non-Christian audience, but the risk is that it will fall between two stools—few who read it as a popular primer on gender will be won to Christian thinking, and Bible students will find it unsatisfying.

The book surveys the history of answers to the gender question, tracing a line from pre-modernity, which looks to biology and stresses difference between men and women; through modernity, which distinguishes between sex as a biological category and gender as cultural category, and stresses similarity; to post-modernity, which looks to experience and resists fixed definitions from either nature or culture. All of this is very helpful wider reading for Bible believers who

come to this book with a background in recent debates; but there are criticisms to be made of Elaine Storkey's treatment of those who disagree with her.

When Storkey discusses what she calls the 'pre-modern' tendency in theology, her tendency is to conflate all thinking more conservative than her own and to caricature it as straight out of the 1950s. It is obviously true that there have been abuses of women in what she identifies as pre-modernity, and obviously right to point these out, and to insist that roles are not simply absorbed uncritically from secular culture but learned from the Word of God. This, however, is exactly the project of those she criticizes, and yet she lumps them together with the abusers. Her main target is the 'complementarian' position represented by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and by John Piper and Wayne Grudem's *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, which she quotes in detail. It is a telling comparison: both her arguments and her vision look thin against the richness of that book's scholarship and spirituality.

For Storkey, conservatives are at fault because they fail to do justice to the distinction between sex and gender, depending on a biological essentialism and a belief in 'nature'. Not true: it is primarily to Scripture and not to nature that her opponents look, and they see fallen nature through Scripture's correcting lens—there is a theological distinction between sex as a fact of biology and gender as part of revealed truth, imperfectly discernible in nature yet infallibly taught in Scripture. She claims that complementarians lose the subtleties and complexities of the debate but, in truth, the shoe is on the other foot. To take just one example, we are told that either we believe in male headship, or we believe that we are all equally purposeful, responsible beings with choices—but both are obviously true, and it is unfounded to claim that believers in male headship must also hold that women make no choices. In this as in much else Elaine Storkey is a less even-handed debater than Piper and Grudem. She calls their scholarship 'less than rigorous' but seeks to prove this in a superficial treatment of Paige Patterson's article which itself depends on inaccurate assertions confidently made. For her own scholarship, she relies uncritically on Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, and makes herself vulnerable by surprising errors of spelling and chronology.

Elaine Storkey's alternative vision comes in a short postscript. Whereas a complementarian summary phrase could be 'equal but different', she identifies

four separate views within the Bible—difference, sameness, complementarity, union—and seems to resist integration of these strands. Tellingly, she uses ‘equality’ interchangeably with ‘sameness’ at times here, which goes some way towards explaining this unresolved tension: if being equal depends on being similar, then either equality or masculine/feminine personhood must always be compromised. But if we accept the Bible’s teaching that equality of status is perfectly compatible with difference in roles, then Scripture speaks with one voice, and offers us a real equality based on more than simply what we do.

JENNIE BARBOUR

**CAN WE BELIEVE GENESIS TODAY?** Ernest Lucas  
Leicester: IVP 2001 192pp £6.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-658-2

Dr. Lucas was a research chemist before he became a theologian and he has doctorates in both subjects; he is now on the staff of the Bristol Baptist College and Bristol University. This is a revised edition of an earlier book (*Genesis Today*, 1989) and brings the subject up-to-date. This is necessary because the whole matter is now one that is attracting a very considerable amount of attention from both the secular scientific side (witness Jacques Monod, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Paul Davies and others) and the biblical side (witness Phillip Johnson, W A Nembeki and the Intelligent Design movement). There are protagonists of high intellectual qualifications on both. In spite of the great publicity on radio and in the press that the former are getting there is a strong and encouraging response from the latter, and it is to be expected that the battle will hot up. The whole issue being raised is a tremendous one: is life a gift with a meaning! and will all men and women one day be called to account for how they have used it? or is it something essentially without any built-in significance, the mere product of Chance, helped by Dawkins’ ‘selfish genes’ or something similar?

DOUGLAS C. SPANNER

**THE GOD OF MIRACLES: AN EXEGETICAL EXAMINATION OF GOD’S ACTION IN THE WORLD** C John Collins  
Leicester: Apollos 2001 219 pp £11.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-477-6

Theoretical models are important if we are to make sense of God’s activity in the world. Most theistic options make similar sense of God’s part in the normal course of events, but they divide sharply in their understanding of miracles.

Collins sets out to compare three models in the light of the biblical data.

Having outlined the models, which he names Providentialism, Occasionalism, and Supernaturalism, Collins takes an exegetical approach to test them against the biblical data. His main argument builds on discourse analysis, in which author and reader must share a pool of presuppositions if they are to engage in successful and honest communication. What assumptions do the biblical authors hold on cause and effect and about the natural properties of objects? Not very surprisingly, they assume the existence of both cause and effect ('squeezing the nose brings out blood' Proverbs 30:33) and natural properties ('a fig tree cannot make olives' cf. James 3:12). With many more examples a case is built that biblical authors endorse both special divine action and the web of cause and effect. After the eventual conclusion that Supernaturalism is the best of the three models it defined earlier, the book closes with theological reflections on the nature of prayer and on the argument for design. There is a bibliography, an index and a scripture index.

One has to ask why Collins felt it necessary to defeat the two rival views at such length when his definitions fail to make either Providentialism or Occasionalism attractive. It is hard to credit that there really is a three-cornered battle being fought for the minds of intelligent Bible students. It is even harder to see what attracted scholars to the two views Collins defeats. Theoretical models are very sensitive to nuances in definition, and one cannot help wondering whether their proponents would have agreed with the definitions found in this book. In the terms Collins sets out, Supernaturalism is the obvious front-runner, and perhaps it would have been better to reach this conclusion more quickly, in order to give more space to theological reflections, instead of having them crammed into a couple of chapters. There is the promise of some excellent material in these last chapters, but just as the interest picks up, we are treated to a footnote referring the reader to one of several 'forthcoming' publications by the same author.

With all that said, Collins has given us a careful analysis of texts which deal with natural and supernatural events. He has a sound understanding of both scientific and theological communities, and there are many useful insights to be gleaned along the way. It is important that Christians, whether scientists or biblical scholars, use sound models to understand God's work in the world. Collins' exposition of such a philosophical model will help thoughtful readers

to make sense of the Bible and of the world.

ED MOLL

**THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES: THEIR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**  
**(A Comparative View with Christianity)**      **Doug Harris**  
 London: Gazelle 1999    252pp    £8.99    ISBN 1-899746-13-7

Doug Harris is responsible for the Reachout Trust providing resources for Churches about cults and other false teaching. He was inspired to reach out to cults when he saw thousands of JW's flocking to a convention.

This is an update look of the Watchtower movement based on earlier work Harris has published. Although he has little new to say this book is thorough and contains all the information you are ever likely to need, with helpful and practical appendices and information about further resources available (with order form). This book could prove to be an indispensable reference book. Despite not being over complicated (most of the time) it is not really the sort of book most would pick up and read from start to finish, although that was the intention.

The book majors on the Doctrine of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. (WBTS). He quotes extensively from WBTS publications to clearly show what JW's believe, highlighting differences with the Bible when looked at in context. He masterfully exposes inconsistencies and the constant 'evolution' of JW Doctrine and practice. He also shows how the WBTS use Bible scholars (often Evangelical) to back up their claims. He then shows how the WBTS have been dishonest in the way they misrepresent and misquote scholars. He also looks at the rather dubious beginnings of the movement.

However, is questioning WBTS authority, exposing its dishonesty and inconsistency the best way to evangelise JW's? Or would that just prove that one has read a book such as this and therefore proved one to be a part of the very system they oppose? Would it be better to show them the real Jesus that we know?

Harris starts well by explaining what our true motive should be. However, like many similar books it could really do with a succinct explanation of God (Trinity), Bible, gospel etc. as many Christians are shaky on this to start with.

He does have a gospel outline that is sound but complicated, using 17 Bible verses, which is similar to a JW style itself. It would have been more helpful to use one or few passages. He does however wisely tackle problem verses that JW's will take Christians to. This was brilliant although he could have made more of it.

Compared to the previous book reviewed about JW's this did lack a personal touch that would have given readers added confidence that this really works. It is still a book worth having on the shelf. There is little you will ever need to know about JW's that this book does not cover.

DARREN MOORE

### **TESTED BY FIRE: THE FRUIT OF SUFFERING IN THE LIVES OF JOHN BUNYAN, WILLIAM COWPER AND DAVID BRAINERD**

**John Piper**

Leicester: IVP 2001    176pp    £7.99 pb    ISBN 0-85111-553-5

John Piper offers a unique and fascinating book on the subject of suffering. While relating it primarily to the experience of the Christian, his endeavour serves to address many of the wider uncomfortable issues that surround the perennial and vexacious problem of an omnipotent and benevolent God permitting pain and suffering in the world. Rather than pursuing a philosophical enquiry, Piper embarks on an exploration of suffering in the light of three individuals. Indeed the three sections presented, represent informative and engaging accounts of the lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper and David Brainerd.

At the outset he remarks on the irony of the seeming-relatedness of the distinctive tribulation through which each lived, and the respective outcomes. Representing the Baptist, Anglican and Congregationalist traditions, they each endured the 'furnace of suffering' and furnished the Church with 'the gold of guidance and inspiration for living the Christian life, worshipping the Christian God, and spreading the Christian Gospel'. Bunyan's confinement resulted in his multifarious depiction of the pilgrim path of Christian freedom; Cowper's mental illness 'yielded sweet music of the mind for troubled souls'; and Brainerd's afflictions resulted in a published Diary that has mobilized more missionaries than any other similar work.

The nucleus of this work came from Piper's presentations to the Bethlehem

Conference for Pastors which takes place in Minneapolis. Certainly the pastoral strain is clear and unmistakable throughout this book, and the insights it affords will be of considerable value to any who wrestle with sensitive and, at times, intractable issues, such as depression, from this perspective. This notwithstanding, it has much to offer any individual curious, mystified, troubled or angered by the moral provocation of seemingly futile and random suffering.

This work differs from traditional apologetic treatments of the subject, which by definition adopt philosophical and theoretical modes of discourse. Its unique contribution is the examination of the various strands of the problem through the lense of individual lives: existential pangs and traumas are scrutinized from a *Sitz im Leben* perspective. To this end Piper presents an honest and unadorned account of William Cowper's relentless, unmitigated pain. While observing that 'he battles in this man's soul were of epic proportions', he states his intent:

To know why William Cowper struggled with depression and despair almost all of his life...to try to come to terms with insanity and spiritual songs in the same heart of one whom I believe was a genuine Christian (pp 84-5).

Piper offers a profoundly moving account of this traumatized life, and does not evade the profound and unsettling problems raised. For instance Cowper's pervasive sense of forsakenness, disclosed by his poem 'The Castaway', was problematic in the light of his Calvinist convictions. It depicts a hapless sailor, washed overboard in a storm; his ship is blown onwards in the relentless gale and he is left in darkness. It is not long until his inevitable fate overtakes him: 'by toil subdued, he drank / The stifling wave, and then he sank'. Having offered a thinly veiled parable, the poem concludes with Cowper making a direct and desperate application to his own predicament:

No voice divine the storm allayed,  
 No light propitious shone,  
 When, snatched from all effectual aid,  
 We perished, each alone:  
 But I beneath a rougher sea,  
 And 'whelmed in deeper gulfs than he (pp 101-2).

Piper seeks to understand and interpret the poet's inner plight, and he does so in a manner that is at once sensitive and incisive. He does not offer solutions, but suggestions that are eminently practical, and can only benefit those who seek to persuade suffering individuals that 'the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy'.

TIMOTHY WALSH

**STUART BLANCH: A LIFE**

**Dick Williams**

London: SPCK 2001 196pp

£16.99 hb ISBN 0-281-05412-6

The late 1970s stand unique in the annals of the Church of England as the time when the two top posts, at Canterbury and York, were simultaneously occupied by evangelicals - Donald Coggan and Stuart Blanch. This is a potent symbol, historians love to tell us, of the post-War evangelical resurgence which carried Bible men into ever increasing spheres of influence. Readers will, however, search this new biography in vain for comment on the fortunes of the Anglican Evangelical movement or Blanch's place within it, apart from one speech delivered at Nottingham 77 (NEAC 2) and the Vice-Principalship of Wycliffe Hall in the 1950s - not the most robustly evangelical period in Wycliffe's varied history. Williams does not give a systematic assessment of Blanch's teaching and writings, and fails to come to grips with his theological position. We are told that in the archbishop's life there was a 'marriage of orthodox faith and prophetic spirit' (p 177), with a desire to apply the gospel to socio-economic and cultural issues, but disappointingly his biographer does not explore these themes further.

So why read this book? Its strength lies in its portrayal of Blanch's inner life and his unglamorous day-to-day activities, away from the House of Lords and meetings with royalty. Of course there were major enterprises, such as the ecumenical 'Call to the North' or the strictly Anglican 'Call to the Nation' and the ecumenical endeavours during his spell as Bishop of Liverpool 1966-75 laid the groundwork for the rapprochement later brokered by David Sheppard and Derek Worlock, but these are exceptions. By the book's end, there is an impression that we have met with Blanch the man, the husband and father, the humble, struggling Christian - not just Blanch the archbishop. Williams has been granted access to Blanch's diaries and personal correspondence, and seeks to let his subject speak for himself. So we learn about his family life, his pastoral conversations, his private devotions - Blanch spent an hour with his

Bible every morning in order to make sure, he used to say, that he was living in the real world - as well as numerous minor initiatives long since forgotten which make up the bread-and-butter of episcopal activity. Occasionally Williams overemphasises the humdrum - we are told, for instance, when the archbishop had a bad back or caught the 'flu - but he manages to avoid drowning us in a flood of minutiae and provides a valuable insight into this important dignitary stripped of his convocation robes.

I have one minor quibble with which to end. For some unfathomable reason, Williams has named his main chapters after the Pentateuch - Genesis (birth and youth), Exodus (leaving home and conversion), Leviticus (parish and theological college - but what has Jewish priesthood got to do with Christian ministry?), and so on. These are followed by Wisdom (retirement) and Gospel (illness and death). This choice of designations is bizarre and should not have survived beyond the first draft.

ANDREW ATHERSTON

**WISDOM WRITINGS (Mercer Commentary on the Bible Volume 3)**

**Watson E. Mills & Richard F. Wilson (eds)**

Macon: Mercer University Press 2001      308pp      \$19.95 pbk

ISBN 0-86554-508-1

According to the publisher's blurb, this volume - and indeed the whole series - is 'for the classroom and for anyone who wishes to focus on the study of these ancient "wisdom" writings'. The first fifty-eight pages are a series of articles, reprinted from the Mercer Dictionary of the Bible. These cover the canonical books and some extra-canonical material, such as the various Targums. There are also articles on relevant subjects, including 'Suffering in the OT' and 'Proverb/Riddle'.

The articles betray a certain wavering between two positions. Job, for instance, is represented as being written in the exilic or post-exilic period, yet he is placed historically in the patriarchal period. The author of this particular article gives the impression that there are two Jobs, one who was real and somewhat cynical, the other who was mythical and devout. At the same time, he and his friends are presented as real, historical figures, whose speeches are typical of the wisdom of various ancient societies. Again, the commentary on Psalm 16 tells us that

Verses 9-10 contain no doctrine of the a resurrection or any development of the idea of life after death...The central point is that communion with Yahweh leads one to a *path of life* that cannot end in death’.

Yet the commentator can add this. ‘The Greek text of vv. 8-10 is used in Acts 2:24-28 to support the resurrection of Jesus’. Those who see this as a contradiction might also consider ‘*Left in Hell?*’ *Psalm 16, Sheol, and the Holy One* by Philip S Johnston in *The Lord’s Anointed* (Baker/Paternoster 1995). The comments on Psalm 22, that most Messianic of psalms, tell us that ‘the psalm in its OT setting is not a prophecy of Jesus...’. Nothing is made of the fact that the description of suffering for the one depicted in the psalm, matches so exactly that of Jesus Christ.

The comments on the Song of Solomon show that the authors see this as only an erotic love-poem, and reject any notion of the traditional, allegorical interpretation and application.

No single volume commentary on such a large and complex part of the Bible, covering as it does the books of Job to the Song of Solomon, can expect to exhaust the material. Indeed, one feels that the overriding constraint has been to interact with recent scholarly views, often in a manner which indicates some approval. The book is an assistance for those need help with Hebrew as it offers fresh examinations of some key words. There are spelling errors on the cover, including the title on the spine, ‘Commentary’!

EDWARD J. MALCOLM