

Book Reviews

HOPE THE ARCHBISHOP: A PORTRAIT

Rob Marshall

London: Continuum, 2004 xvi + 157 pp £9.99pb ISBN: 0-8264-8013-6

Our appetite for episcopal biography and autobiography remains insatiable, but gone are the days when we had to wait for the death of our celebrity bishops and archbishops before reading their stories. Now publishers plan the book launch to coincide with their retirement, or even before, to make the best capital from their high profile. Recent gems include *Know the Truth* by George Carey and *Nobody's Fool* about Robin Eames. Can we look forward to the revelatory memoirs of Richard Harries now that he has left the Oxford diocese?—a certain best-seller, though perhaps not great edification! Here Archbishop Hope's former press secretary, Rob Marshall, has got in on the act with this brief portrait.

Marshall worked under Hope for two decades, during his time as Bishop of Wakefield 1985-91 and London 1991-95 and as Archbishop of York 1995-2005. Naturally, therefore, it is 'Hope the Bishop' which dominates this study and his previous 45 years of life are rushed over in a few pages. This is not well-researched history, but a lively journalistic account, written from personal experience with the aid of a few interviews. Recent political events take centre stage—the death of Princess Diana, New Labour, the Foot and Mouth out-break, 9/11 and the Iraq War, the appointment of Archbishop Williams and the Jeffrey John crisis. Hope's public pronouncements and interaction with the media also loom large—notably his shrewd outflanking of Peter Tatchell and Outrage! in their attempts in 1995 to 'out' various bishops as gay. Hope confronted this intimidation head-on and called a sudden press conference to admit his sexuality is 'a grey area'. His honesty and courage won immediate public sympathy, and Marshall gives us the inside story on those dramatic events.

This book is unashamedly 'gossipy' in style. We learn about Hope's favourite food, TV shows and cars. We hear about his mischievous sense of humour and his choice of holidays. A famously withdrawn and private man, the veil is pulled back. What is sadly lacking is any theological assessment. Although Marshall tells us a little about Hope's views on the ordination of women and homosexuality, it is all very vague. How does he understand the gospel and the mission of the church? What is his place within the Anglo-Catholic movement? Why did he refuse to take on the mantle of Graham Leonard, his predecessor

at London? Admittedly the former archbishop has not published much, mainly books of sermons, but there is no attempt to analyse their content. Nevertheless, Hope comes across with flying colours compared to the villain of the piece, his ‘evangelical’ counterpart at Canterbury, George Carey. There was evidently not much love lost between the two. Marshall slates Carey for making a mess of the ordination of women saga and for ‘unapologetically peddling the government line’ over that great white elephant, the Millennium Dome (p. 106). In contrast the biographer glows with praise for his subject, ‘perhaps the finest Bishop in the Church of England’ (p. 141). That verdict is, of course, entirely a matter of perspective, but none can read this account without being attracted to the new vicar of Ilkley.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

Eynsham

TALES OF TWO CITIES: CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS

Stephen Clark (ed.)

Leicester: IVP, 2005 294pp £14.99pb ISBN: 1 84474 096 X

The seven chapters that form this book were first presented as papers at a Theological Study Conference sponsored by Affinity, a UK-based network of evangelical churches. Jonathan Stephen, director of Affinity, provides a brief introduction. The essays bring together a range of approaches to the question of Christianity and politics, and each explores one area at some depth before raising further questions which the editor attempts to draw together in his closing chapter.

Gordon Wenham and Steve Wilmshurst open with the biblical material. Wenham’s “Biblical Ethics in a Multicultural Society” points to the ethical gap in biblical law: both testaments are agreed in demanding only wholehearted love for God, but any law can only set a floor for behaviour below which punishment is indicated. The ‘ethical gap’ is therefore the difference between the standard aspired to and what laws can achieve. With this in mind, Wenham goes on to suggest that Genesis 1–9 form a paradigm for any society. Wilmshurst’s “Was Jesus Political” addresses what is of course an anachronistic question: ‘Separating “political” and “religious” is unique to Western modernity...the notion of privatized inward religion divorced from

political realities makes little sense to most human societies' (pp. 45-6). He goes on to show, in a long argument, that the changed loyalties brought about by the Kingdom of God have public impact, not least in challenging worldly rulers' so-called absolute powers.

David Field and David Cook have each chosen an historical figure, and explain the relevance of their thought to current questions. Samuel Rutherford was a seventeenth-century Protestant scholastic thinker whose view of government as instituted by God led him to argue that anyone using power for purposes other than as God assigned it is a tyrant. The King rules only by public consent and not by divine right, and even that under permanent probation. Because any form of neutrality or pluralism involves a prior religious commitment, he sees Christendom as desirable for both the church and for a tolerant society. Clearly the question of what, if any, consensus can be reached within the church on the meaning of God's law has become much more complex today than was the case three or more centuries ago. Edward Miall is Smith's 'Prophet without Honour' and was a nineteenth-century Evangelical activist who foresaw the dawn of secularisation and warned of the evils of the 'trade spirit'. His life and thought leave us with both a warning for our times and a model for the Christian as activist.

Paul Helm and David McKay take a more philosophical approach in their chapters. Helm's "Christianity and Politics in a pluralist Society" is helpful and clear in disentangling some of the issues related to holding exclusivist views in a pluralist society. His starting point, argued mainly by scholastic assertion as far as I can judge, is just that: a starting point. McKay also leaves us with a good beginning in "The Crown Rights of King Jesus today". He asserts that Jesus is king over all, but admits that how Christians work this out in a plural society is complicated. In both cases, good ground-clearing work only reveals further unresolved issues.

Finally Stephen Clark asks, "What does Jerusalem have to do with Westminster?" and draws together some of the topics raised by previous contributors. His helpful summary hints at a fuller treatment in a forthcoming book. Consensus among Christians on questions of biblical theology, of the place of law in society, and of the believer's relationship to the state remains elusive and this is bound to hinder the search for a basis for concerted and united action.

The issues raised and to some extent addressed in these chapters are topical and important as Christians, among others, debate the place of ‘faith communities’ in a secular and pluralist society. Many questions remain, but an unthinking and haphazard approach will not do. Readers of Churchman will find little mention of the Church of England or her relationship to the State in England (let alone in the rest of the UK): that reflects Affinity’s free evangelical constituency. But as concerted action is most likely to follow where there is consensus of opinion, Anglican evangelicals can ill-afford to ignore what our free church brethren are thinking and doing in the society we both share.

ED MOLL
Basingstoke

THE CROSS FROM A DISTANCE: ATONEMENT IN MARK’S GOSPEL

Peter Bolt

Leicester: Apollos, 2004 213pp £12.99pb ISBN: 1-84474-049-8

Peter Bolt is lecturer in New Testament at Moore Theological College, Sydney and has published scholarly works on Mark’s Gospel in the past. With *The Cross from a Distance* in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series he enters a more mainstream market where his work will be even more widely appreciated. This is an examination of the cross as it is portrayed in Mark, but Dr. Bolt illuminates every passage of the Gospel he touches on in this well-written and stimulating book. He pays careful attention to both the Old Testament as a background text for understanding Mark, and also the contemporary context into which Mark wrote his persuasive account of Jesus’ life, while managing to interest today’s reader at both a scholarly and pastoral level. So we hear throughout a clarion call to abandon the idolatry of our modern world and the religious hypocrisy to which we are all tempted, while also engaging in the debates on penal substitutionary atonement and the eschatological timetable of Mark 13 (on which Bolt has a distinctive and thought-provoking view in chapter 3—‘The cross as “the end of the world”’).

On penal substitution, Bolt convincingly argues that the language of Jesus being rejected and handed over to the Gentiles is the language of being placed under God’s judgement and wrath (e.g. pp. 51-8) as is the image of ‘the cup’ (p. 67) as well as the mockery and daytime darkness of the passion narrative

(pp. 125-6). This shows that even though the word ‘punishment’ (*kolasis*) is not used of the cross (a decisive argument against penal substitution according to Michael Green, for example in his *Adventure of Faith* p. 246), the concept is most certainly present in the Gospel texts. Indeed, Bolt argues, ‘[i]f we read the details of the event against the backdrop of the Old Testament material...Jesus was most certainly under the wrath of God since, as we have seen, the very historical details of his crucifixion should be interpreted as the wrath of God’ (p. 133), and this he bore on our behalf.

Given the accusation by Steve Chalke and others that such a doctrine has no socially transforming power, it is interesting to note Bolt moving here from the establishment of penal substitution to arguing that ‘the salvation of individuals through the cross of Christ unleashes a revolutionary force that transforms society to the core. The message of the cross is the only force that can change the world for the better, and the only force that has actually proved that it can do so’ (p. 78). Bolt also has words of warning for those who use contemporary illustrations in their sermons on this subject: ‘we shall be closer to the truth when we live with the rough edges of God’s Word than when we try to impose the smooth lines of our own fancy illustrations’ (p. 128).

Given that Bolt is so good on expounding the Old Testament background to the atonement texts in Mark, I was surprised not to see a discussion of ‘the many’ in Mark 10:45 bearing in mind a possible link with Isaiah 53:12. But not everything is possible in 200 pages! Bolt is superb at outlining how Mark’s Gospel stands in sharp contrast to the Greco-Roman background, particularly the Greco-Roman religious background, and is excellent in his attempts to integrate Mark with theological concerns from elsewhere in Scripture and more generally. He interacts regularly with Barth and other theologians, the early church fathers (on p. 74 he interacts with Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Gregory of Nazianzus) as well as contemporary writers, with the odd foray into sociology as well (see pp. 46-7).

All of this makes *The Cross from a Distance* not just a work of exegesis or of ‘biblical theology’ narrowly defined, but of integrated theology. Bolt claims (p. 136) that ‘[t]he task of theology is to attempt to provide coherence to the data of God’s revelation’. I would say ‘demonstrate’ coherence (for it already exists and does not need to be supplied from outside) but his point is clear: mere

exegesis is not the end point of our labours on the Bible text. Much of this book reads like a meditation on the cross rather than an academic treatise, which is very refreshing and a great stimulus to faith.

There are some irritating stylistic errors: inconsistent formatting of numbers (e.g. ‘nine’ and ‘9’ on pp. 13, 15), unnecessary line breaks (e.g. at the top of p. 14), unnecessarily and confusingly transliterated iota subscripts (p. 24), and incomplete footnotes (p. 137). These ought to be corrected in subsequent well-deserved reprints of this fine work which will, I am sure, find its way onto the reading lists of both pastors and academics for years to come.

LEE GATISS
London

JESUS ASCENDED: The Meaning of Christ’s Continuing Incarnation
Gerrit Scott Dawson

London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2004 255pp
£17.99pb ISBN: 0 567 082210

Falling on Thursday, Ascension Day can be a Cinderella in the church’s year, both in terms of service attendance and Bible teaching. Here, though, is a very helpful book aimed at addressing at least the latter of these two neglects. Any minister stuck for how to teach the ascension (at any stage in the year) will find much help here. Pages 57-59, for example, outline where the ascension assumes and influences different New Testament books, a useful resource for preaching the ascension from far beyond the ‘expected’ texts. A later chapter provides four ‘models for recovering the ascension in the life of the church’, and an appendix outlines four ‘prayer guides’ which would refresh any Ascension Day liturgy.

After an introduction outlining why the doctrine of the ascension is worth recovering, the book pursues two aims, outlining a ‘concise theology of the ascension’ and then mapping the present implications of the ascended Christ. Recent ascension scholarship (e.g. Douglas Farrow’s 1999 work, ‘Ascension and Ecclesia’) is usefully summarised and critiqued. This is especially helpful given that Dawson’s summaries are often far more accessible than the original works, and that Dawson keeps a focussed eye for where such scholarship provides helpful insights for the local church.

For Dawson, like Newbiggin, the ascension is a public truth which, ‘in all its glaring physicality, brings the Christian claims about Christ right into the open market of real events in space and time’ (p. 35). In the ascension we face the reigning Jesus, whose glory is secure and with whom believers are seated in the heavenlies, a vision Dawson deftly paints from Biblical evidence and patristic insights. Dawson’s chapter on the priesthood of Jesus affirms the once-for-all nature of this ministry while examining the consequences of its present reality. The implications of ‘a robust doctrine of the ascension in the flesh’ (p. 143), for earthly life and for a properly heavenward reference here on earth, are well drawn. The result is a life-sized challenge to reconsider our place in this world.

As such, the book achieves its stated aims (pp. 10-11) of providing a fresh window on christology, being a lens on the contemporary church, and opening a vital but practical path for spiritual growth. It does so with depth and accessibility. In so doing, it will sharpen any pastor-theologian, and will feed the ascension-driven church in its worship and mission. I heartily commend it.

MATTHEW SLEEMAN

London

AT VARIANCE: The Church’s Argument against Homosexual Conduct

Kevin Scott

Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2004 88pp £5.95pb

ISBN:1-903765 37 4

Kevin Scott is Rector of a Church in Edinburgh, and this book is commended by David Torrance and the Scottish Order of Christian Unity. However it does not seek unity at the expense of truth, being a cogent articulation of the traditional biblical teaching that homosexual conduct is wrong. Many will be sceptical about the need for another treatment of this topic. Nevertheless, if Dr. Scott is right, a short book like this is crucial in the educative process in our churches. He writes: ‘what is really necessary is a recovery of the will to argue the Christian case within the church, so that Church members hold their faith with confidence in what stands behind it and with a critical recognition of the arguments against it’ (p. 2).

Scott begins with chapters on Old Testament Judaism, Jesus and the Gospels,

and the Letters of Paul, examining what these texts have to say on the subject of homosexual conduct. There is no “heavy” exegesis here to deter the unskilled and uninitiated, and yet the arguments are profound and well put for thinking people. There is some significant influence from the New Perspective on Paul, and a slightly superficial treatment of the debate surrounding the continuance of the Old Testament Law for Christians. It is good, however, that a chapter on Jesus was included, as the argument is often made that “Jesus did not say anything about homosexuality”. Scott turns such an argument around, concluding, ‘there is no sign whatever that Jesus relaxed, by the slightest degree, the obligations of Old Testament law with respect to sexual conduct’; indeed when he lists the evil things which come from within that defile a person (Mark 7:14ff) and uses words such as sexual immorality and licentiousness, ‘it is inconceivable that either speaker or hearer would ascribe anything but Old Testament sexual vices to these terms’ (p. 29).

The chapter on Paul has much to commend it, outlining what Paul says and answering clearly (and concisely) the major objections to and ‘softenings’ of his teaching. It suffers a little from viewing marriage as a sacrament, although the suggestion that homosexual conduct is the ‘anti-sacrament of unbelief’ is worthy of consideration. The chapter on the Patristic period of the first five centuries of Christian history is useful in giving a broad overview of how the early church thought and wrote about this subject. ‘[I]t is self-evident to the Ancient Church,’ he writes, ‘that these practices are vile, degenerate and absolutely inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture and the logic of the Judaeo-Christian tradition’ and the Fathers ‘would find the modern world absurdly timid in dealing with it’ (p. 49). This is a short but helpful chapter as it gives those with little knowledge of ante-Nicene and Nicene Christianity at least a brief acquaintance with the thought world of our forefathers in the faith on this subject of contemporary controversy, inevitably highlighting the distance between their faith and that of modern liberals.

The remaining chapters remind us that ‘those who concede such space [to homosexuality in the Church] have usually already conceded much else, especially in the fields of Scriptural hermeneutics and authority, and, even further back, in the whole nature of Christian belief’ and consequently ‘[t]he Church has a much greater problem facing it than simply the challenge of homosexual conduct’ (p. 56). The author ends, however, on a confident note,

boldly declaring that ‘there can be no compromise, no “third way” by which both sides of the argument can co-exist in one communion’ (p. 64). This may seem strident, but it is persuasive and well-founded confidence in the light of the previous chapters, and Scott goes on to outline further implications—pragmatic, soteriological, sociological, ecclesiological—of accepting homosexual conduct within the Church.

This book would, therefore, be recommended for a thoughtful layperson who is already familiar with some of the arguments against this practice and will not be unduly shaken or distracted by this book’s small number of blind alleys. It will strengthen confidence in PCC members and Deanery Synod reps as the conflict in the wider Anglican Communion begins to creep into local church life more and more.

LEE GATISS

London

CONTENDING FOR OUR ALL: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen and J. Gresham Machen
John Piper

Leciester: IVP, 2006 192pp £8.99pb ISBN: 1-84474-135-4

This series of books entitled *The Swans Are Not Silent* each include biographies of three influential Christian leaders. The title comes from the words of tribute which Eraclius gave to his predecessor, Augustine of Hippo in AD326: ‘The cricket chirps, the swan is silent’. Piper’s purpose is to demonstrate that these voices continue to speak in our own day.

The three main chapters of the book look at three controversial voices Athanasius (298–373), John Owen (1616–1683) and J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937). Piper has selected these men to demonstrate their godly eloquence in the heat of controversy. The compelling theme he seeks to illustrate is that controversy is necessary to a healthy Church in order to define and defend Christ (p. 19). He makes his point with a powerful analogy: ‘There are more immediately crucial tasks than controversy about the truth and meaning of the gospel. For example, it is more immediately crucial that we believe the gospel, and proclaim it to the unreached, and pray for power to attend the preaching of the gospel. But this is

like saying that flying food to starving people is more immediately crucial than the science of aeronautics. True. But the food will not be flown to the needy if someone is not doing aeronautics. It is like saying that giving penicillin shots to children dying of fever is more immediately crucial than the work of biology and chemistry. True. But there would be no penicillin without such work. (p. 18). A catalogue of New Testament citations make the point: Jude 3; Philippians 1:7; Acts 20:30; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 Corinthians 11:19; 2 Timothy 4:2-4.'

Athanasius was popular with the people, diligent in his personal devotion and rigorous in his defence of the truth. Yet, he experienced the heat of controversy and spent seventeen of his forty five year tenure as bishop in exile. The controversy which first spawned the Council of Nicaea (AD325) and later the Council of Constantinople (AD381) surrounding the heresy of Arius. It was the essence of Athanasius' life's work to defend the incarnation of the Son of God for the sake of doctrine, for the sake of salvation, and for the sake of the gospel. Piper rightly points out that the heat of the controversy was over the nature of the incarnation and he had less to say about the nature of Christ's atoning work on the cross. However the battle he had to fight was so huge, and so significant for the future of Christendom, that his single focus on this issue was essential. Athanasius became worthy of the title: *Contra Mundum*—'Athanasius against the world'. Our debt to him is huge!

John Owen is self-confessedly a hard author to read. Even his own preface to the justly famous book *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* reads: 'Reader...if thou art, as many in this pretending age, a sign or title gazer, and comest into books as Cato into the theatre, to go out again—thou hast had thy entertainment; farewell!' (p. 79). Nevertheless Owen owns the title of the greatest pastor-theologian of the Puritan age. He gained his MA from Oxford aged 19 in 1635. Piper lists five key events in Owen's life, all of which were occurred during the backdrop of the Civil War. First, his conversion (or reawakening) in 1642. Owen was already a convinced Calvinist, but lacked 'the sense of the reality of his own salvation' (p. 86). This personal awakening happened at St. Mary's Church Aldermanbury. Secondly, his marriage to Mary Rooke and the death of 10 out of 11 of his children. Grief was never far from their household. Thirdly, his first book entitled *A Display of Arminianism* (1642) set him on a theological collision course with Arminianism which would pervade so much of his writing. Fourthly, Piper argues, Owen was always a Pastor, even when

he moved to being Vice Chancellor of Oxford University. Fifthly, his years of political prominence, which began with the invitation to address Parliament in 1646. The result of his acquaintance with Oliver Cromwell would thrust him into the turmoil of the civil war. Owen's friendship with John Bunyan was close. King Charles II found it mystifying that he should associate with an uneducated tinker who spent much of his time in prison to which Owen replied: 'Could I possess the tinker's abilities for preaching, please your majesty, I would gladly relinquish all my learning' (p. 95).

For all his great learning, Owen emphasised personal and public holiness as the hallmark of true faith. Piper comments: One great hindrance to holiness in the ministry of the Word is that we are prone to preach and write without pressing into the things we say and making them real to our own souls. Over the years words begin to come easy, and we find we can speak of mysteries without standing in awe; we can speak of purity without feeling purer; we can speak of zeal without spiritual passion; we can speak of God's holiness without trembling; we can speak of sin without sorrow we can speak of heaven without eagerness. And the result is an increasing hardening of the spiritual life (p. 109). Not so for Owen. As he laid open the book of God, he laid open the book of his own heart (p. 110). 'If the word does not dwell with power in us, it will not pass with power from us.' (p. 111). His life work could be summarised as contending for the gospel by which he was consecrated in holiness.

Gresham Machen is less well known to an English audience but he exercised an enormously significant ministry, leaving Princeton University as it slipped into liberalism and setting up Westminster Seminary. He was born in 1881 and died at the age of fifty-five. Piper paints a picture of a stubborn man who went to an early grave because of his single-minded ambition with few friends close enough to encourage him to listen to his body. He was a man of considerable financial means. He came to reject German liberalism and eschewed the title 'Fundamentalist', mainly because of the tendency to undervalue scholarship and ignore the historic foundations of the faith.

Machen fought with and for the exactness of revealed Christian truth pleading for honesty and clarity in communication. He believed that controversy was essential: Men tell us that our preaching should be positive and not negative, that we can preach the truth without attacking error. But

if we follow that advice we shall have to close our Bible and desert its teachings. The New Testament is a polemical book almost from beginning to end. (p. 146). Machen rose to the intellectual challenge of his day (p. 150) arguing that if the gospel is allowed to penetrate and transform the culture through Christian influence then an evangelistic pathway for the gospel will be better prepared. Piper wonders, did he over-emphasise renaissance—the preparation of the culture—too much? Maybe, but it is a compelling argument, not least in contemporary culture.

Machen was a flawed character who had the ability to alienate people. He lived a life of relative luxury and seemed blind to circumstances of those less well off. But he fought hard for truth in a day when liberalism was gaining the intellectual and theological high ground....He saw courage in controversy [as] the test of a contrite heart. It works both ways. He said, ‘A man cannot successfully go heresy-hunting against the sin in his own life if he is willing to deny his Lord in the presence of the enemies outside.’ In other words, Machen saw the chief shortcoming of controversy not in the lack of humble love in the heart, but in the lack of humble courage in debate. (p. 163).

Piper has done us a great service in opening up the strengths and flaws in three great men. The single message is powerful: controversy is inevitable and can be healthy for the Church. It is a message which weak-kneed evangelicals need to hear today, characterised by Francis Schaeffer as our ‘golden opportunity’ when he said: ‘...we have a great possibility of showing what Jesus is speaking here, in the midst of our differences, than we do if we are not differing...’ (p. 165). These three men did just that and their eloquent defence of the faith speaks to us today.

SIMON VIBERT

Wimbledon

SCIENCE AND FAITH: Understanding, Meaning, Method & Truth **William H. Chalker**

London/Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006 xiii, 218pp
£19.99pb ISBN-13:978-0-664-22753-1/ISBN-10:0-664-22753-8

This book contrasts two theories or philosophies of knowledge. One is that of science, which the author characterises as an approach or philosophy

formulated by human beings in order to produce knowledge about how to accomplish material aims with as few negative side-effects as possible. Its purpose is utility. The other is the approach or collection of claims to knowledge in the theory or method of biblical theology. Unlike science, the latter is not a way of predicting or manipulating phenomena but was, according to the author, formulated by human beings to find the ultimate purpose of life, i.e. how to become the sort of people God intends us to be.

Professor Chalker argues that science and theology cannot contradict each other, because they are directed to different purposes and each forms a closed system (utility or ultimate purpose) that is consistent within itself and neither can properly make knowledge-claims applicable to the other. The reason they sometimes appear to be at odds is that the method of one is sometimes incorrectly applied to the other: it is wrong to apply the knowledge—claims relating to ultimate purpose (biblical theology) to facts revealed and studied by science, while it is equally erroneous to apply the scientific method to religion, especially not to the interpretation of Scripture. In fact, Chalker brands as ‘idolatry’ the using of scientific approach in divinity, i.e. to attempt to use the Bible or other religious knowledge for the utilitarian purpose of influencing God to accomplish our own material aims. The proper knowledge Christians should extract from the Scriptures is only that which furthers their fulfilling their ultimate purpose in life.

Even words themselves cannot be understood as having meaning or relevance outside a philosophy or theory. As descriptors of reality, words are interrelated within a theoretical construct and can have meaning only within this context. Because theological facts or knowledge-claims have meaning only within their own theory, and scientific ones within another, these facts or claims are not about the same things in the other theory; nor do the theories share the same method of looking at the world. Nobody can understand the meaning of Scripture by applying the utility method of science or by any other approach except biblical theology.

In short, Chalker seeks to harmonise the variant claims to truth emanating from science with those of biblical theology by compartmentalising the two approaches to knowledge into watertight and unrelated disciplines so that the truth-claims of one *ex hypothesi* do not commingle with or apply to the other.

I think he presses his thesis too far, as is especially noticeable in his discussion of Christ's resurrection and other miracles. According to Chalker's reasoning, they might never have happened, but might nevertheless be spiritually true in that they teach us something about what sort of individuals God wants us to be. Chalker's divorce between utility and ultimate purpose attempts to replace questions of facts with answers of concepts or theories, thus tolerating even the most glaring of apparent contradictions.

DAVID W. T. BRATTSTON
Nova Scotia, Canada

THE WAYS OF JUDGMENT

Oliver O'Donovan

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005 330pp.hb £19.99 SBN: 0-8028-2920-1

This book is a sequel to the same author's earlier work entitled *Desire of the nations*. In that volume he addressed the question of the relationship between politics and theology by starting with the proclamation of God's authority in the Bible. Here he tackles the same general theme from the opposite end of the spectrum. Instead of beginning with revelation, he starts with politics, and more particularly with the fundamental question of the nature of political power. This he locates in the concept of 'judgment'. Secular authorities, whatever their nature or legitimacy, are called to pass judgment in a world where absolutes can be conceived but do not actually exist. God does not judge in this sense, because as the Absolute One, his judgment is experienced as destruction. At the end of time, he will come to judge the world, but in the process he will destroy what we now see and bring a new heaven and a new earth into being.

Human authorities are not so privileged. They have the unenviable task of finding the 'right' answer to a host of complex problems in which an idealistic absolutism has no logical place. The secular judge has to weigh up a host of competing interests and considerations, and to determine which particular combination best reflects the will of God in the circumstances. Even those authorities which do not officially recognise the existence of God are more dependent on him than they acknowledge. It is characteristic of a secular society that it proclaims the fundamental equality and 'infinite worth' of every individual human being, but such concepts are hard to imagine, let alone define, apart from the theological framework on which they are ultimately based.

Professor O'Donovan is very well-read and quotes with authority a variety of sources, many of which will be unknown to the general public. He avoids party politics completely; what he has to say applies equally to all politicians and political movements, whatever their differences might be. In the end, judgment and mercy are fundamental realities which no political party can change, and those who try to turn the absolute into a law are liable to fall flat on their faces. An example is the desire among some to outlaw the spanking of children for bad behaviour. It is an ideal divorced from the reality of parenting and thus doomed to fail, bringing the law itself into contempt. This, says Professor O'Donovan, is the real danger, for if the law becomes a tool for an impossibly idealized political agenda, it will lose its force and society will disintegrate into lawlessness. Measured responses to particular situations, not panaceas, are what is required above all, and the book is replete with case studies and model situations which illustrate this point.

It has to be said that this book is a demanding read. Consider the following (pp. 251-2): '...differing institutions are designed not merely to communicate one thing, but to communicate that one thing in the context of other communications. Any one of these specialist communities must form part of a larger communicative whole. I know no better way of describing this than Herman Dooyeweerd's useful concept of the "organizing function" of an institution and its "enkaptic relations".'

As this is from the chapter on 'communication', the prospective reader can only imagine what the rest of the book is like! It is not a beginner's guide to political theology, but there can be no doubt that those with a good grounding in the subject already will be provoked and challenged by Professor O'Donovan. His is a faithful voice in a world where too few can see clearly what the essential issues are. We must hope that philosophers, political scientists and others with a professional interest in shaping public policy will get hold of this book and read it—send it to your MP for Christmas! But be prepared for a hard slog if you are not well-versed in these fields. Perhaps one day somebody will produce a simpleton's guide to Professor O'Donovan's thought, and it will take off as it deserves to. This is not that book, but it is a challenging read to anyone with the stamina and interest to persevere with it to the end.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

Engaging with contemporary theologians

Philip Duce & Daniel Strange (eds.)

Leicester: Apollos, 2003 287pp £12.99pb ISBN: 0-85111-287-0

This is the second of two books designed to help theology students find their way in their subject. It would also be useful to pastors who want to keep abreast of ideas that will filter down to pulpits.

Donald Macleod's foreword makes a cogent case for studying contemporary, non-evangelical theologians: four chapters then follow. The first on John Hick by Christopher Sinkinson includes a recent and illuminating interview with Hick. Sinkinson shows how Hick's ideas have shifted over time, whilst certain themes have remained constant. Sinkinson gives a good and fair explanation, in Hick's own terms, of his beliefs on theodicy and pluralism whilst showing how Hick's Kantian epistemology undermines his own beliefs in these areas: if the Ultimate Reality, to which Hick believes that all religions are a culturally conditioned response, is beyond all literal description, then there is no reason to believe that God is a God of love, and thus that salvation is universal. In the interview, Hick defends pluralism on the basis of his observation of the lives of religious believers, but leaves too many questions about the meaning of 'salvation' unanswered. As Sinkinson points out, Hick's pluralism assumes the privileged vantage point that he denies to traditional Christianity.

Stephen Williams gives a 'critical introduction' to Jürgen Moltmann, originally published in 1987. Williams concentrates on Moltmann's early works, clearly explaining his thinking on eschatology, the cross, and the Spirit, and how these lead to Moltmann's reworking of the doctrine of the Trinity. There is less on Moltmann's christology, and his interaction with liberation theology. Whilst commending Moltmann's concern for eschatology and discipleship, Williams indicates the ambiguity of Moltmann's concept of 'hope', and asks if his eschaology leads to universalism. One particularly telling comment is: 'The importance of attaining faith in Christ in this world, reiterated in the New Testament, is scarcely given its due place in Moltmann's theology', (p. 107). This is a damning criticism of any theology that aims to be biblical! Williams then turns to Moltmann's trinitarianism, and questions if the gospels demand his radical conclusions, and how Moltmann can avoid the charge of tritheism.

I would like to have seen more on Moltmann's theological method here, (Williams is helpful on how it differs from more logically rigorous, Anglo-Saxon methods): 'Moltmann sees his trinitarianism as providing a basis for socialism, but one suspects that the political tale is wagging the theological dog!' Williams also gives a brief indication of Moltmann's inadequate doctrine of sin, and his consequent failure to question the good faith of 'protest atheism'.

Timothy Bradshaw writes on "The Trinitarian Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg". He emphasises Pannenberg's debt to Hegel, and his 'theology of the future perfect' whereby the end of history, already realised in the resurrection, works 'backwards' to determine God's eternal being. Of all the theologians dealt with in this volume, Pannenberg is the closest to orthodoxy, not least in his firm belief in the resurrection. However, I would have liked more criticism. Although Bradshaw notes Polkinghorne's criticism that Pannenberg's use of field theory in pneumatology is scientifically outdated, he fails to note that here Pannenberg also seems to have left any biblical foundation far behind. A key issue seems to be the sovereignty of God: is it compromised by Pannenberg's central concepts of openness and contingency? Pannenberg's belief that revelation takes place in history is welcome, but does he leave any place for God's speech as interpretive of that history? His rejection of the virgin conception would suggest not. Although Bradshaw emphasises that Pannenberg rejects any simple opposition between faith and reason, given Pannenberg's explicit rejection of presuppositionalism in theology (p. 133), I was left asking to what extent reason and theology are still subject to the Lordship of Christ. This chapter did make me think that I would like to read Pannenberg.

The final article does not deal with a single theologian; instead Mark W. Elliott writes on "Postmodernism and Theology". This is a worthwhile contribution to the Evangelical debate over postmodernism. However, Elliott covers too much ground, assumes an immense amount of prior knowledge, and the whole article seems to partake of the prolix and non-linear nature of its subject. I found some paragraphs so confusing that they were unreadable. This essay would be useful to postgraduates, but completely useless to the undergraduate who wants to 'get his bearings'. It would have been much better to replace it with an article on George Lindbeck.

The first three chapters are clear and helpful introductions to their subjects and come with good bibliographies of their subjects' writing, although that on Moltmann only goes up to 1984, and none list secondary works. However, the book's format limits its usefulness for its intended audience. Chapter four lacks a bibliography, and there are no suggestions for further reading on contemporary theology. There is no opening chapter that would set the following studies in context by giving an overview of twentieth century philosophy and theology, and an outline of their social location. Without this, the book fails to provide the compass promised in its title. It is also unfortunate that only Protestant theologians were chosen. Contemporary theology can hardly be understood without examining Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox thought. A chapter on, e.g., Hans Küng is badly needed. An informative, and stimulating book; but possibly not what its intended audience is looking for.

STEPHEN WALTON

Rothley

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED: The Subversive Stories of Jesus
Melvin Tinker with Nathan Buttery

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These model expositions of thirteen parables from Matthew and Luke are suitable for Christian and non-Christian alike. They began life as sermons and retain this feel as the reader is taken through accessible explanation, lively illustration and contemporary application. The parables are thus allowed to do their intended work of getting under the reader's radar and shaping his or her worldview. In each case the authors take the biblical text seriously and seek to understand it within its canonical and historical contexts. Helpful for all readers, this book can also act as a useful standard for any would-be expositor to see how it is done. Recommended.

ED MOLL
 Basingstoke