

approach to theology, 'typified liberalism as "anti-supernaturalist" in that it recognized no reality beyond and above nature . . . (he) refused to be totally negative about liberalism' since 'he saw modernism as at least attempting some of these things' which theology should be doing. As well as the interaction with science, Bavinck highlighted the importance of 'study(ing) the psychological and historical conditions under which revelation, inspiration, incarnation and regeneration took place'.¹²

Since Bavinck's day, there have been great advances in the fields of psychology, history and science. Some will tell us that such advances have dispensed with the need for God. Others will allow us to believe in God, but will insist that we must think of him in ways that are rather different from any faith that is recognizable as biblical faith. What are we, as contemporary theologians, to make of this situation? How can we help the contemporary church to relate positively yet confidently to modern discussions about religion? We must not draw back into an authoritarian stance. We need to encourage people to listen and learn from others of a different persuasion. Being open-minded does not, however, mean being empty-minded. We do not abandon our conviction that God has revealed himself. We affirm our conviction—'according to Scripture'—by continuing to read the Bible regularly in an age where many have set aside the Bible as a book which belongs to the past and no longer concerns modern men and women. If our listening to and learning from others is constantly accompanied by listening to and learning from the Bible, we will be better equipped to continue worshipping and serving God in the face of the many pressures

towards either unbelief (the rejection of God) or distorted faith (the accommodation of God and the marginalization of God).

Footnotes

1. *The Works of James Arminius D.D.*, (American edition of 1956), I, 183. Cited by Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, (Grand Rapids, 1985), 276.

2. *Praestantium ac eruditorum virorum epistolae ecclesiasicae et theologicae*, no. 101 (excerpt from a letter to Egbertsz., May 3, 1607). Cited by Bangs, *Op. cit.*, 287.

3. *Rutherford Studies in Contemporary Theology, Volume 2*; Published for Rutherford House, Edinburgh by Edwin Mellen Press, (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, 1992).

4. *ibid.*, x. Citing G. C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology*, (Grand Rapids, 1977), 208.

5. 7–8.

6. H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, (Grand Rapids, 1979), 30.

7. *ibid.*, xi.

8. Edinburgh, 1977, 13.

9. H. Berkhof, *Op. cit.*, cited on one of the title pages.

10. *Op. cit.*, 13–14.

11. *ibid.*, 14.

12. *Op. cit.*, 15–16.

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Christianity and the New South Africa: Some Impressions

DAVID T. WILLIAMS

Recent years have seen South Africa in the forefront of the world's attention; attention which has focused on the dramatic changes that have taken place and which continue to affect the country. The Republic had experienced one of the biggest attempts at social engineering ever since the Nationalist government came to power in 1948 and attempted to solve its racial

problems by means of the policy of 'apartheid', legalized separation of the races. However, the way in which this policy was carried out led to increasing resistance, both inside and outside the country, culminating in the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, a period of negotiations, and finally the elections of April 1994 which brought a 'government of National Unity',

dominated by the ANC, into power. In this way apartheid was ended.

The effects of this process are still being worked out in the lives of the forty million inhabitants of South Africa. A way of life, and more importantly, attitudes, which have been embedded in society over more than a generation cannot be altered overnight with a change of government. But change is occurring, and will obviously do so more and more as the months and years progress.

There is now a deliberate attempt to redress the imbalances of the past, so policies of affirmative action are being put into place. These do not simply benefit the non-white sections of the population, but also women and the disabled.

One area of life which might perhaps have been expected to be little affected by political change is that of religion. After all, belief is an intensely personal matter and should not, even if it often has been, be affected by political change. Nevertheless, just as the political victory of Constantine in 313 AD and his acceptance of Christianity affected both church and State in a drastic way, so it is inevitable that political change in South Africa will affect religion, and Christianity in particular. Nor is it simply a case of cause and effect; Constantine was influenced by the development of the church, and Christianity had already had considerable impact upon the moves taking place in South Africa. Nor was this simply an isolated event; the political moves prior to Constantine had already affected the church, and the forces at work in South African society have affected the running of churches and the beliefs of individuals in South Africa. Historians will continue to debate whether the action of Constantine was detrimental or beneficial to the church, and it obviously must largely remain to be seen what effect the actions of the South African government in the apartheid era and the changes that are now taking place have had and will have upon the church.

The pre-1994 constitution of South Africa was avowedly Christian, and the government actively supported Christianity by, for example, including Religious Education as a compulsory subject (at least officially) in state schools, the aim of which was 'to teach the child to know and to love God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit according to the teaching of Scripture'.¹ Religious Education thus simply taught the Christian faith.

Such official pressure, along with the work of the churches themselves and that of a considerable number of missionaries from other countries, has had its effects. Ostensibly, South Africa is a Christian country. In the last census taken in 1990, 77% of the population claimed to be Christians.² Church attendance has been the norm in many sectors of the community. Now it is obvious that the degree of

commitment of that 77% varies; if all were living a totally Christian lifestyle, South Africa would be a very different place! Obviously, just as was the case following Constantine's acceptance of Christianity, it is often in people's interest to claim to be Christian and to belong to a church. People claim to be Christian for many reasons other than an acceptance of Christ as personal Lord and Saviour.

Western Europe also used to be totally Christian, at least nominally, but recent decades have witnessed a decline in church attendance, and increasingly blatant rejection of the gospel. It seems likely that South Africa will follow this path, and that the 'new South Africa' will not be able to be referred to as a 'Christian country'. As in Europe, church attendance has in fact been declining for a number of years, and for similar reasons. However, South Africa is very different, and there are a number of factors unique to its situation which affect the role and practice of Christianity.

The Growth of Pluralism

Even among committed Christians, there are few in Western Europe who still accept the medieval belief that Christianity is exclusively correct, and that all other religions are completely wrong. Even those who accept the words of Jesus that 'no one comes to the Father except through me' (Jn. 14:6) will often believe that adherents of other religions can be saved. It may be believed that this can be only through the work of Christ, though it may perhaps not require direct and conscious faith. Sometimes the belief is that other religions are fulfilled in Christianity. More often it is simply that all religions are valid and adherence to a particular one is a matter of personal conviction. Obviously such beliefs will affect Christianity; if it is believed that other faiths are valid there is less pressure to consider the claims of Christianity seriously, and on the human level, fewer will become Christians.

There are many well-known reasons which have led to this situation, and these are as applicable in South Africa as in Europe, often even more so, as many South Africans can see at first hand the practice of other faiths in a way which Europeans could not, at least until recently.

The South African experience has however contributed strongly to the growth of pluralism. The basis of the new government is democracy, so that the opinion of everyone is of equal value. This means that the beliefs of everyone are to be respected. In particular, whereas previously the franchise was restricted to a sector of the population which was, at least, nominally Christian, it is now extended to adherents of many other faiths. As a result, these must be respected and even supported by the new government. Thus, as an

example, the new advisory board for religious broadcasting of the South African Broadcasting Corporation is deliberately multi-faith.

The Reaction Against Colonization

South Africa is in many ways similar to other parts of Africa and the third world in that it experienced European colonization and has gone through a liberation process. It is however unique in a number of ways. Firstly, the proportion of whites is higher than in any other African country (although not in other former colonies such as Australia or even America). Secondly, many of the whites no longer have a European country to which they belong; they cannot go 'home' but are really African. Thirdly, the racial segregation which was common to the colonial situation was institutionalized, not just implicit. These factors exacerbated the perception that colonization was for the benefit of the colonizer, and largely at the expense of the colonized.

There is of course another side to this, in that the colonized countries did benefit in many ways, such as by the establishment of education, medicine, and other forms of infrastructure. In some countries the contribution of the colonizers is coming to be increasingly appreciated. Nevertheless the general perception in South Africa is that white colonization led to the suffering of black people, and so anything connected with the white population is viewed with at least suspicion. One example of this was seen when the previous government advocated birth control, viewing the exploding population with Malthusian horror. This was almost uniformly rejected by the black population as a ploy to reduce their growth, and to limit their power since this was seen as based largely upon numbers.

In nearly every case, and particularly in South Africa, the colonizing powers were at least nominally Christian, and so the missionary enterprise, which often accompanied the colonial expansion, was frequently confused with it. In many cases the colonial powers used missionaries for political purposes. This was so in South Africa and several writers³ graphically describe what was often a sordid episode. It is hardly surprising, then, that 'missionary' can even be a term of abuse and modern missionaries are believed to work simply for the economic gain of their countries or themselves personally. 'When the missionaries came to us they had the Bible and we had the land. We prayed together, but when we opened our eyes we had the Bible but they had the land.'

As in other colonial situations Christianity was used in South Africa to support the political system. Workers were told to endure present difficulties and they would

then be rewarded in the afterlife with 'pie in the sky when you die'. It is understandable that Marx in a similar context saw religion, especially Christianity, as the opiate of the people.

In particular, it still rankles in many circles that Christianity was appealed to to support the system of apartheid. The usage of the curse of Ham (Gen. 8:25) to justify apartheid is deplorable, in that some justified the inferior position of the African people by what must be seen as a very dubious exegesis. More seriously, the division of the nations referred to in Acts 17:26⁴ was believed to justify the separation brought about by apartheid. It was, however, the belief that God had particularly led the European to Southern Africa by a kind of new Exodus, and was in a particular covenant relationship with them, which especially undergirded the Afrikaner nation.⁵ Such a belief was even referred to in the preamble to the old pre-1994 constitution. It was a powerful foundation for a nation.⁶

All this naturally produced a negative perception of Christianity; one that continues. Since economic control still largely remains in the hands of Europeans political colonization survives as economic neo-colonization. Where this is perceived as oppressive, Christianity suffers since Europe is still viewed as Christian. Moreover, in South Africa the situation includes what could be termed 'internal colonization'; where white 'Christian' business practice is condemned as oppressive. The previous government was seen as acting in the economic interest of the whites, so its practices to uphold white supremacy are condemned, but because it claimed to be a Christian government, Christianity was, and is, rejected.

It must be noted here that there is a tremendous gap between rich and poor which has been growing as a result of the economic process. This is seen throughout the world, in the gap between the first and third worlds, and within many third world countries. However Wilson and Ramphele⁷ suggest that the gap in South Africa is the greatest in the world, a gap which largely coincides with the racial division.

The Search for an African Identity

While the colonial powers are rejected in the desire for liberation from both political and economic dependence, there is at the same time an appreciation of the influence of European culture and a desire to minimize it. Quite naturally there arises a desire to re-emphasize African culture, for if European culture is still dominant there is no real liberation. This tends to be detrimental to Christianity because the latter is viewed as integrally linked to European culture.

For the African, culture and religion are inseparably

linked. If African identity is advocated, this will naturally mean an advocacy of traditional religion; especially the veneration of the ancestors, particularly as one of their roles was seen as the preservation of the society. This must be seen in the light of the biblical condemnation of the practices of consulting the dead (Lev. 19:31), so if this prohibition is ignored, the religion that prescribes it is also to some extent rejected. In practice, most Africans, including many Christian ministers, both practise Christianity and observe the old customs, to the detriment of both.

This situation is exacerbated because many of the early missionaries saw the imposition of western culture as part of the missionary message. Converts were expected to become little Europeans, to adopt western lifestyle and western dress, such as the wearing of trousers. Houses would no longer be built in the traditional style but as copies of those of the missionaries. Pictures of Jesus shown to the people would almost invariably depict a white Christ, and, perhaps even more destructively, Satan would be depicted as black. It is easy to see how an affirmation of Africanism tends to include a rejection of Christianity.

In South Africa there is a further aspect to this, since there has been a strong desire, particularly by the Afrikaners, to preserve their culture, which is viewed as a bastion of western Christian civilization.

Obviously there is a need to present Christianity in a way which distinguishes it from its western trappings and to separate it as far as possible from cultural accretions. A perception that Christianity and European culture are distinct will inevitably come, particularly with declining church attendance by whites, but this has not yet arrived. Thus, it is still expected that ministers wear suits! Nevertheless, it is possible to be both authentically African and really Christian, as is indeed seen, to some extent, in the indigenous churches. At the same time it may be suggested that veneration of ancestors is not simply wrong but that in Christianity there is a better fulfilment of traditional religion.⁸

The Practice of Education

Whereas Christianity is appreciated in many areas of the world for its establishment of education, the way in which this proceeded in South Africa has been problematic. Although missions established many fine schools and contributed to the development of university education, at the same time, education for white and black was often separate, creating the suspicion that black education was inferior and perhaps deliberately so.⁹ It could be concluded that black people were educated simply because as such they would be more

use to the whites. As Christianity was obviously an important part of mission education, the perception grew that Christianity was used as a tool of oppression.

South Africa exacerbated this problem since with the Nationalist government came 'Bantu Education' which Verwoerd openly declared as specifically designed to reinforce racial separation, and intended to equip blacks to serve the white economy. Far more serious for the gospel is that this developed into 'Christian National Education', and was specifically linked to the gospel. Since education has been, and is, greatly valued by the African community and seen as a tool of progress, it is hardly surprising that it was an educational issue, the imposition of more Afrikaans, which led to the Soweto uprising of 1976 and directly to the present transfer of power.

Christianity as Anti-intellectual

Closely related to the role of education is an increasing perception that Christianity is not intellectually acceptable. This has of course been a major factor in the changed status of Christianity in the West where a scientific empiricist world view has had no place for religion, and has had particular problems with certain aspects of Christianity; such as the creation account. This is also the case in South Africa, where it is often asserted that Christianity has opposed science in the past, such as in the case of Galileo, and has thus hindered progress.

In South Africa, perhaps in Africa as a whole, this perception has been reinforced by the popularity of the charismatic movement. The African personality has accepted with enthusiasm the more exciting forms of worship (the vibrant music, dancing, and congregational participation; in places adding its own touch, such as the use of drums). In itself, this has often benefited the church, but as in Europe, there have been side effects. One example of this is that there has been a laudable openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit, but there has also tended to be a feeling that intellectual training is therefore unnecessary. Worship and what teaching there has been has become intellectually sterile. Where there have been, in addition, manifestations of such things as the 'Toronto experience', it is hardly surprising that the more educated reject Christianity as intellectually inadequate. In fact a common view is not to reject Christianity, but to see it as affecting only the emotions, to value it for this, but to separate it in a dualistic manner from any intellectual truth.

Particularly in student circles, there is a total divide between the Charismatic/Pentecostal Christians, and those linking the gospel with political action.

Christianity as Irrelevant

It verges on the paradoxical, in the light of what has just been said, that the thrust of western Christianity has so often been on the level of the intellect. It has been concerned to present a faith that is consistent with reality and which gives intellectually satisfying answers to the problems of life. This has particularly been the case in the Protestant churches, which separated from Rome largely on the question of understanding; it was not acceptable for Christians to hold to doctrines simply on the authority of the church, but these had to be based on a reasoned understanding of the scriptures.

But this emphasis, valid though it may be, has led to problems in the African, and in particular the South African context. In the first place, Luther's understanding of salvation by grace through faith has undoubtedly contributed to the growth of individualism in the modern West. It is as an individual that a person is saved and relates to God. People individually hear God's voice through the scriptures, read in a personal way; although the church, through its preaching, often contributes to this, 'hearing' it is the personal understanding and response that is stressed. This immediately produces a problem in the African context, for Africans, much more than Europeans, understand themselves in relation to the community. Whereas for the western mind 'I think, therefore I am' is a crucial tenet, in Africa it is rather, as John Mbiti has stressed, 'I am because I belong' or 'I am because we are'. It is community, not individuality, which is at the heart of the African experience. Western Christianity, particularly Protestantism, builds on a foundation which is not really acceptable in Africa; it is hardly surprising that it is questioned.

This is made worse by the fact that Protestantism in particular bases its authority on a book, the Bible. This immediately leads to problems when many are illiterate, and also because the book is viewed as foreign. A common belief is that Africans need their own Bible. More to the point however is that the basis of authority for Africans is experience, and moreover experience mediated communally.

To further exacerbate this problem, a common perception is that many of the difficulties the Africans experience ultimately derive from excessive individualism. The economic poverty is seen as derived from western capitalism, which is of course highly individualistic, and in South Africa many of the social problems can be traced back to the breakup of traditional communities, by such practices as migrant labour. The traditional mores cannot be retained in an individualistic society.

Following this, Christians have often been silent in the face of what has been perceived as the major

problems in South Africa which are communal and political. Christianity has stressed individual piety and individual salvation, and ignored interpersonal relationships. In particular, politics has often been viewed as sinful, and to be avoided by Christians. Since many African people have seen the major problem in South Africa as political, it is hardly surprising that they have also seen Christianity as irrelevant, and have favoured other ideologies such as Marxism, and even Islam with their stress on community.

It is here that Liberation theology, with its insistence that Christianity must be made manifest in social change for the benefit of the poor, and Black theology, which derives much of its inspiration from the experience of blackness and oppression, often make their appeal.

Yet, even at the individual level, Christianity often fails to meet the needs of the people of South Africa. To give the obvious example, western society has seen physical healing from disease as a function of professional doctors and hospitals, and often little to do with the church. This has of course changed in Pentecostalism and in the Charismatic movement, but very many Africans experience Christianity through the more traditional churches, which if they pray for the sick at all, do not actually expect anything significant to happen.

It is thus hardly surprising that the traditional missionary churches are frequently rejected by Africans. There has been a dynamic growth of African Independent (now often called 'indigenous') churches which now account for about 40% of Christians in South Africa. The reasons for these to separate from the others have on the one hand been political, the desire for African leadership, but on the other the desire to worship God in an African way, and to seek for and receive physical, tangible benefits of faith such as healing. The joy is that Christianity as such has not been rejected; but the danger is that of a drift from real Christianity into various forms of syncretism with traditional beliefs. Indeed, if western Christianity continues to be perceived as irrelevant, the traditional element is likely to become increasingly dominant and Christianity will eventually disappear from African circles.

Archbishop Tutu, although the leader of a traditional western church, the Anglican Church in South Africa, can thus lament that although western theology has produced answers 'and often splendid answers', these were to questions that were not being asked by the African people.¹⁰

There is a crying need here for a Christian appreciation of the issues that really concern people, particularly in the African experience, and at the same

time development of specifically Christian answers to them. It is of course no real help just to add Christian support to what is essentially a secular programme, such as the campaign against poverty, but there is rather the need for specifically Christian approaches to such issues if Christianity is to be seen to be relevant.

The State of the Ministry

It may well be expected that those specifically Christian answers to specifically African problems would mainly come from the African church itself, and within that, from its ministry. However, the South African experience is such that, humanly speaking, this is not likely to occur.

Firstly secular educational factors have been carried over into the training of ministers for the church. Where African education in secular society has deliberately been second rate, that of the church has also been inferior; partly due to inadequate educational foundations. Again, separation of the races has exacerbated the situation. Added to this financial restraints have often resulted in training being too short, facilities being inadequate amidst other problems. The duplication of facilities caused by denominational rivalry has also not helped; if there were not so many colleges, perhaps a better overall job could be done. The ministers attached to the Independent churches are rarely adequately equipped, either by a basic education or by specifically Christian training. It is true that some denominations are doing an excellent job, but the overall state is not good. And even the institutions which are doing well are hindered by a lack of good candidates, this being occasioned by the low status of Christianity. Africans will generally seek a career in the secular world, but if that is inaccessible, then the church may be considered!

Secondly, partly but not exclusively because of inadequate training, the Christian convictions and practices of many ministers are questionable. There are repeated cases of financial corruption, sexual lapses and so on, which mean that the ministry is often not respected or trusted, and it is hardly surprising that the churches, with such leadership, are often presenting a lifestyle which generates contempt and so rejection by the outside world. This is not to say that white ministers and churches are immune from such problems, but it would be fair to say that it is worse in African churches. Not only are there problems of training and lack of finance, but there are also tensions which arise from the traditional African culture, which is not Christian based. Added to this, there has been a general lawlessness in African society, because the laws are those imposed by a white government. A lack of

respect for secular authority easily spills over into a lack of respect for any authority at all.

A Condemnation of White Christians

The problems just noted might not be so severe if the state of the white church was such that it commanded respect and so stimulated imitation of at least a Christian moral stance. On the contrary, however, it is viewed as hypocritical. There is a general perception that white churches and individual Christians acquiesced in the previous system, and in many, if not most cases, they positively supported it, largely because they benefited from it. The Kairos document (1985), produced towards the end of the apartheid era before change had begun to take place, castigated expressions of Christianity in South Africa. It condemned firstly a 'state' theology which believed, on the basis of texts such as Romans 13, that Christians should always obey the government, irrespective of its policies, and secondly a 'church' theology which looked for peace and reconciliation while the underlying societal problems that led to division and strife still remained. On an individual level people suffering and in real need saw rich Christians who could have helped but did not. They even saw Christians involved in questionable business practices, taking advantage of those weaker and less able to help themselves.

It is quite understandable that the message of love which is advocated by such Christians is questioned if not simply rejected outright. This is despite the fact that many Christians did much for those less well off than themselves, both economically and politically, and despite the fact that very many white Christians were simply ignorant of the state of affairs in the rest of the country, due to the operation of the apartheid system. The rejection of the gospel has taken place despite also the condemnation that the Bible itself makes of the evils of the apartheid system (e.g. in, for instance, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19f). Since these warnings are seen not to be taken seriously by the church the gospel itself is not taken seriously.

What is being witnessed in South Africa is an example of the situation described in a number of articles by Jan Bonk.¹¹ He points out that the western missionary enterprise is severely hindered because of the great economic divide between rich missionaries and the poor to whom they seek to minister, and especially by the attitudes to each other that this causes. This incidentally draws attention to the fact that Christians in the West, in such places as the US or UK, are also often perceived as guilty of a lack of compassion towards the poor, and as contributing to their plight. Nevertheless, of course, white South Africans are seen as more directly responsible and

more guilty since they are in direct contact with the poor.

Christianity as Ineffective

Not only has Christianity been perceived as impotent to change the lives of many who profess to adhere to it, but more importantly from an African perspective, it has proved unable to solve the problems of the country. It is believed that political pressure, especially from outside the country in sanctions and disinvestment, was ultimately more effective than the weak moral posturing of some, mainly English speaking, churches. It is also observed that some of the most effective figures in the political changes, such as Joe Slovo who died recently, were avowedly non-Christian, drawing their inspiration from other than religious sources.

In this regard it must also be pointed out that Islam is a growing force in South Africa. There are many reasons for this, such as the funding received from the oil-rich Arab countries, and the fact that a fair proportion of the Indian and Malay communities brought in as labourers earlier this century are historically Moslem, giving a base from which to seek converts among the African people. However, perhaps the main attraction is that Islam is seen as resulting in a non-racial brotherhood; the bonds generated by this common religion are seen to work, and Moslems are seen to care for each other in a way that Christians do not.

An Unfolding Tragedy

The common view is that the present situation in South Africa is largely the result of the policies of the previous government. Because that government claimed to be Christian, their beliefs can well be rejected together with its policies. What is often overlooked however is that many of the difficulties, both major and minor, that are being experienced, such as the ubiquitous litter, corruption, lack of diligence in work and so on are not directly the result of these policies. Perhaps the tragedy is that such problems would largely disappear as a result of a positive widespread acceptance of Christianity and its implications. The care for others, and the desire to work well so as to glorify God which Christianity teaches, if they were widely adopted, would go far to remove many of the difficulties currently being experienced. Indeed without these, no amount of social reform will be effective. It also needs to be pointed out that the prosperity of the West, and indeed of white South Africa, is at least partly due to the adoption of a 'Protestant work ethic', which if

commonly adhered to would inevitably raise the overall standard of living and go a long way to alleviate the social problems currently being experienced.

The tragedy is however, that with the pressures indicated above, Christianity is in decline and not in a position to provide the impetus that is so needed at this particular time. People are more prepared to deny Christianity today, where previously very few did not have at least some link with a church. Non-Christian actions and activities are practised more openly.

Yet there is still considerable basis for hope. It is commonly believed that the general peace in the elections of 1994 was due to prayer. The new national anthem, sung at present with the old, is 'Nkosi sikhelile iAfrika' (Lord bless Africa), which is generally interpreted in a Christian way, particularly as it later calls for the Holy Spirit to come down. Certainly there is still very often a favourable attitude towards Christianity; the problem is indeed often seen to be located in Christians not their faith.

If Christians, who are still allegedly in the overwhelming majority, were to really act as such, South Africa would be revolutionized, and in a way vastly more effective than in 1994.

Lord, revive your church!

Footnotes

1. Department of Education and Training: Subject Policy Religious Education and Biblical Studies, (1983), p. 3.

2. M. Prozesky (Ed.), *Christianity in South Africa*, (Bergville, Southern, 1990), p. 3.

3. E.g. B. Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant missions and British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, (Leicester, Apollon, 1990), p. 91f., or C. Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis, 1988), p. 42f.

4. J. Kinghom, 'The Theology of separate equality: a critical outline of the DRC's position on Apartheid', in Prozesky, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

5. Cf. Villa-Vicencio, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

6. Cf. J. A. Michener, *The Covenant*, (Secker & Warburg), for a comment on the belief set in a fictional style.

7. F. W. Wilson & M. Ramphela, *Uprooting poverty: the South African challenge: report for the second Carnegie inquiry into poverty and development in Southern Africa*, (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1989), p. 4.

8. D. T. Williams, 'Towards an African Christian theology: African traditional beliefs and Christianity', *Fort Hare papers* 11, (1992), p. 99–124.

9. Villa-Vincencio, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

10. 'D. M. Tutu Whither African Theology?' in E. Fashole-Luke *et al.*, *Christianity in Independent Africa*, (London, Rex Collings, 1978), p. 366.

11. J. J. Bonk, 'The role of affluence in the Christian missionary enterprise from the West', *Missiol-*

ogy, an international review 14(4), (1986), p. 437–61; 'Affluence; the Achille's heel of missions', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 231, (1986), p. 382–90; 'Missions and Mammon: six theses', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13(4), (1989), p. 174–81.

We welcome this further contribution to Evangel by the author. Dr. Williams teaches at the University of Fort Hare in the Republic South Africa.

Book Reviews

Old Testament

The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding

IVP, Leicester, 1992, 175 pp, £6.99, paperback
ISBN 0-85110-972-1

This contribution to the *Bible Speaks Today* series is written with the conviction that the Book of Judges can be properly understood only if it is approached as a literary unity.

Apart from familiar stories such as those of Samson and Gideon, the Book of Judges is rarely preached on because it is difficult to do so. Michael Wilcock locates part of the difficulty in the fact that the Book of Judges is not made as much use of in the New Testament as some other parts of the Old Testament. Thus there are few New Testament 'controls' to guide us in our exegesis and application of Judges. One feels a need of much experience of applying the principle of the analogy of faith to other parts of the Old Testament before one dare approach Judges at any length.

Michael Wilcock advises that in view of the difficulties of the book we should read Judges in such a way that we allow every part of it to shed light on every other part. We must ask how each part relates to the rest and what the book as a whole intends to teach us.

Against modern trends, the author finds the key to the meaning of Judges in the word 'judge' itself. The author believes that underlying every chapter of Judges is the question, 'who is in control?'. In times of lawlessness it seems that no one is in control. As a result people become fearful and things seem unstable. It is because Judges deals with this question that the book is so relevant to our own times.

The answer found in Judges is that no matter how chaotic and confused the times seem to be, the Lord is Judge. He is in control. He never abandons his people, though they may fail him. Thus, in the final analysis, the

story of Judges presents us with an unfolding of God's grace.

*Tony Baxter
Sheffield*

Jonah (Old Testament Library)

James Limburg
SCM, London, 1993, 123 pp., £12.50 paperback
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The book of Jonah has always made a strong appeal to the imagination, religious, literary and artistic, and Professor Limburg keeps this clearly before his readers in this interesting and useful commentary. To have a whole volume in the OTL series for just four chapters is something of a luxury, and the author uses well his opportunity to bring some unusual features to the task of commentary. The work consists of an introduction, in which the character and theology of the book are discussed, the commentary itself which retells the story with some vibrancy, and appendices which show how the story has been told and re-told in Judaism, Islam and by the Reformers. In the former two cases some relatively lengthy texts are given in full, which would otherwise be difficult for the average reader to have access to. These appendices are an interesting and, I think, valuable feature of the commentary.

The theological concerns of Jonah are identified as an interest in the whole creation, God's deliverance of those in need, his care for all nations, the freedom of God to change his mind about bringing judgement, the oneness of God, and the invitation to praise and thank him for his salvation (33–36). The author pursues these theological topics in his exegesis of the text, and also by bringing New Testament parallels and connections to bear. The portrayal of the sailors of Jonah's ship in a