

greed, corruption, and class stratification could, one day, result in broken bodies, if the bread is not shared today.

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BARR, James, *Escaping from Fundamentalism*, London UK: SCM Press, 1984, ISBN 0334003857, x + 195 pp., paperback, £2.95.

There is increasing concern throughout Melanesia about certain Christian groups, which are aggressively evangelistic, to the point of denigrating other churches, and re-baptising converts. Attention tends to focus on the charismatic phenomena often fostered by such groups, as if these were somehow un-Christian, although such phenomena are attested in scripture, and have their counterparts in traditional Melanesian cultures. Many people seem to overlook the root cause of the problems posed by sectarians: their peculiar attitude to the Bible, which they regard as an arsenal of infallible proof-texts, giving them an exclusive claim to true faith. This attitude is generally known as “fundamentalism”.

James Barr, a distinguished British exegete, and Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford, has already produced a thorough scholarly study of this widely under-estimated mentality (*Fundamentalism*, London UK: SCM Press, 1977). The work under review “is intended rather as a pastoral book. It seeks to offer help to those who have grown up in the world of fundamentalism, or who have become committed to it, but who have, in the end, come to feel that it is a prison from which they must escape.” (p. vii). Its basic thesis is “that fundamentalism is not, as its adherents suppose, soundly founded upon the Bible itself” (p. viii). Scripture does *not* say that it is inerrant, or infallible, not even in the favourite fundamentalist proof-texts, 2 Tim 3:16-17 and 2 Pet 1:20-21 (see ch. 1 on Biblical Inspiration and Authority).

Himself a model combination of tolerance and scholarly objectivity, Barr insists that fundamentalism “is lacking in a sense for the total history of Christianity, from the Bible up to the present day” p. ix), and that its

deceptive simplicity has no other reason than that “it is worked out by, and destined for, people who are basically ignorant of the theological scene” (p. 164). This may seem a harsh judgment, but Barr is at pains to show, by many examples, how fundamentalists lack any appreciation of the role of oral tradition in giving rise to the Bible in the first place (p. 13), or that it is “the product of community tradition” (p. 71). “Inspiration must attach to that entire process of the development of tradition within the biblical milieu”; once this is understood, it comes as no surprise that “it is the Bible itself, and the conviction of its authority, that generated biblical criticism” (p. 71).

One of the most important clarifications made by Barr is that fundamentalism, far from being dictated by the Bible, is a narrowly-rationalistic philosophy (p. 37), which imposes its particular definition of the divine perfection on the Bible, as such (ch. 12), thus giving rise to the tendency to take single texts in isolation from their context (p. 3), and to deny the evidence of translation and re-interpretation within the biblical text itself (ch. 15). Barr drives these points home in his treatment of controversial topics, such as prophecy (chs. 3, 11), legend, myth, and miracle (ch. 9), inspiration (ch. 13), and the origins of the world (ch. 14).

Barr, himself a Protestant, argues that it is not so much the Reformation, with which “modern fundamentalism has only a limited extent of valid identification” (p. 153), as the conservative tradition within Protestantism that gives fundamentalism its dubious authority. The practice of evangelistic revivalism, so widespread in Melanesian countries, appeals to the doctrine of justification by faith alone for its legitimation, but fundamentalists fail to see how this can apply to communities as well as to individuals (p. 53). “Fundamentalists seem to me to fail to perceive that the Bible itself can be made into the instrument of human pride, human self-affirmation, human will to dominate, human ideological fervour” (p. 199).

Though I have picked out some of Barr’s strongest points, the tone of the book is not polemical. Barr tries to show by example, as well as by argument, how it is quite possible to acknowledge the beliefs of Christians who are different without compromising one’s own or caricaturing theirs.

His chapters on “Being Orthodox” and “Staying Evangelical” (chs. 16, 17) should prove particularly helpful to those looking for guidance in a painful personal decision, rather than scientific analysis. Both Pentecostals and Evangelicals often fail to realise that there is no compelling reason why they should also be fundamentalists. Though it is understandable that many Melanesians, confused by the demands of modernity, and the variety of Christian groups, at first, feel grateful for the apparently simple solution offered them by fundamentalists, Barr’s patient explanation of the ways in which fundamentalism, in fact, falsifies the Bible, should bring them a sense of liberation.

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DONDERS, Joseph G., *Non-Bourgeois Theology: An African Experience of Jesus*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985, 200 pp.

“Non-Bourgeois Theology” in this book refers to the largely unwritten religious experience and insights of ordinary people, as opposed to the formal, written work of professional theologians, based on documentary sources and religious experience of ages past (pp. 154f). Joseph Donders tries to put into words the informal theology that lives in African religious experience, and he does it very well. Whether his interpretations of African experience are authentic, this reviewer is not competent to judge. But in 29 short essays, of five or six pages each, he gives a vivid account of ordinary African life situations, and he brings out their theological implications in exciting insights. This book is African theology in action. It also is an apology for this kind of theology, although, presented as it is, it does not need much of an apology.

Having said this, I am still left with a few nagging questions. Is Donders not a bit too romantic about things African, and a bit too harsh on things “Western”? How much of this is due to insight into things African, and how much to thoroughly “Western” existentialism and 1960/1970s Western European counter-culture? Is African culture going to be an exception to the rule that each civilisation, as each individual, is in need of constant *metanoia*? And that each civilisation, like each individual, is