

REVIEWS

Essentials. A Liberal–Evangelical Dialogue

David L. Edwards with John Stott

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1988; 354 pp., £5.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 340 42623 3

It is perhaps a sign of the times that whereas in 1977, barely more than a decade ago, James Barr assailed 'fundamentalism' with no quarter given, in 1988 David Edwards set up a calm respectful dialogue, full of coolness and light, with the doyen of British (or at least English) Evangelicals – whom he cannot altogether acquit of being 'fundamentalist'. The exchange takes the form of six extended critical appreciations by Edwards of areas of belief on which Stott has written – the power of the gospel, the authority of the Scriptures, the cross of Christ, the miraculous Christ, the Bible and behaviour, and the gospel for the world, followed by briefer responses from Stott. Although this procedure allows Edwards to choose the ground for debate (as Stott civilly remarks more than once) Stott has the last word, as well as an epilogue to round off the volume.

The courteous tone of both writers has not placed sharpness of convictions at a discount. Stott is provoked into spelling out for the first time in print his annihilationist understanding of hell – but tentatively, for he is conscious of parting company with a venerable evangelical belief. At the same time he unambiguously rebuts any kind of universalism, while remaining agnostic about the fate of the unevangelised. But this agnosticism has hardly softened his evangelistic passion! One of the few occasions when a little 'needle' barbs his response occurs when Edwards proposes a trimming of the Evangelicals' gospel to facilitate effective communication of the faith in the contemporary world.

From time to time Edwards' presentation loses sight of Stott's works and becomes a general critique of evangelical teaching, which might have been tough on the respondent. It may be significant that the topic on which Stott feels that Edwards has done him least justice is the cross of Christ. At the end of the day, Stott identifies authority and salvation as the key issues, on which a wide gulf still yawns – and is probably, for all the irenicism of dialogue, growing ever wider. It seems to me that the question of Scripture remains the most acute for Evangelicals. Edwards is able to make effective capital out of 'our domestic Evangelical debate over inerrancy', but Stott does well on this sticky wicket. His list of 'eight tendencies of the mind-set styled "fundamentalism"' is good value, but there is little evidence of a meeting of minds on the authority of the Bible.

At more than one juncture the cruciality of the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 comes to the fore. Stott effectively maintains the historicity of Adam and Eve, and the reader glimpses something of the significance of the disagreement over the fall and original sin. It is a weakness at this point that ultimately lies behind Edwards' alarmingly loose justification of homosexual partnerships. (It could also be claimed that the lack of a doctrine of original sin is the single most damaging aberration of the go-getting, self-service theology currently fashionable in high circles in Britain. Liberalism may be more responsible for new-right religion than is often realised.)

THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The debate will go on – as cordially as in these pages, one hopes. It seems the fate of conservative varieties of Christianity is being subjected to periodic anatomy by their critics. In the USA today departments of religion are rushing to mount courses on fundamentalism, lumping together the televangelists and the ayatollahs. It is perhaps time to reverse the roles – time for the dissecting knife to be applied to the pervasive liberalism that presides over our declining churches in the West. It is arguable that it has a great deal more to answer for than contemporary Evangelicalism. One could perhaps choose no better starting point than the gospel itself.

Do the dominant liberal brands of Christianity still have a gospel – rather than a programme, or a therapy, or a manifesto? There cannot be a more basic essential than the gospel. By their fruits we shall know them. No evangelism, no evangel.

The Review Editor

Faith Theology and Imagination

John McIntyre

The Handsel Press, Edinburgh, 1987; 176 pp., no price;
ISBN 0 905 312 65 1.

I have long suspected that the Reformed tradition has neglected the realm of imagination. But, so I believe, imagination is part of our humanness and is a gift of God.

So I welcomed this book by the Professor Emeritus of Divinity at Edinburgh University. As he tells us, he has thought long on the use of imagination, and he is obviously aware of the problems of the subject. His aim is 'Not to invent some new theology which is designed to replace the old, but rather, by using the concept of imagination to work over much of the familiar theological material, to view it from a different angle, in the hope that we would gain fresh understanding of our faith' (p.4). In the Introduction Professor McIntyre briefly discusses why imagination has been suspect. He then considers an essay by George MacDonald: 'The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture'. This little known essay raised questions which have been largely ignored. This book is a response to some of MacDonald's ideas.

In an examination of the biblical material there is an interesting chapter on 'The Parabolic Imagination'. It concentrates mainly on the Gospels and, obviously, the parables and images used by Jesus. There can be no doubt that Jesus stimulated the imagination, and challenged the hearts of his hearers, with his parables. The same is true of his enacted parables which are described as 'Realistic Imagination'. I found some fresh insights in this chapter.

In discussing 'Imagination as a Theological Category' Professor McIntyre shows how imagination can help our understanding in many areas of our faith, including the attributes of God, creation, incarnation, atonement and the Holy Spirit.

Imagination is then considered in the 'Ethical Dimension'. An imaginative approach can help in the tensions which our ethical principles hold, such as those between persons and principles, freedom and necessity, and authority and freedom.

Then there is imagination in the 'Philosophical Dimension'. This chapter gives a helpful outline of various views on imagination and what can be learned from them. Philosophers discussed include Plato, Hume and, among the more modern, Sartre, Collingwood, Warnock and Murdoch. I found this to be a helpful summary

of various philosophical viewpoints. This is then carried into a chapter on methodology and epistemology. The final chapter summarises the characteristics of imagination and images. In all this, Professor McIntyre sees imagination, not as one specific part of the mind but 'the whole mind working in identifiable ways' (p. 59).

I found this an interesting and stimulating book. It reinforced my suspicions that 'whether we acknowledge it or not, we have been employing imagination in our religion and in our theology, ever since we first became involved in these practices' (pp. 175f.).

It is a book of scholarship, as we would expect, and not for light reading. There are areas where I would tend to differ and, as we need our minds renewed, I would have liked something on the question of sanctified imagination. But, on the whole, I found it a challenging and thought-provoking book.

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God and Science: The Death and Rebirth of Theism

Charles P. Henderson Jr.

John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1986; 186pp., £10, paperback;

ISBN 0 8042 0668 6

This book seeks to trace the rise and fall of scientific atheism, attempting to invert the major arguments against religion and use them to defend God. In pursuit of this objective Henderson examines the work of Einstein, Freud, Darwin and Marx and seeks to develop what he calls a 'new biblical theism'. Central to his thesis is the argument that the historical dualism between fact and faith is no longer tenable in the light of contemporary science. This is helpful but needs to be much more clearly developed than it is here. The last chapter - 'Towards a New Theism' - reviews the work of Tillich, Küng, Macquarrie and Torrance, with the last taking us full circle back to Einstein. In earlier chapters the author sees a real reconciling of science and God in the work of Tillich and Teilhard de Chardin. There is an adequate index and bibliography.

I found this a puzzling book because the central thesis often disappears under irrelevant biographical cameos. Chapter One is entitled: 'Albert Einstein - New Proof for the Existence of God.' But Einstein's thought is not explored in any depth and we are treated to a history of twentieth-century physics - in which Einstein certainly played a critical role. Similarly in the third chapter, on Darwin, we find ourselves more caught up in a discussion of Paley. This chapter assumes that the Bible is inaccurate and evolution true. It is also puzzling to learn that de Chardin and Tillich are the theologians who have rescued God from the clutches of scientific atheism. Overall the work lacks an awareness of contemporary philosophy of science - an area one would have thought essential in a work of this nature. Indeed apart from a few references to Torrance and Küng this book is curiously out of date.

Finally, in a book concerned with the rebirth of theism the concept of God is crucial. In the end the fusion Henderson achieves between God and science is with the God, not of the Bible, but of Tillich. With approval he notes that Tillich 'concedes that the concept of a supernatural being who intervenes in history and interferes with natural events is incompatible with science' (p.126). The word

THE SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

'G-o-d' is seen as simply a 'papier mache' symbol of deeper reality. On p.137 Phil.2:6-7 is used to negate any idea that God rules over his creation – surely a strange extrapolation from a passage dealing with the humiliation of our Lord Jesus! In fact God is not even lawgiver: 'as we reflect back upon the biblical roots of western theism, we know that God is not fundamentally a lawgiver at all' (p.150).

This is an intriguing and easily read book. It is intriguing because of the puzzling characteristics I have hinted at, and the sweeping way in which the Bible is assumed to be inaccurate. It is easily read, however, and there are some interesting details concerning the lives with which it deals.

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The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, 1977 – 1984: A Report

Basil Meeking and John Stott (eds),

Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1986; 96pp., £2.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 85364 437 3.

ERCDOM consisted of three meetings: Venice (1977), Cambridge (1982) and Landevennec, France (1984). The Evangelical participants numbered eight (1977), eight (1982) and six (1984). The RC participants numbered eight (1977), ten (1982) and nine (1984), and were appointed by the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. The Evangelicals came from various churches and Christian organisations but did not officially represent any international body.

ERCDOM built on the 1974 Evangelical 'Lausanne Covenant' and the 1975 Papal document, 'Evangelization in the Modern World'. ERCDOM was not seen as 'a step towards Church unity negotiations' but as 'a search for such common ground as might be discovered between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics as they each try to be more faithful in their obedience to mission.... Neither compromise nor the quest for lowest common denominators had a place; a patient search for truth and a respect for each other's integrity did' (pp. 10-11).

The Report is not an agreed statement but 'a faithful record of ideas shared' (p. 11). Only three participants from each side attended all three meetings. Responsibility for the final form of the Report rests with the 1984 participants. It contains seven chapters: Revelation and Authority; The Nature of Mission; The Gospel of Salvation; Our Response in the Holy Spirit to the Gospel; The Church and the Gospel; The Gospel and Culture; The Possibilities of Common Witness.

Defining 'witness' in the broad sense of 'any Christian activity which points to Christ' (p. 83), ERCDOM discusses common witness in relation to (a) Bible translation and publishing; (b) the use of media; (c) community service; (d) social thought and action; (e) dialogue; (f) worship; (g) evangelism. The negative tone of the discussion of common witness in evangelism is particularly disconcerting, especially if one tends to relate 'witness' more directly to 'evangelism'.

When 'mission' is defined with direct reference to the gospel preached, it must be acknowledged that 'missionary activity is differently understood' (p. 30). Vatican II defines the Church as 'the sacrament of salvation, the sign and promise of redemption to each and every person without exception', asserting that 'the whole of humanity is in a collective history which God makes to be a history of

salvation' (pp. 30-31). This view is highlighted in the Papal statement: 'Every person, without exception, has been redeemed by Christ, and with each person, without exception, Christ is in some way united, even when that person is not aware of it' (p. 45). Evangelicals would be generally unhappy with this outlook, strongly emphasizing 'the necessity of a personal response to, and experience of, God's saving grace' (p. 47). Cataloguing areas of common witness must not be permitted to obscure this fundamental difference.

In our confused world, it is vital that the Church proclaims Christ clearly. In the face of both despair and complacency, the Church must proclaim both the gracious promise and the urgent challenge of the gospel. Significant progress in mission demands that we learn to 'read, study, believe and obey' God's Word. 'We believe that the most fruitful kind of Evangelical-Roman Catholic dialogue arises out of joint Bible study' (p. 86).

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So Near and Yet So Far

Hugh Montefiore

SCM Press, London, 1986; 154pp., £5.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 334 01517 0

The work of ARCIC (Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission), which has embarked on a new programme of discussions, including the topic of justification, is arguably one of the most significant of contemporary ecumenical dialogues. That representatives of the two communions (including at least one true-blue evangelical on the Anglican side) were able to formulate Agreed Statements on the eucharist, ministry and ordination and (with qualifications) authority in the church cannot be ignored by anyone who is concerned for the well-being of Christ's church.

The book under review, by an *enfant terrible* of the Anglican episcopal bench (who retires on – what other day? – April 1), has a bark that is worse than its bite. It is scarcely the douche of cold water that the title and foreword lead one to expect. The first chapter is called 'The Miracle of Convergence', and the author frequently pays tribute to the remarkable degree of rapprochement already achieved. The book sounds a warning bell, from the vantage point of broad-church, liberal Anglicanism, against the authoritarianism of much (official) Roman Catholicism. It performs a useful service, not least for Scottish churchmen, in surveying the divisive issues, which for Montefiore include ethics, particularly in the sexual realm, and the ordination of women, of which he is an ardent advocate. Many a reader will find the book informative about recent Anglican and Roman developments in various fields.

The bishop plainly wants to focus the hard questions as sharply as possible. The Marian dogmas could never become *de fide* for Anglicans, but how could they be made optional for Romans? ARCIC makes inadequate provision for the laity's participation in decision-making. (On this point the new ARCIC must take the WCC's Lima consensus, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, more seriously - and also *God's Reign and Our Unity*, from an ARCIC without the middle C - the Anglican-Reformed International Commission.) A much fuller acceptance of the Church of England as truly 'catholic church' is called for than Vatican II granted.

Many other differences in faith and morals are raised in a book that seeks to be honest and rigorous. Evangelicals will read it with mixed feelings, concluding that on some things Rome may have got it more right than this bishop's brand of Anglicanism. They will also be puzzled that other issues are not pressed harder, such as Communion in both kinds, which was after all a central protest of the Reformers. And how odd it is that, in ARCIC and here, authority in the church can be extensively discussed without grasping the nettle of the Vatican as a state, with ambassadors and other features of one of the kingdoms of this world.

The Review Editor

Healing Miracles: A Doctor Investigates

Rex Gardner

Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1986; 214 pp., £4.95, paperback;
ISBN 0 232 51640 5.

Christian health care professionals are already indebted to Dr Rex Gardner for his magisterial survey of the ethical problems of abortion in his *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma* (1972). An indication that he was turning his attention to another area of health care came when the Christmas number of the *British Medical Journal* in 1983 contained a study by him of healing miracles in medieval Northumbria. He has now followed this up with a book, *Healing Miracles: A Doctor Investigates*.

In any approach to this subject certain questions must be asked and answered: 1. What is miraculous healing? 2. Does miraculous healing occur? 3. How can we know that it has occurred?

Let us look at how Dr Gardner answers these questions. He defines miraculous healing as 'the healing of organic disease by means, or at a speed, inexplicable medically and preceded by prayer in the name of Jesus Christ' (p. 1). His answer to the second question is found in the records he includes of twenty-four people who were all healed of disease in modern times in a miraculous way. Some of these cases he knew personally; the details of the rest were supplied and vouched for by others. In each case, healing occurred which was inexplicable according to modern medical knowledge and experience. The answer to the third question lies in the medically inexplicable change in the condition of the sick person which coincided with active Christian prayer made on his or her behalf.

In the course of his consideration of miraculous healing, Dr Gardner discusses its nature and its occurrence and ranges through the Bible and Church history in search of guidance for the situation today. He has a long discussion of the gifts of the Spirit with special reference to the gift of healing. He concludes that this gift was not withdrawn at the close of the apostolic age as Warfield and others maintained, but is still available in the Church today. The modern Christian is entitled to ask for physical healing from God, but it may not always be forthcoming as we see from the cases of Joni Eareckson and David Watson.

Dr Gardner has written a racy and a stimulating book. His knowledge of the relevant literature is extensive and his conclusions are sensible and responsible. Miraculous healing does occur and a belief in such healing is intellectually respectable. However, not all those for whom physical healing is sought from God receive it. Nevertheless, we should pray for it although we shall not know complete healing in our earthly life. He sums up the matter in the final sentences

of his book: 'The conclusion seems inescapable, in the light of the evidence presented in this work, that we have a living God, intimately interested in our affairs, prepared to intervene in a specific practical way in response to prayer. This being the case it is logical to pray about our health, and that of our patients and friends'.

This is a book to read and to study – and to enjoy.

John Wilkinson
Edinburgh

God's Action in the World

Maurice Wiles

SCM Press, London, 1986; 118 pp., £5.95, paperback;

ISBN 0 334 62028 X.

Professor Maurice Wiles fully justifies his decision to break with recent tradition and retain the original form of his Bampton lectures for publication rather than revising and expanding them. The book, as we might expect, is a model of jargon-free clarity with an absorbing intellectual appeal to a wide variety of readers. The work is also freer from the *spirit* of studied iconoclasm than Wiles's previous radical writings, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* and *Working Papers in Doctrine*.

The radical revision of traditional notions of divine providence remains, however, in response to the old problems of reconciling divine providence and human freedom and of knowing 'what sense to give the concept of an arranged contingency' (p. 19). The difficulty, he rightly adds, is not confined to Calvin's followers but inherited by the whole Western Christian tradition. It is highlighted every time God is petitioned to act in the human situation.

Wiles retains the anchor doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*, but goes on to argue that God has voluntarily qualified his omnipotence by conferring on parts at least of his creation a genuine independency. The revised view of God's action which follows is far-reaching. Divine action, consisting simply in (continuous) creation, is only 'in relation to the world as a whole rather than particular occurrences within it' (p.28). But the original dilemma has not here been solved but merely bundled into one package instead of many. The problem now is: how can God's one act of creation fulfil the divinely intended purpose if in its deepest reaches it involves independent beings? Wiles is admitting the difficulty when finally he reduces the prospect of fulfilment to no more than this: '... the work of that creation will not come to an end unless or until it is fulfilled' (p. 52). The 'unless or' is revealing. Perhaps the work of creation will *not* come to an end. The old dilemma of divine sovereignty and human freedom is in fact 'solved' here only by the old-fashioned remedy of making the divine will hostage to human choice and God's enabling or 'grace' into little more than a reassuring presence external to the specifics of human life. The result resembles a quasi-deism.

As Wiles recognises, the chief problem of the Christian faith is the existence of evil, and this difficulty, he acknowledges, remains even under his own radical reconstruction. It all seems meagre gain for a costly surrender by reductionism of such key Christian convictions in their traditional form as the incarnation and resurrection, the believer's strengthening by the Holy Spirit, answers to prayer and all miracles. Moreover it is achieved by a very selective recognition of biblical

material, uncongenial texts being seemingly dismissed on the basis of no established objective criteria and a mass of material, say on prayer, being ignored.

It is impossible in a brief review to do justice to such an ambitious and accomplished piece of work but Wiles's satisfaction on the last page that his scheme's problems are not as severe as those contained in other accounts of divine agency will not be shared by all.

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Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care

Ralph L. Underwood

Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1986; £6.50, paperback;

ISBN 0 8006 173 1

Every counsellor will welcome a discussion of the subject of this book. For many years non-directive counselling was in vogue with a concomitant stress on counselling as empathy. Many would have seen confrontation as a major indiscretion in counselling. Others, however, most notably Jay Adams, have argued that confrontation is not only a legitimate strategy in counselling but the only authentic biblical strategy. Underwood sets out to explore the issue in depth and see if they can be seen in a reconciled relationship to each other rather than in contrast.

In a complex opening chapter he discusses the proliferation of techniques which are current in counselling and sets out his understanding of ministry as communication. This he develops by using the root metaphor of the 'ministry of the word' as the basic imagery behind ministry. He believes the time is ripe for this perspective to assume greater prominence in ministry. 'Pastoral care is the communication of the gospel verbally, dynamically, and symbolically in interpersonal relationships that refer however implicitly, to the community of faith.' After fully expounding his definition, he uses it in the second chapter to offer a critique of other theories of communication in pastoral care. Here he fairly assesses the approach of Thurneysen, Ruel Howe, whose work was inspired by Buber, Faber and van der Schoot and Paul Johnson.

After his two theoretical chapters, which would make some demands on the average pastor, he turns to the application of his perspective to the question of empathy and confrontation. Both approaches are fully set out and any pastor would benefit from his exposition of them. Throughout these chapters he illustrates his argument by quoting snatches of pastoral conversations, many of which strike very close to home.

But how do empathy and confrontation relate? Empathy refers to one's ability to take in another's viewpoint, to understand their outlook, holding one's own views in check, whilst maintaining one's viewpoint. In confrontation one is challenging the person to be open to another view - a fresh perspective is being introduced. The pastor is saying, 'Having gained some understanding of you, I now trust you to deal openly with some things you have not considered'. There is no fundamental contradiction between the two approaches, Underwood argues, so long as there is respect. Both stem from the ministry of the Word and both, when sound in spirit, are expressions of respect.

REVIEWS

This is a worthy addition to the 'Theology and Pastoral Care Series'. It is a work of scholarship, but deals with a very real tension that many ordinary pastors face, and does so in a way which is balanced and perceptive. To a great extent it is convincing in its attempt to resolve the tension between empathy and confrontation and would liberate many a pastor from unnecessary conflicts of interest in their counselling.

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