

REVIEWS

Great Divides: Understanding the Controversies that Come Between Christians

Ronald H. Nash

Nav Press, Colorado Springs, CO, 1993; 240pp., £6.99; ISBN 0 8910 96965

A Marvelous Ministry: How the All-round Ministry of C.H. Spurgeon Speaks to us Today

Edited by Timothy George

Soli Deo Gloria Publications, Ligonier, PA, 1993; 147pp., £4.50; ISBN 1 877611 59 X

The stated aim of Professor Nash is to help his readers grasp why they think the way they do about 'ten of the most important and yet potentially divisive issues of our day'. These include such as the Pro-Life movement, women leaders in the church, divorce and remarriage, the end times, and Christian involvement in politics. The examination of each subject provides a good general outline of the history of the controversy, the principal arguments, and the leading participants with numerous extracts quoted from their most important writings. The general reader who is keen to be informed on the topics selected will find this a helpful introduction.

British readers will notice the strong North American preoccupation throughout the book. It is recognizable in the topics chosen as the *Great Divides*, as well as in the fact that Nash practically confines his references to the works of American authors. This perspective is also evident in the chapter on eschatology. He is particularly concerned about the popularity of dispensationalist premillennialism, but although G.E. Ladd's *The Blessed Hope* is among titles recommended for further reading, that view is not examined, nor is the more moderate dispensationalism of British writers.

The publishers of the second work have rendered a real service in having these six papers on Spurgeon presented together in one volume. Of the six, three were prepared for the Carey Ministers' Conference in 1992, and one for the Puritan Conference at Westminster Chapel, London, in 1971. As Reformed Baptists, all four authors write from a position of sympathy with their subject. Errol Hulse has contributed 'Spurgeon speaks today' and 'Spurgeon and his Gospel invitations'; Geoff Thomas has supplied the main biographical article; David Kingdon has written 'Spurgeon and his social concern'; and Tim Curnow concludes the study with the chapter 'Spurgeon and his activity in politics'.

This book is hard to lay down. Each author writes with clarity and authority. There are numerous quotations from *Sword and Trowel* and Spurgeon's published *Sermons* which allow the preacher's own voice to be heard. It is difficult to choose a sample that will adequately convey something of the character of this work, but perhaps the ten features of Spurgeon's Gospel invitations will provide a taste of it: no restrictions in persons addressed; the reality of death and hell; flexibility in presentation; evident love for souls; personal application of appeal; urgency; joy; offer of immediate justification; sincere persuasiveness; a sense of the power and presence of God.

If, as the foreword states, a century after his death 'there are more works in print by Spurgeon than by any other English-speaking author', this appetizer is surely a fitting introduction to the preacher himself. There are a few slips and misprints (e.g. his wrong age on p. 24), but our main regret is that there is neither an index nor even a short bibliography for further study. This apart, we commend it to a wide readership and share the hope that 'perhaps today he is having more influence in the world than he was 100 years ago. God will honour the life and ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon who loved his Saviour, until that Lord Jesus Christ comes again.'

Robert Boyd, Fort William

The Strangeness of God: Essays in Contemporary Theology

Elizabeth Templeton

Arthur James Limited, London, 1993; 173pp., £7.99; ISBN 0 85305 296 4

Templeton describes this book as 'fragments of thinking done over some fifteen years... mostly since I stopped being an "academic"'. This latter phrase, perhaps, explains her description of this material as 'unacademic theology'. Certainly, these articles are likely to prove very difficult reading for those who are not academics! The Bishop of Durham, who would presumably classify himself as an academic, appears to have found this book heavy going. His Foreword urges perseverance in reading this book, especially where the reader does not 'at first, make much sense of it'.

In the Foreword, we read that this book 'lies very much within Christian Faith, taken for granted and pursued'. Some readers may wonder whether this begs the question: can we take it for granted that this book gives us an authentic account of the Christian faith? Later the Foreword describes God as 'far too great a Mystery and a Glory for dogmatisms, moralisms and sectarian certainties'. This statement highlights the

difficulty of speaking about God in a way that does not reduce him to human size.

Templeton is quite clearly a protest against this type of thinking. Perhaps, in her theology, there is a strong element of reaction against 'two years of fervent evangelical acceleration in my early teens'. Throughout this book there is one conspicuous absence: the voice of Scripture, speaking authoritatively as the Word of God. At the risk of being accused of 'claustrophobic anti-world sectarianism', this reviewer must ask the author for more exposition of Scripture.

Templeton's articles raise the question: what is to set the agenda for our theology – the world or the Word? She insists that we must not say 'more than can be said in view of the facts' and that we must not dodge 'the actualities of existence'. The evangelical theologian must also say that Scripture is one of the facts, Scripture as a Word spoken to our existence by God himself. Where the Word is removed from theology's centre-stage, the world will not be slow to fill the gap. Theology will then be too much our speaking and not enough God speaking to us, too much listening to the world and not enough listening to the Word. There needs to be balance here: listening to the world and listening to the Word. I suspect that many readers will question whether Templeton has come close to achieving such a balance.

In her opening chapter, she depicts God as saying, 'I will go to them *incognito*... I must be careful not to dazzle them. I will be mistakable for anybody, or nobody.' While affirming that in Christ we have God 'veiled in flesh', this reviewer must ask: is the glory of God so hidden as to merit this kind of talk – 'mistakable for anybody, or nobody'? Or is there some other reason why Templeton is drawn to this way of thinking? On the next page, she tells us that 'a strange thing happened. In the community of those who had learned to love this man ... the presence of the man who was dead and gone became more alive and potent and convincing than it had been even in his lifetime'. Here we must ask whether this is how Scripture describes for us the 'strange thing' that we call the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Again we must ask why Templeton speaks as she does. She speaks of God in terms of 'love and freedom which is uncoercive'. Do we have here an explanation why she shies away from a clearer statement concerning the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:16-18)? Is this the reason why she draws back from an account of Christ's resurrection which refuses to reduce the fact of his resurrection to our faith in him (1 Cor. 15:17, 20)? It seems to me that she draws back from any account of Jesus Christ which is in her view too coercive. Here we have the problem of reading Scripture according to our own preconceived notions. We only allow Scripture to say what we want to hear.

Readers who look for a greater willingness to let Scripture speak more freely will, I expect, feel an element of strangeness in this book. Whether this is 'the strangeness of God' is another question. Perhaps, it is the

strangeness of reading theology which seems so uncommitted to a careful and attentive listening to the voice of Scripture, speaking as the Word of God.

Charles M. Cameron, St Ninian's Parish Church, Dunfermline

Perspectives on Christology: Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett

Edited by M. Shuster and R.A. Muller

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1991; xxvii + 302pp., £16.99; ISBN 0 310 39731 6

One of the most heartening things about the *Festschrift* in the 1990s is that it has come of age. Perhaps the fact has eluded most of us, but in post-modern times, when diversity and disunity are in vogue, such a literary genre makes stimulating reading: it alone offers diversity whilst combating disunity in one volume. *Perspectives on Christology* does just this. Indeed, it is perhaps fitting that a *Festschrift* should honour a systematician, in this case Paul King Jewett of Fuller Theological Seminary, best known to British readers for his 1975 *Man as Male and Female*. The book is itself a reflection of the systematician's discipline: the subject matter, as the title suggests, is the person of Christ: its contents, put simply, an evangelical mini-systematic treatise on the relevance and impact of our understanding of Jesus Christ across a broad spectrum of subjects. The book is divided into four parts, 'Scripture and Christology', 'The Person of Christ: Historical Perspectives', 'The Person of Christ: Contemporary and Literary Views' and 'Ethics and Christology'.

Familiar contributors include the late Robert Guelich, Colin Brown, Geoffrey Bromiley, Robert Kelly, Anthony Yu and Lewis Smedes, all in a most enjoyable book in terms of both content and the provocative points it raises. For instance, Donald Hagner's contribution, 'Paul's Christology and Jewish Monotheism', scratches where the itch currently rages concerning New Testament and systematic debate. What could be more relevant than a competent presentation of an ancient debate in which scripture and tradition are shown to be in agreement, whilst challenging the sloppy thinking that pervades much evangelical talk on the nature of God?

The two middle sections contain, perhaps, the most rewarding reading. The humanity of Christ is presented from several interesting perspectives. One of the most outstanding articles is, surprisingly, a refreshing defence of Schleiermacher's Christology by Richard Muller. His superlative article gets behind controversies in order to present the Schleiermacher so often lost in evangelical reactions against the 'Father of Liberalism'. Muller's co-editor, Marguerite Shuster, offers a very stimulating article on the possibility of Christ being tempted to sin.

The last section, on ethics, will be of interest to any involved in pastoral ministry. For the systematician, doctrine has always found meaning only in its practical application. Perhaps the reason why so few Christian thinkers immediately respond positively to the discipline of systematics is the sometimes abstract theologies that have been produced over the centuries. Not the case here, though. The person and work of Christ are explored from different angles for their practical and personal relevance.

All in all, this is an easily digested book. It offers meaningful and thought-provoking content which should appeal to academic and student, lay and ordained alike. Heartily recommended for the study and the soul!

Graham McFarlane, London Bible College

The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood Debate. The Verbatim Record

Church House Publishing, London, 1993; 91pp., £4.50;
ISBN 0 7151 3751 4

Many readers will remember the media coverage of the historic Synod debate on 11 November 1992 about the ordination of women to the Church of England priesthood. In response to popular demand, the verbatim record of the debate has now been published.

However, as the helpful background notes at the end of this volume make clear, this debate was only one part of a long process which began in 1975, when the motion that 'There are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood' was carried, although a motion to remove 'legal and other barriers' was lost. Furthermore, the synod debate was not the end of the process either. However, for good or ill, it was unquestionably of immense importance.

Presbyterians reading this book may find themselves, like me, feeling how alien our two ecclesiastical systems are culturally as well as theologically. For many of us, a crucial difference is the concept of 'priesthood'. In the Church of England there have been women readers and deacons for some time, but the leap to priesthood is seen as an enormous one, theologically.

Of course many different and fascinating arguments were put forward in this debate, but the ones which must be taken seriously by us as Evangelicals are those which claim to be based on Scripture. Others based either on mere tradition, or on a desire to conform with Roman Catholicism, or even on how the world sees the church may be left safely to one side, though they are an interesting reflection of the struggles of those in our churches who have abandoned the supremacy of scriptural authority to find other authorities, other standards and other bases for argument.

The question is whether it is true that 'while the Scriptures are inconclusive on the question of the ordination of women, they are firm and conclusive on man and woman together being in the image of God', or whether the ordination of women is clearly prohibited by the Bible; there is much in the debate which is probably irrelevant to this question.

This is not a book in the usual sense and is not intended to present any particular theory; it is a transcript of a polite and yet lively debate, and, given its historical significance within the Church of England, will be an important addition to the bookshelves of both those interested in the question of women's ordination (regardless of their own denomination) and those interested in the study of modern church history.

Anne E. Stewart, Glasgow University

Sermons on Job

John Calvin

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1993; 752pp., £35; ISBN 0 85151 6440

So very much could be written in appraisal of this great work, but a short review must be confined only to some of the principal points of significance. What we have here is a facsimile reprint of *Sermons of Master John Calvin upon the Book of Job*, translated from the French by Arthur Golding, first published in London in 1574. Scholars and seasoned students of Calvin will hasten to obtain their own copies; others, even if initially lured by the ever attractive dustcover of a Banner of Truth publication, may feel hesitant after close examination. The work is far from easy to read despite the claim that '10 minutes' reading aloud is generally enough to whet the interest for more', and the encouragement that 'the English has the force and colour of the age of Shakespeare'.

The work contains 159 sermons on the Book of Job, in Elizabethan English, each one consisting of about 6,000 words. They are set out in double columns over five pages or so, and rarely broken down into more than three paragraphs: two (an introduction, referring to the previous day's exposition, and a brief conclusion or final prayer) are very short in comparison with the third, which contains the bulk of the sermon. All are divided into very long sentences, frequently the length of a paragraph of today, and subdivided into clauses. The punctuation corresponds to the preacher's rhetorical pauses rather than to any written style.

One is tempted to ask why the Banner of Truth did not try to produce a much more popular version on a computer (such as those used by the Wycliffe Bible Translators, who might have been willing to undertake the task) programmed to translate material from one dialect to another, in this instance from Elizabethan to modern English. As this idea has apparently not yet been explored, the reader must persevere with the archaic text, but

he will have his reward. Throughout the sermons, Calvin's theology is presented and invoked, but not in the crystallised and systemised manner so familiar in the *Institutes*, nor yet in the apt and polished prose of his commentaries. Here we find a much more relaxed Calvin, whose thought flows through the terrain following the course of the text under review. Here and there it eddies for a while as an issue is dealt with in depth. Occasionally it will take up much of the time allotted to the entire sermon, if Calvin feels it is significant enough.

In the sermons Calvin the orator is always Calvin the pastor, concerned with the needs of the common folk and their eternal well-being. Thus the imagery he uses is not that of the intellectual but that of the local countryside – of animals, especially horses, of fairground and circus. Yet those who follow him, whether yesterday's hearer or today's reader, albeit grappling with the forbidding Elizabethan script, will find themselves led into heavenly places in Christ, which is what Calvin always intends. The sermons were preached at 6 or 7 a.m., according to season, on weekdays between February 1554 and March 1555, in alternate weeks, according to Calvin's custom of preaching through the Old Testament.

Peter Cook, St Andrew's, Cheadle Hulme

Lion PC Handbook of the Bible
Lion Publishing / Lynx Communications
Computer Software £51

Could this be the answer to your prayers? At least to prayers regarding the make-up of your sermons? Could a computerised Bible along with the Lion aids to Bible study compete with that well-worn and carefully compiled library upon which you faithfully rely to produce ever better sermons?

Perhaps that scenario would be to misunderstand the nature of computers and their use. However if you are the owner of a PC XT with 640K memory or greater, then you might find the above mentioned combined pieces of software at least an aide in the compilation of those sermons and studies. What the above offers is a system that could allow increased flexibility and speed in your method of working. Perhaps the most helpful aspect is the NIV version of the Bible accessed in all kinds of clever ways by the purpose-designed interface. It is immensely useful to be able to access quickly, in search mode, verses of scripture containing multiple words in which you are interested. Single word access is provided too, but it is the combination search and display modes that are the most powerful and beneficial.

Besides finding verses for your study, it is possible to look up any relevant notes that might be found in the compilation of Lion books, specially adapted for this computer set-up. A list of relevant subjects can be displayed and quick access made to them. This information is now able

to be imported into your own notes in a separate editor. By using this system you are able to work up a comprehensive study of any subject, adding your own notes, of course, from 'books', as required.

Does it sound like a dream? Unfortunately it is not. Unfortunately, because the system of commands through which you access all this 'spirituality', although fast, is very clumsy and not at all intuitive. You would be hard put to find your way round the system by experimentation. The design could be much friendlier, given that the golden rule is 'if in doubt read the manual last'. The learning curve, for getting around and extracting the available information into a usable form, is steep in the extreme. A few years ago people would put up with an interface of this nature, but techniques have come a long way. The arrival of 'Windows' has influenced even humble DOS type programmes in command structures. Greater ease of use is possible. In conclusion: the material is proven, and the idea sound, in this package and ones like it. However in this instance the presentation and access are a hindrance to true productivity, especially for those new to computing.

Bob Akers, Glasgow Bible College

Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomical Theology

J. Gordon McConville

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1993; 176pp., £6.99; ISBN 0 85364 588 4

As McConville rightly points out, Deuteronomy and the related Deuteronomical literature in Joshua – II Kings has very considerable influence on the background thought of the New Testament. He emphasises that this is seen not only in the fact that the actual Book of Deuteronomy is so frequently quoted in the gospels, but that the theological thought of Deuteronomy lies behind the approaches of the New Testament. As a result we are seeing a growing list of studies on the Deuteronomical literature and Deuteronomy itself, so it is particularly apt and helpful to have this scholarly but readable book available. Students will find it a helpful guide through the maze of critical thought and I am thankful to be able to recommend it to my students.

After an initial chapter which sets the scene nicely McConville gives us a good chapter with an overview of the literary and historical understanding of Deuteronomy. Already this chapter begins to demonstrate one of his main theses, that our view of the historical setting will determine our theological interpretation. He shows quite convincingly that 'the literary criticism is far too often subjective and fragile'. This leads naturally to a shorter but significant chapter on the dating of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomical literature. He rejects the commonly held view that they date from the 7th century B.C. and the

times of Josiah. By the end of the book it becomes clear that McConville favours a more traditional dating which is early.

Chapter 4 works through the Deuteronomic idea in the books of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel and I and II Kings. As one might expect from his other writings, McConville is particularly strong on I and II Kings, but his overview of the other literature is also most helpful. This section starts with a critique of some modern Deuteronomic scholars – Cross, Provan, Smend, Hoffman and Hobbs.

Chapter 5 outlines what McConville sees as the key elements of Deuteronomic theology in the glorification of the God of Israel as distinct from the worship of Canaanite or other deities. He underlines that this God is made known through his spoken words and through his actions in history. McConville proceeds to a discussion of covenant and election as central themes and closes with the climax of ‘grace in the end’. Here he sees no necessary contradiction between a message of grace and one of law. While Wellhausen saw Deuteronomy as a book of law, Von Rad as a book of gospel and grace and Nicholson as one of treaty and covenant, McConville shows that the one author can continue these varying themes together. He stresses that God’s gracious promises are matched by Israel’s persistent sin; but the author of Deuteronomy already teaches that God alone can work to change the perverse nature of his people and bring the fullness of salvation – and that introduces its fulfilment in the New Testament where God works in Jesus Christ to bring ‘grace in the end’.

But McConville notes a variety of other vital themes. He shows that God alone is central – there is no sacrosanct authority or position for any other system, whether it be Jerusalem as the place for God’s name or the kingship as an institution. And yet at the same time Deuteronomy does look for an organisation of society with equitable distribution of wealth, brotherhood of all people and the joy of religious celebration. What a pattern for today! And what a pointer to its fulfilment in the New Testament! So the book concludes with two chapters on Deuteronomic theology and its fulfilment in the New Testament.

This book is a masterly introduction at a student level to the Deuteronomic literature. It will be a real help to many students of theology at university or in Bible and theological colleges.

Martin Goldsmith, All Nations Christian College