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## REVIEWS

### **Van Til's Apologetics: Readings & Analysis**

Greg L. Bahnsen

Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, Phillipsburg, 1998; 764pp., \$39.99; ISBN 0 87552 098 7

Some would argue that in the history of apologetics there were basically three approaches: Classical, Evidential, and Fideism, until Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) began developing his 'brand' of apologetics. In 1928, after spending one year in the pastorate, he was asked to lecture in the department of apologetics at Princeton Seminary. When J. Gresham Machen resigned his position in the New Testament Department at Princeton Seminary in 1929 to establish Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Van Til also resigned his position to return to the pastorate. After rejecting nearly a hand full of appeals to accept the position of apologetics professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, Van Til finally accepted the position and began teaching in August of 1929, where he remained until he retired forty years later.

Van Til's first published piece came upon the completion of his masters degree. In that work, a review of Alfred North Whitehead's *Religion in the Making*, Van Til's presuppositional approach became public. Four key points of Van Til's approach emerged. They included '(a) locating his opponent's critical presuppositions, (b) criticizing the autonomous attitude that arises from a failure to honour the Creator-creature distinction, (c) exposing the internal and destructive philosophical tensions that attend autonomy, and then (d) setting forth the only viable alternative, biblical Christianity' (p. 10). In his 1929 review of two works of Bavink, another foundational aspect of Van Til sprang forth. 'He insisted that the propagation and defense of the faith required believers to abandon the impossible notion of a "neutral territory" of truth between believers and unbelievers' (p. 10). Richard Pratt's work entitled, *Every Thought Captive*, encapsulates Van Til's motto in doing apologetics.

Van Til was a prolific writer, and Bahnsen cites nearly one hundred syllabi, books, articles and reviews by him in this volume. Because he was primarily Dutch, Van Til's works were more or less understandable

depending on who his 'proof reader' was when each work was published. Thus, some works are more easily understood than others. Unfortunately, readers often tire prematurely when reading Van Til because of the awkwardness of his grammar and vocabulary, and thus miss the genius of his contribution to the field of apologetics. This is where Bahnsen's work is so invaluable in understanding Van Til's thought. In a matchless way, Bahnsen offers in this work what he sets out to do:

This book is an organized digest of what Van Til taught throughout his various publications about the underlying approach to apologetics. After an introductory sketch of the basic themes that drive Van Til's apologetic and a survey of his life, the book lays out his conception of apologetics and offers a simple description and illustration of his presuppositional method. We then explore and explain in more detail the relevant epistemological and psychological issues that bear on Van Til's way of defending the faith, culminating in a discussion of the transcendental argumentation that he endorsed--set in contrast to the more traditional way of using theistic proofs and empirical evidences. A few of Van Til's opponents are examined before his outlook is summarized in the conclusion. (p. xxii)

Any serious student of apologetics must acquire this work and read it. This is Van Til at his best because it is Van Til presented in a most readable fashion.

*Bruce R. Backensto,  
Beaver Falls and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

### **To Glorify God: Essays On Modern Reformed Liturgy**

Bryan D. Spinks and Iain R. Torrance (eds)

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999; 272pp., £24.95; ISBN 0 567 08606 2

To those for whom the term 'Reformed Liturgy' is not an oxymoron, this book will make an interesting companion. Like all collections of essays the quality is not uniform, but generally I found it to be high. In an age when there is a greater reliance upon centrally produced liturgical resources and the lectionaries they contain, it is good to have a volume like this offering a fairly thorough critique.

The liturgies in question are *Common Order* (CO), produced by the Church of Scotland's Panel on Worship, and the *Book of Common Worship* (BCW) from the Presbyterian Church of the USA. In the opinion of those essayists who offer comparative studies, the latter is usually preferred, if only marginally. All sections of the liturgies are

examined in their own right, and some themes are looked at across the whole, which makes for a good mix of studies. One interesting feature of the collection is that it does not simply seek to assess the liturgies themselves, but also how relevant they are within their broader cultural context.

Rather than try to cover every essay in this review I shall paint a general picture and pick out one or two of the essays that particularly appealed to me. The first few chapters relate the processes by which the books came about, and I particularly enjoyed Horace Allen's account as a participant in the production of the BCW, for two reasons. It was interesting to have an insight into the attitudes and decisions over the last fifty years or so leading to the production of BCW. He also neatly draws out the twin dangers of total prescription and total freedom in worship and suggests that the genius of Presbyterianism can be seen in the creative local use of such liturgies.

A couple of studies on broader issues appealed to me. First, in a telling essay, Will Storrar examines CO from a cultural perspective within postmodern Scotland and lays down the challenge that the Kirk will only be able to use CO as a missionary and edifying text when it ditches its lingering concept of Christendom and modern mentality. The second may be of less relevance to some of this journal's readers, but it was thought provoking on a wider hermeneutical front. I have become more conscious in recent times of a greater number of ministers relying on the lectionary as the basis of the theme for the Sunday sermon. Largely skipping the 'Why?' question, John Goldingay asks the 'Which?' question and proceeds to examine the one compiled by the Joint Liturgical Group that appeared in the *Book of Common Order* (1979) and the Revised Common Lectionary that appears in CO and BCW. Having examined the strengths and weaknesses of both it might seem tame to end up saying what is needed is a hybrid, but he makes many interesting points along the way. Crucially, should the Gospel lesson, following the life of Christ, control the choice of the other readings, or should these other Scriptures be heard in their own right?

A series follows on specific subjects across the range of liturgical rites reflecting on the way in which the two books portray God, Christ and the nature of the Church. Of these, it was Kathryn Greene-McCreight's essay on God that grabbed my attention because of her damning indictment of CO's bland, nice God while the God of BCW is more like the God of the Bible and the Reformed tradition. 'In short, the doctrine of God taught in and though the liturgies and prayers of the two books examined is not the same at all' (p. 113).

Of the essays on individual rites, the one I found most interesting in the present moral climate was Kenneth Stevenson's on the marriage service. I cannot say I agreed throughout, but he raises many issues both theological and pastoral.

Without question, the essay that stands out from the crowd is the final one by Donald Macleod. Not in the quality of its writing, for there are others better, but more in the acceptance, or lack, of the term 'Reformed Liturgy' and the tone of the criticism towards the present subjects. In laying out the inherent difficulties the compilers face producing such material in a Reformed context he makes some good points. But later in more biting criticism one feels that he is straining to keep his language within the bounds of scholarly exchange. I suspect that many readers of this journal, like myself, would be sympathetic to much of what he writes, but there were points at which I found myself disagreeing profoundly, such as with some of his comments on the Lord's supper.

When offered this book to review I almost declined because of the subject matter. I'm glad I didn't because my understanding was broadened and my critical appreciation of these liturgies was deepened. The rub is to use them wisely in leading the people in worship of God. I hope it will help me do that.

*Jared Hay, Balerno Parish Church*

### **The Doctrine of Creation. Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy**

Colin E. Gunton (ed.)

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1997; 179pp., no price; ISBN 0 567 08588 0

King's College, London, continues to be a source of high quality, constructive theological discussion and this collection of essays is no exception. Six of the eight contributions come from current or former members of King's, and the collection is only enhanced by a further two papers from the distinguished names of Robert W. Jenson and Daniel W. Hardy.

The Introduction hopes that the collection will have offered an insight into the importance of the dogmatic content of the doctrine of creation and that it prompts opportunities for further thought and research. By this test it is a highly successful venture. The discussion is sometimes quite technical but always dedicated to constructive dialogue with the issues of the day. The standard is so consistent that it would be a crime to single any one paper out for praise or disappointment.

Robert Jenson finds the identification of the Son with the community of Christ the goal of creation and with his usual craft leaves a Trinitarian

stamp on the subject in a stimulating seminal treatment. Paul Helm pursues the subject of God's timelessness, a debate in which he has become a major figure in recent years. He effectively responds to those who find creation in a timeless zone incoherent but seems to be unusually adventurous in affirming not just a timeless God but a timeless creation ('There was no time when the universe was not' and 'The universe is beginningless, without a first event'), though this eternal creation is distinguished from the temporal *making* of what now is. He certainly succeeds in showing how a timeless God might know things in time. Perhaps more work is needed to show as convincingly how a timeless God *acts* in time. But he uses spirited argumentation all the same. The approach of Paul Helm finds support in Alan Torrance's thoughtful treatment of *creatio ex nihilo*. Here too the idea of creation should not be of the space-and-time world of objects but the 'totality of spatio-temporal identities together with their interconnective matrices from absolutely nothing'.

Colin Gunton writes fruitfully on Genesis, reminding us of the limits to literalness in the long hermeneutical tradition of the opening chapters. More important, he returns to the Christological roots of the doctrine of creation without tipping into Christomonism. His paper on causation is less straightforward but very useful for double-striking the line between 'emanation' and 'creation'.

Daniel Hardy tackles the relation of creation to eschatology. There are many nuggets though the language is the most technical of all the papers. Some may be led to wonder from the paper if the 'eschaton' really is the radical departure from nature and history that the New Testament seems to expect. But only a longer piece would make this clearer. Brian Horne helpfully locates human freedom in a doctrine of creation, arguing that we 'live out our lives in the tension between freedom and necessity; and human creativity can only be properly understood in this context'. Christoph Schwöbel writes on the relation of God to creation and community. The piece is profound in defining God's relationship to creation in terms of divine self-giving (not simply as architect, janitor and emperor). This last approach will commend itself to many women theologians writing today. Which prompts the question: why no contribution from women when 'creation' is a field attracting many such scholars at the present time?

Not everything carries the day, but the more successful elements contribute valuable nurture to a top-priority debate.

*Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University*

## **The Triune Creator. A Historical and Systematic Study**

Colin E. Gunton

Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998; 246pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 7486 0792 7

Colin Gunton's fame in academic theology is assured from his work in Trinitarian studies alone, though he has tackled a raft of tricky issues in addition. Here, much fruit from previous writing has been gathered up and skilfully worked into a comprehensive theological vision. Like so many of his other writings it is enriched by the results of extensive collaborative work at Kings College, London, reaching out to many traditions, including Eastern Orthodoxy, Moltmann and modern Pentecostal thought. The author also has the bottle to engage with other disciplines, negotiating terrain in such diverse fields as biblical studies, science, philosophy and ethics.

The book begins with a mouth-watering taster to an ambitious programme which carries Trinity and creation out to meet challenges from such rivals as evolutionary science, study of religions and secular anthropology. It is too big a task for one book, of course, especially given the uncompromisingly apologetic thrust. While not claiming to be the last word on the subject, this work significantly upends many cosy assumptions of theological revisionism and critiques of religion, though it is done graciously. Amongst other things, the author shows that the all-too popular rejection of a Christian doctrine of creation usually ends up transferring the language of creative agency to the world itself. 'Nature' or 'evolution' enjoy the dignity of being personalised and then placed in charge. Consequently, only two possible views of the universe face us. There is a divinity which created things or the creation simply made itself. I should have liked Gunton at this point to have explored one further possible startling implication. A re-wording, albeit crudely, of the options could then be: 'Creation/science or paganism – that's the choice.' That is, an atheist view of the cosmos can only tend to something like the divinising of nature. On this account, it would be 'scientism' not religion that is superstitious!

This possibility aside, the author does lay out many timely warnings about the link between a doctrine of creation and the foundations of science. He is even-handed with his slap-downs. He points up the dangers of scientific fideism, but also laments the harm that Christian apologists have done to themselves by being ensnared in the nets of Platonism and deism – the real theological enemies of authentic science.

But what does the Trinity have to do with all this? Well, the separate integrity of the creation is assured not by doubtful philosophies of evolutionary naturalism (distinct from merely scientific use of the evolutionary method) but by a creator committed to protecting and preserving the creation. The two 'creating hands' of God, the Spirit and the Son (as in Irenaeus) preserve the Father's intention. A common, too whimsical, notion of evolution must not be confused with the work of the Spirit held in Christian theology. In contrast, the Spirit ensures 'providence', enables creation's freedom and makes possible a journey to the intended future. And the incarnation of the Son marks God's commitment to creation in general and humanity in particular, providing a benchmark of full humanity in the image of God.

That's the main course. But it's a ten-course meal and the only proof of all the ingredients is in the eating. The full menu includes fresh treatments of God's relation to time, eschatology's relationship to ethics and the merits or otherwise of Pannenberg, Moltmann, Augustine, Origen (and many more). You might think the reviewer is exaggerating. Well, just order up for yourself. Eating is believing.

*Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University*

## **Christianity: A Short Introduction**

Keith Ward

One World Publications, Oxford, 2000; 184pp., £8.99; ISBN 1-5168-229-5

This book, written by the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, is stimulating at two levels. First it introduces the Christian faith to the intelligent outsider. It deals with a range of key subjects that shape Christian belief and practice. The distinctive feature of this book is that each theme is dealt with from three angles. After a general introduction on a topic, and before a shorter conclusion, three perspectives are presented that the church has held at different times or in different places. This is done, not to confuse, but to show the range of insights Christians have brought to their faith. It also helps to explain the diversity found in the church today.

At a deeper and more important level it is an excellent introduction for Christians. I suspect many Christians tend to think about their faith in line with their tradition. They may be ignorant of other ways of thinking. They may even be suspicious of or hostile towards any other possibilities. Keith Ward makes it safe and exciting to begin that journey of exploration. His method is such that he avoids the pitfall of caricature.

Moreover he does not trail his own personal preferences too obviously. His very fair and objective presentation allows the reader the chance to see the value and reasonableness of other positions than his or her own.

Furthermore when the position the reader holds is dealt with accurately he has a confidence and interest to approach the subject through other lenses. One aspect that impressed me is that even when a position was clearly not that of the author, he always tried to find something good to justify it, before he moved on to other options. By so doing he displays a generosity of spirit that is sadly not often found in a faith whose mark is supposed to be love for one another.

It could be argued that, by laying three alternatives out side by side and choosing none of them, this book simply mirrors the modern obsession with unlimited choice that renders all choices valueless. This is not, however, a sell-out to the 'pick and mix' philosophy so beloved by our post-modern culture. It is a serious attempt to describe the diversity that exists in the church whilst showing the connections that underpin different points of view. The way in which the writer tops and tails each chapter provides a very helpful setting against which each perspective can be seen at its best.

As a book it reads well and held this reviewer's interest throughout. Language is well chosen. The book is tightly written but remains readable. It provides a good overview to the contemporary Christian landscape and stimulates creative thinking about the Christian tradition. The writer does not provide an exhaustive view of Christian doctrine but is not afraid to face up to some very difficult issues.

This could be for some a very liberating book and for many a worthwhile read.

*Colin A. M. Sinclair, Palmerston Place Church of Scotland, Edinburgh*

## **William Barclay – The Authorized Biography**

Clive Rawlins

Fount, London, 1998; 312 pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 00 628097 8

This is a book which in turn informs, delights and infuriates. The Reverend Professor William Barclay – Willie Barclay to his public – was by all accounts a larger-than-life character, and one who, over twenty years after his death, is still recalled in the church. But, as the years pass, there are more and more who never heard the man, and whose lives and ministries are barely impacted by his work. So this reviewer, for one, is grateful for the opportunity to read of one who made such an impact on the churchgoing (and non-churchgoing) public of Scotland.

Clive Rawlins' biography is presented as 'The Authorized Biography', and as such, he assumes that his understanding of Barclay, as Barclay's authorised biographer (interpreter?) must be taken as correct. More than once we are told that other commentators on Barclay's work are mistaken or plain wrong in their understanding of the man and his work. If Rawlins is to be believed, only his is the proper understanding of Barclay.

'There's a job to be done.' Barclay's strengths come through – his willingness to 'be of service', his lack of 'side'. His kindness and generosity of both his means and his spirit. Yet in some ways his was a life of contradictions. He comes across as a shy, almost self-effacing man who, nevertheless, loved to be the centre of attraction. 'A life of discovery' was his approach to teaching, yet he remained curiously out of touch with a lot of contemporary scholarship on the important and illuminating link between First-Century Judaism and the Early Church.

This is a remarkably uncritical biography. On the one hand Rawlins presents Barclay as the archetypal Prophet of Goodwill – the voice of understanding and compassion crying in the wilderness of closed hard-heartedness. And, Willie Barclay's shortcomings – his penchant for alcohol and his workaholic monomania – are not ignored by the author. Yet they are not given much weight. Indeed, no attempt is made to 'measure the man'. Rather, Barclay is presented as one who sought to be 'all things to all men, that he might win some'. What comes through is the man's great-hearted humanity, but such is the spin that Rawlins puts on Barclay's foibles that one begins to wonder just how true to life it all was. His was a life of giving: 'a ministry, a service; one of consummate goodwill'.

Barclay is seen as one who made scholarship approachable and learning digestible. He is presented the Great Communicator, who sought to make his students' world 'larger, more luminous, kinder'. Above all, Barclay's aim was to make 'the plain, common man, the centre of his work'. As he wrote himself,

I began to think that I might become a theological middleman, to take the results of scholarship, to take the things done in the classroom, to take the great books the scholars have written, and to restate them in ordinary non-technical language which ordinary people understand.

On reading this biography one is enabled to understand William Barclay, the man, better; and surely that is what biography should seek to do. William Barclay and/or his biographer, Clive Rawlins, may infuriate you but, for all that, this is a book worth reading.

*Alan Macgregor, Banff Parish Church*

## **On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible: with Reflections on Experience**

Ronald S. Wallace

Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1999; 137 pp., £7.25; ISBN 0 7073 0775 9

What well-known authors say in their later years is often illuminating, frequently summing up much of their thought or showing the conclusions to which they have come through a life-time's reflection. This happened in a distinctly troubling fashion in 'Mind at the end of its Tether' by H. G. Wells. There is interest in reading the later works of Christians like John Wenham and Oliver Barclay. This book, based on lectures given in Singapore, comes into the same category.

Ronald Wallace has of course written many books, most of them helpful expositions of Bible books or studies of the thought of the Reformers. His latest, written in a popular style, deals with the unity of the testaments, with approaches to interpretation in the contexts both of worship and of critical study and with issues concerned with the application of the Word. There are also chapters on openness and surrender, on typology and allegory and on the integrity of the biblical witness, but he does not deal with post-modern approaches to interpretation. There are many references to his personal experience and these autobiographical sections often show why he holds the particular positions he does.

His indebtedness to the Reformers, especially Calvin, is evident in every chapter and the influence of Karl Barth's doctrine of the Word of God is strong. This latter feature means that many readers will not find themselves in agreement at certain points. Yet it should be said that in the concluding chapter he moves towards a stronger biblical conservatism, for here he places great emphasis on the factual reliability of the Elijah and Elisha stories, for instance, and that of the Gospel of John. Here he says, 'The Bible is too often hindered from making its full and enriching impact on the minds and lives of our lay people, because after many years they have been led to share the current doubts amongst pastors and scholars about the reliability of its witness.'

He stresses the importance of good reading of the Scriptures in church services. On typology he moves deftly between extremes, saying, 'It is a wise rule... that we must avoid the deliberate habit of seeking here and there in Scripture for type and anti-type. We have no need to add to the decisive types which bind the New Testament so closely and convincingly to the Old in reinforcing the one Salvation history.' He

approves of allegorising to some degree (for instance, in expounding the Song of Solomon) but warns against its excesses. He has helpful things to say about the way the story element and the doctrinal elements in Scripture relate and he shows how sensitive their fellowship with God had made the Bible writers to the sufferings of some of the people whose story they narrate.

*Geoffrey Grogan, Glasgow*

### **Retrieving The Tradition And Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants**

D. H. Williams

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK, 1999; ix+243pp.,  
£9.99; ISBN 0 8028 4668 8

Professor Williams writes from the unusual perspective of a Baptist teaching within a Roman Catholic institution. He makes good use of both of these perspectives in his concern to recapture a central role for tradition (as expressed in the early church fathers) within evangelicalism and especially evangelicalism as expressed in the free / independent churches. The 'Suspicious Protestants' of the sub-title are largely Evangelicals in the free / independent tradition a group who have disconnected themselves 'from the rich heritage of the church in its formative years where the doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit were developed' (p. 1) and other essential foundations laid.

Williams attacks a series of misunderstandings about the role of Tradition in church history. Behind these misconceptions, however, is a more profound issue. Under-valuing Tradition risks the danger not only of repeating old heresies but also of undermining Christian identity and mission. In an attempt to be culturally relevant and to meet the contemporary longing for spiritual experience some evangelicals are losing connection with their moorings which Williams identifies as the road to cultism. For example, the growth of small groups within the church is double-edged in that while a group can foster strong bonds of community and deep personal experiences it 'can offer no certainty that Christian orthodox teaching will likewise be transmitted in its midst' (p. 209). The possible result is increased fragmentation of the church.

The misunderstandings Williams addresses in his central chapters relate to the generally bad press associated with the very concept of 'tradition' within some evangelical circles, suspicion towards the Patristic period and assumed negative attitudes of the Reformers to both 'tradition' and the Early Fathers. Tradition as a concept, he argues, is bound up in

the evangelical mind with the idea of extra-biblical activities and unbiblical practices whose rise can be traced to a supposed 'fall' of the church which occurred anywhere between the death of the last Apostle to the time of Constantine. He ably demonstrates the difficulties with this view defining tradition to be the passing and receiving of something living and showing how this took place within the context of the life of Jesus and the Apostles. Williams then draws on the great Church Councils and some key early church figures to show that neither imperial politics nor episcopal power can be used to account for and thus devalue the creeds and confessions of the late patristic era. They stand not as infallible documents but as 'faithful conductors of the Christian doctrine of God found in Scripture and the Tradition' (p. 172).

Much of his argument throughout centres on his understanding of 'sola scriptura'. Williams seeks to argue that the Magisterial Reformers not only drew on the work of the Early Fathers but understood 'sola scriptura' as operating within the context of the foundational Tradition of the church. So 'the hermeneutic of the church's "faith" guides the exposition and reception of Scripture' (p. 233). Williams therefore proposes a triadic structure of authority involving Scripture, Tradition and the church which seeks to recognise that they are not independent sources of tradition but operate together, presupposing one another. Within this he still gives Scripture a place of 'unique authority' (p. 215).

Williams has given us a stimulating and challenging book which rightly identifies some of the weaknesses of parts of Evangelicalism. William's criticisms cannot be levelled at all of Evangelicalism (e.g. see the dependence on the Church Fathers in IVP's *Contours in Christian Theology* series) but nonetheless there are deep concerns about the proliferation of groups and the tendency to demean what God has been doing in the past in favour of what he is doing now. The question that remains is how this situation can and should be addressed.

*Andy Bathgate, Scripture Union Scotland*

## **The People of the Great Faith: The Highland Church 1690–1900**

Douglas Ansdell

Acair Limited, Stornoway, 1998; 234pp., ISBN 0 86152 198 6

My early exposure to Highland church history was sadly lacking. It was almost entirely confined to the oblique references made during a course on the history of Disruption and Union in the church in Scotland. Other than this, I might have spent my entire period of formal theological education

for the Church of Scotland ministry unaware of the unique, important, and fascinating story of the Highland Church.

It was, however, my great privilege some years later to be at Aberdeen University when Professor Donald Meek taught the first ever classes to Divinity students in Ecclesiastical Gaelic. We could well have used Ansdell's superb and necessary book as a main text.

Ansdell shows us both the distinctiveness of the church in the Highlands, and its relationship to external forces and agencies. He helps us through the most significant events and movements that are part of the history of the Highland Church; the establishment of presbyterianism, the rise of evangelicalism, the Church's role in social and political developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Clearances, Education, Revivals, Land League activities etc.), the Disruption, the role of the Free Church, the 1893 Secession and the Union of 1900.

Throughout, Ansdell is good at calling to question some of the presuppositions held by those both inside and outside of the Highland Church. Indeed, he raises the crucial question of perspective in Highland Church history. The book is also good at examining the influence of factors which have been more or less constant in the Highland Church, e.g. Gaelic, the supernatural, and the geographic challenge of mission in the Highlands.

Ansdell's main thesis is that significant movements on a national scale (presbyterianism, evangelicalism and the Disruption) reached the Highlands at times when the prevailing social, cultural and religious conditions did not have the capacity to resist. These movements were then assimilated, but given a particular Highland interpretation and application.

However, by the time the Free Church was moving to a more liberal stance in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Highlands had been much strengthened by a church that had provided leadership, education, identity and a distinctive spirituality. Changes were then successfully resisted, but the cost of this resistance has been a broken and fragmented church in the Highlands.

This book provides a fascinating insight to the church in the Highlands. I was only occasionally frustrated by what had to be missed out, but the overview is clear and helpful. I would warmly recommend it to those outside the Highland Church, as a way of understanding its legacy today. I would strongly recommend it to those within the church in the Highlands, lest we read our own particular theological ideals into our past, and are tempted to believe in some golden age in the Highland Church. I would especially recommend this book to anyone who believes

that the Highland Church represents a monochrome and homogenous mass, 'gloomy, censorious and dictatorial'. The reality, as Ansdell clearly demonstrates, is far more complex, multi-faceted and interesting.

*Iain Macritchie, Inverness Hospitals' Chaplain*

## **Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self. On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise**

Anthony C. Thistleton,

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996; 180pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 567 290302 5

Now, now, it is really no use saying that you just cannot bear to see another book with the word 'postmodern' in the title. They are just going to keep coming, so the best thing you can do is make sure you pick the gold from the dross – and for those serious about it, make sure you include this highly significant book by a distinguished evangelical author respected across the modern theological world. His aim is to grapple with the extensive twentieth-century critique of written texts and authorial purpose. He particularly crunches with those critical writers who claim that all texts and systems are instruments of manipulation and power, in other words disguised power bids. He challenges the claim that this is especially so in Christianity and tracks, in reply, a biblical view of service. He goes on to examine the claims that the self is an illusion and we are really no more than information and performance processors, hooked on to the expectations of those who most manipulate us. He rebuts the particular claim that Christianity is a prime nurturer of 'docility' on behalf of the power-brokers of selves.

The whole discussion is carried out with dignity and respect for opponents, frequently arguing from their own grounds rather than traditional ones. Part of the package is a theological biography of Don Cupitt, thorn in the flesh of conservative Christianity. Criticism that the author has aimed his critique at generalised targets have recently been effectively rebutted by him in a keynote theological conference paper at Edinburgh, but one wonders how the criticism could have been made in the first place. The detail, carefulness, patience and integrity of the discussion is a model of how texts need not be manipulative.

All the same, the clay feet of some key postmodern ideas come to view and get kicked away. The leading response, however, is a positive mapping out of constructive Christian thinking: especially a biblical understanding of the self and its destiny and the Trinitarian basis for 'love without strings', hope and reality. It has to be said that the main part of the book is an analysis and evaluation of critical philosophy,

hermeneutics and theology. It is not intended as fireside reading, and, true, is technical in places. Given the superficiality and subjectivism of most that passes for evangelical thought (as if Jonathan Edwards had set us no example here!) not enough leaders will invest time in grappling with Thistleton's quest. But those who do will have a deeper understanding of why Christian credibility is on the rack today and what the profound theological response of Christian faith should be.

*Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University*

### **Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday**

Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (eds)

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996; 351pp.; ISBN 0-8028-3819-7

It has long been the case that one of the neglected areas of Reformation studies was the interpretation of the Bible. Given the centrality of the Bible to the Reformation, encapsulated by the slogan, 'sola scriptura', this is a rather peculiar lacuna – or rather, was. The situation has been changing over the last ten years or so, and much of the highly significant work in this field has been done by students of David C. Steinmetz of Duke University, as well as by Steinmetz himself. In the work under review, we have set before us a rich selection of studies offered in tribute to Steinmetz on the occasion of his 60th birthday, and in these essays the reader is presented with a first-rate introduction to the history of biblical interpretation in the Reformation. Former students as well as colleagues of Steinmetz have contributed to this volume, which ranges from pre-Reformation developments to the later sixteenth century. In addition to the celebratory aspect of the book, the essays taken together are intended to set the achievements of the Reformation in the area of biblical interpretation within the wider context of pre-critical approaches to the Bible, noting not only the discontinuities with previous centuries, but also the common ground between the Reformers and their predecessors.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One ('The Medieval and Renaissance Background'), three essays are devoted to the issue of the Reformation in relation to the era immediately preceding it. Especially important is the introductory essay by Richard Muller ('Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: the View from the Middle Ages'), which sets the stage not only for this section, but for the entire volume. This essay is complemented by two specific studies: 'Johannes

Trithemius on the Fourfold Sense of Scripture: The *Tractatus de Inuestigatione Scripturae* (1486)' by Karlfried Froehlich; and 'Erasmus's Influence on Zwingli and Bullinger in the Exegesis of Matthew 11:28-30,' by John B. Payne.

Part Two ('Exegesis and Interpretation in the Early Reformation') takes the subject into the crucial early years of the Reformation, with essays by Kenneth Hagen ('*Omnis homo mendax*: Luther on Psalm 116'), Carl M. Leth ('Balthasar Hubmaier's "Catholic" Exegesis: Matthew 16:18-19 and the Power of the Keys'), Timothy J. Wengert ('Philip Melancthon's 1522 Annotations on Romans and the Lutheran Origins of Rhetorical Criticism'), Irena Backus ('The Chronology of John 5-7: Martin Bucer's Commentary [1528-36] and the Exegetical Tradition'), and W. P. Stephens ('Zwingli on John 6:63: "Spiritus est qui vivificat, caro nihil prodest"').

Part Three ('Continuity and Change in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Biblical Interpretation') carries the discussion of the central issues into the later period of the Reformation and on into the earlier stages of Protestant Orthodoxy. Here, we find essays by Susan E. Schreiner ('"The Spiritual Man Judges All Things": Calvin and Exegetical Debate about Certainty in the Reformation'), Craig S. Farmer ('Wolfgang Musculus's Commentary on John: Tradition and Innovation in the Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery'), Joel E. Kok ('Heinrich Bullinger's Exegetical Method: The Model for Calvin?'), John L. Thompson ('The Survival of Allegorical Argumentation in Peter Martyr Vermigli's Old Testament Exegesis'), Lyle D. Bierma ('Remembering the Sabbath Day: Ursinus's Exposition of Exodus 20:8-11'), John L. Farthing ('Holy Harlotry: Jerome Zanchi and the Exegetical History of Gomer [Hosea 1-3]'), and Robert Kolb ('The Doctrine of Christ in Nikolaus Selnecker's Interpretation of Psalms 8, 22, and 110').

The book concludes with Part Four ('Conclusion'), in which there is a final essay by Muller and Thompson ('The Significance of Precritical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect'). The authors seek to draw together the implications of the preceding essays and point out the value of pre-critical exegesis not only for the study of the Reformation era, but also for contemporary exegesis and theology. The volume concludes with 'A Chronological Bibliography of the Writings of David C. Steinmetz', drawn up by Mickey L. Mattox.

The range and richness of the essays are evident from the titles alone, and anyone interested in the subject would do well to add this work to their library. There is little to fault in this volume, which is a fine testimonial to the lifework of David Steinmetz in promoting this hitherto

much neglected field of study. One could wish that the editors had included as well a bibliography of the major works referred to in the text, which would have been a great help to those who wish to read further in the area of the history of interpretation. The lack of an index is also to be regretted. Yet in terms of readability, scholarship and accuracy, this work is first-rate, and cannot be commended highly enough.

*N. Scott Amos, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews*

## **Studies in Scottish Church History**

A. C. Cheyne

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999; ix+325pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 567 08644 5.

Alec Cheyne, Emeritus Professor of Ecclesiastical History in New College, Edinburgh University, has put all students of Scottish Church history in his debt with this fine work. There are thirteen chapters, covering aspects of the entire period from the Scottish Reformation on into the late twentieth century. Among themes surveyed, we find the nature of Scottish Presbyterianism (doctrine, worship, government), the Revolution settlement, the Ten Years' Conflict and Disruption, changing attitudes to Scripture in the nineteenth century, and the history of the teaching of Church history at New College from the beginnings to the 1990s. Among the significant figures dealt with are Thomas Chalmers (clearly something of a hero for Prof. Cheyne), John Tulloch, John Caird, Henry Drummond, and the brothers John and Donald Baillie.

The chapters are written with an easy literary grace and a sure command of the source material, equally delightful. Even though one might from time to time question Prof. Cheyne's judgement on a particular matter, the book as a whole is highly informative, intellectually stimulating, and a pleasure to read. The occasional 'slip' does not normally make any material difference to the argument. For example, we are told on pp. 124-5 that 'the original leaders of Protestantism' did not think that the apocrypha had any place 'in the corpus of truly inspired literature'. The reality is far different. John Wyclif, the 'morning star of the Reformation', included the apocrypha in his English translation. Martin Luther kept them in his German Bible, denying their divine inspiration but characterising them generally as 'useful and good to read'. Zwingli's Swiss Bible also retained the apocrypha in this secondary sense. In Protestant England, the Geneva Bible (1560), Bishop's Bible (1568), and the King James Version of 1611 all included the apocrypha as a separate unit. These facts actually strengthen Prof. Cheyne's argument, which is to the effect that the

demand by many Scottish Protestants in the 1820s for the exclusion of the apocrypha from printed Bibles was an innovatory attitude.

Perhaps the most ground-breaking and illuminating essays in the books are Prof. Cheyne's two chapters on the Baillie brothers. I do not know of any other comparable analysis. In the absence of a full-scale biographical and theological opus on two of Scotland's (indeed, Britain's) most distinguished twentieth-century theologians, the student will now have to turn to Prof. Cheyne's account as his starting point: and he will not be disappointed.

This book should certainly be required reading for any serious study of Scottish Church history.

*Nick Needham, Highland Theological College, Dingwall*

### **A Passion for God's Reign**

Jürgen Moltmann, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Ellen T. Charry

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 1998; xiii+112pp., ISBN 0-8082-4494-4

This brief, but typically thought provoking essay is another demonstration of Moltmann's passion for the coming of the Kingdom of God, the nerve centre of all his work. Here he addresses the issue of the role and status of theology. He is a man who sees humanity as a whole rather than divided into believers and non-believers, and the subject matter therefore belongs to the whole of humanity, not only Christians. Consequently Moltmann would wish to see theology on any platform where it may find a voice, in this case the public arena of the university.

He introduces the birth of the modern world by giving an enlightening summary of the origins of modernity, from the 'discovery' of America in 1492 to the modern advances of science and technology. All, from Columbus and Newton to Bacon and Kant, sought improvement, through the acquisition of knowledge, and the colonising and 'christianising' of alien nations and civilisations. The vision of the New World was the motivation for the modern European discoveries, with Messianic hope evidenced in the optimism of the Enlightenment.

The progress of modernity was not without cost, as demonstrated in the existence of contradictions between modernity and submodernity. The earth is being exploited, reflected by the crisis of meaning, brought about by apathy to the humiliation of the submodern third world. The future needs reinventing, seeing love of the giver of life bringing universal equality and liberation.

Social changes are briefly outlined, from Constantine's conversion and its significance, through The Reformation to the impact of immigration, which has resulted in apolitical multireligiosity. Religion has now moved from being a private matter to becoming merchandise.

Regarding the Kingdom of God and fellowship of the church with Israel, Moltmann, with his customary courage, which often verges on the controversial, urges the creative use of religious distinctions through the common denominators, and the taking from all religions that which promotes the Kingdom of God. The reader is compelled to engage with his thesis.

The essay presented by Nicholas Wolterstorff, entitled 'Public Theology or Christian Learning', disagrees with Moltmann, arguing that 'public' theology is endangered because of atheism and fundamentalism – the latter claiming that theology belongs to the church. His difficulty lies in the non-confessional attitude of theology in the public sphere, and he disagrees with assumption that Christian learning always takes the form of theology, also objecting to the terms 'laypersons' and 'theologians' and their differentiation.

The presentation by Ellen T. Charry, entitled 'The Crisis of Modernity and the Christian self', is a response to a different essay by Moltmann, discussing postmodern individualism. The article is only loosely connected to the one contained here, speaking more of the problems of modernity and secularisation, which are seen as the result of the crisis of the modern self. Her interpretation of Moltmann's view of the role of theology is that it is being wrongly laid at the door of the church.

Moltmann has used his knowledge of history and anthropology, but with the clear and consistent evidence of his own original thinking and persistent motive, passion for God and his Kingdom.

*Wilma Shapiro, Glasgow*

## **The Quest for Full Assurance; The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors**

Joel R. Beeke

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1999; 395pp., £6.95; ISBN 085151 7455

Questions regarding assurance of salvation have plagued believers for centuries and engaged the minds of some of the greatest thinkers of Christendom. Accordingly, this volume, a revision of Joel Beeke's Ph.D. dissertation, is a welcome contribution both for the seasoned student of historical theology and for the layperson who wishes to bring the fruits of thinkers from an earlier age to bear on their own life and struggles.

Beeke introduces his subject by briefly surveying the thought of the fathers and medievals as well as some of the magisterial reformers. Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Huldrych Zwingli, and Heinrich Bullinger receive specific attention in a modest chapter, before the writings of John Calvin are taken up. Here Beeke looks primarily at the reformer's *Institutes*, and endeavours to make sense out of the apparent contradictions found in the chapter on faith (*Institutes* III.ii), after which he offers some analysis on the Calvin vs. Beza question. Following all of this, Beeke goes on to discuss several significant lines of thought which came out of the seventeenth century. William Perkins and William Teellinck are discussed as important points of contact between Reformation and Puritan theology. The theology of English Puritanism and the Westminster Confession are then examined, and analyses of John Owen and Alexander Comrie offered. A comparison between English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation – amounting to an examination of Thomas Goodwin's theology – rounds off the volume.

The single question which, more than any other, undergirds this book has moved in and out of vogue since the seventeenth century: do the reformers, especially Calvin, find their thought faithfully expounded (if elaborated upon) by those in the post-reformation era? Beeke wishes to argue emphatically that they do. In this, he labours against many who have insisted that the relationship between the two is better characterized by discontinuity. Beeke ably engages this scholarship at most points in his book, with the more recent assertions of this view, by writers such as R. T. Kendall being especially targeted. Beeke's bibliography demonstrates how familiar he is with the terrain, and his thoughtful analysis of the issues cannot help but challenge even the staunchest opponent.

Yet this work is not without its shortcomings. The omission of Martin Bucer strikes a serious blow to Beeke's assessment of the Reformation. Nor is his treatment of the other reformers as substantial as one might wish. Moreover, this author cannot help but feel that the essay is peculiarly proportioned. It is as if Beeke wished to produce a standard treatment of the Calvin vs. the Calvinists question, but then decided to append other material to his examination. On top of this, the simplification of the dissertation does not go far enough to make it accessible to any but the serious layperson (and the inclusion of abbreviations such as 'it's' seems down right silly). Yet the tome unquestionably provides a treasure-trove of useful material for pastor and student alike, and is, on the whole, to be lauded.

*Jon Balsarak, Edinburgh*

## John Newton And The English Evangelical Tradition

Bruce Hindmarsh

Oxford Clarendon Press, 1996; 366pp.; ISBN 0-19-826379-1

This Oxford Theological Monograph contains the fruits of research of D. Bruce Hindmarsh, Professor of Church History at Briercrest Biblical Seminary, Saskatchewan, in an area which, the author claims, has been 'largely overlooked by historians interested in the eighteenth century'.

The remarkable story of John Newton, the slave trader who became a Vicar in the Church of England after his conversion, to which he testifies in his acclaimed hymn *Amazing Grace*, is familiar. But our knowledge of him is chiefly derived from popular biographies, some of them hackneyed, rather than from a thorough review of archival sources which the author of the monograph has pursued in order to reconstruct many important episodes in Newton's life story.

Although the work is roughly chronological, it is not strictly biographical. As an academic essay, it is full of detail surrounding Newton's immediate circumstances at any given juncture but it does not explore to any extent personal relationships established with those who became very close to him, such as William Cowper and Alexander Cluny. John Wesley fares a little better on account of his more intimate involvement in Newton's progress.

Hindmarsh's chief source in the early biographical material is Newton's autobiography, published in 1764, *The Authentic Narrative*. He describes how Newton's turbulent life led him to a point where he was able to pursue self-education and become a Free Thinker. However, he stumbled across St Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, and became troubled that the teaching of the New Testament might be true. He progressed towards a lively belief, and benefited from the public ministry of the Dissenters and also that of George Whitefield.

Working in Liverpool, he fraternised with Dissenters and Methodists in Lancashire and Yorkshire, consequently hindering his ordination in the established Church. Only after six attempts was he ordained and given the living of Olney and subsequently St Mary Woolnorth in the City of London.

As the biographical theme develops, Hindmarsh appropriately diverts his attention to excursions into literary criticism of Newton's letters, and into his hymnody, in which he was prolific, especially at Olney. Professor Hindmarsh pays particular attention to Newton's doctrinal stance and his spirituality. He developed an 'evangelical Calvinism', rooted in Bible study and prayer. His reasons for ordination in the Church

of England were not merely because of its social standing as his non-conformist friends suspected, but because of his inner conviction and realisation of the breadth of the influence of the gospel which the established church was able to exercise. This Newton expounds in his *Apologia*, published in 1784, fully aware that it would grievously upset some of those Dissenters. The monograph provides not only a fine piece of study of an academically neglected field but also a pastoral aid for many who, on account of their evangelical convictions, struggle with remaining as members of the established churches and other mixed denominations.

*Peter Cook, Alston, Cumbria.*

### **Rationality in Science, Religion and Everyday Life**

Mikael Stenmark

University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1995; xi+392pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 268 01651 8

'The debate on whether religious beliefs are rationally acceptable is over.' This is the concluding sentence of the book before us. At its beginning, an interesting question is posed. Is rationality always of the same order? The author seeks to broaden the scope of the rationality debate. There are different strands of rationality – theoretical, practical or axiological – having to do, respectively, with what we believe, do or value. What happens when we apply the same criteria to areas as diverse as science, religion and everyday life, his chosen areas of consideration? He expresses the fear that the current concept of rationality is so restrictive, indeed so reductionist, that whatever falls outside science becomes viewed as a-rational or irrational. He follows by arguing that the standards of scientific rationality ('the evidential principle, the proportionality principle, the rule principle and the principles of simplicity, scope and explanatory power') are inappropriate for assessing the rationality of religious belief.

There are, though, more recent insights from the ways of science that the author finds helpful. He directs us away from Popper's view of rational scientific change to the thinking of Kuhn, with his great paradigm shifts to which the usual rules do not seem to apply. He cites Lakatos: 'scientific change is a kind of religious change'. Stenmark points out that scientific rationality is characterised by informed judgements and by subjection to peer evaluation (or what I have heard Bondi modestly express as 'intersubjective verifiability'). He then tackles the question of commitment in religious belief. Is it against the spirit of

impartiality, which is the hallmark of scientific endeavour? He thinks not. For Popper, commitment is an outright crime, but 'social evidentialists reject this celebration of tentativeness', comments the author tartly. Between commitment and tentativeness, even in science, a dialectic must remain.

Scientists, the author notes, do not reach the same standards of agreement in areas of life other than science. Religion, for example, deals with the existential and not with the simply technical. The questions asked in the realms of belief are not spectator-questions. As to whether something is rational or irrational, it is more useful to direct that question to the matter of believing rather than to beliefs themselves. As to what we ask or expect of believers, we should not flout the axiom of reasonable remand. Beliefs are to be considered innocent until found guilty. Predictability should not be required of religious beliefs any more than moral adequacy is required of scientific beliefs. The author compares some philosophical approaches. Formal evidentialists see us as having to abide by specific rules. Social evidentialists see us as making informed judgements exposed to peer evaluation. The author goes outwith the camp of evidentialism as a self-styled presumptionist, accepting belief as long as there is no good reason to do otherwise. The question eventually is not whether religious beliefs can be supported by sufficient evidence, but whether one should be a religious or a secular believer of some sort.

This is a book which has succeeded admirably in presenting a philosophical topic in a way that is interesting and mind-stretching for the non-philosopher. It demands from the reader a sustained intensity of attention which, if granted, will be amply rewarded. A shorter, Schaeffer-style version could prove immensely popular.

*Alex McIntosh, Falkirk*

## **God and Rationality**

T. F. Torrance

T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1997; 216 pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 567 08582 1

This is a 1997 new edition of a book published first in 1968 and then in 1970.

Some writers and teachers speak down to those they are addressing. In contrast Tom Torrance pays most of us the compliment of assuming we are more educated than we really are.

Yet we should persevere with his writings for they are truly profound, speaking prophetically to church, theology, and society including the worlds of natural science and modern culture.

The book's title together with the titles of its chapters could give the impression that his theology is a dry scholasticism cut off from a warm-hearted knowledge and love of God. However nothing could be farther from the truth. One of the great burdens of the book is to show that there can be no knowledge of God and therefore no true theology unless we approach him with a humble earnest worshipping heart open to the deeply personal revelation of himself that he has made in the person of Jesus Christ. This indeed is the 'scientific' way to know God for it is the way appropriate to the Subject Matter of Theology— God himself. Fundamental to this way of doing theology is the conviction that the way of knowing God is the same as the way of salvation. So although many readers may be put off by what they might consider very technical terms from science and philosophy, the fundamental message of the book could be enthusiastically accepted by a less educated person who has recently opened his/her heart and discovered salvation in Christ in the pages of the Bible.

However to really get to grips with the text the reader needs to know what certain terms mean. Unfortunately it is only a relatively few people who have sufficient grasp of both: 1. The history of philosophy and also 2. Clerk Maxwell's Field Theories, Einstein and relativity, and Quantum Mechanics, to find the book anything other than a difficult read. Not that one should excuse laziness. These are important subjects indeed for anyone who is seriously engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. They, together with the message of this book, would help the honest searcher of truth – in any field of knowledge. For the message of this book challenges us to liberate our minds from preconceived logical structures which we might unconsciously impose upon the subject matter of our enquiry but which are inappropriate for the object of the enquiry and therefore are likely to distort the results of the quest.

There are many far from difficult books by such authors as John Polkinghorne (Christian minister and quantum physicist) and Paul Davies (non Christian theoretical physicist) who have a great gift for explaining the second group of awe-inspiring and mind-blowing subjects to the moderately intelligent enquirer. Little or no background in academic science is needed to understand them. Good introductions to philosophy are also not difficult to find. However a good addition to many of Tom Torrance's writings, when they are re-published, would be an extensive glossary. A glossary for *God and Rationality* should list the following names and terms: Mechanistic and Instrumentalist view of science, Quantum mechanics, Indeterminacy principle, Newtonian physics, Kantian metaphysics, Einstein and relativity, James Clerk Maxwell,

Field Theory, Michael Polanyi, Godel's Theorem, Aristotelianism, Receptacle or Container view of space, Relational view of space, Dualism, Static-ontic structures, Dynamic-noetic structures and many many more.

It is true that he does give some explanation to these names and terms but not enough for many for whom these are completely new.

In his preface Torrance tells us that the book is meant as a sequel to his *Theological Science* (for which he was awarded the prestigious Templeton Prize) and *Space Time and Incarnation*. The main chapters are divided into three main headings: 1. Theology Old and New; 2. Theology and Science; 3. Word and Spirit.

Under these headings we meet the following chapters: 'The Eclipse of God', 'Ecumenism and Science', 'The Word of God and the Response of Man', 'The Epistemological Relevance of the Spirit' and others too. Most of these individual chapters are papers that Torrance gave about thirty years ago and one at least refers to writers such as John Robinson and Paul Tillich that many of us have now forgotten. However this should not put us off, for the theological points have a continuing relevance to current debate and the pursuit of knowledge in all ages. Some of the 'prophecies' he made in these papers about the coming break up of Western society and civilisation are indeed coming true before our eyes.

The reader will find considerable overlap and some repetition but that is not a bad thing for Torrance's style is so concentrated and meaty that repetition helps drive the points home.

He tells us that there is only one way of knowing, whatever the object of enquiry. By that he does not mean that there is only one method of enquiry – very far from it. But what he does mean is that all methods of knowing must be appropriate to the subject of enquiry so that (say, against Aristotle and Kant) the enquirer must not approach the object of his study with a fixed logical system into which he seeks to fit the answers to his questions. Rather the subject matter itself will contain its own, at first, hidden logic or rationality, so that the scientist (be he a physicist or theologian) must seek to uncover a rationality that is inherent in the object of his quest. This is how all great advances of knowledge in the natural sciences take place. For example if we had simply studied the universe with a belief that space is the mere container of objects such as the stars and planets, we would never have resolved apparent contradictions that arise from our observation of the universe. We would never have grasped the nature of light. It took Einstein to discover a deeper logic in nature in which light, space, time, matter and energy are bound together in relationships – relationships which come

from the very being of their existence. That is to say they are relationships which are not dependent on independent external and eternal laws. Gravity, for example, is not, as Newtonian physics assumed, an independent external law which relates one object to another but rather belongs to the internal structure of what matter, energy, space and time actually are in themselves.

If this reviewer could be permitted to take a human example (*mutatis mutandis* of course), one might consider what binds two human beings together. It could be a rope, a contract or something else which is an external *third* thing holding them in relationship. Alternatively it could be friendship or a covenant of love *which are not external third things but things that flow out of what the human beings are in themselves and help define their very being*. Theologically speaking we are called to live by grace and faith (which belong to the very nature of what a Person/person is), not law (which is a temporary third thing added by God because of our transgressions). That is part of the inner rationality of theology that we so easily miss if we impose our legalistic ways of thinking upon the data of theological enquiry.

Imposing our own way of thinking upon our studies is his problem with much of what is called 'Biblical Scholarship' which tries to understand the Bible solely from the various ways we think it came to have been written – the phenomenon of the Bible. But this, again, is to separate the data of our enquiry from the fundamental nature of God's self-revelation, trying to understand the data by fitting it into our self-made mental constructs. He believes that this false *dualism* between reality and what we perceive – this phenomenalism – has bedevilled much of what is called Biblical Studies.

Indeed one of Torrance's pet hates is dualism in some of its many forms which itself becomes a kind of false rationality imposed upon its subject matter and thus incorrectly separates two qualities of reality into quite separate categories. This does not mean he is a Monist who believes 'All is One'. He could not possibly be accused of such a belief because one of the foundations of his theology is that God created the universe distinct from himself and out of nothing. Two of the other dualisms which he objects to are:

- space and matter (as if space were the mere container of the created order rather than an aspect of the creation which is redeemed in Christ)
- cause and meaning (as if one could separate off the natural sciences from the moral sciences)

He also does not like the 'mechanistic-vitalist' controversy about the nature of life. (Can life have a mere physical explanation or does it need something 'magical' added to it?) He prefers rather to speak of the bipolar and non-picturable nature of much of reality (so amazingly exposed at the fundamental levels of natural existence in quantum physics).

The dualism that he dislikes most is that of a Detached God and mechanistic universe. Rather in the pages of the Bible he believes we meet a God who, though He created the universe out of nothing, is – through His Word and Spirit – personally and deeply related to it. This is seen especially and uniquely in the Incarnation and Atonement in which he makes himself known to us by redeeming the world from evil. This act of revelation and redemption is made known, not apart from our physical world in some spiritual realm, but in our 'flesh'.

The appropriate way to respond to Word is by listening and answering. As we listen we find that the Word challenges us deeply so that we cannot do theology in a detached way but must allow ourselves to be challenged and changed in our inmost being. Even in the natural sciences the scientist must be open enough to the object he seeks to know to allow its hidden logic to engage with his mind so that he/she is able to grow in understanding. How much more must this be true in our knowledge of God.

Our problem, though, is that we cannot answer and respond to that Word from God because as sinners we are alienated from it. So, important for Torrance is the conviction that Christ is not only God's Word to us but also our human response to that Word. It is here that Torrance has got into trouble with some evangelicals who imagine he is saying that we don't need to repent and believe because Christ has done it all for us in our place. Of course this is not what he is saying. This is another place in which he assumes some of us know more than we do. Some of us need things from the Bible spelled out more explicitly in Torrance's writings. (Perhaps footnotes would be a good way to do this.) For the fact that Christ makes our response for us, taking our prayer to the heaven of heavens, is the major theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews. So when we fix our eyes upon Jesus the originator and completion of faith, we are set free from assurance-destroying worries so evident in both seventeenth-century Calvinism and seventeenth-century Arminianism. For whether we believe there is an irresistible causal relationship between the Holy Spirit and our faith or whether we think we need to co-operate with the Spirit, it is still *our* faith that becomes the subject that we are driven to consider. That is bound to lead to great doubts as to whether our experience of faith, prayer and worship are sufficient to please God. When

we are open to Christ we cease to examine neurotically our own personal experience of faith and prayer (wondering whether we have the signs of election or whether we have co-operated enough with God's grace). Rather we find that we are indeed born from above, do indeed believe in him and turn from our sins.

Since this way of salvation is the same as the way of knowing God, it is Tom Torrance's missionary endeavour to theologians to get us to think in Christ so that we do not cut off our theological or even the biblical statements from Christ himself. He uses as an example the statement: 'God is Love.' We see the meaning of that in Christ. However if we use it as an independent free standing statement from which we deduce other propositions apart from Christ then we will reach false conclusions. Language must not be cut off from that to which it refers. This is his quarrel with what he calls 'rationalist fundamentalists'. They are those who think they can treat biblical statements as independent from the ultimate Being to which they refer and apply *preconceived* rational structures to fit them into a dogmatic system. But this would be to commit the error that is referred to elsewhere in this review, namely to impose our own systems of logic on the subject matter of enquiry rather than letting it teach us its own inherent logic. Such systems of doctrine tend to be legalistic constructs of our own minds where we may seem to put grace (say) at the centre of the system but instead end up perhaps with a new legalistic system that does not really set people free in Christ.

The book has a full and helpful index of subjects and a good index of names.

*Howard Taylor, Chaplain, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh*

### **Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth. Sacred Doctrine and the Knowledge of God**

Eugene F. Rogers, Jnr

Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1995; 248 pp., h/b \$34.95, p/b \$24; ISBN 0 268 01889 8

Why should Christians with good traditional, evangelical Protestant credentials want to read a book mainly about Aquinas? Given the technical detail mastered here by Eugene Rogers, perhaps the answer for some is: not for any reason at all. In fact, however, the issues he raises are profoundly relevant for the church's witness.

Rogers seeks, very plausibly, to show that Aquinas was not the dichotomist that Protestant apologists assume him to be. He did not espouse an autonomous pursuit of the knowledge of God through natural

theology after all. In him philosophy did not triumph over scripturalism as often assumed. His theological discussions must be seen in the light of his commentaries (a piece of advice often applied also to Calvin). In particular we must revise our thinking to take account of the fact that Aquinas's arguments for the natural knowledge of God are rooted in Romans 1. He is therefore similar to the arch-enemy of natural theology, Karl Barth. The author argues a 'material convergence' in Aquinas and Barth based on a common master – Paul! Thomas too can talk about 'the ineffectiveness of natural knowledge of God under certain sinful conditions and how it serves to prove the necessity and sufficiency of grace, conditions that go unmentioned in the... article on the Five Ways...'

If Rogers is right, the alleged divergence of theology and philosophy, Scripture and apologetics by which Catholic medieval writers are vilified by Protestant analysts of western thought, may not be so strongly laid at the door of Aquinas. So how successfully does the author do this? It really depends on many issues, some difficult to falsify or validate- for instance, that it is enough for Aquinas to announce his biblical or Christological assumptions without making further reference to them throughout hundreds of pages which follow. Or the claim that Thomas espouses Aristotelian first principles only in the sense that sacred doctrine is an Aristotelian *scientia* which takes all things captive for Christ. Certainly, we are looking at a forcible and riveting case in Rogers' handling of Aquinas on Romans 1:17-25, and some fascinating insights follow. For example: Thomas preserves rational powers in the fallen human being, not to exalt human reason but *to locate the fall in the will*. Rogers also succeeds in showing that Thomas, in his Romans commentary, sees human reasons as mere 'not yet', serviceable, preambles to faith which may be taken up into faith itself. For Aquinas, claims to be such preambles require the most intense validation from Scripture. Put this way, Thomas comes close to modern ideas of 'pre-evangelism'.

Serious theologians and students of the history of Christian thought can only learn much from this careful, balanced and highly skilled study from a master of the craft. For Barthian and Calvinist sympathisers alike, Rogers may not have done quite enough to dispel suspicions that Aquinas over-valued human reason. But he has certainly flung a rope that, at worst, almost spans the chasm between Catholic and reformed ways of thinking and, at best, finally draws the two together. Definitely a book that is not a waste of time, though not for the indolent.

Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University

## **Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans**

Robert Haldane

Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1996; 729pp., £14.95; ISBN 0 85151 708 0

This is the fifth Banner reprint in forty years from the ninth edition (1874) of Haldane's 1830s work. (Fifty years ago A. L. Drummond considered that 'the modern reader would not be attracted by his style'.) The thrice-weekly Bible studies for almost thirty young men given in his own rooms in Geneva during his evangelistic visit of 1816-17, from which this exposition grew, were instrumental in converting several rationalistic theological students to a divine Christ, reviving Calvinism on the European Continent and bringing strong opposition to their author.

Commending the first reprint D. M. Lloyd-Jones expressed the view that 'while Hodge excels in accurate scholarship there is greater warmth of spirit and more practical application in Haldane'. The commentary reflects his concern that all reasonings be brought to Scripture and that doctrine be translated into experience and life. (When Merle d'Aubigné, one of Haldane's hearers, said, 'Now I see the doctrine of sin in the Bible', his response was, 'But do you see it in your own heart?') This detailed exposition of the book which taught Haldane the sovereignty of God, the corruption of humanity and the perfection of the righteousness provided by God, has not been made redundant by subsequent more scholarly works and will be appreciated by those who want careful exegesis, exposition which contributes to 'an exact and comprehensive knowledge of the distinguishing doctrines of grace', and application which promotes thought, action and worship.

*Hugh M. Cartwright, Free Presbyterian Church, Edinburgh*

## **The Christmas Stories in Faith and Preaching**

John Proctor

Grove Books Ltd, Cambridge 1998; 24pp., £2.25; ISBN 185174 382 0

The Christmas stories, like everything else in the Gospels, are a piece of woven cloth. The warp is the life of Jesus, the weft is the meaning of these events. The booklet has main chapters on Matthew, Mark, Mary, John, and Jesus in relation to Christmas; and then shorter passages on theologians and preachers and what they do with Christmas. The author well holds event and theology together, and affirms the reality of the virgin birth.

**Can Balaam's Ass Speak Today?**

Walter Moberly

Grove Books Ltd, Cambridge 1998; 24pp., £2.25; ISBN 185174 390 1

No. 10 in the Grove Biblical Series. Walter Moberly outlines a hermeneutical basis for approaching the Old Testament, and considers the story of Balaam's Ass as a case study, well chosen because it appears to illustrate all the features of the Old Testament that irritate people today. Balaam, like Israel, is presented as one who knew God and was lured away from his calling. The booklet illustrates the aim of the author, that good commentary should leave us with the text itself better understood, and better able to be appropriated.

*Jock Stein, Cumbernauld*

**The Theological Wordbook: The 200 Most Important Theological Terms and Their Relevance for Today**

Don Campbell, Wendell Johnston, John Walvoord, John Witmer (eds)

Word Publishing, Nashville; 437 pp., \$29.99; ISBN 0-8499-1381-0

This useful survey is clearly written and avoids unexplained technical terms. The words are well-chosen and plenty of biblical examples of the words and the ideas they express are given. Each entry concludes with a one-sentence devotional comment. The dispensationalist outlook of the authors influences some of the entries.

*Geoffrey Grogan, Glasgow*

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