Book Reviews

THE MESSAGE OF GENESIS 1-11 David Atkinson
Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1990 190pp. No price
ISBN 0 85110 676 5

It is a bold person who undertakes to write a commentary on the opening chapters of the Bible. The Chaplain of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, serves us well in his boldness.

This is a stimulating treatment of the chapters which maintains the aim of this Bible Speaks Today series of being an exposition rather than a commentary, and to that end expanding the biblical text with accuracy relating it to contemporary life, and being readable. Wisely, therefore, he does not attempt to answer questions which the human mind brings to the creation narrative, where no answer is revealed by God. So he says (p. 17) 'The writer does not attempt or want, to explain creation'. With reverence, he wants to catch us up into its wonder. He is not concerned with the question 'How did God do it?' He would not, I think, have been terribly interested in our debates about the time-scale of evolution, or the physics of the First Three Minutes. Those are not the questions he is asking. And when we ourselves bring such questions to the text, we are disappointed. We perhaps want to know how it is that the sun and moon (1:14–6) are created after the light (1:3). The writer is not so stupid as to be unaware that there is a problem. He leaves us with the mystery.

While David Atkinson also leaves us with the mystery, he does not shirk tackling the inter-relation of the Bible and science, and gives his readers some valuable considerations of the assumptions of science (pp. 18–20), evolution (pp. 29–31) and time (pp. 44–50). Quotations from, for example, Polyani, Polkinghorne and Torrance, reveal a wide reading round the themes these chapters introduce, and the author's insights into the meaning of knowledge (pp. 6–7), sexuality (pp. 71–79) and sin (pp. 85–97) offer much material for meditation and illumination of our understanding of these subjects.

Even a brief acquaintance with these chapters reminds us that they contain material that is relevant to many of the most pressing problems facing the contemporary world—ecology, conservation, technological progress—as well as the age-old estrangement of man from God. All these subjects receive thoughtful treatment, encouraging the reader to form a Biblical judgment on them. At the same time, the author's profound scholarship finds expression in a variety of poetic quotations, which promote the sense of awe and worship appropriate to the study of such themes.

This volume is a worthy and much-needed addition to the Bible Speaks Today series that is providing much valuable help and insights to the preacher and Bible student.

22 Woodland Way, Fairlight, Sussex OWEN THOMAS

OUR FATHER ABRAHAM: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith
Marvin R. Wilson
Paternoster Press, Exeter 1989 374 pp. £12.50
ISBN 0 8028 0423 3

Professor C.F.D. Moule once pointed out that while Paul's letter to the Galatians was addressed to a Church in danger of being Judaized, the Epistle to the Romans was written to a community facing the opposite peril of becoming gentilized. For the most part, the Christian Church has heeded the Apostle's warning in his epistle to the Galatians, but has manifested 'the sins of triumphalism, arrogance, and pride' expected of those who forget their Jewish roots (p. 49).

In this quite splendid book, Marvin Wilson shares his own zeal for God's Covenant People, and takes issue with the latent, if not patent, prejudice against Judaism that has prevailed almost universally throughout the Christian Church's long history. Each chapter has a check-list of questions appended to help the reader master its contents. But this is no dry-as-dust theological tome. It is a celebration. Marvin Wilson writes like a man who rejoices at finding great spoil, and he spares no pains in sharing those delights with us.

From time to time we need reminding of the rock from which we were hewn. Jesus was born into a Jewish home, reared in the Jewish faith, and sent to 'the lost sheep of the House of Israel'. If now the Church worldwide is predominantly gentile, it is only because by grace we have been grafted into the stock of Israel through our faith in Messiah Jesus. We are Abraham's offspring (Gal. 3:29),—'Spiritual Semites', as Pope Pius XI put it.

The painful story of Jewish-Christian relationships over the past twenty centuries is a master-piece of compression. And Christians today are summoned to start thinking in Hebrew categories, for 'when Christianity severed itself from Judaism, the Christian faith itself became distorted' (quoted from John Shelby Spong, p. 167). There are brilliant word studies on themes like repentance (p. 42), emotion (p. 138f.), meditation—the Hebrew word indicates that Jewish people mused out loud (p. 154), faith (pp. 182–4), and teaching (pp. 295–8), as well as fine examples of word pictures and word play found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Several prominent themes are selected for special attention, including Jewish teaching about marriage (though not divorce), the Passover—in which Jewish people eat their history,—the place of the Land in God's covenant with His people, and Education in its widest sense.

With a sure foot, Wilson picks his way through the political minefield of Israel-Arab relationships, warning strongly against hasty judgments on prophetic issues, and being sensitive to Arab concerns, and reminding us that 'Palestinian Arab Christians, no less than American or European Christians, owe their spiritual heritage to the Jewish people' (p. 271).

His description of Hassidic teaching methods in Brooklyn, where teenagers rise at 3 or 3.30 a.m. six mornings a week, and bathe in the *mikveh* before studying in Schul from 5.30 or 6.00 a.m. until sunset, only to return to the synagogue for the nightly study session, is enough to make even the most avid Christian educator quail. 'Who is sufficient for these

things?' we ask! In contrast, and from an American standpoint, he protests that 'much so-called teaching today is little more than jokes, drivel, and human-interest stories' (p. 295), and that 'too often the Church's attitude towards learning amounts to little more than passive satisfaction with its seemingly superficial Sunday scanning of the Scriptures (p. 301). But at least they have all-age Sunday Schools in many of the churches on his side of the pond!

This book is unashamed propaganda. It is written with evangelistic fervour. Wilson wants Christians to rediscover their roots. He recognizes that it cannot happen all at once—'nineteen hundred years cannot be fully rethought in a day' (p. 324). But he knows the task is urgent, so he quotes Rabbi Hillel to his students: 'If not now . . . when? And he sets out an agenda for immediate action, including face-to-face dialogue, joint educational programmes, and social involvement, such as helping to repair defaced property and to defend those being abused in the media (p. 334). Above all, he calls his fellow Christians to that free, spontaneous acceptance of others, with no preconditions attached, which is the hall-mark of Christian love (p. 335).

The blurb rightly speaks of this book as a stunning achievement, and a powerful first salvo in the process of inter-faith dialogue. The fact that Jewish scholars like Prof. David Flusser, Pinchas Lapide and Geza Vermas, among others, have moved the whole process forward from the Jewish side, is most exciting. But my own evangelical convictions yearn to see a new attempt to focus on the whole question of messiahship. It is really quite astonishing that a book which majors on the Jewish roots of the Christian faith should devote a mere paragraph here and there (as on p. 327) to what is quite literally the crucial issue, when there is a perfectly respectable school of exegetical study which maintains that the 'root' which supports us (Rom. 11:18) is none other than the one who declared 'I am the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star' (Rev. 22:16).

13 Wheatfield Road, Stanway, Colchester, Essex JOHN WOOD

The quotation from Prof. Moule comes from his *The Birth of the New Testament*, A.C. Black, London, 1966, p. 51. **Ed.**

THE MESSAGE OF CHRONICLES Michael Wilcock
Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester 1987 288pp. £5.95 pb.
ISBN 0 85110 769 9

Michael Wilcock has very much put us in his debt and done a great service to the church of God in producing this volume. In the opening pages he implicitly acknowledges that most preachers, let alone Christians, see 1 and 2 Chronicles as 'closed books' (p. 13). But, he says, that is to misunderstand both the character and purpose of them. Wilcock believes that, far more than just providing an alternative history to what is given in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, the Chronicler sets before us a sermon (two books in our Bibles though originally a single one), the object of which is to foster 'a right relationship between God and his people' (p. 14). Here we

do not just read history but history from a theological perspective.

One of the great cries of the seventeenth century Puritans was that Christians should learn to read not just the Bible but also providence. The books of the Chronicles, written as they were many years after the events they record, provide a biblical justification for that call. Michael Wilcock makes this abundantly clear as he carefully and sensitively expounds the text. Here we learn that we reap what we sow; that we are accountable to God; and that he judges those who are unfaithful to him. We also see that he is the God of grace who is working his purposes out and who has determined to have people for his own possession who delight in doing his will.

This is no dry exposition devoid of application. Wilcock is at heart a pastor. Good pastors are good preachers. And good preachers provide apt application. The strength and challenge of this volume lies in the fact that the author opens up these otherwise closed books in such a way that this portion of Scripture speaks today. We are taught much about God and much about ourselves.

It is sincerely hoped that this book will enjoy a wide readership. It is an invaluable aid for preachers. But it will also richly benefit other Christians who use it for personal Bible study.

St. Stephen's Vicarage, Low Elswick, Newcastle upon Tyne GEORGE CURRY

THE PROPHETIC GOSPEL A Study of John and the Old Testament A.T. Hanson
T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1991 393pp. £27.50
ISBN 0 567 09583 5

A.T. Hanson who died recently and his twin brother R.P.C. Hanson who died in 1988 were well-known biblical scholars of strongly liberal views. Their *Bible without Illusions* (1989) I reviewed earlier in this journal (Vol. 104, No. 3, 1990), and those who have read it will not be surprised when they read this. The author's thesis is as follows. 'John' (he is non-committal as to his identity, except that he was certainly *not* the Apostle John) was convinced of 'the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ', and his Gospel is framed around this conviction. 'But it should now be clear to all honest minds that this description of Christ is a construction of John's', and not derived from historical evidence, let alone from revelation. In fact the author says over and over again that the historical basis of the whole Gospel is very dubious indeed. 'Above all', he writes, 'we must not imagine that we are encountering'—in the Fourth Gospel—

> either the historical Jesus, or the historical Baptist, or if it comes to that anything very much like the disciples as they really were when they consorted with the earthly Jesus (p. 40).

Again,'it is highly improbable that Jesus ever claimed to be God in any sense whatever' (p. 123), a typically subjective judgment which rests on Prof. Hanson's authority alone. These are very characteristic extracts out of many.

How then does the author imagine the Gospel came to be written? His answer seems to be as follows. 'John' in his circle came to hold very definite convictions about the person of Jesus. He was the God-man, the Word made flesh, abundantly adumbrated in the Old Testament scriptures. The Gospel needed to be written therefore to propagate this truth. All's fair in love and war, and apparently in theology too—if only you are strongly enough convinced you are right and can persuade yourself that you have the Scriptures on your side. At least, John seems to think so. Nothing persuades like a well-told story; so John set his imagination to work to invent stories to convey the truth about the God-man, Jesus. He did so with amazing vividness and realism. It is not quite fair to call his method 'free imagination', for at every point John constrained himself to illustrate functionally only the sort of thing he believed the 'prophetic scriptures' foretold (hence the title of this present book, *The Prophetic Gospel*). The great bulk of this latter is accordingly taken up with examining serially and minutely the text of the Gospel to see just where John got his ideas from. It is quite a chase, and Prof. Hanson displays equally great ingenuity and imagination in following the trail. Take the story of our Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4 as an example. He writes:

> in the *Midrash on the Psalms* we have a play on words which depends on the word in Hebrew *mqwh* being pointed differently according as it means 'fountain' or 'hope'. Because God is called a fountain he is the hope of Israel. Immediately after this comes a passage which emphasises that Israel can pray anywhere: 'when you cannot go to the synagogue in your city, pray in the open field . . . etc'. This reminds one of John 4:21. Jesus as the source of living water also enables his new community to worship anywhere; they are not confined to Jerusalem. (p. 57).

It is all quite neat; not our Lord, but the *Midrash* (he implies) is the source of the conjunction of ideas in 4:13–15, 20–23. One is hardly encouraged to look for anything spiritually profound after this. He continues,

> There can be no doubt but there is a rich scriptural background to John 4:1–30. It cannot possibly all be explained as a simple narrative of an historical encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. (p. 60).

One needs to fish in the *haggada* of the Targums of Inkelos, Palestine and Pseudo-Jonathan; the CD6.7 fragment in the Qumran documents; the Septuagint versions of the Psalms and Proverbs as well as much the ordinary Bible reader will be familiar with if one wants to understand the real significance of the 'living water'—at least, its significance to the writer of this piece of artful fiction.

Most of the book is filled with this sort of detective work, and the search ranges far and wide.

> Why does Jesus deliberately delay for two days before going to the aid of Lazarus? The answer may be: because, according to John's understanding, scripture foretold that he should. Job 14.6a in the LXX runs: [the text in Greek is quoted first] 'stand back from him, that he may rest'. Jesus stands back and lets Lazarus rest for two days in order to fulfil the word of Scripture.

> This is a striking example (sic!) of John's technique in using scripture. He reads Job, perhaps the most obscure book in the OT, in which probably the LXX translator was more often astray than in any other book, and he conjures out of it a prophecy of the resurrection of the body (misrepresenting the intention of the author of Job completely) and adapts his narrative of the Lazarus miracle to the words of the LXX version . . . once one's attention has been drawn to it one can hardly deny . . . the allusion . . . (p. 153).

To your reviewer this is a 'striking example' of something else not altogether to the credit of Prof. Hanson. The Gospel writer comes in for so many disparaging remarks that it is difficult to keep tally of them—he has invented (of course always with scriptural justification) the reference to the Brazen Serpent in 3:13; the teaching on the Holy Spirit in 16:8–11 ('in the last degree unlikely'); the details of the arrest in 18:6; the *Gabbatha* incident (with notable ingenuity in this case); the *Stabat Mater* episode; the 'I thirst' of 19:28 and probably the 'It is finished' of 19:30; the anointing by Nicodemus; Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre (borrowing details from the Song of Solomon this time); and so on. No less than about fifty such instances are traced. Modestly, he alludes to only 'the most eminent examples' in his summing up.

How then should the Church today handle this Gospel? The first rule is: 'do not treat it as a reliable historical record'. If we do, 'we are in the realm of legend and are in full flight towards a positively superstitious attitude towards Jesus'. However, 'the Church does not need to jettison the Fourth Gospel. Interpreted in terms of the risen Lord and not of the historical Jesus it makes excellent sense'. I am afraid I cannot see either how or why, but Prof. Hanson goes on to try to explain. First,

> If we still proclaim the coming of Jesus Christ as *God's unique and climactic approach to mankind*, as we must if we are to be faithful to the Gospel, some form of Logos doctrine is essential *he writes* (my italics).

He does not elaborate further. 'Secondly, John's doctrine of the Spirit is most valuable and necessary'. Why John's Spirit should be believed in when his Jesus is so impossible to believe in Prof. Hanson does not say. All this fails to make any sort of sense to your reviewer, especially when (it seems fair to add) Prof. Hanson accuses John not only of wholesale invention, but also of deliberate and unscrupulous deception (pp. 297–299).

I am not a theological scholar, so I am free from the constraints of professional loyalty. This makes it easier for me to say what I think. My conclusion is this: scholarship such as this is a case of the blind leading the blind. It will almost certainly be spiritually barren and quite destructive in the case of ordinarily-gifted people who form the great majority of our fellow men and women. Greatly as it may (possibly) enrich the spiritual life of theological scholars, it will vastly impoverish that of many for whom God cares. Scholarship is a good servant but a bad master. Here it has lost its subordinate rôle and become mutinous and self-consciously so. Prof. Hanson's major reason for rejecting the historicity of John is apparently 'because of its incompatibility with the other Gospels', especially in its Christology. What does he make then of the 'Johannine thunderbolt' in Matt. 11:27, Luke 10:22? J.A.T. Robinson in his well-known defence of

John's Gospel apparently refers to this often, and 'makes it work very hard indeed'. By contrast, Prof. Hanson gives it no work to do at all, merely dismissing it (or rather Matt. 11:28f.) with the remark that 'this can hardly be described as one of the most authentic-sounding of Jesus' *logia*'. This is not an altogether unexpected comment on a *pericope* whose whole thrust runs so counter to the temper of theological liberalism. Such a cavalier attitude hardly inspires much confidence. He later refers to J.N. Sander's use of the well-known differences in the accounts of Socrates given by two of his students, Plato and Xenophon (an interesting study of which is incidentally provided by Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy*); but he never answers the point it raises. In fact, his real problem seems to your reviewer to be that he simply refuses, on *a priori* grounds, to receive John's doctrine of Jesus as the God-man. If one receives this however, all else in the Gospel falls fairly readily into place, and the historicity of the Johannine record becomes a matter both to believe in and to rejoice in. Even the results of Prof. Hanson's detective work might be gratefully accepted as possibly correct in view of the biblical insistence on the concrete reality of messianic prophecy ('that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet . . .'); but I am afraid he would not have been at all likely to concede this reality.

Of course, the net result of Prof. Hanson's thesis is utterly to demolish the Fourth Gospel as *revelation*, and almost to destroy its value as the work of a thinker of real integrity. But its most disastrous effect is on our understanding of God. Prof. Hanson is persuaded that 'the coming of Jesus Christ is God's unique and climactic approach to mankind' (p. 368). Yet God has apparently allowed the record of this 'climactic approach' to reach men and women of later generations (that is, the *vast* majority of mankind) in a written form so dramatically influential but so artfully and unscrupulously distorted that for nearly two thousand years the Church has worshipped and put her faith 'superstitiously' in a frankly 'legendary' figure (pp. 365, 367). To use one of his own metaphors, into her infant hands God apparently allowed to fall a 'most dangerous medicine' from which her health has suffered terribly ever since—until, that is, the new scholarly antibiotic arrived. How can such a God be exonerated from the charge of carelessness, indifference, or incompetence? or at the very least of such painful impotence that He has been unable to order successfully the most centrally significant strand of His church's understanding of salvation history? I am afraid this is a consequence of the author's thesis so contradictory of the whole thrust of the Bible that I for one cannot accept it for a moment. It makes God look an incompetent fool.

There is a useful account of the trend of British scholarly opinion on the Fourth Gospel since Westcott in the opening chapter, and a brief note on Prof. M. Hengel's *The Johannine Question* (1989) at the end. Unfortunately Prof. D.A. Carson's fine Commentary (1991) was not available in time to be noticed. There is a Bibliography of six pages; an Index of Biblical and other References of nine; and an Index of Names of three.

Ivy Cottage, Grove, Wantage, Oxon. DOUGLAS SPANNER

READING CORINTHIANS: A New Commentary for Preachers Charles H. Talbert
S.P.C.K., London 1990 188pp. £9.99 pb. ISBN 0 281 04493 7
MEANING AND TRUTH IN 2 CORINTHIANS Frances Young and David Ford
S.P.C.K., London 1987 289pp. £10.95 pb. ISBN 0 281 04317 5

In rather different ways both these volumes seek to help the preacher who is attempting to tackle the Corinthian correspondence. This is not an easy task! Both are concerned to move away from the traditional form of commentary and to bridge the gap between the technical study of the biblical text and 'living theology'. The two books are helped in this aim by being critically conservative. Thus Talbert only splits 2 Corinthians into two separate letters, whereas Young and Ford actually argue for the original unity of that letter.

Talbert has the preacher very much in mind and commendably seeks to identify the flow and argument of the biblical text. However it is questionable whether he really succeeds in doing this. He is remarkably brief on chapters 1–4 of 1 Corinthians which must be seen as fundamental to understanding the problems with which Paul is dealing in Corinth. A great deal of space in the book is still devoted to certain technical minutiae instead of identifying the issues of Christian life and ministry which dominate these letters. However there is a lot of useful information in this book and it is the sort of work one can dip into and find illuminating insights.

Young and Ford's book is not collaborative in the usual sense since each has written one half of the book. Although there is true collaboration between the authors the two halves of the book (chs. 1–4 and 5–9) are readily identifiable. To me, the more theological section of the work (the last part) was the least satisfactory. However if anyone wishes to understand the concerns of modern hermeneutics chapter 5 would repay careful reading. I found chapters 3 (The biblical roots of Paul's perceptions) and 4 (Determining the meaning of the text) interesting and helpful. Chapter 3 demonstrates how Paul is soaked in the attitudes and mindset of the Old Testament. Chapter 4 has some worthwhile studies on certain key words which appear in 2 Corinthians.

In short this work is one which can only be recommended as something to dip into in order to find helpful points.

52 Elm Road, Leytonstone, E.11 MARK BURKILL

IDIOMS OF THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT
Stanley E. Porter
Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1992 339 pp. including glossary, bibliography and indices £27.50 hb. £14.95 pb.
ISBN 1 85075 357 1 hb.
ISBN 1 85075 379 2 pb.

This intermediate-level volume is the first to appear in the new series, Biblical Languages: Greek (B.L.G., 2). Other volumes to appear are: an

elementary New Testament Greek Grammar well suited for classroom use (B.L.G., 1), and a multi-authored, comprehensive reference grammar of the Greek of the New Testament (B.L.G., 3). When complete, this series will comprise a coordinated set of instructional and reference volumes, designed to take the student of New Testament Greek from elementary through to advanced competence, as well as providing a lasting library of works on the Greek language of the New Testament.

This book is designed for students who have completed approximately one year of Greek and who need further help before using advanced grammars. It is assumed that students will already know the basics of how to recognize and parse nouns, adjectives and verbs, and will have a basic understanding of phrase and clause structure.

There are two sections of the book. The first deals with the functions of individual words and their relation to one another within phrases. The second deals with clauses and larger units.

The author claims that his book makes serious advances over other equivalent grammars in three ways. First, his analysis is based upon principles of modern linguistics, translated and adapted for students and teachers who may not have had any exposure to its technical language and method.

Secondly, he has brought a new and sometimes distinctive perspective to several of the major topics for discussion in Greek grammar and linguistics. He has tried to advance the discussion especially in the areas of tense and aspects, mood and attitude, cases and gender, prepositions, participles, conditional clauses, word order and clause structure, and discourse analysis.

Thirdly, he has made extensive use of New Testament examples (with a literal translation alongside) to illustrate each grammatical phenomenon, as well as referring to pertinent secondary literature.

Unfortunately, the philosophy upon which Porter's work depends is not sound. He has taken a synchronic approach to the New Testament and views the language as a self-referring linguistic system. He disregarded historical considerations which might have influenced the state of the language up to that time. He is sceptical that sizeable and significant examples of Semitic influence on New Testament Greek can be established.

Since Porter does not follow the formal or traditional view of linguistics, it is not possible to make the transition from his grammar to the standard advanced Greek grammars such as Blass, Debrunner and Funk, Robertson, Moulton and Turner, who basically hold the traditional view.

When dealing with verbs, Porter again abandons the traditional view and reduces the significance of the tenses and blurs the distinctions in their meanings. He says that the original function of the verb in Greek was not to indicate different levels of time, thus contradicting the standard Greek grammars.

On the other hand, the treatment of prepositions (with diagrams using cubes and spheres) is helpful, and Porter believes that *hyper* can be used in a substitutionary sense, pp. 176–7. Porter admits that 'for some, this book may seem too difficult and inaccessible' (p. 14). He has not succeeded in making the very difficult aspects of grammar and syntax easy to understand. For example, his definition of deponency on pp. 70–71 and his discussion of the genitive absolute on pp. 183–4, are hard to understand.

A form of the critical text of the New Testament is used rather than the

Textus Receptus.

Misprints were noticed on p. 77, line 20, and on p. 141, lines 21 and 24. A whole line is printed twice, bottom of p. 65, top of p. 66, and bottom of p. 313, top of p. 314. There is a mistranslation of *hygies* in Acts 4:10 on p. 41.

It is doubtful that this grammar will be a serious challenge to the standard intermediate Greek grammars which are already available.

11 St. Barnabas Road, Sutton, Surrey BRIAN FELCE

NO CONDEMNATION IN CHRIST JESUS Octavius Winslow
Banner of Truth, Edinburgh 1991 396 pp. £3.95
ISBN 0 8151 592 4

For many years now the publishers of this book have sought to restore to the Christian public some of the gems of a past generation, many of them doctrinal treatises which need recapitulating, and many like this which are more of a devotional nature based on sound scriptural interpretation. It does, however, mean that the reader has to accustom himself to language, which is sometimes ponderous and ill-fitted to modern society. But this should not prevent a careful reader from benefiting from this book as it covers a subject which needs restoring to many a pulpit in the land today. As a Church we have lost the emphasis to be found in its pages and everyone would profit spiritually from using each chapter for devotional reading. Christians are in desperate need of the assurance which the inspired Word of God can bring and that is what the writer seeks to cover. Romans 8 should be the essential diet of every child of God and, read alongside this book verse by verse, hearts cannot fail to be stirred and lives enriched.

14 Cambridge Road, Stamford, Lincolnshire JOHN BOURNON

FROM EVERYWHERE TO EVERYWHERE A World Review of Christian Mission Michael Nazir-Ali
Collins, London 1990 269 pp. £8.95
ISBN 0 00 599222 2

Recent years have seen the publication of many books on Global Religion. The present one is remarkable in that the General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society declares his concept that mission is God's activity as well as man's. He sees God blessing non-believers and using their histories to forward his purposes. In this sense God communicates his will to pagans, as in the case of Cyrus who in 537 B.C. allowed the Jews to return to Palestine from their Babylonian exile. Salvation-history may thus be evident among unbelievers. He has a humane and tolerant view of Islam in stating that their doctrines and beliefs set forth in the Qhuran meet the communal and religious faith of its members by creating a solidarity of them. But he qualifies this view by pointing out that Christianity in the Person and work of Christ has bridged the gulf between God and man.

The greater part of the book is, however, devoted to a consideration of the Christian Mission, which he traces from the days of the Early Fathers.

Much credence is given to the truth that virile Christianity sprang from the global south, particularly from Ethiopia, Egypt and India before it blossomed in the north. But he tends to by-pass the ancient British Church and its Continental missions, though he notes the work of John Wycliff. He is correct that the sixteenth century Reformers had little urge for world mission, its members relying upon God to further its advance if it was his will. In a strongly worded passage he claims that the Anglican concept of mission is rooted in pastoral work and not a 'Hit and run' method. To him the churches' identity-presence is an important factor in mission. The author pleads that Anglicans must discover the doctrine of the cross as an effective missionary force. But, most of all, the communication of the Gospel by individuals will transform the lives of others. There must, he says, be biblical expository preaching applied to human life and the community if healing is to be brought into the world. He covets an 'every Christian a missionary' as a potent force in the area where he lives.

In reference to the 1988 Lambeth Conference he welcomes the view that the Pastoral approach to mission is the strongest in all the primary approaches to evangelism. He welcomes the influence of Christian festivals such as 'Greenbelt', and sees much value in visiting mission teams, and the involvement of the laity in public worship. In his view, he claims, there is a strong feminine element in Holy Scripture that should be re-discovered. In his last chapters, dealing with mission essence and practice, his advice given is admirable. It is to be regretted that little is said of great missionary characters, the western missionary movement from the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth nor of the historic revivals of religion that changed the face of communities. The book moves away from them, such is the author's desire to place evangelism and mission upon the conscience of every Christian. In this book the Decade of Evangelism comes alive. If out of that vitality Christians and congregations are stimulated to accept its suggestions the close of the twentieth century may see a great advance of the Christian Faith in Britain and elsewhere.

5 Green Lane, Clapham, Bedford ARTHUR BENNETT

DISCERNING SPIRIT A Theology of Revelation
T.J. Gorringe
S.C.M. Press, London 1990 144pp. £8.95 ISBN 0 334 02462 5

The author, who is Chaplain of St. John's College, Oxford, has given us here a book about the Holy Spirit. His argument, he says, is simple. 'A God who is not engaged in our world is no God' [Maurice Wiles notwithstanding!].

> But if God engages, then it must be possible to know him, . . . But where does God reveal himself in our world? That is what a theology of the Spirit is all about.

The slightly ambiguous 'discerning' of the title is thus intended to denote something that it is proper for *us* to do, not something the Spirit does; and

what we discern constitutes for us *revelation*. Revelation is 'what we cannot tell ourselves'; its function is 'to displace us from our totality', the sum total of the inherited ideas that are governing us. Using habitually this sort of language the author has clearly written a book for theologians, not for the ordinary layman, and he has many serious things to say. But one could wish his style in places were more down to earth and less in the clouds.

The author looks at four areas outside the church where, he says, the Bible finds it appropriate to use 'Spirit' language. These areas are community, sexuality, politics and art. The Bible is not referred to extensively, and then rather to illustrate his points than to establish them. Indeed, his attitude to the Bible is ambiguous; it contains the story of Jesus as well as things we must reject. His criterion seems to be 'the story of Jesus', but he nowhere indicates how firm a historical basis he attributes to this. He thus seems to belong to the 'canon within a canon' political school. A few further remarks must suffice. On politics, he has a lot to say about the programme of liberation theology. The Spirit seems to be at work here, but (tantalisingly) we must be careful not to assume too readily that this is the case wherever powerful movements are afoot which aim to put abuses right. Lesslie Newbigin confesses he was early on taken in by Naziism! But 'spiritual love is as likely to be found in a Gandhian action group or a Marxist cell as in the church . . . and there the Spirit is at work'. Perhaps; but has he forgotten 'Whom the world cannot receive'? A lot of his emphasis seems to advocate what William Haslam (the man converted through his own sermon) called 'building from the top'. He has forgotten that the Kingdom cannot even be seen without the New Birth, which he never mentions.

In *Spirit and Art* he enlarges on his aphorism 'Art is the only valid form of natural theology', and he says many things worth saying. But he leaves many important things unsaid too. His last chapter is on *Spirit and the Feminine*. He toys with the idea that the Spirit might justifiably be referred to as 'She', and he instances the use of feminine metaphors for God and the Spirit (*e.g.* Isa. 46:3f.; John 3:4f.). But he overlooks the fact that these metaphors may simply be used as the most vivid available. We employ them for this reason ourselves; Bismarck, we say, *conceived* the idea of a united Germany; an inventor has a very *fertile* brain and so on. This usage is common in the Bible too: 'the wicked man *conceives* evil, and is *pregnant* with mischief, and *brings forth* lies' (Ps. 7:14). The argument falls quite flat. So does the appeal to the imagining of 'Wisdom' in the Old Testament as feminine. Are not 'Justice' and 'Liberty' (to name no more) imagined in the same way in our own culture? Far more telling is the fact that when the Spirit is referred to pronominally and the gender is not merely dictated by grammar (and is even contrary to it) the pronoun used is masculine (for example, *ekeinos*, John 16:14, *etc.*).

On the whole I found this a most disappointing treatment, with very little biblical basis. The author is quite difficult to categorize. He criticizes (as well as commends) Barr, Barth, Boff, Buber, Farrer, Lampe, and Nygren. But I can well see him as a future Professor in one of our main theological faculties!

There are six pages of Notes and an Index (of names) of two pages.

Ivy Cottage, Grove, Wantage, Oxon. DOUGLAS SPANNER

INDEX OF REVIEWS

ATKINSON, *The Message of Genesis* (O. J. Thomas) 83
GORRINGE, *Discerning Spirit: A Theology of Revelation* (D. C. Spanner) 93
HANSON, *The Prophetic Gospel: A Study of John and the Old Testament* (D. C. Spanner) 86
NAZIR-ALI, *From Everywhere to Everywhere: A World Review of Christian Mission* (A. Bennett) 92
PORTER, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (B. G. Felce) 90
TALBERT, *Reading Corinthians: A New Commentary for Preachers* (M. E. Burkill) 90
WILCOCK, *The Message of Chronicles* (G. R. Curry) 86
WILSON, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (J. Wood) 84
WINSLOW, *No Condemnation in Christ Jesus* (J. R. Bournon) 92
YOUNG, FORD, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (M. E. Burkill) 90

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