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## Book Reviews

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### **The Church & Its Unity**

*When Christians Disagree Series*

Alan F Gibson, Editor

IVP, 1992, 255pp, £7.95

This courageous and painstaking venture employs eight main writers who address some of the principal issues which are encountered when evangelical churches seek greater unity. The contributors work in pairs, each writing a major chapter, with an additional piece by way of response to their partner's chapter.

The introduction affirms that, "This book is an exercise in respectful confrontation." This proves to be substantially true. Most contributors have sought objectivity in their exegesis of controverted passages of Scripture and theological principles, and genuinely attempt to understand the alternative view they do not hold. This is surely an essential prerequisite for the success of the commendable project. However, this high standard proves to be unattainable throughout, and some shots are fired, not in self defence!

We are assured of the evangelical credentials of all the authors. However, this does not provide a simple *Sola Scriptura* approach. Questions of institutional loyalty in some cases, and of contemporary gifts of the Spirit in others, entangle themselves.

**The first main section of the book addresses church membership as viewed by the national and gathered churches.** David Holloway and Derek Prime view the matter from their respective positions inside, and independent of, the national church in

Britain. Holloway attempts to be reassuring about the role of the state in the national church by distinguishing recognition (by the state) from interference (by the state), and co-operation from legislation, and what the state may wish to give from what the church should be willing to receive. The attempt to support the church/state union from the nation of Israel in the Old Testament fails to address the temporary nature of the theocracy. Referring to the New Testament church, the assertion that some *nominal* believers existed in it is obviously true; however, it is another matter for the Church of England to normalise and even promote this. On the practice of baptism, Holloway concludes that minimal requirements and a most elementary faith were called for by the Apostles. But this may be to read the New Testament through twentieth-century eyes and miss how radical a thing it was then to 'simply' confess Christ and be baptised. Infant baptism is well defended (though not well enough for Prime) from Scripture and Patristic history. Indiscriminate infant baptism is pronounced to be 'wrong'. Holloway thinks that the standards of the Anglican Alternative Service Book (ASB) if properly implemented are a sound safeguard here. The congregations of the Church of England are termed 'church-type churches' while independent congregations are termed 'sect-type churches'. Holloway is troubled by the proliferation of the latter with little conception of history or

tradition. This may sometimes be the case, but there are so many exceptions to this generalisation to prove that there is nothing in independence *per se* to make it so. In fact, it is notable that some independent congregations are very well instructed in tradition and history.

Derek Prime relates his early personal history which began in the national church until his decision not to enter its ministry. References to baptismal regeneration in the Anglican service book were a major factor. The ASB fails to make any significant reform at this point. He states his position regarding the nature of the church and individual membership of it by gathering the biblical data under four headings. 1 The early church was a fellowship of believers. 2 The early church was a fellowship of believers who professed their faith through baptism. 3 Believer's baptism and church membership were synonymous in the early church and N T period. 4 The N T description of members of a local church demand and take for granted the existence and profession of personal faith in Christ. This is an attractively simple position based on thorough and conscientious use of Scripture. To this position is added the affirmation - "There is a total absence of any command to baptise infants in the N T." But, is it so simple? The practice of withdrawing the covenant sign from children which in O T times they received also lacks any explicit command. And an even more troublesome silence concerns the age at which a credible profession of faith may be made by a child and received by the church.

Much of the discussion between Holloway and Prime concerns

*nominalism* in the visible church. Prime wants to eliminate it as far as is humanly possible, because it has no place in the N T doctrine of the church. Holloway has to live with it in the national church and seeks to put the best construction on it. But sympathise as we may with the desire to include those who may have some 'seed' of faith without showing much evidence of it, in the hope that they will eventually make good, the case is flimsy and probably flawed because nominalism so seriously obscures the evidences of regeneration.

**The second main section addresses whether churches should exist independently or in a connectional denomination,** Eryl Davies supporting the former, and Harry Uprichard the latter. Davies calls for an assessment of all forms of church government as something which our submission to Scripture and the Headship of Christ demands. A foremost principle for him is that the local church is never regarded as incomplete. There is a sufficiency of rule in a partnership of local elders and members, which are two co-operating dimensions of church government in mutually sensitive balance. The uniqueness of the local church as "the specific location of Christ's rule by his Word and Spirit," has been seriously obscured by the plethora of para-church organisations which have claimed Christian loyalties and resources and drawn them away for the local church.

An excessive independence is recognised as Davies argues that local churches are not only independent but also interrelated and *interdependent*. John Owen on 'mutual communion' is quoted favourably. The council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) is

viewed as having a consultative and advisory role only. Prof J Murray's view that it is 'a pattern of consultation and adjudication' is rejected.

Harry Uprichard introduces the view that a particular church is part of a connectional government much wider than one congregation. Writing from a Presbyterian background he questions the biblical basis for the idea that the authority of eldership is delegated from the church meeting. He brings to bear on the local church emphasis of independency an emphasis on the universal church in which the rule of elders expresses 'a continuity of Christ's rule over the entire church'. Explaining and supporting the 'regulative principle', he adds to it a 'developing principle', ie "a maturing progression of form and order in the church within the NT itself." Paul's teaching especially "goes beyond particularity and locality and embraces universality." General evidence for connectional government is found in (i) the unified nature of the congregation of Israel in the OT (ii) the unified nature of teaching, practical support, fellowship and mission in the church of the NT. In particular, Uprichard regards the Acts 15 council of Jerusalem as fundamental to the connectionalist position because it exercised 'authoritative jurisdiction'.

These two authors give to the book its high point by the thoroughness of their treatment, the spirit in which they write, and respect for each other's position. Here is an exemplary exercise in mutual understanding without agreeing.

**The third main section deals with the doctrinal purity of the church** as it affects an evangelical church within a doctrinally mixed denomination, and as it affects a separated evangelical church in its relationship to the former. Gordon Kuhrt writes from within the Church of England and Graham Harrison from independency.

Kuhrt begins by affirming that all Christians in any place are the church in that place. They should not be divided. No separation should occur from the existing church in any place. The present-day evangelical practice of 'starting new churches' ignores the fact that "the Apostles urged reform and correction in the strongest terms, but never advised Christians to separate into new churches". In defending this position, the worst features of independency are enumerated; eg excessive individualism and a tendency for separatists to sub-divide even further, thus robbing the church of visible catholicity, etc. The writer's position is also rationalised by the formulation of several distinctions, eg the formal approval of serious error by a church is distinguished from the presence of some erroneous individuals in a church. The legitimate scholarly activity of asking questions is distinguished from explicit denials. A further distinction is drawn between confused understanding and unbelief in the individual.

The present reviewer finds Mr Kuhrt's thesis too theoretical and too little realistic. Here is ecclesiastical generosity taken so far as to become dangerous laxity. No awareness is shown of the commonest situation experienced by fair-minded and

restrained evangelicals, of being wholly unable to worship or find meaningful fellowship in a local church because of multiple offences to the evangelical conscience. The fact that most Anglican clergy and bishops consistently behave as opponents of the gospel is not addressed.

Graham Harrison endeavours to define the gospel because it is the gospel which determines the nature of the church, and that ecclesiology - national, local and personal is a consequence of understanding the gospel. The church is founded upon specific gospel propositions. This leads to the definite nature of the Christian church. It consists of 'saints' set apart to God, and uniting in a common allegiance to the gospel. The state of the church today is very far from this, and all evangelicals are agreed about this fact. But there is no consensus about how to proceed. Harrison commends courteous and persuasive debate, but also believes that there comes a point when the 'crunch question' must be faced - can those who deny the gospel be tolerated in teaching and leadership positions within the church? The church does not consist solely in what its formularies contain, but very substantially in the life, deeds and words of its ministers and members. These can make its official position invalid.

The fourth section of the book concerns charismatic gifts and experiences and whether these can be contained in existing church structures or require a new church order. Michael Cole defends traditional church structures. He is a committed Anglican with some charismatic expe-

rience. Nine points of Anglican excellence are offered to support the claim that the ecclesiastical position of the Church of England is 'the best of all worlds'. He evaluates the several respects in which the renewal movement he represents differs from the Restoration churches. He warmly approves of episcopal church government. Apostleship today is discussed and he concludes that an Anglican bishop has "an apostolic role and ministry but not the unique title of apostle". He welcomes prophecy but is careful to say that it has no parity with Scripture. The pastoral care practised by Restoration churches goes beyond biblical parameters and becomes intrusive and heavy. Cole also thinks that Restorationist baptismal practice leads to the re-baptism of many through an unworthy disregard for 'each other's church discipline'. He also considers that the House-church movement rejects 'the testimony of past generations of faithful men and women of God'. He concludes that the way forward for Restoration churches and renewed traditional churches is to avoid the extremes of denominationalism on the one hand and the extremes of non-denominationalism on the other.

David Matthew writes from the position of the Restoration fellowships. Christian unity is primarily organic, in his view, and can only achieve any organisational expression among those who possess and experience the dynamic of the same spiritual life. Any form of organisational unity is based on the pre-requisite of identifying those of whom this is true. A number of evidences are given to guide this process, all of them more or less

subjective. Acceptance of a revealed gospel in terms of Galatians ch 1 is not mentioned. On the matter of baptism, church leaders are urged to take 'a more gutsy approach'. Mr Matthew possibly exemplifies what this means as he proceeds to assert "everything points to total immersion". The baptism on profession of faith of very young children is commended, while infant baptism as such is rejected without courtesy, as all the learning of the Reformation and subsequent eras is sweepingly dismissed. The pastoral theology associated with baptism is dealt with by affirming that all the baptised (by immersion) have to do when attacked by doubts is to say - "I took the plunge. I died with Christ that day, and there can be no going back". The present reviewer regards this as dangerous spiritual counsel, at least for anyone wrongly immersed on the basis of a false profession. Speaking in tongues, it is claimed, opens a deeper level of communion with God. It is recognised that some evangelicals have reservations about baptism in the Spirit as distinct from being born of the Spirit. Such reservation belongs to a 'more cerebral Christianity'. Some evangelicals hold back, it is noted, from a working unity with the sort of church of which David Matthew approves. This culpable reluctance makes unity difficult. All the fault is on one side, and there are several jibes in this chapter at one aspect or another of the practice of traditional evangelical churches. It is the low point of the book.

After all this, Alan Gibson adds a last and sympathetic word in which he identifies four 'crucial watersheds' in the evangelical unity debate. This is

valuable analysis for all who are burdened about national and local unity among those who profess one Lord Jesus Christ and one salvation in him. Finally, the editor offers some practical suggestions for all who cannot rest in doing nothing toward making evangelical unity more workable and more visible.

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### **Signs of the Spirit**

*Michael Kinnamori (Ed)*

WCC, Geneva \ Eerdmans 1991

396 pp, pb, £13.95

### **To the Wind of God's Spirit:**

*Compiled by Emilio Castro*

WCC, Geneva, 1990

102 pp, pb, £5.25

### **Acting in Faith:**

*The World Council of Churches since 1975*

*Leon Howell*

WCC, Geneva, 1983

120 pp, pb, £3.95

**SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT** is the official report of the seventh WCC Assembly held in Canberra in February 1991. Following a personal overview and introduction by the editor, readers are immediately directed to the Assembly Theme, 'Come Holy Spirit - Renew the whole Creation' which was the focus of plenary sessions on the Assembly's second day. The next subsection reports on the sub-themes in the Assembly, namely, 'Giver of Life - sustain your creation', 'Spirit of Truth - set us Free', 'Spirit of Unity - Reconcile your People', 'Holy Spirit - Transform and Sanctify us'. Tensions, disagreements and contradictions

appear throughout these two crucial sections with some Orthodox members protesting strongly against the modification of the biblical, church teaching. An example was their opposition to the identifying of the Holy Spirit with 'the spirits' of the world as in the syncretistic and animistic contribution of the Korean female theology professor, Chung Hyun Kyung. In all these sections, there was a failure to wrestle with the biblical teaching concerning the objective and subjective aspects of the Holy Spirit's work.

Section 4 assesses the work done by the WCC in the seven years since the previous Assembly and anticipates the future. The global economic recession, however, has hit the WCC resulting in staff reduction and the discontinuation of some of its activities. Another section deals with statements and appeals on public issues. Interesting reading is found in pp 282-286 expressing evangelical perspectives and observations from Canberra. They regret that evangelicals were under-represented at Canberra and requested that they should be represented in each WCC commission. Twelve practical challenges are then presented which betray an inadequate ecclesiology, a sympathetic and committed attitude towards WCC membership\ involvement and a desire to reflect more on social, political issues. Altogether this is a good reference book if we want to understand what is happening now in ecumenical circles.

**TO THE WIND OF GOD'S SPIRIT** is a companion volume to the foregoing official report and contains ten reflections on the Canberra Theme, all

of which were published in recent issues of the **ECUMENICAL REVIEW**. The book was intended primarily as a theological resource for Canberra assembly delegates.

These ten reflections are startlingly different, written from varied church and theological perspectives and cover a diverse range of subjects. For example, a liturgical Bible study on Acts 2:1-4 under the title, *The Icon of Pentecost*, forms the first reflection which at least is Trinitarian in its ethos although Orthodox in its ecclesiology. *Pneumatology as an Ecumenical Frontier* is another reflection which makes brief observations on 'ecumenical epiphanies' in recent decades like Edinburgh (1910), Lausanne (1927), Vatican II (1962-65) which was 'the most unexpected... no-one was prepared... neither the pope who convened it (John XXIII) nor the pope who saw it through (Paul VI), nor the one now grappling with its long-term consequences (John Paul II)'.

Acknowledging that 'the ecumenical glamour days are dead and gone', he favours an alternative pattern of *Organic* Christian unity 'that is deeply pneumatological and paracletic'. He insists that such organic unity was 'conserved more by shared eucharists than by conformity to rules, formularies and doctrinal speculations'. Jurgen Moltmann's reflection on *The Scope of Renewal in the Spirit* is brief but tackles some key Scripture passages relating to creation within a Trinitarian and eschatological context. In his *Distinguishing Between Spirits*, Eduard Schweizer concludes that what is central in the New Testament is 'there is no doctrine of the Spirit, but rather that the Spirit is NARRATED as an EVENT - AS HAPPENING' (p 47).

Stanley J Samartha's article, *The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths* is predictably open and thoughtful. He claims that the 'question of the Spirit AND people of other faiths is a NEW question that has somewhat aggressively thrust itself on the theological consciousness of the church only in recent years' (p 50). There is hesitation on the part of many to discuss this question, argues Samartha, because they fear both syncretism and relativism. The fears are justified, too, in the reviewer's opinion. However, Samartha is persuaded that any *doctrine* about the Spirit 'is unlikely to provide a basis to discuss the Spirit's relation to people of other faiths' (p 57); rather, one has to discern the actual working of the Spirit in the lives of people. Such works of the Spirit include freedom, boundlessness, new relationships and new communities. The last three chapters cover important subjects like *Spirit, Reconciliation, Church; Pluralism and Problem of Discernment; Orthodox Reflections on the Assembly Theme*. Altogether it is an important book even though its assumptions and conclusions are often unbiblical.

The third book, **ACTING IN FAITH**, is a more popular book outlining the main history of the WCC since 1975. It is informative, at times illuminating, and a useful resource for catching up on recent WCC history and developments.

### **The Trojan Horse in the Temple**

*The Hidden Agenda of the Ecumenical Movement*, Alan Morrison  
Rushworth, 1993, 54pp, £1.95

The basic position and fears underlying this book are shared by the BEC, namely, ecumenism is closely allied to liberal theology, and moving inevitably towards syncretism, universalism, and Rome. However, the book goes further: 'Behind all the idealistic talk of ecumenical unity lies the dark reality of another universal movement - a mighty alliance of demonic power in the form of the many occult and secular organisations of "world brotherhood", posing as angels of light and servants of righteousness, which has made the political work of the United Nations and the ecumenical activity of the world wide professing church a major focus of its secret endeavour' (p 44).

The book is very readable and provides basic historical details relating to the origins and development of ecumenism. WCC's involvement in dialogue and the significant shift in thought after Visser't Hooft's retirement in 1966 is accurately highlighted as well as the extension of the term 'ecumenical' to the entire human race rather than just different denominations within Christendom. Vatican II's influence is duly noted and consequent Roman Catholic involvement in ecumenism. I have no disagreement with the basic message of the book although I would have expressed some of the points and problems differently. Many folk will find help in its pages and it is sufficiently brief to be passed around church members and leaders.

### **The Glory of Christ**

*Peter Lewis, Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, 504 pp, £9.99*

This is a lengthy work, replete with enough quotes to make Ph D students envious, with thirty six pages of footnotes and indices. However, the book is most readable and, at times, enjoyable.

The general structure of the work follows a kind of *Cross-Roads* Christology. By Part Two, called *The Divine Explanation*, the writer has turned left from the Jesus before us into matters of pre-existence. He then moves to the right side of the junction to look at the worshipped Jesus. By Part Four the author has returned to the central position of the Cross. Parts Five and Six take the reader forward into the Resurrection and Second Coming.

Within this structure there are different theological approaches. In chapters 8, 16 and 17 Lewis adopts a commentary cum expository style which is, if a surprise, not inappropriate. A systematic approach is evident in the overall structure. Attempts at Biblical theology are also present in the examination of the Cross in the Old and New Testaments. However, these varied approaches are a weakness as well as a change. It leaves a sense of confusion in the mind of the reader. Where does it all lead? Is this book meant to encourage worship? Who is Lewis writing for? The intellectual? Preacher? Theological student? Or the man in the street?

In the *Preface*, Lewis asserts boldly, 'This is a book of theology written for everybody. It is written by a pastor who believes that 'theology' and 'everybody' go together...'. Although these statements sound generous yet the book itself is fuel against such opinions. Those who would soundly

argue that the area of theology is a matter for "the academy" would feel confirmed in their fortress opinions after reading it. Like all who attempt to be all things to everybody it ends up giving little to all. Although the truth is available to all, it is not available without hard work, as this large volume of simple theology shows. Peter Lewis is to be admired for the amount of work revealed here despite his busy ministry.

There are many quotations, often of five or six lines. In the first section there are several quotes from Doctors Carson and France. The weakness, however, is not in the number of quotes or their length, although the reader may wish to hear more from the author himself, but in the origin of some quotes which are also used without criticism. If this book is written for those without theological training then there is a danger in it. Such readers would be accepting comments from persons like C F D Moule, J Dunn, C S Lewis, J V Taylor, M Hengel, J Jeremias, O Cullmann, J H Newman etc without warning alongside recognised evangelical scholars. These thoughts then gain an acceptability through being employed without qualification in lay preaching. A sad neglect was minimal quotations from either the Patristics or from the Puritan writers apart from John Owen.

The sermonic element of the book is discernible in the structure of some chapters, together with some useful epigrammatic definitions; for example: "The Word is all that God is, yet, although part of the Godhead," p 104. In this covenant context his 'I am who I am' really means, 'All that I am, I am for you', p 83. In defining the

term *harpagmos* in Phil 2:6 he says, "It may be a somewhat unsuitable comparison but our common English idiom, 'to have an ace up one's sleeve' might illuminate the point", p 232. He is certainly a preacher but this is not a book of sermons.

Lewis addresses succinctly throughout the book the issue of the *uniqueness* of the Lord Jesus and also definitively states his views on the issue of Hell in chapter thirty three, which is to be welcomed in a work which may gain a popular readership. There is no evidence of anything but an orthodox view.

Part One adequately covers **The Divine Revelation**. The coverage of the title "The Son of Man" is especially well presented including the view of Christ's coming in Mark 14:62 as that of enthronement rather than parousia. The six page chapter on "The Only Revealer of the Father" seems a little short but if treated as an introduction to "The 'I am' sayings of Jesus" it is adequate.

**The Divine Explanation** title of Part Two concentrates on the aspects of Pre-existence and Incarnations. In **The Significance of the Virgin Birth** it would have been helpful to have the same amount of reasoned argument as the Resurrection received. The section is again full of useful material, particularly for preachers.

Part Three: **Jesus Confessed and Adored** contains the theology of Paul essentially and examines various titles used by him: Messiah, Lord, Son of God, Last Adam, One Mediator. It also includes an exposition of Phil 2:5-11 under the title of **The Condescension of Christ**. Col 1:15-20

is covered in the same way with the title **The Cosmic Christ**.

Part Four is really more **Soteriology** than Christology, covering such areas as: the Cross itself, Redemption, Sanctification, Justification, Adoption. There is no unhappy over-emphasis on the human; the idea of a mystical Christianity without any effect on the life-style is firmly dismissed.

**Christ the Exalted Lord** forms Part Five. Here there are some edifying re-iterations of Christian doctrine. Having myself heard the writer speak on the High Priesthood of Christ it is obvious that this is one of his areas of interest. Here the book almost fulfils its title and a sense of the glory of Christ appears.

Part Six deals adequately with **The Last Things**. It concludes with a chapter on "Jesus and the World Religions Today". This seems out of place with all the other material in this section. Perhaps the book needs a section seven - **The Glory of Christ Today**. In this section he could have added comments on the views of various liberals and a clear statement of the battle lines in this theology for "everybody".

Lewis has made a valiant attempt to write a clear theological work but he does not completely succeed, largely because of this book's multi-purpose nature. Perhaps it has a helpful role as an introductory book for theological students. One strength of the book is that it will be helpful to the busy preacher. On all levels, however, it has been stimulating for the reviewer.

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