
Book Reviews

Jesus and the Logic of History

Paul W. Barnett

Apollos, Leicester, 1997, 182pp., pb., £12.99

This is the third volume in the series edited by DA Carson, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, but interestingly the author (who is Bishop of North Sydney, Australia) does not follow the established pattern of examining an important theological theme. Rather, in these published lectures (given in Moore College, Australia in 1996), he moves into the realm of history, and particularly into the daunting but exciting world of "life of Jesus research" or the "third quest". In particular, he sets out to address the problem that in the present discussion there "are as many Jesuses as there are people who write about him" (p. 11).

Chapter 1 introduces the issues, noting the renewed confidence of recent scholarship in what can be known of Jesus and yet the general unwillingness to acknowledge anything unique about him. He raises the question of whether this approach is as historical as is claimed, comparing the views of various historians. His insistence that all possible sources must be examined is a particularly significant contribution.

Barnett's thesis is that Jesus can only be understood as an historical figure when he is assessed in the light of the events which followed his ministry. In particular, the proclamation of the early Christians, as found in the letters of Paul and other New Testament documents, is fundamentally important for appreciating the impact of the historical figure of Jesus on his followers.

The letters are particularly valuable sources of historical information, it is

argued, because they are not self-consciously historical documents. Therefore, any information that is gleaned from them forms a valuable framework for comparing the accounts concerning Jesus in the Gospels. In this connection, Barnett discusses the concept of "tradition" in Paul, showing that the historical Jesus lies at the heart of Paul's preaching.

In his chapter on "Jesus in the Gospels", Barnett makes his view plain. Elaborating on a statement made by M. Bockmuehl (who constructs a similar argument), Barnett writes, "Not only is ... a 'causal continuity' between Jesus and the faith of the early church 'historically legitimate', but any lesser interpretation would be historically implausible" (p. 102). Barnett is aware of the different emphases of the four Gospels; he addresses the question of whether Jesus can be reconstructed from these documents, and later he discusses how Jesus teaching would have found its way into written form. In these discussions he is both sensitive to the problems and faithful to the Gospels.

A brief final chapter on the death of Jesus challenges modern scholarship (as Ben Witherington has already done) to take sufficient account of the death of Jesus as an exceptionally significant part of the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus.

This is a helpful volume which provides a strikingly different approach to the study of Jesus from many contemporary works, and therefore challenges the validity of a number of their conclusions. It deserves a wide readership, including both students and interested Christians, but I fear that such a readership might be restricted by the fairly high price for a relatively slim paperback.

Jesus and the Gospels

Craig L. Blomberg

Apollos, Leicester, 1997, 440pp., hb., £16.99

Craig Blomberg has produced an admirable textbook for theological students coming to serious study of the Gospels and Jesus for the first time. In his introductory remarks, Blomberg explains how the book developed out of twelve years of teaching students and attempting to provide a balance between thorough coverage of material and opportunity for discussion and application of what is learned. The end result is a volume that is comprehensive and yet clear, and will be of great value both to students and their teachers.

The book is composed of five main parts. The first deals with details of the historical setting of Jesus' ministry, both historical and religious. The chapter on socioeconomic factors indicates the value of a fresh survey which takes account of recent research.

The second part deals with methods of biblical criticism. This is always a tricky issue to address without alienating some Christians and baffling others, but Blomberg provides a sensibly brief outline of the significance of textual criticism, followed by fuller, yet clear, discussions of both historical and literary criticism. Inevitably, this is a demanding part of the book and demands some significant level of concentration and commitment, but Blomberg helpfully explains the value of persevering by showing how Luke indicates in his preface to his Gospel that he made use of earlier sources and composed his own distinctive account of the life of Jesus.

The third section is composed of brief introductions to each of the four Gospels. Thankfully, Blomberg does not wade his way through the jungle of evidence and

arguments related to the traditional introductory questions regarding authorship and date, etc. (The job has already been done well by Guthrie and more recently by Carson, Moo and Morris.) Instead, he provides a very readable theological introduction to each Gospel which takes account of structure and important theological emphases. This is both more memorable and more illuminating for the student. Having traced the distinctive contributions of each Gospel, on the other hand, Blomberg is then in a position to make brief but sensitive comments on the historical matters.

The fourth part which surveys the life of Christ is the longest section of the book. The first chapter deals with the history of the "Quest of the Historical Jesus", along with matters of chronology. Here as elsewhere in the book, clear charts make the information more accessible. This chapter is followed by others on the infancy narratives and then the beginning of Jesus' ministry, through to a thorough chapter on "Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection".

The final part briefly discusses the historical reliability of the Gospels and the theology of Jesus. The former chapter deals with issues on which Blomberg has written more fully previously, yet it is a useful survey of the discussion with reference to important recent literature. The latter chapter surveys Jesus' teaching on issues such as the kingdom of God, ethics, redemption and Christology.

Each chapter concludes with suggested literature for further study, graded according to the experience and competence of the reader. The literature is consistently both appropriate and up to date, reflecting a good range of perspectives. Questions at the end of each chapter are a helpful means of review and consolidation of learning, and also provide teachers with useful material for class discussions. The book concludes

with indices for Authors, Subjects and Scripture citations.

There is a certain amount of overlap between this volume and Blomberg's 1987 book, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, but not so much as to depreciate the value of either. Indeed, many teachers will wish the former volume continued good health (and perhaps a facelift?) while greeting the new addition with enthusiasm.

Alistair I. Wilson

The Person of Christ

Donald MacLeod

IVP, Leicester, 1998, 303pp., £14.99

This volume is the seventh in what is proving to be a most stimulating series of theological works published under the general title, *Contours of Christian Theology*. The series preface by Gerald Bray, its editor, might well be encapsulated in some theological equivalent of the *Starship Enterprise's* stated mission: "To boldly go where no man has gone before!" It indicates that these studies are intended to build on material already extant in the standard handbooks of theology and go on to explore the interface between systematic theology and the contemporary world.

In light of such an introduction, it is striking that Donald MacLeod spends so much time in the past as opposed to the present. Saying that is in no sense meant as a criticism but rather as a commendation. He demonstrates in a most constructive fashion that so much confusion in the realm of contemporary theological studies arises from the fact that modern theology has in many cases cut itself loose from its roots in Scripture and historical theology, especially in this most central of biblical doctrines which was the focus of such concentrated reflection in the early centuries of church history.

The first five chapters of the book are grouped together and entitled, "Very God of very God' – from the gospels to Nicea," while the remainder in the second half, "'Very God, very man' – to Chalcedon and Beyond."

Although the work is prefaced with an apology for the length of time it took in being written and its consequent failure to take into account the most recent of literature on the subject, it is refreshingly up-to-date in the way it answers many of the problems thrown up by the twentieth century debates over Christology. The author's presupposition that the Gospels provide access to the real Jesus is stated from the outset and set forth without reservation throughout. He has no hesitation in asserting that the Christology of the Gospels is "from above", despite the insistence of Pannenberg and other contemporary theologians that such an approach is impossible. Thus the pattern of the Gospels is followed in this consideration of Jesus in such a way as to take seriously the humanness of Christ. Yet in his revisiting of these issues from Tertullian to Barth and Praxeas to Irving, what is proffered does not degenerate into mere parrot-like repetition of past definitions.

By taking us immediately into a discussion of the Virgin Birth of Christ, MacLeod challenges the contemporary insistence that Christology "from above" is impossible. He takes the record in the Gospels at face value and follows their own pattern in introducing Jesus in this way. This follows through into chapters which explore the pre-existence of Christ and his deity. "The Jesus of History" takes us across "Lessing's Ditch" to the fact that the early church had no significant problems in accepting that Jesus was divine. This approach obviously takes the author into conflict with Bultmann and his scepticism

at this critical point. The final chapter in this first section of the work deals with "The Christ of Faith" and brings us right up to date with contemporary issues, interacting constructively, for example, with the Christology of John MacArthur in the area of eternal Sonship.

The humanity of Christ becomes the focus as we are taken into a discussion of the incarnation. We are helpfully warned of a mere scholastic approach to such significant truth and reminded of the need for a true understanding of this doctrine to be suffused with faith and love. In this and following chapters, most of the major Christological heresies from the early church are surveyed both in their original expression and also in the different forms in which they have surfaced at different times in church history.

The treatment of *kenosis* from the second chapter of Philippians brings out the fine balance between exegesis and theological formulation, warning against popular expressions of doctrine which are not adequately supported by the textual evidence they claim.

The penultimate chapter brings us into the struggle of Gethsemane and the final chapter to the unashamed exclusiveness of Christ as the only Saviour as he is presented in the New Testament.

It is impossible to read this work without being conscious of the much publicised circumstances which formed a backdrop to its writing (something to which the author alludes obliquely in his preface.) At the same time it is impossible not to acknowledge that this is a work which commends itself for its thoroughness and orthodoxy, combined with a sense of reverence and awe. Professor MacLeod is insightful and incisive in the way he deals with recent and contemporary critical scholarship and leads, not just to a fresh

endorsement of historic evangelical Christology, but to a sense of holy adoration in the presence of such a glorious Saviour.

The closing epilogue acknowledges that the canon of theological reflection is never closed. Each generation is faced with fresh issues which demand renewed deliberation. The church can only be grateful to this professor of theology for the way in which he brings the timeless light of Christ to shine into the darkness of a modern world.

Mark G. Johnston

The Acts of the Apostles, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary

Ben Witherington III

Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1998, 874pp., £19.99

As Don Carson noted in his 1993 edition of *New Testament Commentary Survey*, "The Book of Acts is still not particularly well served by commentaries". The shelves of many ministers' libraries probably bear this out. In the age of the mega-commentary this one will fill quite a large space, and it will be space well-filled. As a *Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* particular attention is paid to the background of Acts, its relationship to literary forms of the day, and the way Luke selects and fashions his material to clarify the Christian faith for Theophilus and establish him in it. In a brief, fascinating *Foreword* Witherington says it is his belief that Acts "was a document written to be read aloud, and the author attended to his writing so that what he had written could be rhetorically effective when read and heard by the first listener or listeners." From time to time the commentary draws attention to Luke's use of *paranomasia*, and seems to delight

in word-play itself, so that not only are the section headings frequently alliterative, but 9:1-19a is entitled *The Assaulting of Saul*, and 25:1-12 *An Appealing Time with Festus!*

There is a thorough *Introduction* of 100 pages, half of which is taken up with *Acts and the Question of Genre* and *Luke-Acts and Rhetoric*. The final section of the *Introduction, Acts and Hermeneutics*, raises the important issue of what in Acts is normative for the church today, "Luke does not encourage us simply to ... assume that all the early church did and said should be replicated today." The text of Acts is not printed in the commentary; it appears to be taken for granted that readers have their English text before them. There is no close word by word exegesis. The commentary is broken up by excursions called *A Closer Look* – 25 in all, which are printed in smaller type. There is also another excursus called, *Chronological Comparison – Paul's Letters and Acts* and two appendices, the second being a substantial discussion of *Salvation and Health in Christian Antiquity*. Some of the *Closer Looks* are particularly interesting; for example *Luke's Use of Sources in Acts* considers the lodgings used by Paul and Luke, "Lodging is important... because it provided a venue where Christians could meet, eat, pray, preach and relate stories... these residences may well have become places where oral and written Christian traditions were not just passed on but also collected." There are also illustrations at various points in the text and a map of Paul's missionary journeys.

While Witherington presents forceful arguments for the historicity of Luke's account, it is disappointing to find him say, "Luke could have made a mistake in his dating of Theudas. This must be

frankly admitted." If Luke was not only a careful historian, but also writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit such a concession is not necessary. Some of the more theological statements, 4:12 for example, receive rather meagre treatment. In view of the importance of a verse like this for the contemporary church one might have expected a more thorough discussion than he gives.

It is a pity to have to sound any negative note because there is a great deal that is informative and stimulating in this commentary. Richard Bauckham, on the back cover, is quoted as saying, "It is full of fresh insights..." and this is certainly the case. Note, for example, the suggestion that Ethiopia (not Rome) represents the "end of the earth". So chapter 8 takes the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth even before the conversion of Saul. Students and pastors will find considerable benefit from this commentary.

Paul E. Brown

Strategy of the Spirit

J Philip Hogan and the growth of the Assemblies of God Worldwide 1960-1990
Everett A. Wilson

Paternoster Press, 214pp., Price £6.99

Gordon Fee once joked that where he grew up the phrase "Pentecostal Theologian" was considered an oxymoron. There is also something of a paradox about the title of this highly readable account of AOG growth. Yet like Lloyd-Jones' definition of preaching as "logic, on fire," there is a compelling resonance to the title *Strategy of the Spirit*, it reminds me of the dynamic redirection of Paul by the Spirit which opened Europe up for the gospel. This exciting historical account is built

around the imposing figure of J. Philip Hogan who was Director of Missions for AOG during the three decades covered by this book. Everett Witson writes: "An AOG national church is listed as the largest or the second largest Protestant denomination in almost a quarter of the countries of the world, making it one of the most effective vehicles for extending the historical Christian faith in our time." What then was the strategy? One factor is visionary leadership; little of lasting value is accomplished without key people. Hogan was a man who discerned the time, grasped opportunities and was open to the prevailing wind of the Spirit. Wilson describes him as "A man of strong convictions and courageous action, Hogan was not afraid to face new challenges and adapt to change." The second factor is the use of an effective model of church planting. The continuing presence of foreign missionaries was not regarded as indispensable, instead the AOG missions operated on "indigenous" church principles. This meant working hard at enabling local believers to fulfill roles of responsibility. This trust invested in local leadership and the granting of permission for the AOG churches of each country to establish their own distinctive identity has served to promote good stable grassroots growth. A further factor is the emphasis on the movement's application to a single task: Christian conversion and spiritual development. Here is a group that has been especially good at reaching lost people. The book also honestly faces the scandals which mar its history, the downfalls of Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Baker etc. are analyzed and the dangers of the abuse of power noted. This was a period when the AOG movement had its fingers burnt. Jimmy Swaggart in particular had a considerable missionary network. The

lesson that no-one should be allowed to be so big that they can operate without proper accountability was learnt, albeit belatedly.

Mention is also made of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul South Korea, and its phenomenal growth. Planted by Pastor David Yonngi Cho in a shack in the aftermath of the Korean War, it has now grown to a congregation of 700,000 which fills a stream of Sunday services in the largest (Protestant) ecclesiastical edifice on our planet. There is no critical analysis of this often controversial congregation or of its rather idiosyncratic senior pastor. This is a book that celebrates rather than dissects a movement which has come of age and is clearly here to stay.

Here is a book that demands that we do not ignore nor lightly dismiss a group that now numbers 30 million members worldwide. This account of bold initiatives in virgin territory, perseverance despite misunderstanding or rejection by mainstream Christianity, cruel setbacks and great suffering dispels many of the accusations of froth and bubble often directed at Pentecostalism. Facing the challenge of mission in the 21st Century and beyond we could do far worse than be informed by a group that has made such an energetic impact on the last quarter of the 20th Century.

John Woods

The Inclusive Language Debate (A Plea for Realism)

D.A. Carson

IVP and Baker, 1998, 197pp+notes and indexes, £9.99

In this book Don Carson is trying to shed light (not heat; there is plenty of that already) on the vexed issue of putting

“people” instead of “men” in Bible translations—and lots of other similar changes. The New RSV uses so-called “inclusive” language (i.e. language that does not exclude women by the way it refers to people or by the use of he/him/his when it could be a woman), and an inclusive language NIV was published in Britain, with an American version in the pipeline. However, a storm of protest broke in the US, which led to the formulation of some essentially anti-inclusive language translation principles at Colorado Springs; and now the NIV translation committee is revising its inclusive language guidelines, presumably in a slightly “conservative” direction.

Carson is a very interesting man to read on such a topic because not only does he know a lot about linguistics and translation, but he is ideologically right in the middle on this one: he takes a clear complementarian rather than egalitarian view of male/female roles, yet is more than a little sympathetic, on linguistic grounds, to inclusive language translations.

First he describes the crisis and then sets out the NIV translation committee principles (that led to the NIVI) as well as the Colorado Springs principles. After this, we come to the meat: thirty pages on what translation inevitably involves because of the nature of language and the differences between languages. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book. We discover that you cannot translate anything and keep “the same” words: “... it is impossible to map the words of one language onto the words of another” (p. 48). We learn here and elsewhere in the book that a word’s referent is not the same as its meaning—so in James 5:17 *anthropos* refers to a man (Elijah) but does not mean “man” as opposed to woman, but “human being”. We learn that a “gloss”, or translation

equivalent (i.e. a one or two-word way of expressing a Greek or Hebrew word in English) is not the same as the *meaning* of the word. We also learn in chapter 4, the other really linguistically meaty part of the book, that different languages have enormously varying number systems and gender systems—i.e. the way the gender of words in one language function is not the same as in another language. Thus the Hebrew word for Spirit, *RUACH*, is feminine and is treated as feminine a number of times in the Old Testament; but Hebrew and English do not have the same gender system, so there is no need to use the English feminine third singular pronoun. His central thesis is summed up on p. 98: “The argument that attaches a particular formal equivalent in gender assignment to faithfulness to the Word of God is profoundly mistaken in principle. It understands neither translation nor gender systems.”

Carson then applies these facts of language to the two conflicting sets of principles, and comes out *largely* in favour of the inclusive language ones. After this he applies his approach to various Biblical passages, asks if the English language really is changing and pleads for Christians, even when they disagree with one another, not to do so in a manner that puts all sensible non-Christians off the faith by the irrationality and condemnation-by-association employed.

Not only is a vast amount of light shed on the inclusive language debate, but the insights into the limitations of *any* translation are calculated to take 98% of the unhelpful steam out of the whole translation issue—apart from textual questions, of course!

Rev. Christopher Bennett
