

Reviews & Resources

The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the Twenty-first Century

by **Mary C Grey**

(Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000; ISBN 0 232 52319 3; 128pp; £9.95)

A new millennium is a time beloved of prophets, whether of doom or of hope. A new era invites reflection on the past and prediction of what is to come. The end of the last millennium saw no shortage of doom-laden predictions and apocalyptic movements from Waco to Japan, from Uganda to Seattle. From the rise of the Industrial Revolution to the dawn of the Space Age, we have seen hopes of unlimited human progress dimmed by the high cost to an earth increasingly ravaged and depleted of resources and a population divided by obscene inequalities. As the third millennium begins, time is money and is measured in nanoseconds. So a book which offers a measured reflection on the state of the world and of humanity in the light of Isaiah's proclamation of the Jubilee is a welcome resource.

Like the writers of the book of Isaiah, Mary Grey focuses her reflection squarely in the social, cultural, political and economic context of the world. But if there are apocalyptic overtones in her book it is apocalypse as revelation, not as doom, where, through a rich analysis of Isaiah's spiritual vision, she offers a resource for unveiling God's purpose in the coming age.

Her approach is founded on the feminine sense of cycles and rhythms, of seasons of dying and rebirth, echoed in the liturgy. Through scriptural analysis, current affairs, literature and the insights of eco-feminism, we are invited to pray over and consider our next step. The failures of the twentieth century in terms of justice and wholeness of living are considered as devastating as its achievements are seen as

monumental. Both individually and collectively, we are invited to consider the past and dream for the future.

Quoting from the American theologian Maria Harris, Grey proclaims: "The demand is liberation, the emphasis is connectedness, the corrective is suffering, the power is imagination, and the vocation is ... the repair of the world". A tall order, perhaps, in a short book, but the challenge and the invitation are as profound as they are simple, founded on Grey's own powerful theological reflection and her experience in founding the charity Wells for India.

This book would work well both as a tool for individual prayer and as a resource for group reflection. It maintains a sound balance between Scripture and lived experience, prayer and analysis, and builds bridges between the sometimes estranged worlds of spirituality and serious theology. It is a gentle and welcome invitation to wiser thinking.

Gemma Simmonds

Sister Gemma Simmonds is a Roman Catholic sister of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the chaplain of Heythrop College in the University of London.

Varieties of Unbelief

by **John Habgood** (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000; ISBN 0-232-52320-7; p/b, 148pp + ix; £8.95)

John Habgood's retirement as Archbishop of York in 1996 was a disquieting prospect. He was, perhaps, one of the last in an impressive line of episcopal theologians during the twentieth century. They were passionate about giving quality time to academic rigour, as a basis for critical public engagement with the prevailing culture and its correlative relationship to the Christian tradition. This, they believed, is the job of a bishop or archbishop. Today, we must look beyond the Church of England to find a comparable figure.

The publication of Habgood's 1999 Bampton lectures confirms the

author's continuing capacity to analyse the present cultural climate and to comment upon it with incision and clarity. It also serves to demonstrate that, if a rigorous pursuit of theology is to have any meaning in the *public* arena, it must begin there with the questions and situations that arise out of the present crisis of meaninglessness. He resists the seductive temptation to identify casually a past "dark age" as the genesis of our present condition: he is too aware of the complexities of history to fall into that particular trap. Rather, he recognises that a fully synoptic catholicity is as much a promise for the future as it is a gift from the past.

Habgood's analysis recognises that belief – or more precisely unbelief – is contingent upon the complexities of the human person and the composition of human society. Just as the data and traditions of Christianity will always be, to some extent, evolving; so people's thinking and feeling about their own refusal to believe will be similarly fluid. This calls for a mutual recognition of vulnerability between Church and culture, of eschewing dogmatic certainty and polemic, and embarking upon the more risky and humane enterprise of acknowledging that neither believer nor non-believer can make claims for themselves which are beyond interrogation, ridicule or crucifixion.

Of course, this speaks directly – and, I suspect, uncomfortably – to some of the current missiological concerns of the Church and other agencies. If Christians make universal claims about their faith, they can only do so with integrity by acknowledging that these claims are limited by a human and historical perspective. There is a fragility about our knowing and believing because it must be open to historical scrutiny. This suggests that the symbolism and language of belief will both create an historical stability (as opposed to rigidity) and ensure that the believing community is always willing to have a conversation with itself and those outside. This, says Habgood, is a model of accepting vulnerability without being paralysed by it. For it poses a consequent challenge to unbelievers who also have their symbols and language, which are equally vulnerable, and which do not always relate with historical or scientific security to the happenings upon which they are meant to be based.

This book is a compelling argument for a correlation between passionate belief and critical realism

as the basis for the Church's engagement with an unbelieving culture. It is an invitation to believer and unbeliever to embark upon a common quest for truth, and to be surprised by the future. For passionate belief is not incompatible with generosity and openness any more than critical scrutiny denies the need for silent awe and adoration in the face of an incomprehensible mystery.

Simon Reynolds

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A History of Pastoral Care

edited by G. R. Evans
(Cassell, 2000; ISBN 0-225-66840-8; 476pp; £49.95)

This is a time when encyclopaedic volumes seem to appear with alarming regularity, providing students and practitioners with comprehensive overviews of a subject. Here we are offered a guide to pastoral practice through Christian history. It, therefore, updates and supplements the earlier standard surveys: JT McNeill (1951) and Clebsch and Jaeckle (1964). It also sits most usefully alongside Woodward and Pattison's *Reader in Pastoral Theology* (2000), which opens up current issues and practice. *A History of Pastoral Care* should thus be warmly welcomed as providing a mine of historical information that is a necessary background for contemporary practice. It will also be welcomed by historians as highlighting a strand of Christian history that is usually lost sight of. It should be on the shelves of any theological library as well as being of interest to specialists and researchers in the field.

Such an undertaking was a bold venture. The scope was potentially boundless, both in terms of variety of context and of material (despite some paucity of evidence in places). It must have been very difficult to know what to put in and leave out. It almost seems niggardly to criticise, but this may in fact point to a major weakness. It would have been good to have seen more material on the Eastern tradition and on the American experience. There is also only a brief acknowledgement of the African and Asian Church. The problem would seem to be the approach to editorial selection and control. It is not quite clear whether the authors were writing to a brief or

whether the selection of topics was more eclectic. There are clear historical clusters: Bible, early, mediaeval, early-modern and contemporary; but within these groupings there are foundation essays, essays on very particular issues and some that take up themes like the family, that cross historical boundaries. It would have helped if there had been some deliberate signposting as to how it all fitted together, providing a context for what is, on the whole, an excellent and informative collection of essays by distinguished authors.

It is, however, a joy to be invited into areas of which one knew very little and to have familiar ground freshly illuminated. Not surprisingly, perhaps, as my field, it was the contemporary material that felt weakest, not least in the sometimes surprising bibliographical omissions. The indexing also leaves something to be desired, even if entries are to be limited to names and topics in the main text. Practical theology is essentially a dialogic process and one of the values of such a volume is to see how the historian perceives the tradition out of which one is working. As well as providing us with a useful historical compendium, it can also valuably contribute to the on-going debate about the nature and practice of pastoral theology.

Paul Ballard

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The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms

by Donald McKim (Westminster John Knox Press; reissue September 2000; ISBN 0 664 22089 4; 320pp; £35 / p/b £14.99)

A requirement of my present post is that one should be "theologically literate". It amuses me that the Oxford Dictionary offers us a literate person as being someone "admitted to Anglican orders without university degree". You don't have to go to university to be literate! One's college teachers might not agree, but at least they occasionally write books which are helpful when away from the *alma mater*.

Dictionaries and great reference tomes are fascinating and useful things and, I suspect, they are the stuff of literacy. Knowing where to look for the information is often as

important as having that body of knowledge in one's mind.

As both an educationalist and a journalist I know literacy to be a strange phenomenon. There are so many different worlds out there, so many areas of life that we touch upon, but are not yet part of. The experts talk among themselves, we occasionally pick up crumbs from their tables. Where can we go for enlightenment, for encouragement, for greater knowledge?

From a cappella to Zwinglianism, via *manducatio impiorum*, the reader of *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* can find some 6,000 terms in theology and related subjects. Whether it's to do with biblical studies, church history, philosophy, ethics, ministry, liturgy, spirituality or the social sciences, indeed any topic that impinges on theological thought or practice, it is likely to be covered.

Single volume, sole author works of reference are, by their very nature, likely to be limited in their scope. McKim, Professor of Theology at Memphis Theological Seminary, manages a difficult task with flair. His work is suitably wide-ranging, thoroughly ecumenical, includes derivations and helpful references to primary sources and as such is a useful, user-friendly work of reference.

John Lloyd

John Lloyd is an editor at Bible Society.

John McCarthy's Bible Journey

(Audiotape from BBC Radio Collection, BBC Worldwide Ltd; 2000. Running time: 5 hours 35 minutes. ISBN 0-563-55324-3; £13.99)

This talking book provides a welcome chance to hear in its entirety *John McCarthy's Bible Journey*. It was first broadcast in twelve parts on Radio 4 between November 1999 and March 2000. McCarthy tells us he read the Bible twice-over as a hostage in Beirut. "Despite having no great faith" he hoped for encouragement and "mental stimulation". Reading it didn't change his life, but it did leave him "with a mind full of questions". Who wrote it? When and why was it written? How historically accurate is it?

These questions are brought alive through people, stories and evocative sounds. There is a stronger sense of place than of journeying. Whilst we are taken to airports, up

mountains and in a bullet-proof car on the West Bank, what is more memorable are the places. McCarthy takes us to the expected sites: the Holy Sepulchre Church, the Wailing Wall and the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. But it is the less expected locations that are particularly intriguing, such as the oldest street in the world in Damascus, the barber's shop in the last remaining Aramaic speaking community in the world, and the tomb of Oscar Romero in San Salvador.

Alongside the sense of place, are a number of strong interviewees, including Desmond Tutu, Tony Campolo, Tony Benn, Lea Rabin and Terry Waite. A smattering of academics provide conflicting answers to the question whether it really happened. This question of historicity dominates many of the programmes, and eclipses other approaches to interpreting the Bible. This is a shame as it means that there are number of strands of recent biblical scholarship and research that are largely ignored. The result is that at times the biblical narratives become objects to be dissected rather than relished.

The story of David and Bathsheba is a fine exception. Here imaginative production brings the story alive.

The strong sense of place, lively interviewees and memorable stories make up for the somewhat confusing structure of the series as a whole. We leap, for example, from an unforgettable interview with a Jesuit priest working in San Salvador, to the statue of Cromwell holding a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other. But McCarthy has an easy voice to listen to and he holds some of the bizarre juxtapositions together.

Overall, this is rich radio.

The production team, Norman Winter, Abigail Saxon, Roger Childs, and McCarthy himself are to be congratulated on a memorable series. Let's hope that more of the best of religious radio finds its way into the BBC Radio Collection.

Jolyon Mitchell

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