

# Reviews & Resources.



## The Spirit of Britain – A Narrative History of the Arts

by Roy Strong (Hutchinson 1999;  
ISBN 1-85681-534-X; 708pp; £40)

## Art and Soul – Signposts for Christians In the Arts

by Hilary Brand & Adrienne Chaplin  
(Solway 1999; ISBN 1-900507-82-X;  
224pp; £9.99)

## The Art of God and the Religions of Art

by David Thistlethwaite (Solway 1998;  
ISBN 1-900507-78-1; 178pp; £19.99)

## Art in Action – Toward a Christian Aesthetic

by Nicholas Wolterstorff (Solway 1997;  
ISBN 1-90050-756-0; 244pp; £4.99)

Daily ploughing the lonely furrow in my studio, the opportunity to consider what others are thinking about what I do is a welcome one.

The arts are so central to our lives. Christianity, too, can make that claim. Both have an all-pervasive influence, often denied, but undeniable in my opinion. What a relief it is, therefore, to find my views backed in such a brilliant and scholarly way by none other than Sir Roy Strong.

His masterly one-volume, one-writer survey of the arts in Britain from Roman times to the present comes from someone who has spent his life looking at, thinking about and experiencing the "essence of our civilisation". Through this beautifully illustrated overview of Europe's response to both the classical and Christian traditions readers can quickly enter into the sumptuous world of the arts in all their fullness and glory.

Historically it can be demonstrated that Christianity is at the very core of the Western arts,

says Strong. Today, however, this is being challenged.

To quote A N Wilson, "Our forebears had the Bible and The Pilgrim's Progress. We have Stephen Hawking and Delia Smith." Strong says, "While writing [this book] I became increasingly aware of the fragility of that inheritance. The thought premises to which the vast majority of this volume relates have either been eroded or else are in the process of erosion. Once lost they will not be easily put back ..."

And that brings us to the next group of titles.

*Art and Soul* is a great encouragement. Here is a practical guide that is peppered with sensibly applied experience and helpful quotations. "Christian art, in our view," write the authors, "is art which is produced from a thoroughly Christian worldview." The book entertainingly and most adequately tells us what that entails.

*The Art of God* deals more directly with the visual arts. Produced in conjunction with Bible Society's Open Book project, this book discusses more overtly Roy Strong's emerging tale of loss: Thistlethwaite looks at "that time and place which most thinks it has escaped from religion: the secular West in the twentieth century."

The place of art in the religious dynamic of life is sensibly discussed. In a book that is well illustrated with specific examples of artists and artworks, the writer has some interesting things to say. We may not agree with all of his conclusions, but he is certainly making scholarly points that are worthy of consideration and discussion.

The inescapable belief that art must lead to truth brings Thistlethwaite to the conclusion that we do "not have to go along with the confinements of the present age ... radically strange as [Christian] values may sometimes seem, one day they will be vindicated."

In *Art in Action* Nicholas Wolterstorff argues from his Christian and academic perspective that this day has dawned. Art has a legitimate, indeed central, place in everyday life, seen from

an authentically Christian standpoint. No longer must we tinker with current thinking and just go in for theological interpretation: works of art are instruments and objects of action. Here is proposed a functional approach to art.

Art must be appreciated in action, in the street, in the church, he suggests. That much I certainly agree with, but, oh, how glad I am that I've left behind those lecture theatres that Wolterstorff and his like inhabit! His "art" is the densely written word and ideas expressed too often in jargon, and that's a medium I cannot appreciate.

I'll get back to my studio, encouraged that what I'm doing seems to be a legitimate expression of my Christian life. It is not a mere tool for evangelism, but a true and real expression of my God-given human life. With fellow artists from all disciplines I can work with the hope and a new understanding that I might just be making a worthwhile contribution to the kingdom.

Cilla Lloyd

*Cilla Lloyd is an artist printmaker.*

## The Pastoral Nature of Theology: An Upholding Presence

by R. John Elford (Cassell 1999;  
ISBN 0 264 67490 1; 175 pp)

John Elford, Pro-Rector of Liverpool Hope University and Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral has thrown his hat into an important current theological debate. As a former parish priest and lecturer in social theology at Manchester University, he is well placed to do so.

The thrust of this book is that theology is essentially and creatively linked to the pastoral concerns and challenges of the present. Indeed, theological understanding arises out of the continuing and renewing dialogue which asks, in David Jenkins' words, "What does it mean to live Christianly today?" The theological process is one of critical correlation between the wisdom of the Christian past and the

normative story of Jesus in its biblical context and the demands, constraints and opportunities of our actual living. Within the history of interpretation we discover and rediscover the Gospel.

Elford has thereby firmly placed himself within the spectrum of one of the important theological discussions of our time. Christian practice is not simply applied theory. We do not know Christian truth and then seek to carry it out. Rather, we find Christ in the midst of life present to us in mercy and grace, in judgement and challenge. This, he argues, has been the form of the biblical faith from the beginning. In our time it has been the special gift of Liberation Theology.

At the same time, Elford has made his point in the context of Practical or Pastoral Theology. Thus, he has also, more implicitly than by extended argument, made a statement about the structure of the theological enterprise. He is reluctant to want to talk about Practical and Pastoral Theology alongside other theological activity such as Bible or Systematics. All theological activity is pastoral, engaged in some way with "the upholding presence". But is it true that a separate subject area is to denigrate or isolate the practical? Maybe it is equally true that what is everybody's business is nobody's responsibility. By having an explicit place for the practical we can ensure that all are reminded of the common task. In this he is somewhat dismissive of others who would take a similar basic stance but who find it also useful to define Practical Theology as a proper theological discipline.

Having established the nature of theology he illustrates, in general terms without seeking to be exhaustive or up to date, how this dialogic pattern might work out in three fields: the personal and pastoral care, the social and communal, and the ethical in a changing world. The strength of Elford's approach is his recognition that contemporary world-views, such as Marxism or pragmatism or utilitarianism, may have very different understandings of the person from the Christian tradition. But in the process of correlation there is both comparison and

contrast, seeking for agreement and the challenges of difference. In a not well-thought-through passage he points to the need to relate similarly to other world religions. For the Christian, however, this process is rooted in faithfulness to Christ.

The result is a useful contribution to the current state of literature on Pastoral Theology, striking a particular theme in a sustained way. For some this complex problem may seem somewhat arcane. Yet it is important since the way in which the theological task is understood expresses and informs the nature of Christian discipleship. In the context of the Open Book such an approach reminds us that "the story" is always told in a living context which itself hears it for the first time and incorporates it into its own story, thereby making a new story – yet one in which the living presence can still be heard.

**Paul Ballard**

*The Revd Paul Ballard is Head of the Religious and Theological Studies Department at Cardiff University.*

## Canon and Mission

by **H Dan Beeby (Trinity Press International; ISBN: 1-56338-258-X; 117pp)**

Dan Beeby is one of the elder statesmen of the Gospel and Culture movement. The long and wide-ranging experience on which he can draw for Christian reflection illuminates every chapter.

*Canon and Mission* sounds like a work of academic theology, but it is not academic in style (not a single footnote). It is wonderfully readable and a truly significant book. One of the key emphases in the Gospel and Culture movement has been the importance of embracing the biblical story (or worldview) as a whole and consciously, proactively, living out of it in every realm of life. Beeby does just this for our use of Scripture. It will probably be an uncomfortable read.

Beeby is, of course, right when he comments that "Each part of the church ... tends to build upon a selected text and its close relatives or, more disastrous still, builds upon fashion, prejudice, or ideology and then decorates the resulting structure with texts subjectively and arbitrarily chosen" (p 6). If we read the Bible as a unified whole (i.e. canonically), we then cannot easily escape those inner critiques and self-correcting tensions that act to preserve us from the dangers of imbalance, single-issue fanaticism and heresy (p 24). None of

this can ever be easy and we need all the help we can get. In chapter two Beeby gives us "eight" (I count nine!) ways of seeing the Bible as a unity, but underlying them all, for Beeby, is mission (from creation to new creation) that proclaims the lordship of Christ over all of life.

He expounds Scripture in ways that make even the very familiar speak afresh to our situation today. And all the time he illuminates it richly from his own personal history in mission. The story of his encounter with Exodus when teaching in Taiwan is particularly moving – and somewhat unnerving. This is enough for one short book, but Beeby still has more for us. He addresses one of today's pressing issues: our relationship in mission to those of other faiths. Again, his canonical framework with its inbuilt tensions and critiques prevents us from forgetting, for example, either the finality of Christ or the presence of God in the nations and world he has created.

There is rich Christian wisdom in these pages. God has given us some wonderful elders. I, for one, am very glad that I have had the opportunity to see and imitate their faith.

**Arthur Jones**

*Dr Arthur Jones is Research Consultant for Curriculum Development to the Christian Schools' Trust.*

## Friendship Matters

by **David Spriggs & Darrell Jackson (ISBN 1 85999 229 3)**

## Man to Man, Friendship and Faith

by **Steven Croft (ISBN 1 85999 308 7)**

## Wake Up to Work, Friendship and Faith in the Workplace

by **Geoff Shattock (ISBN 1 85999 309 5)**

## Sharing the Salt, making Friends with Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus

by **Ida Glaser & Shaylesh Raja (ISBN 1 85999 307 9)**

**(Relating Good News series; Scripture Union 1999)**

Eating together is at the heart of friendship, particularly in Asian cultures, hence, *Sharing the Salt* is about making friends with Sikhs,

Muslims and Hindus. Rajah, reared a Hindu, and Glaser, of Jewish-Gentile parents, tell stories – funny, moving, but all of them a window into a multi-cultural world. They provide us with an Asian perspective on Ruth, Abraham, Peter and Jesus. It may surprise some that Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims will be delighted if we share our faith with them. The book doesn't dodge the issue of evangelism; it explores it with integrity. We are reminded that we will never discover the wavelength of another's receptivity unless we are courteous, and listen. I wish every British Christian would read it!

*Man to Man* is "written for men who don't normally read books" and it's written well. Croft draws on his own ministry in leading a successful group known as "Real men don't go to church (or do they?)". He is persuaded that groups are the "way in" for men. Each of the chapters includes a Bible passage with questions to prompt thought and discussion. An appendix provides a useful guide on how to make the most of the book with a group of men.

*Wake up to Work* is made up of five "files" and thirty one "memos" on friendship and faith in the workplace. They include a variety of stories, each a "case in point" and we are invited to be "interactive" in different ways with the issues raised. The Damascus, Emmaus and Jericho commuter routes can be tough learning experiences. Shattock's dry humour makes for many a smile on the way.

People frequently find faith in the context of friendship but to use friendship with the intent of persuading them to become Christians begs some very serious questions. I am glad that *Friendship Matters* affirms friendship as "something about genuineness, valuing the other person, wanting to be with them for their own sake," but it left me ill at ease with its approach to friendship in the pursuit of evangelism. At times I felt a touch patronised. Are Spriggs and Jackson struggling too hard to explain issues simply?

Glaser and Raja sum up the meaning of "relating good news" (the series title): "The friendship of God towards us is the gospel. As we model his friendship, people will come to know him."

A small, but important, quibble might be allowed: *Man to Man* and *Friendship Matters* both bear covers with left-handed handshakes. That may please some Scouts, but such a

transposition of the photographic image could actually be offensive to some ...

**Barrie Cooke**

*The Revd Barrie Cooke is a Methodist Minister and a former Head of Consultancy at Bible Society.*

## Conversations with God: Fifty Dramatised Dialogues To Bring The Old Testament Alive

by **Sharon Swain (SPCK, 1999; ISBN 0-281-05151-8; 142pp; £6.99)**

The Old Testament is portrayed in this delightful, easy-read book, as a two-way relationship between God and his people. Fifty short dramatised "conversations", each one based on Old Testament passages, explore this basic relational theme. This will be an excellent resource book for those leading services, youth groups, workshops etc who are looking for a simple and effective dramatic way of engaging listeners, stimulating thought and deepening faith. The conversations look at some of the envisaged exchanges between the Lord and his people and help to bring alive some of the Old Testament passages and echo our own relationship with God.

## The Story Goes... the Stories of the Torah

by **Nico ter Linden (translated J Bowden) (SCM 1999; ISBN 0-334-02764-0; 296pp; £14.95)**

Nico ter Linden studied theology in the Netherlands and America. After working as a hospital chaplain in Nijmegen, in 1977 he became minister of the Westerkerk in Amsterdam, where he remained until 1995. His sermons, retelling the stories of the Bible in a brilliant but unconventional way, packed the church. They became a television series, then were published in book format and have now been translated brilliantly and seamlessly into English by John Bowden.

Since retiring in 1995 ter Linden has devoted himself to writing and began *The Story Goes...*, which became a bestseller on publication in the Netherlands in 1997. The book contains over 70 stories from the Old Testament. Each short story, picking up from where the previous one left

off, forms a continuous narrative.

A gifted writer of stories, his style is lucid, engaging, imaginative, and dynamic. Here we have a book that deals with the impact of Old Testament theology on modern day spirituality, written by a scholar who has read the Jewish texts, understands the Hebrew mind, and thought deeply about the theological intentions of the narrators of the stories of the Torah.

At the same time, he shows a keen understanding of the human dilemma, of faith and doubt, strength and weakness, courage and fear. We meet the patriarchs and walk with them, seeing their struggles as the narrators' contrast the way of faith against the way of paganism: Abraham versus Lot; Isaac versus Ishmael; Jacob versus Esau etc. In almost every story one encounters fresh insights and challenges into one's own relationship with God.

There are, however, aspects to his writing that will court controversy in some circles. For example, he gives little authority to the Genesis account of creation, other than to ask if anyone has ever fantasised about God "as beautifully and as profoundly as the people of Israel". And yet, paradoxically, he goes on to draw out the theology of the double creation account in a fresh and convincing way.

## The Story Goes... Mark's Story and Matthew's Story

by Nico ter Linden (translated  
J Bowden) (SCM 1999;  
ISBN 0-334- 02765-9; 290pp)

Continuing in the same rich vein as his first volume, each short chapter of ter Linden's second book covers a few verses from Matthew and Mark's gospels.

The words are interspersed with background notes, links with the Old Testament, the other gospel accounts and much more. Every section is told as a story in an unforgettable way. Here are the stories, the gospel narratives, told in powerful and compelling ways that engage with the heart and the mind. ter Linden is in no doubt as to the essential narrative intention of the gospels, "Mark isn't a reporter, he's a storyteller and he puts his account of Jesus together in compact form. His stories are like

OXO cubes."

With a renewed appreciation of the place of story to human life ter Linden has provided two excellent pieces of writing for all who take their theology and spirituality seriously, who value storytelling and who will appreciate finding a refreshing, and at times challenging, read.

Read these volumes and look forward to the next ones.

**Roy Searle**

*The Revd Roy Searle is one of the leaders of the Northumbria Community and is the Director of Open Book Storytellers.*

## Faith Comes By Hearing – a resource for churches

Do you remember when you were a child and someone would read you a story? Can you remember how you felt part of that story as it unfolded? Most of us enjoyed those times and often the stories and their meanings are still part of our memories. As we get older the veracity of the story becomes important to us.

The greatest true story ever written is the collection of books we know as the Bible. It is a book that can inspire, entertain, teach and help us to understand God better. However, Bible Society research tells us that even amongst regular churchgoers nearly 40% seldom or never read the Bible. Why is it then that so few people know and enjoy this book?

I don't know the complete answer to that question but I do know it is important to help people find their own way into the Scriptures. Over the last four years *Faith Comes By Hearing* has been helping to do this. It has given people the pleasure of hearing the New Testament read to them allowing Scripture to become a natural part of their everyday lives. It is exciting that during this time it has been used in more than 5000 churches, throughout all denominations, in England and Wales. People from five to eighty years old have benefited from listening. It has been enjoyed by busy professionals as well as those out of work or on the edge of society. *Faith Comes By Hearing* is helping provide the New Testament to today's Christians in a way that will encourage them to want to make

God a central part of their lives.

The idea of *Faith Comes By Hearing* is simple. The minister or leader of the church gives everyone the opportunity to take part in the programme. Individuals or families choose which version they want to listen to. This could be one of the English versions or one of eighty foreign languages. People then listen to the tapes during their normal day; with the children, while ironing, in the car, on the production line, wherever they are. They also know that others in their fellowship are listening to roughly the same piece of Scripture.

Ministers tell me that when this happens the talk on Sunday morning veers away from "What's for Sunday lunch?" to "Did you hear what Paul said to Timothy?" From the many comments and stories that come back to us, it seems that *Faith Comes By Hearing* has succeeded in opening up the New Testament to people who have not dared open the Bible before. It has also deepened the enjoyment of others who have known and enjoyed this book for many years.

A minister from Wales commented "I believe the programme made a real impact on those who listened, both in relation to an increase in knowledge and an encouragement to read more of the Bible. It caused some, who are new in faith, to think and ask serious questions and have a realisation that God is not afraid of questions and that the Bible is dynamic and true."

**Lesley Whelan**

*Mrs Lesley Whelan is supervisor of Bible Society's Faith Comes By Hearing programme. For more details of the scheme, please ring 0500 555805.*