**The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism**
Kathleen C. Boone
SCM Press, London, 1999; 137pp., £9.50; ISBN 0 334 00117 X

The recent spate in the growth of so-called 'fundamentalist' groups in Christianity and other religions has not surprisingly led to a number of critical and analytical works discussing the phenomenon. Kathleen Boone writes in a North American context, and her concern is largely with Fundamentalism as it is found in Protestantism in that continent. Her treatment is, as often in similar works, a mixture of true and false observation. She rightly recognises that the characteristic of Fundamentalism is its stress on the authority of Scripture literally interpreted. Her main argument is intended to show that in fact a particular interpretation of Scripture is developed especially by authority-figures: 'Fundamentalist pastoral theology fosters dictatorial leadership', which arms itself with the Bible as the infallible defence for its interpretations. Thus Fundamentalism presents a complex intermix between what Scripture commands and what the source of personal authority in the community may command – with the latter often disguised as the former. The text is not always taken literally: when the literal force is unacceptable (*e.g.* because it contradicts other scriptural teaching), then it is given a different interpretation.

The Fundamentalist answer to this type of criticism may be that a biblical passage has an objective meaning about which there can be no argument. The basis of Boone's counter-argument lies in the dismissal of the E.D. Hirsch type of interpretation, in which authority rests in the 'determinate meaning' of the text, in favour of the S. Fish type of interpretation which argues that authority lies in 'the collective determinations of the "interpretive community"'. But this means that the author's criticisms are in principle dependent on an unfinished controversy in literary criticism. The issue is a subtle one; and Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance is more defensible than is allowed here. Nevertheless, it leaves open the question of how the significance of a text is to be determined for a community.

Boone repeats some of the standard criticisms of Fundamentalism – such as the oddity of predicating inerrancy only to the (invisible) autographs and of not having an infallible interpretation of these lost originals. Hence the Fundamentalists must have agreed strategies of interpretation – especially to deal with contradictions in the text. Here Boone argues that dispensationalism provides a way of dealing with such contradictions. But she misjudges the position somewhat, first because she is looking largely at the North American scene, and secondly because she equates premillennialism with dispensationalism.

Boone rightly attacks the kind of approach which says in effect 'any interpretation of the text will do so long as it preserves inerrancy' even if it is a strained interpretation. She also devotes attention to the role of works like the Scofield Bible which in effect determine the interpretation of Scripture within certain circles; here she is ignorant of the way in which scholarly dispensationalism, as represented, for example, by Dallas Seminary, has

become increasingly self-critical and less tied to such traditional formulations. Although she commendably tries not to look at TV evangelists, she cannot altogether ignore the downfall of some of them, but reflects that Fundamentalism remains unscathed, because in fact the Bible remains the authority in the movement and not those who depart from it.

The basic issues in the debate continue much the same as they were. It is the question of whether the Bible can rightly be accepted as an infallible authority in religion. What Boone has done is to call attention to the question of the relation of the Bible to other kinds of authority and to point out the very real danger that in some circles a particular set of traditions, upheld and developed by human leaders, may replace the authority of the Bible. Boone thinks that this is inevitable, given her understanding of literary criticism. A better assessment would be that it is an inherent temptation which should and can be overcome.

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**Mission and Meaninglessness. The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder**
Peter Cotterell
SPCK, London, 1990; 332pp., £12.95; ISBN 0 281 04449 X

Peter Cotterell's 'major contribution to Christian missiology' (as this book is introduced by the publisher) is a wide-ranging review of the Christian mission and of Christian missions. Part One is primarily concerned with the theological basis for the Christian mission. Entitled 'Religion, Religions, and the Apparent Meaninglessness of Life', it takes as its starting point the apparent meaninglessness of life expounded in Ecclesiastes which is identified with the Buddhist concept of *dukkha*. A 'religion' is 'any coherent philosophical system which attempts to answer the fundamental questions', or in effect, to provide life with meaning. 'The Christian World-View' is outlined in a brief chapter (or is it, less ambitiously, 'a Christian's world-view'?) and it is maintained that 'fundamental and irreducible contradictions' exist among the world's religions. This leads to 'The Problem of Particularity', namely the difficulty of maintaining a belief in the uniqueness of Christianity when confronted with religious pluralism. The inclusivism of Karl Rahner and Hans Küng, the pluralism of John Hick and the 'traditional evangelical view' are rejected. The last, represented by J. Oswald Sanders and Dick Dowsett, is that salvation depends on an overt knowledge of Christ and that 'a lost eternity' awaits those who have not heard. A fourth view is developed as an evangelical alternative: 'that although salvation is not supplied by the non-Christian religions, still salvation may be found by those who are within them, through the threefold programme of an inward *Logos* illumination, general revelation, and the saving work of Christ.'

Part Two, 'Mission as Response to the Apparent Meaninglessness of Life', continues the examination of the theological basis by considering 'The Mission Theology of Matthew', 'The Human Disorder' and the doctrine of the

church. The last leads to a chapter on the Church Growth movement and a factual look at the reality of the church, particularly in Europe. Part Three considers three alternative responses to meaninglessness. Islam ('an alternative monotheism') and Marxism ('a political alternative') are criticized for producing repressive societies. The perspective of Liberation Theology, 'an alternative Christian missiology', is rejected (particularly the justification of violence and the hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures which makes the Exodus the key), but it is recognized that it has been a corrective to the failure of traditional missions to combat poverty and oppression. Part Four is a one-chapter summary of the theme of Meaninglessness and Mission.

As an introduction to the issues raised by the Christian mission this book is a wide-ranging overview. Its failings are perhaps difficult to avoid in missiology, which according to one of its leading practitioners is a cross-disciplinary study, using the distinct methodologies of theology, anthropology and history. The dangers are of a lack of coherence and of superficiality. Major classical debates are dealt with summarily here (for example, predestination in pp. 139–141, where Barth is preferred to Calvin; the interpretation of Romans 6 and 7 in pp. 111–114). Perhaps this is unavoidable in a book of this kind, but the impression is left that the theology of missions lacks dogmatic grounding and coherence. The argument seems to jump from exegesis of passages of Scripture, or from hermeneutical issues, to practical observations. One consequence is that a somewhat fierce anabaptist ecclesiology is assumed and asserted without being established. Other assertions appear in passing, including criticism of the divinity faculties, 'notorious for their refusal or inability to up-date their syllabuses', the 'general irrelevance' of Anglican theological colleges, the need to change the creeds to include contemporary *ethical* issues, and, not least, the assertion that 'in Europe today the ministry probably constitutes the highest barrier to the believableness of the Church'.

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**The Modern Theologians. An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century**
David F. Ford (ed.)
Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989; Vol. I: 342pp., £10.95, ISBN 0 631 15372 1; Vol. II: 330pp., £10.95, ISBN 0 631 16808 7

In this introduction to modern theology the editor has executed with great shrewdness and professionalism a simple but overdue conception. Although not unique, it is rare to entrust a survey of modern thought to an international team of specialists. David F. Ford has magnificently overcome the threat of inconsistency between contributions and given us what will surely be a standard work for a long time to come. His own long experience in teaching modern theology at Birmingham University shows through clearly in his lucid introductory summaries to each major section. Moreover he has miraculously managed not only to keep each contributor to the average length of around twenty or so pages (there are just one or two who take liberties) but also

maintained a consistent and most helpful format throughout for each chapter: Introduction, Survey, Content, Debate, Achievement and Agenda. The arrangement works splendidly, not only because of the fine editing but also because of the mastery of content and quality of work by the specialists. It would be unfair to pick out any particular contributor because of the sustained high standard but well-known names proliferate, such as Daniel Hardy, S.W. Sykes, Hugo Meynell, Aidan Nichols, Rowan Williams, George Lindbeck and many others.

The first volume covers key modern theologians grouped according to some sort of genre – a task not for the fainthearted since famous theologians are notoriously idiosyncratic. Ford does well here, though many would hesitate to put Bonhoeffer in the same group as T.F. Torrance! The volume is more dense in content than the second volume and, inevitably, selective. Robert W. Jenson surely deserves some sort of medal for squeezing Barth into around 25 pages whilst still being remarkably readable. In all, fourteen giants of the twentieth century receive attention.

The second volume launches into a survey of major theological movements. It is, on the whole, more accessible than the first volume whilst maintaining the same high standard of competence. As well as covering major trends in British and North American theology (which includes an interesting account of 'Postliberal theology' virtually unknown in this country), it handles Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox, Latin American, Black, Asian and Feminist theologies. It rounds off with both ecumenical theology and theology of religions. David Ford adds a helpful summary of the present situation in theology.

Both volumes include a glossary which should be helpful to the student reader and is all the more commendable for knowing how to distinguish between 'Fundamentalist' and 'Evangelical'. Each also includes an index combining subjects and names. Each chapter concludes with primary and secondary bibliographies. These closely relate to the chapter content which aims, I believe successfully, to 'prepare for, accompany and aid reflection on the study of texts'.

The only hesitation I would express over this excellent production concerns the density of content, especially in the first volume, and use of the work by undergraduate students. Even with the glossary to help, some will find some chapters relatively hard going. The serious students amongst them will, however, greatly benefit. But never mind the students; the *teachers* need books like these!

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**The Spirit of Love: Theology of the Holy Spirit**
Brian Gaybba
Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987; 290pp., £12.95;
ISBN 0 225 66500 X

Dr Gaybba is Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa. As a Catholic theologian he serves as an adviser to the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, and was formerly Secretary of the South African Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Commission. The book appears in a series which offers post-Vatican II perspectives on the central issues of Christian theology. It is presented as a comprehensive treatment of the main beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit with two complementary sections: first, a historical perspective, tracing the development of the main ideas and movements associated with the Spirit from the Old Testament to the present day; secondly, a systematic development of a theology of the Spirit in relation to the Trinity, the church, the individual believer, and the world.

This book is geared for the student and theologian, with check questions provided at the end of each chapter, along with ideas for discussion and recommended further reading. It has three very thorough indices and a very comprehensive bibliography. Unlike many offerings from Protestant theologians, whether conservative or liberal, it takes into account works by authors from such different standpoints as Karl Rahner, Michael Green and Hendrikus Berkhof and presents alternative interpretations in a constructive and ecumenical spirit. Its catholicity commends it to the reader as few other recent works on pneumatology have been able to do. One can only be impressed by the depth and sensitivity of the treatment, especially if the reader has had little experience of modern Catholic theological writing.

*The Spirit of Love* succeeds in drawing on the rich resources of philosophy and theology throughout the centuries without giving the impression that the Holy Spirit is the exclusive concern of charismatic and Pentecostal theology. With a very sympathetic reflection on Luther and the Reformers, Gaybba faces up to the issues which divide Catholics from Reformed Christians in a way which encourages hope for future ecumenical dialogue. If the author is typical of more recent Catholic theologians, conservative evangelical scholarship will be forced to challenge traditional views and point to future co-operation which might have been unthinkable a few decades ago. Evangelicals will not agree with everything Gaybba says, but they will discover lines of thought which are uncommon in evangelical treatments of the subject.

For example, Gaybba refers to a Catholic emphasis on the gifts mentioned in Isaiah 11:2 (wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, fear of the Lord) as qualities bestowed on the believer by the risen Christ in fulfilment of this Messianic prophecy. Because of this, some Catholic theologians have referred to the *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12–14 as 'charisms', to avoid confusion. The former 'gifts' express the way in which the Spirit overcomes the effects of sin upon our minds and volition. 'They are gifts that have always been regarded as given to every believer at the moment of justification.' That is, they are intended for the benefit of the recipient,

primarily, for his or her sanctification, while also benefiting the community as a whole. Yet the 'charisms' more specifically concern service as practical expressions of the love of God in Christ whether in utterance, action, or understanding. Reformed scholars will be fascinated by Gaybba's exposition of Paul's concept of the Word of God in preaching, prophecy, wisdom and knowledge. He is unconvinced that a word of knowledge is a spontaneous insight into the mind or situation of one who is present in worship, and places such 'words' within the teaching ministry of the Word.

*The Spirit of Love* will be essential reading for any serious student of pneumatology for years to come. It is hoped that evangelical scholars will take time to appreciate its importance before embarking on similar projects, and give Brian Gaybba all due credit for this timely and convincing study.

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**I Believe in Church Growth**
Eddie Gibbs
Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1990; 303pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 340 51732 8

Eddie Gibbs casts his net widely, and the result is a nearly comprehensive and very valuable study. Gibbs exposes the reader to a wide array of important works on church growth and related subjects through the notes (in the text) and bibliography. The volume truly is a wealth of material. Having been slimmed down and updated from previous editions, this version is especially tailored to the non-specialist. (I doubt, however, that many individuals who own an earlier edition would want to purchase this one – the revision is not that drastic.)

*I Believe in Church Growth* is an introduction. Its breadth would prevent those new to the field from supposing that church growth can be reduced to, say, a simple evangelistic method, but it also occasionally prohibits depth of analysis. Also, anyone who is well acquainted with the works of Donald McGavran or Peter Wagner (the gurus of church growth from Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission) will find portions of Gibbs's book strangely familiar. Gibbs does surpass other church growth specialists, however, by offering a discriminating application of church growth perspectives to the British scene. His interest in church growth in Britain, however, does not prevent him from calling attention to certain negative British (and European) church growth trends of recent years. He faces the problems head on. Gibbs commends Peter Wagner's popular definition: 'Church growth means all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with him and into responsible church membership'. A central thrust of *I Believe in Church Growth* is an emphasis on that word 'responsible'. The mere lengthening of the electoral or membership role is of little concern to Gibbs.

A major divide follows chapter 2. Up to that point Gibbs is concerned to uncover the biblical and theological foundations for church growth. In the

much longer second section, the book turns to pragmatic concerns. Gibbs cautions, however, that theological and practical matters cannot be neatly separated, and that he hopes his is a 'sanctified pragmatism'. That hope is largely realised in the second section.

Some of the many pragmatic concerns of chapters 3–10 may be noted. It is not unspiritual to attempt to quantify growth; indeed, a pious aversion to record-keeping has sometimes concealed inactivity or ineffective ministry. The geographical parish map needs to be accompanied by a 'map' identifying different types of people. Small groups have great value for providing the intimacy and community many crave. Large groups enable Christians to celebrate their faith and experience a special kind of worship that cannot occur in small groups. Churches and their leaders need to remain open to change. Traditional theological education is impractical in certain respects.

A few of the book's many strengths may be noted: Gibbs deftly borrows from other disciplines (*e.g.* management, statistics) in a way that does not reduce missions to a business. Gibbs provides countless practical pointers from his pastoral experience (*e.g.* on the inner workings of church government). The biblical basis for church growth is stated clearly and forcefully, and not forgotten amidst subsequent pragmatic concerns. Divine action and human responsibility are properly intertwined. A discerning analysis of the homogeneous unit principle leads to twin conclusions: on the one hand, people find it easier to enter a Christian community if they do not have to cross social boundaries in so doing; on the other hand, in order to grow into maturity and reflect the variety of Christ's body, homogeneous churches must take steps to broaden their fellowship. Gibbs offers a healthy balance of stern criticism for failure in the church, and genuine hope for great prospects of growth by God's sovereign power.

As for weaknesses, the lack of Scripture and author indexes is detrimental (the detailed table of contents suffices as a subject index). More substantial shortcomings include a neglect of the problem of other religions (*e.g.* the challenge resurgent Islam poses to church growth in some quarters). The book's introductory nature also seems to restrict the measure of creative and strategic thinking for the future of church growth. A more specific objection is that Gibbs is overly critical of transfer growth, overlooking the valid reasons people often have for leaving one church to go to another. Lastly, Gibbs falls into the logical trap of making missions the church's top priority. Accordingly he fails to see that worship ultimately constitutes both the aim and the impetus of missions.

In the end, the strengths far outweigh the weaknesses of this informative, challenging and thought-provoking book. Eddie Gibbs's love for the church and longing for its healthy development is abundantly apparent. The book deserves a wholehearted recommendation.

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**The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God**
R.P.C. Hanson
T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 1988; 931pp., £34.95; ISBN 0 567 09485 5

Dedicated to fellow scholar Henri Crouzel, this book is a major contribution in the field of contemporary patristic studies, consisting in the most thorough treatment yet of fourth-century Christological and triadological debate, and (along with R.D. Williams' *Arius*) the first significant treatment of Arian theology in English for many years. Those familiar with Hanson's earlier contributions to the field (for example his book on Origen, *Allegory and Event*) will recognise here the same thoroughness and critical spirit; yet they may also find themselves disappointed with certain aspects of the book.

Despite the subtitle 'The Arian Controversy 318–381', Hanson opens the book by referring to this popular way of describing the theological agenda between these two dates as 'a serious misnomer'. From here on, the picture painted of Arius himself is one which seeks to disabuse us of the idea that the notorious priest from Alexandria was in any way a significant figure, either theologically or politically. He was simply, by accident of history, the occasion for certain powerful theological currents finally surfacing, and was drawn into a doctrinal whirlpool with which his name was subsequently associated, but which he himself in reality did little either to cause or to prolong, the latter role having been taken up by much more capable and predominant figures such as Eusebius of Nicomedia and Asterius. To describe these as 'supporters' or 'followers' of Arius, therefore, would be misleading if it were thought to imply some sense in which Arius broke new theological ground or founded a school which developed in his wake. The epithet 'Arian' is thus at best one worth keeping for the sake of convenience: otherwise it is 'scarcely justified to describe the movement of thought in the fourth century which culminated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed'.

Hanson also considers the worth of the word 'controversy' in this particular context. That there was indeed controversy throughout the fourth century is undeniable: but was there a single controversy, the history of which can be neatly charted, and the ultimate resolution of which at Constantinople demonstrated? Hanson thinks not, rejecting this over-simple presentation of the matter for a much more complicated version in which numerous different controversies feature, and in which the lines of demarcation between the various sides become much more blurred. In part this is simply the inevitable result of the relatively microscopic detail in which Hanson's study is carried out. Yet his book goes further, calling into question any suggestion that, by stepping back from the historical trees to gain a perspective on the wood, a more simple or straightforward picture of the fourth century disputes can be obtained. The pattern, he insists, remains a highly complicated one, even in its broadest outlines.

It is here that the distinctive polemical thrust of this book is felt. The significance of the main title emerges as it becomes apparent that Hanson's concern is to challenge traditional accounts of the fourth century, presenting it not as a period of dispute between ancient orthodoxy and emergent heretical tendencies, but rather as a time of considerable doctrinal confusion, when it was not at all clear what orthodoxy *was* in relation to either Christ or

the doctrine of God. Thus, to cite Hanson himself, 'this is not the story of a *defence* of orthodoxy, but of a *search* for orthodoxy, a search conducted by the method of trial and error'. We are to think, then, in terms of a confused and confusing tangle of strands of development upon which dogmatic uniformity was ultimately imposed, rather than any clear conflict between the champions of 'the received tradition' and those troublesome heretics who insisted on rocking the boat with new-fangled ideas borrowed from pagan philosophy and elsewhere.

It is the relative novelty of this perspective which, Hanson insists, gives his work its true *raison d'être*. Certainly, it is refreshing to find so detailed a treatment in which the 'cowboys and indians' approach of so many previous commentators (including, it must be admitted, some of the Fathers themselves!) is shown to be both inadequate and unhelpful. Yet it is possible, in the passion to move beyond over-simplified accounts, to go too far, and it is for this that Hanson must be criticized. The metaphor of a search has an appropriateness in this context; but we must be clear about its proper object. This was not, as is sometimes implied in the book, a search for a Christological truth hitherto unknown or unrecognized. It was precisely a search for orthodoxy, that is to say, a search among various extant Christological alternatives for the one which best accorded with the apostolic witness to Christ. Thus, whilst Nicene theology as it eventually emerged was certainly not the simple rubber stamping of 'what all Christians everywhere have always believed' about Christ, it was, nonetheless, perfectly continuous with an important strand of interpretative tradition (albeit not the only important strand) reaching back into the third and second centuries. That it also broke considerable new ground in the process of reiterating, clarifying and rehoning this tradition is hardly surprising: but the discontinuity ought not to be stressed at the expense of a considerable degree of continuity. If the picture is admittedly more complicated than some accounts have allowed, we must not allow the confusion to obscure this important fact.

There are other areas of Hanson's treatment which are deserving of the sort of careful criticism which lies beyond the scope of an ordinary book review. His treatment of the incarnational theology and soteriology of Athanasius is sadly deficient, and it is especially disappointing in a book of this size to find some of the more questionable prejudices of recent scholarship simply rehearsed without further comment, and then used as the basis for considerable parts of the argument which follows. Yet this remains a highly important book which will provide the next generation of scholarship with a valuable resource; just as long as the conclusions which it reaches do not become the unquestioned assumptions for all future ventures in the field.

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