REVIEWS

Green Christianity

Tim Cooper
Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1990; 282pp., £5.99; ISBN 0 34052339 5

Should browsers wonder what Green Christianity represents and whether it should interest them, the author provides his own definition – but not until the end of the book! According to Cooper, it is an attitude of both head and heart and is 'centred upon God as revealed in Jesus Christ and concerned with the structure and function of the whole creation'. This definition may sound rather academic but his book has in fact been written with the general reader in mind and in engaging style. I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone who wants a well-researched and thoughtful treatment of Christian responsibility to natural resources and our environment.

Cooper points out that whilst the roots of the historical Green movement lie in the early nineteenth century, and the problems of despoliation of the planet are evident everywhere, the churches as a whole and individual Christians by and large have failed to present a clear moral lead about environmental matters and the responsible use of animals. Meanwhile, New Age philosophers are conspicuous in these debates – and there's the rub. The author is at pains to point out the dangers of monism and the occult and is staunchly uncompromising about historical faith. His arguments for biblically-based Christian concern deserve to be widely read. As we might expect of one who is prominent in politics, he also reveals a good deal of evangelical zeal and conviction for his party colour.

Whether or not one swallows his brand of conviction politics, there is no doubt about either his sincerity or his courage in writing this book. It is not a task to be undertaken lightly in the face of the paradoxes and compromises of a comfortable life in the Western World. Despite the enormous scope and complexity of green issues, Cooper has aimed to be both comprehensive and practical as he describes alternative life-styles that are gentler towards nature and more considerate of generations to come. Consumerism, energy policies, intensive farming practices, population growth and economics (his speciality) are all grist for his mill. But he does not, and cannot, do full justice to all these crucial topics in a book of this size. I found his historical research and economics much more convincing than the treatment of population issues and experimental biology. His attitudes to some issues, such as nuclear power and intensive farming practices, are predictably critical though falling short of being doctrinaire. Whether one agrees with him or

not one must acknowledge that he strives to use the best data available to back up his arguments.

Although intended for personal study, the book could be well used as a basis for a series of informal discussion groups or seminars because each chapter is self-contained. Those who wish only to browse will find that the book is well-indexed and contains a short bibliography. Some people may be disappointed to find that Cooper fails to tackle the delicate task of comparing Christian eschatological doctrine with the forebodings of the Green movement. The closest we get is the hopeful note on which he closes the book. He assumes, rightly or wrongly, that greater emphasis on the doctrines of creation ought to change human behaviour, and he provides a number of practical suggestions of how the churches and their members could act.

R.G. Gosden, University of Edinburgh

Christian Ethics in Secular Worlds

Robin Gill

T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1991; 160pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 567 29198 7

'Christian ethics is both exciting and dangerous.' Insisting that Christian ethics must engage with secular worlds, and fearlessly following this through, Robin Gill has little difficulty in substantiating his opening claim. The natural law approach and modern biblical scholarship are both charged with over-reliance upon individual enquiry: it is worshipping communities that act as harbingers of moral values in society. The fact that sociology is now as fragmented as theology, and tolerant of value commitment, enables a whole chapter to treat the interaction between the two disciplines and so indicate new opportunities for doing Christian ethics in secular worlds.

Part 2 turns to the environment. The Anglican report *Faith in the Countryside* failed to sustain the moral and theological conviction in responding to the empirical data. At the level of global survival, Ian Ramsey adopted a 'consensus-through-natural-law' strategy, of bridge-building value; Stanley Hauerwas is theologically more explicit, confrontational yet affording valuable further insights. As to human reproductive ethics, Paul Ramsey's *Fabricated Man* is given ample credit but its response is of the strident variety and restricted by too static a concept of creation. Favouring a more dynamic model, with man as co-creator, Gill rather exhorts to prudence, vigilance and the cultivation of moral responsibility. He then focuses on society, offering a critique of the various views on the social role of religion including the notion of 'religion as a whole'. Optimistic that Judaeo-Christian values, albeit transposed in their secular setting, still inform the British moral and

social order, he approvingly quotes Backford: 'better to conceptualise religion as a cultural resource or form than as a social institution.' The initial promise of excitement is perhaps most fully realised in the chapter on the nuclear debate. The convergence-towards-consensus strategy of *Peacemaking in a Nuclear Age* is contrasted frankly with the more confrontational *Theology Against the Nuclear Horizon* and with the positive embrace of apocalyptic by stances of the latter type. Taking the form of a report, the chapter on AIDS lacks the dynamic of the actual debate but makes observations significant for public policy.

On occasion some may be impatient at inconclusiveness and be tempted to cite the want of a more robust confidence in 'the Bible as a whole'. To Gill, admittedly in something of an aside, the latter is 'a highly questionable phrase'. But there is enough of crucial interest in the main thrust of the book to interest and reward the serious reader. And any inconclusiveness may be due rather to the constant thesis that in those (non-nuclear?) areas where 'implicit theology, participatively inculcated' and 'explicit theology, confrontationally communicated' are equally valid approaches, the former should be given a chance. A more thoroughgoing consideration of this policy would have been welcome. Gill also occasionally criticises too simplistic a use of Scripture; where appropriate, all who take Scripture seriously should surely concur. As to his further plans to investigate the facts about worshipping communities in our society and to explore further the concept of moral communities, my appetite is whetted.

Frank V. Waddleton, Glasgow Bible College

The Book of Ruth: Its Structure, Theme and Purpose

Murray D. Gow

Apollos, Leicester, 1992; 240pp., £18.95; ISBN 085111 765 1

Gow provides a clearly written example of applying a 'rhetorical critical' approach to the text of Ruth as a means to understanding its message, its purpose and its context. This is an easily grasped model of a literary analysis which appreciates those aspects of the text which it emphasises (through repetition and inclusion) and which it compares and focuses (through chiasm). Gow concludes that the work is an apology for David's Moabite ancestry written during David's reign by a figure in his entourage, such as Nathan. He sees the interaction of human prayer and divine providence as a key theological theme in the work. Whether or not the reader will agree with everything which is written here, one cannot fail to acknowledge Gow's clarity of argument and to be impressed at the structural elegance of the book of Ruth.

Richard S. Hess, Glasgow Bible College

God's Truth: Essays to Celebrate the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of *Honest to God*

Eric James (ed.)

SCM, London, 1988; xii+227pp., £9.50; ISBN 0334 00585 X

This is a collection of seventeen essays on many topics associated with the concerns of the late John Robinson. Between them they strike two notes. First, despondency at the failure of radical theology since *Honest to God* and the persistence of reactionary conservatism in theology, church and often politics. Secondly, commitment to recast Christian thought and attitudes so that they should be suitably informed by modern experience.

The cumulative effect of these essays is to suggest the bankruptcy of modern liberal or radical theology. They are surprisingly thin and weary on the whole when one considers the contributors: T.G.A. Baker, Tim Beaumont, Trevor Beeson, John Bowden, F.W. Dillistone, Alan Ecclestone, David Edwards, J.L. Houlden, Alistair Kee, John Kent, John Lee, Dennis Nineham, John O'Neill, Ronald Preston, Alan Race, Ruth Robinson, Peter Selby. The planning is partly to blame. Only two essays made any impact on this reviewer. One was John Bowden's, with its blunt disappointment at the failure of radicalism, for its mood, as well as its content, reveals the gulf between orthodox and non-orthodox interpretations of Christianity. The other was Alan Ecclestone's with its convincing claim that *Honest to God* had failed in significant respects really to grip *life*.

However, conservative complacency is the last response one wants to make to this collection. There is a dangerous tide of anti-intellectualism in some evangelical circles which may eventually scuttle conservative theology as effectively as radicalism might do. Also, liberals and radicals pose questions to the conservative tradition which, I believe, have by no means been adequately addressed at the level of asking in every case. Orthodoxy today must be stated in *response to* specific challenges not just *on the occasion* of them. Perhaps that is the main lesson to be learned from this collection.

Stephen N. Williams, Whitefield Institute, Oxford

Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation

Mark A. Noll (ed.)

Apollos, Leicester, 1991; 232pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 85111 421 0

One's first reaction to this book might easily be to question the need for yet another presentation of the Reformation confessions. By their very nature these documents are obviously available elsewhere but two things contribute to the necessity of having available such a work as this: the author's preliminary reflections on the confessions, together with the varied range which he has chosen for inclusion, namely Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Anabaptist and Roman Catholic.

Perry Miller once wrote that there would always be those who would be eager to let sleeping dogmas lie, not so it seems this particular history Professor from Wheaton. Nothing could be more damaging, he says, to an understanding of the Christian faith than neglect of the past. He believes it to be a tragedy that in the confusions of our own day we refuse to listen to these voices from the past. The importance of the Reformation era then is only part of his justification for re-presenting these ten confessional statements. There is a personal desire here that the church of today must examine its roots.

His style is refreshing given that his subject matter does not easily lend itself to such an approach. His work is aimed at students but not exclusively so, for his desire is that this collection might prove useful for all those, as he puts it, 'who want to know what all the fuss was about in the sixteenth century'. Consequently the purpose of the book is not to add to the debates on the confessions themselves, but only to introduce the documents. However, the brief but scholarly introductions he provides to the documents must contribute to a heightened awareness of their theological significance and the historical conditions in which they were formulated.

I was a little disappointed not to have found the Scots Confession included in Noll's list of ten. Because he limited his selection of documents to those which appeared between 1517-1571, I would have thought the inclusion of the Scots Confession (1560) could only have added to the representativeness of his study, one of his own principles of selection.

For those who wish to pursue in greater depth the confessions and the worlds in which they emerged, Noll very helpfully includes lists of resources available for further study. For anyone seeking a reliable guide to the documents of the Reformation, this surely is that book.

Michael D. McMullen, University of Aberdeen

The Protestant Evangelical Awakening

W.R. Ward

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; xviii+370pp., £40; ISBN 0 521 41491 1

This immensely learned and vigorously written book by the retired Professor of Modern History at Durham University links together the various revival movements of the eighteenth century in a single international network. The account ranges from Silesia and the beginnings of Pietism in Philipp Spener to the American colonies and England, Wales and Scotland. It draws upon a daunting mass of source material both published and manuscript, especially in the Herrnhut archives, and continually surprises the reader familiar with the main course of developments by exposing unexpected lines of influence and points of connexion.

Professor Ward particularly emphasizes the impact in America and the UK of continental revivals. Mainland Europe not only established precedents and set forces in motion but even determined chronology: 'Almost everywhere the revival began in resistance to real or perceived threats of assimilation by the state in its modern shape, and the timetable of the revival, even in the West, was set by the timetable of the Protestant crisis in Eastern and Central Europe where that threat was raw and crude.' So when the author comes to deal with Scotland, he sets the outbreak of revival amid 'Problems of Religious Establishment....', the first Secession and Jacobitism.

Key figures in this story are A.H. Francke, underpinning the revival movements of the first generation, Nikolaus Zinzendorf who shaped them in the second, and George Whitefield, 'the universal gospel salesman of the next generation'. But fresh light is thrown on a host of other actors, even as well documented as John Wesley – whose presence in Edinburgh during four successive General Assemblies suggests to Ward that he must have been seeking Church of Scotland recognition.

It is hard to imagine any reader, however well-informed, who will not learn a great deal from this book. Yet it is not for the beginner; the first chapter, 'The Protestant frame of mind in the eighteenth century', is particularly demanding in the density of information it purveys or assumes. The work must surely attain the status of a standard authority on this freshly revealed pan-Protestant movement – as participants as different as Jonathan Edwards and Robert Wodrow viewed it at the time.

D.F. Wright, New College, University of Edinburgh

Bultmann
David Fergusson
Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1992; xxi+154pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 225 66623 5

This book, written by the Professor of Systematic Theology at Aberdeen University, is part of a series of books on 'Outstanding Christian Thinkers' edited by Brian Davies OP, which seeks to provide authoritative studies of those regarded as having made outstanding contributions to the development of Christian thought and understanding through the centuries.

After a brief introduction to the story of Bultmann's life, Fergusson describes the various currents of theological thought which provided the context for Bultmann's work, especially those of the liberal school of the late nineteenth century and the dialectical theology of the post-First World War period. He then embarks on an account of Bultmann's own distinctive ideas. Here we have a chapter on Bultmann's understanding of faith, which Fergusson describes as the 'leading concept' in his theology; a chapter on Bultmann's hermeneutics, with special emphasis upon his appropriation of the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger; a chapter on his contributions to New Testament criticism and theology through his form criticism of the Synoptic Gospels, his existentialist interpretation of Paul and his commentary on John's Gospel; and a chapter on his 'demythologising' programme, of which he became a well known advocate from 1941 onwards. Throughout these chapters exposition is interspersed with critical comment, but Fergusson keeps most of the latter for a final chapter, in which he traces post-Bultmannian perspectives in the areas of objectivity and theological language, christology and the historical Jesus, salvation and the Christ event, and theology and politics, and shows where the weaknesses in Bultmann's thought lie. There is an index at the end, and a bibliography, both of the works of Bultmann cited in the text and of secondary literature, at the beginning.

The book as a whole can be highly recommended as an excellent introduction to the main lines of Bultmann's thought. The author everywhere shows a firm and sympathetic grasp of his subject and a commendable clarity in expounding it, though I suspect that those without theological training will find the book tough meat in places. On a more substantive level, evangelical readers may well judge that the author's sympathy for his subject has led him on occasion to make too positive an assessment of Bultmann's orthodoxy, as when, for example, he says the Bultmann's theology 'everywhere' reflects 'faithfulness to the Christian tradition', but at the same time they will no doubt agree with, and find helpful, many of the criticisms which Fergusson rightly levels at Bultmann's work throughout the book.

As Fergusson himself tacitly admits on his final page, it is one thing to ask the right questions, another to provide satisfactory solutions. One suspects that the solutions which Bultmann offered on a whole range of subjects, both historical and theological, will continue to appear increasingly unsatisfactory and outmoded with the passage of time. He has certainly been a major figure on the twentieth century theological scene. Whether he will be as important in the next century is much less certain

Peter Ensor, Aberdeen University

Suffering

A. E. McGrath

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1992; 112pp., £2.99; ISBN 0 340 53821 X

In this short book on suffering, Alister McGrath, the respected Oxford theologian, sets theology a major challenge. He pleads for the reinstatement of theology's position as the servant of the Church, encouraging faith rather than (as is often the case) hindering it.

In chapter 1, McGrath utilises the contrast between the balcony (theology) and the road (faith experience; and the Christian's true place). The higher perspective of the balcony can assist travellers on the road whose way is marred and dimmed by uncertainty, pain and suffering. By showing that 'suffering is a pastoral and spiritual issue, not just a theological problem', McGrath highlights the essential (and proper) relationship between theology and faith experience.

The next three chapters focus on issues often raised from an unbelieving or doubting perspective. Blaming God and questioning his omnipotence and loving nature are all answered in terms of God's desire, through Christ's suffering, to accept limitations on his power (judgement), to share in human pain and, ultimately, to transform it. Love (in contrast to modern notions) is seen by McGrath to be costly and painful and at the centre of God's actions, most supremely upon the Cross.

McGrath argues strongly for a realistic grounding to suffering. Humanity's fallenness and real freedom to choose evil expose facile notions of human goodness and self-sufficiency. Echoing C.S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*, McGrath clearly shows the human origin of much suffering. Its existence is not new but, McGrath suggests, the twentieth century's catalogue of wars, terror and scientific achievements used for evil ends has magnified its intensity.

The balcony-road interplay in respect of suffering is found, for McGrath, in the person of Jesus Christ. His work of redemption upon the Cross (Mark 15:34) is achieved only through real pain and suffering. Such incarnated love demonstrates God's suffering presence on the road.

McGrath's insistence upon theological foundations allows him to see suffering creatively. It can bring forth a Van Gogh in art or a Beethoven in music. It can also serve to draw the believer into closer communion with God, producing humility, grace and witness to others. Western materialism, however, cannot cope with suffering. Such cultural influences affect Christians also: McGrath points out how affluent Western Christians have over-exaggerated the problem of suffering in contrast to fellow-believers in the Third World.

For McGrath, suffering draws God's compassion and his Church does likewise in any alleviation of human affliction. God bears our pain because he has experienced it first (Heb. 4:15). Ultimately, the Christian response to suffering's threat to the future is one of hope, of looking forward to eternal union with Christ.

This is a book which unfolds the meaning of suffering in terms of God's grace. One of its sub-themes is the failure of so many Christians to see it in such dimensions. Recovering a greater sense of our dependence upon God is crucial here. Another is the need for the Church to share, through persecution, Christ's sufferings and afflictions.

Does this book meet the author's challenge? This reviewer believes so. It is refreshing to see theological tools used in traditional forms and yet being engaged cogently with modern issues. In a book of personal reflections, McGrath writes in simple, non-technical language. Quotations are used sparingly but William of Ockham, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Barth are acknowledged. This is a book for all Christians involved in pastoral care to reflect upon. It could also be profitably used, chapter by chapter, in Bible study discussion groups.

Andrew McKie, Aberdeen

Greek Tools – Parsons Technology

Being fairly new to the study of New Testament Greek and computer literate, I was more than happy to review the Greek Tools software. I did not find all the facilities of the program useful, but that is because of my limited knowledge of Greek and not a criticism of the software. Overall Greek Tools is very easy to use and flexible, even allowing the user to add to the extensive data that comes with the package. I found the Lexicon, Grammar and Textual Criticism options of most use; the Manuscripts and Editor went over my head.

The whole system is tied in to the lessons in John H. Dobson's *Learn NT Greek* (Baker Books and United Bible Societies), and can be used either with the textbook or independently. A copy of the textbook is included in the software package. The Lexicon has cards with the word in Greek, its meaning, part of speech and number of occurrences in the New Testament, and allows you to make notes on each card. It is possible to 'flag' cards so you can record the words you know as you learn them. I was impressed that the writers of the software have given the facility to

add new cards. It also incorporates a print facility with which you can print the cards you have, but be warned if you do not have a dot matrix or laser printer: you will not get what you are looking for. Deskjet printer produced some lovely garbage!

The Grammar option gives you tables of nouns, verbs *etc.*, and helps the student in the pronunciation of Greek vocabulary. These tables can be edited but regrettably not printed. The Textual Criticism option gives information about the sources of biblical manuscripts, their text families and details of how to judge them. Again this can be added to, but not readily printed. The Manuscripts and Editor options' description from the manual is: 'The Manuscripts Catalogue option allows you to perform a detailed analysis of variant readings of the Greek New Testament. The Editor is a true word-processing tool, which lets you create new data files, edit existing Greek Tools, data files and even import files from other sources as ASCII text.'

My overall impression of this software is that it is an excellent tool for learning the Greek New Testament. Even if you are not very confident when it comes to using computers you will find the software easy to use. The manual is well laid out and easy to follow. As far as future developments go there are a number of enhancements that could be made. Top priority has to be an increased range of printers; this would make the package much more attractive. It would also be useful if the complete New Testament, in Greek, was available, allowing the user to highlight a word and get its meaning. I also felt that a version for windows would be helpful, allowing you to cut and paste from the program data directly into a document in a word processor. The system requires 512K RAM on an IBM compatible PC.

Gavin Williamson, Glasgow Bible College

Woman in the Bible: An Overview of All the Crucial Passages on Women's Roles

Mary J. Evans

Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1992; 160pp., £10.95; ISBN 0 85364 337 7

Mary Evans lectures in Biblical Studies at London Bible College. This book is a re-issue of one published by IVP in 1983. She writes with reverence, careful scholarship, and from a conservative-evangelical commitment. Her book first appeared in 1983 when issues of 'androcenticity'. 'inclusive language', and women's 'liberation' were beginning to make an impact on British biblical exegesis.

Chapter 1 reviews the Old Testament material under two heads – Doctrine and Practice. Evans argues that the creation narratives teach that man and women were created equally in God's image. Their harmonious and unitive relationship was broken by 'the fall', and thus androcenticity

crept in. She sees Israelite society as strongly patriarchal: in relation to her sexuality a woman was regarded as her husband's property. Nevertheless, women took an active part in religious life, and female leaders occur (*e.g.* Miriam; Deborah; Huldah). Evans frankly recognises that the Old Testament often depicts women as secondary to men; yet she affirms that 'the intentionality of biblical faith' must be distinguished from 'a general description of biblical religion': the intention of the Hebrew Bible is 'neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy, but rather to function as salvation for both men and women'. This short chapter is well-balanced in its discussion, and convincing in its broad thrust.

Chapter 2 focuses on 'Contemporary Cultural and Religious Influences'. It is too brief (only 10pp.) for its large subject: Rabbinic Judaism is treated very cursorily and the Graeco-Roman world merely touched on. While mentioning various attitudes to women, Evans tends to stress negative ones, and she concludes that there is a 'dramatic decline' in women's status compared with the Old Testament.

Three substantial chapters are devoted to the New Testament. Jesus' approach to women is seen as 'revolutionary'. He accepts them as *people*, never treating them as sex-objects. They are active in service and faithful witnesses. There is no special theological significance in their absence from the Twelve. While much of the discussion is attractive and compelling, the contrast between Jesus and Judaism (and the Graeco-Roman world) is over-emphasized, to the detriment of the latter. No attempt is made to distinguish the Gospels' doctrinal teaching from community practice, nor Jesus' own attitudes from those of the individual Evangelists.

The best part of the book is that on the Epistles. All the main texts are considered. Evans points out that Paul sees women and men as relating to God in exactly the same way. She accepts that he sees man as woman's 'head', but she interprets this 'headship' in terms of loving and giving. Paul's view of marriage is described as 'amazingly egalitarian'. There is a sensitive discussion of women's roles in worship. Evans draws attention to Paul's female co-workers, and, while recognising the lack of evidence for women serving as New Testament 'bishop' or 'elder', argues there is no reason to suppose that this is prescriptive for all time.

A final chapter calls on the churches to re-examine their whole attitude to women, including their ministry, in the light of the Bible's positive affirmations. There are footnotes and a bibliography.

In general, this is an encouraging and helpful book. It interprets the biblical texts positively, and shows there is no need for those who have a high doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture to have a low esteem of women, or to deny them a full role in the church's life. Nevertheless, some cautions are in order. This is an unaltered reprint of a 1983 book. In the last ten years feminist scholarship has advanced at a rapid pace, with many major studies (*e.g.* Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; Trible, *Texts of Terror*; Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*). There has

been fresh work on women in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman worlds, and further exegetical study on the relevant biblical texts. None of this has been taken into account. Nor is the work in tune with recent redaction-criticism of the Gospels, or the current trend towards a more sympathetic understanding of Judaism. We need a more nuanced treatment of Jesus' attitudes to women, and, perhaps, a franker recognition that the Old Testament contains 'texts of terror' for them.

But as an introduction, this work still has considerable merits. It treats a wide range of texts in a way that is easy to grasp, with fair summaries of their content and of a good range of interpretations. If it can help Christians think more deeply about what the Bible says about women, it will have done a good work.

Ruth B. Edwards, University of Aberdeen

The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back: An Old Heresy for the New Age

Peter Jones

Phillipsburg, NJ, P&R Publishing, 1992; 112pp., n.p.; ISBN 0 87552 285 8

This book aims to show that the New Age movement has links to the Gnostic heresy which troubled the Church in the first three centuries of her existence. It is argued that the Gnostic world-view can be seen with remarkable clarity in the New Age movement and that the moral and social effects of Gnosticism are parallelled in our own time in the rise of militant feminism, eastern religions, homosexual rights, nature worship and political correctness. Unlike some other Christian commentators on the New Age, Jones is convinced that the movement, despite its disparate nature and apparent contradictions, is in fact a coherent pagan ideology which is spread in a highly organised way. He says: 'In spite of its apparently tolerant, pluralistic and diffuse nature, the New Age has a coherent agenda, orchestrated from a diabolical center, moving and reproducing ineluctably, like algae in a lake.'

Jones is not the first to make the connection between the New Age and Gnosticism. It is very instructive and salutary to all Christians, but it needs more work than is given in this book. To be fair, the author informs us in a note that a major study on this theme is forthcoming as well as 'a book on the New Testament's answer to Gnostic and New Age thought'.

The conspiracy theory which dominates the book is one that many Christians, who have investigated and written on the New Age, would want to challenge. This, along with the polemical tone maintained throughout, may deter some readers and that would be a pity, since Jones' scholarship and clarity of thought are not in question. He is currently

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Fergus C. Buchanan, Milngavie

Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage for Life

David Coomes

Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1992; 256pp., £14.99; ISBN 0 7459 1922 7

Dorothy L. Sayers was 'quite simply hugely entertaining and incomparable company', and what made her so was a 'careless rage for life'. David Coomes in his new biography allows her detective character's fictional biographer to write her epitaph: 'Dorothy', he intones but of Lord Peter Wimsey, '"has always had everything except the things (s)he really wanted" and I suppose (s)he is luckier than most.'

This reviewer frankly doubted it, but the local library proved that Lord Peter and the painstaking detection novels that needed his pivotal role are still very popular – even if in a larger-print edition. But by letting her voluminous literary output, in a vast correspondence as well as novels, articles, plays and translations, speak of Dorothy Leigh Sayers, one can scarcely avoid becoming energised by her combative, knockabout style, devout seriousness and frail vulnerability.

If the watermark of a good biography is to reveal the subject's character by her own hand and through her own created characters, then Coomes' effort is superb. The meticulous logical brain in the foolish persona of Lord Peter; the iconoclastic hand at work in 'A Man Born to Be King' (for that drama *has* to be heard in its war-time setting to recover its radical impact); and now thankfully in the extraordinary output of hundreds of letters to detractors and supporters stored in the Marian E. Wade Collection in Wheaton College, Illinois – all reveal the complex 'infuriating' intelligence of this formidable and contradictory and likeable character.

All her life, it seems, she knew what she was about, always able to distinguish between being creator of, not subject to, her fantasies. In the unpublished 'Cat O'Mary', Dorothy, as Mary, contrasts herself with 'cats o' Martha', as one who ponders, learns quickly and prizes intellect above all else. That intellect was used frequently to excoriate a passive and doleful Church that simply failed to be excited by 'the greatest story ever told', and indeed one that by its portrayal of that story was evidently bored by it. Her poetry gently derided where her open and tongue often lambasted with skilfully controlled but straightforward ferocity.

I liked the Gargoyle best. He plays
So cheerfully on rainy days –
While parsons, no-one can deny,
Are awful dampers when they're dry.

Bland religiosity was despised: 'The blade is not made in the fight but in the forge.' Certainly in love (she bore a son to an unnamed lover), in education (at Oxford when women could not be deemed worthy to receive a degree, and refusing later in life an honorary DD) and in marriage (Fleming, her husband, could not match her wit or intelligence and became a burden to her) her wordsmith's tools were hardened and honed. To one leech-like suitor came the outburst: 'It INFURIATES me to feel that my words are numbered and my actions watched. I want somebody to fight with.'

So why has Lion Publishing put this particular biography in our hands? Any who are passionately concerned to relate Christian doctrine to the modern world would do well to re-read Dorothy L. Sayers. Coomes has been allowed not merely to paint this vigorous character in strong but congruent colour. He has given us her 'Statement of Aims' for her incompleted series 'bridgeheads' which included 'The Mind of the Maker'. The breadth of vision, theology and intellect is as audacious as it is arrogant. But for this re-awakened and newly enlightened reviewer, Dorothy L. Sayers speaks with brilliance to our crass and disintegrating culture, making demands as she does so upon the Church to wake up before it is too late. If you also imagined 'A Man Born To Be King' to be good evangelism, read this biography and grapple with the Sayers' radicalism and perceptive challenges right now.

Peter Bowes, Edinburgh