

This book originates in a lovely idea which is clearly not just an idea, but a real experience for the two co-authors. It shows their "perception of what most needs saying at present: that the balance and direction of Christian thought and living ... need to be corrected and energised by praising and knowing God" (p. 138). They set out "to explore some of the remarkable implications of the theme of praise for the nature of man, the nature of God, the Trinity, creation, providence, sin and redemption" (p. 153). The book is "not about worship, but concerned specifically with the praise of God, and has sought to trace its presence within many other movements of the life of man within his life with God" (p. 168). The authors refer to "a vacuum felt today in the lives of many individuals and groups" and call attention to the danger of this being filled "by more exciting and extreme creeds" which, in their view, constitute as great a challenge to Christianity as did the crises of the time of Augustine or Luther. "The prophetic importance of knowing the God of joy in this situation cannot be estimated" (p. 145). Praising God is seen as a "way of life which explicitly and radically challenges a culture which lives in practical atheism" (p. 23).

The book opens with a description of praising God which includes analysis of the idea of praise, and of various contemporary expressions of it. Two chapters consider the experience and expression of praise in the Bible, and Dante is brought in as representative of the tradition bridging the gap between Scripture and modern Pentecostalism. Chapter 5, the central pivot of the book, applies "a God-centred realism to basic elements of existence" (p. 71) considering basic Christian experience as praise, while chapter 6 tries, not very successfully, to integrate evil and suffering into this picture. The last three chapters consider some of the effects of this vision of life in a Trinitarian framework, centring in turn on each of the persons of the Trinity, a scheme which seems artificially strained. An appendix attempts to clarify the whole by offering a "more systematic exposition of the nature of praise in relation to knowledge, action and social life" (p. 153), and a further appendix surveys the relevant literature, "to assist the reader by giving him practice in reading important sources from the past in a particular way" (p. 170).

The authors assert firmly that the resurrection is the genesis of both Christian praise and mission, and the whole of the book is concerned with what praise is. Definitions, however, accumulate throughout, for praise "is elusive ... interwoven in the history of God with man, and in every moment of that movement" (p. 171). Its multiple forms "cluster around two key acts: recognition and respect" (p. 25). This does help a little to clarify the bafflingly abstract or jargon-laden phrases used in the opening pages of the book and reverted to later. They can be challenging but are not always helpful. "Praise is a form of thinking, and aims to 'think God' as adequately as possible" (p. 56) is a little more apprehensible than "the logic of overflow" (p. 7).

This approach to Christian experience produces some nice insights. "Praise is the primary form of the communication of the Gospel, the sheer enjoyment and appreciation of it before God" (p. 149). In the human context it is seen that the effect of praise is "to open space for the recipient to be himself" (p. 159) for "to recognise worth and to respond to it with praise is to create a new relationship" (p. 6). So "faith in God is an experience which lives and grows by praise" (p. 10) and "Christian hedonism is the holy intoxication of pleasing and being pleased by God" (p. 11).

Life comes to be seen from a new angle. Speaking in tongues can be considered as a "sacrament of speech" for it "signifies free speech in relation to God and received from God" (p. 20). The life of faith is "a matter of setting one's mind where praise is the natural language (heaven) and allowing one's whole life to be transformed accordingly" (p. 29).

Clearer light is cast on facts we already know. "In the sacramental (order) the

media are appreciated both in themselves and as pointers to God" (p. 17), and shrewd observations are made about people and society. "The investment of people in their network of recognition and respect is so large that the most stubborn resistance ... is bound to follow ... the effort is made to separate praise of God from its social and practical consequences" (p. 76). "If the self is seen as completely secure ... free to concentrate on God and other people ... taken up in thanks and praise ... all sorts of growth and change can happen, but they are by-products, not aims, flourish in freedom and unselfconscious absorption in God, the object of praise" (p. 84).

Occasional happy phrases light up a whole paragraph. "In a faith which has 'the foolishness of the cross', a 'lamb on the throne' and the 'justification of the ungodly' there must be an appreciation of upside-downness, and many ways in joining in the laughter of the resurrection". (p. 73)

But does the enterprise succeed? The treatment of St. Mark's Gospel in chapter 3 is very valuable, as is a nice comment on Ephesians on p. 58. The choice of Dante as representative of a tradition of praise is masterly but does presume a fair degree of familiarity with the *Divina Commedia*. The discussion of Philippians in chapter 3 is complex and at times hard to follow, as is the rest of the book. The style is somewhat opaque, the material often far too abstract and the argument involved and unclear. Some positions seem unduly strained to make them fit into the line of thought, and one or two theological assertions are open to question. The treatment of evil and suffering in chapter 6 is weak and unconvincing, though there are some perceptive insights on this subject elsewhere. Saddest of all perhaps, the treatment of the Psalms in chapter 3 does not rise above the mediocre, and makes them seem dull and uninspiring.

As the authors point out, the inquiry pursued in this book is without parallel in theological literature. It is an interesting and ambitious project which holds out many exciting and inspiring ideas. Perhaps it needs further pondering to bring it to a satisfying clarity and fruition.

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE by Robert M. Grant with David Tracy. *SCM Press*, London, 1984. Pp. ix + 213. £6.95.

Many Christians sense a deep gulf between modern biblical scholarship and the ways they use the Bible, whether in their theological thinking, their preaching or their devotion. One way of bridging the gap is to see the rise of modern historical scholarship in a wider theological context by seeing how the Bible has been used throughout Church history. The republication of R.M. Grant's compact, informative and readable little book, first published in 1948 and again in 1963, is therefore most welcome. It has not dated much. Only the chapter on Jesus seems a bit old-fashioned, and some readers will find that an advantage. Both the strength and the weakness of the original is its simplicity and avoidance of much deep theory. This has now been changed by the addition of three chapters by David Tracy, whose own book *The Analogical Imagination* is an outstanding if verbose contribution to the subject. But here he struggles for clarity, and the results are accessible to the general reader, while providing specialists with food for thought. The Anglican common-sense of Grant is thus enriched by Tracy's fine account of interpretation as 'conversation' with classic texts. Gadamer's hermeneutics of retrieval is balanced by a hermeneutics of suspicion with its attendant critical theory, and 'understanding' is enlarged to include textual explanation. Both authors have distilled wide reading into brief space.

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