

Helpfully, Middleton and Walsh endeavour to make their vision concrete ... (p. 191): 'Concretely, this vision will engender an economics of care rather than exploitation, of enough rather than insatiable greed, an ethos of listening to the voices of creation rather than mere exploitation and control, an environmental ethic of loving and wise development rather than an aggressive lifestyle of global toxification, waste, extinction and degradation.'

It is difficult to be against things such as these – justice, compassion, care, service – even if, ironically, they are norms and principles rather than narrative enactments. It would certainly be unfair to require any sort of generalising normative elaboration from Middleton and Walsh as to how one might enact the biblical metanarrative in an improvisatory manner in this time of crisis. But the claim that the paragraph quoted makes their ethical vision concrete is surely extravagant. One would have imagined that a greater number of more detailed examples – maybe in the form of exemplary narratives of contemporary Christian improvisations – might well have been instructive.

There is much that can be helpful in a narrative approach to ethics. Why such an approach should be privileged exclusively, as Middleton and Walsh appear to recommend, in particular over and against the approach of theoretical analysis, is unclear. Stories are one way of knowing reality. Ideas another. Both abstract. Both generalise. Both provide gateways to and from worldviews. Neither can be either contextless or timeless. Certainly we re-interpret norms for praxis in our time and place, but if such normative improvisation is not anchored to the creational principles most certainly scripted in the Bible (including the very justice, compassion, care and service invoked by Middleton and Walsh) and not aligned with the practical testimony of the people of God throughout history, then we are indeed abandoned to the fatal play of a radically relative autonomy.

Despite the delightful prose and enticing exegesis peppered throughout, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be* suffers from an unfortunate meta-weave of confusion with regard to contemporary history, evasion with regard to the nature of biblical authority, and erosion of the ethical core of Christian praxis. This book would have gained considerably – at least in clarity – had the authors taken greater care in their delineation of modernity and postmodernity, had they exemplified

more expansively their proposal for Christian praxis, and had they succumbed less thoroughly to the effects of their apparent alienation from the evangelical community.

I enjoyed reading this text. There can be no doubt that Middleton and Walsh are imaginative, well-read, nice people. For serious engagement with the historical, theological, and ethical issues of our time, though, I would rather recommend the reader cuts straight through to the notes and tracks down the original sources referenced there.

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Women in the Church's Ministry: A Test-Case for Biblical Hermeneutics
R.T.France

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995, 96 pp.
£6.99 pb ISBN: 0-85364-675-9

RÉSUMÉ

La thèse principale de l'auteur est que l'exhortation à la soumission des femmes aux hommes s'applique à la vie conjugale et non aux structures sociales. L'ouvrage peut rendre service aux lecteurs évangéliques comme une introduction aux discussions qui leur sont propres, mais le débat plus vaste qui agite notre monde contemporain n'est pas abordé.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Frances zentrale These besteht darin, daß die an Frauen gerichteten Ermahnungen, sich dem Mann unterzuordnen, auf die eheliche Beziehung gemünzt sind und nicht auf gesellschaftliche Strukturen angewendet werden können. Das Buch ist als interne, an evangelikale Leser adressierte, Einleitung durchaus nützlich, doch die Kernpunkte der breiteren momentanen Debatte werden nicht angesprochen.

Dr R T France, formerly Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, presents here the published form of his Didsbury Lectures for 1995. He opens his discussion with a reminder of the timely nature of the topic, when the Church of England General Synod approved the ordination of women in 1992, but two traditions continue within several Churches, partly on the ground of concerns about New Testament language concerning 'headship' and 'order',

especially in 1 Cor 11:3–16, 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11,12. These passages, he argues, offer a test case for hermeneutics.

The central thesis is summed up in the comment 'injunctions to women to submit to men are not applied to the structures of society [eg queens, judges, employers] but to the marriage relationship' (p 36). 1 Cor 14:34–5 and 1 Tim 2:11,12, both refer to married women, while Eph 5:23 applies specifically to marriage. 1 Cor 11:7 'may [France's italics] have the same reference (though now in relation to their behaviour in church rather than in the home)' (pp 47–8). But 'head' language is 'appropriately linked with an explicit statement of the mutual dependence of man and women ... not here addressing the issue of ministry or leadership in the church ...' (p 48).

This would have been an admirable point at which to explore A. C. Wire's claims about the conflict between The Corinthian Women Prophets (1990) and Paul and Paul's strategy of limiting their freedom by 'privatizing' much of their sphere eg in 1 Cor 7, 11 and 14. But France does not address these complex interpretative issues. He might also have addressed E. A. Castelli's reading of power-issues in these chapters. Further some account might be taken of the flood of literature in periodicals from Sigountos and Odell-Scott to Petzer, Barton and Nadaeu, where 'power' and 'place' as well as 'order' become part of the issue. Rather, he returns to the well-worn arguments of S. Bedale (1954), M. D. Hooker (1964) about whether *kephale* in 1 Cor 11:3 means 'head' or 'source', also noting Fee's endorsement and Grudem's counter-arguments. Rightly he regards that issue as a digression from the point at issue. However, he makes genuinely constructive use of periodical literature arising from his drawing on the illuminating work (as always) of Ken Bailey (Anvil, 1994). Bailey argues that the injunction to 'silence' in 1 Cor 14:34,35, relates to tendencies to interrupt prophetic discourse with spurious questions which could be asked privately. Further, 1 Tim 2:8–15, Bailey continues, may well be influenced by local factors arising from the Artemis cult at Ephesus. France follows Bailey; the text may allude to 'independence' of an assertive, even domineering nature. A final chapter identifies instances of women's ministry or leadership in other parts of the NT, including the well-known allusion to 'Junia among the apostles' in Rom 16:7.

As an 'in house' introductory summary of issues for a mainly evangelical non-technical

readership this may well serve as a useful volume. But if it is to be a 'test-case' for 'biblical hermeneutics' its restriction mainly to well-established or to evangelical literature will not introduce readers where much of the action is on 1 Corinthians, especially its feminist readers and its distinctive importance as an epistle reflecting a cultural situation where power, place, status and self-affirmation (as in post-modernity) constitute the heart of the problems which Paul addresses through a theology of the cross. This does not diminish the usefulness of this volume for those who are not yet ready to take on these tougher issues. But the purpose and value of the work is to serve a very specific readership. For such a readership it may provide a useful clarification of issues.

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A New Dictionary of Religions

J.R. Hinnells, editor

Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 760pp., £60.00, hb, ISBN: 0-63118-139-3

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage de référence couvre tout le domaine religieux, depuis les manifestations anciennes jusqu'aux expressions contemporaines. Il s'intéresse surtout aux nouveaux mouvements religieux ou aux anciennes religions qui se sont implantées dans de nouveaux milieux culturels. Des mouvements laïcs susceptibles de remplacer la religion reçoivent un traitement utile, et plusieurs articles plus étoffés explorent la méthode scientifique de l'étude de la religion. Pour un livre qui couvre le monde entier, la liste des auteurs ayant contribué à sa rédaction et celle des auteurs cités dans la bibliographie demeurent fortement dominés par les occidentaux. La compréhension du phénomène religieux héritée du 'siècle des lumières' transparait partout ; selon celle-ci, aucune religion ne peut s'ériger en juge d'une autre religion, et chaque religion doit être évaluée selon ses propres critères, en fonction des objectifs qu'elle se propose.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses vielseitige Nachschlagewerk bietet einen Überblick über das gesamte religiöse Spektrum, angefangen von den Manifesta-