

or ways in which a passage has been understood. In evaluating them he usually favors the most "classical" alternative, so to speak, from the viewpoint of modern interpretation. The evaluation is usually guarded and thoughtfully considered. An exception may be found on p. 17. When discounting the possibility that the census figures found in Numbers may derive from authentic sources, as suggested by several scholars, Davies claims that they are merely "the invention of the Priestly author," as evidenced by the fact that exactly six tribes had more, and six tribes had fewer members than the average for the twelve tribes. This result he deems artificial, but such "evidence" would certainly be disputed by any statistician.

Of special interest to many readers is the stance of a commentator toward the historical-critical method. The methodological approach used by Davies is fully critical, as usual in mainstream scholarship. The solid scholarship of the commentary, however, should not be ignored even by those who look for alternative ways to understand the text.

In his introduction of the book, the author deals with the problem of source division (xlv-li). However, the discussion of difficulties recently encountered by the Documentary Theory is centered solely on the challenge posed by Rendtorff, a scholar who does not rest his case primarily on evidence gathered from the book of Numbers. Therefore we must conclude that Davies is dealing with the problem of the composition of the Pentateuch as a whole. That being the case, the discussion hardly seems sufficient for the purpose. The problem of the Documentary Theory is certainly much larger than Rendtorff, and should not be dismissed merely by showing that this scholar has not proven his own version of the history of the composition of the Pentateuch.

The table of contents is very detailed for the introduction (12 lines for 30 pp.) but extremely succinct for the commentary (3 lines for 370 pp.). In particular, a list of excursuses (such as those of pp. 12-23) would be welcome.

As with other volumes in the series, this commentary has been carefully edited and is reasonably free from typographical mistakes. The typeface is compact but still very clear. This is a high-quality volume packed with information.

Universidad Adventista del Plata  
Villa Libertador San Martin, Entre Rios, Argentina

AECIO E. CAIRUS

Dockery, David S. ed. *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995. 428 pp. \$16.99.

In the context of religion, philosophy, and politics, post-modernism is, roughly, the rejection of the Enlightenment's "understanding of human reason, human action, and human culture." For postmodernists, this dubious Enlightenment understanding is marked by such features as: a belief in the capacity of detached reason, using arguments and information accessible, comprehensible, and defensible to everyone, to ground moral, religious, and scientific practice; the importance of a measure of alienation from one's psychosocial context in order to achieve appropriate objectivity; the capacity of a political order dependent on agreement regarding fair procedures to meet the needs and foster the ends of persons with diverse substantive goals and convictions; the essentially—politically

irrelevant or destructive and publicly indefensible character of religious belief, which is rooted, supposedly, in local prejudice. All of these positions are, to one degree or another, rejected by those who adopt the postmodern label.

What postmodernists are against is considerably clearer than what they are for. In fact, radically different schools of thought may appropriately claim the postmodern label "Communitarian." Postmodernists often see the decline of the authority of a supposedly neutral science, of the quest for an unachievable objectivity in science, philosophy, and politics as opening the way for a renewal of distinctive traditions of belief and practice—often religious in nature—to which modernity has been unfavorable. By contrast, "anarchic" postmodernists tend to view the decline of modernity as the final failure of attempts to provide rational defenses for moral and religious beliefs or to construct a coherent common culture; they often imply that the advent of the postmodern era should be greeted by an enthusiastic acceptance of an unavoidable cultural or even individual relativism. And yet other categories and subcategories might be identified.

The difficulty in clarifying the nature of postmodernism makes it hard for the contributors to any symposium on the topic—of which there have by now been many—to be sure just what it is they ought to be assessing or responding to. Every commentator offers her own classification scheme—more than one such typology is employed in *The Challenge of Postmodernism* and none is identical with the one I have suggested. (Perhaps this fact itself, evincing as it does the intractability of language and the resistance of reality to imprisonment by our concepts, is a symptom of the postmodern condition.)

It would obviously be impossible in a short review to detail the contributions to the ongoing discussion of postmodernism made by all those whose work appears in this book. I do want, though, to comment briefly on some of the more interesting chapters.

Kurt A. Richardson's *Disorientations in Christian Belief: The Problem of Detraditionalization in the Postmodern Context* is uncompromising in its criticism of postmodernism, which Richardson terms "a movement embodying irresponsibility in any and every form." I find Richardson's assessment excessive, but it is articulate, reflective, and coherent—more than a pasted-together array of quotes from others.

Stan Grenz, a distinguished up-and-coming Baptist theologian, offers an informative overview of postmodernity that is more lighthearted than one might expect. The secret? Grenz's analogy between the modernity and postmodernity on the one hand and *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on the other. Grenz's suggestion, offered here and elsewhere, that a postmodern evangelical theology "must be focused on spirituality"—that *piety* be the defining characteristic of the new evangelicalism—has met with mixed responses (including criticism elsewhere in this volume).

The single best section in the volume may be the six chapters on hermeneutics. While the positions taken vary, clear, original, first-hand thinking is often in evidence. This is not to say, of course, that all of the arguments in this section are equally persuasive. Mark Seifrid's "The Pauline Gospel in a Postmodern Age" defends a Reformation-oriented interpretation of Paul against the more sociologically-focused positions of contemporary thinkers like James

Dunn and E. P. Sanders. Those who find the "new perspective on Paul" attractive may not agree with Seifrid in dismissing Krister Stendahl's claim that Luther's reading of Paul lies at the root of the neurotically introspective conscience of the West. But his stress on the importance of grace in Judaism is welcome, as is his insistence that we may too quickly read our own concerns with plurality, unity, and diversity into the Pauline materials. The reader who, like me, tends to find contemporary work on Paul not only historically fascinating but theologically and spiritually helpful may not wish to concur with Seifrid's judgments; but he is at any rate suggestive and thoughtful. Adventist readers will be interested to note that Southern Adventist University systematic theologian Norman Gulley is responsible for a chapter in this section entitled, "Reader-Response Theories in Postmodern Hermeneutics." It is good to see that Adventists, once shunned by evangelicals as by other Christians, have become increasingly welcome in evangelical conversations of various sorts. Dan Stiver's "The Uneasy Alliance between Evangelicalism and Postmodernism" is perhaps the best of the hermeneutics chapters. Stiver paints a positive picture of many postmodernists—while noting the diversity of positions that might claim to be postmodern—and suggests, appropriately, that Christianity has more to gain than to lose from the passing of the modern era. Stiver's essay is an excellent overview of the varieties of postmodernism and their theological availability.

Kathryn R. Ludwigson's "Postmodernism: A Declaration of Bankruptcy" may not fully take the measure of the postmodern challenge. Ludwigson—apparently the only woman among the contributors to this volume—rightly points to the unsustainability of a radical relativist position. But she assumes too readily, I think, that one can avoid relativism through an appeal to revealed absolutes without taking completely into account the challenge posed to all appeals to absolutes of any sort by the postmodern recognition of the situated, limited character, not only of *what* we know but of *how* we know. If the postmodern claim were only that we don't know very much, evangelicalism might reply by alluding to an inerrant Bible and Catholicism by trumpeting the claims of an infallible church—"Yes, we do *too* know the truth about God." But postmodernism calls into question the very processes by which we acquire knowledge, interpret experience, and validate our claims to truth.

The rise of postmodernity has obvious implications for Christian higher education, as thinkers including Nicholas Wolterstorff and George Marsden have appropriately noted. C. Richard Wells chooses to explore these implications indirectly through a splendid and informative appreciation of John Henry Newman, "Newman Revisited: The Idea of a University in Postmodern America." Wells's reflections on *Newman's Idea of a University* situated in the context of the growth of his life and thought, are enjoyable both as a resource for ongoing Christian deliberation about the educational task and as an exercise in the history of ideas.

Kelvin Jones suggests that a series of formal principles are employed in everyone's thinking and can be derived by a method akin to Kant's transcendental deduction. In "The Formal Foundation: Toward an Evangelical Epistemology in the Postmodern Context" Jones delineates these formal principles and argues that they can serve as the basis for a contemporary Christian apologetic conversation with the non-Christian world. It is open to question whether even transcendental

claims as limited as those Jones makes will be affirmed by people sensitive to the difficulty of successfully effecting a transcendental deduction of anything. Nonetheless, his proposal is intriguing, and might provide a bridge between modernist and postmodernist theological and apologetic positions.

James Emery White's "Evangelism in a Postmodern World" is a clearly-written delineation of the challenges faced by Christians who seek to communicate the good news of God's love in a postmodern world. Focusing on the cultural characteristics of those to whom we must communicate this good news today in Europe and North America, White suggests several characteristics our communication ought to exhibit. He does not highlight, as I wish he would, the opportunity offered by such encounters to grow and learn as well as to teach, and he does not question directly whether postmodernism might entail any theological revisions, but readers of this volume involved in the practice of evangelism will find many useful pointers toward an evangelistic style more suited to contemporary needs than many church planting and discipling methods currently in vogue. White's discussion might have been even more helpful had he highlighted how the capacity for dialogue about and involvement in the quest for appropriate social change might facilitate recruitment into the church. These concerns do receive some attention in the following chapter, Rick Gosnell's "Proclamation and the Postmodernist," which contains a variety of helpful insights. Gosnell's concern with dialogical models of preaching and evangelism that invite involvement and participation, as well as his awareness of the importance of stories, are especially welcome.

This book is valuable as an evangelical contribution to the theological discussion of post-modernism. For readers of *AUSS* who might wish to explore the topic further, however, *The Challenge of Postmodernism* may not be the place to start. William C. Placher's *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* remains the best general introduction to post-modernism from a Christian theological perspective; works by philosophers that traverse similar terrain include Richard Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, Jeffrey Stout's *The Flight from Authority* and *Ethics after Babel*, and Alasdair MacIntyre's work of the past decade and a half. This is not to downplay the distinctive contributions some essays in this volume surely make. But those interested in postmodernism will no doubt benefit from exposure to sources representing other perspectives as well.

La Sierra University  
Riverside, CA 92515-8247

GARY CHARTIER

Dyck, Cornelius J., trans. and ed. *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995. 312 pp. \$16.95.

Liechty, Daniel, trans. and ed. *Early Anabaptist Spirituality*, Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1994. xxiii + 304 pp. Cloth, \$29.95; paper, \$19.95.

The stated purpose of these two books is to provide a collection of sixteenth-century Anabaptist writings which focus on the Christian spirituality of the