

function within the overarching concern of an apologetic historiography, namely to show that in *this* history, God's providence was at work.

Given the strength of his analysis, Squires' conclusions (ch.8) are less sharp than might have been expected. Throughout, he ably demonstrates how Luke is concerned above all to show that the death of Jesus and the Gentile mission—the two most shocking *paradoxa* in a context shaped by Greco-Roman and Jewish sensibilities concerning divine action—were providential, key elements in "God's plan." But when he comes to the question, "Why does Luke write apologetically?" Squires does not state as clearly as he might the pertinence of this precise emphasis.

He could have followed up more vigorously the implications of his (correct) premise that apologetic works as much for insiders as for outsiders (p.53), and that Luke was writing to provide *asphaleia* (assurance) for Gentile readers. In this light, what needed defending above all was God's paradoxical workings in history. Luke-Acts was less an "apology" for the Christian movement directed toward outsiders than an "apology" directed to insiders for the God who, while seeming not to, nevertheless kept his promises.

There is a wealth of learning here made available to other scholars by an important study that makes a genuine contribution to the understanding of Luke-Acts in its cultural and religious context.

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POSTMODERNISM, REASON AND RELIGION by Ernest Gellner.
London. *Routledge*. 1992. Pp. 108 + ix. £9.99.

In what is really an extended essay, Gellner offers an interesting and unapologetic defence of modern scientific rationalism—what he calls "*enlightenment rationalist fundamentalism*"—against the claims of two rivals for the soul of late twentieth century man, *viz. religious fundamentalism*, represented here by present day triumphalist High Islam, and *relativism* as that is currently urged upon us by the advocates of *postmodernism*.

The latter is very much the evil suitor, disingenuous, hypocritical and certain to bring ruination. Although Gellner attacks religious fundamentalists' uncritical acceptance of supposedly self-validating sources of revelation, he admires the believer's commitment to an absolute truth transcendent of human opinion, and even accords (to Judaeo-Christian fundamentalism) a necessary historical role in the development of the secular rationalism he himself favours. He also recognises that religious fundamentalism usually offers an ennobling vision of humanity and its final end, and thereby is a source of inspiration and consolation unmatched by secular alternatives.

By contrast he has to struggle to find any good at all in postmodernism. At the very close of the book he remarks that if its ambiguities help minimise the risk of conflicts between holders of

fundamentalist positions—religious and or rationalist—that it may “yet be performing a public service”, but though writing this Gellner does not sound as if he really means it; in any case such a weak concession does not detract from the damning criticism which immediately precedes it: “To the relativists, one can only say you provide an excellent account of the manner in which we chose our menu or our wallpaper. As an account of the realities of our world and a guide to conduct, your position is laughable” (p. 96).

Gellner’s case against postmodernism combines logical and psychological diagnoses of its failings. There is the standard, but undiminished, criticism that someone is incoherent who presents, as a reasoned and justified critique, the claim that reasoned and justified critiques are impossible fantasies. More interesting, however, are the often pithily stated observations on the motives of postmodernist writers, particularly in the social sciences: the anthropologist’s preference for study-room theorising over dirty and dangerous fieldwork; the literary theorist’s desire to offend the sensibilities and convictions of middle America; the general wish to exculpate colonial guilt by tolerating in new states various beliefs and practices much weaker European versions of which are continuously ridiculed. As Gellner perceptively observes “Relativism, basically an affectation, is most attractive in places where it is least relevant, places which have benefited most from the [progressive] nature of knowledge” (p. 79).

In the preface Gellner explains that the text was originally written as a contribution to what was to have been a co-authored publication, the other part to have been contributed by a representative of religious fundamentalism, Professor Akbar Ahmed. In the event, however, the publishers decided to release the texts separately—for the other see Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam* (1992). No doubt Routledge had its reasons but I rather doubt that the interests of readers were prominent among these. Gellner offers a respectful account of Islam but one that many Moslems may want to reject. It would have been helpful to see the issue debated in one volume. Also the pricing of the present book has the reader paying about 10p an essay page. Gellner’s interesting contribution deserves a wider audience than this will allow for. It also calls for a response on behalf of a position not adequately characterised or considered, viz. rationalist theology of the sort developed within Catholic Christianity. It might be argued from this perspective that realism requires theism and that Gellner’s acknowledgement of Judaeo-Christianity’s historical role does not appreciate the possibility that this is like the root structure of a plant—a continuing condition of its life and growth.

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