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## REVIEWS

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The following document, initially printed in the American magazine, *Christianity Today* in June 1999, is reprinted here because of its singular usefulness in clarifying exactly what is and is not the Christian gospel at this particular point in time. As an introduction to the piece, however, one or two comments are in order.

First, the document is, in an important sense, not a church creed or confession. It should not be seen as the modern equivalent of the Nicene Creed or the Westminster Confession of Faith, both of which were formulated within a particular church framework and enjoy official status as doctrinal standards of churches around the world. This document is a more *ad hoc* affair, not having been commissioned or produced within a specific ecclesiological setting and serving the specific, limited function of clarifying important terms and doctrines in the current theological climate.

Second, having said this, the names of members of the Drafting Committee (e.g. Don Carson, Timothy George, Thomas Oden and James Packer) and those of the endorsing committee (e.g. Eric Alexander, Donald Bloesch, Gerald Bray, John Bolt, Wayne Grudem and David Wells) should alert us to the fact that this is not an insignificant document. These are not men known for their superficiality or for wasting time on trivia. In addition, they represent a significant variety of evangelical theological traditions, from Dutch Reformed to Anglican to Charismatic. When such men speak out with one voice, the rest of us should sit up and take notice.

Third, the issue at the heart of the statement is one of the points at which evangelicalism is under most pressure at the moment. We are all aware of the way that the Doctrinal Basis of UCCF was understood (in accordance with the catholic creeds and the consensus of the Reformation). The problem, of course, is that doctrinal statements, for a variety of reasons, tend in practice to become more flexible and therefore more meaningless as time goes by and as theological declension goes unchecked. In recent years, however, a new area of doctrinal revisionism has joined the litany of traditional pressure points: ecumenical co-belligerence by Protestants and Catholics in the churches and the arrival of the *New Perspective on Paul* in the academy have made justification once again a matter of controversy.

Justification is, of course, an old pressure point, being one of the central issues in the breach between papal Catholicism and Protestantism in the sixteenth century. Indeed, when one looks at subsequent Protestant statements (at least of the confessional orthodox variety) and at the Canons of Trent, the two movements have in large part defined themselves in large part over against each other on precisely this issue. In recent days, however, the *New Perspective on Paul*, pioneered by E.P. Sanders and picked up in Britain by James Dunn and N.T. Wright, has challenged not only the correctness of the traditional Protestant notion of justification epitomised by Luther but even the legitimacy of the terms of debate in the West at least as far back as Augustine. Given this assault on the tradition, and the perennial ecumenical pressures which are always call for a downplaying of the doctrine's importance to the church, a robust statement such as that printed below is most welcome. Put simply, this statement clarifies the traditional Protestant position, demonstrates what is at stake in attempts to redefine the doctrine, or sweep it to one side, and, most important of all, relates the whole to the fact that salvation is available only in and through the work of Jesus Christ. Let us make no mistake: revising justification, either in line with ecumenical Protestant-

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Catholic concerns or in terms of the New Perspective will involve a fundamental redefinition of what Protestantism is, and what the gospel claims to be. That does not necessarily make such a revision incorrect – all human formulations must be tested continually by the standard of Holy Scripture – but it does mean that we should be very careful before moving to abandon time-honoured positions.

One final comment on the piece: it ends with a series of counterpointed affirmations and denials. This may jar with some but is, sadly, necessary. Both Tridentine and New Perspective views of justification are excluded by any honest reading of the UCCF Doctrinal Basis (DB), as are inclusivist and pluralist understandings of salvation and unitarian notions of God. That the DB does not make these denials explicit does, however, leave the document more open to specious interpretative manipulations and abuse than might otherwise be the case. It is therefore refreshing to find an evangelical document like that following which takes such care to define where it stands, that it does not flinch from stating the obvious negative counterpoints of its positive affirmations. Indeed, the positive affirmation of something inevitably involves the rejection of something else, even if that rejection remains tacit. Nevertheless, the tacit nature of these boundaries leaves UCCF vulnerable. One hundred years ago, the Student Christian Movement (SCM) sought to define itself in an undogmatic, positive way that refused to draw boundaries. The rest, as they say, is history – which is certainly what the SCM became. Today, the SCM as a student movement is virtually defunct; but there is evidence that the undogmatic temper of the SCM of yesteryear is alive and well even within the institutional boundaries of British evangelicalism. Indeed, to anyone familiar with the history, the parallels in terms of attitude and culture between the SCM of the early twentieth century and various bodies today are positively unnerving. Now, an evangelicalism which only defines itself in positive terms may appear attractive but the bottom line is that it lacks any meaningful boundaries. This frightens me for the simple reason that such an evangelicalism is inherently and unavoidably unstable, less a movement with a purpose than a meaningless spectrum of theological opinion. The SCM should serve as a salutary warning to any who think evangelicalism can prosper through a refusal to draw appropriate boundaries.

So, then, let us all read the following to see a clarification of what the gospel really is, of how significant current doctrinal debates on justification are, and to remind ourselves of the need to realise what evangelicalism is not. And let us not forget to give thanks that God has given to the church men and women with the moral fibre and integrity to say 'no' once in a while.

# THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST: AN EVANGELICAL CELEBRATION

***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*** *John 3:16*

***Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.*** *Isaiah 12:5*

## Preamble

- The gospel of Jesus Christ is news, good news: the best and most important news that any human being ever hears.
- This gospel declares the only way to know God in peace, love and joy is through the reconciling death of Jesus Christ the risen Lord.
- This gospel is the central message of the Holy Scriptures, and is the true key to understanding them.
- This gospel identifies Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel, as the Son of God and God the Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, whose incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension fulfilled the Father's saving will. His death for sins and his resurrection from the dead were promised beforehand by the prophets and attested by eyewitnesses. In God's own time and in God's own way, Jesus Christ shall return as glorious Lord and Judge of all (1 Thess. 4:13-18; Matt. 25:31-32). He is now giving the Holy Spirit from the Father to all those who are truly his. The three Persons of the Trinity thus combine in the work of saving sinners.
- This gospel sets forth Jesus Christ as the living Saviour, Master, Life, and Hope of all who put their trust in him. It tells us that the eternal destiny of all people depends on whether they are savingly related to Jesus Christ.
- This gospel is the only gospel: there is no other; and to change its substance is to pervert and indeed destroy it. This gospel is so simple that small children can understand it, and it is so profound that studies by the wisest theologians will never exhaust its riches.
- All Christians are called to unity in love and unity in truth. As evangelicals who derive our very name from the gospel, we celebrate this great good news of God's saving work in Jesus Christ as the true bond of Christian unity, whether among organised churches and denominations or in the many transdenominational co-operative enterprises of Christians together.

- The Bible declares that all who truly trust in Christ and his gospel are sons and daughters of God through grace, and hence are our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- All who are justified experience reconciliation with the Father, full remission of sins, transition from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, the reality of being a new creature in Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. They enjoy access to the Father with all the peace and joy that this brings.
- The gospel requires of all believers worship, which means constant praise and giving of thanks to God, submission to all that he has revealed in his written word, prayerful dependence on him, and vigilance lest his truth be even inadvertently compromised or obscured.
- To share the joy and hope of this gospel is a supreme privilege. It is also an abiding obligation, for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ still stands: proclaim the gospel everywhere, he said, teaching, baptising, and making disciples.
- By embracing the following declaration we affirm our commitment to this task, and with it our allegiance to Christ himself, to the gospel itself, and to each other as fellow evangelical believers.

## The Gospel

This gospel of Jesus Christ which God sets forth in the infallible Scriptures combines Jesus' own declaration of the present reality of the kingdom of God with the apostles' account of the person, place, and work of Christ, and how sinful humans benefit from it. The Patristic Rule of Faith, the historic creeds, the Reformation confessions, and the doctrinal bases of later evangelical bodies all witness to the substance of this biblical message.

The heart of the gospel is that our holy, loving Creator, confronted with human hostility and rebellion, has chosen in his own freedom and faithfulness to become our holy, loving Redeemer and Restorer. The Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14): it is through his one and only Son that God's one and only plan of salvation is implemented. So Peter announced: 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). And Christ himself taught: 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6).

Through the gospel we learn that we human beings, who were made for fellowship with God, are by nature – that is, 'in Adam' (1 Cor. 15:22) – dead in sin, unresponsive to and separated from our maker. We are constantly twisting his truth, breaking his law, belittling his goals and standards, and offending his holiness by our unholiness, so that we truly are 'without hope and without God in the world' (Rom. 1:18–32, 3:9–20; Eph. 2:1–3, 12). Yet God in grace took the initiative to reconcile us to himself through the sinless life and vicarious death of his beloved Son (Eph. 2:4–10; Rom. 3:21–24).

The Father sent the Son to free us from the dominion of sin and Satan, and to make us God's children and friends. Jesus paid our penalty in our place on his cross, satisfying the retributive demands of divine justice by shedding his blood in sacrifice and so making possible justification for all who trust in him (Rom. 3:25-26). The Bible describes this mighty substitutionary transaction as the achieving of ransom, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, and conquest of evil powers (Matt. 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 3:23-25; John 12:31; Col. 2:15). It secures for us a restored relationship with God that brings pardon and peace, acceptance and access, and adoption into God's family (Col. 1:20, 2:13-14; Rom. 5:1-2; Gal. 4:4-7; 1 Pet. 3:18). The faith in God and in Christ to which the gospel calls us is a trustful outgoing of our hearts to lay hold of these promised and proffered benefits.

This gospel further proclaims the bodily resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Jesus as evidence of the efficacy of his once-for-all sacrifice for us, of the reality of his present personal ministry to us, and of the certainty of his future return to glorify us (1 Cor. 15; Heb. 1:1-4, 2:1-18, 4:14-16, 7:1-10:25). In the life of faith as the gospel presents it, believers are united with their risen Lord, communing with him, and looking to him in repentance and hope for empowering through the Holy Spirit, so that henceforth they may not sin but serve him truly.

God's justification of those who trust him, according to the gospel, is a decisive transition, here and now, from a state of condemnation and wrath because of their sins to one of acceptance and favour by virtue of Jesus' flawless obedience culminating in his voluntary sin-bearing death. God 'justifies the wicked' (ungodly; Rom. 4:5) by imputing (reckoning, crediting, counting, accounting) righteousness to them and ceasing to count their sins against them (Rom. 4:1-8). Sinners receive through faith in Christ alone 'the gift of righteousness' (Rom. 1:17, 5:17; Phil. 3:9) and thus become 'the righteousness of God' in him who was 'made sin' for them (2 Cor. 5:21).

As our sins were reckoned to Christ, so Christ's righteousness is reckoned to us. This is justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. All we bring to the transaction is our need of it. Our faith in the God who bestows it, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is itself the fruit of God's grace. Faith links us savingly to Jesus, but inasmuch as it involves an acknowledgement that we have no merit of our own, it is confessedly not a meritorious work.

The gospel assures us that all who have entrusted their lives to Jesus Christ are born-again children of God (John 1:12), indwelt, empowered, and assured of their status and hope by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:6, 8:9-17). The moment we truly believe in Christ, the Father declares us righteous in him and begins conforming us to his likeness. Genuine faith acknowledges and depends upon Jesus as Lord and shows itself in growing obedience to the divine commands, though this contributes nothing to the ground of our justification (James 2:14-26; Heb. 6:1-12).

By his sanctifying grace, Christ works within us through faith, renewing our fallen nature and leading us to real maturity, that measure of development which is meant by 'the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13). The gospel calls us to live as obedient servants of Christ and as his emissaries in the world, doing justice, loving mercy, and helping all in need, thus seeking to bear witness to the kingdom of Christ. At death, Christ takes the believer to himself (Phil. 1:21) for unimaginable joy in the ceaseless worship of God (Rev. 22:1-5).

Salvation in its full sense is from the guilt of sin in the past, the power of sin in the present, and the presence of sin in the future. Thus, while in foretaste believers enjoy salvation now, they still await its fullness (Mark 14:61-62; Heb. 9:28). Salvation is a Trinitarian reality, initiated by the Father, implemented by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit. It has a global dimension, for God's plan is to save believers out of every tribe and tongue (Rev. 5:9) to be his church, a new humanity, the people of God, the body and bride of Christ, and the community of the Holy Spirit. All the heirs of final salvation are called here and now to serve their Lord and each other in love, to share in the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings, and to work together to make Christ known to the whole world.

We learn from the gospel that, as all have sinned, so all who do not receive Christ will be judged according to their just deserts as measured by God's holy law, and face eternal retributive punishment.

### **Unity in the Gospel**

Christians are commanded to love each other despite differences of race, gender, privilege, and social, political, and economic background (John 13:34-35; Gal. 3:28-29), and to be of one mind wherever possible (John 17:20-21; Phil. 2:2; Rom. 14:1-15:13). We know that divisions among Christians hinder our witness in the world, and we desire greater mutual understanding and truth-speaking in love. We know too that as trustees of God's revealed truth we cannot embrace any form of doctrinal indifferentism, or relativism, or pluralism by which God's truth is sacrificed for a false peace.

Doctrinal disagreements call for debate. Dialogue for mutual understanding and, if possible, narrowing of the differences is valuable, doubly so when the avowed goal is unity in primary things, with liberty in secondary things, and charity in all things.

In the foregoing paragraphs, an attempt has been made to state what is primary and essential in the gospel as evangelicals understand it. Useful dialogue, however, requires not only charity in our attitudes, but also clarity in our utterances. Our extended analysis of justification by faith alone through Christ alone reflects our belief that gospel truth is of crucial importance and is not always well understood and correctly affirmed. For added clarity, out of love for God's truth and Christ's church, we now cast the key points of what has been said into specific affirmations and denials regarding the gospel and our unity in it and in Christ.



## Affirmations and Denials

1. We affirm that the gospel entrusted to the church is, in the first instance, God's gospel (Mark 1:14; Rom. 1:1). God is its author, and he reveals it to us in and by his Word. Its authority and truth rest on him alone.

We deny that the truth or authority of the gospel derives from any human insight or invention (Gal. 1:1-11). We also deny that the truth or authority of the gospel rests on the authority of any particular church or human institution.

2. We affirm that the gospel is the saving power of God in that the gospel effects salvation to everyone who believes, without distinction (Rom. 1:16). This efficacy of the gospel is by the power of God himself (1 Cor. 1:18).

We deny that the power of the gospel rests in the eloquence of the preacher, the technique of the evangelist, or the persuasion of rational argument (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:1-5).

3. We affirm that the gospel diagnoses the universal human condition as one of sinful rebellion against God, which, if unchanged, will lead each person to eternal loss under God's condemnation.

We deny any rejection of the fallenness of human nature or any assertion of the natural goodness, or divinity, of the human race.

4. We affirm that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, the only mediator between God and humanity (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

We deny that anyone is saved in any other way than by Jesus Christ and his gospel. The Bible offers no hope that sincere worshippers of other religions will be saved without personal faith in Jesus Christ.

5. We affirm that the church is commanded by God and is therefore under divine obligation to preach the gospel to every living person (Luke 24:47; Matt. 28:18-19).

We deny that any particular class or group of persons, whatever their ethnic or cultural identity, may be ignored or passed over in the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-22). God purposes a global church made up from people of every tribe, language, and nation (Rev. 7:9).

6. We affirm that faith in Jesus Christ as the divine Word (or Logos, John 1:1), the second Person of the Trinity, co-eternal and co-essential with the Father and the Holy Spirit (Heb. 1:3), is foundational to faith in the gospel.

We deny that any view of Jesus Christ which reduces or rejects his full deity is gospel faith or will avail to salvation.

7. We affirm that Jesus Christ is God incarnate (John 1:14), the virgin-born descendant of David (Rom. 1:3), he had a true human nature, was subject to the law of God (Gal. 4:5), and was like us at all points, except without sin (Heb. 2:17, 7:26–28). We affirm that faith in the true humanity of Christ is essential to faith in the gospel.

We deny that anyone who rejects the humanity of Christ, his incarnation, or his sinlessness, or who maintains that these truths are not essential to the gospel, will be saved (1 John 4:2–3).

8. We affirm that the atonement of Christ by which, in his obedience, he offered a perfect sacrifice, propitiating the Father by paying for our sins and satisfying divine justice on our behalf according to God's eternal plan, is an essential element of the gospel.

We deny that any view of the atonement that rejects the substitutionary satisfaction of divine justice, accomplished vicariously for believers, is compatible with the teaching of the gospel.

9. We affirm that Christ's saving work included both his life and his death on our behalf (Gal. 3:13). We declare that faith in the perfect obedience of Christ by which he fulfilled all the demands of the law of God in our behalf is essential to the gospel.

We deny that our salvation was achieved merely or exclusively by the death of Christ without reference to his life of perfect righteousness.

10. We affirm that the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead is essential to the biblical gospel (1 Cor. 15:14).

We deny the validity of any so-called gospel that denies the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ.

11. We affirm that the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone is essential to the gospel (Rom. 3:28; 4:5; Gal. 2:16).

We deny that any person can believe the biblical gospel and at the same time reject the apostolic teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. We also deny that there is more than one true gospel (Gal. 1:6–9).

12. We affirm that the doctrine of the imputation (reckoning or counting) both of our sins to Christ and of his righteousness to us, whereby our sins are fully forgiven and we are fully accepted, is essential to the biblical gospel (2 Cor. 5:19–21).

We deny that we are justified by the righteousness of Christ infused into us or by any righteousness that is thought to inhere within us.

13. We affirm that the righteousness of Christ by which we are justified is properly his own, which he achieved apart from us, in and by his perfect obedience. This righteousness is counted, reckoned, or imputed to us by the forensic (that is, legal) declaration of God, as the sole ground of our justification.

We deny that any works we perform at any stage of our existence add to the merit of Christ or earn for us any merit that contributes in any way to the ground of our justification (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5).

14. We affirm that, while all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are in the process of being made holy and conformed to the image of Christ, those consequences of justification are not its ground. God declares us just, remits our sins, and adopts us as his children, by his grace alone, and through faith alone, because of Christ alone, while we are still sinners (Rom. 4:5).

We deny that believers must be inherently righteous by virtue of their co-operation with God's life-transforming grace before God will declare them justified in Christ. We are justified while we are still sinners.

15. We affirm that saving faith results in sanctification, the transformation of life in growing conformity to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification means ongoing repentance, a life of turning from sin to serve Jesus Christ in grateful reliance on him as one's Lord and Master (Gal. 5:22–25; Rom. 8:4, 13–14).

We reject any view of justification which divorces it from our sanctifying union with Christ and our increasing conformity to his image through prayer, repentance, cross-bearing, and life in the Spirit.

16. We affirm that saving faith includes mental assent to the content of the gospel, acknowledgement of our own sin and need, and personal trust and reliance upon Christ and his work.

We deny that saving faith includes only mental acceptance of the gospel, and that justification is secured by a mere outward profession of faith. We further deny that any element of saving faith is a meritorious work or earns salvation for us.

17. We affirm that, although true doctrine is vital for spiritual health and well-being, we are not saved by doctrine. Doctrine is necessary to inform us how we may be saved by Christ, but it is Christ who saves.

We deny that the doctrines of the gospel can be rejected without harm. Denial of the gospel brings spiritual ruin and exposes us to God's judgement.

18. We affirm that Jesus Christ commands his followers to proclaim the gospel to all living persons, evangelising everyone everywhere, and discipling believers within the fellowship of the church. A full and faithful witness to Christ includes the witness of personal testimony, godly living, and acts of mercy and charity to our neighbour, without which the preaching of the gospel appears barren.

We deny that the witness of personal testimony, godly living, and acts of mercy and charity to our neighbours constitutes evangelism apart from the proclamation of the gospel.

### **Our Commitment**

As evangelicals united in the gospel, we promise to watch over and care for one another, to pray for and forgive one another, and to reach out in love and truth to God's people everywhere, for we are one family, one in the Holy Spirit, and one in Christ.

Centuries ago it was truly said that in things necessary there must be unity, in things less than necessary there must be liberty, and in all things there must be charity. We see all these gospel truths as necessary.

Now to God, the Author of the truth and grace of this gospel, through Jesus Christ, its subject and our Lord, be praise and glory forever and ever. Amen.

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# THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF TRUTH CHALLENGES POSTMODERNIST TRUTH DECAY

*Douglas Groothuis*

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A venerable old Russian proverb claims that 'One word of truth outweighs the world'. Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn mounted a decades-long, suffering-ridden campaign for truth on the basis of this proverb, believing that an entire communist regime would not forever resist, repress or refute the stubborn realities that witnessed against it. Having found God in the Gulag, and against all odds, Solzhenitsyn staked his life on the hope that the truth would prevail and that his calling would be vindicated – even in the face of entrenched ideology, massive propaganda, systematic oppression, and pure terror. Though the history books be rewritten, the dissidents silenced, and the masses misled, the truth itself would stand firm and upright. It could not be beaten into submission to falsehood. And Solzhenitsyn, under God, would be its prophet.

Nearly two hundred years after the founding of America, a moral reformer called his country to be true to its constituting ideals. On August 28, 1963, before over two hundred thousand people gathered between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King Jr explained the purpose of this historic gathering:

*In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>1</sup>*

'But!, King lamented, it 'is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of colour are concerned'. Nevertheless, the civil rights leader passionately intoned, 'I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "we hold these truths to be self evident; that all men are created equal",<sup>2</sup> and that one day

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., 'I Have a Dream', in William J. Bennett, ed., *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 573.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, *The Book of Virtues*

*all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'free at last! free at last! thank God almighty, we are free at last!'*<sup>3</sup>

King's flair for oratory should not obscure the philosophical assumptions on which his earnest and articulate outcry was founded. His moral appeal flowed from his conviction that America's deepest ideals, though imperfectly implemented, were true to a moral reality larger than America itself. His hope was animated by his belief that a greater measure of justice was attainable through the struggles of the oppressed, the repentance of the oppressors, and the providence of God Almighty. Truth would win out in the end – despite the snarling police dogs, the gushing fire hoses, the bombed black churches and the political damage control of an establishment unwilling to grant full personhood and the rights thereof to African-American citizens.

For millennia, a resolute confidence about truth has summoned philosophers, prophets, reformers and even a few politicians to defy convention and resist illicit authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical. When Professor Martin Luther affirmed the newly rediscovered doctrine of justification by faith alone – a truth that would galvanise and energise the Reformation – he confronted both state and church power by saying, 'Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me'.

The very phrase, 'speaking truth to power', so often invoked by idealists and activists of many stripes, rests on the assurance that truth is owned by no one, is rejected at one's peril, and contains a dynamic greater than any error. Whether we find Socrates suffering death at the hand of the state rather than recant his teachings, or envision Gandhi standing unarmed for Indian independence against the British imperial forces, or remember our American suffragists fighting for the right of women to vote in a male-dominated society, heroes have heretofore been defined and esteemed by their adherence to truth and their willingness to suffer all on its behalf.

## Truth In Decay

Surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, American philosopher Richard Rorty sounds a different note. Following his hero, John Dewey, he asserts that 'Truth is what my colleagues let me get away with'.<sup>4</sup> Rorty and a raft of other academics in philosophy, history, psychology, law, sociology, anthropology, and even theology have abandoned the classical and commonsensical view of truth that lies at the heart of the examples given above and

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, *The Book of Virtues*, 576.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1979); see also, Stephen Louthan, 'On Religion – A Discussion with Richard Rorty, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff', *Christian Scholars Review*, Volume XXVI:2, 177-83.

have instead embraced a concept of truth that undermines any sense of absolute, objective, and universal verity. The idea of truth as objective, we are told, must be abandoned with the demise of modernism, which is regarded as the misguided attempt of the Enlightenment to attain objective certitude on matters of philosophical, scientific, and moral concern. We are postmodern now, and have left behind such grandiose endeavours for the sake of more modest aims.

For these postmodern thinkers, the very idea of truth has decayed and disintegrated. It is no longer something knowable by anyone who engages in the proper forms of investigation and study. Truth is not over and above us, something that can be conveyed across cultures and over time. It is inseparable from our cultural conditioning, our psychology, our race, and our gender. At the end of the day, truth is simply what we, as individuals and as communities, make it to be – and nothing more. Truth dissolves into a host of disconnected ‘truths’, all equal to each other but unrelated to one another: there is no overall, rational scheme of things. One chronicler of postmodernism, Walter Truett Anderson, explains it this way:

*Postmodernity challenges the view that the truth is – as Isaiah Berlin put it – one and undivided, the same for all men everywhere at all times. The newer view regards any truth as socially constructed, contingent, inseparable from the peculiar needs and preferences of certain people in a certain time and place. This notion has many implications – it leaves no value, custom, belief, or eternal verity totally untouched.<sup>5</sup>*

But truth decay is not occurring only in the halls of the academy, where isolated and idiosyncratic professors advance strange theories before their curious colleagues and captive students. It is everywhere in postmodern culture, often more assumed than argued for, more in the air than on the mind. Truth decay dominates most television programmes, the cinema, best-selling books, and popular songs.

Truth decay insinuates itself even into churches, Christian colleges, and seminaries. During a somewhat heated debate on the nature of truth at a conference on postmodernism at which I had spoken, a man who teaches philosophy at a Christian college told me that objective knowledge is impossible and that he rejects the idea that our ideas can correspond to an external reality. When I asked him if the law of gravity would be true if no one were on earth at the time, he replied, ‘No. Truth is limited to our language’. Philip Kenneson, another professor at a Christian college, also propounds the notion that ‘there is no such thing as objective truth, and it’s a good thing, too’.<sup>6</sup> Author and chaplain William Willimon stated in an article in

<sup>5</sup> Walter Truett Anderson, *The Future of the Self: Inventing the Postmodern Person* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1997), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Kenneson, ‘There is No Such Thing as Objective Truth, and it’s a Good Thing, Too’, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed., Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 155–72.

*Christianity Today* that 'Christians who argue for the "objective" truth of Jesus are making a tactical error', because 'Jesus did not arrive among us enunciating a set of propositions that we are to affirm'.<sup>7</sup>

Such decay is evident in the fact that various polls have shown that high percentages of self-proclaimed evangelicals do not believe. A woman I know startled a table of Christian women at a luncheon by saying that her mission in life was to discover the truth and apply it to life. It was, apparently, a new thought for them.

## Understanding Truth Decay

Truth decay is a cultural condition in which the very idea of absolute, objective and universal truth is considered implausible or held in open contempt. The reasons for truth decay are both philosophical and sociological, rooted in the intellectual world of ideas as well the cultural world of everyday experience. These two worlds reinforce one another. Postmodern culture – with its increasing pluralism, relativism, information overload, heightened mobility, identity confusions, and so forth – makes postmodernist philosophy seem more plausible. However, merely living in this cultural context does not mean that one must become a postmodernist on matters of truth, however tempting that may be to some.

The truth itself does not decay. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'The grass withers, and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever' (Is. 40:8). Likewise, Jesus affirmed that 'heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away' (Matt. 24:35). Yet, the human grasp of truth in a fallen world may loosen or slip. 'Truth has stumbled in the streets', Isaiah lamented (Is. 59:14). Jeremiah also declared to an apostate Israel, 'Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips' (Jer. 7:28).

When Pontius Pilate interrogated Jesus before his crucifixion, Jesus proclaimed, 'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me' (John 18:37). To this Pilate replied, 'What is truth?' and immediately left Jesus to address the Jews who wanted Christ crucified (38). As philosopher Francis Bacon wrote, 'What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer.'<sup>8</sup> Although we have no record of any reply by Jesus, Christians affirm that Pilate was staring Truth in the face, for Jesus had stated earlier to Thomas, 'I am the way and the truth and the life' (John 14:6).

This raises the perennial question of the nature of truth. What does it mean for a statement, a philosophy or a religion to be true?

<sup>7</sup> William H. Willimon, 'Jesus' Peculiar Truth', *Christianity Today*, March 4, 1996, 21. Willimon would not consider himself a postmodernist, but a postliberal. Nevertheless, his views agree substantially with postmodernist themes.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Of Truth', in *Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works*, ed. Sidney Warhost (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1965), 47.



This has been the subject of much debate in postmodernist circles, where the traditional view of truth as objective and knowable is no longer accepted. Even outside of academic discussions, people may be as cynical about truth as was Pilate. 'What is truth?' they smirk, without waiting for an answer. Unless we are clear about what it means for something to be true, any religious or moral claim to truth – Christian or otherwise – will perplex more than enlighten. Before attempting to determine which claims are true, we need to understand the nature of truth itself. Or as Francis Schaeffer put it, we need to distinguish the *content* of truth (what statements are true) from the *concept* of truth (what truth is), because our view of truth itself shapes everything about us.<sup>9</sup>

The problem with postmoderns is that they have made peace with a poisonous view of truth, an untrue view of truth. It is one kind of problem to believe an untruth, to take as fact something that in reality is a falsehood, yet still believe that truth exists and can be known. If one believes, for instance, that Jesus never claimed to be God Incarnate, historical evidence can be marshalled to refute this claim. However, it is another kind of problem too if one believes that truth itself is merely a matter of personal belief and social custom, so that the truth about Jesus depends on who you take him to be; in this case, no amount of evidence or argument about particular matters of fact will change one's belief. The argument must, instead, be shifted to the very nature of truth itself.

Even though 'the need of truth is more sacred than any other need',<sup>10</sup> as Simone Weil put it, this nutrient for the soul is often scuttled and usurped by a desire for lesser goods. C.S. Lewis captured this problem a generation ago in the *Screwtape Letters*, where a senior demon, Screwtape, instructs a lower-ranking demon, Wormwood, in the art of deception. His insights are a warning of things to come. Instead of using logical arguments to keep someone from following Christ, Wormwood is advised keep the Christian's mind off the very idea of sound reasoning leading to true conclusions. After all, Screwtape observes,

*Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily 'true' or 'false', but as 'academic' or 'practical', 'outworn' or 'contemporary', 'conventional' or 'ruthless'. Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church.<sup>11</sup>*

Argument shifts the man's thoughts 'onto the Enemy's own ground', and by 'the very act of arguing, you awake the patient's reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result?' Wormwood must see to

<sup>9</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 30th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998; orig. pub., 1968), 175.

<sup>10</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953), 37.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, revised ed. (New York: MacMillan, 1961), 8.

it that his man avoids the 'fatal habit of attending to universal issues and withdrawing his attention from the stream of immediate sense experiences'.<sup>12</sup> Attending to 'universal issues' – to matters of objective and eternal verity – is just too dangerous, from the demonic perspective. Being concerned with 'real life', meaning the unreflective immersion in the immediate, is far safer – and much more postmodern. But just don't think too much about what 'real' actually means.<sup>13</sup>

Truth decay has ramifications for all religious truth claims, including those of Christianity, because all schemas of the sacred claim to represent ultimate reality, whether it be the Tao, Brahman, Nirvana, Allah, or the Trinity. But truth decay also affects every other area of life, from politics to art to law to history. If the idea of objective truth falls into disrepute, politics devolves into nothing but image manipulation and power mongering. Social consensus and the duties of shared citizenship become irrelevant and impossible as various subsets of the population – differentiated by race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation – grasp for power by claiming unimpeachable authority on the basis of their cultural particularities: 'It's a black thing; you wouldn't understand', or 'It's a woman's thing; men just don't get it'. If there is no beauty beyond the eye of the beholder, art becomes merely a tool for social influence and personal expression; the category of obscenity is as obsolete as the ideal of beauty. If law is not grounded in a moral order that transcends any criminal code or constitution it becomes a set of malleable and ultimately arbitrary edicts. If no objective facts can be discerned from the past the novel cannot be distinguished from the historical, nor mythology differentiated from biography. History becomes a tool for special interest groups who rewrite the past on the basis of their predilections, without the possibility of rational critique from outside the group.

These interrelated elements of truth decay energise the culture wars that besiege our postmodern times. Just as warfare between nations breaks out after the breakdown of diplomacy, and civil wars break out after the breakdown of agreed upon legal norms, so culture wars break out after the breakdown of a consensual understanding of truth as objective and knowable through rational investigation and persuasion. When reasonable debate serves no purpose in achieving a knowledge of truth, all that remains are the machinations of power – whether the cause be racial, sexual or religious. Citizens become tribespeople with little sense of the commonweal. The maxim of 'speaking truth to power' is transformed into 'mobilising power to overcome the other's power'.

Although the Bible does not present a carefully nuanced philosophical discussion of the nature of truth, it does offer a unified perspective on the matter of truth and falsity that flatly opposes the postmodernist orientation. It speaks authoritatively not only on

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*.

what things are true but on the nature of truth itself. The biblical view of the nature of truth was common in the cultures for which it was originally written, but this view can be rigorously defended before the postmodern world as well. We will discuss the biblical notion of truth and then advance a more philosophical exposition and defence of that view against postmodernist rejections of it.

## Biblical Language and the Nature of Truth

The Scriptures use the Hebrew and Greek words for truth and their derivatives repeatedly and without embarrassment. The meaning of the Hebrew term *'emet*, which is at the root of the great majority of the Hebrew words related to truth, involves the ideas of 'support' and 'stability'. From this root flows the twofold notion of truth as faithfulness and conformity to fact.<sup>14</sup>

God is true (or faithful) to his word and in his activities and attitudes; God is the God of truth. So David prays, 'Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth' (Ps. 31:5; see 2 Chr. 15:3). Through Isaiah, God declares, 'I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right' (Is. 45:19). Likewise, people need to respond to the God of truth in truth: 'The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth' (Ps. 145:18).

The Hebrew *'emet* can also represent 'that which is conformed to reality in contrast to anything that would be erroneous or deceitful'.<sup>15</sup> In several passages, 'If it is true' means, 'If the charge is substantiated' (Is. 43:9; Deut. 13:14; 17:4). Many biblical texts include statements such as 'speaking the truth' (Prov. 8:7; Jer. 9:5) or 'giving a true message' (Dan. 10:1) or a 'true vision' (Dan. 8:26). After Elijah raised from the dead the widow of Zarephath's son, she exclaimed that 'the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth' (1 Kgs 17:24). *'Emet* can also connote 'what is authentic, reliable', or simply 'right', such as 'true justice' (Zech. 7:9) or as in swearing in a 'truthful, just and righteous way' (Jer. 4:2) or 'your law is true' (Ps. 119:142).

Roger Nicole explains that faithfulness and conformity to fact are

*converging lines of meaning in the Old Testament. Neither is reducible to the other, yet they are not mutually conflicting. It is because truth is conformity to fact that confidence may be placed in it or in the one who asserts it, and it is because a person is faithful that he or she would be careful to make statements that are true.*<sup>16</sup>

There is no indication that *truth* in the Hebrew Bible is another word for belief or mere social custom, since beliefs can be false and

<sup>14</sup> Roger Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth', *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D.A. Carson, John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 290.

<sup>15</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth'.

<sup>16</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth', 291.

customs be opposed to God's will. 'The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in those who are truthful' (Prov. 12:22). Jeremiah attacked the falsehood and unfaithfulness of his people when he said, 'How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD", when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?' (Jer. 8:8). When Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he drew a stark contrast between irreconcilable options: 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him?' (1 Kgs 18:21). The ensuing power confrontation vindicated Elijah's God as the one who was the faithful and true God. After God sent fire to consume the sacrifice left unchanged by the pleas of Baal's frantic followers, the people 'fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD - he is God! The LORD - he is God"' (1 Kgs 18:39). Nicole notes that 'the clear and insistent witness of the OT in condemnation of all lies and deceit reinforces its strong commendation of *'emet* as faithfulness and veracity'.<sup>17</sup>

Although some scholars have posited a great difference between the Hebrew and Greek notions of truth, the Greek NT's understanding of truth is consistent with that of the Hebrew Scriptures. The NT word *aletheia* and its derivations retain the Hebrew idea of 'conformity to fact' expressed in *'emet*. To cite just one book of the NT, the Gospel of John employs *aletheia* ('truth') and related words very frequently in a variety of settings. 'John uses truth vocabulary in its conventional sense of veracity/genuineness/opposite of false; but also develops his own particular meaning, where truth refers to the reality of God the Father revealed in Jesus the Son'.<sup>18</sup> John's understanding of truth presupposes a correspondence view of truth, but it also builds this foundation theologically by adding specific content concerning the manifestation of truth in Jesus Christ (John 7:28; 8:16).<sup>19</sup>

The related idea of faithfulness is typically expressed by words in the family of *πιστος*, which are translated as: faithful, reliable, or trustworthy.<sup>20</sup> The NT frequently combines the words 'grace and truth', which is reminiscent of the Hebrew phrase 'mercy and truth'. Jesus is 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14) and 'grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). Another fact that shows the continuity between the two Testaments' view of truth is the NT's use of the Hebrew 'amen', which occurs 129 times.<sup>21</sup> This is typically translated as 'truly' or 'I tell you the truth', as when Jesus says, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again'. In Revelation 3:14, the glorified Christ refers to himself as 'the Amen, the faithful and true witness'.

<sup>17</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth', 292.

<sup>18</sup> D.M. Crump, 'Truth', in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, 1. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 859.

<sup>19</sup> See Crump, 'Truth' *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* in 859-62, for more on this.

<sup>20</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth' 292.

<sup>21</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth' 293.

Each member of the Trinity is closely associated with truth in the NT. In praying for his disciples Jesus says, 'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth' (John 17:17). The gospel is sometimes called 'the truth of Christ' (2 Cor. 11:10). The Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of Truth' (John 14:17; 15:26) or simply 'the truth' (1 John 5:6).

According to Nicole, 'The primary New Testament emphasis is clearly on truth as conformity to reality and opposition to lies and errors'.<sup>22</sup> Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the NT draw a clear contrast between truth and error. John warns of distinguishing the 'Spirit of Truth and the spirit of falsehood' (1 John 4:6). Paul says that those who deny the reality of the God behind creation 'suppress the truth by their wickedness' (Rom. 1:18). Before Pilate, Jesus divided the field into truth and error: 'For this reason, I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me' (John 18:37). Pilate took the side of falsehood.

In another group of passages, mostly in John's writings, 'the contrast is not so much between correct and false, but rather between complete and incomplete, definitive and provisional, full-orbed and partial'.<sup>23</sup> For instance, 'the law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). Christ's truth completed what was anticipated in the law.<sup>24</sup>

New Testament scholar, Leon Morris points out that the Apostle Paul often uses the noun *altheia*, which Paul knows to mean 'that truth is accuracy over against falsehood'. Paul also refers 'to speaking the truth just as we commonly do (Eph. 4:25; 1 Tim. 2:7).'<sup>25</sup> Paul develops this basic concept of accuracy in a rich and full way in his references to 'the truth of God' (Rom. 1:25; 3:7; 15:8) and the 'judgement of God' as 'according to truth' (Rom. 2:2). Morris comments that for Paul 'human judgements might be biased according to class or creed, but with God truth is the only consideration'.<sup>26</sup> Paul finds truth in the OT Law (Rom. 2:20), in God's creation (Rom. 1:18-20), and supremely in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:21; see also John 14:6). This claim about Christ is that 'the revelation of truth in Jesus is utterly reliable'.<sup>27</sup> Paul also writes of the truth of the gospel (Col. 1:15; Gal. 2:5; Eph. 1:13). As Morris notes:

*The truth that is so closely bound up with God finds its expression here on earth in the gospel, which sets out the ultimate truth of the love of God especially as shown in the cross, the sinfulness of the human race, and the provision God has made for salvation. The gospel and truth are closely connected. This is so also in the passage in which Paul speaks*

<sup>22</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth'.

<sup>23</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth', 295

<sup>24</sup> See also John 1:9; 6:32, 55; 15:1; Heb. 8:2; 9:24.

<sup>25</sup> Leon Morris, 'Truth', in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Red (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 954.

<sup>26</sup> Morris, 'Truth' *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*.

<sup>27</sup> Morris, 'Truth' *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*.

of God's will for people 'to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth' (1 Tim. 2:4).<sup>28</sup>

A survey of the biblical view of truth cannot do justice to the richness of the words employed in a wide diversity of contexts. Nevertheless, it should be clear that such a view of truth collides with postmodernist notions of the social construction of reality and the relativity of truth. Nicole concludes that 'The biblical view of truth (*emet-aletheia*) is like a rope with several intertwined strands'; it, 'involves factuality, faithfulness, and completeness'.<sup>29</sup> The Bible does not present truth as a cultural creation of the ancient Jews or the early Christians. They received truth from the God who speaks truth to his creatures, and they were expected by this God to conform themselves to this truth.

### The Distinctives of the Biblical View of Truth

We need to amplify the character of the truth described above and draw some contrasts with postmodernist claims. There are several core aspects to a biblical view of truth, especially in regard to the great truths of God's redemptive programme. In explaining these crucial categories of the nature of biblical truth I do not mean to imply that I or anyone else has perfectly grasped the nature or extent of God's truth. We all err in many ways, not least of which in our thinking about the most important truth of all – God! However, I believe this discussion helps open up what Scripture claims about God's revelation.

#### *Truth is revealed by God*

Truth is not constructed or invented by individuals and/or communities. Various *beliefs* may be the result of human invention and group construction, but *truth* comes from the disclosure of a personal and moral God who makes himself known. Paul's letter to the Romans, for instance, tells us that God has made his existence known through both creation and human conscience, so that all people are 'without excuse' before their Creator and Lawgiver (2:14–15). Those who suppressed this revealed truth in wickedness (1:18) crafted idols instead of worshipping God (1:21–25); but in so doing 'they exchanged the truth of God for a lie' (1:25). Lies become idols, and every idol obscures the truth. This is because all idols are unrealities in deceptive dress, untruths, shabby social constructions of the supposed sacred.

Besides revealing himself generally through creation and conscience, God has revealed the particular truths of salvation through his mighty deeds in history, the incarnation, and in the sixty-six books of Holy Scripture. The writer of Hebrews declares the nature of God's revelation: 'For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing

<sup>28</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth' 296.

<sup>29</sup> Nicole, 'The Biblical Concept of Truth'; emphasis in the original.

of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart' (Heb. 4:12). The word of God is a revelation from a transcendent, holy and communicative being, and so has an inner dynamism that rises above the psychology, sociology, and politics of its readers, even though it is mediated through the particular cultural forms of its original context. For Paul, Scripture is divinely inspired: 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16). G.K. Chesterton captured the meaning of divine revelation, as opposed to human construction, when he affirmed this about the Christian faith: 'I won't call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and humanity made it; and it made me'.<sup>30</sup> This stress on God's authority and ownership of truth should give followers of Christ a deep sense of anchorage in a divine reality beyond themselves. Their faith is not a 'religious preference' but has an indissoluble reference to revealed truths.

The Christian world-view, contra-postmodernism, understands language not as a self-referential, merely human, and ultimately arbitrary system of signs that is reducible to contingent cultural factors, but as the gift of a rational God entrusted to beings made in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). 'In the beginning was the Word [*Logos*], and the Word was with God and the Word was God' (John 1:1-2). Communication has eternally existed between all the members of the Trinity, and continues as God speaks to us – through creation, conscience, and Scripture – and as we speak truth to each other and to God. Human language has been wounded by the fall and fractured by the judgement at Babel (Genesis 11), but is not thrown down for the count. Language is God's vehicle for conveying truth, although it may be clouded in much of our experience (as evidenced by the density and outright unintelligibility of much postmodernist writing).<sup>31</sup>

God's disclosure of himself through revelation is not an existential experience devoid of rational, knowable content. God reveals objective truth about himself. J.P. Moreland makes this point with respect to biblical revelation:

*The central biblical terms of revelation – galah (Hebrew), apocalupto, paneroo (Greek) – express the idea of revealing, disclosing, making manifest or known. When we affirm that the Bible is a revelation from God, we do not simply assert that God as a person is known in and through it. We also mean that God has revealed understandable, objectively true propositions. The Lord's Word is not only practically useful, it is also*

<sup>30</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (New York: Doubleday, 1990; orig. pub., 1908), 9.

<sup>31</sup> For a humorous treatment of this, see Stephen Katz, 'How to Speak and Write Postmodern', in *The Truth About Truth*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 92-95. See also, John Leo, 'Towers of Pomobabble', *US News and World Report*, March 15, 1999, 16.

*theoretically true (John 17:17). God has revealed truth to us and not just himself.*<sup>32</sup>

*Objective truth exists and is knowable.*

The claim that God has revealed himself to us presupposes objective truth as the cognitive content of revelation. God is the source of objective truth about himself and his creation. Unlike a Platonic view that makes truth abstract and independent of God's being and revelation, the biblical view deems truth to be personal in that it ultimately issues from a personal God. But truth is also objective because God is the final court of appeal, the source of all truth, by virtue of his nature and his will. Objective truth is truth that is not dependent on any creature's subjective feelings, desires, or beliefs. Paul makes this point when he discusses the unbelief of some Jews: 'What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every person a liar' (Rom. 3:3-4). God's truth is not dependent upon any individual's or group's experiences or interpretations, however strongly felt or culturally entrenched they may be.

George Barna claims that 80 per cent of Americans 'believe that the Bible includes the statement that "God helps those who help themselves"'.<sup>33</sup> But the numbers say nothing concerning the facts of the matter because this folk belief is not based on any objective reality and woefully contradicts the biblical teaching on God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:3-8).

The biblical emphasis on objective truth does not minimize the imperative to make God's truth subjectively or existentially one's own; rather, it sharpens and deepens the need for authentic personal experience. Believing in objective truth does not mean one is neutral or detached concerning that truth. Truth matters mightily, particularly the saving and sanctifying truth of the gospel. Biblical faith involves assent to true doctrine (derived from biblical revelation) as a necessary element of saving faith and growth in Christ, but it also demands trust and commitment to the flaming truths to which one gives assent.<sup>34</sup> The objective truth must be subjectively appropriated. Deeper and more personal yet, one should entrust oneself to the very God of truth, the one 'to whom we must give account' (Heb. 4:13). When Paul was labouring to persuade the Galatians not to follow the error of the Judaizers, he spoke to them as 'my dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth

<sup>32</sup> J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 45. For an in-depth treatment of the biblical words for revelation and modern views of revelation, see Colin Brown, general editor, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), vol. 3:309-39.

<sup>33</sup> George Barna, *Index of Leading Spiritual Indicators* (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1996), 80.

<sup>34</sup> I take the term 'flaming truth' from Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), 81-83.



until Christ is formed in you' (Gal. 4:19). This highlights the need for biblical truth to stick to the soul and transform the whole person into greater Christlikeness. As David prayed, 'Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place' (Ps. 51:6).

Neither does the objectivity of God's truth diminish the reality of the church as an interactive and interdependent community of believers. Postmodernism has tended to stress community norms and practices over the existence of objective truth, but biblically there should be no conflict between the two. The church, as the community of God, was born through truth and is constituted by the truth. Therefore, Paul calls the church 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). He also desires that the church mature to the degree that members 'speak the truth in love' to one another (Eph. 4:15). The worship, teaching, preaching, fellowship, outreach and service of the church must all be centred on revealed and objective truth as its unifying and impelling dynamic. The Body of Christ, like Christ himself, must 'bear witness to the truth' (John 18:36).

### *Christian truth is absolute in nature*

This means that God's truth is invariant. God's truth is true without exception or exemption. Neither is it relative, shifting, or revisable. The weather may change, but God will not. An example from physics helps to illustrate the concept. According to Einstein's theory of relativity, the speed of light is an absolute limit in physics; nothing can travel faster. For this reason Einstein almost called his model idea 'the theory of invariance'. He named it 'the theory of relativity' not because everything is relative, but because things are relative to what is invariant or absolute, namely, the speed of light.<sup>35</sup>

A classic text on the absoluteness of truth is Jesus' uncompromising statement, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me' (John 14:6). There is no exception or exemption from this claim: there is but one way to the Father, Jesus himself. Facing the pluralism of the ancient Mediterranean world, Paul was so bold as to say this in his discussion of food offered to idols:

*We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Cor. 8:4-6).*

The truth of the gospel is not subject to any human veto or democratic procedures. Jesus was not elected Lord by humans, but

<sup>35</sup> On this see, Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties*, revised ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 1-5.

chosen by God; nor can he be dethroned by any human effort or opinion or insurrection. Jesus declared, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son' (John 3:16). Jesus is an only child, without peer and beyond challenge.

The insistence on absolute truth is a massive and sharp stumbling block for postmoderns - given their absolute abhorrence of the absolute - but it cannot be softened or avoided if believers are to remain faithful to the truth of God. In Barna's annual surveys he asks a random sample of adults their opinion on this statement: 'There is no such thing as absolute truth; two people could define truth in totally conflicting ways, but both could still be correct'. He found that between 1991 and 1994 the percentage of those who agree with this statement grew faster among Christians than non-Christians, with 62 per cent of Christians rejecting absolute truth in 1994.<sup>36</sup> Charles Colson comments that 'believers cannot present a credible defence of biblical truth when more than half don't even believe in real truth'.<sup>37</sup>

The notion of absolute truth is sometimes misunderstood and rejected for false reasons. Consider, for instance, the following statement: 'Jesus alone is Lord and provides the only way for anyone to be reconciled to God'. There are several things this statement does *not* mean.

First, it does not mean that Christians claim to have unlimited or perfect knowledge about God or humanity - or anything else. It simply means that God has revealed his one way of salvation through Christ and made this known in history, as recorded in Scripture and as illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Those who know Jesus as Lord confess his absoluteness, not their own. Christ's supremacy means our dependency. We can know this truth and testify to it only in light of God's grace because it is only by grace that grace can be known.

Second, to confess the absolute truth of Christ does not entail that one must be able to prove it absolutely to anyone on command. The nature of truth and its verification are two different matters. For instance, a mathematical problem has only one correct answer, but the calculation of that answer may be quite long and involved. The defence of the Christian worldview (apologetics) involves many intellectual claims and counterclaims, but this does not detract from the absoluteness of the truth that is being defended.

Third, holding to absolute truth does not remove one from the give-and-take of logical argument and the presentation of evidence. Sadly, many Christians confess Christ's absoluteness and then resolutely refuse to engage in any apologetic discussion of the matter. This leads their questioners to conclude that Christian faith

<sup>36</sup> Reported in Charles Colson, 'Apologetics for the Church: Why Christians Are Losing the Culture War', *Christian Research Journal*, Summer, 1996, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Colson, 'Apologetics for the Church'.

is not only absolutely unshakeable, but absolutely unconvincing. Yet a solid conviction of truth should lead to intellectual satisfaction and contentment, as well as the willingness to dialogue. As Harry Blamires put it in his classic *The Christian Mind*, 'If one is conscious of drawing one's convictions from a solid, deep-rooted tradition, one inevitably has a sense of quiet assurance in one's beliefs and a feeling that is the reverse of touchy defensiveness'.<sup>38</sup>

Fourth, to claim that the truth about God and God's ways with humanity is absolute is not to claim that Christians are inerrant in their understanding about every aspect of their faith. The Apostle Peter, a personal disciple of Jesus Christ, stubbornly refused to believe that Gentiles could be full participants in the new order of redemption revealed through Jesus until God gave him a vision to dispel his theological narrowness (Acts 10:9-48). Christians should be open to having their theology corrected and deepened through prolonged intellectual engagement with fellow believers and non-Christians alike. If the core of their faith is indeed absolutely true, there is nothing to fear – and much to gain – from such a dialogue. J. Gresham Machen was a staunch defender of the fundamentals of the faith against those who would undermine it; yet he realised that our grasp of the truth always needs to be refined and improved. Theology can progress because our errors can be corrected by God's truth. Theology is

*a setting forth of those facts upon which experience is based. It is not indeed a complete setting forth of those facts, and therefore progress in theology becomes possible; it may be true so far as it goes; and only because there is that possibility of attaining truth and of setting it forth ever more completely can there be progress.*<sup>39</sup>

More positively, though, the absolute truth of Jesus Christ frees erring and needy mortals from the confusion of a welter of conflicting religious claims. God is focused in Jesus and not spread all over the map. There is one way out of the spiritual maze – if one looks up to the cross. As Jesus said, 'Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life' (John 3:15).<sup>40</sup>

### *Truth is universal*

To be universal means to apply everywhere, to engage everything and to exclude nothing. The gospel message and the moral law of

<sup>38</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 120–21.

<sup>39</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1927), 32–33.

<sup>40</sup> On Christ's exclusivity, see R. Douglas Geivett, 'Is Jesus the Only Way', in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1995), 177–205; Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995); and Douglas Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).

God are not circumscribed or restricted by cultural conditions. When Peter was preaching before the Jewish religious authorities, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and declared in crystal clear terms concerning Jesus of Nazareth: 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). This includes everyone and excludes none. Salvation is offered to all humanity, not just a particular group of people. Paul further extends the universality of the gospel by affirming the supremacy of the risen Christ, 'not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church' (Eph. 1:21-22). The scope of Christ's authority is unlimited. Paul further expands on this in his great Christological hymn that declares that because Christ Jesus, though 'being in very nature God', emptied himself to come to earth for our salvation, God the Father 'exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name that is above every name'. In light of this, 'every knee should bow' and 'every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil. 2:6, 9-10). Evangelical theologian Carl Henry drives this home:

*Christianity contends that revelational truth is intelligible, expressible in valid propositions, and universally communicable. Christianity does not profess to communicate a meaning that is significant only within a particular community or culture. It expects men of all cultures and nations to comprehend its claims about God and insists that men everywhere ought to acknowledge and appropriate them.<sup>41</sup>*

The universality of the gospel message is conceptually locked into the Great Commission. Jesus proclaims that he possesses *all* authority in the universe. On this basis, his disciples must disciple *all* the nations, baptising converts in the name of the Trinity, and teaching them *all* that Christ commanded. Those sent can take heart that Jesus will be with them *always*, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus' authority is universal, as is the field of mission, the scope of the teaching, and the duration of Christ's fellowship.

The Book of Revelation gives us a powerful picture of the universal effects of the Great Commission. While not all who are offered the gospel will believe it and receive it, the Apostle John was privy to a heavenly vision of a vast and diverse multitude who accepted the truth of Jesus and worshipped him accordingly:

*I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:*

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<sup>41</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1976), 229.

'Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb' (Revelation 7:9-10; see also 5:9)

God's truth is not provincial, parochial, or partial; it is universal in scope and application. Yet it also allows for unique cultural expression and the creative individuality of people made in the divine image and redeemed through the Lamb. The truth does not flatten us out into faceless conformity, but liberates each of us to be who we ought to be under the Lordship of Christ. Just as God provided for twelve different tribes in the Hebrew economy, Providence makes room for a diversity of gifts, personality types, and callings in Christ. Yet all exist because of, and under, God's universal truth. As Jesus promised, 'If you are truly my disciples, then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:31-32).

*The truth of God is eternally engaging and momentous, not trendy or superficial*

In postmodern times, our sensory environments are saturated with bright images, intrusive words and blaring sounds – all vying for our attention (and our funds). Fads, whether in advertising, politics or sports, come and go with increasing rapidity. It seems that nothing is settled or rooted or stable over time. In his book, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*, Stephen Carter laments that for many people (and the state), religion is little more than a hobby, something with which to amuse oneself, or a kind of curiosity for when the mood strikes, but not something to take all that seriously, especially in matters of legality.<sup>42</sup>

Yet beyond empty ephemerality, there lies 'the Rock of ages'. Beyond the fragility of shifting tastes, hobby horses, and market fluctuations stands the Word of the Lord, resolute and rooted in the eternal God of the universe. 'The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God lives forever' (Is. 40:8). 'Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens' (Ps. 119:89). And as God declared to his rebellious people: 'I the LORD do not change' (Mal. 3:6). God remains faithful to his covenant with creation and to the community he summons forth. His word endures and is reliable, from age to age. James combines the eternal trustworthiness of God with divine goodness and truth:

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created (Jas 1:17-18).*

God's truth is grounded in God's eternal being. It has no expiration date and needs no image make-overs. Moreover, it is not an inert and abstract kind of truth, such as that of mathematics, but a living,

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993), 23-43.

personal, and dynamic truth – a truth that transcends the transient trivialities of our age and touches us at the deepest levels of our beings by including us in an eternal drama. This truth transforms us, as David knew well: ‘I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you’ (Ps. 119:11).

While postmodernists are enamoured of stories and narratives, they demur when it comes to meta-narratives, deeming them hopelessly ideological and debunked by the failures of history. But God’s eternal truth involves the meta-narrative of divine Providence. Being a disciple of Jesus alerts us to the grand themes of God’s story and the unfolding of his eternal plan of creation, fall, and redemption. Christians live, as Kierkegaard put it, ‘under the audit of eternity’ and within the vicissitudes of the divine drama.<sup>43</sup> Everything matters, when viewed under the eternal audit.

Far from being trivial, the truth of God made known to a rebellious planet is perennially engaging and continually controversial. Because of this, followers of Jesus are enlisted in the great debate for the hearts and minds of immortal beings. The stakes are infinite, the participants precious. The eternal God offers eternal life through ‘the blood of Christ’ who ‘offered himself unblemished to God’ to ‘cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God’ and ‘receive the promised eternal inheritance’ (Heb. 9:14–15). The truth is deathless, but the ‘second death’ awaits those who reject God’s saving truth (Rev. 21:8). Because of its view of truth – the truth of Christ, of heaven, and of hell – the Christian claim is the highest stakes proposition on earth. God’s revelation of truth has eternal consequences for us all. As Os Guinness said, ‘Hell is nothing is nothing less than the truth known too late’.<sup>44</sup>

### *Truth is exclusive, specific, and antithetical*

For every theological yes, there are a million nos. What is true excludes all that opposes it. This why God declares, ‘You shall worship no other gods before me’ (Ex. 20:3). If there is but one God, all other claimants are impostors. The inexorable logic of antithesis is also behind Jesus’ fearful utterance, ‘Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it’ (Matt. 7:13). As R.J. Rushdoony commented, ‘Truth is exact and precise, and the slightest departure from the truth is the substitution of falsity for truth’.<sup>45</sup> Exactitude in truth should be our goal, even if it is never our perfect achievement.

<sup>43</sup> On this, see Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1948).

<sup>44</sup> Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death: The Sixties Counterculture and How it Changed America Forever*, revsd edn (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994; orig. pub. 1973), 358.

<sup>45</sup> R.J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978), 118.

While 'all truth is God's truth', not all that claims to be true fits together logically and factually. Postmoderns find this hard to swallow, because of their taste for a smorgasbord of varying 'truths' selected and combined according to whim, fashion, feeling, or even frenzy. This was highlighted by a rather surreal exchange between Pastor Leith Anderson and a young man who asserted he believed in, (1) Reformed theology, (2) the inerrancy of Scripture, and (3) reincarnation - all without seeing the contradiction between believing in reincarnation and believing in a Bible and a theology that teaches resurrection! Because the young man did not think in terms of truth being exclusive (resurrection eliminates reincarnation), he held to both because he 'liked' both.<sup>46</sup> One may like green peas and chocolate ice-cream without pain of logical contradiction, but resurrection (the once-for-all uniting of the soul with one immortal body) cannot be squared with reincarnation (the recycling of the soul through different many bodies over time).<sup>47</sup>

The logic of truth is the logic of the law (or principle) of non-contradiction. First codified (but not invented) by Aristotle, this law states, 'Nothing can both be and not be at the same time in the same respect'. Nothing can possess incompatible properties; that is, nothing can be what it is not. For example, Jesus cannot be both sinless and sinful. Put another way, if one statement is true, its opposite cannot also be true in the same respect at the same time. If there is exactly one God, there cannot be more than one God. This logical principle is not the unique possession of Christianity, it is a truth of all creation. It is how God ordained us to think. Despite what some benighted theologians have claimed, Christian faith does not require that we somehow transcend this law of logic. Although God's ways are above our ways (Is. 55:8-9), God is consistent and cannot lie (Titus 1:2). God cannot deny himself or assert what is false; nor can he make something both true and false in the same way at the same time.<sup>48</sup>

Those who claim that this basic principle of thought is false must assert this principle in order to deny it. In so doing, they make a mockery out of all thought, language and the very notion of truth. Consider the statement: 'The law of non-contradiction is false.' For this statement itself to be true, it must contradict its opposite (that the law of non-contradiction is true). But in so doing, it must affirm the duality of truth and falsity - which is the very thing that the law of non-contradiction itself requires. As Schaeffer tersely, but truly, put it:

<sup>46</sup> Reported in Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 175-76.

<sup>47</sup> There are, in fact, various theories of reincarnation, some much more complex than this. However, all views of reincarnation - whether Buddhist or Hindu - are logically incompatible with the doctrine of resurrection. On this, see Douglas Groothuis, *Confronting the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 85-105.

<sup>48</sup> For the record, this is not a denial of God's omnipotence, because omnipotence concerns the ability to perform logically possible actions.

When a man says that thinking in terms of an antithesis is wrong, what he is really doing is using the concept of antithesis to deny antithesis. That is the way God has made us and there is no other way to think.<sup>49</sup>

Schaeffer, the great modern soldier for truth, was echoing Aristotle, Plato, all great philosophers – and Reality itself.<sup>50</sup>

The law of non-contradiction combined with the specificity of Christian truth and the high stakes involved in choosing whether to believe in Christ means that truth for the Christian is confrontational. The Christian cannot rest contented and happy in a world oozing with error. When Paul beheld the idolatry of Athens, he was 'greatly distressed' and 'so he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks' (Acts 17:16–17), which led to his famous Mars Hill address. While the postmodern world beholds the great welter of lifestyles, trends and facades and can only utter 'whatever' with a smirk and a slouch, the followers of 'the Way' (Acts 11:26) must lift their heads, take a few deep breaths, pray for courage and humility, and defend 'the faith given once for all to the saints' (Jude 3).

Anthropologist Ernest Gellner, who was a secular critic of postmodernism, paid tribute to monotheism when he said that the Enlightenment emphasis on 'the uniqueness of truth' and the hope of discovering nature's objective secrets is rooted in monotheism's avoidance of 'the facile self-deception of universal relativism'.<sup>51</sup> Gellner said:

*It was a jealous Jehovah who really taught mankind the Law of Excluded Middle: Greek formalisation of logic (and geometry and grammar) probably would not have been sufficient on its own. Without a strong religious impulsion toward a single orderly world, and the consequent avoidance of opportunist, manipulative incoherence, the cognitive miracle [of the Enlightenment] would probably not have occurred.*<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 35.

<sup>50</sup> Some think that modern physics has done away with the principle of non-contradiction because of light behaving like both wave and particle. This is not true. The discovery of quantum electrodynamics (QED) near the turn of the century showed that 'light is essentially made up of particles' but that all elementary particles are capable of 'wave-like' behaviour. By showing in a logically consistent manner how light was capable of behaving like a wave on some occasions and a particle on others, this breakthrough produced one self-consistent paradigm that satisfactorily resolved the confounding puzzle of 'wave-particle duality', Scott R. Burson and Jerry L. Walls, C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer: *Lessons for a New Century from the Most Influential Apologists of Our Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 86–87. The authors cite as their source: Richard P. Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 37.

<sup>51</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 95.

<sup>52</sup> Gellner, *Postmodernism*, 95–96.



The law (or principle) of excluded middle trades on the same essential insight as the law of non-contradiction by stating that any factual statement and its denial cannot both be true. Either Jehovah is Lord or he is not Lord. There is no middle option. Jesus assumes this principle when he warns that 'No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money' (Matt. 6:24). Although Gellner embraces the Enlightenment vision, which he deems more rational than Christianity, he respects monotheism for its insistence on a singular and knowable truth – against postmodernism's 'opportunist, manipulative incoherence'.<sup>53</sup>

The fires of theological antithesis are at work in the apostle Paul when he sharply warns the foolish Galatians not to embrace heretical teachings that opposed the gospel. Being 'astonished' that the Galatians were 'so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ' and were 'turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all' (Gal. 1:6–7), Paul drives home his point with passion and power in two passages:

*Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you let that person be eternally condemned (Gal. 1:7–8).*

*I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:11–12; cf. Acts 9).*

The logic of Paul's appeal is simply the logic of antithesis and exclusion. He is unwilling and unable to synthesise or amalgamate the truth of the gospel with the error of the Judaizers, who were bewitching his beloved flock of believers (Gal. 3:1). This truth is far too important to be compromised; the stakes are far too high for that, because only one gospel can deliver sinful people from eternal condemnation – the gospel of Jesus. Paul is not having a temper tantrum or throwing his apostolic weight around. No, he recognises the terms of the debate and the eternal implications of truth and falsehood for the soul.

### *Truth, Christianly understood, is systemic and unified*

Truth is one, as God is one. All truths cohere with another as expressions of God's harmonious objective reality – of his being, his knowledge, and his creation. Something cannot be true in religion and false in science (or vice versa), or true in philosophy but false in theology (or vice versa).<sup>54</sup> There is only one world, God's world; it is a

<sup>53</sup> Gellner, *Postmodernism*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> On this see, Mortimer Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religion and the Unity of Truth* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1990), 10–39.

uni-verse, not a multi-verse. Although not a Christian, Wittgenstein understood this unity of truth well, 'If a god creates a world in which certain propositions are true, he creates thereby also a world in which all propositions consequent to them are true'. This is because a 'proposition asserts every proposition which follows from it'.<sup>55</sup>

In an age content with fragmented knowledge and conflicting opinions, Christians must strive for a well-integrated perspective on life that rings true wherever it is articulated. Nietzsche anticipated the postmodern mood when he opined: 'I mistrust all systematisers and I avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity'.<sup>56</sup> But Nietzsche was wrong. As Arthur Holmes put it, 'In a universe subject to the rule of one creator-God ... truth is seen as an interrelated and coherent whole'.<sup>57</sup> All areas of thought and life should be brought under the cosmic lordship of Christ. Schaeffer challenges us in this:

*It is no use saying he is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Lord of all things, if he is not the Lord of my whole unified intellectual life. I am false or confused if I sing about Christ's lordship and contrive to retain areas of my own life that are autonomous.*<sup>58</sup>

In our finitude and fallenness, we often fail to see the harmony of God's orchestration of all truths, but we strive to know what we can and to rest content with the mysteries framed by our knowledge. A fragmented and incoherent world-view is never the goal of the truth-seeking Christian.

#### *Christian truth is an end, not a means to any other end*

It should be desired and obtained for its own value. This flies in the face of postmodernist pragmatism, which reduces truth to social function or personal preference. As Harry Blamires declared,

*There is no subtler perversion of Christian Faith than to treat it as a mere means to a worldly end, however admirable that end in itself may be. The Christian Faith is important because it is true. What it happens to achieve, in ourselves or in others, is another and, strictly speaking, secondary matter.*<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Routledge, 1981), 107. Wittgenstein's understanding of the concatenation of propositional truth in the *Tractatus* was smaller than that which is implied in the Christian world view, where all things (whether necessary or contingent truths) work together according to God's plan; but his essential insight concerning logical implications with respect to propositions still holds, and is suggestive for Christian thinkers.

<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols', Aphorism #26 in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kauffman (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 470.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 7.

<sup>58</sup> Schaeffer, *Escape*, 83.

<sup>59</sup> Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 104.

Postmodernist spirituality deems truth as malleable and adaptable to one's perceived needs and style. One's 'God-concept' or 'personal spirituality' is formed irrespective of the idea of reality in and of itself. Truth, religious or otherwise, is what works – for me or for my social group. But Christian faith teaches that it works (or bears spiritual fruit) only because it is true.

The notion of spiritual truth as a means and not an end was hammered home to me by a college student who attended a lecture I gave on comparative religion in which I attempted to argue that all religions cannot be one in essence since they make such radically different truth-claims. She claimed that both Buddhism and Christianity can be true since Buddhists are helped by their Buddhist meditations and Christians benefit from their Christian prayers. To this, I gave an example of a married couple where one partner is committing adultery. The innocent partner is oblivious and thinks they have a good marriage. The marriage seems to 'work', but the reality is otherwise. Even if this scenario is somewhat unlikely, the illustration hit home, because the student then asked how we can ever know the truth at all. This scepticism ('What is the truth?') is better than pragmatism ('Truth is nothing but what works'), because it allows for the existence of a discoverable truth that means more than mere pragmatic results.

### Returning to truth

Without a thorough and deeply rooted understanding of the biblical view of truth as revealed, objective, absolute, universal, eternally engaging, antithetical and exclusive, unified and systematic, and as end in itself, the Christian response to postmodernism will be muted by the surrounding culture or will make illicit compromises with the truth-less spirit of the age. The good news is that truth is still truth, that it provides a backbone for witness and ministry in postmodern times, and that God's truth will never fail. As J.P. Moreland puts it:

*This is why truth is so powerful. It allows us to co-operate with reality, whether spiritual or physical, and tap into its power. As we learn to think correctly about God, specific scriptural teachings, the soul, or other important aspects of a Christian world view, we are placed in touch with God and those realities. And we thereby gain access to the power available to us to live in the kingdom of God.<sup>60</sup>*

This article is excerpted from chapters one and three of *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity From the Challenges of Postmodernism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000).

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<sup>60</sup> Moreland, *Love Your God*, 81-82; emphasis in the original.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST: APPROACHING THEOLOGICAL STUDY

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There can be no more pressing question to be addressed by the theological student than that of how academic theological study proper is to be related to the everyday life of that same student as a Christian believer. Now this is a vast subject, and scarcely one that can be covered adequately in this paper. It is, after all, an issue with which some of the church's greatest minds have wrestled with for a lifetime and yet never come up with a fully satisfactory answer. It is important at the start, therefore, that I clarify precisely what specific issues I intend to address in this paper in order, as the advertisers would say, to prevent disappointment later on. My aims will be modest. I shall not deal with specifics, merely with the general framework within which your studies should be approached.

I should make it clear from the start that although I recognise the head-heart dilemma as one that is peculiarly relevant to those engaged in full-time theological study, it is something that affects all thoughtful Christian everywhere. It is, of course, a cliché that all Christians are theologians – but it is nonetheless true for being a cliché. Anyone who reflects on God, who thinks about who God is and what he has done; anyone who has ever been puzzled or challenged by an apparent problem in the biblical text, or confused by the church's teaching that says God is one yet three, has been confronted with an issue of theological importance, has entered the world of theology proper, and has faced, perhaps albeit unconsciously, the perennial head-heart dilemma. It is thus not something peculiar to university bedsit discussions late at night; it is the inevitable result of the fact that the Christian faith, while challenging human beings as human beings, yet has an intellectual content which needs to be faced up to in some form and at some level by all Christian believers.

Having said all that, the head-heart dilemma is peculiarly relevant to full-time theologians because the issue lies so close to their existence on a relentless daily basis, and because it confronts them left, right, and centre. Challenges to their view of Scripture, God, Christ, and salvation occur on a daily basis, requiring much hard-headed intellectual effort in response. This embattled environment then creates an overwhelming temptation to abstract doctrine from the practical context of life, and to make it an end in itself. Thus, the Bible becomes a book we argue over, not something we build our lives upon; the trinity becomes an exercise in logic and metaphysics; not the cornerstone of creation and salvation; and so on and so

forth. Belief and practice, doctrine and life, are thus rent asunder and the Christian faith is, to put it bluntly, emasculated.

Now, many questions crowd into our minds when we approach the subject of how to relate theological studies to our everyday lives. A lot of these, however, deal with specifics: how does text criticism fit in with my evangelicalism? What is the relevance of hermeneutics to my daily Bible reading? What can history tell me about church life today? These are important questions but they represent specific manifestations of a deeper problem: for theologians the issue is ultimately one of how to integrate the task of treating the Bible both as an object of analysis in their studies and as the source of devotion in their Christian life. Problems raised by text criticism, systematic theology, philosophy of religion, church history *et cetera* all ultimately resolve themselves into variations on this one basic theme. What is needed, therefore, is a model of the Christian life which provides a framework that allows for the integration of analysis and devotion.

To construct such a model, we need first of all to define what theology, in an ideal world, would be (and I stress that we are talking 'ideal world' here. I will come to the real world in a while). At this point I confess my debt to John Calvin who, at the start of his *Institutes*, while not using the word 'theology', highlighted the fact that knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are intimately linked to the extent that it is not easy to see which precedes the other. Calvin's definition is useful here because it highlights the fact that theology has two poles which stand in relation to each other: on one side, there is God who reveals himself; on the other side there are human beings who receive that revelation. As Calvin will go on to say, that revelation of God is accommodated to human capacity - not that it is an imperfect, misleading and inadequate synthesis of the human and the divine, but that it is divine truth expressed in a manner which human beings can grasp. In short, the nature of theology is determined both by the God upon whom it depends and upon the humanity that receives it. This means that whatever model we develop to understand how theological study and Christian devotion are to be integrated must proceed on the basis of who we understand God to be; who we understand ourselves to be; and therefore the relationship that exists between the two.

The fundamentals of this relationship from an evangelical perspective can be sketched briefly as follows: the triune God created the world with humanity as the crown of creation; humanity fell into sin, sin which darkened the whole of its existence, including those areas traditionally referred to as intellect, will and emotions; through the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, God redeemed a people for himself; that people now enjoy fellowship with God the Father through Christ the Son via the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit; while Christians have a foretaste of their eschatological perfection in this life, however, they remain as those who look forward to the full consummation of their salvation at the end time, not those who enjoy it here and now other than by way of anticipation.

Given the reality of this basic framework for understanding our existence, it becomes obvious that the conditions for a healthy life as a theological student are, as one would expect, determined to a large extent by the conditions for a healthy spiritual life in general. What are these conditions? Well, to use a phrase beloved of the Puritans, these conditions consist primarily in careful and faithful attendance to the means of grace. That is where healthy spiritual life begins, and that is something which must take priority if we are ever to achieve a proper integration of our working lives with our broader Christian existence. We must all look to these bread and butter issues first before turning our minds to the more refined details.

What are these means of grace? Very simply they are, on a corporate level, involvement in the worshipping life of the church, with its preaching of the Word and its celebration of the Lord's Supper, and, on an individual level, prayer and Bible reading. Get these right, and you are well on the way to putting into place a life policy which will help you resolve difficulties you may have with relating your Christian life to your studies.

Of course, at this point some may be tempted to sneer. You wanted to read a university academic tell you some clever and brilliant ways of tying together the different parts of your life; you don't want to be told to go to church, to pray, and to read your Bible. Like Naaman wanting to be cured of his leprosy, you want something sophisticated and elaborate that will solve the problem. Well, if that is how you react to my argument so far, I would like to make a number of observations:

In my experience as a university academic over the last eight years, I have known a number of evangelical students come unstuck during their studies. They have found the critical assaults on the Bible or the radical attacks from philosophy and theology, or the relativising effects of historical and phenomenological studies, to be too much to bear and have ultimately found it easier to abandon their evangelicalism than to stand against the deluge of alternative arguments being hurled at them from all sides. This is without doubt a tragedy and has, on more than one occasion, called me to question my own position as a member of departments where such things take place; and yet, in every single case of which I have personal experience, the problem has never been purely, or even primarily, an intellectual one. In conversations with such students, the problem has always started in another sphere: church attendance has slipped; Bible reading has slipped; the life of principled obedience has slipped; and it is this practical decline in daily Christian walk which has provided the framework for the impending intellectual crisis. Indeed, on one or two occasions, it would appear that the intellectual crisis was itself primarily the result of the individual concerned trying to justify to themselves a prior course of moral or practical action which they had adopted. Of course, I would hesitate to generalise from my experience to every individual case of student spiritual crisis, but the general pattern is at least suggestive; and when we take seriously our existence as whole, spiritual, sinful beings, with all of the irrationality that

inevitably entails, we must be wary of overestimating the amount of intellectual honesty and integrity which really motivates our intellectual convictions.

We must always remember that human beings are not simply intellectual automata. Our beliefs are not simply the result of value-neutral logical processes working from self-evident truths. This is something which the collapse of Enlightenment rationalism in the wake of postmodern critiques has made very clear indeed; and yet this is something which Luther and Calvin could have told us five hundred years ago, which Paul had spotted way back in the first century, and which the serpent so brilliantly exploits in Genesis 3. Christian belief is therefore a moral as well as an intellectual stance. The reason that individuals do not believe in Christ is because they are in a state of moral and intellectual rebellion against God. This is not to say that non-Christians are as bad as they could be; but it is to point to the fact that objections to Christian belief all contain a fundamental moral element which refuses God's claims. After all, Christ points us to our sinfulness, our moral turpitude; he stands in judgement on our self-righteousness; he calls us to repent, die to self, and live for him, though every instinct in our minds and bodies militates against this; and surprise, surprise, we do not like this at all. Furthermore, while we remain on this mortal plain, we will continue to struggle against our basic human desire to be free of God. Loss of faith, like lack of faith, is thus never simply a problem of epistemology; it is also a problem of morality. In the same way the failure to integrate any particular aspect of our lives into the larger reality of our union with Christ, from our studies in the university library to our behaviour within the marriage bond, is not simply a problem of technique but also a problem also of morality.

My first basic point, then, is this: don't imagine that you can successfully integrate your theological studies with your daily Christian walk unless you have first established the latter on a sound footing. Are you praying daily for spiritual help, not just for your work, but for your life in general? Are you reading God's word every day not simply to pass your examinations but to familiarise yourself with salvation history, with God's revelation of himself, so that you yourself can understand more fully the God who has redeemed you and your own identity as one of the redeemed? Are you attending a local church regularly (and I must stress at this point that CU is no substitute for church) where the word is faithfully preached and the Lord's Supper is duly administered? If not, then you might as well stop now, for I have nothing more of use to say to you here; if you have not laid such basic foundations for integrating your studies with your faith, then you are simply not ready to address the more specific issues which academic theology raises for the Christian.

If, however, you are one who attends carefully to those things which are the basic staple of the Christian life, both at an individual and corporate level, then we can move on the next level of getting the integration right. If the first point refers to your general life as a Christian, then my second point refers specifically to how you should

understand your studies to function. What is the model with which you should operate when attempting to set your studies in the context of your Christian life as a whole? Here, I would like to make two points and, again, neither of them is unique to the calling of the theological student. The first (in order of priority) is that theological study, like everything else we do in this life, is something to be done first and foremost to the glory of God; and that is to inform and shape the attitude with which it is pursued. Such a point is, I hope, self-evident. Second, theological studies are to be seen as an opportunity for, and an avenue of, service to the church in general.

It is worth taking this latter point to heart: the fundamental model of all Christian activity is that of servanthood. Christians are not those who live for self, who strive to gain personal glory, but those who give of themselves to others. 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' – a slogan of Marxist origin, I know, but not a bad watchword for the Christian in general and the theological student in particular. The Christian is, by definition, someone to whom great privileges have been given; and with great privileges come great responsibilities for serving others. And the theological student, by dint of what he or she studies, is somebody with particularly marvellous privileges and thus especially daunting responsibilities.

How does this play out in practice? Well, first, we must rid ourselves of any notion that we are, so to speak, God's gift to the Christian church. We may know more theology than the person sitting next to us on the pew at a Sunday morning service; we may well be able to beat them hands down in any debate which may erupt concerning some theological point in the context of a church meeting or even an informal discussion over coffee; but that does not mean we are in any sense a more effective, God-glorifying Christian than they are. If Christianity involves the intimate union of belief and practice, of knowledge of God which finds its being through piety, as Calvin would say, that is the godliness of the true Christian, then technical mastery of the niceties of scholarship does not in any sense count by itself as genuine Christianity. As a result, mere technical accomplishment does not qualify you to take a leadership role within your local congregation, or provide an occasion for you to lord it over others. Many of us are quite capable of reading and mastering the ins and outs of a car maintenance manual; but I would hesitate to recommend myself as capable of changing the brake blocks on my own car, let alone that of someone else. Thus, knowing what prayer means is not the same as knowing what it means to pray; knowing what, say, the Chalcedonian definition *says* is not the same thing as knowing the Chalcedonian definition's *personal significance*.

Luther captured this truth nicely when he distinguished between his own theology and that of his opponents by contrasting the existential impact and personal demands of Christian doctrine as he understood it with the position of others. His enemies, he said, knew that Christ had died and been raised from the dead; but he knew that Christ had died and been raised from the dead *for him*. The difference is between, a scholar sitting in a library and reading



a note from the archives saying that the cavalry are on their way to save the beleaguered troops, and actually being one of the beleaguered troops who receives the note.

All this is to leap ahead of ourselves, but it does underline the fact that knowledge of an abstract, impersonal kind should never be mistaken for that personal, doctrinal knowledge which lies at the heart of the Christian life, faith, and church. The simple point, therefore is: when you leave the lecture theatre and walk through the door of the church, remember first, who you are – a sinner saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, nothing more, nothing less. Second, remember that while you may have gifts, great gifts, to offer the church – that is for the church to recognise and for you to offer in all humility. Your attitude should be that of the servant who sees his or her skills as an opportunity for the more effective serving of others than as a basis for exalting yourself above the level of those who have not had the privilege of a theological education.

As a result the next step towards getting theological study right, after the foundation of personal and corporate worship, is involvement as a servant at whatever level in the day-to-day running of the church, whether as a Sunday School teacher, a Youth Club leader, or even as a church cleaner. Even Christ stooped to wash feet – and we should be prepared to make ourselves no less humble.

This of course is no less than is demanded of every believer: all should work hard within the local church as a natural part of their Christian existence. What I am arguing all along is that true integration of faith and learning is only possible within a balanced and healthy Christian life in general, and this aspect of practical church service, in whatever form, is simply another part of this. Nevertheless, there are many tangible benefits that can accrue to the theologian in particular from certain kinds of service, in addition to the general spiritual benefits of a life of principled obedience.

Sunday School, for example, is one excellent means of developing a truly theological (as opposed to merely academic or scholarly) mindset. Here the theologian is faced with a class of youngsters who are probably not yet old enough to be either indifferent or hostile, or some lethal combination of the two; and yet they are also theologically unlearned. Children may have the basic Bible stories, they may even have a certain amount of theology proper; but the twin challenges of explaining difficult concepts to them in ways that they can understand, and of making these concepts relevant to how they live their lives and think each day is a profound challenge of which the average ivory-tower theologian has but the vaguest notion. This is where the rubber hits the road; this is where you get your hands dirty; this is where the real challenge of the relevance of theology to real life as lived by real people can start to be felt.

This, in a roundabout way, now brings us at last to the issue of academic theology. As I wrote at the beginning, I am neither qualified nor keen to address the specific questions that you may have about biblical criticism, religious philosophy *et cetera* which you may feel impede the integration of your faith and your studies for which you

long. I do however wish to highlight one problem with academic theology which lies right at its very core and which provides much of the context for the problem of relating faith and studies under which some readers labour. This is the issue of theology as a university discipline. Now, I need to be careful that I am clear about what I mean here, and thus it is necessary to give a little historical background.

Anyone who has any knowledge of theology as it was pursued in the patristic era, as it developed in the Middle Ages, or as it was elaborated by the Reformers and the Puritans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will know that it was a practical discipline, intimately connected with the life of the church and that precisely because it arose out of the life of the church. It was part and parcel of the church's life and testimony, and thus intensely practical. Not that it was reducible to mere praxis or reflection upon religious experience and never engaged in any deep analysis of doctrine – such is self-evidently not the case. But it was generally pursued as part and parcel of making sense of the church's confession in worship that Jesus is Lord. Debates about the trinity, about the person of Christ, and about grace all arose within the life of the church as the church itself faced up to various challenges, internal and external, to its position and sought to clarify its testimony in the world. I am of course aware that this is something of a simplification; after all, any attempt to reduce 1800 years of theological reflection to a single cause or theme is bound to involve a considerable amount of generalisation. Nevertheless in the pre-critical world there was a unity of purpose involved in the theological enterprise provided both by its practitioners, people involved in the day-to-day life of the church, its target audience, those who made up the church, its foundation, the personal revelation of the personal God, and its overall context, the worship of the church. Pre-critical theology was thus doxological, terminating in the praise and glorification of God by the men and women who made up the worshipping congregations. This is an element that has been lost particularly in the sphere of university theology courses.

The reasons for the loss are manifold. The privatisation of religion that the Enlightenment witnessed served to push existential questions concerning the personal nature of religious truth to the background. In addition, central aspects of Christianity's historic testimony, notably the whole idea of Scripture, of special revelation, and of reconciliation as embodied in the great creeds and confessions of the church, became something of an embarrassment, given the epistemological and ethical assumptions of the time. Theology had long been described using the language of science, but Enlightenment notions of what was and was not scientific meant that if theology was to retain scientific status within the university, it would have to undergo a fundamental divorce from its roots in the life and worship of the community of faith.

In addition – and here I guess I tread a more controversial path – the very existence and pursuit of theology within universities was not, I would argue, either helpful or appropriate. While many had

Christian origins, the university at the Enlightenment became – and remains – a secular phenomenon, where the structures of what does and does not count as knowledge were set (and continue to be set) by the philosophies of Enlightenment Europe (postmodernism being, in my view, fundamentally continuous with modernity in highly significant ways). The founding of the University of Berlin, with the debates that involved about whether, and what kind of, theology had any role to play are a microcosm of what was happening all over Europe.

The outcome of the Enlightening of the universities was devastating for theology precisely because the Enlightenment demanded that theology give an account of itself not in terms of itself, its own inner dynamics and ultimate purposes, but in terms of the universal criteria which had been established for judging what was and was not plausible within the university framework. Basic to this, of course, was the loss of the idea that the Bible was a supernaturally inspired book and that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. As Stephen Williams has persuasively argued in his book *Revelation and Reconciliation*,<sup>1</sup> the former offended Enlightenment epistemology, the latter outraged Enlightenment morality. At the time, this was not considered to be too serious to the Christian faith: the self-confidence of the Enlightened Christians, bolstered by the fact that Christianity was, after all, utterly dominant in the cultural realm, led them to continue to believe that Christianity was self-evidently superior to other religions and belief-systems, even without a supernatural Bible and saviour understood in terms of Chalcedon.

That the theological toothpaste was well and truly out of the tube at this point only became evident later. Nobody at the time ever thought that Christianity would have to justify its special place in life and thought, so obviously superior did it seem to all the other alternatives. Indeed, the fact that the Bible was not inspired in the traditional sense of the word, and that Christ was not saviour in the traditional sense of the word, did not mean that both were not still that much better than the rest. Nevertheless, in conceding these two points, Enlightenment theologians conceded the two points which actually supported the pursuit of theology as one discipline possessing its own integrity. Now, without any epistemological or soteriological centre to hold it together, the stage was set for the discipline to fragment hopelessly, not just as a result of the external pressures created by the rising tide of information and of sub-disciplinary specialisation in academic culture in general, but also by its own lack of any internal basis for providing coherence and unity. The result is that today, it is rather misleading to speak of theology or divinity as a university discipline. More often than not, it is a disparate collection of various subjects, methodologies, and philosophies that just happen to be in the same department for reasons which have more to do with institutional history and administration than any inner-coherence or mutual relationship.

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge: CUP, 1996.

There are a number of lessons to be drawn from this brief historical observation. First, be aware that the discipline or disciplines you study today did not drop straight out of the sky. They possess no ideal existence. Their form and content, the questions asked and the answers given, are not immune from the more general flow of history. Rather, they are profoundly shaped in form, purpose and content by the world from which they have emerged. One factor is, therefore, Enlightenment presuppositions as to what constitutes valid method, what is plausible, and what is unacceptable as an academic argument. For the reader, in the year 2000, more significant factors are, I suspect, how the managerial culture that so dominates universities, combined with the crude vocationalism with which teaching philosophy and political policy is so riddled, is changing not just the way subjects are taught in the classroom, but the whole way in which education is understood within the context of the wider society. For all the talk of the impact of postmodern epistemologies on education, my own belief as one working within the system is that the epistemological discussions within the academy are a side-show to the main event, a case of academics fiddling while Rome burns. State-funded university theology's main problem at the moment is not actually one of justifying itself on epistemological grounds but of justifying itself on commercial and economic grounds. The real danger to thoughtfulness, intelligent debate, and real learning comes from the fundamentalist mullahs of management control and consumerism who, not content with having reduced society at large worshipping the false gods of modern materialism, wish to do the same with higher learning. When the purpose of education becomes merely serving the commercial marketplace, Arts subjects in general are placed in grave peril, and theology in particular looks decidedly unstable.

But I digress. The real lesson here is *learn* the history of your chosen discipline. Why do NT scholars think the way they do when they reject the Virgin Birth? Is it to do with the historical evidence? Is it to do with an epistemology that rules out *a priori* the possibility of this having happened? Is it to do with the tradition of theology to which they belong which simply discounts the need for the Virgin Birth? All are legitimate questions to ask. This, of course, is a simple but important point. Obviously, the evangelicals who specialise in these different fields are the ones who are competent to guide you in these matters; but in general do not be fooled by outward displays of scholarly objectivity – find out what the agenda is, and how it is shaping the way your lecturers think and teach.

The second point is of somewhat more importance: be aware, as you seek to integrate your faith and your studies that the very context of your studies, the very university tradition within which you stand, is profoundly opposed to precisely the integration you seek. The world of university theology is an unnatural one. It is one where a subject which developed specifically within the context of faith as a means of nurturing the people of God has been taken out of its context and stripped of its most important presuppositions. This is where I think most danger lies and indeed, it is what concerns me

most about the evangelical obsession with academic success. Theology is not just a question of content it is also a question of context; and if we simply replace liberalism with evangelicalism with regard to content whilst remaining happy with the overall context, we will have failed.

Let me elaborate this as follows using a silly, but I hope pointed, analogy. Let's imagine that at some point in the future it is decided that the discipline of medicine needs to be reformed. This is done first of all by denying that certain medicines had curative properties which others lacked. Initially it is assumed that while antibiotics are obviously superior to baking soda in curing infections, the difference in curative power is one of degree, not kind; but gradually, over time, all compounds come to be regarded as having equal power to cure. In addition to this first claim regarding curative powers, the reformers also deny that there are any diseases out there that need to be cured. Again it is initially assumed that the very ill person is actually not very ill but simply in possession of less health than others; gradually, however, the logic of the position works itself out and it becomes an act of cultural imperialism to claim that any one person is more or less ill than any other. Indeed, such a claim will certainly lose you your job within the medical faculty. The results, of course, are predictable – the discipline of medicine, whose very purpose was reflection upon and the curing of human diseases, fragments because there is nothing to keep it together, no central concern or conviction which can provide a positive base for disciplinary integrity. In addition, the hospitals run by the students of these great men of medicine gradually empty as their patients are either killed off by the treatments offered, and other people simply go elsewhere for treatment, knowing instinctively that what is on offer is not adequate for their needs.

Then along come a group of students who, for whatever reason, gradually become disillusioned with what they are being taught. For some it does not match up to their own experience; for others it is singularly useless when they themselves are ill; for yet others it is because they have been reading of some other books on medicine which, while not featuring on any reading list they are ever given in medical school, yet seem to make a good deal of sense. Over time they formalise themselves into a Pharmaceutical and Medical Students Fellowship, where they meet once a week to discuss medical questions and to attack the received academic orthodoxy. Indeed, once a year they even arrange a conference where the speakers are a bunch of crazed fundamentalists who have somehow managed to get jobs on medical faculties despite being committed to the outlandish ideas that medicine is good for you, poison is bad, and people actually suffer from diseases (though, interestingly enough, many of these speakers hold faculty positions in the history of medicine, or the interpretation of medical texts, not in medicine proper).

There is a problem with this group, however: yes, they are intellectually committed to the old reactionary notions of disease and cure; yes, they want to think through the medicinal issues for

themselves; but at the end of the day, all they do is talk. They consider their task done when they demonstrate to Professor Smith and Dr Jones that it is *plausible* even within the setting of the medical school to believe in disease and cure; and at base, all they really want is for Smith and Jones and their ilk to accept them and their viewpoint as having a legitimate place at the discussion table. They don't actually want to go out and apply what they have learned to themselves or to the sick lying in hospital; they are fearful even in their fellowship groups of ever using the old offensive terminology of illness, cure, poison, and remedy; and they certainly don't want to imply that Smith and Jones don't make interesting and legitimate contributions to debate. Indeed they often laugh loudest when Smith cracks a joke about ignorant medical fundamentalists of the past such as Louis Pasteur and Alexander Fleming; these students just want to be known as clever men of medicine who, despite their intellectual commitment to curing people, are nevertheless on the whole perfectly decent and user-friendly and not going to rock the boat by actually trying to cure people. They have rejected the *shibboleths* of contemporary medical theory, but they have done so within the same context and culture as their opponents: not that of curing people, but that of juggling with clever and interesting ideas.

You get the point, I hope? Of course, the analogy is not perfect and medical science will never, we hope, go down such an absurd path. Yet the modern university's approach to theology would appear as absurd to a medieval scholar as the scenario I imagined above would appear to a modern medic. The modern university has divorced theology from its proper place in the life of the church and has abandoned the traditional language of doxology, orthodoxy and heresy. You can set up all the RTSF meetings you like, but the problem is not just the liberal theology which you learn at university but the whole university culture and ethos, of which you and I are a part. The university is ultimately not interested in those claims which make Christian theology so important: revelation, sin, Christ, redemption. For the university, at best these are artefacts to be examined and discussed, at worst irrelevant in an education which looks only to economic criteria as constituting real truth; they are certainly never to be applied. Yet these are things the very truth or falsehood of which demand not just an intellectual response with our minds but an existential response with the whole of our beings. We simply cannot talk about them in a disinterested way and remain true to their original import. It is not enough to reject the liberal theology of your lecturers; that is a task worth doing when done thoughtfully and in an informed manner; but it is not a task worth doing as an end in itself; nor is it the most difficult task you will face. Indeed, if that is all you as an evangelical theology student, are interested in, you might as well not bother.

Far more subtle and far more serious than being damaged by the *content* of what you are taught is being damaged by the *context* of university discourse, with its tendency to neutralise all the imperatives of Christian theology. Now don't misinterpret me here – I am not saying that we should not be aware of and interact with the best contemporary scholarship, the most thoughtful liberal theology,

and the most sophisticated challenges to orthodoxy. My own historical heroes, Augustine, Aquinas, John Owen, Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield and W.G.T. Shedd, to name but six, did all of these things; none of them felt the need to cut themselves off from the scholarly world; but they did not pursue orthodox theology for its own sake. They did so because they thought that such theology was faithful to the biblical text and was therefore of overwhelming importance both for themselves and for others. Don't be fooled by those evangelicals who today spend their time praising the insights of liberals and non-evangelicals while trashing or mocking our evangelical forefathers for their intellectual peccadilloes. Make no mistake, God will be the ultimate judge of this contemporary evangelical tendency to turn a blind eye to great blasphemies in liberal theologians who happen to say the odd useful or orthodox thing, while excoriating evangelicals of the past for their mistakes. Too many gnats are strained out, while too many huge elephants are being swallowed whole. Our forefathers were not idiots; neither were they uncouth louts who responded with knee-jerk abuse and anger to any who disagreed with them; but neither were they prepared to play happy families with those whose theology was fundamentally opposed to the gospel. The issues at stake, issues after all, of eternal consequence, were, are, and always will be just too important to be reduced to intellectual parlour games or restricted by the protocols of academic diplomacy. Yes, interact with liberals in an informed and thoughtful manner – the church needs men and women for such a task; but please do not buy into the contemporary culture of evangelical academic protocol which leads only to a useless blurring of what is good with what is bad. Making unconditional peace with heresy should never be mistaken for a proper integration of faith and learning.

In a way this brings me back to the points with which I started. You want to integrate your faith with your studies? It simply cannot be done in the purely academic environment of the university because the modern university in its very essence is designed to reject the kind of integration for which you seek. It can only be done when theology is given its proper place within the church, within the worshipping community. And that is why it is not just a matter of principled Christian obedience that you are actively involved in a local church fellowship; it is also a matter of sanctified common sense if you wish to pursue your university studies with true Christian zeal.

Why is this? Because church is the place where you will be reminded again and again of what it really is that you are studying and how it affects you. You may debate sin in a theology class, but in a sermon you will be told something you will never hear in a university lecture theatre: that you are yourself a sinner, intimately involved in the very thing you talked about so abstractly at the seminar. You might talk about atonement with your supervisor; but only the preacher will tell you that Christ died for you. You might study eschatology for an essay assignment, but only in church will you take the Lord's Supper, remembering that you do this until he comes again in glory.

In other words, you need not only to supplement the liberal stuff your lecturers teach you with sound, orthodox evangelical theology; you also need to place yourself in an environment where the indifference to and distance from real life that academic theological study engenders can be alleviated. And that place is church.

I hope this prospect excites you. When you hear on Sunday that you worship the God who rules over history, who is sovereign, who is powerful to save, and yet who stoops to take flesh himself, to care for the poor and the needy – does it not make your heart burn within you when you come to deal with issues of theology and biblical studies on a Monday morning? Of course, much of your studies will be tedious, frustrating, antithetical to the faith you hold dear; but the bottom line is, don't let it grind you down; and don't let the university set your theological life agenda as it sets your theological studies curriculum. Make sure that your head and heart are filled with enough good stuff to enable you to deal with dross as and when it comes your way. See your theological work as you should see all of your work: an act devoted to the glory of the God who bought you with his precious blood and will one day glorify you in heaven.

I close, therefore, with the words of one much better placed than I am to speak of the theological scholarship of his own day, liberal and conservative, Catholic and protestant; one who was accomplished across a whole range of academic disciplines in a way that would now be impossible; a man honoured by one of the great universities of Europe for his contribution to theology; but also a man who knew the love of Christ in his own heart and who sought through his writings, scholarly and devotional, to shed that love abroad. I speak, of course, of the great Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. Writing on 'The Idea of Systematic Theology', he wrote the following:

*The systematic theologian is pre-eminently a preacher of the gospel; and the end of his work is obviously not merely the logical arrangement of the truths which come under his hand, but the moving of men, through their power, to love God with all their heart and their neighbours as themselves; to choose their portion with the Saviour of their souls; to find and hold him precious; and to recognise and yield to the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit whom he has sent. With such truth as this he will not dare to deal in a cold and merely scientific spirit, but will justly and necessarily permit its preciousness and its practical destination to determine the spirit in which he handles it, and to awaken the reverential love with which alone he should investigate its reciprocal relations. For this he needs to be suffused at all times with a sense of the unspeakable worth of the revelation which lies before him as the source of his material, and with the personal bearings of its separate truths on his own heart and life; he needs to have had and to be having a full, rich, and deep religious experience of the great doctrines with which he deals; he needs to be living close to his God, to be resting always on the bosom of his Redeemer, to be filled at all times with the manifest influences of the Holy Spirit. The student of systematic theology needs a very sensitive*



*religious nature, a most thoroughly consecrated heart, and an outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon him, such as will fill him with that spiritual discernment, without which all native intellect is in vain. He needs to be not merely a student, not merely a thinker, not merely a systematizer, not merely a teacher – he needs to be like the beloved disciple himself in the highest, truest, and holiest sense, a divine.*<sup>2</sup>

Such was Warfield's vision. Impossible, you say, impossible to achieve that level of integration between devotion and study. Well, yes, with us these things are impossible – but with God, all things are possible. Let us pray that the great God of grace might grant us some measure of that Christian experience in our studies and teaching which Warfield describes so eloquently!

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<sup>2</sup> Warfield, B.B., *Studies in Theology*.

## INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR HOWARD MARSHALL

*Howard Marshall is Professor of New Testament in the Faculty of Divinity at Kings College, Aberdeen in this piece he talks to Carl Trueman the Editor of Themelios about his life and faith.*

**CT** *Howard, I wonder if you could start by telling us how and when you became a Christian.*

**IHM** It sounds like one of those traditional Christian testimonies which begin, 'I was brought up in a Christian home'. People usually go on to say, 'But that didn't make me a Christian', but I think in my case it probably did because it was largely due to the influence of my home and the churches to which my family took me that I became a Christian. I was, as it were, brought up with the Christian faith. Around about the age of 12 we moved to Aberdeen and I was taken to one or two evangelistic meetings of the sort where people had to stand up or come forward or do something to show that they were making a profession of faith, and I knew that you ought to make a public profession of your faith to be really a Christian. I did so at a meeting with Alan Redpath as a speaker in 1946, and that I think took away the doubts I had as to whether I really was a Christian or not, and I have continued carrying on ever since.

**CT** *So you were a Christian for as long really as you can remember, but when and why did you feel the call to evangelical scholarship?*

**IHM** I think I began to feel it while I was still at school. In the third year of the senior school the option arose of taking Greek as a subject, and I did so knowing that this would enable me to read the New Testament in the original Greek. I think from then onwards the conviction gradually grew that this was what I ought to be doing with my life and this led to me choosing to do classics at university rather than mathematics which was what I would have done if I had been left to my own devices. So it grew up gradually, and I think I felt a call to be a scholar or teacher, rather than being a minister.

**CT** *Would you see then the world of academic scholarship as one avenue of service to the church?*

**IHM** Yes certainly. For many people it is not such a thing, it is something done for its own sake. But I like to repeat the saying I heard from David Hubbard from Fuller Seminary a year or two back when he commented, 'We are not scholars who happen to be disciples, we are disciples who happen to be scholars'. I think that is the way round it has got to be. So the person who is doing biblical study and teaching is certainly there ultimately to serve the church even if they are serving in a secular institution such as I am and primarily teaching and writing as an academic discipline.

**CT** *This of course points towards the old issue of how one relates head and heart. I wonder if you wouldn't mind telling us how you have integrated your own life as a scholar with your own life both as a Christian believer and also as someone who is recognised as a significant figure.*

**IHM** I am not sure how far I have integrated these things successfully. I have never really felt any conflict between being a Christian and being a student of the Bible, particularly of the New Testament. There have certainly been problems and struggles for faith when the conclusions of scholarship which you are being taught, or are up against seem to go against Christian faith or the particular version of it that I hold. I think my stubbornness and sheer conservatism, as a psychological quality, has often kept me going when otherwise I might have wandered around a bit. I think it is important to be in a good Christian fellowship to have support from it and to be occupied in Christian work of one kind or another, and if possible to try and relate your studies to your practical Christian work. This is easier said than done. It is very difficult I should imagine to be lost in textual criticism, and to somehow make that part of your Christian witness. But there are other areas where one can do it successfully.

**CT** *Could you give any practical examples of how you aimed for this integration, even if you haven't always achieved it in the manner in which you have tried?*

**IHM** I think it has been useful to be involved in Christian work with students whom one is teaching. There were a number of years for example when we did a mission with students in our divinity department in Aberdeen and I think that was a good experience. I have also tried to write on a level that would be helpful to people in the church; sometimes one has to write things on an academic level and that is what counts in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), but at the same time it seems to me that those of us who are Christians studying the Bible have a very strong responsibility towards the church to produce what will be helpful particularly to preachers, and also to the church generally.

**CT** *Do you have any regrets, anything that perhaps you did wrong, or when you got the balance wrong, that you feel able to share with us.*

**IHM** It's hard to say. I think looking back I would like to have done more to bring together the academic study of the New Testament and the problems of expounding Scripture and using it in the church. I feel this particularly in teaching where it has been very much living in the first century and not doing sufficient to transfer, 'now what does this mean for the 20<sup>th</sup> century?', 'how do you preach about it?', 'how do you bring out its relevance for today?' To say that is the job of the practical theologians is really ducking the issue. But the trouble is that time has so often prevented one doing justice to both sides of the task, let alone to one side of it, so I have had to be content very often with saying, 'here is the foundation, now see how you build on it.'

**CT** *If we could move on, many of us younger folk have read books by Oliver Barclay and John Wenham, insiders' accounts of the changes within scholarship, particularly evangelical scholarship, since the war. You yourself have actually been an insider involved in many of the events recounted in these narratives. It's quite clear that major changes have taken place. I wonder if you would like to give us your opinion on the changes that have happened, the good ones, the bad ones, and changes that are neither good nor bad but merely changes.*

**IHM** So far as biblical scholarship is concerned I think we have seen over the last 40 years or more the development of a respected evangelical scholarship which has been able to show that the evangelical faith is compatible with taking a scholarly approach to the understanding of Scripture and of theology. We can see this in the number of people now teaching in universities and colleges in this country and elsewhere, we see it in the number of books being produced. The situation with books is so very different from what it was when I was a student, when there was so little help on many areas. Some of the books were frankly poor. Now we have seen a tremendous growth in the number of books and textbooks and other aids to help students, and a lot of this has come from scholars at the more conservative end of the spectrum. We are also seeing that, whereas round about that period many Christians of evangelical persuasion didn't think scholarship was necessary and could be ignored and carried on without it, we now have the recognition on all sides that we must present our faith in a way which is intellectually rigorous and intellectually compelling. That doesn't mean to say that we have all the answers or solved all the problems, or have any reason to feel proud of ourselves.

Along with that I suppose is the way in which evangelical scholars have on the one hand come to be more respected by other scholars because their work is able to stand up for itself, and on the other hand I think evangelical scholars and evangelicals generally have been more willing to recognise the good and value in the works of people with whom they may differ. There has consequently been a greater toleration by both sides, improved relationships and a much better sense of working together, which I think can only be for the good of the subject and for the good of the Christian church. This may mean that evangelicals today may be 'broader' on some issues than people were 40, 50, or 100 years ago, but I think that in the past people tended to ignore what was going on, and sometimes take up positions that really were not terribly defensible. I remember thinking in my teens that it was ludicrous to believe that the gospel writers used written sources, for example. I used to turn up my nose at studies of the synoptic problem. With age I think one learns sense and begins to realise that this sort of anti-intellectual approach really was unsound and wasn't appropriate for Christians who were meant to use their minds.

**CT** *That's very interesting Howard. I wonder if I could just raise one other question about that, and that's the problem of fragmentation. We all know that in universities these days disciplines*

are breaking down into smaller and smaller sub-disciplines to the extent that theologians find it difficult to dialogue with biblical scholars, and even within biblical scholarship you have those who specialise in Paul, those who specialise in the Gospels. I wonder if you would just like to say a few words about what you think the major challenge of fragmentation is to scholarship and how evangelical scholarship can best respond to this.

**IHM** I think the problem is caused by the explosion of knowledge in biblical studies, as in everything else. It means that it is very difficult indeed for one person to be competent in several fields, let alone in one, and they all tend to specialise within areas. I was fortunate in that when I took the Cambridge examinations in theology we had two papers in which we were expected to cover the whole of the New Testament in Greek, and I have ever since been profoundly grateful for a course which made me read and study the whole of the New Testament, and not just little snippets and bits of it. It is extremely difficult now for anyone to keep up with the sheer volume of literature that is being produced. I would love to see a moratorium on publication of all books, except of course my own, for the next ten years, to give me time to catch up with all that I haven't read! I'm rather regarding my commencing my retirement as an occasion to catch up on all the things I haven't done in the past. So it is very much a practical problem, and yet there needs to be some answer to it, because we cannot go on with people working in one area and not knowing what is going on in others.

Maybe we need to have people who are prepared to be in the old-fashioned sense of the term, scholars, rather than researchers. I think that there is a clear distinction between the scholar who is able to have a rounded knowledge which embraces many fields and to see how they are related to one another and the person who knows more and more about a smaller area and never gets out of it. We certainly need systematic theology to be informed by biblical studies and we need biblical study to work within the context of systematic theology and also the relation within the Bible between the Old and New Testaments which are so often now studied apart from each other and it is very rare to find somebody who is expert on both sides. So there is no simple answer to this one that I can see, just that it is a matter of regret that there is now so much knowledge that very few people are capable of keeping up with it. It raises the danger that the only people that are going to cope with this are those with super minds able to read extremely fast, remember what they read, and absorb vast amounts of information. That's not what most of us can do; we have to work on a much more humble sort of level.

**CT** *Moving on from that, you have talked a little bit about the past and about the present, what do you think are the major challenges looming up for the church as a whole and for evangelical scholars in particular?*

**IHM** For the church as a whole the major problem we face is the decline of Christendom in the Western world where it is very much now a minority grouping and where it will not necessarily die out

completely, but is becoming increasingly weak, and somehow we have got to face up to this issue in the church and seek a new vision and a new power and new methods to cope with this decline. So mission and evangelism remain the challenge that we have to face as we go into the new millennium. I think a part of the problem is the church at large has spent the last 40 or 50 years talking and talking and talking about unity and getting nowhere very fast, whereas I have come to believe increasingly that the way to church unity is by working together in mission. I believe that we should be missioning towards unity rather than talking about having one church united for mission. We will never reach it by that particular route. There are also of course the issues to be faced of the way in which we can learn from the wider world where Christianity seems to be on the increase, and we need to be asking ourselves why it is that the church is declining here and what other strategies we should put into action. I believe very much that the church does nothing because it doesn't try to do anything. We ought to be making plans, having vision for the future, checking up to see what we have done, and setting ourselves goals that can be achieved. I think in this way we may do something to arrest the spiritual decline.

So far as the task of scholarship is concerned, although I have said earlier that evangelical scholarship has developed and is respected now much more in the world, it has to be remembered that what we may call 'radical' scholarship, questioning much of the truth of Scripture, whether as history or theology, is still very much on the go, is very strong, and in many ways takes positions far more extreme than anything that was around in the past. So the problem of defending the faith must still go on. We cannot assume that we have arrived, and think that we have solved all the problems and have all the answers. We most certainly haven't. One thing that I think we need to be doing much more is on a different level, asking ourselves what are the principles by which we expound Scripture for today as opposed to simply doing exegesis of it as it was in the past. How do we make the step from the ancient text to the modern world. I don't think as of yet we have worked out what I may call biblical principles for doing this that may help people. I am not suggesting that there will be methods to follow, scientific procedures, lists of rules which if you follow them will produce the answer, but I think we have got to wrestle with this question to see how we can produce a defensible means of expounding Scripture for the world in which we live. If we as evangelicals believe that Scripture has a message for today, then the responsibility is all the more upon us to get on and do it.

**CT** *Thanks very much for that. I wonder if we could close just by asking what is the one piece of advice you would give to the young student or young scholar who is considering evangelical scholarship of theological study as an avenue of Christian service.*

**IHM** I think one thing I would say on the academic level is that you need to become as much as possible the master or mistress of the sources. If I had my time again, I think I would do much more by way of studying the background to the New Testament, because

it is so often out of this that fresh light comes. There is now such a vast amount of material to be read and used that this is a very large task indeed, but somehow we must cope with getting to know the sources, the background, the Old Testament, Judaism, Graeco-Roman world within New Testament scholarship, to get to know these things as well as we possibly can.

The other thing that I would say is that one always has to remember that people who disagree with you may be wrong, even if you can't immediately know how to refute them. That has kept me going an awful lot, understood in the right way, not in terms of intellectual pride or thinking that you are better than anyone else, but somehow knowing in your heart that a position can't be right and therefore not acquiescing in whatever everyone else says but being prepared to stick out and be different. Always doing so in a responsible kind of way and not just being a maverick.

**CT** *Many thanks Howard, and thank you on behalf of the readers of Themelios both for giving up the time to speak to us today and the work that you have put in over the past decades which have created a space for a journal like Themelios. Thanks very much.*

# Book Reviews

## A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament

Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann,  
Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen  
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999,  
475 pp., £24.99

This is the book that even Hananiah the 'prophet' could have predicted, although probably guessing wrongly at two of the authors and much of the contents. It reflects the current keen interest in the *theology* of the OT and disinterest in the topics found in most introductions. Previous critical work is acknowledged, summarised briefly and assessed. But the use made of it varies. Some sections could have been written without any critical work at all, while others contain little theological comment. This probably reflects the varied stances of the four authors, who nevertheless present their work as that of a unified committee.

After an introduction ('The OT as Theological Witness'), the book moves through the OT section by section (Gen. 1-11; Gen. 12-50; Exod. 1-18; Exod. 19 - Deut. 34; etc.). The first three chapters are useful supplements to more standard critical introductions. They make creative suggestions and contribute to the reader's understanding of Genesis and Exodus. 'Suffering of God' theology emerges strongly in different forms, e.g. 'on the far side of the flood, God rejects annihilation as the means to accomplish this reformation and graciously chooses a more vulnerable, long-term engagement, working from within the very life of the world itself' (65).

However the sections are not uniformly helpful, nor do they have the same end in view. For example, the important (at least to Jesus) prophet Zechariah is referred to extremely briefly, and only in connection with the political system he allegedly recommends, viz. a 'dyarchy of priest and king' (or 'political leader' three lines previously, 424). Of course, in a chapter of 31 pages covering most post-exilic prophets and writings, space is bound to be limited. But why not give us the actual theology, e.g. significance of the temple, punishment and chastening, universal hope for the nations, the final battle between Israel and her enemies (though see 304)? It is strange that Zechariah should be neglected given Petersen's work on the period: his well known commentaries seem unmentioned, and there is no author index to accompany the useful scriptural and topical indexes.

The book *begins* to fill a gap, and hopefully will inspire other scholars to write similar theological introductions. However, it suffers from infuriating vagueness and generalisation, often without indication of sources or arguments. Conservatives will be dismayed to find that their existence is hardly acknowledged, and caricatured when it is. 'Those who ask *only* historical questions [of Joshua etc.] have failed to reckon with the ideological-interpretative character of the text.' Indeed, but who are these people? It is very difficult to follow up this sort of statement. The 'three positions' concerning the historical events of Joshua are described as 'the older US



hypothesis(!), the German theory of infiltration and the 'peasants' revolt'. This last is presented tentatively at first, and then, without any further evidence, as the model to go for (see 182f., 190, 192f.).

The authors affirm: 'It is important to see these texts as advocacy and not reportage. This does not mean that they are untrue, but that the truth is always interpretative' (184). Perhaps we should add that those who say 'advocacy that does not accord with facticity is not necessarily untrue' are fooling someone. To claim to elucidate the theology of the text and then to speak of the Israelites' 'demonisation' of the Canaanites (cf. Hollywood westerns, 192) and the 'legitimation of violence within these texts' is somewhat paradoxical. The authors claim not to be 'taking the good stuff and ignoring the rest. They are, in fact, subtler. They acknowledge the bad stuff and criticise it strongly from a western perspective, despite deploring this. They then assert that the text is designed to help exiles affirm their claim to the land, to warn against foreigners and to urge careful Torah obedience.

A final example. On Isaiah 53 the authors tell us: 'There is no clear way to identify the servant. Clearly it must be recognised that the poetry and the text *per se* do not have Jesus in purview, so that such Christian reading is surely a belated extrapolation. More important is the awareness, shared by Jews and Christians, that this much discussed chapter probes a fresh and radical way whereby healing, perhaps healing among exiles, may be accomplished.' 'Clearly' is a suspicious word (as all mathematicians know), especially when used to sweep aside the convictions of millions of Christians over many centuries. The dogmatic (but often woolly) ideas promoted in this book make it ultimately very unsatisfactory. It will be used widely – the names of Brueggemann and Fretheim will guarantee that. I hope

it will also be used critically. Very critically.

**Mike Butterworth**  
Oxford

### **Praying the Tradition. The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9 (BZAW 277)**

*M.J. Boda*  
Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999,  
284 pp., h/b.

The Old Testament contains a number of prayers embedded in historical narrative: short ones like those of Hannah or Jonah (1 Sam. 2, Jonah 2), and longer ones like those of David, Solomon or Nehemiah (2 Sam. 22, 1 Kgs 8, Neh. 9). It is interesting, not just for academics but for people who pray in general, to explore the origins of these prayers. Were they composed for the particular occasion, or were they pre-existing prayers which were then re-used?

In this book, a revised version of a Cambridge Ph.D., Boda analyses Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 9. He seeks to delineate the people responsible for the composition of the prayer, and explores the way they used tradition. After an introductory survey of past research, Boda determines the prayer's *Gattung*. He places Nehemiah 9 in the centre of the continuum between prose and poetry, and links it with the Penitential Prayer tradition which emerged in the exilic period (with Ezra 9, Neh. 1, Ps. 106 and Dan. 6) as a transformation of the classical Lament *Gattung*. The second chapter studies both shared and unique elements and vocabulary in these Penitential Prayers.

In the heart of the study, Boda examines the boundaries of the tradition complexes in the prayer and the historiographical patterns used to combine the traditions. Here important decisions are made concerning the boundaries of some

tradition complexes on which scholars disagree, notably Exodus-Wilderness and Conquest-Land. He sees the following traditions: Creation (6), Abraham (7-8), Exodus (9-11), Wilderness (12-23), Life in the Land (24-31). These are enveloped by the hymnic introduction (5c-d) and the concluding request (32-37). Boda then applies the tools of traditio-historical research to each tradition complex, and traces their origin and their linking with other traditions. This is done by a detailed analysis of the use elsewhere of words and phrases found in Nehemiah 9.

Boda's analysis partly confirms earlier investigations: the prayer presupposes the Pentateuch in a form very similar to that known today, and is dominated by Deuteronomistic idiom. But he also uncovers the widespread presence of Priestly and Ezekielian influence both in vocabulary and in the transformation of Deuteronomistic idioms. He acknowledges that the particular use of traditions in Nehemiah 9 leads to praise of Yahweh and confession of sins, but concludes that its agenda is ultimately set by the concluding petition for grace. He argues that the prayer was not composed by the Chronicler, but was incorporated into the literary context of Nehemiah 8-10 and the historical context of Nehemiah 9. Its affinity with the situation described in Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 suggests that the prayer arose in the early Persian period, probably in the earliest part of the restoration period before the appearance of Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah.

This study demonstrates the usefulness of a traditio-historical approach to passages which bring together a number of traditions whose sources are accessible to us. What I missed, though this is a minor point, was reflection on the practice of using an existing prayer in a new context rather than making a new prayer.

What was the motivation and purpose of Nehemiah (or Hannah, or Jonah) in using an existing prayer at such crucial moments of their life or the life of their people? Having enjoyed this stimulating study, I express the wish that Boda will one day offer us such a reflection.

**Wolter Rose**

Kampen, The Netherlands

### **The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study (JSOTS 294)**

*Charles E. Carter*

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,  
392 pp., h/b., £56.00/\$88.00

In this book Charles Carter provides an excellent resource for students of the Persian Period in Judah and the literary works produced in this era (Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, etc.). He assembles data from diverse sources inaccessible to the layperson, and provides a new analysis of the settlement pattern and population distribution of the Persian province of Yehud (Judah). He takes a minimalist view both geographically and demographically, restricting Yehud to the central hills of Judah and excluding sites in the Shephelah and Coastal Plain (ch. 2), and estimating the population at 13,350-20,650 (chs 3 and 4). Carter uses this data to paint a picture of the social conditions in Persian period Yehud, in contrast with the periods before and after this era, e.g. Judah was one third of its pre-exilic size, and Jerusalem one fifth (ch. 5). He then draws out the implications of his conclusions for various theories proposed over the past century to explain the social fabric of this small Persian province (ch. 6).

The two final chapters provide the most helpful information for those studying this period. Carter identifies several general economic patterns for

this province, including: the gradual emergence of a moneyed economy alongside a traditional in kind taxation system, the enjoyment of a considerable degree of autonomy by the province in establishing its own mints, an agricultural pattern based as previously on a mix of agrarian and animal husbandry, and a tributary mode of production. He shows how his view of a small Yehud fits with general trends established already for this period, and contends that a small Yehud would still provide for the extensive literary activity posited by many scholars for the Persian period, and would explain the kind of economic insecurity evidenced in the books of Haggai and Nehemiah. The survival of the province was ensured in the end by the support of a Persian overlord who needed security in western Palestine. In addition, the great concern in this period for the preservation of the 'true seed' of Israel, evidenced especially in Ezra-Nehemiah, fits well with a small Yehud where the need for ritual purity and ethnic boundaries would be essential for survival.

Other views about the sociology of the Persian period are refined and criticised in Carter's work. Hoglund's view that this province was comprised primarily of small, unwallled villages is confirmed, while Weinberg's view of the urbanising effect of the Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde is undermined. Of the various views on the rise of apocalyptic communities (Plöger, Hanson, Berquist, Cook), it is Cook's suggestion that fits the evidence the best.

Carter's dissertation-become-book (Duke University) is a helpful resource for those who study the Persian period. It bridges the gap between the socio-archaeological and literary guilds and provides much needed information for scholars of this era. It is not an easy read, with long lists and charts, but it makes more obscure materials available to a much wider public. Carter's introduction is

a helpful guide to the present state of methodology for the interpretation of history in the biblical guild. Although at times he appears more sceptical of the biblical text than he needs to be (ch. 2), he is sensitive to the literary features of the text and not given to simplistic readings. One must understand, however, that his work remains an interpretation of the data and will continue to be refined with further reflection and additional discoveries.

**Mark J. Boda**

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Regina

### **A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build**

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*Michael V. Fox*

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999,  
xvii + 422 pp., \$30.00

Qohelet has shared in the recent rescuing of Wisdom literature from its Cinderella-like status, and a number of significant studies and commentaries on the book have appeared in the last two decades. The distinguished Wisdom scholar Michael Fox has now given us a revision of his earlier work *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (JSOTS 71, 1987). Yet it is more than a revision, and the new work bears tribute to the endless fascination of the biblical book.

Fox begins with a preface 'On Rereading Qohelet' which interacts with recent scholarship and reiterates his basic thesis about the contradictions of Qohelet, while now discerning a deeper underlying unity. He believes that Ecclesiastes watches and records fundamental contradictions which lie at the heart of the world. Thus Qohelet collects contradictions but is not content to do a demolition job; rather he uses these to create new meaning. Fox speaks of the context of the book's ideas; he sets it in Wisdom Literature but denies (as

is currently fashionable) the existence of a 'Wisdom School'. He further draws an interesting comparison with Camus, especially in their sensitivity to the absurd, seeing Qohelet as essentially a deconstructionist. He argues for a holistic reading of Ecclesiastes which will nevertheless take the contradictions seriously because these are part of the fabric of life.

Fox then explores four main themes central to the book in terms of how meaning can be found. Chapter 2 deals with Qohelet's characteristic word *hebel*, defined as 'absurd' in the Camus-like sense of the tension between reality and expectations. This is traced in relation to leading concepts such as work, wealth, speech, and wisdom. Chapter 3 explores justice and its violation; the paradox of a just God presiding over a world of injustices. Chapters 4 and 5 explore Wisdom, seen mainly in Ecclesiastes as ingenuity, good sense and rational intellect. Chapters 6-8 examine effort and its results. Chapter 9 looks at the basis of Qohelet's thought, arguing that the book is about meaning. This chapter is useful because it is largely a summary of the previous chapters. It also prepares the way for the commentary in chapters 10-11, which is brief but contains many useful sections, e.g. on the work of Qohelet (160-61), the 'Catalogue of Times' (194 ff.), and the Epilogue (350 ff.).

This book is a 'good buy' for anyone serious about understanding Ecclesiastes, indeed for any student of Wisdom literature. It has immense erudition and an infinite capacity for painstaking discussion. Fox is producing a more detailed commentary for the Jewish Publication Society, which should provide a good example of detailed Jewish exegesis.

However it will need to be supplemented in two ways. The first is in setting Ecclesiastes in canonical context. For obvious reasons Fox

confines his study to Qohelet in the OT and thus does not consider the role of the book in pre-evangelism. At the other end, the links of Wisdom with Genesis 1-11 are not deeply probed. Secondly, in my view, more attention needs to be given to the sheer literary power of Ecclesiastes. While Fox has useful discussions of the great poems in chapter 3 and 12, for example, these discussions tend to focus on the meaning of words. Thus we are not given as much help as we might in understanding how the poet achieves his effects.

One quibble: there is no mention of Kidner's fine BST commentary (IVP, 1976), which wears well after a quarter of a century and is strong precisely where Fox is weak. Nevertheless this is a fine and thorough piece of work for all who wish to grapple with one of the most fascinating OT books.

**Bob Fyall,**

Cranmer Hall, Durham

### **Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World (The Biblical Seminar 63)**

*Jean-Marie Husser*

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,  
197 pp., £14.95/\$24.75

This volume is composed of two roughly equal parts. The first provides a general introduction and then surveys dream narratives and practices throughout the ancient near-east. The second section deals with the same phenomena in the OT. A chapter on Generalia is followed by discussions of OT narratives under appropriate categories: symbolic dreams (Gen. 40-41; 37; Dan. 2, 4); message-dreams (1 Kgs. 3; Gen. 20:3-7; 31:10-13); dreams and the prophetic vision (Jeremiah, Balaam, etc.), and dreams and wisdom (mainly Job and Ben Sira). A final chapter deals with practices associated with dreams. Helpful bibliographies are included throughout.

Husser provides a comprehensive survey of a very complex and much neglected area, indicating its current status in scholarly debate, yet arguing his own case throughout. Quite apart from his analyses of ancient near-eastern sources, the ample citations from the texts themselves provide an invaluable resource for the student. In his treatment of the OT, Husser sometimes displays a cautious approach to critical scholarship, on occasion rejecting doctrinaire reconstructions of hypothetical originals, and being cautious about psychoanalytical readings. Generally, however, he treats the OT texts as having several layers of redaction, with each having potentially discrepant ideologies. For example, he sees the element of the 'staircase' as a later addition to Genesis 28:10-22, and accepts Westermann's reconstruction of Genesis 31:11-13 in order to argue that the redactor 'copied the Deuteronomic narrative of Exodus 3' (136). While Husser seems to welcome the growing scholarly questioning of standard source criticism, deuteronomic redactors seem to have filled the gap in many places. Inevitably, given these presuppositions and the methodology used, many of the dream texts in their current form are assigned to the exilic or post-exilic periods. Those who on independent grounds assign the same texts to different periods will obviously have difficulty accepting Husser's conclusions. The work would be strengthened by giving more consideration to the function of these passages in their current form and context (cf Diana Lipton, *Revisions of the Night*).

The sheer breadth of subject matter makes it difficult to isolate specific contributions, but two stand out. First, Husser uses a wider range of dream categories than is usual. This helps to clarify the function of individual OT dream passages. Secondly, the work is not entirely text-based, but considers modern study of the physical and psychological

phenomena of dreaming. His comparison of these with the content of dream narratives is sometimes stimulating, but necessarily subjective.

The book's contents first appeared in 1996 as an extensive article in the *Supplément au dictionnaire de la Bible*. It is a pity that the translation is not more lucid. It does not help the reader's navigation through the often dense text to be confronted frequently by exotic vocabulary such as 'continuator' (41), 'orant' (47), 'concertation' (48), 'hypnic' (120), 'affabulations' (141, 143), or 'outwith' (155, 163), to mention but a few. A sprinkling of typographical errors, and occasional oscillations between British and American spelling (e.g. 30-31; 160-61), provide further irritations. A final chapter, drawing together the many threads that run through this highly detailed and jargon laden study would enhance the volume by clarifying the larger picture. At times one feels swamped by detail.

Despite the reservations noted above, Husser has written a significant survey which provides an in-depth orientation for the advanced student. It will be of value to exegetes wishing to interpret biblical dream passages within their ancient near eastern context.

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### **Exodus (Westminster Bible Companion)**

*J. Gerald Janzen*  
Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997,  
xii + 275 pp.

The series in which this commentary appears is 'intended to help the laity of the church read the Bible more clearly and intellectually' (xi). Thus Janzen sets out his own interpretation rather than learned discussion. Taking his cue from the Greek title *Exodus*, he describes the book's

theme in the introduction as a story about 'going out' or the 'out - through - in' stages of life (1). He reads it as a story of two acts (8), with each act further divided into two:

**Act I** A 1-24  
Oppression, Redemption, Covenant

B 25-31  
Planning a place of Presence

**Act II** A' 32-34  
Sin, Redemption, Covenant

B' 35-40  
Preparing a Place for Presence

There is no consideration of the unity of *Exodus-Numbers* linked by a common setting to which Israel is led (*Exodus*) and from which they set out (*Numbers*). Nor is there any discussion of the place of *Exodus* in the Pentateuch and related questions, though Janzen does forge a link to *Genesis* with his comment: 'to begin reading the book of Exodus without having just read Genesis is like tuning in to the fourth episode of a season-long TV serial' (14).

Each segment opens with the full NRSV text, except the final section (B'). The treatment is very uneven: Part A gets the lion's share (190 pp., including the text), followed by Part B (34 pp.), Part A' (42 pp.) and Part B' (3 pp.). This is eloquent testimony to the work's peculiar imbalance. The interpretation is primarily concerned with question of contemporary church life. However valuable such a concern is, the present reviewer was left feeling somewhat helpless. Even a commentary for lay readers should not be patronising but furnish tools for grappling with and understanding the text, the book and its historical context. In the present work even the odd stimulating passage hardly dispels the overall impression of a highly subjective, uneven and arbitrary exposition.

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## Pivot Patterns in the Former Prophets (JSOTS 247)

*Nathan Klaus*  
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,  
310 pp., h/b., £53.50/84.00

## Topic, Focus and Foreground in Ancient Hebrew Narratives (JSOTS 295)

*Jean-Marc Heimerdinger*  
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,  
268 pp., £50.00/\$80.00

These two new dissertations on Biblical Hebrew narrative seek to add precision to the analysis of story-telling. Klaus looks at patterns of stylistic repetition in order to discover clearer criteria for positing concentric structures. Heimerdinger attempts to go beyond text-linguistics into literary analysis and especially to discover linguistic features that are motivated by pragmatic concerns. Both therefore help us to understand and evaluate the contribution of studies of stylistic repetition and linguistic usage. The latter is more specialized and scholarly in scope and involves knowledge of Hebrew, unlike the former.

One way to illustrate the two approaches is to compare their analysis of 2 Samuel 12:16-20. Klaus (110-117) finds an outer frame in David's fast and his breaking of the fast (A: v. 16-17; A': v. 20), which encloses the boy's death on the seventh day and David's question about his death (B: v. 18; B': v. 19b). Inside these repetitional frames we read 'and the servants of David feared to tell him' (C: v. 18a) in parallel to 'but when David saw that his servants whispered' (C': v. 19a), exhibiting a word play in Hebrew on 'fear' and 'see'. It encloses the climax of the paragraph, the pivot of the servants' deliberations in verse 18b, and it focuses on the contrast between despair and hope. Heimerdinger's discussion of 2 Samuel 12:19 focuses

on how the name David is repeated three times in a deliberate slowing of the action by breaking it into three separate phases and centering the attention on David (154). He also discusses the chain of ten *wayyiqtol* verbs in 12:20, and believes that there is no peak and no crisis involved (73), even though David's behaviour when informed of the boy's death is the most surprising feature of the whole story.

As for detail, Klaus, an Israeli scholar, often includes less well known Jewish scholarship. He is healthily critical of readings which have no firm formal basis but are largely thematic guesswork. Notably, he restricts his analysis to concentric patterns, i.e. literary repetitions with a central piece as climax (thus distinguishing pivot patterns from chiasmic arrangements). This means he focuses on only 25 examples from the books of Joshua-Kings. Even if this allows for a careful and well presented case, it does not provide a very broad basis for analysis.

Helmerdinger, who teaches at London Bible College, has specialised in linguistics and his work is much more challenging at a scholarly level. Most linguists could benefit from his work were it not for the unvocalised Hebrew, and most Hebrew scholars would benefit from the presentation were it not for their lack of modern linguistics training. Personally I find his work both a disaster and a gem, all in one! Helmerdinger is not aware of important scholarly work by Walter Gross and others in the mid-1990s, so his presentation is to some extent outdated. Further, he directs an almost personal vendetta against one of the masters of Hebrew text-linguistics, Robert E. Longacre, and I find his attack unbalanced, uninformed and unfair. Yet at the same time he exploits some of the best modern theory on pragmatic information structure and artificial intelligence, and in this regard provides the most important work so

far on topic and focus in the Hebrew Bible. However, the present shape of his thesis means that only the latter part should be studied carefully by anyone working in Hebrew language and text analysis.

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**The Israelites in History and Tradition**

*Peter Niels Lemche*  
London and Louisville, Kentucky: SPCK and  
Westminster John Knox Press, 1998,  
249 pp., h/b., £37.00/\$20.00

This book asks whether the Israel of the OT is a reflection of a real historical society, or a negative literary contrast to the 'new Israel', understood by the author as an ideal society to be established in the near future.

The book opens with a useful discussion on the concepts of national state and ethnicity, and demonstrates how reconstructions of Israel's history have often been governed by concepts derived from modern western civilisation. Lemche then highlights the lateness of the OT text as a problem for using it to reconstruct Israel's history in the Iron Age. He does not preclude the possibility that it contains historical reliable information. But he claims, significantly, that in every single case it has to prove its status as a historical reliable source. The basis for his investigation into the early history of Israel is therefore the *contemporary* epigraphical and archaeological evidence.

So Lemche next analyses various references to Israel: the Merneptah stele (Egypt, late 13<sup>th</sup> century), the Tel-Dan stele (Palestine, late 9<sup>th</sup> or – as preferred by Lemche – early 8<sup>th</sup> century), the Mesha stele (Transjordan, mid 9<sup>th</sup> century), and the annals of Shalmaneser III (9<sup>th</sup>

century). He concludes: 'there is absolutely no reference that can be interpreted as a national or religious name of a special group of people living in these quarters and having some of the particular traits attached to them by the Old Testament tradition' (63) ... 'There is nothing that may look like a national consciousness before the Assyrian invasion and conquest of Israel (Samaria) in 722' (85n).

Turning to the biblical evidence, Lemche revives Noth's amphictyony hypothesis as a *literary device*. He attributes the idea of the twelve tribes surrounding their central shrine to the literary imagination of late Persian and Hellenistic Jewish society, which saw itself as the heir of ancient Israel. The writers re-created the past as a tragic drama of Israel, constructing their origin myth as a programme for taking over a country in spite of its indigenous inhabitants.

Taking his cue from Davies, Lemche concludes with a few samples of the image of ancient Israel created by critical scholars (Wellhausen, Noth, Bright, Albertz). He argues that they are all more or less guided by the OT's chronological and terminological framework. This procedure has to be abandoned, since the historian of Israel must use the primary sources alone, *not* the secondary sources of the OT.

Lemche acknowledges in theory that 'a later source [can be] more reliable than a contemporary one' (24). But in practice he refuses to allow the OT to link the Israels of Merneptah and Shalmaneser III, since such a procedure represents a premature blending of primary and secondary sources. However, his arguments are both unnecessary and circular. First, Lemche's interpretation of the epigraphical and archaeological material is tendentious. To use a particular interpretation of the sparse primary evidence to dismiss a possibly reliable secondary source is circular argumentation. Secondly, the

OT's sophisticated literary devices and complex composition history do not necessarily detract from its historical reliability. Unless there are *other* reasons for doubting its historical reliability, it should be allowed (with due attention to its religious, political or other biases) to testify to what happened to Israel in the Iron Age. Since other interpretations of the primary epigraphical and archaeological material are possible, which do not contradict the biblical narratives, a reconstruction which takes into account both primary and secondary evidence must be preferred to Lemche's distinction between the 'historical' Israel of the Iron Age and the 'literary' Israel of the Bible.

### Jens Bruun Kofoed

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### Until the Spirit Comes – The Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah (JSOTS 271)

Wonsuk Ma

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,  
247 pp., h/b., £46.00/\$73.00

Wonsuk Ma prefaces this study by saying, 'As an Asian Pentecostal, and now Old Testament scholar, the years of my study have taught that the Spirit of God works within and for communities, although individuals may experience his presence as well' (7). This offers the prospect of an important insight into Isaiah from non-western scholarship. Coming from a missionary among animist peoples of the Philippines, and a seminary lecturer in Baguio City, such insight into God's work among the community of faith is to be welcomed warmly.

This revised Fuller Theological Seminary PhD thesis contributes to an uncrowded area of OT study, and provides the first full-length study on *rūah* in Isaiah. Following a brief review of the spirit tradition prior to



Isaiah. Ma examines the term 'spirit' in a two-stage process. Firstly, 'spirit' is examined according to pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic Isaianic traditions. These do not correspond precisely to the three-fold division of Isaiah as per Duhm, but that division is treated as a given. This deliberately 'fragmentary' reading is intended to show the value of the study to traditional historical criticism. Secondly and in contrast, the material is viewed synchronically, from the standpoint of the canonical whole, in a nod to current trends in Isaiah studies. The intention is to provide a model for a holistic reading of Isaiah. The effect of this dual approach is a fair amount of repetition, but this very fact appears to vindicate the results of the approach.

Ma's conclusions are summarised under two main headings. Firstly, the evolution of the spirit traditions are seen in relation to the concepts of leadership, prophetism, and creation. Spirit endowed leadership now contains a moral and spiritual emphasis rather than military or physical, as in pre-Isaianic traditions. Regarding reference to the prophetic spirit, there is development from the near absence in pre-exilic Isaiah to its prominence in the post-exilic book (61:1). The significance of the spirit in creation is the pouring out of the life-giving spirit on the entire community.

In each of these areas Ma finds what he calls a 'democratising' effect. This term is never defined, nor are its implications spelled out, but the intent seems to be that each of the major spheres of activity of the Spirit of God in Isaiah comes finally (whether diachronically or synchronically) to be bestowed on the entire restored community of God. So, the moral and spiritual emphasis of 44:1, the prophetic word in 59:21, and the world to come described in 32:15-20, all describe the Spirit poured out on the entire community, achieving the full effect of Joel 3:1-3.

The second heading under which Ma presents conclusions is eschatology – one of only a few major themes which appear throughout the whole of Isaiah. The Spirit of God prepares the way for and inaugurates the New Age (32:15; 44:3), and restores his people by the 'perfection of a faithful remnant' (210). The 'messianic' figure of the future evolves from a Davidic king to a more prophetic leader with an increasingly moral and religious role. He will accomplish his task only through God's spirit.

The format of this book bears all the hallmarks of a PhD thesis. The evidence is evaluated thoroughly; the conclusions, while not groundbreaking, are solidly based. I hope that Ma will go on to draw out the implications of these conclusions, and so complete the tantalising promise of the preface.

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## The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible

*Martin Abegg Jr, Peter Flint, Eugene Ulrich*  
Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999,  
xxii + 649 pp., h/b., £24.95

The 'advance international claim' which opens this book demonstrates that many leading Qumran scholars see it as tremendously important. And rightly so. We have been well served with translations of the non-biblical materials for a long time now – the many editions of Vermes, two from Martínez and that of Wise, Abegg and Cook. But this volume, by three world-renowned Qumran specialists, is the first to present a translation of all 225 biblical manuscripts from Qumran (plus twelve from Masada, Wadi Muraba'at, Nahal Hever and Wadi Seiyāl). The book is divided into 'Torah', 'Prophets' and 'Other Books'. The authors also include Jubilees under 'Torah' and 1 Enoch under 'Prophets' because the Qumran community might well have given

these two works canonical status (xvii), and Ben Sira, the Epistle of Jeremiah, and Tobit under 'Other Books'.

The format is very simple, yet manages to convey a great deal of information. There is a brief introduction and a 'How to Use this Book' section, both very clear. Then comes the main section, the translations of the Qumran OT texts. At every stage the authors compare the Qumran text with the other three major manuscript groups, the Masoretic family, the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch. Every difference is italicised and footnotes give variant readings. Every few pages there is a brief discussion of particularly informative variations between the traditions, e.g. where the Qumran evidence solves an outstanding problem (e.g. 160 on Deut. 8.18; 312 on Is. 29.5). Each book has a brief introduction, discussing the most interesting variations and noting important citations in the non-biblical Qumran texts.

This volume shows that the biblical manuscripts from Qumran contain a few striking additions to the Masoretic text which might have a place in the OT as Scripture, e.g. short paragraphs at 1 Samuel 11.1 and Numbers 20.13. Another interesting matter is the very different order of the Qumran Psalter. In general, however, there is a striking similarity with the Masoretic text, considering that these Qumran texts are over a thousand years older. Nevertheless, for some books the Qumran manuscripts agree more closely in places with the Septuagint (e.g. Samuel, 214) and/or the Samaritan Pentateuch (Numbers, 126). The authors generally accept (against, say, L.H. Schiffman) that there was a considerable plurality of versions of the Biblical books in the inter-testamental period (e.g. 260 on Samuel and Kings; 483 on Daniel). On the other hand, they note that by

the second century AD the OT text had been standardised (4).

The introduction makes several important comments: e.g. that the best attested Biblical books from Qumran are Psalms, Deuteronomy and Isaiah, which are also the three most quoted in the NT (xvii). However, there are also some misleading points regarding canon. The authors claim that 'lateness' of composition and 'unorthodoxy' are not reasons for the exclusion of the apocryphal books from the Protestant canon. 'The real reason ... is more complicated' (viii). But having said this, the authors then make a sweeping generalisation that 'Early Christians accepted the Greek Septuagint, which contains these additional books'. There are serious problems with this kind of historical reconstruction when one considers how Paul and other NT authors are theologically opposed to concepts prominent in the apocryphal books. Some will also be unhappy with the judgements that the authors make on the dates of the manuscripts, since the ability to date copies from the style of script is contested by many.

Doubtless this book will instantly become a reference work, particularly useful to anyone interested in the Qumran community and the textual history of the OT. Actually it will be essential for anyone engaged in research in biblical studies of any kind. Although it is already very big, a larger bibliography would have been appreciated: it extends to only three pages. Also there is no index: the book might have benefited from a list of all sizeable excerpts not found in the Masoretic text. But these are small quibbles, and the authors are to be commended for the production of what is an extremely useful tool for research.

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## 2 Corinthians (The College Press NIV Commentary)

William R. Baker  
Joplin, MO: College Press, 1999,  
470 pp., \$29.99

College Press is the unhelpful name of a publishing arm of the Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ movement. Historically, it has not focused on producing scholarly volumes, but this emerging commentary series is part of a move to change that situation. William Baker (PhD Aberdeen), Professor of New Testament in the St Louis Christian College, Missouri, has produced what is probably the best volume in the series thus far.

The introduction covers the expected topics. With several recent evangelical commentaries, Baker argues for the unity of the letter and distances Paul's opponents from the *bona fide* early Christian apostles. He suspects the offending party with whom the Corinthians have finally dealt properly (2 Cor. 2 and 7) is not the incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5.

The commentary proper prints the entire English text of the NIV in consecutive, discrete phrases or clauses, with the relevant comments following each segment. The majority of the commentary is lexical; Baker is fully abreast of the meanings of key words and phrases and describes how they fit into their context. Greek words are printed in the text but always with transliteration and translation. Footnotes carry on running interaction with numerous major, recent commentaries on the epistle and a representative selection of other important secondary literature.

Baker determines that the body of the letter begins with 1:12. What some have termed a major digression in 2:14 – 7:4 is actually an integral part of the letter, defending Paul's apostolic ministry in principle. *Thriambeo* in

2:14, paradoxically, should be understood as a metaphor of the victory parade of an army displaying its captives. With S. Hafemann, the difficult expressions in 3:7 and 13 should be taken as describing the fading glory blocked by Moses' veil, which symbolised the inherent limitations of the Law from the onset of the Sinaitic covenant. With M.J. Harris and F.F. Bruce, 5:1–10 offers a resurrection body to believers immediately upon death; no intermediate state of disembodiment is countenanced. The judgement seat of verse 10 is not for determining who is saved but for assessing the qualities of believers' lives 'within their salvation status' (218).

The emphasis on reconciliation in 5:11–21 is to be distinguished from Paul's treatment of justification, redemption or propitiation in that it is the one dimension of salvation that stresses our horizontal responsibility to our fellow humanity and not just our vertical relationship with God. There is no contextual or lexical support for applying 6:14 *primarily* to marriage issues; it is a broad injunction calling on believers to separate themselves from all manner of idolatrous, pagan relationships. Chapters 8–9 are supremely important, given the amount of energy Paul devoted over the years to this collection; abiding principles for believers focus not so much on a title as on generous and sacrificial giving. 'Equality' in 8:13–15 should better be translated 'equity', because of the inherent variations of gathering and consuming that remained even in the Israelites' wilderness manna economy.

Hints throughout the letter suggest that Paul's abrupt change of tone in chapters 10–13 is not unplanned. Boasting in his weakness forms the countercultural heart of Paul's rhetorically sophisticated but not Sophistic defence in this final section. We must be wary of too quickly imitating Paul's vitriolic rhetoric in

our world because we do not share Paul's unique apostolic relationship with God. The thorn in the flesh (12:7) is increasingly being identified with some hostile personal relationship but is still best viewed as a physical disease or weakness.

As with all commentaries, there are issues reviewers could dispute. For example, I remain unconvinced to the 'revisionist' interpretation of 5:1-10, and Baker does not improve on previous attempts to avoid the impression that Paul simply changes his mind or contradicts himself. The biggest problem with the book, however, is not its exegesis but the lack of adequate proof-reading. Scattered typographical errors appear throughout the text and footnotes (Murphy-O'Connor is mistakenly spelled 'O' Conner' literally dozens of times), but it is the bibliography that is in extraordinarily poor shape. I found 91 mistakes in 19 pages (checking approximately three-quarters of the entries), and almost every foreign language reference contains at least one mistake. I can only assume that no one competent ever edited this part of the book. The value of the commentary proper, though, should ensure a quick reprinting, so hopefully these items will be corrected.

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### **John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation, (JSNTS 166)**

*G.K. Beale*

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,  
443 pp., h/b., £55

Ever since the publication of Beale's thesis on *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St John* (1984), there has been a steady stream of articles culminating in his magisterial NIGTC commentary on Revelation (1999) and this collection. Previously published work occupies about half the book

and includes the 'Eschatology' article from the *IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, studies on Revelation 1:19 (1992) and Revelation 3:14 (1996), his contribution to the *John Sweet Festschrift* (1997) on the 'Hearing Formula in the Letters' and his thought-provoking piece on the effect of OT allusions on the grammar of Revelation (1997). These are supplemented by a survey of recent writing on John's use of the OT, where he responds to his critics (especially me), an expanded summary of the different ways that John uses the OT (from his earlier contribution to the 1988 *Lindars Festschrift*) and two further pieces. The first is a 58 page article on the use of *mysterion* in Revelation and elsewhere. The second is a 38 page article on 'The Bearing of the Old Testament on the Interpretation of the Millennium in Revelation 20:1-7'.

The nature of the collection means that this is not a comprehensive account of John's use of the OT, despite its 443 pages. There is very little on John's use of Ezekiel, for example, on which whole monographs have been written. This also reflects Beale's view that the book of Daniel is the most important influence on Revelation. Indeed, he believes that whole chapters of Revelation (namely, 1, 4-5, 13 and 17) are a midrash on Daniel's famous 'Son of Man' chapter. John's visionary descriptions are not simply an account of what he saw but 'also a result of subsequent reflection on the OT during the writing down of the vision'. John uses the OT in a variety of ways. He draws on many of its themes, uses segments as literary prototypes, borrows its language, universalises its message, indicates prophecy fulfilled and sometimes inverts its meaning in an ironic sense. I and others have concluded from this that John exercised considerable freedom in his use of the OT but Beale strongly argues that John never takes a text out of context and though texts might gain new significance by being placed in new settings, this never

involves a change of meaning. Beale and I have debated these issues in the May and November issues of *Irish Biblical Studies* (1999).

Finally, what does Beale think about the millennium? In his own words, 'the millennium is inaugurated during the interadvent age by God's limitation of Satan's deceptive powers ... and by deceased Christians being vindicated through reigning in heaven ... and it is concluded by a resurgence of Satan's deceptive assault against the Church ... and the final judgement'. Beale denies the 'annihilation' view in favour of 'conscious suffering for eternity', though one has to go to his commentary for a detailed defence of such views.

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**The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism**

*Peder Borgen and Soren Giversen (eds)*  
Hendrickson, 1997,  
293 pp., \$24.95

Eight years ago a conference was convened in Aarhus to investigate to what extent the NT was influenced by the matrix of its Hellenistic Jewish environment. Given that a substantial part of the NT was written outside of Palestine (or for audiences outside of Palestine), the question of Hellenistic Judaism needs to be taken seriously. If, for instance, Hellenistic Jewish views of the covenant differed from those in Palestine this might have influenced the way the NT reflected on the relationship between Christ and the Jewish covenants. Needless to say, one would not want a return to the days when Palestinian Judaism and Hellenistic Judaism were regarded as two distinct Jewish phenomena. This volume does not favour such a dated position, but it recognises, quite rightly, that an in-depth understanding of the

*Diaspora* helps significantly to understand major portions of the NT.

Giversen takes up this matter of covenant in the first essay and focuses on the Epistle of Barnabas. He sees the Epistle of Barnabas as a radical extension of the Pauline letters and Hebrews in that it challenges certain Jewish understandings of covenant. It differs from these other letters, however, by generally adopting a less positive view of the Jewish religion as such. Hartman demonstrates how the Jewish Bible was used in the *Diaspora* for shaping people's worldviews. There are some useful hints here, but the problem of such whirlwind tours is a certain lack of depth and focus. He is followed by Walter's look at interfaces between Hellenistic Judaism and the cradle of early Christianity. He concludes that Jewish views of the universal appeal of the Torah were determinative in the formation of early Christianity.

De Jonge picks up the question of the Jewishness (or otherwise) of some OT Pseudepigrapha and notes that not enough certainly about the backgrounds of these writings has been achieved to allow them to speak to us decisively about early Judaism or the origins of early Christianity. Charlesworth highlights various magical texts, which portray King David as an exorcist, and wonders if these texts ultimately go back to traditions about Jesus as exorcist. Here too the main conclusion is a rather general one, namely to emphasise the complexity of the Hellenistic world. A further essay with somewhat general ambitions is that by Yarbro Collins. She uses ancient texts on apotheosis and divine translation to throw light on some resurrection texts in the NT and claims to have detected different emphases, either on resurrection as revival or, sometimes, as translation. Pilgaard considers the merits of the *theios aner* thesis which some have applied to Mark's Gospel. He rightly rejects such an approach to Mark on

the ground that Mark's use of the Son of Man motif owes more to Jewish creation/re-creation traditions than to Greco-Roman anthropology. Even more specific is Nissen's contribution that seeks to relate the NT's love command to Hellenistic Jewish parallels. The distinguishing features of the NT command include (of course) the christocentricity and the specific emphasis on the need to love one's enemies.

Three articles turn to Philo with a view to improving our understanding of Galatians 4 (Hagar and Ishmael traditions - by Borgen), 1 Corinthians 10 (anti-sacramental? anti-idolatry? or anti-over-confidence? - by Sandelin) and Romans 10 (use of Deut. 30 - by Bekken). Borgen ends with a note of highlighting the importance of Galatians 4 within Paul's argumentation against Judaizers. Sandelin opts for interpreting 1 Corinthians 10 as being directed against idolatry and Bekken is confident that Paul's use of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10 falls well within common Jewish exegetical techniques. Hyldahl's and Willert's contribution are also about Paul, but they proceed by surveying a more wide-ranging array of Hellenistic Jewish texts. In the Corinthian correspondence, according to Hyldahl, Paul reacts against an Alexandrian understanding of the gospel represented by Apollos. He prefers to subordinate philosophy to the gospel. This is despite the fact that Paul himself would have been exposed to Hellenistic Judaism both in Palestine and in the *Diaspora*. Willert agrees with this last point, but he too stresses that Paul the Christian came to a position where the earthly Jesus mattered a great deal more than is commonly assumed for Paul. This Willert argues especially with reference to NT hardship catalogues. Somewhat atypical is Davidsen's closing essay, which applies semantic analysis to parts of Romans 5, the point being to clarify the precise logic of the Adam-Christ

typology developed there. It is not entirely clear how this chapter fits into the framework of the volume as a whole.

This is a fairly substantial collection of essays. As one would expect, the quality of individual contributions varies, and so does the degree of precision and relevance of the conclusions reached. Apart from the overarching topic embodied in the title, there is no particular framework, which would have forced the contributors to interact with each other. Some essays are related by topic, others are decidedly not so. Some conclusions are specific and worthwhile, others (as could be seen above) are too general. Publications of conference contributions tend to be a mixed bag. To a degree this is also true here, but the book is useful to demonstrate to students what Hellenistic Judaism is about and how studying aspects of it can enhance one's understanding of individual NT passages. It also functions quite well to give readers without first hand knowledge of these primary texts a feel for their contents and importance.

### **Thorsten Moritz**

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### **A Believer's Search for the Jesus of History**

Phillip J. Cunningham, C.S.P.  
Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999,  
ix + 154 pp., \$14.95

This book is a clearly written attempt to present the latest in (predominantly Roman Catholic) historical Jesus scholarship. It draws very heavily on the work of J.P. Meier and R.E. Brown, and to a lesser extent, E.P. Sanders, Geza Vermes and Luke T. Johnson, seeking to popularise their conclusions for an educated lay audience. The book is in the format of a biography, and seeks, as the title implies, to present a historical account of the life and

ministry of Jesus and at the same time to set it in a confessional context.

His justification for attempting the historical task is twofold. The first is 'to give our faith a firmer anchor in reality', while remembering that the historical Jesus (understood by Cunningham as the reconstructed Jesus behind the Gospels) is not the *object* of our faith: the historical Jesus can only ever be 'fragments of a mosaic, the faint outline of a faded fresco' of the *real* Jesus. This phrase of J.P. Meier is repeated throughout the work. The second purpose is to remind us that Jesus was fully human, and so knows our temptations and weaknesses: thus the historical task 'keeps us mindful of the "real" Jesus, the "real" person who lies behind "the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"'. The book contains chapters on the sources, the Galilean setting of Jesus' ministry, as well as the wider Jewish context. There is a wealth of interesting material on the Jewish background which will benefit the lay person in seeing Jesus in his historical context. The background to the Passover meal is especially useful, though the focus on Jesus as a *Hasid* (after Vermes) is slightly overplayed, as is the rather romanticised portrait of the rural, village setting of Jesus' origins. Similarly, there is a misleadingly vague description of Jesus as a charismatic, who had an 'informal familiarity with God', and therefore a 'liberal' and 'cavalier' approach to the Law. The chapters on Christology, the Kingdom and the opposition to Jesus are then followed by accounts of the trial, the death and (an afterword on) the resurrection, which, following Sanders, Cunningham takes to lie outside the boundaries of inquiry into the strictly *historical* Jesus.

The material is clearly presented, though there is little argumentation because of the introductory nature of the book. But the chief problems with the work are very serious ones. The very limited confines of the

scholarly discussions mentioned – the conclusions of Meier and Brown are almost invariably followed – mean that large tracts of scholarly discussion are ignored. In the discussion of Christology, there is no acknowledgement that there might be alternatives to the views presented in this book: there is no mention of the early high Christology that has been so prominent in much recent discussion (M. Hengel, L. Hurtado, B. Witherington, R. Bauckham). And the possibility that Jesus could have been acknowledged as divine in his lifetime (N.T. Wright, C. Fletcher-Louis) is ruled out of court. This is particularly confusing in the context of Cunningham's discussion, as he deems it impossible that any monotheistic Jew could have conceived of a divine Jesus, yet later all the Gospel writers knew of Jesus' divinity.

A second issue is a methodological problem which runs throughout the work. There is consistent application of the distinction between 'remembered history' (i.e. ideas which originated from the testimony of the first disciples) and 'historicised prophecy' (ideas constructed out of OT passages which came to be pinned onto Jesus later). No criteria are set out by which one should distinguish between the two, apart from the presence of OT ideas. This is very surprising: why should Jesus' actions and sayings, such as the last words from the cross, not be shaped by his understanding of his destiny from the OT? How could the disciples *not* view Jesus through the lens of the OT, in categories such as 'Messiah'? And why should God (as in the darkness which accompanied Jesus' death) not act consistently with the way he acts in the OT? Would that not enable his activity to be more comprehensible? In each of these areas, Cunningham opts for the path of scepticism pioneered by D.F. Strauss in the nineteenth century, rather than seeing the OT as preparatory for, and a formative influence on, the thoughts

of Jesus.

This raises the larger issue of how historical study is done by believers, a central issue flagged up in the book title and in the text. The incongruity of this book is that there is a very laudable attempt to integrate history and faith: the two justifications for the historical task above are very sensible. But the history done in this book is offered entirely according to enlightenment canons of rationality: there is no attempt to construct a 'believer's history'. The real Jesus, Cunningham asserts throughout, is much *more* than the historically reconstructed Jesus; and yet a significant proportion of the Gospel accounts are eaten away by the acids of criticism. This is particularly disappointing after Cunningham's initially promising appropriation of Meier's point that if a historian has no reasonable explanation for an event, to affirm that God has or has not brought it about is beyond the historian's field.

For the beginner who is looking for an introduction to the conclusions of current Roman Catholic scholarship, this would be a very good starting point, considerably less intimidating than the big multi-volume works of Meier and Brown. But the book needs to be read with a critical eye.

**Simon Gathercole**

University of Aberdeen

### **Slave of Christ, A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ (NSBT No 8)**

*Murray J. Harris*  
Leicester: Apollós, 1999,  
224 pp., £12.99

Professor Harris, an eminent NT exegete, has written a lucid account of the NT concept of slavery as it relates to those who chose to follow Christ. Whilst not a terribly endearing title, the book provides a comprehensive study of the importance of the

spiritual implications of being a 'slave to Christ'. It begins with an apologetic concerning the translation of the Greek *doulos*, (lit., slave) which in most English translations of the NT is rendered *servant*. Harris argues that as a result, the positive metaphor of slavery has been lost. It is at this point that those with an acute sense for justice of oppressed people might be tempted to dismiss the book as offensive in its suggestion that there be anything good about slavery. The book has to be read as a whole and is not intended as a 'dip in' theological reference book on the exegesis of terms based on the *doul*-stem.

The first section of the book deals with the literal and physical aspects of slavery, as it was in first-century CE Mediterranean societies. The latter section concerns the way the NT uses the metaphor to relate to the believer's spiritual freedom and includes themes such as lordship, ownership and privilege in the context of devotion to Christ.

The subject is highly emotive and Harris tries sensitively to argue for a return to a Biblical and cultural understanding of *doulos*. He is emphatic that slave imagery cannot be eradicated from the NT as it formed part of normal culture in the Graeco-Roman and Near Eastern societies. The problem, as Harris himself concedes, is that the overriding image of slavery is abhorrent to most people where the general impression is that of enforced obedience, loss of freedom, and cringing subservience.

Overall the book is written very well. Readers seeking to study in-depth should have to hand a NT, preferably a parallel Greek/English text version. There are occasions when the arguments appear weak to support the author's thesis. For example, the suggestion that an author is writing about the positive notion of slavery in the minds of NT converts is at best presumed, and is only qualified by such phrases like: 'there is no reason



to believe otherwise'. However it is imperative to read the book as a whole. Reading exclusively the sections that highlight the negative view of slavery in relation to Israel's slavery in Egypt or comments concerning the believers status as 'no longer being slaves' (John 15:15 and Gal. 4:7) is bound to be misleading.

Harris surprisingly does not conclude that English translations should render *doulos* as 'slave', as E.J. Goodspeed and the NRSV translations do. Instead consistent exegetical and hermeneutical principles should be applied to the proper understanding of the relevant Pauline and Petrine passages. For example, the paradox of positive slavery is not so much focussed on the individual, but on the master, Christ himself in respect of his total devotion to his Father in heaven. Any abject submission to a master, born of fear, is not a reflection of a NT-based Christian doctrine.

Harris wants readers of his book to understand that being a disciple of Christ does not mean having individual autonomy, but means, having been bought at a price, belonging to Christ - who is both master and friend. This book will be appealing to theological students. The comprehensive index and bibliography affords further study that students beginning biblical exegesis will find most helpful. The underlying devotional emphasis means that the book will also be a valuable resource for churches too.

**Jeremy Boulton**  
Cheltenham

## When History and Faith Collide: Studying Jesus

Charles W. Hedrick  
Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999,  
xix + 179 pp., \$16.95/£12.99

Hedrick provides a user friendly elementary introduction from a moderate critical perspective to the study of the historical Jesus and the sources for such a quest. Its purpose is to 'help beginning students to appreciate the gap [between the Jewish man and the Christian Lord] and to invite them to engage for themselves a discussion that has been taking place, out of the public eye, for some two hundred and fifty years'. The promise held out to the reader is as follows: 'a more mature faith ... out of challenging an earlier faith that has never struggled with the issues discussed in this book'.

The first chapter surveys the delicate relationship between faith and history and the various solutions proposed. This is followed by a short survey of the various quests for the historical Jesus in the twentieth century. The third chapter gives perceptive summaries of the portrait of Jesus in each gospel. This is followed by a study of the diversity between the narrative of the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel and of the similarities and differences among the Synoptics. Chapter 5 attempts to account for this diversity and the similarities. Further chapters raise the question of a lost sayings gospel (i.e. the hypothetical source Q), trace the development from oral traditions to a written gospel and discuss the relationship between early Christian prophets and the Jesus tradition. The last chapter outlines the criteria for 'Searching for Jesus among the Christs of Early Christian Faiths' (i.e. the standard criteria for determining the originality of Jesus' sayings). Each chapter concludes with a list of recommended reading and helpful questions for study and discussion. Notes and

indexes of modern authors and references round off the volume.

Throughout Hedrick offers a sensitive, though often one-sided, treatment of the major issues that are involved in the study of the historical Jesus. Even though Hedrick may not like it, those who stress the continuity between the Jesus of history and the orthodox Jesus of Christian faith do so with good, scholarly reasons. Hedrick all too quickly dismisses attempts of harmonisation between the canonical Gospels. Other than one note, with reference to J.A.T. Robinson, Hedrick does not mention that a good number of scholars are ready to date one or more Gospels before 70 AD, even in the fifties and sixties of the first century and thus far closer to the historical Jesus. Likewise only few scholars would evaluate the Gospel of Thomas as highly as Hedrick and place it side by side with the canonical gospels (roughly contemporary with the composition and final standardisation of the canonical gospels themselves). Several scholars have argued persuasively that the memorisation techniques current in contemporary Palestinian Judaism were also applied in the preservation of the Jesus tradition and thus suggest a high historical reliability of the tradition. Hedrick only considers a literary solution for the similarity between the Gospels. Like many studies of the historical Jesus and the corresponding methodological approaches, Hedrick focuses almost exclusively on the words of Jesus. His deeds and actions (including those that are miraculous and/or programmatic for his mission) are neglected.

For a more balanced appreciation of all the issues of the study of the historical Jesus Hedrick's volume should be supplemented by J. van Bruggen's excellent study of the same subject (*Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History*) and the older studies by C. Blomberg,

*The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* and I. H. Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*.

**Christoph Stenschke**  
Stralsund, Gemany

### 'Mysticism' in the Gospel of John. An Inquiry into its Background (JSNTS 158)

Jey J. Kanagaraj  
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,  
356 pp. h/b., £55.00/\$88.00

The claim that John's Gospel is a mystical work or contains mystical elements is placed under scrutiny in this thorough study into another possible religio-historical context for its contents and organisation.

Kanagaraj begins by reviewing past research into the mystical character of the Gospel. He points to the ongoing problem of contemporary definitions of mysticism being used to evaluate the alleged mystical elements of the Gospel and asks if these elements might be better read against a mystical background contemporary to the actual time of writing. He first examines mysticism in the Hellenistic-Jewish context of Philo and the Hermetica and while finding certain affinities in terms of both language and concept concludes that these provide an inadequate basis for the Gospel's emphasis. Kanagaraj then turns his attention to Palestinian Jewish mysticism and the practice of Merkabah mysticism as described in the later Hekhalot literature. It is here that he finds the background that will both help to define as well as account for the Gospel's 'mysticism'.

After a detailed analysis of a variety of texts Kanagaraj establishes the practice of Merkabah mysticism in the period prior to and contemporaneous with the NT documents and in so doing establishes the main elements of this Jewish mystical practice. Merkabah mysticism consists of

meditation on passages from Ezekiel, Isaiah and Daniel with a view to a visionary experience of ascending to the chariot throne of God and seeing his glory. Other elements include God's self-revelation, one like a Son of Man, God's judgement, esoteric knowledge, the transformation of the visionary and sending on a mission. These elements, amongst others therefore help to define the contested term 'mysticism'.

Having established the presence and content of Merkabah mysticism, Kanagaraj then moves, against this background, to read the Gospel of John. He does this through an examination of seven Johannine motifs: ascent, glory, king, sending, indwelling, light and the logos. He concludes that the Gospel is written both as a polemic against exponents of Merkabah mysticism and as an address, with the gospel, to these exponents. The mystical elements that are reflected in the Gospel are reinterpreted and focussed in God's revelation of himself in Jesus. Kanagaraj also suggests that the author himself, the priestly John (the Elder?), in all probability had a Merkabah mystical background and adopted certain tendencies from this background in his formulation of the message of Christ.

The wealth of detail and swathe of texts makes, at times, demanding reading, but there is a mine of information here about early Jewish mystical practice as well as some neat observations on the various motifs considered in the Gospel. The discussion on the concept of divine agency in interaction with the work of Borgen was particularly stimulating.

There will doubtless be disagreement over the identification of the essential elements of Merkabah mysticism, the relationship between the elements that Kanagaraj finds in the first century texts with the later Hekhalot literature and whether the polemic/

appeal with respect to Merkabah mystics can account for all that is claimed. However the basic premise that any discussion of the mystical qualities of the Gospel is to be grounded in the relevant religio-historical context is correct and this study represents a considerable advance that future studies into the alleged mystical nature of the Gospel will need to reckon with. Kanagaraj has placed us in his debt for this patient and stimulating study illuminating yet another facet of this intriguing Gospel.

**Bill Salier**  
Cambridge

### **A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew**

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*Craig A. Keener*  
Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999,  
1040 pp., \$60/£30.00

It is not easy to get a commentary published that is not part of an established series. Such a commentary must earn its way more than others by being of special merit. Keener's commentary eminently qualifies and further enriches the considerable resources now available to the student of Matthew's Gospel. Keener is also the author of a more popular commentary on Matthew in the IVP Commentary Series (1997), as well as *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (1993).

While the commentary proper is 649 pages long, it is followed by a bibliography of no less than 150 pages and indexes comprising a further 167 pages! The index of 'ancient sources' is itself 140 pages long, with about 50 pages devoted to OT, Apocrypha and NT and no less than a further 90 pages (with triple columns) devoted to other ancient literature! The bibliography and indexes thus combine to form nearly one third of the book! This is indicative of the thick richness of the scholarly apparatus

that supports the commentary, which abounds in highly detailed footnotes and numerous erudite excursions. This is nevertheless not a commentary only for scholars, but also – indeed, especially – for readers who want help in understanding what Matthew means for Christian living today. Keener provides his readers with a 71 page, comprehensive – if somewhat rambling – introduction. He describes the distinctive focus of the commentary as twofold: the social-historical context of Matthew on the one hand, and the nature of Matthew's exhortations to his Christian readers on the other. Keener describes the former as a Jewish-Christian community, the second located perhaps in Syria. He writes: 'My most striking discovery while writing this commentary was how often Matthew "re-Judaizes" his sources'. Assuming the common two-source hypothesis, Keener rightly notes that for the sake of his readers Matthew consistently makes Mark's Jesus, more 'Jewish'.

As for the relationship between Matthew's community and the synagogue, Keener takes the minority view that a definitive break with the synagogue had not yet taken place. He affirms the argument of Andrew Overman that Matthew's Christianity is best conceived of as a different form of Judaism from that of the non-Christian Jews. This conclusion, in my opinion, undervalues the radical newness of Matthew's Christianity that made continuance in the synagogue virtually impossible. For all the Jewishness of Matthew's viewpoint, there are marks in the Gospel that point to the Christianity of Matthew as necessarily separate from Judaism, though continuing in dialogue with it.

On the question of authorship, Keener notes that he has changed his mind since the 1993 commentary mentioned above, being now willing to accept, 'the possibility of Matthean authorship on some level'. He is

inclined to date the Gospel in the late 70s, thus a little earlier than the consensus. I note two striking characteristics of Keener's commentary. First is his resilient and untiring defence of the historical reliability of Matthew. This position is not taken in a naive or dogmatic way, but is intelligently argued. Keener places the burden of proof on those who are sceptical about the historicity of the narratives. As an example, Keener says that the conclusion that Matthew invented the material that is unique to his Gospel 'appears to be simply imagination run amuck'. Second is Keener's refreshing defence of the supernatural.

Opposition to the possibility of miraculous events occurring in history Keener attributes to prejudiced Enlightenment presuppositions. This is a commentary, then, that is solidly evangelical, reflecting both a high caliber of scholarship and a firm commitment to the verities of the Christian faith.

It must be said that the format of the commentary itself is rather unusual. Keener does not proceed in the usual verse by verse manner, nor does he discuss everything in every verse. The result is that it can occasionally be difficult to find what one is looking for, and the treatment of the text is not equally thorough (some passages get very thin treatment for a volume of this size). Furthermore, instead of introducing his remarks in the customary fashion, by a lemma from the text, he employs his own analytical headings, in bold type, presumably based on the text's 'lessons or morals'. This presents an advantage in that the commentary can focus on the important and neglect the incidental. It may also present a slight disadvantage, however, in that it adds a level of interpretation as well as making it possible for the headings to drive the commentary as much as, or more than, the text itself.

Unfortunately it is not possible to sample the commentary in this short review so I will risk a few generalising statements. The strength and weakness of the commentary are the result of the approach Keener has chosen. It is clearly a fine success in getting at the teaching of the Gospel, and that after all is of the greatest importance. At the same time however, those who turn to commentaries often want to know about the incidental, the problematic, the supportive detail. Often Keener does not deal with this kind of material in sufficient depth, despite the huge scholarly apparatus already noted. For example, the discussion of the difficult 27:51-53 is given in a mere 16 lines of text in which Keener affirms the resuscitation of the dead saints, but deals with none of the difficulties in accepting the story as a historical event. Keener has produced a distinctive and valuable and insightful commentary. With its abundant references to ancient literature and secondary literature, it can only be described as a remarkable tour de force. Solidly evangelical, deeply thoughtful, always informed and eminently practical, this is a commentary that will faithfully lead readers to the heart of Matthew.

**Donald A. Hagner**

Fuller Theological Seminary

### **New Testament Christology**

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*Frank J. Matera*

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999,  
307 pp., £14.99/\$26.95

This title is carefully chosen: not 'The Christology of the New Testament', because Matera claims there is no one christology; rather this is a study of the christologies in the NT. So like many before him he works through the NT book by book explaining how each author presents Jesus.

If there is anything new in his approach it is his claim to focus on the *stories* of the NT, but I have to say

that it was not obvious to me that this nod to current scholarly fashion made more than a terminological difference to the material or to the way it was presented. 'Story' is used not just of narratives; rather each author has his own 'story' to tell, so that for instance the 'story' of Hebrews can be set out in a single paragraph which is in fact a summary of the letter's christology. I cannot see what the word 'story' has contributed, except perhaps to remind us that the NT portraits of Jesus are to be discerned as much in the narratives as in propositional statements. But that is something which I hope we knew well enough already.

The job is done well, if predictably. No one who already has a reasonable acquaintance with NT christology will find much that is new here, but the ground is covered clearly and sensibly for readers at the theological undergraduate level. There is little to object to, even if little to get excited about. In the gospels he works through the material in its narrative sequence rather than grouping material by theme, and so leaves the reader to do the work of constructing 'a christology' out of the raw data presented.

New Testament specialists will not be surprised to find that the traditional distinction between the 'person' and the 'work' of Christ proves impossible to maintain. Christology for Matera very properly includes soteriology, because the NT writers were concerned to help their readers to know Christ as Saviour, not just as an ontological enigma. When Matera finally attempts to sum up the NT's claims about Jesus under five headings, it is instructive to discover that four of these are functional rather than ontological (Messiahship; significance for Israel and the nations; relationship to Church and the world; meaning for the human condition), leaving only 'relationship with God' to touch on the more traditional ontological questions. This seems to

me a healthy recognition of the perspective of the NT witness to Jesus.

**Dick France**

Llangelynin, Gwynedd

### **Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology**

*John J. Pilch*

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000,

xiii + 180 pp., £11.99

Drawing on his multi-cultural experience in preventive medicine and healthcare planning, Georgetown University Biblical Studies Professor John Pilch applies social-science models to NT healing stories. Pilch seeks to equip readers with culturally sensitive insights into healing in antiquity, thus contributing to their understanding of contemporary healing. The book introduces cultural and medical anthropology, applies its model to the evangelists, and concludes with personal and hermeneutical reflections on the difference between healing and curing. This differentiation is developed through the book.

For Pilch, this differentiation is obscured by ethnocentrism. So he probes cross-cultural values, assuming that all societies share a set of inescapable human problems and a range of available solutions. Pilch argues that mainstream US health definitions emphasise individual functionality but the NT 'complete well-being'. Medical anthropology, affirms Pilch, focuses on the social and experiential meaning of health issues, rather than on biomedical standards of efficacy. Thus disease is a biomedical and illness a cultural construct for explaining sickness. To cure a disease is to eradicate it from affected organisms. To heal an illness is to restore meaning to affected lives. The case of leprosy helps illustrate the interpretative

superiority of a culturally sensitive as opposed to an empirically focused model.

With additional concepts such as healthcare system sectors, kinship, illness taxonomies, and health as good fortune, Pilch probes the evangelists' writings. Mark presents Jesus as a folk healer without official authorisation. Faith or loyalty to Jesus as God's healing agent is a Matthean emphasis. In Luke-Acts, blindness, physical or metaphorical, is a central misfortune that Jesus heals. Sent from God the divine patron as a broker of wholeness, Jesus offers light and life to the Johannine anti-society through his resurrected presence among them. All four evangelists emphasise healing rather than curing. Concluding with his personal experience of this difference, Pilch reiterates finding no evidence that Jesus cured anyone, and calls again for culturally sensitive exegesis.

The book provides a helpful introduction to medical anthropology, enhanced by extensive references, web pages, a glossary, and discussion questions. The epilogues help update the previous publications on which the first six chapters are based. Pilch offers a systematic way of investigating foreign cultures, re-entering one's own culture, and making cross-cultural communication easier. Potential uses are not limited to NT exegesis.

Concerning social-science methods, Pilch himself calls his model a 'net'. What slips through a net may not be any less valuable than what is retained. Pilch's model of cultural generalities would be hard put to capture narrative and theological particularities highlighted by other exegetical approaches. Thus Louise Wells uses a literary approach to show unique features in Luke's 'contiguous' use of *therapeuo* and *iaomai* (in *The Greek Language of Healing from Homer to New Testament Times*). Biblical scholarship has developed

many tools, social-science being one. Pilch's work could be strengthened by reflections on the practice of a coherent eclecticism.

Finally, did Jesus cure anyone? The evangelists record that Israel's God has visited his people, with free (curative technology is usually limited to the affluent) and full healing for the afflicted, his presence attested by eyewitness accounts of cripples walking, the blind seeing, and the deaf hearing. That the writings give these accounts their full theological significance does not mean that the eyewitnesses were confused as to whether or not they witnessed the lame walking. That God chose the unlikeliest witnesses to his freely lavished presence may be ironic. For their testimony to be domesticated as a cultural metaphor by a hermeneutic which (rightly) challenges ethnocentrism and anachronism would be tragic.

**Daniel R. Niles**

University of Cambridge

## The New Testament Today

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*Mark Allan Powell (ed.)*

Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999,  
xvii + 156 pp., £12.99/\$18.95

This is quite an interesting survey of where NT studies have got to at the turn of the millennium. Powell enthuses, rightly, about the huge advance made in recent decades. It is a quite different and far more interesting discipline than when I was a student. He has asked experts on each book or group of books to write about their subject (plus two more general articles on critical methods and on the life and sayings of Jesus), and has given them their head without attempting to standardise the nature of their contributions. He justifies 'the somewhat chaotic formatting of these chapters as appropriate to a field where very diverse approaches are current, and certainly the reader will find here everything from the traditional

historical-critical exegesis of Don Hagner (Matthew) to the unbridled post-modernism (he doesn't use that word) of Fernando Segovia (Methods) who celebrates the end of the 150-year reign of historical criticism and of 'the ideal of exegesis'.

But the diversity extends beyond the views of the contributors to their understanding of the nature of their task in this book, and of how to use the very limited space (about 12 pages each) allotted to them. Thus while Hagner presents a heavily-footnoted survey of most main aspects of recent Matthew scholarship, Mary Ann Tolbert (Mark) gives virtually no documentation and focuses largely on reader-response approaches leading up to an anonymous presentation of her own theory. Marion Soards gives a very readable account of Paul, the man, his life and letters, with no reference to specific scholars except in an appended bibliography to which the text does not refer, while Jimmy Dunn (Pauline Theology) helpfully surveys and categorises recent contributions to Pauline scholarship (including an interesting brief section on the impact of the Holocaust) and then collects the data in a bibliography. Several contributors use no footnotes at all, others devote nearly half their space to them.

This deliberate lack of editorial control makes it difficult to see who will use the book, and for what. All its chapters offer an interesting read, but at different levels. Its uneven approach makes it frustrating to use as a class text-book (as which I guess it was planned), though some individual chapters would serve very well. The much more selective approach of some writers than others means that the beginner must beware of assuming that any one chapter gives a balanced view of its subject-area. Those with some acquaintance with the field will find little that is new, and the diversity of approach prevents one from using the book with

confidence as a source of bibliographical information. But for the general reader who does not need an academic guide but wants to get a selective impression of where NT scholarship is going, and who is not put off by a monumentally boring cover and an unattractively dense page lay-out, this is quite an accessible way in to a fascinating and rapidly developing field of study.

**Dick France**

Llangelynnin, Gwynedd

### **The Streets of Heaven. The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John**

*Robert M. Royalty Jr*

Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998,  
viii + 292 pp., h/b., £27.95

This new reading of the Book of Revelation provides a confident challenge to the current range of options for the interpretation of the Apocalypse. Robert Royalty's two distinctive positions are as follows: first, that Revelation is critical of the conceptions of wealth in the Graeco-Roman world of John's day, but that the author merely substitutes them with a different kind of ideology which contains no justice either. Secondly, this is the result not of persecution from Rome or even from the synagogues, but arises principally out of a power struggle within early Christianity in which John is trying to persuade his audience of his own authority and that of his circle of prophets. This book comes with an investigation of early Jewish attitudes to the subject, as well as a wealth of Classical sources, and a good grasp of the secondary literature in the extensive discussion of the text of Revelation itself.

*The Streets of Heaven* aims very much at reconstructing the thought-world of Revelation's audience as a key to the rhetorical impact of the Apocalypse: this is the consequence of Royalty's suspicion about our ability to recover authorial intent. However,

problems are caused by Royalty's confidence in his ability to recover the world-view of the audience. First, he makes the decision that the audience's understanding is defined almost entirely in terms of the Graeco-Roman context of the congregations. He effectively says that the author is drawing on OT imagery, but the audience would have heard this imagery in terms of their Greek conceptual world. The impression is given that the churches addressed in Revelation were a *tabula rasa* as far as the OT is concerned. However, even within the Graeco-Roman evidence used, problems arise: for example, Royalty bases a good deal on the negative portrayal of trade in Classical literature. The Apocalypse thus portrays Babylon as a city of dirty traders, and both large-scale shipping and small-scale trade are equally vulgar: Royalty mentions that 'Cicero is quite clear about the status of petty merchants and small shopkeepers' (103). The wealth of God by contrast is genuine, aristocratic wealth, which the saints receive by the noble means of inheritance. This is an interesting idea, but it falls down when one considers that this characterisation was an attitude that would have been held almost exclusively by the nobility. Most of the rest of urban society (and not least the majority of the Christians in Asia Minor) would have been involved in some kind of trade, whether small or large-scale.

As for Royalty's hypothesis about the power struggle within early Christianity, this is a line which is being increasingly taken in reconstructions of NT history (for example, by Elaine Pagels, and Robert Funk). But most of these reconstructions are non-verifiable. 'John projects onto heaven and Babylon not lower-class resentments, but the moral, theological, and ideological struggles of the Christian communities'. This is constantly assumed and asserted throughout



the book, but is nowhere properly argued for. (And does a struggle for power instantiated in a text not presume 'authorial intention'?) Again, the issue of authority (this time, textual authority) surfaces in Royalty's statement that 'the use of the Hebrew Bible in the Apocalypse undercuts the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures because it does not acknowledge that authority'. So, because John does not employ citation formulae such as 'as it is written', but merely *alludes* to Scriptural phrases and concepts, he is trying to create authority for himself at the expense of the OT. This is an extraordinary judgement, and does not do justice either to the way Scripture is used in Early Judaism and Christianity (various works from intertestamental Judaism, as well as Phil., Col., 1-2 Thess, 1 John do not 'cite' Scripture), or to the way intertextuality functions. Implicit reference to authoritative texts can reinforce that authority just as effectively as direct quotation.

Royalty raises the interesting question of how wealth can function both as something positive (as in the portrayal of God's wealth, and Christ's luxurious garments) and wholly negative, as in the corrupt wealth in which the Babylonians exult. And he does supply a nuanced discussion of the different ways in which wealth is thought of in (particularly) early Judaism, Cynic and Stoic philosophy (for the Cynics, wealth was an impediment to virtue, for Stoics it was a matter of indifference), and the texts of the NT. However, his hermeneutic of suspicion in his approach to the Apocalypse is often grating: by his own admission, Royalty's understanding of the nature of justice is very different from that of John. While Royalty understands the judgement of God in Revelation as an ideology 'with no justice', the Apocalypse insists that this revelation from Christ must be obeyed.

**Simon Gathercole**  
Durham

## The Theology of the First Christians

Walter Schmitals

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997,  
396 pp., £20.00/\$32.95

Walter Schmitals may not be very well-known to readers of *Themelios*, however *The Theology of the First Christians* is a fascinating, lucid and enjoyable read. In the reviewer's opinion it is worth reading because it will introduce those familiar with British and North American scholarship to their German sibling. In an academe which can be uncompromisingly insular this is a very good thing.

Schmitals' chapters include the usual range of subjects such as Jesus and apocalyptic; the Son of Man; a number on Paul; Worship within Early Christianity and the Conflict between the Church and the Synagogue. The fact that Schmitals is free to discuss Paul's conversion theology and the worship of Jesus without reference to Seyoon Kim and Larry Hurtado respectively illustrates my point concerning the insularity of the different (national) streams within NT scholarship.

In terms of Paul's conversion, readers will be interested to note that Schmitals contends that the Apostle was converted to a Johannine type of Christianity. Schmitals is thus able, unlike a number of British scholars with whom readers will be familiar, to argue for a high form of Christological belief prior to Paul - and see the Johannine tradition as relatively early. Yet from the sources Schmitals interacts with, he does not seem to be alone within German NT scholarship in putting forward these arguments. Other dogma cherished by British and American scholarship appears to be put to the sword, for example, Schmitals argues that Paul was converted to a Torah free form of (Gentile) Christianity in Damascus.

An interesting feature of the whole book is that Schmitals does not just

dialogue with NT traditions in his shaping of the theology of the first Christians: where possible he looks, for example, at the *Didache* and Justin Martyr for evidence. Thus on the question of baptising children, Schmitals mentions Justin, Tertullian and Origen in his discussion. Readers brought up on a diet of British NT scholarship will find this aspect refreshing.

There is so much to this book: it is very hard to know where to start, what to mention, and where to end. It deserves a place on the shelf of every NT scholar. It should find a place on the reading list of all introductory courses within NT studies. This is not because readers of *Themelios* will agree with its conclusions, but because it will remind undergraduates that German biblical scholarship is very much alive and doing innovative things.

**Kevin Ellis**

The Queen's College, Birmingham

### **The Weekend that Changed the World The Mystery of Jerusalem's Empty Tomb**

*Peter Walker*

London: Marshall Pickering, 1999,  
xix + 220 pp., £9.99

A fascinating, inspiring and challenging book. Walker turns what might have been a run-of-the-mill souvenir for tourists visiting Jerusalem into a powerful piece of evangelism. It is also generally an excellent work of scholarship, although some sections are considerably stronger than others.

Peter Walker is a tutor at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and currently one of the leading authorities on Jerusalem in the early centuries AD. He was invited by the association that looks after the 'Garden Tomb', a possible site of Jesus' burial and resurrection, to write about the resurrection and the places linked with it. The book is in three sections.

The first is a re-telling of the story of the first Easter weekend, together with an explanation of why we should believe that the resurrection took place. The middle, and longest, section is a detailed discussion of the history of two sites, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Garden Tomb, and a weighing of the arguments for the authenticity of each. The final section provides a powerful exposition of the significance of Jesus' resurrection both for the early Church and for us today.

I began reading the book with no interest in either of the suggested sites of Jesus' burial but found myself being drawn into their stories. By the way he writes and by a lavish use of diagrams and colour photographs, Walker manages both to present the evidence very clearly and to bring the historical characters alive. I could imagine Eusebius, for example, wary about the bishop of Jerusalem, his rival, but exuberant about the apparent arrival of God's Kingdom with the accession of Constantine, and about the amazing discoveries that had been made under the now-demolished temple of Aphrodite in Jerusalem. The arguments for the authenticity of the Garden Tomb (favoured by most Protestants) and of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (favoured by most other kinds of church) are judiciously expressed. Walker sets out the evidence and shows its limitations. We are left to decide for ourselves. He communicates clearly the way in which the Garden Tomb, a place set aside for remembering Christ's resurrection, functions powerfully irrespective of whether it is the right tomb or not.

Also excellent is the final section. Walker depicts the consequences of the resurrection on a wide canvas – from the affirmation of Jesus' life and teaching to the affirmation of hope for the world and of the victory and judgement of God. He then argues persuasively for the need for each of

us to meet Jesus personally. I was pleased to see that Walker did not 'pull his punches' about judgement and hence about the challenge that the Gospel presents.

A criticism of the final section would be that it is rather derivative: I kept expecting N.T. Wright's name to appear. The more serious weakness in the book lies in the method of its first section. Here, I think that the attempt to be souvenir-cum-scholarly-text-cum-evangelistic-book unravels somewhat. Walker re-tells the events of the Passion and Resurrection with particular attention to the sites around Jerusalem where they happened. He gathers material indiscriminately from all four Gospels, often producing rather odd syntheses by drawing together isolated pieces of data from the four stories – most notably in constructing a family tree of many of the characters. To be evangelistic, you need to persuade. Walker does not explain or defend his method for this section and it ends up feeling very arbitrary. However, his chapter on the reasons for believing in the Resurrection is well argued. Walker explains many of the classic arguments clearly and effectively.

If you are interested in Jerusalem, you will find this a valuable book. If you are not interested, it may make you interested. It will also make you think seriously about the significance of the Resurrection. The beautiful presentation of the book makes it particularly suitable for buying as a gift. Anyone receiving such a gift would discover that it contained not just interesting pictures but a great deal of thought-provoking, and possibly life-changing, material.

#### **Peter Oakes**

Northern College and  
University of Manchester

## **The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus**

*Ben Witherington III*

Leicester/Downers Grove: IVP, 1998,  
347 pp., h/b., £16.99

Amidst the attention generated by the *Third Quest for the Historical Jesus*, the scramble among scholars to reconstruct the Historical Paul has gone virtually unnoticed. With this contribution, Ben Witherington III, prolific author and Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in the US, joins this neglected debate.

In spite of what the title promises, this is not an account of the *Quest* itself. Rather, Witherington has written his own portrayal of Paul. The first two chapters describe Paul as a first-century personality and identify three factors that shaped Paul's identity, namely, his Jewishness, his Roman citizenship, and his Christian faith. The remainder of the book consists of chapters organised around paired aspects of Paul's identity, ministry, and theology. Witherington treats Paul the writer and rhetor; the prophet and apostle; the realist and radical; the anthropologist and advocate; the storyteller and exegete; and the ethicist and theologian. The book concludes with a brief summary chapter plus a 29 page appendix on Pauline chronology. A bibliography, index of authors, and index of subjects round off the volume. Unfortunately, the book contains no index of biblical passages.

Two factors make this book beneficial for students: Witherington's interaction with secondary literature and his methodology. The first point can be summarised briefly. The second requires more extended comment since an overview of Witherington's methods offers a glimpse of his interpretation of Paul as well.

First, in describing Paul as he sees him, Witherington engages the most important secondary literature on the apostle. Consequently, though this is not the book's primary intent, the reader gains an orientation to the current state of Pauline studies.

With regard to method, Witherington utilises three approaches to Paul that represent the cutting-edge of Pauline studies: socio-scientific criticism, rhetorical criticism, and a narrative approach to Paul's theology. The reader thus gains not only an overview of Pauline studies, but also of the contemporary methods guiding those studies. Each of these approaches receives brief explanation below.

Drawing upon the work of socio-scientific critics, Witherington describes Paul in his first-century context as a 'dyadic' person, meaning his identity emerged from the group or groups to which he belonged. This central conviction undergirds all other aspects of Witherington's interpretation and enables him to construct a Paul distinct from modern conceptions of personhood. In such a context, identity was fixed and determined by one's gender, where one was born, and what family one was born into. As such, identity was socially established and unalterable. Therefore, the transformation brought about by Paul's conversion from a violent, zealous Pharisee to an equally zealous but non-violent eschatological prophet and apostle of Christ caused him to be reviled as a deviant by many of his contemporaries.

In terms of ancient canons of argumentation, an analysis of Paul's epistles reveals he employed primarily deliberative rhetoric. In other words, Paul sought through his letters to advise his hearers and gain their consent, thereby influencing the communities' future course of action. Witherington argues that Paul's writings must be understood in these terms.

Paul's theology consists of a series of

interconnected stories (about God, Israel, the world, Christ, believers) that reach their climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As such, there is no 'centre' to Paul's theology, but a narrative that reaches a culmination in those events. Paul's ethics derive from this narrative as believers become conformed to Christ's example of servant leadership.

In a book such as this, no one will agree with the author on every point. Some will find Witherington's Paul too Arminian (Witherington is Methodist). Others will disagree with the author's basic embrace of the 'new perspective' on Paul. Given the vibrant debate that characterises so many aspects of Pauline studies at the turn of the millennium, such disagreements are to be expected and in no way detract from the overall value of the argument.

Two problems that relate to Witherington's presentation are worth mentioning. First, the author repeatedly refers to arguments made in his numerous earlier writings without recounting those arguments themselves. Readers should not be expected to have Witherington's previous books at hand when reading this one. The text is also liberally sprinkled with footnotes instructing the reader to 'See earlier discussion' with no page numbers to guide the reader to where that discussion may be found. These shortcomings, however, do not significantly alter the merit of Witherington's presentation as a whole.

In summary, Witherington has done scholars, students, and pastors a great service by producing a cogent reading of Paul that employs several state-of-the-art methodologies and interacts with the best of recent scholarship. All will find his work useful not only for understanding the first-century Paul, but also for appropriating his writings for today.

**James C. Miller**

Daystar University, Nairobi

## The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology

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**Paul Badham**

Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998,  
vii + 179 pp., £12.99

Many believe that liberalism is, in fact dead, just about given up the ghost. However in this work Paul Badham illustrates that liberalism still has a stronghold on many and for many theological students still presents a challenge.

The aim of the work is to show a middle path between traditional Christianity, and the radical interpretations of the likes of Don Cupitt. Thus modernist theology is classically liberal, in that it maintains a theistic belief whilst discarding much of what is seen as supernaturalism. The endorsements of the book by John Hick and Martyn Percy should give most readers a hint as to what to expect. Interestingly, his opponents include fundamentalists (and so evangelicals), Barthians, and Don Cupitt!

In the course of his exposition of modernist theology, Badham discards miracles, the doctrines of the atonement and hell, and the infallibility of the Bible. Whilst he is entirely at liberty to do so, it is slightly frustrating that he claims very few Christians now believe in such things. The fastest growing churches in the world admit to such beliefs, and it is therefore plainly wrong to make such claims. Not that the truth of such beliefs are confirmed by popular opinion. It just seems that Badham is out of touch with worldwide Christianity.

Similarly, Badham claims that no scholar continues to believe that the messianic passages of the OT apply to Christ (25), or that 'almost all modern Christians who will talk about the atonement agree with Barth' and his reinterpretation (41). He also claims that most Christian physicists do not believe in supernatural miracles (74);

that few modern scholars believe the words of John's gospel (83); that the infancy narratives are unanimously agreed to be Jewish Midrash (84) ... and the list could go on.

So there are two levels to engage with this work. Firstly, that Badham is arguing from false understandings of the way that things are. Secondly, that Badham is putting forward a liberalism for the new century which holds most of the beliefs of the old liberalism. The arguments are well known, and will not be rehearsed in this review. It is a shame that Badham seems to have paid little attention to the developments of the past 30 years - although he is up-to-date with scientific advantages and inter-religious dialogue, much more thinking has been carried out from other perspectives.

Ultimately this is a frustrating book. If you wish to know what modernist theology is, this is an excellent statement. Otherwise, for a living and life transforming theology that avoids generalisations, look elsewhere!

**Tony Gray**  
Oxford

## The Twentieth Century, A Theological Overview

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*Gregory Baum, (ed.)*

London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999,  
viii + 263 pp., £17.99

This collection could have been subtitled, 'A North American Perspective' for that is arguably what it delivers. However, although it has a North American Catholic flavour it draws upon the skills of several non-Romans too, such that its central concerns are by no means denominationally partisan even if their geographical purview is in places.

The essays fall into two groups: the first moves from historical events that have marked the twentieth century to theological reflections upon those

events. The second group starts from a contemporary theological basis and proceeds to a critique of major movements that have shaped the contours of much twentieth century theology. Both sections have their strengths. In the first group there is material on both World Wars (including the Holocaust), and on political movements and their social ramifications such as the early Bolshevism of the Russian Revolution and the state of Welfare Capitalism mid-century. There is also a (disappointing) essay on the advent of globalisation as a world phenomenon. Several instructive chapters on the development of Roman Catholic theology, from the early days of the century in the aftermath of Vatican I and its hostility towards 'Modernism', are also worth noting. They chart the developments in mid-century, dealing with several theologians whose work is more remote from Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, such as Jaques Maritain and Henri de Lubac.

The second set of essays echoes some of the same concerns but from the opposite direction. The ecumenical movement and the impact of Vatican II are both dealt with sympathetically, and the impact of Marxist ideas on Christian thought take up the political aspects of the first half of the book. Here too are other developments in more recent theology. Of particular note among these are the essays on Postmodernism, the Ecological problem and Feminism, all of which continue to excite varying degrees of interest as the twentieth century wanes. Moreover, Harvey Cox's treatment of the rise and fall of secularisation is an interesting comment on the development of his own thought.

In any such collection, it is often as instructive to note what has been omitted as to read what has been included (something which Baum acknowledges in the introduction). It is perhaps understandable that some theologians/movements are

absent - for this is not a theological overview which seeks to chart the theological developments of the century, as much as a series of reflections upon movements and events which have shaped the history of the period. So for example, there is no serious treatment of Pannenberg's thought, nor is Moltmann dealt with adequately. But it is less excusable if such an assessment fails to deal with movements which have been spawned as a direct response to the socio-political and cultural changes which the volume seeks to address, as with religious fundamentalism, and Charismatic/Renewal theology. Neither of these gets a fair hearing, yet they have played an important role in shaping recent theological reflection.

Furthermore, although there is mention made of various thinkers whose work has made an impact upon society and theology, such as Heidegger, or Marx, there is no mention of, for example, Wittgenstein, or Existentialism. Nor is there any attempt to interact with the Natural Sciences, or with the technologies it has spawned. Finally, there is scant attention to cultural factors like religious pluralism and the rise of non-western spirituality, all of which is curious to say the least, given the brief the editor has set himself.

Nevertheless, many of the essays are well worth reading, particularly for those with interests in recent Historical Theology, Church History and the Sociology of Religion. But as a *truly representative* theological overview of the twentieth century, it is somewhat lacking.

**Oliver D. Crisp**  
London

## The New Religion of Life in Everyday Speech

*Don Cupitt*

London: SCM, 1999,  
ix + 117 pp., £8.95

Don Cupitt is an Anglican priest who has abandoned orthodox Christian belief in various, ever more sceptical ways, seeing the object of religious attention as unknown and ineffable, then as a mere moral and spiritual ideal, and finally as contingent existence itself. Rejection of a real God has led to rejection of realistic views of morality and science, such that evangelicals might be tempted to see Cupitt as a warning to all who take leave of God. However, this book marks something of a new methodological departure. Cupitt claims that talk about a real God has almost disappeared from common speech, but that religious attitudes and feelings persist and have come to be refocused about 'life'. A substantial body of relatively new idioms has sprung up, expressing, according to Cupitt, a surprisingly coherent, radical, religious philosophy, replacing God with life itself.

The idioms he has in mind are such things as 'the sanctity of life', 'the meaning of life', 'quality of life', and 'get a life!'. Morality based on supposedly objective rules has been largely replaced by a plurality of 'lifestyles' and an implicit moral imperative merely to 'live life to the full'. In the past a funeral oration might have centred on someone's having loved God, but now it would be far more likely to celebrate the fact that they loved life. Cupitt explores the roots of this 'coming to life' in such things as the Romantic movement, philosophers of life and action such as Nietzsche and Bergson, and philosophical movements such as the pragmatists, phenomenologists and existentialists. He also notes the role of novelists like D.H Lawrence and Virginia Wolf who focused attention and value on human

experience. He argues that the evolutionary theories of Hegel and Darwin helped overthrow pessimistic views of fallen human nature that inhibited the celebration of natural, human life.

All of this is interesting and stimulating, and plausibly does identify real shifts in popular sentiment. However, Cupitt makes the far less plausible, and largely unsubstantiated claim that such idioms express a coherent, essentially naturalistic philosophy of life. For Cupitt, life should be understood as finite, contingent mortality, rejecting belief in a supernatural power and an afterlife. However, opinion polls suggest that such belief remains widespread, despite people's lack of commitment to clear, coherent religious traditions. It may be true that belief in judgement and hell has diminished, and that consequently belief in God and the afterlife no longer seems so important, but Cupitt is claiming something far more radical than this. Furthermore, many of the expressions to which he appeals might be used by traditional believers; Christianity has plenty of reason to foster reverence for and attention to life in this world. Cupitt hardly even tries to prove that most life idioms exclude there being more to life than is dreamt of in his own philosophy. Additionally, though it seems that there is a consensus that this life is important, I doubt that there is a consensus about why and in what ways it is important. I therefore remain unconvinced that there is a coherent philosophy either expressed or established by the wide variety of 'life' idioms to which Cupitt makes appeal.

Cupitt writes in an eloquent, informal style, but with endnotes suggesting eclectic learning. However, he hardly develops his arguments or methodology in a systematic, rigorous way. Indeed, Cupitt rejects attempts at systematic or dogmatic truth, favouring instead creative imagination

and a pragmatic, instrumentalist view of language and science. Though there are stimulating observations, important questions and creative proposals, there is little interaction with evangelical concerns, and the argumentation is often weak. Therefore, while it may be essential to get a life, it is not essential to get this book.

**Patrick Richmond**  
Leicester

### **Eschatology and the Shape of Christian Belief**

*Robert C. Doyle*  
Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999,  
ix + 342 pp., £19.99

To say that eschatology is a much-neglected subject in theology may come as surprise to many. Yet to have it taught as a key element of a biblical or systematic course is a rarity. Eschatology is often either so 'Bible-based' that it is of no earthly use (extreme forms of millennial theories), or so 'systematic' that one wonders why the revelation of God has been left out of the equation.

In this marvellous book Doyle seeks to redress the balance, stressing the fundamental importance of eschatology literally to the shape of Christian belief. He begins with a section on why the church, and a theological education, must consider eschatology. This work then apparently covers all the major bases - biblical studies, biblical theology, historical theology, and systematics. Doyle even includes a stimulating and uplifting chapter on hope and the Christian life, drawing out some of the relevance of the theme for everyday Christian living.

In the Biblical section, Doyle covers the major terminology used to talk of eschatology - both in terms of the terminus of the end times (heaven, hell, universalism), and the categories used to describe the consummation of

God's plans (kingdom of God, hope, kingship, promise, and *parousia*). Historically Doyle works chronologically, starting with patristic eschatology up to *Chalcedon*, and focusing then on the influence of Augustine over the subject of time and eternity. After medieval eschatology (including Aquinas), Luther and Calvin are singled out for the role which eschatology played in reformation theology, and the differences between the two reformers. The modern era is evaluated by how millennialism has been appropriated in various ways, and a final historical chapter examines Barth, Moltmann, and liberation theology.

There are of course matters of interpretation that people will quibble over. It would have been helpful perhaps to have seen more interaction with Pannenberg. Yet the fact that the major historical figures are covered in such detail must excuse small omissions in the twentieth century! The presentation of the work is also to be commended, offering further reading suggestions, and ideas for discussions 'over coffee'! All in all, a pleasure to read.

**Tony Gray**  
Oxford

### **Reading the Mind of God. Interpretation in Science and Theology**

*Philip Duce*  
Leicester: Apollos, 1998,  
xi + 159 pp., £14.99

*Reading the Mind of God* takes as its basic framework Francis Bacon's metaphor of 'the two books', God's Word (Scripture) and God's works (the created order), and sets out to explore ways in which the interpretive approaches appropriate to each may interact fruitfully, rather than being deadlocked in tired old 'science versus faith' debates. Duce's work, a revision of his MTh thesis at London Bible College, moves comfortably and confidently beyond the basic



caricature of scientific method as objective fact to which the only Christian responses are either capitulation or stubborn 'biblical literalism'. His background as a research chemist allows him to play a strong 'insider's' hand on the scientific side of the debate, and he surveys a wide variety of the literature on Christianity-science issues.

Part 1 sets out basic accounts of how the two 'books' are read. Duce is particularly helpful on the philosophy of science, charting a variety of emphases away from Bacon's own 'pure' idea of logical induction from observed data. He looks at the work of Thomas Kuhn on paradigm shifts; positivism; Popper's 'falsification' approach, and 'critical' realism. This is followed by a survey of aspects of hermeneutics: biblical interpretation seen through the grid of traditional, modern and evangelical approaches. I would be hesitant about recommending this as anything more than the briefest of broad-brushstroke portraits, and it is debatable whether this is enough to sustain Duce's attempt to develop a self-consciously evangelical position on the science-interpretation issue.

Part 2 explores a variety of models for 'integrating' the readings. Duce prefers 'dialogue' approaches to conflict, independence or integration models (ch. 4) and develops an eclectic dialogue model, recognising correctly, that biblical interpretation occupies at times distinct and at times overlapping discourses to the concerns of science (ch. 5). 'Conflict' between the two approaches is thus not ruled out, and Duce probes, perhaps a little inconclusively, how one might handle the potential of conflict (ch. 6). Although he touches on areas of historicity, naturalistic presuppositions and so forth, he sticks to his declared aim of treating method rather than specific examples, and thus ends only with suggestions about potential approaches. Substantial engagement with at least

one example would have helped considerably here.

Part 3 essentially revisits aspects of the earlier arguments in more detail. Baconian and Kuhnian perspectives in the two 'readings' are discussed under the helpful rubric of 'methodological similarities and differences', leading to the conclusion that appropriate overall models of epistemology should be broadly based enough to allow for both science and hermeneutics to make their home rather than prejudging in favour of one of them (ch. 7). Michael Polanyi's philosophy of personal knowledge is then explored briefly as an example of such an approach (ch. 8). Duce seems to support Polanyi's 'fallibilist' realism as a preferred option.

I appreciated the wide range of options presented in this book and especially the successful attempt to re-orient the science-faith issue away from debates about creationism and set it on a broader canvas. Duce's reservations about the popular 'complementarity' approach, where the two domains complement, but do not contradict each other (63-69) is carefully balanced to show the merits of the approach while still concluding that it is too serene about the possibility of avoiding uncomfortable contradictions in this area.

However, while Duce's position may be worth exploring, I am not convinced that he has successfully defended it in this book. Firstly, the whole book is littered with references to secondary sources to structure the discussion, and these are very often such sources as theological dictionary articles or textbook summaries. The decision not to interact with primary sources is seriously flawed. Secondary summaries frequently resort to that dreadful device of so much contemporary academia: classifying and labelling positions. In a book concerned with hermeneutics this is especially inappropriate.

Secondly, Duce sometimes seems to think that a point has been demonstrated by citing authors who believe it. Thus 'No final conflict' declares Francis Schaeffer (79) and on the next page we are apparently committed to this 'basic principle'. Maybe so, but why? Likewise I hunted high and low for any reason as to why inerrancy was required of me, rather than say the view of John Goldingay (82 n. 18) which is summarised but left unevaluated, but all I could find was that a lot of ICBI members all believe it. Right or wrong, this demonstrates nothing. Duce is sharp on this when scientists do it (77), but doesn't seem to spot himself doing it. Perhaps the book is only aimed at those for whom inerrancy is a prerequisite of being 'evangelical', although in general I didn't get that impression, but in that case I think that Duce should at least clarify how a Polanyian hermeneutic which has served Colin Gunton, Lesslie Newbigin and others so well, could possibly at the same time support inerrancy. No indication is given that this is even thought to be an issue.

Thirdly, the decision not to engage with even a single example is disappointing. Thus abstracted, all the talk of hermeneutical complexity and nuanced spirals of engagement is just so much idling language.

And finally, a doctrine of Scripture which requires us to say that the Bible is always right even if interpretations of it are always wrong (e.g. 76) is at the very least hermeneutically simplistic. What, one wonders, would Polanyi make of it?

It is possible that Duce could address all these issues and thus make a much more compelling case. In the meantime this book stands as a useful first step into thinking about interpretation in science and in theology, although one which falls short of defending all the interesting views it puts forward.

**Richard Briggs**

University of Nottingham

## Reading Biblical Narrative. An Introductory Guide

J.P. Fokkelman

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999,  
216 pp., £14.99/\$22.95

This is a clear and well-written introduction to the many aspects of reading narrative, and it has a particular merit in its focus on the biblical text rather than secondary literature. Indeed, almost no other scholars are mentioned in the book until the final suggestions for further reading, and the focus throughout is on capturing the experience of reading biblical narrative itself.

Fokkelman begins with a trial run on the brief story of Elisha's miraculous provision of oil for a widow (2 Kgs 4:1-7) which he uses to introduce several of his general points. He then introduces 'the art of reading' under two rubrics: language and time. He suggests that the Bible presents itself for 'plain reading': without preconceptions and without any necessary theological prejudice which will make us squeeze the text into our own boxes. Biblical language then 're-describes reality', and narrators construct their stories into certain temporal patterns. This last point is deftly introduced and allows Fokkelman to explore how stories speed up and slow down, present parallel events consecutively, and so forth, and thus construct and emphasise the world they wish to talk about. This makes for one of the best and most engaging presentations of what is essentially Paul Ricoeur's thesis in *Time and Narrative*, taking the wary student of the Bible through something of a phenomenological minefield without dropping them in the jargon even once. The scholarship is worn lightly, and all manner of interesting insights into the biblical text are brought forth.

This is the great strength of the book. The author achieves similar clarity on a whole variety of narratological topics, along the way defining

narratology as 'largely a form of rhetorical analysis'. The idea of a 'narrator' is explored, suitably differentiated from God, but nevertheless possessed of a similarly omniscient perspective. Fokkelman rightly, in my view, defers from Sternberg's view that the narrator's voice is the voice of God, again without reference to other scholars. He also discusses the notion of 'action' through a look at how to identify a hero, a plot and a quest in a biblical story. Senders and receivers loom into view, but the student is once again guided to interpretive insight through this model without a single structuralist ('actantial') diagram, and without even hearing the word 'structuralist'. Further chapters discuss repetition, point of view and the organisation of stories into acts and cycles.

Early on Fokkelman introduces a 'practice arena' of 12 stories which he revisits time and again to deliver examples of how it all works. These are drawn mainly from Genesis, Judges, and Samuel-Kings, reflecting his particular knowledge of the Samuel stories, on which he has written a 4-volume study of 'Narrative Art and Poetry'. It is a pity that there is no index to the discussion of these stories, since I could imagine this book being a great aid to sermon and study preparation. Concluding chapters peer over the fence into a poetry-prose comparison (illuminating) and into the world of the NT, where he offers tantalising instances of similar narratological insights into Luke's gospel. One might only wish for a book in which he would develop the NT material in further detail. He closes with some helpful questions to bear in mind when reading a story.

The book as a whole is very reminiscent of Robert Alter's, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), perhaps containing more detail and more wide-ranging examples. It compares favourably to what should have been a

similar work, David Gunn's and Danna Nolan Fewell's, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (1993), lacking entirely the polemical bite of that work and handling issues of theological sensitivity irenically and, on the whole, fairly. It would make an excellent introduction to this most fruitful and refreshing of avenues into biblical narrative for a student who has already mastered the basic historical contexts of the biblical books. Questions remain, about how such an approach is best allied to a view of the Bible as Christian scripture, and thus to what end readers would engage with these stories in the first place, but while such questions must follow from such a study, Fokkelman will admirably guide the student to the point where they are raised.

**Richard Briggs**

All Nations Christian College, Ware

### **The Christ of the Bible and the Church's Faith**

*Geoffrey Grogan*

Ross-shire: Mentor (Christian Focus Publications), 1998,  
297 pp., £10.99

This book is wonderfully written. It is a cogent example of biblical scholarship operating as the handmaiden of the Church. Geoffrey Grogan has produced a fascinating study in an innovative way. The odd number chapters are largely apologetic material, whereas the evens are focussed on theological issues. Thus for example, chapter 1 looks at Jesus in the Gospels, and chapter two at the historical reliability of the biblical material. It is clear that both chapters dovetail together and should, in the reviewer's opinion, be read and interacted with together. The pattern is repeated throughout the book.

Grogan has been able to rehearse the history of Jesus research in a readable way, and as such readers will find it helpful for reminding them

just where scholars such as Weiss and Schweitzer fit into the NT studies gallery. Grogan's book exhudes a gentle courtesy. This comes across when he discusses scholars he disagrees with – see for instance his discussion of Bultmann (73–77). While readers will quickly find Grogan's critique, all will be impressed by his even handed arguments. This is something sadly lacking in academic scholarship today. The book therefore could be used as a model of how to dialogue without rancour. The present reviewer would thank Geoffrey Grogan wholeheartedly for this.

Another positive feature of the book is that Grogan does not duck the hard questions. While mindful of his apologetic purpose he does not sidestep influential scholars. Thus when discussing Christology he mentions the work of James Dunn and gives a little critical appraisal (79–80). The only possible drawback is that he does not always cover everything he would like to in sufficient detail, but this is not the book's aim.

It is not a book that confines itself only to the furrow of NT studies. Grogan includes a chapter on the Creeds and one on interfaith dialogue. The book is therefore an example of biblical scholarship in its richest sense. The NT scholar and biblical theologian will want it on the shelves as a reminder of our apologetic calling. As an Anglican Ordinand, I will want to give it to my peers, and after ordination it will be distributed to those in leadership with me.

Geoffrey Grogan has done us a great service in producing this book. More importantly, it is a book that points us to Christ. Buy it, read it, and pass it on!

**Kevin Ellis**

Queens College, Birmingham

## Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith

Wayne Grudem

Leicester: IVP, 1999,  
523 pp., h/b., £14.99

Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1994) has already achieved something like 'classic' status among evangelicals due in part to its readability (theological jargon is cut to a minimum), pastoral applicability, and its teaching on certain issues which are not often associated together in theologies of this kind (Grudem can be described as a 'Reformed, baptistic, charismatic premillennialist' and the book is endorsed by both Jim Packer and Terry Virgo). *Bible Doctrine* is a substantially abridged version of *Systematic Theology*, edited by Grudem's teaching assistant Jeff Purswell and aimed in Grudem's words, 'for students in one-semester classes in Christian doctrine ... adult Sunday school and home Bible studies' (11) i.e. people who have never studied theology before. As with the larger version, the book's aim is not to engage with 'liberal theology', (by that he means those who deny the absolute truthfulness of the Bible), rather, it is firmly based within the world of conservative evangelicalism.

Noting the intended audience, the packaging and layout of the book seems to have been an important consideration in trying to make the study of systematics both appealing and accessible. The silver cover and 'space-age' headings are an attempt to do this although I thought the name change (from *Systematic Theology* to *Bible Doctrine*) would do little to reduce the intimidation some Christians feel at the prospect of 'doing theology'. From *Systematic Theology* I was pleased to see the retention of 'The Historic Confessions of Faith' (minus the Westminster Confession and the 39 Articles), and the extremely useful bibliography of evangelical systematic theologies.

New sections of the book include, review questions at the end of each chapter, some relevant websites in the footnotes and an excellent cross-referencing glossary.

In terms of structure, the book retains the 'classic' systematic outline arranging the task into various *loci*: the doctrine of the word of God, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the application of redemption, the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the future. As with the larger version Grudem is not afraid to take a definite line on the disputed issues within evangelicalism, but is fair both in terms of space and description of other evangelical positions. Therefore both Calvinists and Arminians, charismatics and cessationists, paedobaptists and nonpaedobaptists, all have their say.

What I found most interesting in comparing this shorter version to the larger original, were the topics that have been edited out completely. These include specific treatments of miracles, the biblical covenants, the extent of the atonement, church government, the Holy Spirit (although there are still two chapters on spiritual gifts and the only text on the cover of the book is a fragment of Acts 2:3-4). Personally, I found these rather strange exclusions. The question of how we 'do church' today in our post-Christian society is becoming more and more important and issues of church government are very relevant to this debate. The debate concerning the extent of the atonement continues to be a 'big issue' in evangelicalism especially in light of religious pluralism. The omission of a chapter on the Holy Spirit may create the impression that the Spirit's work is solely concentrated on the gifts of the Spirit rather than focusing on his work in a whole load of other fundamental *opera*.

Perhaps what I found most disappointing was omission of the

treatment of the biblical covenants. Although I still believe there to be a place for topical systematics, there is always the danger that doctrines will become compartmentalised and that the unifying themes of God's purposes in history will be lost. Some kind of organising scheme, whether on covenantal or more dispensational lines at least, demonstrates the connection between doctrine and illustrates the organic nature of theology. One of the reasons why some deem systematics as irrelevant is that it fails to link past, present, and future in a cohesive way. Therefore I do feel there has been something of a missed opportunity here to be radical (and not just readable), not in terms of content but in terms of structure and to experiment with how evangelicals approach the organising of the theological project.

However, having noted the above caveats, I would recommend the book and I am sure it will be used profitably by the people the book targets. Grudem and Purswell have made a good attempt to provide a clear and accessible systematic theology.

**Daniel Strange**

Leicester

### **Religion and Sexuality (Roehampton Institute London Papers 4)**

*Michael A. Hayes, Wendy Porter, David Tombs (eds)*  
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,  
438 pp., £40.00/\$65.00

This collection of conference essays is divided into three sections that deal respectively with past, present, and future. Put crudely, to 'the past' belong all the characters who were hopelessly wrong about the Christian view of sex, and to 'the present' the Bible as understood from within a healthy spirituality. The future is about theological practice, and the discussion is bathed in the rhetoric of 'bringing in the kingdom of God'. After

all, 'theology, understood as the inclusion of the female in the divine, is presented as a move toward a more open future' (19).

With so many essays, one can only give a flavour here of the contents.

The first essay deals with the (primitive sense of *the*) primitive unconscious and has little to contribute. Then there is a fairly workmanlike piece on Islam and woman, with the good news that *Shi'i* Islam sees women as an image of paradise, although this is somewhat naively interpreted. Another: modern genetics and biology suggest that women came before men – why else do the latter have nipples? Marriage in ancient times was one's social duty for the greater political good. Porter argues that Paul's beef with women in 1 Corinthians 14 was not with 'women' as such, but with pipe-playing orgiastic worship styles (the verb). Sexual ethics should be done according to the spirit (what we feel now) rather than the letter (the old Bible). Metaphysical poets, such as Crashaw, were obsessed with sex (well, never!). K. McCarron has an article entitled 'O Come all ye faithful': orgasm, asceticism and the rhetoric of self-abandonment in de Sade, Bataille and Updike in which the orgasm is seen as the ultimate moment and symbol of despair (guilt the reason for this in Updike, though not so clear in the others).

There is a nice summary of the 'postmodern' mindset, represented by De Sade who, 'haunted by the loss of God' took delight in his sado-masochistic 'atrocities, all of which point to an absence of God ... seem to wish to attract the attention and the intervention of a divine agency, to finally provoke him to show himself, but all that looks back at them is the impassive face of a completely indifferent universe' (168).

Good ascetic spirituality was incarnational, so God loves bodies. Bad ascetic spirituality (Augustinian)

is anti-incarnational. They (the ascetics) had to put off the flesh associated with the feminine, and attain the values espoused by the God who occupies the place of the masculine subject, although this is read into the church fathers rather than out of them. Some think that sex is spiritual because it is relational. Mystics use sexual language, even if sometimes this means that religion steals and disenfranchises sex of its language. Yet the overall tendency of recent feminism is the belief that sex is no longer so much for procreation or partnership, but is rather something which 'grounds us in the present', stops us feeling that we are spinning off into outer space. Loosed from its place in procreation and partnership, sex is now officially free to be pleasurable: 'Theology undoubtedly celebrates the embodiedness of lesbian or heterosexual women who individually and collectively reclaim the generative energies of female sacral power that fuel the personal/political/natural/cosmic cycle of birth, death and rebirth and which have been demonised and parasitised by patriarchal institutions' (214). Ultimately, sexual reproduction has little real function in the theological concepts of the sacred. Perhaps in twenty years or so we shall look at this rhetoric and laugh as we now laugh at that of those who sell *Socialist Worker*. More seriously, this is to block sex and sexuality off from transcendence, not to free it from it, even if there is something to be acknowledged in postmodernity's recognition of the limitations of sex. And yet in this extreme form of feminist religion, there is a move from the vulva to the womb, from excitement to psychological safety, a glaring separation, a dualism even.

Evangelical readers will be amused by a piece on that most patriarchally challenged curmudgeon, Tom Small, who dared to call God 'Father'. There is a very good essay on Brian Moore, and a thought-provoking one entitled

'Mary as Mother of the Disappeared in El Salvador'. But that's about it. Exercise your photocopying rights.

**Mark Elliott**

Liverpool Hope University

### **Given for You: A Fresh Look at Communion**

*Eleanor Kreider*

Leicester: IVP, 1998,

255 pp., £9.99

Even Dean Inge might have liked this book. Many today would still concur with Inge's famous comparison of liturgical study to stamp collecting, and with his judgement that there was little point in either. Thankfully, Eleanor Kreider does much to liberate liturgology from such stereotypes. She is clearly acquainted with the key sources in her field, and displays an assured grasp of the technical aspects of eucharistic doctrine and history. What distinguishes this work, however, is her ability to weave a vast range of material into a fluent, vivid and largely convincing narrative.

There are books on liturgy which read like the theological equivalents of car repair manuals – this is not one of them. At times Kreider's ability to evoke the meanings and dynamics of Holy Communion are nothing short of poetic. This is substantially due to the fact that she has travelled widely and undertaken a great deal of fieldwork in various traditions and locations, as a 'participant observer'. Indeed, her prose exudes not only the language, but also the sights, sounds, music, tastes and smells of communion on five continents. All this will be appreciated by IVP's mainly evangelical readership, which is hardly known for its devotion to liturgical theology.

Although she clearly cherishes her own Mennonite tradition, Kreider's diverse experience lends weight to her gentle critique of 'freer' evangelical

approaches to the Lord's Supper. Indeed, one indication of this is her defence of the word 'eucharist' as an appropriate description of the sacrament.

The task Kreider sets herself is an ambitious one. She begins by tracing the roots and development of communion from Jewish blessings and Roman banquets through Jesus' Last Supper and the 'love feasts' of the early church, to medieval, Reformation and modern variations. In the main body of the book she explores the key biblical, doctrinal, missiological and pastoral themes associated with communion. Her central thesis is that communion shapes character, and especially the corporate character of the church. 'At the table', she writes, 'the people acknowledge the Lord's presence. He offers them the bread of life and the cup of joy. In receiving these gifts, they are shaped by the Spirit into a compassionate community of love.'

Beyond these broader brush strokes, Kreider is unafraid to examine controversial issues such as open very closed tables, infant reception, the common cup, extemporary very scripted prayer, and the vocabulary of 'sacrifice' and 'offering'. On all these points she is careful and fair. She does not even try to hide her own preference for relatively structured rites accessible as 'converting ordinances' to more than the local fellowship of believers.

As much as anything, this is a book teeming with ideas. Kreider's grass roots research throws up numerous strategies for renewing the way communion is done. When matched to her own creative suggestions, it has to be said that there is an occasional sense of 'information overload'. This, however, is due more to Kreider's infectious enthusiasm for her subject, than to any serious organisational neglect.

All in all, *Given for You* is a lucid and thorough introduction to a subject

which is too often characterised as either daunting, obscure or the preserve of 'high church' Christianity. For students, ministers and congregations alike, it deserves to become a standard introductory text.

### David Hilborn

Theological Adviser, Evangelical Alliance (UK)

## Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development

Bernhard Lohse

Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999,

304 pp., h/b., £24.95/p/b., £14.95

Professor Bernhard Lohse has left us this magisterial treatment of Martin Luther's thought. A lifetime's engagement with the theology of the reformer has resulted in a generally reliable guide, full of measured and mature judgements, and detailed interaction with the primary material. The distinctive feature of this volume arises from the author's awareness of the ease with which modern interpreters have read their own concerns and perspectives into Luther's writing. Lohse is convinced that Julius Köstlin, who produced a similar work one hundred years before him, was on the right track when he decided to approach Luther's theology from two different perspectives. The first was in terms of its historical development, and the second in a systematic presentation. Both men have held out the hope that as these two perspectives are brought together the distorting influence of contemporary issues might be minimalised.

The first section of the book sets the scene for examination of Luther's thought in the context of the sixteenth century. The situation in the church of the period, the particular academic ethos in the universities of Erfurt and Wittenberg, and the atmosphere and character of Luther's homelife are examined in outline. This leads Lohse into his second section, a study of

Luther's theology in its historical development. The major phases of Luther's life, the events that surrounded him and the major pieces of writing he produced in those contexts are studied chronologically. A sense of the development of Luther's thought, the gradual abandonment of some of the methods and presuppositions of his teachers, the refinement of his own insights in the face of controversy, and especially the occasional rather than systematic structure of much of his thinking is highlighted by such a method. The third section looks at various aspects of Luther's thought in a more logically structured way, beginning with *Sola Scriptura* and concluding with Luther's view of the end and an excursus on his attitude towards the Jews.

Lohse's volume has much to commend it. However, it is not beyond criticism. Three points are worth mentioning here. Firstly, Lohse attempts to cover so much material in such a short space that at points the treatment must be frustratingly brief. Luther scholars will be left crying out for more. Some important questions are not dealt with. Secondly, on a few occasions Lohse seems unable to detach himself from the reigning consensus among Luther scholars. This is particularly evident in the chapter on Scripture where he perpetuates Barth's misquote from the *Adventspostille*: 'no book but Holy Scripture can comfort ... for it contains God's word' (188). In the original context it is the believing 'soul' (*die seele*), rather than 'the Holy Scripture' (*die heyligen schrift*), which 'takes hold of God's word' (*sie fasset gottis wort*). Modern Luther scholarship has been reluctant to acknowledge the directness of Luther's appeal to the biblical text as the Word of God and Lohse proves to be no exception. Thirdly, there are a number of annoying errors in the translation which should have been picked up. On page eight 'toward the end of the sixteenth century'



translates 'in den späten dreißiger Jahren des 16 Jahrhunderts', distorting the chronology of Luther's debates over law and gospel. On page 13 Lohse is made to say that 'even Thomists and Augustine himself followed Occam', an obvious anachronism which arises from a mistranslation of 'und selbst Augustiner'.

Despite such minor blemishes, this is a volume that anyone seriously interested in Luther's theology will want to own and study. Here is Professor Lohse's impressive legacy to the next generation of Luther scholarship.

**Mark D. Thompson**

Moore Theological College, Newtown

### **Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation?**

*C. Lowe*

Bristol: Mentor/OMF, 1998,  
191 pp., £9.99

I am becoming increasingly convinced that a good book whether dealing with matters theological or otherwise, should resemble a good meal. Just as the sweet course should be the crowning glory of a meal, making subtle references to that which has delighted both palate and eye before it, so should the final chapter of a book be. Chuck Lowe in *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelisation?* as something of a 'literary chef' in this respect, achieves the twin accolades of informing head and motivating heart in the area of contemporary spiritual warfare.

Here is a book that seeks to provide some much-needed illumination on the current 'trendy bandwagon' of *Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare* (SLSW). Lowe engages at length with the main proponents of this so-called school of SLSW, most notably Peter Wagner. Indeed, both the title of the book, a direct reference to Wagner's premier book in this field, and the extensive bibliography bear ample

testimony that Lowe is not interested in stereotypical evangelical knee-jerk reactions.

What should one's reaction be to those who are certain that extended periods of prayer, 'prayer walks' and seeking the name/s of the ruling demon/s to do battle with them in the heavenlies will open up our towns and cities to the Gospel? Has the church neglected to utilise aspects of its God-given authority in Christ to fulfil the Great Commission? What hermeneutic should one apply to such chapters of Scripture as Daniel 10 and Ephesians 6? What are the origins of SLSW?

These are questions that cannot and must not be neglected. SLSW makes some startling claims which must be faced head on by a church that has often abrogated its responsibility in the area of spiritual warfare. Lowe seeks to guide us through this minefield and draw attention to some of the presuppositions with which Wagner *et al.* operate.

Despite the occasional over-pithy endnote, of which there are many, this is a serious scholarly work. Lowe takes the time to survey various manifestations of anything that may be classed at SLSW throughout both Jewish and church history. Chapters are devoted to 'SLSW in the InterTestamental Period', 'SLSW in Church History' and even 'SLSW and Animism'; no stone is left unturned. Lowe seeks to be as fair as possible to the proponents of SLSW but, nonetheless, pulls no punches. His increasing incredulity at many of the claims made by SLSW is clear to see; indeed, it is quite difficult to remain critically detached (is such a thing genuinely possible?!) as one reads his book. If one were to offer any criticism it would be, to return to our 'meal analogy', that the 'main course' is too heavy. The latter two of the above three chapters are not easy reading, but then have extracts from 1, 2 and 3 Enoch ever been so?

Churches sometimes remind one of rivers: they follow the course of least resistance! In his penultimate chapter Lowe briefly surveys the life and ministry of James Fraser to the Lisu in China at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the face of one who faced direct attack from those he was seeking to win for Christ, bouts of lethargy, apathy and depression, and yet refused to surrender to such hindrances to his work, we have ample cause for thoughtful reflection at the 'quick fix' culture of much of Christendom. Lowe picks up on this in his final chapter and strongly criticises western evangelicalism for being obsessed with 'technique': wanting to find the quickest and most successful way of praying, evangelism, church growth and so on. When one reflects upon many of the titles that adorn the shelves of our Christian bookshops promising near instant success in all these areas and more, I find myself having to agree. There is a real temptation for both the church and individual Christians to take the course of least resistance that promises even a modicum of success – and often that is measured by our standards rather than God's.

Lowe's challenge to the Church, while age-old, is far from anachronistic. It is the call to stand firm to the end; it is the call to faithful, persistent prayer by the saints on behalf of a lost and hurting world. The activities of SLSW may fill our Church prayer meetings for a season but often disillusion in the end can lead people to question the power of the Living God. Since initiating the review of this book it has proved invaluable for providing pastoral wisdom for those whose zeal for the Kingdom is never in question. Prayer is not a hobby but a lifestyle. To conclude, one is reminded of the challenge and encouragement of Romans 5:3–5: '... we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint

us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.'

**James McIntosh**  
Aberdeen

### **The Imaginative World of the Reformation**

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*P. Matheson*  
Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark, 2000,  
164 pp., £14.95

This book proceeds from the (undoubtedly correct) premise that the evangelical Christianity of the Reformation is very unpopular nowadays, both as Christianity and as a species of 'modernist' outlook. In that situation, Reformation Studies need justifying in fresh terms. The complicity of Protestantism in the demise of the pre-modern, iconic, pre-national, minimally textual world of the late Middle Ages is no longer seen as a matter of praise but as confirmation of the mean-mindedness that is to be expected of those who try to live life by a mere textbook, especially Scripture.

As Matheson's title suggests, his book is an attempt to rescue the Reformation from these negative evaluations at the hands of a post-modern generation by highlighting aspects that are more likely to appeal in the new climate. And so he emphasises the element of paradigm shift that is present in the early sixteenth century, and the changes in the imaginative world of ordinary people, which Protestantism both reflected and facilitated. As he says, 'it is possible to revisit the Reformation, seeing it less as a doctrinal shift or structural upheaval, though it was both of these, than as an event in the imagination, a shift in the basic paradigms through which people perceived their world' (119). Accordingly, the book has chapters on 'The Stirring of the Imagination'; 'A New Song or the Stripping of the Altars?'; 'Rural and Urban Utopias';

'Nightmare'; 'The Contours of Daily Life' and 'The Spirituality of the Reformation'.

Matheson's arguments are at least partly persuasive. Certainly the hidebound confessionalism which views the Reformation as primarily an episode in the history of doctrine ('a doctrinal shift') has little enough to commend it. But the more moderate traditional approach that emphasised the role of religious change as the harbinger of modernity (print, rationalism, nation-states, the triumph of abstract principles over formal personal relationships - 'structural upheaval') may also require some modification. An emphasis on the importance of the Peasants' War is only to be expected, perhaps, from the editor and translator of *Thomas Müntzer's Collected Works* (T. & T. Clark, 1988), but Matheson's arguments that the Reformation changed its character in a conservative direction after 1524-25 are considerable. Certainly I shall be modifying the way that I explain this period to my own students.

That said, Matheson's book does not give us the whole picture, even in outline. (Within so small a compass, how could it?) The emphasis upon women's writings and participation is understandable in the present climate, but some of his generalised references along these lines appear to be mere rhetorical flourishes to the postmodern gallery; the only concrete examples he provides are (the wholly admirable) Katharina Zell and Argula von Grumbach - and he works the latter hard. It would be true to say, also, that German-speaking Europe almost eclipses everywhere else in this book, an emphasis not quite justified by the spread of phenomena in the period under review.

However, these are trifling criticisms. This is a lively and stimulating discussion, which brings new questions to a much-worked field of study. That is a commendable achievement in itself. It deserves to be

widely read by specialists in the period.

**Meic Pearse**

London Bible College

### The J.I. Packer Collection

*Selected and Introduced by Alister E. McGrath*

Leicester: IVP, 1999,

287 pp., £9.99

Undoubtedly Packer has proved to be one of the foremost proponents of Conservative Evangelical scholarship in the last half century. Yet he has not written a *magnum opus*, but has spent his energies in a plethora of smaller works. For many who espouse a position within the Calvinist tradition similar to his own this has been a source of some disappointment which is picked up by McGrath at several points in his selections. However what Packer has done is make scholarship accessible to a whole generation, and the genius of this book is that it takes up this theme in Packer's work and has sought to make the different strands of his thought available within one volume. The result is a helpful digest for those coming to Packer for the first time and a useful work of handy reference to themes in Packer's *oeuvre*. The selections made are not merely snippets from other works, but whole articles in themselves, or lectures which summarise what he deals with in greater length in book form elsewhere (such as his lecture, 'On Knowing God', which sets out the thread of his eponymous book in outline.)

The selection can be subdivided into several areas. These include Packer's doctrinal interests; his apologetic concerns; and his popular and practical works.

Foremost among the doctrinal essays is his treatment of the logic of penal substitution. This is the longest piece. In it Packer develops a model of the atonement which supervenes

objective and subjective views, and clears up a lot of the terminological morass that this subject engenders. He explains how previous generations of evangelicals would have understood penal substitution as the 'Satisfaction view' (Hodge), or even would have rejected the forensic overtones of the prefix 'penal', whilst retaining the essence of the doctrine (Denney). This is a masterly piece which repays careful scrutiny.

He also deals with familiar themes like revelation and inspiration, universalism and the problem of eternal punishment, all of which are ongoing concerns in the literature, and are given the distinctive Packer treatment.

In his apologetic concerns Packer deals with the legacy of C.S. Lewis and, in another piece, outlines rather too briefly what the place of apologetics is. But his essay in response to the '*Honest to God*' debate is excellent, and unusually acerbic.

Finally, on more popular and pastoral pieces, he treats subjects like Christian Spirituality and the importance of revival.

A note on the editor: McGrath has done a masterful job in handling the material, but his own differences with Packer surface in one or two places. For instance, he maintains that Barth's *apokatastasis* doctrine was a species of particularism (38), but does not sufficiently distinguish this from the traditional evangelical position of particular redemption. As a result it *could* look like Packer endorses Barth's general outlook, which, on the basis of what he says elsewhere in the book (on Universalism itself, p. 85) he clearly would not. Although Barth's thinking is particularist in the sense that (it seems) God's grace in Christ will triumph over all, it is (arguably) universal in its scope (none will refuse). This is quite different from saying, as Packer does, that only some are finally saved, no matter how unpalatable that may be.

On a pedantic note, McGrath makes the point that Hick defends a pluralist agenda on salvation, but Hick's most recent writings show that he no longer holds to a broadly theistic understanding of this as McGrath seems to suggest (bottom of p. 36). Hick's views on what commonality there does exist between world religions has taken a sharp shift to the orient, not reflected in McGrath's comments.

That aside, this is a useful and judicious selection of the work of a fine theologian.

**Oliver D. Crisp,**

King's College, London.

## The Didache

*Kurt Neiderwimmer*

Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress Press;

*Hermeneia*, 1998

xxvii + 288 pp., h/b., \$52.00

Neiderwimmer's commentary on the *Didache* is the third *Hermeneia* Commentary on the Apostolic Fathers. These are early Christian writings close in time to the writing of the NT. Although theologically distinct from the canonical writings by virtue of standing outside the canon, historically they are close to them and therefore of great help for NT interpretation and the reconstruction of Christian origins.

First published in 1883, the *Didache* is a document of about the same length as Galatians, but there can be little certainty as to its date, its purpose or its provenance. There are also significant questions about the integrity of the text; different parts of the *Didache* appear to contradict each other, and scholars have presented different theories as to how it was edited over time.

Fundamental to Neiderwimmer's analysis is his source critical approach, which posits a strong distinction between the Didachist's

source and his own redaction and expansions. Neiderwimmer sees the text as the work of one compiler, the Didachist, who was an early second century Jewish-Christian church leader, possibly a bishop. He may have around 120. He had sources which he compiled, expanded and interpreted to produce a kind of book of rules to order the life, worship and leadership of his local church community.

Neiderwimmer views the Didachist as fundamentally conservative. He preserves and protects old traditions but applies them to the developing current situation of his community. In so doing the Didachist is keen to reconcile differences, and Neiderwimmer uses this to explain apparent contradictions in the text over the Eucharist, for example, and the reception of itinerants.

There are four sources, possibly very ancient, and they preserve the archaic traditions of a particular local community. These sources are (1) an originally Jewish text, the Two Ways, an exhortation for the reader to choose the way of life and not the way of death; (2) a (written or oral) archaic liturgical tradition concerning baptism and the Eucharist; (3) a (probably written) archaic tradition concerning how to receive itinerant charismatics; and (4) an apocalyptic description of the end time, the ending of which is lost.

The Didachist's own contribution may be seen primarily in his concern to Christianise the material with which he works. Thus for example it is the Didachist who by a redactional insertion at 7.1 turns the Jewish Two Ways tradition into baptismal catechesis, and who adds Jesus tradition.

Perhaps of most interest for *Themelios* readers will be Neiderwimmer's discussion of the witness of the *Didache* to the emerging Jesus tradition and to the canonical Gospels. This is dealt with at length in

his introduction, as well as in the relevant sections of the commentary. Neiderwimmer helpfully summarises previous contributions before giving his own judicious analysis. Useful synopses set out material from the *Didache* alongside the Synoptic Gospels and other early Christian writings.

All possible echoes of or parallels to Synoptic tradition are to be found in material which Neiderwimmer attributes to the Didachist's own activity. The Didachist may have known Matthew and Luke, although Neiderwimmer cautiously refrains from a definitive judgement on this 'especially complicated' question. On four occasions, all in redactional passages, the word gospel is used. It refers not to the missionary proclamation of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, but only ever to his words. These words of Jesus are the gospel, and they both bring salvation and regulate the life and behaviour of Jesus' followers through binding rules that they must obey. From this gospel – sayings of Jesus either derived from or paralleled in Synoptic tradition – can be derived rules for daily prayer, for dealing with apostles and prophets, for conduct within the community, and for prayer, almsgiving and the whole of life.

This is an excellent commentary and a joy to use. It is now the standard work in English, although not sufficiently up to date to be the final word. The 1998 English translation is of the second German edition of 1993, itself a barely altered reprint of a 1989 original. A great deal of work has been published since then, but although most of it is included in the bibliography there is no interaction with it in the text of the commentary. Clayton Jefford, for example, has produced a monograph (1989) and edited an important collection of essays (1995). His name occurs five times in the index, but on each occasion the reference is to a footnote in which the series editor has noted

the relevance of a contribution by Jefford or his collaborators to a point under discussion. This aside, this remains an excellent commentary.

**Andrew Gregory**

Lincoln College, Oxford

### **Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious**

*George Pattison*

London: SCM, 1999,

xxiii + 208 pp., £12.95

### **The End of Theology – And the task of thinking about God**

*George Pattison*

London, SCM, 1998,

xii + 148 pp., £9.95

Pattison's book: *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* is strong on presenting the intellectual context for Kierkegaard. In line with his earlier work Pattison majors on the literary side and less directly on the religious-philosophical. Schiller as a sort of Romantic believed that in art, or perhaps in art's inspiration and in what it inspires – imagination and creativity – 'mind' and 'body' could be harmonised. Hegel's philosophy of history argued that opposites interact over time, and cancel each other out, so that the thinker or the reflective spectator could still his mind, and his life would follow. But, for Kierkegaard, as long as the contradiction of the world remains in human hearts, no amount of optimistic spectating is going to deal with them. The Hegelian 'cancelling out' is ultimately nihilistic, especially as consciousness is lost – in that one cannot spectate and participate at the same and the view on offer is not (to translate) good triumphing over evil but good and evil producing something fairly grey. To overcome this one needs to present models for people: life as art or art as life. So back to a sort of religious aesthetics.

What Pattison does for us is give a refreshing reading of Kierkegaard as a writer, an artist. There is a lot of selective digging in his Journals and Letters which removes the focus from being yet another tour through the main works such as *Concluding Scientific Postscript or Either/Or*: these in some senses are presupposed through summary references to their content, so that *this is not really the book to buy if you are looking for an introductory volume*. Kierkegaard was critical of the Kantian then, Goethean ideal (of course an optimistic one) that controlling ideas are the beginning and end of art. No, life, the world, are not reducible to big ideas which unite them. Kierkegaard emphasises the wandering, yearning ideal of the knightly philosopher but that ideal should not become all self-important (as it would, in Heidegger). There is not only the world-negation that irony allows – that is Hegelian, some cheap consolation for the loss of one thing being found in the new acknowledgement of another (*as if a person who loses their sight is comforted by some supposed increase in tactile sensitivity*). Humour is much less cynical: one can only see the light side of things who has been and continues to be vulnerable and hurt. (The backlash against making too much of divine vulnerability in theological writing recently may be more to do with existential cynicism than the desire to defend the concept of God from unworthy notions.)

Pattison makes the useful point that drama for Kierkegaard was the summit of aesthetic forms since it represents life in terms of agents interacting with each other at a heightened level of consciousness. It is sculpture which moves and talks (although does not sing: how would Kierkegaard have regarded Wagner's claim for *Gesamtkunst?* – probably unfavourably). Music carries people along unreflectingly, and is a heady brew if joined to tragic stories, whereas comedy and its (softer) irony demand distance and reflection.

As Pattison puts it: 'the development of reflection undermines the element of fatality which is essential to all true tragedy'. Tragedy can only be a sub-set of comedy: we should view tragedy as containing painful lessons for ourselves which bring us to repentance and thus a sense of being removed from 'the human individual as the centre of the universe' – a comic vision. The self is taken seriously only for it to be blown up, exploded and gently resurrected/put back together again – differently. In all, a worthwhile exposition of worthwhile themes from a timely thinker.

In *The End of Theology – And the task of thinking*, Pattison turns his hand to some assessment of where theology is at today. The initial assessment is not encouraging. Theology is 'eking out an existence at the margins of academic life, foraging amongst the uncultivated borderlands of other disciplines'. This makes theology sound like some sort of low life-form, which, wobble-like, picks up pieces the everyday folk leave behind. Pattison (with one wave to matters pastoral) prefers to think of the theologian as a 'fellow-worker who understands'. Theology is understood as telling its own story and remaining silent about metaphysics yet (curiously) at the same time retreating to the church-community. It does not help when Pattison admits that all he is doing when he writes the word 'God' is to affirm intelligibility and coherence of the world (as distinct from those 'postmodernists' who feel it is lacking). He feels that mystical theology cannot work since the mystic vision is incommunicable, even among a group of mystics and only a few people are allowed to be mystics, despite, presumably what those who pray might think. We need to be 'dialogical like the Bible', although by dialogical he means interacting with creation, human and non-human, but especially tradition: the voices from the strange other worlds which have gone before us but whose language can be understood by reference to those who came a generation later.

We should not think it is all becoming clear, as we, the subjects interrogate the objects. Pattison insists that we be not monological like the reductionists who say: 'we can no longer believe that'.

Dialogism takes history seriously. Furthermore, 'it is not just about telling the story of a single hero [Hegel], or presenting the unfolding of a single point of view. It is more like a drama than a novel' (42).

The object of theology would then seem to be this conversation rather than 'God'. For dialogism we need people, speaking beings for truths to exist, since if they ceased to exist there would be no 'truths', *pace*, Augustine, who thought all truths existed in the mind of God and would exist even if the world came to an end. There is no Archimedean point: according to Pattison, the NT has no more right to be seen as timeless than Heidegger's 'basic words in philosophy' which have endured since before Plato. Nor can we hope to get 'the big picture': Kierkegaard was rightly critical of Hegel's conceit in that respect. But he is not a postmodernist. One, the past matters and must not be treated with Nietzschean contempt, as though it were dead and mute. The self is held in its dialogue with those things which have formed its community. An ontology (that which is fundamental to existence) of dialogue (communicative relationship) is preferred to a Heideggerian ontology of language. The author has sympathies more with a Gadamerian/Catholic valuing of the tradition of Scriptural interpretation than with the Protestant *sola scriptura*. Also, two, Kierkegaard is once more the patron saint when, in chapter four Pattison insists that the individual 'me' matters despite all postmodern trends such as the colonising of 'theological anthropology' by sociology. 'Personality' still means something, and Christians are called to be individually heroic despite the trends, to be like Simone

Weil, or Kierkegaard. Moral anguish and action belong to individuals; so do moral failings.

On these last two points, Pattison puts clear water between himself and Don Cupitt. There is a striking similarity to his Cambridge mentor in the format of the book: shortage of footnotes; no index, no bibliography. Neither of these books for all their brevity are introductory: far too much is presupposed and the works are dense. Yet sometimes full immersion in the icy currents is better than slow wading.

**Mark Elliott**

Liverpool Hope University

### **Women and Redemption: A Theological History**

*Rosemary Radford*

London: Ruether, SCM, 1998,

xi + 366 pp., £14.95

I must confess to being disappointed with this book. This book sets out what it sees as the 'scientific' truth of the minute, that there is no such thing as 'female' in this postmodern Endzeit. This corresponds to a serious reading of Galatians 3:28 or Matthew 22:23 following. 'Sisters doing it for themselves' is read back into the apostolic period: Thecla may have belonged to, or be the literary representative of the radical wandering groups of women evangelists. These groups included social concern in their 'whole person oriented' ministry. There is little sense of difference or discontinuity between 'orthodox' and 'gnostic' groups. Thus for Valentinians a celibate redeemed group, male and female, minister to and help those who still exist on the fallen level of actual marriage to rise to this higher state: "In the kingdom of Heaven the free will minister to the slaves: the children of the bridal chamber will minister to the children of the marriage". (57) This drives the practice of women religious almost

into Apostolic times. As the Gospel of Mary puts it simply: women have more insight (72:19-22).

Thereafter there is a trawl through the lives, times and significance of the holy women who contributed to Christian theology and who by their scarcity appear all the more valuable. What we get is a shaggy dog story, uncritically and not particularly well, let alone *theologically* told of one consciousness-raised mystic after another. Better to get hold of the books which put these lives in their contexts: Susanna Elm, Gillian Clark, Grace Jantzen, Saskia Murk-Jansen, Oliver Davies have all done such work.

**Mark Elliott**

Liverpool Hope University

### **Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World**

*Vinoth Ramachandra*

Leicester: IVP, 1999,

192 pp., £9.99

In this work Vinoth Ramachandra surveys the various results of religions engaging one another whether in mission or in political dialogue. Always noticeable in his writing is a breadth of understanding. He does not write as if all important issues are defined by their significance to the western world. Rather, he draws upon a global grasp of multiculturalism. The book is a published form of lectures given in 1998 at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

In chapter 1 he discusses the simplistic distinction sometimes made between the Islamic world and the 'Christian' west. This unhelpful and false framework has given rise to insensitive responses to Islam and naive treatments of Christianity. Chapter 2 turns to the situation in India. It is a nation where democratic institutions do not always sit comfortably with ancient religious



traditions. Ramachandra provides an illuminating account of how modern India was created and the unresolved tensions that remain within its national constitution.

Chapter 3 explores the catalyst for Christianity in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There is a detailed and wide-ranging statement of the uniqueness of Jesus. Ramachandra acknowledges that any accurate statement of the identity and purpose of Jesus is bound to generate some form of social conflict. The only questions that matter are whether such conflict is necessarily wrong and whether it needs to lead to any form of violence. The evidence of Christian engagement with other religions is quite able to demonstrate that commitment to the uniqueness of Christ engenders love and understanding. Throughout the book Ramachandra provides a compelling case for the constructive and intelligent engagement that has taken place between Christianity and other religions. There has been a wealth of quality Christian scholarship on Islam contrasted with only a poor treatment of Christianity among Muslims. Christianity has had a major positive impact on Indian culture in its social and political development. Gandhi's original contributions to Indian thought owe more to the New Testament than to the Bhagavad-Gita. Furthermore, in chapter 4 Ramachandra presents a case for active evangelism as leading to an enrichment of genuine inter-religious encounter. The western pluralist agenda has minimised differences in its quest for a cheap form of tolerance. In contrast, missionaries have sought proper understanding of other religions in all their differences. For example, he notes that many languages have owed their continued existence to the on-going work of Bible translation.

Chapter 5 discusses the important issue of what kind of political framework is best for a multicultural

society. He argues against the liberal agenda that attempts to make religion a subjective affair and which creates a new god out of our individualism. In contrast, Ramachandra is optimistic that some form of what John Rawls calls an 'overlapping consensus' is possible among religions upon which they can create a safe and stable state.

Ramachandra has written an important and timely book. His critique of pluralism and secularism is powerful and effective. However, his book is also a critique of much western Christian theology. He notes the failure of western Christian education to integrate Asian and third world theologians into its discourse. He also identifies the weakness of the moral voice of western Christians in failing to speak out on international, political and moral issues. The credibility of evangelical opposition to abortion in the west is undermined by its failure to show concern for the 40,000 children who die daily from malnutrition or easily preventable diseases. With insights like these Ramachandra produces a work that is both academic and prophetic. His description of the current situation is revealing and perceptive. His suggestions for future evangelical engagement are stimulating and plausible.

**Chris Sinkinson**  
Bournemouth

### **Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea For Unity**

*John R.W. Stott*  
Leicester: IVP, 1999,  
158 pp., £7.99

After more than 50 years of Christian leaders, John Stott – above all others except perhaps Billy Graham – is recognised as the authentic voice of twentieth-century evangelicalism. So when he produces what he himself calls 'a kind of spiritual legacy', a brief

statement of evangelical faith and an appeal to the rising generation of evangelicals, then all who love the gospel which he has so ably proclaimed and defended are bound to sit up and take notice.

Evident throughout the book is Stott's concern for evangelical unity. He makes no secret of the fact that he continues to be 'profoundly grieved by our evangelical tendency to fragment'. He asks '[w]hile holding with a good conscience whatever our particular understanding of the evangelical faith may be, is it not possible for us to acknowledge that what unites us as evangelical people is much greater than what divides us?'. His basic argument is that evangelical fragmentation is unnecessary and could be avoided by a greater degree of discernment about what are 'evangelical essentials which cannot be compromised' and what are '*adiaphora*' ("matters indifferent") on which, being of secondary importance, it is not necessary for us to insist'.

The principle of distinguishing essentials and *adiaphora* is self-evidently important. Just as important is a clear understanding of the criteria to be used when making this distinction. Stott is quite aware of this and proposes that we acknowledge genuine and sincere disagreement between 'equally biblical Christians' to be an indicator that the matter in question is not essential to evangelical identity. However, readers are bound to ask whether such a criterion is as helpful as it appears. Is a sincere difference of opinion among biblical Christians sufficient grounds for declaring an issue to be 'a matter of indifference'? Surely even the fact that we may all agree that something is indifferent does not make it so. After all, the lingering presence and influence of sin in our lives may show itself in a refusal to submit to the truth. Furthermore, the entire project of distinguishing between essentials and matters of indifference is complicated

by the simple fact that gospel truth is coherent. There are points of connection between various Christian doctrines as well as between those doctrines and elements of practice. Once such connections are seen and appreciated it is much more difficult to separate the essentials and the matters of indifference.

Though the call for unity among evangelicals is the subtext of the entire book, its three central chapters are an exposition of evangelical truth with special attention to its trinitarian form. Here John Stott is at his best: clear, stimulating, insightful, and most of all, always committed to the Scriptures. He presents the basic elements of evangelical theology under three headings: The Revelation of God, The Cross of Christ, and The Ministry of the Holy Spirit. Such a way of explaining evangelical truth has the great strength of focussing on God himself. From the beginning to end, evangelical theology speaks of God and what he has done, is doing and will do.

Stott carefully unfolds the doctrine of revelation, beginning with the question of a general revelation through nature which speaks of God's glory but is suppressed by sinful human beings, and concentrating on the nature and authority of the Bible. He demonstrates that the authority of Christ and the authority of Scriptures belong together. Not only did Jesus himself submit to the Scriptures of the OT, he personally authorised those who would write the NT. The authority of Scripture is not a replacement for, or rival to the authority of Jesus. To honour Scripture is to honour Christ who rules his church through Scripture.

The second major chapter, dealing with the cross of Christ, includes a powerful assault upon any notion of human boasting in our own ability to save ourselves. A proper understanding of the cross involves a correct assessment of our own condition. We stand before God

corrupted and guilty, living under the curse which must fall on all who rebel against the living God. This is why the penal substitution of Christ - his bearing the penalty that we deserve in our place - is such good news. John Stott insists that such an understanding of the cross is 'a distinguishing mark of the world-wide evangelical fraternity'. He dismisses the caricature which pits the love of the Son against the justice of the Father, as well as that misunderstanding which pictures Jesus as a third party who intervened between God and us. The glory of the gospel which lies at the heart of evangelical thought and practice is that God himself has, in Christ Jesus, acted out of love to take our place, to bear our sins, to endure our curse, and to die our death, so that we might be forgiven'.

The third part of Stott's explanation of evangelical truth deals with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Under this heading he describes what he calls 'six main stages or aspects of Christian discipleship' which 'would be impossible apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit': the new birth by the Spirit; the assurance provided by the Spirit and anchored in the cross; the sanctifying work of the Spirit; the church gathered and equipped by the Spirit; the evangelistic work of the Spirit; and the hope guaranteed by the gift of the Spirit. There is much here that gives us a clear, biblical perspective on the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit. However, when Stott turns his attention to the controversy surrounding the charismatic movement, it is hard not to conclude that he fudges. He tends to gloss over the theological consequences of decisions taken on these issues. His suggestion that division on this issue to 'an excess of rigidity' is less than convincing. It is true that these debates may not always have been handled appropriately, but that does not mean the debates themselves are unnecessary or of secondary importance.

The book concludes with a fivefold challenge from Philippians 1:27-30. Here the plea that underlies the entire work is brought into sharp focus. John Stott calls on the evangelicals of the rising generation to seek integrity, stability, truth, unity, and endurance. Most fittingly, a postscript highlights the pre-eminence of humility. John Stott may well be right that in the final analysis human pride is what really lies behind both liberal unbelief and evangelical self-destructiveness.

**Mark Thompson**

Moore College, Sydney

### **The Postcolonial Bible (The Bible and Postcolonialism 1)**

*R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.)*

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,  
204 pp., £12.95/\$19.95

The title of this book is misleading, as the editor has elsewhere admitted, and it would have been better served under its series title, *The Bible and Postcolonialism*. As such, it gives us ten essays of considerable diversity, representing some of the firstfruits of the valuable and penetrating emergent discipline of 'postcolonialism'. What, then, is 'postcolonialism'? A popular introduction to the subject appeared in 1989 under the title *The Empire Writes Back*, and there you have it in a nutshell: response to the empire; a redrawing of the critical map from the perspective of the marginalised, and the whole presented with one foot in contemporary idiom and/or popular culture.

Sugirtharajah detects at least two possible significances for the term in biblical studies: as reading strategy; or as a state or condition. It may be roughly defined as scrutinising and expressing colonial domination and power as these are embodied in biblical texts and interpretations, and as searching for alternative hermeneutics while thus overturning

and dismantling colonial perspectives'. *The Postcolonial Bible*, dizzy with the newness of this vast field, is an exhilarating if uneven beginning.

The book is perhaps best appreciated by way of Sugirtharajah's own probing chapter on the construction of Western missionary discourse. Here he rehearses William Carey's manifesto for the need for missionary work, and explores in particular how the so-called 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28, and the pattern of 'Paul's Missionary Journeys', begin to appear in Christian literature only after this date. Earlier interpreters found various biblical texts to inform their understanding of mission, but not these ones. The author's contention, well-founded in my judgement, is that the choice of these particular key texts and paradigms for 'modern mission' has as much to do with their congruence with Western economic expansion and territorial conquest as with any 'biblical basis of mission'. The construction of Antioch as 'missionary HQ', and the assumption that the 'spread of Christianity' is a simple Westward phenomenon, lay the foundation for subsequent readings of Christian faith within the frame of 'empire', and Christian mission as colonial expansion. Sugirtharajah's contribution casts considerable light on some of the structural fault-lines running through, and increasingly apparent in, many contemporary attempts to articulate a coherent missiology for the Christian church.

Several other chapters offer equally helpful analyses. Sharon Ringe writes openly of the conflict of being simultaneously colonizer and colonized as a 'feminist of the dominant culture of the United States'. She explores the banquet of Luke 14 and suggests that 'truly the lowest place is not at the table at all, but in the kitchen'. Who judges the limits of social status? Kwok Pui-Lan interrogates the various Quests for the Historical Jesus in a delightful

piece which suggests that the construction of academic pursuits out of texts and bones can never really capture experience of religious significance. Randall Bailey writes as a black man struggling with celebrating how Jesus washes him whiter than snow, in a thought-provoking essay entitled 'The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text'. Richard Horsley suggests that Postcolonialism can act as a hermeneutical filter to retrieve the particular emphases of Mark and Paul, rescuing them from various forms of disembodied Western theorising.

Some of the chapters are less enlightening. Musa Dube on John seems unable to make up her mind whether John is colonial or postcolonial; and although surveys of how biblical studies has worked out in certain cultural contexts (such as Australia, the very edge of empire) are interesting, they are perhaps inconclusive.

In general, however, this is a thought-provoking and rewarding read which has much to say to all who are willing to believe that their social location, whether it be political, geographic, economic, ethnic or whatever, plays a significant role in their interpretation of the Bible. There will be more to come from this direction, and we should take it seriously.

**Richard Briggs**

All Nations Christian College, Ware

### **Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith**

*James F. White*

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999

168 pp., \$17

Dr White, who has recently been appointed to the faculty of Drew University, has taught liturgical studies for over forty years. In this brief survey he gives students an introduction to the sacraments as

they have been expressed in the five major Protestant traditions - Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Methodist and (Ana)baptist. He begins with Augustine and does not attempt to assess the Biblical evidence one way or another, although he does indicate how the different traditions have relied on Scripture for their own interpretation and sacramental practice. Careful readers will note that the title has been subtly constructed to read 'practice and faith', rather than the other way round, which probably reflects the fact that it is matters of practice which are of most significance to Protestants and not questions of faith, on which they are generally less divided.

After a brief survey of the medieval tradition, including the vexed question of the number of sacraments, Dr White concentrates on baptism (including confirmation) and the eucharist. In the case of the former, baptismal regeneration (which divides most Protestants from Rome), takes a back seat to the more immediate and practical problem of infant versus believers' baptism. Dr White presents both sides of the issue as fairly as anyone can, and indicates to what extent modern ecumenical discussions have been able to bring the different sides together. His conclusion is that we all need to take a hard look at our own church's current practice, though he admits that this is unlikely to solve the underlying difficulty in the foreseeable future.

In dealing with the eucharist, Dr White notes that all Protestants reject the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation, and that there is a wide variety of meanings which attach to the practice in Protestant churches today. Here there is much less division than in the case of baptism, though Dr White, who is writing from an American context, feels obliged to give more than adequate treatment to such matters as the use of a common cup and/or fermented grape

juice. He mentions thanksgiving, commemoration, communion and even sacrifice as features of eucharistic interpretation, and gives substantial space to the liturgical changes which have occurred in the twentieth century. Non-American readers must remember that in dealing with these changes it is the American scene that he has in mind. What he says about Methodists and Baptists cannot be assumed to apply elsewhere, though that is less true of Anglicans and Lutherans, with the Reformed group somewhere in the middle.

A concluding chapter covers the so-called sacramentals - penance, extreme unction, marriage, and ordination (confirmation having been discussed in the context of baptism), and even adds Christian burial, which must be something of a first. It certainly makes us think again about the meaning and importance of participation, which is a recurring theme elsewhere in the book.

For the evangelical reader, the main thing to notice is that the book never discusses the main protestant emphasis, which is that the sacraments are an extension of the ministry of the Word. This is particularly true in the case of the eucharist, and is of great importance when discussing such practices as the admission of young children to the sacrament. Evangelical churches which practise infant baptism see it as a means of evangelism, whereas holy communion is a challenge to those already baptised to commit their lives to Christ. Admittedly, this way of thinking has faded out to such an extent nowadays that even many evangelicals themselves are scarcely aware of it, and it hardly ever figures in ecumenical discussions. But it remains a central part of conservative Protestant belief, and as such it should have received at least some treatment in a book like this.

Dr White writes very fluently and his facts tend to be correct, though his

statement (26) that 'confirmation tended to disappear among most Protestants, except Anglicans' will cause a few raised eyebrows among Lutherans, for whom it is an even more important 'rite of passage'. But on the whole what he says is reliable, and that is no small achievement in a short book which covers so much ground. In conclusion we may commend it as a useful introduction to its theme, though non-Americans will need to supplement what it says about the twentieth century from other sources closer to home.

**Gerald Bray**  
Cambridge

### **Valuing People: Human Value in a World of Medical Technology**

*D. Gareth Jones*  
Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999,  
241 pp., £12.99

The focus of this book is to examine the value placed on human beings in our modern age, with specific reference to biomedical technology. Writing as an evangelical Christian and a scientist, D. Gareth Jones discusses the impact of this technology on our lives. Both his faith and scientific training as an anatomist cause him to ask questions about biomedical issues, particularly those at the beginning and end of life. He concentrates on the status of the embryo, issues around genetics and cloning and the status of elderly and demented people.

Jones addresses different Christian positions on the value of human life and potential human life, arguing human life can have different value at its different stages. He believes that the Bible provides sets of moral principles, rather than absolute moral rules, which must be applied to specific situations. The Bible may not address specific biomedical dilemmas that arise in our modern world, but it does provide a framework for

approaching dilemmas relating to the value of human life.

The book is well thought-out and clearly written. It is not overly technical and will be accessible to a wide range of people. There is a helpful use of hypothetical vignettes throughout the chapters that illustrate the types of dilemmas faced. Jones is not trying to convert people to his point of view, but to stimulate further debate and reflection on these issues. It is encouraging to read a text that offers a helpful attempt to integrate the Christian faith and scientific knowledge, approaches and questions. Jones does not shy away from the difficult, grey areas in biomedical ethics, nor does he tell the reader what to think. He recognises Christians do, and will continue to disagree on many biomedical areas, but encourages us all to examine these issues.

The main point with which some readers will disagree with Jones is his gradualist view that human life (or potential human life) has different value at its different stages, i.e. an embryo has a different value to a newborn baby or an adult. He recognises that all human life does have value and worth because it is made in the image of God, but not necessarily the same value. Value is determined by the stage of biological development and the quality of relationships with other people and God (47).

One danger with this view is that it bases human value and worth on capacity. If a person (or potential person) does not have the capacity to relate to others or God, then he/she could be deemed as less valuable. This view places vulnerable people in society at risk of being undervalued, or worse, being deemed to have no value. Jones recognises this difficulty and tries to emphasise an appreciation for human life at its various stages. Yet, someone somewhere still has to judge the quality of relationships one human

being has with others and with God. Making such assessments is difficult and people often disagree.

Overall, the book is a very useful means of exploring these areas and Jones is careful in his consideration of the issues involved and the implications of his position. The volume makes interesting and stimulating reading.

**Katie Wasson**

London

### **Life after Debt. Christianity and Global Justice**

*Michael Northcott*

London: SPCK, 1999,

ix + 182 pp., £9.99

Michael Northcott has written an excellent little book expressing a determined hope for a life after debt. Its excellence lies not so much in the originality of the arguments presented, but rather in their in-gathering. The author begins each chapter with a story 'designed to draw the reader into direct engagement with the subject of the chapter through personal encounter'. These stories are composites of verbatim reports from testimonies taken by Christian Aid workers in different locations around the South. ('South' and 'North' being the *terms* Northcott adopts for either side of the world's *economic* divide, rather than assuming a crass geographical divide.)

This is more than a post-modern stylistic choice, for the book develops a critique of markets, free trade liberalisation and consumerism that is based on the growing trend to see development in holistic, personal terms, with initiatives such as 'barefoot banking', credit unions and fair trade (122 ff.). In the face of the debt crisis, this critique, Northcott argues, unmasks the hypocritical self-interest that the North projects, through supposedly well-meant structural adjustment programmes

run by the International Monetary Fund. Such programmes do not have as their aim the help of persons, but the maintenance of a global economic order which has the inevitably vaster Northern financial interests at heart. Northcott makes proposals for ethical regulation of the global economy by way of exploding the myth of the totally free and unregulated market. Don't worry if you are not an economist. Northcott does not assume economic expertise in his readers although he does show that the matters of the global economy cannot be addressed simplistically, even if the root spiritual cause is simply idolatry.

Each chapter ends with a Christian theological critique of the preceding discussion. Helpfully the much used notion of structural sin is clarified: 'For sinful structures to be built and sustained requires the actions and consent of sinful people'; elsewhere we find recourse to the biblical teaching on idolatry and gift-giving (64 ff.), a tempering of an African theology that has veered too close to political Messianism in its triumphalism (90), and a developing theme that sees the church as a necessary model of community in the world.

Refreshingly Northcott seeks to learn and engage with theologians from the South, including Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and Ethiopian Orthodox. These are geographically drawn from African, Indian and South American sources. Appended to each chapter is a discrete list of sources alongside contact addresses and web sites of relevant organisations, including both governments and non-governmental organisations. The packaging is therefore one of a publication in the social sciences.

Although this book may not appear to be one of continuous and sustained theological and moral reflection it is clear that, for the author, the response of Christianity in favour of global justice is one of obedience to evangelical truth, so that it might recognise the good in secular efforts in

this area whilst not surrendering the right, under Jesus' sovereign Lordship, to critique underlying currents of humanist ideology-idolatry (176). The theological methodology underlying the book is that of engaging in reflection upon truth, (including the truth of the present human situation), and so bringing God's prior word to bear as the normative fund for subsequent deliberation on action. If the fully fleshed political theology is to be found elsewhere we should be all the more grateful for the author's readiness to bring a clear unifying analysis to the disparate cases along with questions that lobby for our attention, prayer and action.

**Andy Draycott**  
Canterbury

### The Effective Pastor

*C. Peter White*  
Fearn, Ross-Shire: Mentor, Christian Focus  
Publications, 1998,  
260 pp., £10.99

Subtitled 'the key things a minister must learn to be', this is a very wide-ranging handbook on Christian leadership in the twenty-first century. Its aim is to combine the best of the past with practical pragmatism for the present, in every area of local church life and practice, so as to provide experienced Biblical wisdom about the challenge of ministry in the current climate. Its author, Peter White, has several years as a Bible college principal to add to his many years in parish ministry, so that he speaks from a realistic and authentic basis of personal knowledge and experience, in addressing what is by its very nature, a mammoth undertaking.

The book's seventeen chapters divide into five main sections, delineated as follows: 'Before God', 'Among the People', 'With Individuals', 'Development and Outreach' and

'Organisation'. This is a helpful progression, beginning with the minister's own walk with God, as it affects himself, his vision and his congregation, and concluding with a final chapter on perseverance and reward. The author's theological position is thoroughly Biblical and conservative, from the Scottish Reformed tradition, which inevitably (and by no means unhelpfully) colours the book's perspective on church practice, liturgy, *et cetera*.

The chief impression this reader is left with is of the amazing amount of ground which the book covers. It is a compendium of ideas, supported by a huge number of quotations, Biblical, Christian and secular, from a wide variety of sources and examples. Nearly eight pages of bibliography, plus ten pages of Scripture, Person and Subject indices bear eloquent testimony to the amount of research and inquiry compressed into these pages. The net result is something of an avalanche of material, which might prove daunting in its range and scope to the young pastor. Derek Tidball's wise advice on the jacket is 'it's worth drinking slowly and savouring every mouthful'. The alternative might be choking.

So, this is a book to be worked through gradually and ideally to be discussed with other practitioners. Its approach is unashamedly prescriptive, supporting its propositions with quotations from a variety of authorities, which made me want to ask further questions and debate many of the issues raised. I would have preferred more personal argument from the author and less assertion, but recognise the constraints of space in a book of this range. Its Biblical word studies were to me much more convincing and helpful than its pragmatic management theories, but there are plenty of good, practical tips here for the pastoral care and government of the church. It was particularly encouraging to see the role of



expository preaching given such prominence in the work of the pastor.

The only danger with the distilled wisdom of many years of experience is that the newcomer (or old hand) can feel overwhelmed and inadequate in the face of the implicit demands made. It was comforting therefore to be assured that 'omnicompetence is not a burden God lays on anyone. World-conquering visionary leadership is not God's expectation of every pastor in a leadership team' (183). But to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the contents of this book will undoubtedly both challenge and raise the levels of any pastor's competence in the many and varied tasks which constitute 'the ministry'.

**David Jackman**

Director of the  
Cornhill Training Course

**Christian Socialism:  
Scott Holland to Tony Blair**

*Alan Wilkinson*

London: SCM, 1998,  
302 pp., £14.95

This book gathers together the 1998 Scott Holland lectures and, whilst we in Britain still live under a Labour administration, can be read as getting as up to date as one would wish without offering too many hostages to fortune. One of the author's themes is the contention that Tony Blair and New Labour have re-discovered elements of Christian socialist thought that had been obscured for most of the last century, namely a more ethical (non-statist) socialism. The bulk of the book is a fascinating historical presentation of a movement that admits a great breadth and a wider influence on the political developments of the British Left than non-Christian accounts might have taught us to expect. The reader is taken from a discussion of the nineteenth century background; through treatments of key individuals;

(Scott Holland and the Christian Social Union, Charles Gore, R.H. Tawney, William Temple); to a central discussion on the Search for Community – before allowing the Dissenters to intrude on a largely Anglican (often anglo-catholic) and, latterly, Roman Catholic, party. The book ends with an assessment of the politicians who have claimed a Christian Socialist tag and how they have understood and applied that somewhat amorphous tradition. Recent names such as Frank Field, the late John Smith and Tony Blair mingle with those of George Lansbury and Arthur Henderson, both giants of the parliamentary labour party's more distant past. Not unsurprisingly, even the lexical ordering – Christian Socialist or Socialist Christian – is up for grabs for non-trivial reasons.

Wilkinson mostly works at the level of historical description rather than theological critique, as is consistent with the task he sets himself, albeit reporting the considerable theological disputes of the movement within the period surveyed. Yet he announces, at the outset, his rejection of a 'progressivist understanding of history' (xiii) and regrets those past Christian Socialists who 'so surrendered to optimism (which is different to hope) that they came to believe that the Kingdom of God could be established by political means' (xv). This warning must be one the reader bears in mind as, throughout, we see the contribution a (curiously detached) doctrine of the incarnation seems called upon to make. Indeed reading between the lines may allow the reader to at least start to formulate questions, if not determine the answers, *vis* a more rounded doctrinal armoury for a political theology.

A criticism of the book is that the reasoned relevance of a theological conviction, or ecclesiological orientation, to the shape of a particular individual's political outlook is not explicitly articulated. A theologically

learned author, writing descriptively, fails to share generously the theological insights that govern his treatment of the material with the general reader who will find the theology rather than the history harder to appropriate and evaluate. The most recognisable theological references for the undergraduate student to look for, are those to the work of Duncan Forrester, Timothy Gorringe and to the 'impenetrability' of John Milbank, in the discussion of the search for community.

Finally, it is sad to read of 'an Evangelical with a social conscience' as a rarity worthy of note (204) or R.H. Tawney's observation: 'In my experience those who say that what they desire is a change of heart usually mean that they object to a change of anything else' (100). The question for the reader is: what are the distinctly evangelical convictions that might lead us to being the former and refuting the latter?

**Andy Draycott**  
Canterbury

## Book Reviews

- Birch, Bruce C., Brueggemann, Walter, Fretheim, Terence E., and Petersen, David L. **A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament** Mike Butterworth
- Boda, Mark J. **Praying the Tradition The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9** Walter Rose
- Carter, Charles E. **The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study** Mark J Boda
- Fox, Michael V. **A Time to Tear Down and A Time to Build** Bob Fyall
- Husser, Jean-Marie **Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World** Laurence Turner
- Janzen, J Gerald **Exodus (Westminster Bible Companion)** Herbert H Klement
- Klaus Nathan **Pivot Patterns in the Former Prophets (JSOTS 247)**
- Heimerdinger, Jean-Marc **Topic, Focus and Foreground in Ancient Hebrew Narratives** Nicolai Winther-Nielsen
- Lemche, Niels Peter **The Israelites in History and Tradition** Jens Bruun Koefed
- Ma, Wonsuk **Until the Spirit Comes – The Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah** Dwight Swanson
- Abegg, Martin Jr, Flint Peter, Ulrich, Eugene **The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible** Simon Gathercole
- Baker, William R. **2 Corinthians (The College Press NIV Commentary)** Craig L. Blomberg
- Beale, G.K. **John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation** Steven Moyise
- Borgen, Peder and Giversen, Soren (eds) **The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism** Thorsten Moritz
- Cunningham, Phillip J. C.S.P **A Believer's Search for the Jesus of History** Simon Gathercole
- Harris, Murray J. **Slave of Christ, A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ** Jeremy Boulton
- Hedrick, Charles W. **When History and Faith Collide: Studying Jesus** Christoph Stenschke
- Kanagara, Jey J. **'Mysticism' in the Gospel of John. An Inquiry into its Background** Bill Salter
- Keener, Craig A. **A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew** Donald Hagner
- Matera, Frank J. **New Testament Christology** Dick France
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- Powell, Mark Allan (ed.) **The New Testament Today** Dick France

<i>Royalty, Robert M. Jr</i> <b>The Streets of Heaven. The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John</b>	Simon Gathercole
<i>Schmitals, Walter</i> <b>The Theology of the First Christians</b>	Kevin Ellis
<i>Walker, Peter</i> <b>The Weekend that Changed the World: The Mystery of Jerusalem's Empty Tomb</b>	Peter Oakes
<i>Witherington, Ben III</i> <b>The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus</b>	James C Miller
<i>Badham, Paul</i> <b>The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology</b>	Tony Gray
<i>Baum, Gregory (ed.)</i> <b>The Twentieth Century, A Theological Overview</b>	Oliver D. Crisp
<i>Cupitt, Don</i> <b>The New Religion of Life in Everyday Speech</b>	Patrick Richmond
<i>Doyle, Robert C.</i> <b>Eschatology and The Shape of Christian Belief</b>	Tony Gray
<i>Duce, Philip</i> <b>Reading the Mind of God. Interpretation in Science and Theology</b>	Richard Briggs
<i>Fokkelman, J.P.</i> <b>Reading Biblical Narrative. An Introductory Guide</b>	Richard Briggs
<i>Grogan, Geoffrey</i> <b>The Christ of the Bible and the Church's Faith</b>	Kevin Ellis
<i>Grudem, Wayne</i> <b>Bible Doctrine: Essential teachings of the Christian Faith</b>	Daniel Strange
<i>Hayes, Michael A.; Porter, Wendy; Tombs, David (eds)</i> <b>Religion and Sexuality (Rochampton Institute London Papers 4)</b>	Mark Elliott
<i>Kreider, Eleanor</i> <b>Given for You: A Fresh Look at Communion</b>	David Hilborn
<i>Lohse, Bernhard</i> <b>Martin Luther's Theology; Its Historical and Systematic Development</b>	Mark Thompson
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<i>McGrath, Alister E.</i> <b>The J.I. Packer Collection</b>	Oliver Crisp
<i>Neiderwimmer, Kurt</i> <b>The Didache</b>	Andrew Gregory
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<i>Pattison, George</i> <b>The End of Theology- And the task of thinking about God</b>	Mark Elliott
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<i>Ramachandra, Vinoth</i> <b>Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World</b>	Chris Sinkinson

*Stott, John R.W.* **Evangelical Truth:  
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Mark Thomson

*Sugirtharajah, R.S. (ed.)* **The Postcolonial Bible  
(The Bible and Postcolonialism 1)**

Richard Briggs

*White, James F.* **Sacraments in Protestant  
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Gerald Bray

*Jones, D. Gareth* **Valuing People:  
Human Value in a World of Medical Technology.**

Katie Wasson

*Northcott, Michael* **Life after Debt.  
Christianity and Global Justice.**

Andy Draycott

*White, C. Peter* **The Effective Pastor**

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*Wilkinson, Alan* **Christian Socialism:  
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## Selected Books Received

**Commending the Faith: The Preaching of D.L. Moody**

*Garth Rosell*

Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999

**Health Care and the Rise of Christianity**

*Hector Avalos*

Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999

**Signs of Life: Sermons and Meditations**

*Gerd Theissen*

London: SCM, 1998

**The Great Deception, and What Jesus Really Said and Did**

*Gerd Lüdemann*

London: SCM, 1998

**The Pastoral Nature of Theology: An Upholding Presence**

*R. John Elford*

London: Cassell, 1999

**The Making of Luke-Acts**

*Henry Cadbury*

Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999

**Theology of Ministry**

*Thomas F. O'Meara*

Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999

**Jesus the Son of God: The Gospel Narratives as Message**

*Jakob van Bruggen*

Eerdmans: Baker, 1999

**Under The Tree of Life: The Religion of a Feminist Christian**

*Gail Ramshaw*

New York: Continuum, 1998

**Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure**

*Charles Carpenter*

Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999

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