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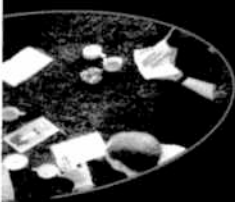
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Editorial: A Revolutionary Balancing Act

Having spent my undergraduate days studying at the feet of a Marxist ancient historian who, to this day, remains one of the most brilliant and inspiring teachers I have ever had the privilege to know, ever since I have been somewhat interested in the notion of revolution. In Marxist philosophy, revolution takes place when the movement of capital has created such social tensions that the group 'in charge' so to speak is displaced by those whom they have previously governed. Thus, the feudal lords are displaced by the bourgeoisie, the bourgeoisie by the proletariat - unless, of course, the society happens to be in the Far East (but that's another story, and another of those exceptions which, to the faithful at least, proves the rule).

My own interest in revolutions, however, is slightly different. As an intellectual historian committed to the study of ideas and their functions in historical context, and the role of self-understanding in the formation of cultures and movements, I am fascinated by the problem which all successful revolutionaries must ultimately face: the transition from rebels with outsider status to establishment with insider status. This is, of course, one of the themes of George Orwell's wonderful satire, *Animal Farm*. Here, the move from animal to human is so seamless that the protagonists are unaware it is happening until, in the last scene, no difference can be discerned between pig and human. But it afflicts all revolutions: when do the revolutionaries stop fighting the battles of the past? When do they come to realise that their agenda must change, that the pendulum must swing back in the opposite direction? When do the particular useful insights which they bring to bear upon particular situations become not simply insights but overwhelming and exclusive ideologies which prevent them from seeing wider realities and which fundamentally distort their perception of, and responses to, reality?

The question is particularly pressing with regard to theology and the church because the need for balance is absolutely crucial if the church is to witness God's truth to the world, and a failure to speak the whole counsel of God is a critical weakness in our testimony as Christians. The problem is, of course, that the theological history of the church is a history of revolutions, generally driven by correct concerns, but all needing to be subject to the searching criticism of God's Word.

The issue that particularly concerns me at the moment is what I might call the crisis in systematic theology. I'm not, of course, talking here about the crisis in systematic theology in the university setting. With no coherent epistemological or ontological basis to hold itself together, the university discipline has long ago collapsed into an incoherent mish-mash of courses of the 'Theology and ...' variety, where you insert your own particular concern or interest, be it women, ecology, politics, vegetarianism, or Tom and Jerry cartoons. Hey, it's a postmodern world, cartoons are as worthy of time and energy as starving children, and the unifying factor in our disciplines, if there is one, must be found in our own little universes, not in the God of revelation.

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No, I'm talking about the crisis in systematic theology in the churches. Now, it is, I think, true to say that fifty years ago or so in the UK there was a major problem when it came to preaching: if it happened at all, it was often little more than pious platitudes or, in very conservative circles, a lifeless reiteration of the tradition. One of the great revolutions in the church has been that this is no longer the case. Good preaching and teaching, while still not universal, is more common than it once was. We have the Lloyd-Joneses, the Stotts, the Packers, and the countless less famous yet no less competent church leaders to thank for that. More recently, we also have the biblical-theological/redemptive historical movement from Moore College, disseminated by such groups as the Proclamation Trust which has, perhaps more than any other movement over recent years, served to transform how churches read and teach the Bible. One might say, in fact, that if Lloyd-Jones led the revolution which placed preaching back at the centre of British evangelicalism, the biblical theology movement has led the second revolution which has put careful attention to Christ-centred exegesis back at the centre of preaching.

Now, all this is good and to be welcomed, and all that I say in the rest of this editorial should be read in that light. My question, however, is: have the revolutionaries become the new establishment, and are we therefore missing out on issues of crucial importance through turning the valid insights of biblical theological preaching into ideologies which exclude other, necessary emphases? I raise the question because it seems to me as I mix with students in the USA and the UK that many of them have a good grasp of biblical theology. They understand the Bible contains a narrative, that this narrative culminates in Christ, and that this imposes certain demands upon the way they exegete any given passage. The problem today is not what it was ten, twenty, or fifty years ago when fanciful pietistic exegesis and non-exegetical doctrinalism might have vied for centre stage in the church (or so we are told); it is, rather, that the triumph of biblical theology has been so complete in some quarters that we now need to realise that this new establishment might itself be generating problems of its own.

Well, what's wrong with a biblical-theological approach, you ask? Nothing, in and of itself. But the way it pans out has, I would suggest, sometimes been less than helpful. First, there is the problem of mediocrity. It is one thing for a master of biblical theology to preach it week after week; quite another for a less talented follower so to do. We all know the old joke about the Christian fundamentalist who, when asked what was grey, furry, and lived in a tree, responded that 'It sure sounds like a squirrel, but I know the answer to every question is "Jesus"'. One of the problems I have with a relentless diet of biblical theological sermons from less talented (i.e., most of us) preachers is their boring mediocrity; contrived contortions of passages which are engaged in to produce the answer 'Jesus' every week. It doesn't matter what the text is; the sermon is always the same.

Second, the triumph of the biblical theological method in theology and preaching has come at the very high price of a neglect of the theological tradition. The church spent nearly seventeen hundred years engaging in careful doctrinal reflection; formulating a technical language allowing her theologians to express themselves with precision and clarity; writing

creeds and confessions to allow believers over the face of the earth to express themselves with one voice; and wrestling long and hard with those aspects of God which must be true if the biblical record was to be at all coherent or make any sense whatsoever. Classic systematic theology was taught systematically, not because it was divorced from exegesis (no scholar of the Middle Ages or of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would argue such a ridiculous thing, although the claim is frequently heard in popular circles), but because the church had a firm understanding of the need for clear teaching, a confidence in the substantial unity of God's revelation, and a deep appreciation of the need to push beyond economic questions if there was to be such a thing as orthodoxy and it was to be defended in a coherent fashion. The economics of the history of salvation, on which the biblical theology movement is so good, were always carefully balanced by judicious reflection upon the ontological aspects of God which undergirded the whole of the church's life and history.

My greatest concern with the biblical theology movement is that it places such an overwhelming emphasis upon the economy of salvation that it neglects these ontological aspects of theology. In doing so, it will, I believe, prove ultimately self-defeating; a divine economy without a divine ontology is unstable and will collapse. Trinitarianism will dissolve into modalism; the theological unity of the Bible will be swallowed up and destroyed by its diversity because it has no foundation in the one God who speaks; and Christian exclusivism will be sacrificed to a meaningless pluralism as the church's narrative is reduced to having significance only within the bounds of the Christian community. I suspect that 'openness theism' is merely the most well known heresy to have been nurtured in the anti-doctrinal, anti-tradition world of contemporary evangelicalism; it will certainly not be the last. And my fear is that the overwhelming economic emphasis of the biblical theology trajectory effectively cuts the church off from probing the ontological questions which I believe are demanded by reflection upon the biblical text, by consideration of the church's tradition, and by our Christian commitment to the notion of the existence of a God who has revealed himself yet whose existence is prior to that revelation.

The strategic problem, is of course, getting anyone to believe that this is so, and not just another one of Trueman's eccentric and pessimistic takes on contemporary evangelicalism. And that problem is really a function of the fact that the old biblical theological rebels have become the new establishment but have not yet realised this and have therefore not relativised their contribution accordingly. Important insights have become controlling ideologies which cut the church off from her tradition and render her thereby impoverished. Biblical theology is - or rather, was - a necessary corrective to fanciful pietistic exegesis and mindless doctrinalism - but anyone who thinks that these are still the major problems in evangelical churches clearly inhabits a different world to the one of which I have experience. In most churches where preaching still holds a central place, I suspect that an overemphasis on doctrine and systematic theology is not the problem. After all, how many of us go to churches where the Trinitarian nature of God, while upheld in our doctrinal statements, is sidelined in preaching and worship to the point where most of us are functional Unitarians. In my experience as a

teacher, it is a lack of knowledge of, say, the doctrine of the Trinity rather than puzzlement over how to preach a Christian sermon on David and Goliath which is today the most pressing problem.

Year in, year out, I teach the history of Christian doctrine; and, year in year out, I have not only taken flack from those liberals for whom the whole idea of doctrine is somewhat fanciful; I have also taken flack from those evangelicals who 'just have their Bible'. That the church wrestled for at least 1700 years with issues of systematic theology, not just biblical narrative, and did so in a manner which sought to preserve the balance between economy and ontology in the church's proclamation of God in Christ, is lost on such students. My fear is that the biblical theology movement, while striving to place the Word back at the centre of the church's life, is inadequate in and by itself for the theological task of defending and articulating the faith. Reflection upon the wider church tradition is needed, creeds, confessions and all, because this is the best way to understand how and where the discipline of biblical theology and redemptive history can be of use to the wider picture without it usurping and excluding other, equally necessary and important theological disciplines. Christianity is Trinitarian at its very core, and it is my suspicion that biblical theology on its own is inadequate to protect and defend that core. We need ontology as well as economy if we are to do justice to the Bible's teaching on who God is and what he has done. The biblical theological revolutionaries have become the new establishment, it is time for those of us rebels who think that the Bible raises more than just redemptive-historical questions, and that the creedal tradition of the church gives important insights on this, to raise our voices in dissent, to highlight the very real dangers of making this insight into an ideology and to do our best to bring the pendulum back a little.

For those wishing to pursue these ideas further, consult Richard A. Muller, *The Study of Theology: from biblical interpretation to contemporary formulation* (Zondervan, 1991)

DEVOTIONAL BOOKS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT: SOME RECOMMENDED READING

Simon Gathercole

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I am sure that many *Themelios* readers share my experience, and often find it perplexing trying to read the Old Testament in the hope that it will give strength for the day. Since the OT is written across such a wide time-frame and encompasses so many different historical situations, it is often difficult to get a grip on the situation of a particular chapter of a book. (Are they in exile at the moment, or not? Who is the king in this chapter?) The setting of a particular episode, and understanding the text in its historical context can be very challenging, and it is easy to give up altogether on the whole enterprise.

Even if we can, to some degree understand the text successfully in its historical context, the question of how to apply a passage or a verse often seems just as difficult. Sometimes we tend not to worry too much about principles of interpretation, but the danger of simply making random connections in our minds between OT events and our own lives is a real one. On the other hand, sometimes we are simply 'stuck', and feel unable to make any connections at all.

In this article, the intention is merely to highlight a few examples of devotional books which have done a good job of keeping the balance between historical context and practical application; between faithfulness to the text and clear exposition. Not being an OT specialist, I am certainly not an expert in this area, but I hope to recommend some literature that I have found useful, on the assumption that most readers are not specialists either.

Some things to look for in a good exposition

There is no fail-safe check-list to determine which are the good books and which are the bad, any more than there is an all-encompassing formula to apply to each part of the OT, yielding three nice points of application each time. In any case, of course, the process of reading the OT devotionally is not primarily an academic or mechanical exercise. The starting point should be a willingness to submit to God's word, and prayerfully to meditate on the text. I will however begin with a short summary of a few key principles which are important for any exposition of an OT book to follow.

Beware of Fanciful Allegorising

This is a common failing for all of us who try and investigate the OT, although a number of writers have sounded warnings about this issue already. Probably the best-known is Graeme Goldsworthy's classic example of the five stones of David.¹ How, the teacher asks the Sunday school class, did David defeat Goliath? Answer: with his sling and the five stones. How can we defeat the spiritual Goliaths in our lives? Answer, with the five stones of obedience, service, Bible-reading, prayer and fellowship.

The rest of Goldsworthy's book gives excellent guidelines on how to interpret various passages in the OT through the grid of God's Kingdom consisting in *God's rule over God's people in God's place*. Therefore David is God's anointed ruler who rescues God's people from the enemy. The proper analogy to David for us is actually Jesus, who is also God's anointed ruler, who has rescued us by defeating God's enemies on the cross. So, we should not so much identify with David, though that is not completely ruled out: really, as Christians, we are closest to being the Israelites who are standing on the touch-lines cheering after God's servant has won the victory over our enemies.

So there is a sense in which there is some truth in the process of 'allegorising', that is, in making a connection between something in our experience and something in the text because of a suggestive resemblance. What Goldsworthy does is provide some basis for how we work out what are real, theological 'resemblances', and what are not. Do not despair, however, if it seems an enormous task to do this. Working out the principles of biblical interpretation has been an ongoing challenge throughout the history of the Church, and we do not have to have everything worked out in order to be blessed by God through the Bible.

Beware of a Restrictive Salvation-Historical Approach

It is possible, however, to go so far in reacting against allegorising that the OT ends up even more difficult to apply. If the focus is *exclusively* on the way in which OT passages provide types, or prefigurings, of Christ's death on the cross, the danger then is that the application will be almost the same every time, whether one is reading Deuteronomy, Psalms or Ezekiel. In addition to understanding OT figures constantly as types of Christ, the NT authors also frequently make use of them as examples. Abraham is

¹ G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 9-10. For a similar warning against mistakes on the NT side, see Gordon Fee's example of a medieval interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The man who fell among thieves was Adam, the priest and the Levite who did not help him were the OT law and priesthood, the Samaritan is Christ, the inn where he was taken was the church, and the innkeeper was either Paul or the Pope! G. Fee and D. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 124.

an example of how God justifies by faith: 'The words "it was credited to him" were not written for him [Abraham] alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead' (Rom. 4:23–24). Similarly, Elijah is an example of the power of prayer: 'Elijah was human just as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops' (Jas. 5:17–18).

One crucial way in which we can be helped in applying an OT passage is by understanding the vital link between Christ and the Christian. (Since the focus here is on devotional reading, I am focusing on the individual rather than corporate, 'church' dimension.) Since the NT must be our guide to reading the Old, we can see some of the ways in which Christ's experience is the pattern for that of the Christian also. In the gospels Jesus commissions his disciples to teach just as he has been doing (Matt. 10:1; 28:20). He foretells that Christians will experience the same hardships as he has experienced: because the world rejects the Father, so it also rejects the Son, and those whom the Son sends out (John 16:1–3; 17:14). This is acted out in the book of Acts, as we see the peculiar way in which the lives of the apostles' become mirror images of the life of Jesus in the gospels. Stephen, like Jesus, is martyred on some of the same charges that were levelled against Jesus (Acts 6:13–14, cf. Mark 14:58). His words which precipitate his execution echo Jesus' words in the same situation (Acts 7:56, cf. Luke 22:69). Finally, his dying words mirror the dying words of Jesus (Acts 7:59, cf. Luke 23:46; Acts 7:60, cf. Luke 23:34). Paul's ministry in Acts also bears an uncanny resemblance to the ministry of Jesus. In his letters, Paul provides some of the theological basis for this. As Jesus died and rose again, in baptism we died and rose with him (Rom. 6:3–4). As we are now 'in Christ', we share in his sufferings in the present, in anticipation of sharing in his glory in the future (Phil. 3:10–11, 20–21).

One the one hand, of course, Christ is unique, and there is no sense in which we will achieve what he has achieved in his death and resurrection. It is, however, also true that the experience of death and resurrection is a pattern which Jesus sets down for all of humanity, even all of the created order. Adam 'surely died' in Genesis 3, but the same chapter also forecast the downfall of Satan. Israel's history is established in Deuteronomy as one of death followed by life, of exile followed by restoration. In Hosea 6:2, the nation of Israel is described as having been revived or restored on the second or third day after being dead in exile. David in the Psalms laments that he has gone down to the depths of Sheol, but is brought back to the light of life by God. The 'suffering servant' of Isaiah 52–53 has the same career-path, as does Jonah.

So, to take some practical examples, we can share in David's laments in the Psalms (as most Christians instinctively do) because we are simply doing what David did: sharing in the sufferings of Jesus, who is the one the Psalms are really about. See for example Acts 2:24–32, where Peter talks about Jesus' resurrection in his Pentecost sermon:

David said about him:

I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence (Ps. 16:8-11).

Brothers and sisters, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet ... Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay (Acts 2:29-31).

What appears in the quoted Psalm, to be David's triumphant resurrection is actually not his own, but Christ's! Sharing in the sufferings of Christ was a reality for OT saints just as much as it is for us.

There are, however, reasons why we cannot apply everything in the OT directly to ourselves. Here, there is a balance to be struck between two key points. On the one hand, the way in which God deals with people never changes through history. So, for example, Bultmann is profoundly wrong to say that advances in scientific knowledge have put an end to 'mythical' concepts like spirits and demons;² Christ's pre-existence and second coming;³ and his sacrificial atoning death.⁴ But it is also true that the *old* covenant functioned in a different way from the new. For example, while obedience to the old covenant led to *prosperity*, for Christians, the opposite is the case: 'All those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (2 Tim. 3:12). The best way to learn how the OT books apply to us is gradually to absorb the way in which the NT uses the Old. The NT authors certainly do not think that OT figures cannot be used as examples for us.

Beware of an approach which excludes Christ from the Old Testament

On the other hand again, it is all too common to find Bible study books and devotional commentaries that sometimes make no mention at all of Christ in an exposition. In this connection, we should remember the comment often made by the Australian evangelist John Chapman, who notes that if an exposition of an OT passage would be acceptable to a Jew or a Muslim, then something must have gone wrong. If Christ is 'in all the Scriptures' (Luke 24:27), we must take that seriously. (Luke 24 as a whole is a good place to start to understand how Jesus saw the OT as about

² R. Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', in Bultmann's, *New Testament and Mythology and other Basic Writings*. Selected, edited and translated by Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 4.

³ Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', 7.

⁴ Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology', 5.

himself.) There is no sense in reading the OT and coming out with an understanding of God as omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and the like in abstraction from Christ. Similarly, any ethical application about self-discipline, commitment to God, holiness or whatever, must be concretely connected with the *gospel* if it is to be true. I choose these two examples because I have had personal experience of both.

The first, in a series of Bible studies called *Meeting God* provides a series of questions designed to draw out the key points of content in, and application of Daniel 4.⁵ In this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar has his dream, and is brought to the position of crawling around on the ground and eating, then comes to the realisation that Daniel's God is all powerful. Unfortunately, however, in the list of questions in the Bible study, there was no mention of Christ, and so we had a last ditch attempt at the end of the Bible study to salvage something Christian out of it!

In the second case, I must myself plead that I have been guilty in the past of bolting on to biblical passages (even NT passages) practical application which is not related to Christ and the gospel. Again, I was recently part of a house group in which the booklet *Christian Character* was used.⁶ For two chapters in succession, however, the questions made no mention of Jesus at all.

The first was on 'Resisting Temptation' in Genesis 39, using Joseph as an example of how to resist temptation from the 'Potiphar's wives' in our own lives. The second was on 'Trusting God' in Genesis 22, using Abraham as an example of trust and faithfulness in his willingness even to sacrifice his own son. The Joseph story, with its emphasis on God's providence and God's constant presence with Joseph finds its fulfilment in the gospel, where God's presence with his people is eternal in Jesus (Matt. 28:20). Similarly, the Abraham's offering of Isaac has its fulfilment in the gospel, in that God 'did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Rom. 8:32) and provided a lamb in our place. We must remember Luther's warning about approaching the Bible: we can either accept Scripture as law or gospel. If we see the crucified incarnate Son in the Scriptures (i.e. in New and Old Testaments), then the Scriptures are good news for us. But if we see the Scriptures (again, whether Old or New Testaments) in abstraction from the crucified incarnate Son, the Scripture is law and only condemns us.

Beware of an approach which sees Christ as an 'add-on' to the Old Testament

There is a similar mistake to the one above, which sees Christ and the gospel as referred to in the OT in a kind of 'secondary' or 'additional' way. The reasoning goes something like this. The 'real' meaning of the OT is its original, historical setting, but when Jesus

⁵ J.I. Packer, *Meeting God* (Leicester: IVP, 2001).

⁶ A. Sterk, P. Scazzero, *Christian Character: 12 Studies for Individuals or Groups* (LifeBuilder Bible Studies; Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 1999).

comes he applies these things to himself which do not strictly speaking refer to him. Echoes of this approach can be heard in the editor's introduction to the OT 'Daily Study Bible' series, in his description of the primary purpose of the series:

Professor Barclay summed it up for his New Testament series in the words of Richard of Chichester's prayer - to enable men and women 'to know Jesus Christ more clearly, to love Him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly'. In the case of the Old Testament we have to be a little more circumspect than that. The Old Testament was completed long before the time of Our Lord, and it was (as it still is) the sole Bible of the Jews, God's first people, before it became part of the Christian Bible. We must take this fact seriously. Yet in its strangely compelling way, sometimes dimly and sometimes directly, sometimes charmingly and sometimes embarrassingly, it holds up before us the things of Christ.⁷

If what Jesus says about the OT is true, do we really need to be a little more circumspect when reading the OT? Is the OT primarily, as is implied here, the Bible of the Jews? Jesus' statements on the subject, give us the confidence that the OT holds up before us not just 'the things of Christ', but Christ himself.

Some take the view that Jesus' application of these OT institutions and prophecies to himself are regarded as legitimate, because he is so great. Others, however, regard his approach as a bit cavalier. These approaches however are fundamentally wrong. As we have seen, Christ is the key to *all* the Scriptures. Augustine and the Reformers have valuable insight on this issue. Modern scholars, even evangelical scholars, tend to privilege the original, historical meaning of the text as the primary and then the Christian, theological meaning as secondary. The Reformers however saw the literal sense of the OT as referring to Christ. This was not because they were in any sense sloppy in their scholarship. One scholar has written of Calvin, one of the most brilliant Reformation exegetes, that he 'spoke of Christ when expounding the Old Testament because for him this *was* the literal meaning of the text'.⁸ All this is entirely in line with Jesus' statement that 'If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me' (John 5:46). Similarly, 1 Peter 1:12 records that the prophets in the OT knew that they were not merely writing for their own time, but were actually writing about the Messianic age. Jesus was not a plan 'B' thought up after the OT was completed (or even after it was started). The OT was, all along, directly about our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ J.C.L. Gibson, 'General Preface', cited here from J.G. McConville, *Chronicles* (The Daily Study Bible; Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1984), v-vi.

⁸ P.R. Noble, 'The Sensus Literalis: Jowett, Childs, and Barr', *Journal of Theological Studies* (44.1 (1993), 1.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones has said that the first consideration when reading the Bible is to ask what it is saying to us about God. What lessons can be drawn about his character, what he likes and dislikes, how he is towards us? This approach safeguards us from jumping immediately to the question of how the text applies to us, or asking which character in the story represents us. Asking where *we* are in a passage may be very difficult to answer. If however we ask what a verse or chapter tells us about who God is, we may find that applications arise very naturally in terms of how we are to think and act in response to the God we see in Scripture.

Some Recommended Reading

Of the multitude of literature on the market, both good and bad, I have tried in particular to highlight examples which readers might not have come across, in order to provide an introduction to some possibly new gems, mostly recently published. I have not, for example, provided a review of any volumes in the *Bible Speaks Today* series, since readers are probably aware of many of these, and they are easy to find in most Christian bookshops. Many of these volumes are excellent, and I have found Michael Wilcock's *Chronicles* and Barry Webb's *Isaiah* particularly helpful. Again, the emphasis in this article will be on devotional books: I do not include commentaries which are more strictly exegetical, even when they are very accessible like a number of the volumes in the *New International Biblical Commentary* series. In this series, for example, Chris Wright's on Deuteronomy is very good, and Iain Provan's on 1-2 Kings superb.⁹ The latter provides marvellous short excursus on the place of Solomon, Elijah and Elisha in their canonical context which are alone worth the price of the book. Provan sets an excellent example of how to identify typology, seeing the patterns of certain figures throughout Scripture, without speculative allegorising.

Pentateuch and Historical Books

A series which has a similar aim is *The Gospel in the Old Testament* series, edited by Tremper Longman and Alan Groves: 'A series of studies on the lives of Old Testament characters, written for laypeople and pastors, and designed to encourage Christ-centred reading, teaching, and preaching of the Old Testament.' Unfortunately not many of these have appeared yet, but one which has, is Iain Duguid's on Abraham.¹⁰ This is particularly welcome, because as far as I have observed, the Pentateuch is perhaps the least well served by devotional books of all the OT literature. The

⁹ Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995).

¹⁰ Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Gap between Promise and Reality: The Gospel according to Abraham* (The Gospel according to the Old Testament; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999). Quotation is from the editors' preface on p. ii.

emphasis, in keeping with the focus on Abraham, is on the need to trust God even when our situation does not seem to fit with what we expected. Duguid highlights well both cases in which Abraham responds to such situations well, and badly. For example, when Abraham goes down to Egypt and pretends that Sarai is his sister so that Pharaoh does not kill him and marry her, Duguid comments:

Abram's logic, natural as it was, was fatally flawed. He had forgotten that the God whom he served was greater than his problems. He thought that God needed some help in fulfilling his promise. He thought too much about the potential disasters that might befall him and too little about obeying God and letting the chips fall where they may. Isn't that what we do so often? We ask, 'What if this were to happen? What if things don't work out? What if I lose my job for telling the truth? What if I don't get that promotion because I wasn't willing to put in the extra hours, because I wanted to spend more time with my family?'

Duguid makes the application flow very naturally from the passages themselves, and does not force applications out of things which were specific to Abraham's special role in salvation history.

A number of commentaries on the historical books have appeared recently from Dale Ralph Davis. In my judgement these are excellent commentaries, in which each section is easy-to-read and a manageable length (8-10 pages on average). Davis's comments provide a welcome emphasis on the sovereignty of God. English readers may feel put out by the strange combination of large amounts of American and Scottish illustrations! But the practical parts are very good, although they focus largely on application to our thinking and attitudes.

Davis makes good use of current OT scholarship, though it is only included in the main text when it is of direct interest: other material is relegated to the footnotes so that the reader can take them or leave them. He also makes constant appeal to the classic commentaries by the likes of Calvin, and Keil and Delitzsch. Davis makes this scholarship very accessible by showing that it brings into focus what we can already see through a glass darkly, rather than, as with much OT scholarship, trying to conjure a completely new meaning for the text out of ancient Babylonian parallels. One of the reasons I enjoy Davis's exposition so much is that I feel confident that he has done his exegetical homework, and so is not just delivering blessed, unhistorical thoughts on the text. Yet at the same time, he applies the text so well. This is the case even when the raw material does not seem very promising, and the historical books *can* contain material which appears very difficult to apply.

For example, Joshua 18-19 deals with the different lots (allotments of land) which are assigned by God to each of the tribes. Joshua is entrusted with administering this process. A contemporary Christian reader of Joshua 18-19 would have to confess that he is not interested in lots. However, I would again insist that all Scripture is profitable and that instructive notes ring in these chapters as

well.¹¹ Davis's application of the 'lots of lots', as he entitles his exposition, rings true:

There could be no end of complaint, quarrelling, or discontent unless the tribes were assured that their lot was determined by the hand of God, that their territory was theirs by Yahweh's decision. The heart of the matter differs little for the Christian, though it may seldom involve real estate. Only as I am convinced that 'my times are in thy hand' (Ps. 31:15 ...) and that Yahweh really does hold my lot (cf. Ps. 16:5), can I be kept from bitterness and discontent. There is, by a strange chemistry, something oddly consoling when I realise in a fresh way that my present lot is what my Lord has intended for me.¹²

Davis's 2 Samuel commentary is also challenging in its constant attention to David and his opponents.¹³ We also read that David is no sinless saint, yet the contrast between David as God's legitimate king and his opponents who try to undermine God's rule is brought out well. This means that the christological dimension of David's reign is well covered: Jesus is of course David's greater son, the anointed King over God's people. The personal application which Davis makes is also profound: he reminds us that the Kingdom of God cannot be built by natural worldly means. The political machinations and military means which David's opponents employ cannot dent the Kingdom of God; nor can the people of God bolster or build up the Kingdom of God by similar devices. Davis has also done excellent commentaries in much the same style on 1 Samuel (*Looking at the Heart*) and Judges (*Such a Great Salvation*). These are also available in Christian Focus's *Focus on the Bible* series, and in the USA from Baker Book House.

Another commentary on Judges, with Ruth in the same volume, is from David Jackman in the *Mastering the Old Testament* series.¹⁴ To focus on the Ruth section of the volume, Jackman provides here a wonderfully heart-warming and challenging exposition, which emphasises the sovereignty and faithfulness of God in particular. The chapters here are full of solid exegesis and application, as well as numerous illustrations and quotations which provide a model of readable and reliable interpretation. Jackman has a way of making the application naturally emerge from simple explanation of what a passage is saying. For example, on Ruth 1:19-22, where Naomi retains her trust in God despite the fact that he 'dealt very bitterly' with her, Jackman comments astutely, and also provides a good summary of the whole book:

She consciously places all her pain, bitter experiences and hopelessness within the structure of God's sovereignty, and she

¹¹ D.R. Davis, *Joshua: No Falling Words* (Focus on the Bible; Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 139.

¹² Davis, *Joshua*, 143-44.

¹³ D.R. Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity* (Focus on the Bible; Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1999).

¹⁴ D. Jackman, *Judges, Ruth* (Mastering the Old Testament; London/Dallas: Word, 1991).

leaves the explanation and responsibility with him. Whether that is escapism or realism entirely depends on the character of God. This book is designed to vindicate that character of steadfast love and dependability and to generate a similar faith in the Lord. He provides in his person the only context in which faith can learn to cope with the uncertainties, pain and bitterness of life. For he is also Yahweh – the God of covenant-love and faithfulness [323].

The exposition is particularly easy to read because it is broken down into chapters, as well as subdivided into three to four page chunks.

Similarly, sections of about three to four pages per portion come in the *Daily Study Bible* series. Gordon McConville's on *Chronicles* has a lot of excellent, profound personal application. However, it is too cautious in making connections between the OT and Jesus. It is surprising that Jesus is not mentioned in the exposition of the key passage in 1 Chronicles 17, where David is promised a kingdom and a throne forever in his offspring. On the other hand, the application is thoughtful. The fact that David is not permitted to build the temple, a job which is reserved for Solomon, is applied in this way: 'Often we may have to accept that the work which we would dearly like to perform in terms of Christian service is not that for which we are best equipped and not that to which God has in fact called us. It may be, like David's, a preparatory work'.¹⁵ Again, on David's desire to build the temple, McConville puts well the mistake David had made: 'David failed to appreciate that it was the Lord who was the real architect of the continuing healthy relationship between himself and his people.'¹⁶

Prophets

Iain Duguid's hefty commentary on Ezekiel comes in the *NIV Application Commentary* series. I cannot make much comment on it, having only just bought it on the strength of enjoying his Abraham book. The commentary weighs in at about 500 pages, but since Ezekiel is a long book, Duguid's sections of comment on each chapter are manageable, 10–12 pages. This series has a number of excellent contributions from OT scholars who also have a keen interest in applying their research to the church. Some of the commentaries in this series are quite technical, making reference to the original language frequently. Each commentary in this series consists of sections of commentary which are further sub-divided into three parts, 'original meaning', 'bridging contexts' and 'contemporary application'. The original meaning section of each commentary employs 'all of the elements of traditional exegesis',¹⁷ although the contributors are all conservative theologically, and so not all conceivable literary approaches are employed. The main

¹⁵ McConville, *Chronicles*, 55.

¹⁶ McConville, *Chronicles*, 56.

¹⁷ Editor's Introduction to I.W. Provan, *Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 11.

object of study here is the historical, literary, and cultural contexts of each passage. The 'bridging contexts' section aims to identify what is *timeless* in the text, and what was *timely*, in other words specific to the original historical context of the book. Thirdly, the 'contemporary significance' section aims to cover a range of ways of applying the text to people today. The volumes are probably aimed primarily at ministers preparing sermons, but, depending on the lengths of the sections, could also be used for quiet times.

Bob Fyall's *Daniel* commentary is another fine book in the *Focus on the Bible* series. (He is also preparing the volume on 1–2 Kings in this series.) A brief look at Fyall's comments on Daniel 10 will give a flavour of the book as a whole. The chapter begins with Daniel's fasting and his vision of Jesus, 'a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God who is also the Son of Man' (154), which overwhelms him, and knocks him out, and into a deep sleep. The Son of Man appears to Daniel in 10:12 in response to his prayers; he has been delayed because, with the archangel Michael, he has been fighting against the prince of Persia (i.e. the demonic angel who fights for Persia against Israel). Fyall explains clearly the implications for our understanding of the spiritual realm and its impact on our lives in the world, as well as the power of prayer. In a summary section (159–60), he offers three main implications. First, there is 'the reality of the unseen world'. Here he explains the importance of being aware that there is a demonic realm without which world events of great horror become incomprehensible. This is of course extremely relevant for us all at the present time. Second, 'the reality of conflict' places us in this spiritual reality. Citing 'our struggle ... against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Eph. 6:12), Fyall comments: 'Any effective living for God is impossible without recognising the reality of, and engaging in this conflict' (160). Finally, 'the reality of prayer', which enables us to participate in this heavenly world. In order to reinforce these points further, Fyall provides 'Questions for further study' which facilitate more reflection on the text. Books like this are invaluable in the current Christian climate where, as C.S. Lewis warned, we are constantly tempted by one or both of the mistaken attitudes to evil: either to imagine it does not really exist, or to have an unhealthy interest in it. For theological students in universities, rationalism constantly crouches at the door, but there is also a constant barrage of trashy end-times literature filling our bookshops with speculation about angels and demons. Let the buyer beware.

Peter Craigie has produced two volumes in the *Daily Study Bible* series on the Minor Prophets.¹⁸ Craigie is strong on historical background to the prophets, and helpfully argues (without too much scholarly detail) that a sceptical approach to the historical events described by the prophets is unjustified. One weakness is his theological emphasis on how prophecy has more to do with the importance of human choice rather than divine providence. Many

¹⁸ P.C. Craigie, *Twelve Prophets: Volumes 1 and 2* (Daily Study Bible); Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1984).

readers might be confused by statements such as (in his exposition of Joel), 'The point of the prophet was not so much to predict some future event, as it was to see the possibility of such a future in the present ... The divine will does not change the nature of the future, for human evil can still create its own apocalypse, but it does make it possible for the future to be changed.'¹⁹ Nevertheless, there is a lot of useful application. The exposition of Jonah has a number of different warnings based on the prophet's actions and attitudes. In Jonah 4:1-5, 'Jonah was angry because his theology was in evident conflict with the nature and action of God' (233), or in 4:6-11, 'if God cares for castor-oil plants, not to mention cattle (v. 11), was it not possible that he also cared for people, even foreigners?' (237). Craigie draws out astutely a number of Jonah's attitudes which we are also prone to, as well as clearly bringing out God's challenging responses.

Wisdom Literature

A useful introduction to the Wisdom literature is provided again by Graeme Goldsworthy, and is now available in a very cheap edition from Paternoster.²⁰ This has general introductions to the relationship between biblical wisdom and 'worldly' wisdom, the place of wisdom in biblical theology, and a characteristically helpful emphasis on the need to see OT wisdom through the lens of Christ and the gospel. Christ embodies the true wisdom of both God and man, and therefore the gospel has 'intellectual' content because it entails a way of looking at the world, and challenging false conceptions of the world.²¹ There are also specific chapters on Ecclesiastes, Job, and Proverbs. He focuses on a number of important points to remember in interpreting Proverbs: the basis of wisdom being fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7), the fact that wisdom is an expression of the order of the cosmos (Prov. 30:21), but also that the proverbs are not precise theological formulations, but 'wisdom distilled from one or a number of actual experiences'.²² He cites the example of Bookworm Basil, an unfortunate academic who finds pearls of wisdom in great tomes and puts them into practice with disastrous effect. He finds the (non-biblical) proverb 'still waters run deep', and coming across a fast stream reasons that it must therefore be shallow. So he steps into the stream to cross it, and disappears under the water. Similarly, when we come to read Proverbs, we are in for a shock if we try and see them as theological doctrines which are applicable in every situation. Goldsworthy gives a number of examples of particular proverbs and how to interpret them, making this a useful introduction to reading the collection as a Christian. Many of us are probably not used to reading Proverbs all the way through, though Billy Graham's example of reading a

¹⁹ Craigie, *Twelve Prophets: Volume 1*, 100.

²⁰ G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom: Israel's Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life* (Biblical Classics Library; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995).

²¹ Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom*, 147-69.

²² Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom*, 75.

chapter a day (and so, reading the whole book every month) is a challenging one.

Further, there is also a nice, recent introduction to the so-called Five Scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther) by Barry Webb.²³ It contains a good survey of the recent commentaries and scholarship on these books, but reviews them in a very readable way, and from a thoroughly evangelical stance. For example, on the Song of Songs, Webb looks at the literary features, arguing against others that the Song is one song, rather than merely a collection (22–26), and shows that the book is a celebration of ‘bodily existence and sexual relationships’ (31–32). He also highlights well the biblical-theological context of the books he discusses. Song of Songs, for example, displays that in male-female relationships, there is a ‘return to Eden’. He makes the connection with Genesis 2:25: ‘The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.’ Webb comments, ‘With some justification the Song of Songs may be seen as a kind of extended commentary or poetic meditation on this verse.’²⁴

A similar approach to Song of Songs is seen in Iain Provan’s commentary in the *NIV Application Commentary* series. Provan’s commentary on *Song of Songs* has a fair amount of reference to the meanings of Hebrew words. This may be off-putting (though it should probably not be for *Themelios* readers!), but there is a lot of good material in Provan’s commentary, and a strong biblical-theological orientation. As in Barry Webb’s chapter, there is a strong emphasis on the *Song* displaying a reversal of the fall. But Provan pushes this in a different direction, and emphasises the dimension of the woman being treated as an individual in her own right. She does not have to be in a relation of subjugation or oppression; rather a male-female relationship should be mutual. Some readers will find the emphasis which Provan repeatedly puts at the beginning of his commentary on male-female equality in the church a bit grating, but the basic point is an useful one.

Bob Fyall’s exposition of *Job* is a treat to read.²⁵ It is very short (under 100 pages), not a commentary on the whole text, but an exposition of some of the key sections. In common with his Daniel commentary, it is shot through with a profound understanding of the spiritual forces at work in the book. Perhaps for these reasons, Fyall’s books make excellent reading material for the Christian life. One of the most perplexing questions raised in the book of Job is what mistake is it of which the friends are guilty: one would often be hard-put to find much theological unorthodoxy in the statements of ‘Job’s comforters’. They may not be the most pastorally sensitive people in

²³ B.G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on The Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther* (Leicester/Downers Grove: Apollos/IVP USA, 2000).

²⁴ Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 30.

²⁵ R. Fyall, *How Does God Treat His Friends? Lessons from Job* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1995). Soon to appear is a book by Fyall on Job in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series, ed. D.A. Carson.

the world, but how can God pronounce the verdict near the end of the book (Job 42:7) that Job with all his complaining was in the right, and the friends were in the wrong? Fyall presents a challenging and compelling answer: 'There is no place in the friends' universe for Behemoth and Leviathan, and that is no small part of their inadequate understanding of God' (120). Fyall provides good evidence that these two beasts are not merely animals, but rather represent spiritual forces: Behemoth is the embodiment of evil, chaos and death (119), and Leviathan is actually Satan himself (121). Fyall acknowledges that there is still considerable mystery to the book of Job, but argues persuasively that at least some of the problems of the book are solved when Job is seen as a battleground, over whom these spiritual forces are engaged in warfare.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this provides some fresh inspiration, or at least some fresh suggestions of reading material, to turn again to the OT for spiritual upbuilding. *Themelios* readers are no doubt aware of a number of the challenges and potential pitfalls in reading the OT devotionally, but we can all benefit from seeing biblical exposition done well. The examples above generally model good expository practice from scholars who are both fully engaged in the exegetical task, and concerned with the practical dimension of the biblical text. May God give us the strength to know and obey Christ through reading the Old Testament.

INTRODUCING THE NEW TESTAMENT: ITS LITERATURE AND THEOLOGY – A REVIEW ARTICLE

Craig Blomberg

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Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology

Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, Marianne Meye Thompson
Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001,
xii + 624 pp., h/b., £24.99/\$35.00

It has been twelve years since Donald Guthrie's classic evangelical New Testament introduction was last revised. Carson, Moo and Morris' widely-used, scaled-down equivalent is now a decade old. As a result a highly-touted, fresh, relatively conservative New Testament introduction immediately raised my hopes that I would have an excellent new textbook to use for my year-long introduction and survey required of all our students. My anticipation rose even higher when I read that historical-critical concerns were to be abbreviated with much more of a focus on theological and literary questions, precisely the balance I already try to create in my classes.

This nicely laid-out hardback is handsomely furnished with black and white photographs, maps, and charts. Numerous sidebars present interesting and relevant excerpts from inter-testamental or Greco-Roman literature that help us put a given NT text or theme into cultural perspective. There are almost no footnotes and only three to six items listed for further reading at the end of each chapter. Thus students will not learn which scholars support which views.

The opening three chapters are very clearly written with the introductory student obviously in mind. 'What is the New Testament?' accurately describes the contents of this collection of Scriptures. 'The World of the New Testament' treats the most essential historico-political, religious and sociological background material, though the first two of these are treated much more briefly than one is accustomed to in a book of this nature. 'The Nature of the Gospels' surveys the three quests of the historical Jesus, discusses gospel genre, and introduces source, form and narrative criticism. Matthew, Mark and John are labelled biography, but Luke by adding Acts as a sequel to his Gospel writes 'historiography'. The selection of Gospel forms chosen for detailed scrutiny overlaps with traditional presentations only via parables. Proverbs, pronouncement stories, miracle stories, 'I'-sayings and sentences of

holy law are all eschewed in favour of the genealogy, symposium, type scene, farewell discourse, passion narrative and summary.

The next four chapters introduce the four Gospels, one at a time, in their canonical sequence. By far and away the largest subsections of each of these chapters are surveys of the contents of each Gospel, sometimes merely paraphrased, sometimes interpreted, but the promise of focusing on actual literary and theological concerns is not entirely fulfilled. The promise to do very little with historical questions, the staple of standard introductions, is however fulfilled. Usually this material appears last, ending with a statement about our inability to know the identity of the authors, accompanied by disclaimers as to how little it matters anyway! The authors do seem somewhat more confident, however, that Luke may have written the two books traditionally assigned to him.

Chapter 8 may be the strongest in the book. The most secure results of a moderately conservative study of the historical Jesus are summarised, with particular sensitivity to placing him in his Jewish context and presenting the issues as they would have appeared to his original audiences. Without coming out and explicitly saying so, the authors apparently believe in Jesus as having understood himself to be (a significantly unconventional) Messiah, offering his life as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of humanity, and genuinely resurrected from the dead.

Chapter 9 treats the Acts of the Apostles, but its summaries of the book's contents are dramatically briefer than with the four Gospels. The question of historicity, however, is given greater treatment, but the conclusion is simply that there is some substantial historical substratum, by no means as much as conservatives are used to finding.

Two very short chapters introduce the topics of letter-writing in the ancient world and 'Paul and His World', respectively. The former is a helpful introduction, especially to conventional form; the latter seems unnecessarily agnostic about several historical details of Paul's life.

Subsequent chapters deal in turn with the Pauline epistles in canonical order. Here a greater unevenness of treatments emerges. Romans and Galatians are summarised in great detail but the two Corinthian epistles, far more quickly. 'Justification by faith' is helpfully explained as 'righteousness by trust' in light of OT covenantal backgrounds, but none of the recent flurry of scholarship on patronage in Corinth makes its way into the treatment of Paul's letters to that city. The authors lean toward the North Galatian hypothesis and a later date for Galatians.

Our trio doubts that the case for dating 1 and 2 Thessalonians to the early 50s is strong. They are quite sure that Ephesians was not intended first of all for Ephesus and doubt that Paul wrote it, but they show no acquaintance with Clinton Arnold's or Peter O'Brien's recent, strong arguments to the contrary. They are somewhat more agnostic with respect to Colossians, but curiously think the most

decisive issue is whether Paul could ever have spoken of Christians as sharing in Christ's resurrection in this age. Still, Philemon and Colossians must have been composed 'at roughly the same time and place', and the authenticity of Philemon is not in question, so it is hard to see how they can even leave the door open for a deutero-Pauline Colossians. Philippians probably comes from an Ephesian imprisonment in the mid-50s. The authenticity of 2 Thessalonians seems to be left up in the air, while the Pastorals are all but certainly pseudonymous.

The proposed outlines for each of the biblical books vary greatly in plausibility. Beginning with the Pastoral Epistles, in several instances, the authors give up making sense of the narrative flow as it stands and propose thematic outlines, combining passages otherwise out of sequence. The only place where a really plausible case for doing this exists is with 1 John but at this point they revert to following the book's sequence! With Hebrews and the general epistles, the pattern of leaving typical introductory information until the end of each chapter is reversed, without any explanation. There is also less thorough and less consistent actual summarising of contents and more thematic treatments. Even then coverage is spotty; the detailed chapter on Hebrews manages to avoid the issues surrounding the apostasy passages altogether!

The treatment of James is the best in this part of the book, stressing the coherence of this letter with other parts of the NT and avoiding the caricature of its author, probably the elder of the Jerusalem church, as a thoroughly law-abiding Jewish Christian. The parallels between 1 Peter and other parts of the NT are also helpfully canvassed, but we read nothing of the recent sociological approaches, so highly touted in the beginning of the book. 2 Peter is assuredly pseudonymous, not least because of its testamentary nature. The discussion of interpreting Revelation is inherently sound but general enough that post-, a- and historic pre-millennial interpreters could largely all agree.

A final chapter rapidly surveys the formation of the NT canon, but ultimately adopts a self-consciously circular argument that usage in the church was the most fundamental criterion for selection. A combined index of names and subjects rounds out the volume.

There are several glaring mechanical mistakes in the volume, the most striking of which is the omission in the outline of Matthew of 1:1 – 4:22. More disconcerting are a number of factual errors. It is not the case that 'in the last two centuries ... almost all students of the Gospels [have posited] Johannine independence from the Synoptic Gospels'. It is not true that, apart from the feeding of the 5000, 'all the other miracles narrated in John are found only in that Gospel'. Paul's letters are not entirely arranged in descending order of length. Tiberius' dates as emperor are not 17–37, and 1 Corinthians 9:5 does not necessarily imply Paul himself was married. Assuming that 'secular' means 'non-Jewish' (as elsewhere in the book), it is not the case that Paul only quotes secular authors once. The explanation of 1 Corinthians 14:33–38 claims that Paul

chides certain women for 'seeking to dominate the worship services', an interpretation that is suggested by neither the details of the text nor any of the major, recent explanations of it. That the masculine generic plural of verse 36 must refer to men only strikingly misrepresents Greek grammar.

More common than outright errors are noticeable overstatements – calling the 'Christian Paul' view of Romans 7:14–25 'impossible', denying the existence of any form of Jewish gnosticism, unequivocally distinguishing 'elder' and 'overseer' in 1 Timothy, and not even acknowledging the existence of the historic, Christian (i.e., complementarian) interpretations of all of the vexed gender role passages.

The upshot of my review of Achtemeier and company was disappointment. Great promise did not produce consistently good results. I'll stick with Carson, Moo and Morris for my classes and await the revised edition, especially since it promises to come soon and with an added focus on the content of each NT book.

TWO RECENT COMMENTARIES ON 1 CORINTHIANS

— A REVIEW ARTICLE

Kenneth A. Fox

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First Corinthians

Roymond F. Collins

Sacra Pagina 7, Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999,
695 pp., h/b., \$39.95

The First Epistle to the Corinthians

Anthony C. Thiselton

New International Greek Testament Commentary, Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000,
1446 pp., h/b., £49.99/\$75.00

Raymond F. Collins's *First Corinthians* begins with a forty-page introduction in which he shows how Paul's apostolic letter compared to other letters in antiquity, and how it may be treated as an oral communication in written form, 'a kind of "speech-act"'. Because Paul is a 'great preacher' set on persuading his hearers to act and think in certain ways in the future, 1 Corinthians can be identified as a piece of deliberative rhetoric. What unites this letter is Paul's concern: 'What does it mean for the Christians of Corinth to be God's one holy people at Corinth?'. The Introduction concludes with an outline of the letter and a bibliography.

The layout of the commentary is according to the rhetorical and epistolary structure that the author sees embedded in the letter. 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 and 16:1-24 provide the introduction and closing of the letter. The body of the letter is divided into seven parts: the theme and occasion in 1:10-17; and six rhetorical demonstrations, 1:18 - 4:21; 5:1 - 7:40; 8:1 - 11:1; 11:2-34; 12:1 - 14:40; 15:1-58. This commentary challenges interpreters to pay attention to argumentative designs that give cohesion to the letter as a whole.

Collins begins each section of his exposition with a literal translation that is reminiscent of the New American Standard Bible. It will serve as an exemplar for students reading 1 Corinthians in Greek for the first time. A section of Interpretation follows, in which the author provides his exposition and how the unit functions argumentatively. He takes note of epistolary and rhetorical features, and explains

Paul's thought against the backdrop of his historical situation and roots in Judaism. Collins avoids interpreting the letter in terms of later theological developments in Christianity, but this does not mean that First Corinthians is non-theological, for Paul's thought is frequently explained in terms of what the author perceives to be Paul's theological perspective. A section of Notes follows, where select words and phrases are examined and text-critical issues discussed. A bibliography of scholarly works concludes each unit.

Indexes, of 'Scripture References', of 'Classical, Jewish, and Patristic sources', of 'Modern Authors', and of 'Topics', round out the commentary.

There are a number of occasions where I would like to have seen the author explain himself more fully or push the data further. For instance, in his discussion of 7:14, he says that the non-Christian partner and children are made holy through the spouse, and that this holiness means 'belonging to God' (267). However in distinguishing this from salvation, one is left to imagine how the spouse can belong to God and be in need of salvation at the same time. Also, Collins reads the letter in terms of later Jewish rabbinic texts, but this is a practice that Pauline specialists more and more think is anachronistic. As he sees things, the form of Paul's argument is Hellenistic but the content is Jewish. If this were indeed the case, why does Collins not make an effort at least to explore the possibility that Paul was also informed by approaches to rhetoric that was indigenous to the Jewish tradition? He does, however, note Paul's midrashic expositions and admits that with respect to the appropriation of the Scriptures, Paul shares the hermeneutic of his Jewish contemporaries, that the Scriptures applied to his own situation.

For those who would teach 1 Corinthians to undergraduate and graduate students who have little in the way of formal training in Paul and Greek, this reviewer can think of no better commentary to assign as course reading than Collins' *First Corinthians*. It is, furthermore, excellently suited for clergy and lay people who are looking for a full-length, critical commentary on 1 Corinthians to assist them in interpretation and application.

Along with other subject-matter typical of introductions, the fifty-two page 'Introduction' to Anthony C. Thiselton's *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* furnishes the reader with the latest scholarly opinion on the historical reconstruction of the Pauline mission to Corinth. It also covers the apostle's socio-economic status, and the history, geography, economy, social structure, and cultural values of Roman Corinth. According to Thiselton, because 1 Corinthians addressed a church in an environment that was pluralist and acquiescent to "local" social constructions of truth' as opposed to 'trans-contextual rationality', the letter 'stands in a distinctive position of relevance to our own times' (16-17). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the history of rhetoric in Pauline studies, an explanation of how the author will employ rhetoric (subservient to Paul's theological strategies), and a justification for reading Paul's 'apostolic rhetoric'

in terms of speech-act theory. In the outworking, the Paul of 1 Corinthians is never seen as authoritarian, manipulative, or self-deceived in his use of reason. Instead, he expects his readers to evaluate the letter's content in terms of logical coherence and other canons of rational thought.

Each section of the commentary begins with Thiselton's modern English translation, which is true to the intent of the Greek, gender-neutral, and, considering Paul generally did not write in that fashion, in non-technical language. The author provides comments, sometimes brief, often extensive, to justify his translation over against other translations. In an otherwise splendid translation, his rendering of *ho adelphos* as 'our Christian brother' at 1:1 is problematic, for had Paul understood the word this way we should suppose he envisaged his movement to be a separate religion from his ancestral faith. With respect to 12:15, this reviewer asks why Thiselton chose to translate the text as an interrogative when he thinks that such is unlikely.

When it comes to his discussion of textual variants Thiselton parts company with the NA²⁷/UBS⁴ at 1:14 in omitting 'to God', at 7:18 and 21 on matters of punctuation (although not reflected in the translation), at 10:2 in reading the aorist middle rather than aorist passive, and at 14:7 in reading 'similarly' instead of 'nevertheless' (a question of Greek accenting).

The exposition of 1 Corinthians is rich in lexicography and exegetical detail, which, when combined with the translation, will make this commentary a valuable tool for translators and interpreters. At every turn the exegesis is informed by what Thiselton thinks the linguistic – there is considerable drawing from ancient writings – and theological context of the 'word, phrase, sentence, verse, or extended passage' was (xvi). Moreover, he delivers on his promise to pay 'especially close attention to the socio-historical background' (xvi). This is illustrated well in his treatment of 11:17–34. He draws on 'the dining customs and arrangements of the Roman world' (860) and thereby keeps the text anchored in history.

One will find in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* a special emphasis on Paul's theology, and how patristic, Reformation, and modern theologians have been reading and appropriating the apostle's thought. Of the modern theologians, Thiselton interacts especially with Barth, Jüngel, Moltmann, and Pannenberg. In method, then, he makes it plain that theological investigation is unshakably rooted in exegesis.

If all this were not enough, the author also puts to use his encyclopedic knowledge of hermeneutical theory. He draws, for example, on Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor to explicate the polyvalent meaning contained in the symbols of the eucharist at 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, and he discusses Paul's use of power in relation to Nietzsche and Foucault.

Thiselton also concerns himself with the contemporary relevance of the letter. He seeks to provide 'some kind of answer' 'on the varied

range of serious and responsible questions which readers of today will bring to the text', and especially 'on issues and topics of special concern today' (xvi, xvii). Thiselton's articulation of Paul's theology of proclamation, as that comes to expression in 1 Corinthians 1-2, and the apostle's philosophy of ministry are impressively handled according to their literary and historical contexts, yet it is accomplished with an eye to how they might be modeled today. His treatment of 1 Corinthians 13 is superb, as is his treatment – regardless of whether one supports his arguments in detail – of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

There are exhaustive bibliographies throughout. The commentary concludes with three comprehensive indexes, of subjects (itself twenty pages), of Modern Authors, and of Ancient sources.

As learned and detailed as the commentary is, there are however, some matters of concern. Granted, there is a two-way dialogue between the horizon of text and interpreter, yet it is this reviewer's conviction that Thiselton gives too much interpretive weight to his own horizon of understanding, to such an extent that at times his method and conclusions are skewed. To illustrate, despite his sound criticism of Bousset ('an outdated separation between "Palestinian" and "Hellenistic" compartments of culture'; 926), Thiselton himself (like Collins incidentally) all too often polarises the Hebraic and Greek backgrounds and situates Paul's thought in the former. Because of this polarisation, Hebraic-language backgrounds of words, seen, for example, in his interpretation of 'peace' at 1:3 (p. 82; might not Paul's own theology provide the interpretive key?), the anthropological terms at 2:11 (258), and 'rod of correction' at 4:21 (378), are freely drawn upon. This polarisation also manifests itself in his treatment of blocks of text. At 1 Corinthians 7, Paul's attitude towards sexuality is seen to be entirely in accordance with the OT, so the counsel to mutually abstain at 7:5 has to do with opening up time in one's schedule for prayer; it has nothing to do with avoiding an activity that might have been perceived as a hindrance to the efficacy of prayer. In his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2:11, Thiselton even goes so far as to say that if the view of human nature reflected there is dualistic (Ryle's 'ghost in the machine'), then we must be dealing with 'a quotation from a piece of Corinthian theology or a post-Pauline editorial interpolation' (257). Now if Thiselton is correct on this approach, it begs the question whether Paul's readers at Corinth, possessing little or – more realistically – no knowledge of that Hebraic language background as the interpretive key for reading Paul, would have understood the letter as Paul intended it. And if that were the case, I have to question how effective Paul was as a communicator, since he failed to take his audience into consideration. Without a doubt, Thiselton is sensitive to this problem (see 816 and 820), and he sees Paul as an effective communicator whose 'fundamental rhetorical strategy' is to start 'within a projected "world" of the addressees' (621). I agree, but I also think Thiselton has inadvertently committed the fallacy of 'unwarranted restriction of the semantic field' (to borrow from Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies*) in interpreting 1 Corinthians all too

Hebraically, much like other scholars who read Paul all too Hellenistically.

Thiselton wants an interpretation of 1 Corinthians that is not only valid for himself and his faith community, but also one that can be judged, with respect to its truth claims, by trans-contextual standards of rationality within the public domain. However by the very selection of the 'texts' that he uses to test and support his interpretation, I wonder if he has given some hostages to fortune by being open to the criticism that the final determiner of his interpretation is whether it coheres with selected texts that express his theology? To take his treatment of 1 Corinthians 12 - 14 as representative, he says, 'It is almost universally agreed that reference to modern Pentecostal and charismatic phenomena cannot be used as an exegetical test for proposed interpretations of Paul and Corinth'. Then comes the reason: 'This would be to presuppose the validity of one specific tradition of interpretation in a circular fashion' (979). But if one were to treat 'Pentecostal and charismatic phenomena' as a *text that interprets*, just as Calvin's *Institutes* and commentaries are *texts that interpret*, how is one to decide whether the other tradition of interpretation is better or worse than one's own as 'an exegetical test' for valid interpretation? Were this commentary to drift into the wrong hands, it could be used to show that validity in interpretation is circular.

To work productively with *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, it will benefit the reader to have first-hand acquaintance of Pauline scholarship. A casual glance will show just how meticulously its author has interacted with the scholarly literature on 1 Corinthians. Yet on account of its depth in exegetical and philological insight, and its breadth of historical and contemporary scholarship, Thiselton's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* functions masterfully - if comparison may be permitted - to bring up to date and stand beside that other important and indispensable exegetical and historical commentary on 1 Corinthians, the one by H.A.W. Meyer.

RECKONING WITH THE PAST IN AN ANTI-HISTORICAL AGE

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As I prepared this article I was reminded of the very first issue of the English journal, *The Evangelical Quarterly* which was issued in January 1929 as part of a concerted attempt to articulate the historic Christian faith in times that were not particularly well-suited to such an endeavour. On the back cover of that issue is a series of names of those who had agreed to write articles for the journal. Among the names are those of Professors Ridderbos and Schilder of Kampen. The presence of their names on that list speaks volumes of the consistent ecumenical desire of Reformed theologians throughout the ages to propagate their faith in an intelligent and articulate manner; of their desire to combat heresy while at the same time engaging in well-mannered dialogue with those with whom they disagree.¹ It would indeed have been very opportune for this article if the programmatic statement about the Reformed faith which that journal's first issue contained had been written by a Dutchman – and from my personal perspective, had I been editor I would certainly have arranged it thus – but, as a matter of fact, that honour was accorded to an American, Caspar Wistar Hodge. In an essay of 20 pages or so, Hodge expounded the basic principles of the Reformed faith in a context which showed both his knowledge of its historic origins and emphases and the looming crises which it faced. Indeed, his remarks on the rising Swiss star, Karl Barth, offer us insights into early orthodox responses to the new theology. More than that, they remind us that 1929 was a transition point in the history of Reformed theology, a time at when great change was about to sweep over the Reformed world. In the closing paragraph, Hodge makes the following comment:

Doubtless this Reformed Faith is suffering a decline in the theological world today. What has been termed 'Reformed spring-time in Germany' we cannot regard as the legitimate daughter of the classic Reformed Faith. In Scotland the names of William Cunningham and Thomas Crawford no longer exert the influence we wish they did. In America the influence of Charles Hodge, Robert Breckinridge, James Thornwell, Robert

¹ The term 'Reformed' is used throughout this article to refer to the tradition of theology which attempts to place itself self-consciously in the tradition of thought epitomised by the ancient creeds of the church and the confessions and catechisms of the Reformation.

Dabney, William G.T. Shedd, and Benjamin Warfield, seems largely to have vanished.

This list reads almost as a metaphorical obituary for Reformed theology, being as it is a litany of dead Reformed theologians, with Warfield – the most recently deceased – having been dead at that point for eight years. If Hodge had had a less Anglo-American focus he might also have added the names of Kuyper and Bavinck, who died in 1920 and 1921 respectively. The times they were indeed a-changing and, in retrospect, we can see that 1929, witnessing as it did the reorganisation of Princeton Theological Seminary and the end of classical confessionalism at that institution, was an historic turning-point for Reformed theology.

I shall return to Hodge's article later on. What I wish to do in this article is to argue that once again confessional Reformed theology, along with its close relatives of confessional Lutheranism and conservative evangelicalism, stands at a crucial crossroads in its history; and that the opening years of the twenty-first century present the orthodox Christian world in general with a series of serious challenges to its theology and its ecclesiastical identity. I want to make the case that the only hope for such orthodox theology, and for the churches which give visible expression to such theology, lies in the ability – or rather the willingness – of those of us who claim the name Christian to be what we always should be. That is, exponents of a counter-cultural movement which finds its norms and its purpose not in an assimilation to the wider culture but in a recovery of its own distinctiveness.

Anti-Historical Tendencies

The aspect of modern life which I wish to highlight as presenting one of the most significant threats to the Reformed faith is that of the tendency of the modern world to be anti-historical. By this, I mean the aversion of modern men and women to tradition and history as a source of wisdom and even authority. In a world where the very language that is used reflects the deep-seated suspicion of all things old and an adulation of most things new, this is hardly a contentious claim. It is, however, one which has massive significance for the church and for theology.

Before engaging in a closer analysis of this problem, we must first acknowledge that it is too easy for those who spend their lives studying ideas and concepts to overestimate the role of self-conscious intellectuals in creating this anti-historical atmosphere. When students, in the rarefied atmosphere of university libraries, read of anti-historical tendencies many instinctively reach for their textbooks of anti-historical philosophies and the primers of deconstructive method. Yet to do so is to expose themselves to the error of seeing the problem of the importance of history merely as a crisis in intellectual method and philosophy. It is certainly to be seen as such in certain contexts. But as so often happens in the history of ideas, a problem which appears to manifest itself as primarily philosophical and intellectual can have roots which lie deep in the wider cultural milieu.

We must be aware that we live in a world where, for most people, designer labels, credit cards and the Pill are of far more immediate and decisive significance than the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci or the musings of Michel Foucault. In other words, to understand the world in which we live, we must not only engage in intellectual genealogy in order to establish the philosophical roots of the modern world but we must also broaden our analysis to engage with the wider sociology of knowledge. Thus what follows will not be confined solely to the history of ideas as traditionally conceived but will also look at the broader picture of society.

The intellectual roots of the modern anti-historical tendency can be found in the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Whether one looks at the continental or at the Anglo-American tradition, it is quite clear that the rhetoric of the new and the novel quickly becomes associated with the improved and the better. While the last thing of which a theologian in the sixteenth century or before wished to be accused was novelty or innovation, in the Enlightenment era an iconoclastic view of history and tradition was seen as part and parcel of the freeing of humankind from bondage and darkness. Thus, Voltaire, Kant and company were happy to understand themselves as taking part in an 'enlightenment' and to surround their work with the language of liberty, while dismissing their predecessors as scholastic, obscurantist, and inhabiting the dark ages. This intellectual tendency toward the exaltation of the new at the expense of the old was massively reinforced with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. At this time new modes of production, urbanisation, and the rise to dominance of the middle classes led to the fundamental reshaping of society and its values. In an apocalyptic passage in *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx, writing in the heat of the Industrial Revolution, describes the changes he sees around him:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society ... All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.²

Thus the preference of the Enlightenment for the new and the novel at the level of ideas found its social counterpart in the changes driven by the Industrial Revolution, and its concrete expression in the changed economic and social relations in society. All of this militated against the older, classical notion that history and tradition were important sources of positive wisdom.

² Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings I* (London: Penguin, 1973), 70.

Looking around today it is quite clear that these anti-historical tendencies have reached something of a crescendo in the Western societies of the present time. The advanced consumerism of the West promotes novelty as an absolute virtue. Marx would no doubt have seen this as the result of capitalism's need to be constantly creating new products and new markets for itself. One may hesitate to go all the way with the Marxist analysis of the situation in purely material terms but one cannot deny some truth to such an argument. It is, after all, crucial that we do not wear yesterday's fashions, sport yesterday's labels, or listen to yesterday's music lest we be labelled, not so much 'reactionary' as 'square' or 'out of touch'. And who says that this is the case? – The people whose financial security depends upon the sale of more and more of their products. In addition, the cult of youth is evidenced in everything from the domination of adverts aimed at young people on television to the plethora of available anti-ageing products. The underlying ideology would seem to be clear: the young, the fresh, the new is good; the old, the aged, the traditional is bad.

This anti-historical commitment of modern consumerist society finds its ideological counterpart in the some of the strands of that amorphous group of philosophies which go under the over-used name of postmodernism. Ever since Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, secular thinking has been aware of the specious nature of claims to objectivity in all realms, including the historical. Even within a modernist framework the need for a hermeneutic of suspicion in the study of history comes across clearly in the work of a traditional Marxist historian such as Eric Hobsbawm. In the introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, (a collection of essays on the creation and applications of various traditions), along with accompanying spurious historical pedigrees, Hobsbawm notes three overlapping uses of types of tradition since the Industrial Revolution. Some traditions establish or symbolise the social cohesion of certain groups; some establish or legitimise institutions or certain power relations; and some inculcate value systems, patterns of behaviour, and social conventions in the interest of socialisation and social stability.³ What underlies each of these three types is the manipulation – or even 'creation' – of history and historical narrative for some ulterior political purpose, either of social control or of legitimisation.

What is a useful critical tool in the hands of a traditional Marxist becomes an utterly destructive and self-defeating weapon in the hands of those thinkers who have pushed the hermeneutic of suspicion to its logical conclusions. In the world of postmodern history, the point is neither to *reconstruct* the past, as in the work of tradition positivist historians, nor to *construct* it as in the work of traditional Marxists, but rather to *deconstruct* it. It is to lay bare the hidden agendas which underlie all historical narratives and to ask

³ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 9.

the key question again and again, who owns history?⁴ For the ownership of any given historical narrative is intimately linked to the question of who wields power in the present. Hence, the last two decades have seen a ferocious reaction against the traditional narrative of history that focused on Europe and on white heterosexual males. This has been reinforced by a consequent growth in histories from other perspectives, for example those of women, blacks and gays. Perhaps the most famous and articulate exponent of this rejection of traditional history was the late French intellectual, Michel Foucault. As Richard Evans summarises the position of Foucault on history:

History [for Foucault] was a fiction of narrative order imposed on the irreducible chaos of events in the interests of the exercise of power. And if one version of the past was more widely accepted than others, this was not because it was nearer the truth, or conformed more closely to 'the evidence', but because its exponents had more power within the historical profession, or within society in general, than its critics.⁵

For such as Foucault, therefore, histories do not offer explanations of how we come to be where we are in the traditional sense of the word; rather they offer bids for power, attempts to legitimise particular institutions or attitudes in the present. Thus, historical narratives, along with other attempts to provide all-embracing explanations of reality or to make truth-claims, must be unmasked and exposed as the bids for power that they really are. As the Enlightenment downgraded history and tradition by stigmatising them with the language of obscurantism and reaction, and as consumerism has made space for history only as a marketing opportunity in the shape of theme parks and nostalgia shops, so much recent philosophy has labelled history as yet another surreptitious attempt to exert power under the guise of objective truth. Taken together, the voracious appetite for novelty and innovation that marks advanced consumerist societies, and the inveterate cynicism of the modern world, whether expressed in popular political apathy or sophisticated postmodern theories, have proved to be a potent anti-historical, anti-traditional combination.

The Impact on the Church

This article is not intended as a sketch map of contemporary society. The purpose is to address the very serious question of where and how orthodox, Christian theology as classically conceived, can speak to this day and this generation and why, therefore, time should be

⁴ For a survey and discussion of postmodern approaches to history by a historian who is profoundly influenced by Michel Foucault and Hayden White, see Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997). For a vigorous restatement of a modernist position, see Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta, 1997).

⁵ Evans, *In Defence of History*, 195-96.

spent studying it at the start of the third millennium. Before a positive agenda can be offered, however, some time needs to be spent assessing the impact of the various anti-historical trends, noted above, on the Christian church. If society at large is losing its sense of history, and if the academy is launching a full-frontal assault upon the very possibility of history, how is this affecting the church?

I want to suggest that anti-historical trends of the pragmatic, consumer society of the West have elicited two differing but equally inadequate and, ultimately, anti-historical, responses from the church in the West. First, part of the church has itself enthusiastically embraced these tendencies and has abandoned its self-conscious position within a historical tradition, leaving itself somewhat rootless. Second, part of the church has attempted to grasp the significance of history once again by seeking traditions to enrich its spirituality, but has done this in a manner which is historically fallacious and ultimately a symptom of precisely the same consumerism which has shaped the first response.

To take the first point, the evidence of a collapse in historical rootedness is evident for all to see. We can start by looking at the liturgical practices of the church. By 'liturgical practice' I do not mean specific formal liturgies such as the Book of Common Prayer. Rather I use the term to refer to the broader linguistic and ritualistic shape of Christian worship: the kind of songs that are sung, prayers that are prayed, and sermons that are preached. When looked at in these broad terms, the last twenty or thirty years have seen a veritable transformation of Christian practice, with many churches abandoning traditional hymnody and worship service structures in favour of songs that are more contemporary and service styles that are more conducive to modern sensibilities. More often than not, these changes are implemented with more than a passing reference to the need to attract young people to church – a most legitimate aim but also perhaps a significant modification of the emphases contained in the Great Commission where the category of age receives no specific mention. It is also interesting that a clear connection is being made between attracting youth and breaking decisively with the past in key areas. The ideology of consumerism, with its emphasis on novelty, youth markets etc., clearly lies just below the surface.

To use language that is familiar to a consumer society, no one should make the mistake of seeing the move to contemporary praise songs and service styles as simply a straightforward, value-neutral repackaging or rebranding of a traditional product. After all, at a basic level, language and worship forms offer significant lines of continuity with the past, a past which inevitably shapes our identity in the present. This is seen quite clearly in the Bible's own teaching, whereby the Passover is instituted as a means of commemorating God's mighty act of salvation of ancient Israel. The ceremony was to be repeated annually as a reminder to the Israelites both of what God had done in the past and, consequently, who they were in the present. The historical connection is underlined by the reference in Exodus 12:26-27, where God instructs the Israelites what to say

when their children question them about why the Passover is celebrated. The same is true in the Christian church: connection with the past is vital. Of course, the Bible and the sacraments provide us with the basic, vital historical connection to God's saving action in Christ; but there is also a wealth of theological and church tradition which, while not authoritative in the way that Scripture is, is yet extremely useful for maintaining the knowledge of who Christians are, through relating them to the past; and one important avenue for this is the church's current liturgical practices. The language and the practices of the Christian community, tried and tested over the centuries, while not in themselves absolutely sacrosanct, should not be casually abandoned or lightly cast to one side. They are an important element in the identity of the church; and to break decisively with them on the purely pragmatic grounds of enhanced marketability risks the displacement of the church's historic identity.

Of course, Protestantism has always had the potential of providing fertile soil for a theology and a church culture which disparages tradition. The notion of scriptural authority as articulated by the Reformers and by subsequent Reformed and Lutheran thinkers inevitably subordinated church tradition to the Bible. It created a situation where tradition could, where necessary, be abandoned. They regarded the Bible as the sole source of revelation and that inevitably meant Protestants were far more critical and selective in their approach to the church's dogmatic tradition than was typically the case in medieval Catholicism. Nevertheless the Reformers and the subsequent tradition never intended this notion of scriptural authority to act as the means for a wholesale rejection of the church's theological traditions in themselves; they saw it simply as a critical tool by which those traditions could be continuously critiqued and reformed.

While there were groups within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which argued for just such a rejection of all tradition on the basis of a radical biblicism, it is most significant that these groups were not part of the magisterial Reformation and were repudiated by the mainstream. The most famous and influential of these were the Socinians. The Socinians originated in Italy but flourished in Poland. They rejected even the doctrines of the trinity and the incarnation on the grounds of a literalist hermeneutic combined with an emphatic rejection of metaphysics within theology.

Here there are obvious parallels with the sophisticated theological-historical work of later liberals such as Adolf von Harnack, but at a less sophisticated level, the Socinian understanding of scriptural authority is alive and well within the evangelical church today, fuelled by the very anti-historical and innovative forces of modern western consumerism. At the level of ideology, it can be seen in the work of the so-called 'openness of God' movement associated with such as Clark Pinnock and Greg Boyd – a movement which, incidentally, shares significant ground with the work of von Harnack as well as to early Socinianism in its opposition to the alleged

distorting metaphysics of the orthodox Christian tradition, patristic, medieval and Reformation, on the grounds of a radical scripture principle. Thus, their god has limited knowledge of the future and continually changes in relation to his creation. Given the amount of metaphysical language deployed in patristic trinitarian discussions, we may well ultimately find that this Socinian approach to theology will place God's trinitarian nature in danger. Maybe this will not happen, but, as this has always been the result of such anti-metaphysical crusades in the past, the omens are not good.

At a more mundane level, the application of this crude Scripture principle can be seen in the everyday life and practices of evangelical churches around the world where cries of 'No creed but the Bible', preaching which fails to draw biblical exegesis into theological synthesis, and a disregard for historic patterns of worship and confession, are offered in all seriousness as examples of fidelity to the authority of Scripture. The underlying assumption seems to be that the Protestant notion of scriptural authority can only exist with an iconoclastic attitude to tradition, a position the Reformers themselves would have repudiated. This kind of neo-Socinianism, whether at the level of ideology or of practice, is one response of the church to the challenge of modernity and consumerism.

So much for the first type of church response to modern anti-historical tendencies. The second response is, on the surface at least, almost the exactly the opposite. This response is that of recovering earlier Christian tradition as a means of rediscovering a more authentic spirituality than the church in the West has generally offered. The most influential example of this in Britain is the so-called rediscovery over the last two decades of Celtic Christianity and the spirituality of the Celtic churches in the early Middle Ages. In a veritable cornucopia of books, the Celtic way has been promoted in church circles as the recovery of a previous lost dimension of church tradition. The Celtic way is promoted as more in tune with nature, as less obsessed with the theme of sin, as offering a spirituality which appeals to the whole person, and as being more rooted in images than in words. All of this is seen as giving it a superior value to that of sin-obsessed Western Augustinianism, particularly as this found its ultimate expression in the word-centred, cerebral religion of the Reformation. The Reformation, as the birthing-room of modernity and Enlightenment, of imperialism, of individualism (whatever that means), and ultimately industrialisation is seen as the ultimate theological disaster and the source of many of the modern world's ills.

Yet this 'Celtic revival', while superficially appearing to represent a return to history and tradition, is on the whole simply a theological manifestation of the same phenomenon we see in society around us. It is an eclectic and nostalgic appropriation of a pseudo-history which supplies the church with a specious historical authenticity. To apply the categories of Hobsbawm, the church, having lost sight of its real historical roots, has invented traditions for the purpose of socialization and legitimation in the present. Within the mythology of the Celtic Christianity movement, the ideal of the Celt functions for

today's adherent of Celtic Christianity in a manner similar to that in which the ideal of the 'noble savage' did for the generation of Rousseau.

As to the historical integrity of the movement, this has been exposed as a complete sham in a book by Donald Meek, Professor of Celtic, at Aberdeen University.⁶ He points out that none of the high-profile advocates of Celtic spirituality know any of the Celtic languages, and so have no direct access to the sources. He analyses the cultural history of the movement, with its highly selective approach to Celtic matters and exposes it as a historical con-trick. Indeed, his work is embarrassing in the way that a badly-matched boxing fight is embarrassing. In the end, one almost feels sorry for his opponents because they have taken such a merciless and effective beating from a man who actually reads the sources and knows the history.

What Meek demonstrates so well is that Celtic Christianity is more akin to the New Age movement in terms of its rejection of the literary in favour of the visual, its obsession with ecological issues, and its desire to reject certain aspects (though by no means all) of Western culture. Indeed, one area where the new Celtic Christians reveal their Western, consumerist colours so effectively is in the matter of ascetic practices. The rigorous penitential system which was one of the hallmarks uniting Welsh, Scottish, and Irish churches, is conspicuous only by its almost total absence from the modern Celtic Christianity movement.⁷ Like pampered Hollywood stars who proclaim their adherence to Buddhism, and meditate daily, yet continue to live lives of massive consumption and self-indulgence, most modern Celtic Christians appear to take the bits of the tradition which appeal and leave the rest, unpurchased, on the shelf.

As such, it is scarcely the authentic recovery of historical tradition which it claims to be, but is rather the invention of tradition by a culture which finds itself rootless and disillusioned. Such a culture needs to invent a history for itself that will meet its contemporary concerns. It is, therefore, only superficially different from the outright rejection of tradition that can be seen in many evangelical quarters. It uses language, names and symbols which would appear to give it historical integrity; yet it does so in a manner that is driven not by the sources but by the romantic vision of certain people in the modern world.

In sketch form this is the Western European world of today. Christianity is no longer the dominant cultural force which it once was; in other words, we live in a post-Christian, pluralistic society. The church itself has in large part abandoned its historic pedigree, as is evidenced by the worship songs that are sung, by the kind of things spoken in church and by the widespread ignorance of church history and tradition. Furthermore, where tradition is held in high-

⁶ Donald Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 2000).

⁷ See Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 95 ff.

esteem, as in the Celtic Christianity movement, it is often done in a way that is both self-consciously iconoclastic towards the Western tradition in general and the Reformation tradition in particular. With this in mind some will ask: why study orthodox, historic Christian theology, particularly in its classical Reformed form, at the start of the third millennium? I would like to reply to this by proposing two theses.

One: the Reformed tradition takes seriously the biblical teaching that God is primarily a speaking God.

It almost goes without saying that the Reformed church originated in a movement of words. The Bible translations, the pamphlets, the sermons, and even the changes to church architecture which the Reformed church embodied, all speak volumes about the increasing significance of words in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While social and cultural historians would no doubt root this in a complex of historical forces, from the invention of the printing press to rising literacy rates, burgeoning trade, changing fiscal policies, and increases in bureaucracy and record-keeping, for those who take self-understanding and even theology seriously as categories of significance to historians, the conviction among the Reformed that God is a God who speaks must also be allowed to play its part in the analysis. The importance of the notions of command and, above all promise to the Protestant message, immediately meant that Protestantism was inevitably going to be an irreducibly verbal phenomenon. One simply cannot command or promise by mere symbols, as was made so clear in the Reformers' insistence that the sacraments could not be administered except in the congregation and in the context of the clear and comprehensible preaching of the word.

In addition to this very obvious point, we might also make reference to the careful articulation of the relationship between the Word of God conceived as the second person of the Trinity, and the Word of God as Scripture, both of which identifications are commonplace in Reformed theology. The emphasis upon God the Father working by the Word through the Holy Spirit as the ontic source of our knowledge of God was not seen as standing in any way opposed to the emphasis on the inscripturated Word as the cognitive ground for theology. God and words were thus theologically inseparable in the Reformed account of revelation. This simple point finds biblical warrant in the consistent scriptural testimony to God as the God who speaks, who uses words in order to address mankind and to reveal himself to mankind, whether in the context of Mount Sinai or of the Mount of Olives. The Christian God is the God who speaks, who communicates and relates to his people in a manner which is inextricably bound up with speech and with words.

At this point it is necessary to highlight two current trends, one broadly cultural, the other more narrowly intellectual, which strike at the very heart of this notion of a speaking God. The first is the general shift within our culture from the literary or the verbal to the

visual and the iconic. As the Reformation, and the Reformed theology which it nurtured, were in part the products of a cultural shift from the visual to the verbal, we now stand at a point in history where the cultural pendulum is swinging back somewhat in the opposite dimension. While the sixteenth century had its printing press and its book industry, today there is television and, more recently, the internet. While it is true that these latter media involve words and language, the emphasis or the dominant mode of communication within both is that of the visual image. To give examples is easy: one can cite the US presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon in 1960, where radio listeners thought Nixon had won while television viewers gave the result to Kennedy. The reason? Kennedy *looked* cool, suntanned and physically prepossessing while Nixon, although he *sounded* more impressive, was pale and gaunt, having just returned from hospital. If the television could exert such ominous power in 1960, how much more significant is it today, in a world where the most powerful men and women in the world are, with little doubt, those who control the giant global television industry.

This cultural shift raises huge questions for the church and for theology. For a start, the church has to face the perennial question of how its message can be communicated in the surrounding culture. Such a question has always involved some form of dialogue with and accommodation to the wider context, even if for some, this has only meant that the word must be preached in a language society can understand. The major question that is posed by our increasingly visual culture is: can the gospel be communicated in a more visual manner?

There are many who answer yes to this question – and do so with an unnerving passion. To return to the interest in Celtic spirituality, this is a movement that lays far more stress upon the emotions and upon symbols and aesthetics than upon the intellect and upon dogma. It is the classic spirituality for the visual age, with its mysticism, its artwork and its disdain for classic doctrinal formulations. But it is not Celtic spirituality that needs to be focused on here. What we need to be concerned about is the replacement of preaching and doctrine in many generic evangelical churches with drama, with so-called liturgical dance, with feelings, emotions and mystical experiences, and, sometimes, with elaborate sacramental ceremonies which make the Catholic Church look positively Puritan by comparison. They all speak of the transformation of Protestantism from a word-based movement into something more concerned with aesthetics of one form or another.

This is where a thorough grounding in the classic Reformed or evangelical faith is so important at the level of church leadership. If the central notion of the God who speaks is more than simply a social construct, an act of cultural projectionism, then the movement against words in the church – whether words in preaching, prayer, or doctrine – is a movement with profound theological implications. It is not simply a rebellion against words in themselves; it is also a rebellion against the God who speaks them.

Yet it seems that the argument is being won within the churches by the advocates of the new aesthetic Protestantism almost by default. Of all the forms of Protestantism to emerge from the Reformation, that of the Reformed tradition is the one which reflected at most length upon the notion of the God who speaks and worked out the implications of this for the church's theology and practice. It is thus crucial at this time that the Reformed church should take the lead in critiquing current aesthetic trends within evangelicalism and reasserting once more the centrality of God and of God's speech to the church at large. I would suggest that Reformed theology, with its rich tradition of careful reflection upon the notion of the God who speaks, is superbly placed to address these issues with the seriousness and the biblical fidelity which they demand.

The war against words, however, is not simply being conducted at the level of popular cultural trends. It has also received significant intellectual expression in the various schools of literary criticism and social science which emerged from France in the nineteen-sixties and which now hold sway within many universities and seminaries in Europe and North America. While any generalised description of these schools is bound to be simplistic, it is accurate to say that one characteristic which many share is the notion that meaning is ultimately determined by the reader or reading community and not by the author or the texts themselves. The so-called 'death of the author' is something one sees frequently trumpeted from the lecterns of lecture theatres, books of literary theory, and the pages of influential literary journals.

In a significant study of such theories from a Christian point of view, Kevin Vanhoozer has argued that the death of God in the sixties became the death of the author in the nineties. In other words, he sees the attack on the authority of authors and texts as being, at root, a theological problem, a rebellion against God. Certainly, the case seems compelling. If Dostoevsky was correct in seeing the non-existence of God as thrusting man into the abyss of ethical nihilism, then Vanhoozer would seem to be correct in seeing the death of God as thrusting man into the abyss of epistemological nihilism. In other words, the speaking God is that which gives meaning to all life, whether it be moral codes or texts.⁸

Once again, this is where the Reformed faith is singularly well-placed to meet the challenge. While there is considerable evidence that many within the broader evangelical constituency are flirting with aspects of postmodern literary theory, though often in a highly derivative and simplified form, Vanhoozer's warning ought to be heeded. While the days when the meaning of texts could be regarded as generally clear and self-evident are long gone – and the Reformed, with their understanding of the epistemological impact of sin should have no problem with this idea – the notion that communities or readers create meaning is highly dangerous and ultimately thrusts

⁸ See Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998).

God back into the realm of the noumenal, incapable of communicating with his people. Once again, it is here that the Reformed emphasis upon the God who speaks to humanity, the God who accommodates himself to human capacity, is both counter-cultural in terms of wider trends but also crucial in terms of the future survival of the church. Christians have a God who speaks; and that has profound implications for the manner in which they are able to interact with and appropriate contemporary trends in epistemology.

Two: The Reformed Faith appreciates the beneficial aspects of history and tradition.

The suspicion and disdain that characterises much of the modern attitude to history and tradition was noted above. At the level of mass culture, the impact of consumerism as generating a continual need for the new and the novel was noted. At the level of philosophy, a brief look was given at the approach to history of those such as Michel Foucault, who regard the writing of history as being about power and manipulation, in the present as much as in the past, rather than about being a quest for the 'truth', whatever that might be.

There is a level at which the Reformed can agree with such as Foucault. The emphasis in the confessional documents upon total depravity should alert the church to the fact that history and tradition, like everything else, can be written, manipulated, and used in a manner which is profoundly abusive.⁹ Indeed, there is a sense in which one could read Foucault's writing as perhaps the greatest reflection upon the significance of total depravity for historical writing which there is. Where Foucault errs, along with many Marxists, is in his failure to see that history and tradition can also be profoundly helpful, even liberating, to humanity. The assumption of Foucault is that all history is about power, about classifying and marginalising, about promoting a 'them' and 'us' mentality that is based upon power relations. For Marxists, tradition and history are too often ways of cultivating false consciousness, of maintaining class distinctions and therefore of keeping the poor in their subordinate position in the economic foodchain. For both Foucault and Marxists, therefore, it is imperative to unmask the hidden and manipulative agendas which underlie the writing of the history of the maintenance of traditions. Christians too should be in the game of unmasking the ungodly agendas and bids for power that lurk around every corner – even, or perhaps, especially, in the church; but they must also be aware that, as Christians, their attitude to history should be more nuanced than Foucault and company.

⁹ By 'total depravity' I do not mean that everybody is as bad as they possibly can be but that every aspect of humanity is corrupted to some degree by the Fall. Thus, epistemology becomes in part a moral issue and all claims to mere, absolute objectivity are rendered false.

First, they must question the blanket assumption that is found in this kind of secular philosophy that all history and tradition is, by definition, manipulative and abusive. This can be done indirectly by applying the same yardstick to the Marxists and the disciples of Foucault as they apply to others. They could be charged with writing history that is simply ideology dressed up as truth, that is subtly manipulative, that simply marginalises and disenfranchises those whom they wish to subjugate for their own ends; but they would probably have little difficulty agreeing with this claim and little would have been achieved beyond showing the futile nihilism of these approaches when consistently applied across the board. Relativising the relativisers ultimately calls forth cries of little more than 'So what?' from those watching on the sidelines. Far better to point to the profoundly disorienting cultural and social effects which the collapse of history and tradition have brought in their wake in recent years. As historical ignorance and anti-traditionalism has increased with the rise of Western consumerism, society has not witnessed any great liberation; rather, there has been the creation of a desperate and deep-seated craving for precisely the kind of identity which history and tradition are capable of supplying. Thus, for example, we have the rise of new, militant nationalisms and the invention of the pseudo-historical New Age spiritualities. The removal and destruction of traditions and histories which actually have some roots in the real past have frequently not liberated humanity but rather left aching voids which have been filled with synthetic traditions and histories which are indeed truly the invention of those who promote them; and arguably these have proved far more manipulative than many which have gone before.¹⁰ Multinational consumerism reduces all of life to a bland and rootless present, and, as humanity finds itself free-floating and rootless, it desperately strives to create (rather than rediscover) for itself a history and a network of tradition which will give it value and identity. The death of history and the death of tradition has not proved to be a liberating experience; it has merely created a hole into which any old fairy-story can now be fitted.

The first reason for the importance of the study of the Reformed faith in this context is, therefore, that it does provide the church with a history and a tradition upon which to build its identity and understand its place in the wider world. The Reformed church, with its creeds, confessions, catechisms, and theological tradition provides its people with the historical continuity for which so many people crave today and which is so crucial if they are not to be blown here and there by every puff of doctrine or every passing fad. Unlike alternative traditions, such as that of Celtic spirituality, however, our tradition is defined by public documents, creeds, confessions, and historical movements, not by romantic speculation about what might have happened, speculation which speaks more of contemporary

¹⁰ Along similar lines, though from an avowedly Marxist perspective, Terry Eagleton has criticised postmodernism precisely on the grounds that it is profoundly politically disempowering: see Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

aspirations than actions in real time-space history. Of course, the past can be romanticised and people can become idolatrous with regard to traditions. This is a most serious and ever-present danger, and one has only to think of the way that the Reformed faith has been used in the past to realise that it can as easily be a means of oppression as of liberation. However the danger at this particular point in time would seem rather to be that of thoughtless iconoclasm rather than of rampant idolatry. This is not to say that the church is simply in the business of maintaining its tradition for the sake of tradition and of accepting uncritically all that the tradition contains. That would be to raise tradition to the level of revelation, the very thing against which our Reformation forefathers reacted so strongly. It is rather to argue that our tradition provides us with a place to stand and a starting-point from which we can assess the world around us, ourselves, and even our own tradition. By so doing, we can acknowledge in all humility that, while the church in the past may indeed have made mistakes, informed reflection on that past is nevertheless crucial to any intelligent engagement with the present. I would suggest that the critical appropriation of church tradition which we see in the best theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in fact provides a fine model of how to relate to history and tradition today.

This is also where the catholicity of the Reformed faith offers great opportunities. A careful reading of the great Reformed theologians of the past indicates that Reformed thought is far from sectarian in its spirit. The great trinitarian creeds of the early church provide the backdrop to the tradition; and those theologians who lie behind the confessional standards of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while standing firm on their beliefs and adamantly refusing to reduce all doctrine to the level of *adiaphora*, yet interacted with all shades of theological opinion and still provide both a theology and a pattern of engagement which seeks to do justice to the wider theological scene in a manner which is articulate rather than obscurantist. An appreciation of history, and of the doctrinal struggles of the church throughout history, are surely crucial to the avoidance of a narrow sectarianism and self-righteousness in the present. If the church capitulates to the anti-historical forces at work around us, it is exposed to all manner of unfortunate consequences, not least the potential of repeating many of the theological errors of the past.

While this is to argue for the general usefulness of history and tradition, note must also be taken of the fact that for the Reformed, the problem with the relentless assault on history and tradition, at both intellectual and popular levels, also has a profound theological dimension. Our understanding of God is that he is a God who works through history, and whose identity and purposes are bound up with the way he has acted in times past. This is an important biblical truth, as any number of references in the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Prophets or the New Testament tell us. We cannot simply accept either the radical approach to history and tradition which reduces it all to the level of a power struggle, nor can we opt for the innovative and creative approach which is found in Celtic spirituality, which

simply creates the past it wishes to discover. History means something because God is its author; and at root, the attacks on history from both the academy and modern popular culture are profoundly theological because they are attempts once again to push God out of the big picture. They may not deny his existence; but they effectively deny him any positive relation with his creation. That is at best Deism.

This is why Reformed theology is so important. With the centrality of the notion of covenant to its theological scheme, the Reformed faith places the God who works in history right at the heart of its confession. At the level of theology, this is surely as crucial to holding the Bible together as a theological unity as is the notion of the one God who speaks in the Bible. It is one of the strengths of Reformed theology that it sees the biblical history as witnessing to the actions of a single God who is committed to the salvation of his people through the Messiah who marks the culmination of the history of his covenant people. While there are manifest problems in extending this approach to our reading of post-biblical history, the notion of covenant, the place of families and children within our understanding of the church, and the centrality of the sacraments to our worship, all reinforce the importance of continuity with God's saving actions throughout history. As soon as sight is lost of this historical dimension to God's action, then there will be a tendency towards mysticism and individualism and all sight is lost of the real significance of the church as the covenant community of the God who rules over history and works within history. We will also lose sight of the importance of theological and practical humility in the Christian life: so much of today's attitude to the past is iconoclastic; so little of it reflects the attitude of people like Paul in the Pastoral letters. Acknowledging that God works in history means that we acknowledge that he has worked in the past; and acknowledging that he has worked in the past means that we acknowledge that we may not ignore that past as if we today had all the answers. In short, without God as its author, history becomes meaningless, as do the lives of all those who make up history. All that is left is the unchained and autonomous individual in the present. The way we worship becomes whatever suits us here and now; and our theology becomes whatever we think the Bible means or whatever the latest scholarly consensus tells us it means. In short, we lose any perspective from which to be self-critical.

We might add, finally, that when we lose sight of God's work in the past we may easily also lose sight of his work in the future, of the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith. Once we neglect the past, we will also just as surely fail to understand the significance of the present in relation to the future. This is one of the reasons why many evangelical churches have an over-realised eschatology. The failure to understand the significance of history in God's purposes has led to a failure to understand the balance that exists in the Bible regarding the now/not yet tension in relation to the coming of the kingdom. This provides fertile soil for, at the trivial level, nothing but triumphalist worship songs with no room for Christian suffering, and, at the more openly dubious level, prosperity

teaching, total healing movements, and all manner of groups who fail to come to real grips with the reality and the problem of evil in the present day. Such over-realised eschatology is itself another function of a consumerist, credit-card culture that wants everything now, and will not wait until tomorrow. The disastrous pastoral consequences of such teaching, not to mention its theological inadequacies, are visible round about for all to see. By contrast, Reformed theology, by giving due place to history in God's purposes, points beyond the present to a brighter future in eschatological glory and thus does justice to the biblical tension involved in living in the world between Pentecost and the Parousia.

Why, then, should we study the Reformed faith today? The answer is because it offers the most effective and biblical antidote to the forces around us which most threaten Christianity. These are Western materialist consumerism, and its concomitant ideologies of the superiority of the new and the rejection of the old. The cultural war around us is, at a very deep level, a war against history and thus, against the God who works in and through history. In this context, the Reformed faith sets forth the theological importance of history with supreme clarity; it also offers us a framework for doing justice not just to biblical history but also to church tradition.

Times are hard for Reformed traditionalists, not least because of precisely this current questioning of the value of history. But they should not lose heart – if God has worked in the past, then he will work in the present and in the future. I thus leave the last words to Caspar Wistar Hodge, who concluded the essay alluded to earlier in the following way:

[T]hough in theological circles and in ecclesiastical courts the leaders of Reformed thought find scant recognition, wherever humble souls catch the vision of God in His glory and bow in humility and adoration before Him, trusting for salvation only in His grace and power, there you have the essence of the Reformed Faith, and God in His providence may yet raise up a leader of religious thought who shall once again make the Reformed Faith a power in the theological world. If and when this happens we may confidently expect a true revival of religion in the Protestant world.¹¹

¹¹ Hodge, *Evangelical Quarterly*, January 1929, pp. 23-24.

BETWEEN BUKURU AND NEW YORK: REFLECTIONS ON ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY AND WESTERN VALUES

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This article was first given as a lecture at the Theological
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For a few days before the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon building in Washington, a few British newspapers carried brief reports of civil unrest in the city of Jos in Northern Nigeria. One report mentioned that the trouble had spread to the nearby town of Bukuru, hence my title. However, these reports were very brief, indicating only that a number of people had been killed and that the Nigerian army had been ordered into the area to restore order.

On 11th September 2001, Jos disappeared from the coverage of the Western media, much as four passenger aircraft vanished from the radar screens in America on that fateful day. Thereafter TV news bulletins were filled with horrifying images: passenger aircraft deliberately flown into buildings packed with civilians; people throwing themselves from windows above one-hundred storeys high to avoid incineration; and, most horrifying of all, the slow implosion of those towers with God alone knows how many people inside them. For days afterwards people in the United Kingdom could talk about little else, sharing a sense of bewilderment and incomprehension and a nagging fear that if fanatical terrorists were capable of this deed, they surely would stop at nothing in their attempt to destroy the Western world.

At first glance there might seem to be no connections between the events in America and those in Jos and Bukuru in Nigeria a few days earlier. However there are certain parallels which I wish to explore in this article.

In the first place, there is *a commonality of human suffering and loss*. Clearly, the events on the Nigerian plateau cannot compare with those in America in terms of scale and the number of lives lost, but (contrary to those brief newspaper reports in Britain) it is now clear that the loss and suffering resulting from the troubles in Jos was considerable. In fact we may ask whether the differential coverage the Western media gives to events in the world suggests that human life is valued differently between the continents? One paragraph on an inside page for the deaths of hundreds of Nigerians compared to saturation coverage for weeks after the disaster in America. It is important for Christians to affirm that God makes no such distinctions; all human life is precious and the tears of widows and orphans matter to him, whether shed in New York or Jos, or by Christians or Muslims.

Secondly, the events in America and Nigeria have in common the fact that *they have shaken peoples' self-confidence and stimulated serious thought and discussion on some fundamental issues*. People not usually inclined to ask philosophical questions have found themselves wondering what has happened to the world? In the West the disaster was followed by a remarkable outburst of discussion, reflected in newspaper articles of unusual depth and honesty. One newspaper somewhat sensationally devoted an issue to this discussion, calling it an 'Apocalypse Special'. Journalists used biblical terminology to suggest that we might indeed be facing the end of the world. In a rather more sober vein, writers tried to wrestle with the disturbing question as to what had created the depths of bitterness and human alienation that could make a deed as terrible as this one possible? The sheer magnitude of the horror in New York resulted in the resurfacing of the most fundamental concerns regarding human life as previously unchallenged axioms were shown to be inadequate if not patently false.

Listening to conversations in Bukuru at that time it was evident that the troubles there also triggered serious discussions. The Plateau State of Nigeria promotes itself as the 'Home of Peace and Tourism' but in the light of the violence recently witnessed there, clearly something more than a nice slogan was needed to hold society together. Jos found itself asking the same kind of questions raised in divided cities around the world – cities like Sarejevo, Belfast, Bradford in Northern England, Jerusalem, Los Angeles and Johannesburg. Can people belonging to different cultures, different ethnic groups, and different faiths live together in a single state, or is separation the only way to survive? Is the model of the secular state now dead, destroyed by a rising tide of religious fundamentalisms, each insisting on their own unchallenged superiority and right to rule? And in Jos, as in America, the shock of recent events prompts even deeper, existential questions concerning both Christian and human identity in a world riven by cultural and religious tensions.

However, the third parallel is both the most important and the most difficult to discuss. In the tragedies in America and Nigeria there was what we may call *a Muslim connection*. This inevitably gives rise to questions concerning the nature of Islam and, in particular, its relationship with the modern world. It is very important at this point to emphasise that the Muslim involvements in America and Nigeria were not of the same kind and we must notice the difference between the overt terrorism in New York and the far more complex situation in Jos.¹ Nonetheless, both events have exposed the fault lines

¹ The complexity of the crisis triggered in Nigeria by the introduction of Sharia law on the part of Muslim-dominated northern states is recognised by Bee Debki in an account of the outbreak of violence in the city of Kaduna in February, 2000. While the author regards Sharia as unconstitutional he recognises that the troubles cannot be explained simply in terms of religious conflict, but that ethnic and economic factors played an important part in these tragic disturbances. *The Tragedy of Sharia – Kaduna Crisis From An Eyewitness* (no publication details).

which run between Islamic and Western (or Western-influenced) cultures and it is precisely this aspect that I wish to explore further in this article.

Following the destruction of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon building, both unarguably planned and executed by Muslim terrorists, a wave of anti-Islamic feeling swept through the Western world. In both Britain and America mosques were defaced with hostile graffiti and Muslim women were spat upon in the streets. Far-right political groups, whose leaders had already been stoking the fires of anti-Islamic feelings, saw the dastardly deeds of the terrorists as vindicating their view that Muslims should never have been allowed to settle in Britain and America in the first place. Estimates of the number of Muslims in the United States vary considerably but the figure may exceed five million.² In large part this is due to immigration, but a significant number of Afro-Americans, the descendants of African slaves who were once firmly Christian, have converted to Islam to form a black-Muslim community. On both sides of the Atlantic there is a move within the majority populations to treat these Muslim communities as the new 'enemy within', raising the spectre of serious social strife along this religio-cultural divide within the western democracies.

In the meantime political leaders, well aware of the dangers of internal divisions as they planned the military response to the attack on America, endeavoured to re-direct the passions aroused by these events toward those perceived as the real culprits, the Muslim extremists, or fundamentalists, on the other side of the world. People in the West found themselves in the unusual position of being instructed by their leaders on the subject of religion. President Bush and Prime Minister Blair announced that 'true Islam' is a peaceful religion which supports modern, democratic ideals. Both leaders appeared on TV surrounded by local Muslim representatives anxious to be seen and heard endorsing the assurances given by the leaders of the Western world. The Muslims affirmed their loyalty as British and American citizens and condemned the evil acts of the madmen who had attacked New York and Washington. President Bush, who earlier had made the crass mistake of describing the planned American response as a 'crusade', now made the remarkable claim that all good Muslims everywhere 'share our values'.

Islam and Western Values

At one level President Bush's claim seems, frankly, absurd. If as we may suspect, the reference to 'our values' includes everything intended by the phrase 'the American way of life' – including unlimited individual freedoms – then it is impossible to imagine Muslims adopting such values. The whole of Islamic history, not to mention the teaching of the Qu'ran, is against such a possibility.

² See Alan Neeley, 'Religious Pluralism: Threat or Opportunity for Mission?' in Paul Varo Martinson (ed.), *Mission at the Dawn of the 21st Century: A Vision for the Church* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1999), 38.

It is not just a fanatical minority that reject the classic western division of life into 'sacred' and 'secular' spheres and insist that the worship of God must embrace the entirety of life, such convictions are at the heart of a faith that refuses to put religion in a separate box which isolates it from economic and political concerns. Moreover, throughout its history, Islam has been a missionary faith and has never been content (as, at times, has Christianity) to play the role of chaplain to a society whose fundamental ethical values originate from sources outside divine revelation. Rather, it has felt impelled by a deep religious impulse to expand into non-Islamic areas with the intention of bringing new peoples under the rule of divine law.³

In the light of Islam's fundamental beliefs therefore, it would be interesting to know just how western Muslims react to the president's claim. It is understandable if in the present situation they are reluctant to express public dissent, but it would be astonishing if, given a calmer atmosphere and the freedom to express their honest views, they failed at least to qualify their support for Western values. The plain fact is, as Craig Gay has recently said, that the fundamental presupposition 'embedded in modern institutions and habits of thought' is the assumption that 'even if God exists he is largely irrelevant to the real business of life'.⁴ The title of the book from which this quotation is taken is *The Way of the (Modern) World. Or, Why It's Tempting To Live as if God Doesn't Exist*. If this is the ethos of the modern, Western world, then any Muslim who retains a living contact with his own, radically theistic tradition is bound to at least qualify his support for the values of a culture governed by practical atheism.

It is this, I want to argue, that takes us to the heart of the clash between Islam and modernity. In a brilliant study of the relationship between Islam and the West, John Esposito observes that most Western perceptions of Islam have been shaped 'by a liberal secularism which fails to recognise that it too represents a worldview which, when assumed to be self-evident truth, can take the form of a "secular fundamentalism"'. From this secular perspective, alternative paradigms, 'especially religious ones, are necessarily judged as abnormal, irrational, retrogressive'.⁵

³ See the classic studies of Kenneth Cragg, *The House of Islam* (Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing, 1969); *The Call of the Minaret* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); *Muhammed and the Christian: A Question of Response* (London/New York: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984). See too Michael Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1987).

⁴ Craig Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World. Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2.

⁵ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat - Myth or Reality?* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 [2nd ed.]), 249. This is by far the best book on Islam and modernity I have come across. See also, W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1988); Norman Anderson, *Islam and the Modern World - A Christian Perspective* (Leicester: Apollon, 1990).

In a postmodern, post-communist world, increasingly dominated by a capitalist market economy, with its base firmly located in the West, perhaps Islam's greatest challenge to America, and the feature that most causes secular intellectuals to dismiss it as an anachronistic hangover from an earlier age, is its insistence that economic theory and practice must be subject to divine law. Thus a Muslim scholar discussing the differences between the Western understanding of economics and that of Islam wrote that 'there is a radical difference between the vision of the good and successful life in the worldview of Islam and that of the capitalist or socialist world' (he was writing in 1983!). In the former, he says, the aim is to fulfil 'one's covenant with Allah' and to live life 'in terms of divine guidance as preparation for a more beautiful life awaiting mankind'. In other words, economic activity has both *theistic* and *transcendent* reference points; it is not an amoral activity governed by so-called scientific laws. The writer sees clearly that things are very different in the West where 'an essentially materialistic and earthly worldview' prevails.⁶ It is precisely here that Islam presents an awkward, unwelcome and disturbing challenge, not only to Western secularists, but especially to Western Christians who have lived far too comfortably with a modernist worldview that excludes God from the public sphere of life. The question then becomes: do Christians share George Bush's values?

Christianity and Western Values

In 1915 a Chinese scholar named Ku Hing-ming returned from studies in the West and composed a mock catechism intended to inform Chinese young people about the nature of the Christianity he had observed in America. It goes like this:

Q: *Do you believe in God?*

A: *Yes, when I go to church.*

Q: *What do you believe when you aren't in church?*

A: *I believe in self-interest whatever happens.*

Q: *What is justification by faith?*

A: *To believe - each one for himself.*

Q: *What is justification by works?*

A: *To put money in one's pocket.*

Q: *What is heaven?*

A: *Heaven is to be able to live at Bubbling Well Road and to drive around in a large motor car.*

Q: *What is hell?*

A: *Hell is to fail.⁷*

⁶ Khalid M. Ishaque, 'The Islamic Approach to Economic Development' in John Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 268.

⁷ Cited in Martin Jarrett-Kerr, *Patterns of Christian Acceptance: Individual Responses to the Missionary Impact, 1550-1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1. I have modified the catechism slightly in the interests of clarity.

Clearly there is an element of mockery and perhaps of exaggeration in this catechism. Nonetheless, it is consistent with the reaction of non-western peoples in their encounter with modernity over the past two hundred years, a reaction which discerns that, despite the formal profession of Christianity in Europe and America, the *real* religion at the centre of the culture is one of self-interest and personal success. This same reaction can be detected in the words of another Chinese scholar, Chee Pang Choong, a theologian based in Singapore and a visiting professor at the University of Beijing. He comments on a speech of President Clinton's delivered in 1998 in which, addressing immigrants into America, he advised his audience to 'honor our laws, embrace our culture [and] our most basic values'. With the courtesy characteristic of the Chinese, Professor Choong asks what exactly these 'basic values might be'? The question is pertinent when, as Choong observes, everything related to the sex scandals of this president had been openly discussed and relentlessly exposed to public gaze. In the eyes of the watching world – literally *watching*, courtesy of CNN Television which beamed its prurient coverage around the globe twenty-four hours every day – it seemed to be a Christian president on trial. Is it any wonder then that millions of non-Christians in Asia, and Muslims throughout the world, were left to draw their own conclusions concerning 'western, Christian values'? Professor Choong asks President Clinton precisely the question we are raising with his successor in the Oval Office: 'Are there still any *basic values* left?'.⁸

The response of evangelical Christians in Europe and America to this will be to point out that there is a clear distinction between genuine Christianity and the worldview and ethics which now govern the wider culture. This is a perfectly fair point, but the trouble is that for the past two hundred years western Christianity has failed to make such a distinction.⁹ Indeed, it has frequently exulted in the convergence between the gospel and civilization. In fact, these two elements were often treated as almost equal components of the blessings which the West was called to bestow on the rest of the world through the agency of the missionary movement. It was widely believed that the deep spiritual needs of humankind, together with their supposed cultural poverty could be met through the spread of 'the gospel and civilization'.

⁸ Chee Pang Choong, 'A Friendly Observer's View of North American Global Mission Responsibility Today'. In Paul Varo Martinson (ed.), *Mission at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, 368-69.

⁹ On a recent flight out to Nigeria I read a small book entitled *Unto This Last* by the Victorian intellectual, John Ruskin. Published in 1862, it attacks the so-called science of Political Economy which separated economics from moral and ethical considerations and purported to identify the laws by means of which human wealth and happiness could be increased. Ruskin's attack is devastating, but his most withering comments are reserved for Christians who, in their love of money, have abandoned the first principles of the gospel: 'I know of no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion'. John Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 203.

Consequently, it is now rather late in the day to begin the task of prising the gospel from the embrace of Western culture and non-Christians around the world can hardly be blamed if they experience difficulty in distinguishing between the two.¹⁰

Back to Bukuru

So far this article has focussed on the situation in the West but I want to conclude by returning to the Nigerian context. When teaching a course on Christian mission I often use an OHP acetate illustrating the church in Africa on which the Sahara, North Africa and parts of East Africa are shown to be areas with a Muslim majority population. The continent south of the Sahara, plus southern Sudan and Madagascar are shown as overwhelmingly Christian. However, between these two blocs, running from the north-east corner of Liberia, across the Sahel and snaking down into East Africa, is a bright red line which designates what the mapmaker describes as 'Areas of Tension'. *Jos and Bukuru are located in the middle of this line.* In other words, it is precisely here that two cultures meet and, as we now know, clash.

I will make three comments on this situation. First, with regard to the controversy over the introduction of Sharia law by the northern states: Sylvester Shikyil, a lecturer in the Law faculty at Jos University, has argued very convincingly that this action violates the Nigerian constitution. He argues that Nigeria is designedly a pluralist state which can only survive and prosper if 'all the major component parts ... agree to adopt a system of governance that gives each of them a sense of being equitable stakeholders in the affairs of state'.¹¹

The move toward the imposition of Sharia law appears to be a move in the opposite direction, toward the *de facto* establishment of one religion and the diminishing of the freedom of religion quite explicitly written into the Nigerian constitution. Therefore, Shikyil argues, the extension of Sharia must be resisted by all legal and constitutional means available because failure on this issue could seriously endanger the cohesion and stability of the nation.

Having said that, I want to ask, secondly, what motivates Muslims in their desire to extend Sharia beyond the personal sphere (for which there is provision in the constitution) and into the realms of criminal and commercial law? One answer often given to a question like this

¹⁰ Professor Choong comments: 'For years I have been trying very hard to convince my part of the world that it is a very serious mistake or misunderstanding to identify the West with Christianity without much qualification'. He observes that Asians continue 'to identify what is *Western* with Christianity' and find it hard to distinguish the two. 'It is not just an Asian issue, but a global one [with] profound implications for the mission and life of the church' In Paul Varo Martinson (ed.), *Mission at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, 364-65.

¹¹ Sylvester Shikyil, 'The 1999 Constitution and the Sharia Legal System in Nigeria' *Research Bulletin of the Theological College of Northern Nigeria*, October, 2000 (34), 29.

is simply to state that Islam is a reactionary religion; it is by nature totalitarian and therefore represents humankind's past. Dr Shikiyil himself appears to endorse this view when he describes Islam as 'a spent force in the emerging international system' and argues that Nigeria's future lies along the path of 'modernisation and progress'.¹² This view of Islam as irretrievably conservative and incapable of change is widely held and has articulate and powerful advocates both in Bukuru and New York.

With the greatest of respect, I want to suggest that it is a mistaken view. Of course Islam has many faces and there are deeply conservative Muslims who claim to be the sole guardians of the purest traditions of their faith and seek to ensure that the community is sealed off from contact with the wider, polluting world. However to treat such groups as representative of the religion as a whole, and on this basis construct a model of normative Islam in terms of bigotry, intolerance and the propensity to violence ignores both the witness of sober history and the evidence of change within Islam today. John Esposito demonstrates that change, often rapid and disturbing change, is a reality within Islam and he says that the tendency to 'pit modern change against a fixed tradition' obscures the degrees of difference and change within modern Islam.¹³

Let us return, by way of example, to the many Muslims who we noted earlier are now living in the West. These are people who wish to affirm a double identity, both as faithful followers of Muhammed *and* as loyal citizens of modern, pluralist democracies. This involves tension as the Islamic traditions have to be related to, and reinterpreted within the new pluralist setting in which political and religious freedoms, established against tyranny, are fundamental values. In such a setting, religions change. For example, coercion in matters of belief must be renounced and in a pluralist society faith can only be commended by means of example, teaching and persuasion. Consequently in a close and sustained encounter with modernity, Islam is liable to become one religious option among others. In this respect it follows the path already taken by Christianity which once defended the divine right of kings and had its own brutal methods of compulsion when dealing with heretics and pagans. Just as Christianity has left behind its Christendom phase, so also Islam is challenged by democratic ideals and is likely to be compelled to discover ways of propogating its faith that are consonant with this context.

But to return to my question: what is the attraction of Sharia law for Nigerian Muslims? This is a complex issue but we should at least consider the reasons Muslims themselves give for supporting such a change. The preamble to the document introducing Sharia into the northern Nigerian State of Zamfara in 1999 says that this is intended to 'curb the high crime rate, moral decadence and anti-

¹² *Ibid.* 20.

¹³ Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 237.

social behaviours now increasingly on the rise within the state'.¹⁴ In other words, the declared motivation concerns the restraining of social evils and the encouragement of righteous behaviour within the state. Christians will of course have many questions about this, not least in relation to the Pauline insight that the law is a feeble instrument with which to address the problem of human wickedness. Nonetheless, it is surely important to understand, even to sympathise with, Muslim anxieties regarding the moral and social consequences of what is perceived to be a creeping secularisation.

While driving from north to south in Nigeria one passes huge advertising hoardings. Most of these contain advertisements extolling the virtues of cigarette smoking. In one of them, young smiling Africans are sharing a packet of British made cigarettes with the catch phrase across the bottom of the picture: BRINGS OUT THE LONDON IN YOU. It may be, as Dr Shikyil argues, that Nigeria's future lies along the path of growing modernisation, but Christians, no less than Muslims, should be aware of the dangers that lie in wait along that path. Nothing could be more tragic than for the churches of Nigeria to simply repeat the terrible mistakes made by the Western churches in relation to modernity in the past two hundred years through an *uncritical* embrace of technology and the acceptance of a system of economics cut adrift from moral restraints and principles. Is it naïve and unrealistic to suggest that serious discussions over these issues between Muslims and Christians might do much to take the heat out of the Sharia issue?

I come to a final question concerning Christianity in Northern Nigeria. Let me remind you that there is a clear distinction in the New Testament between *proselytism* and *conversion*. The former existed before the coming of Christ and was the means by which Gentile enquirers were incorporated within the people of Israel. They were circumcised, baptised in water and taught the Torah. In other words they became, to all appearances, Jewish. The early church faced with a massive influx of Gentiles might have been expected to follow precisely this pattern. Astonishingly, they did not. Instead they struck out in a completely new and revolutionary direction. They decided that Gentile believers in Jesus 'should be left to find a lifestyle of their own within Hellenistic society under the guidance

¹⁴ See Shikyil, 'The 1999 Constitution', 32. It must be admitted that Muslim advocacy of Sharia sometimes serves only to increase the anxiety of its opponents. For example, Dr Abdur Rahman I. Doi, Professor of Islamic Law at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, argues convincingly that Western penal policies manifestly fail to arouse shame on the part of offenders and contribute toward the hardening of a criminal class. This is valid observation, the truth of which is reflected in new quests for forms of 'restorative justice' in the Western world. However, Dr Doi then defends punishments such as amputations, stoning to death and beheading on the grounds that they deter crime and prevent the offenders 'from committing the same crime in the future'. One cannot cavil with the conclusion but Muslims can hardly attack Western penal policies as inhumane and in the next breath defend such penalties. See A. Rahman Doi, *Non-Muslims Under Shariah* (Brentwood, Maryland: International Graphics, 1979), 13.

of the Holy Spirit'. In other words, apostolic Christianity did not demand conformity to a single cultural pattern but accepted a valid cultural pluralism from the start. This really was revolutionary. As Andrew Walls points out, the proselyte model would have produced devout Gentile believers but 'they would have had virtually no impact on their society; they would have effectively been taken out of that society'. *Conversion*, by contrast, meant that they turned toward Christ as Gentiles, as Greeks, and now sought to open up their culture to him. The result was that 'a truly Greek, truly Hellenistic type of Christianity was able to emerge'.¹⁵

My final question is a deceptively simple one which requires another article to explore: in the history of Christianity in Northern Nigeria have the churches approached the Muslim community on the basis of a 'proselyte model' or a 'conversion model'? Has the Muslim north understood the message of Christian evangelists who frequently came from a different cultural background, one often associated with westernisation and modernisation, to mean, to become a follower of Isa is to become like us? The question is crucial because devout Muslims are unlikely ever to get close to the Jesus of the gospels as long as the lifestyle of the evangelists and the worship of the churches makes him appear to be the destroyer of all that is treasured within their traditions.

Perhaps all of us, readers of *Themelios*, Christians in Bukuru and New York, need to reflect on the practice of the apostles in cross-cultural mission and seek the grace to take seriously today their extraordinary approach to conversion. In the process we may discover that we have more in common with Muslims than we ever dreamed possible and, by God's grace, Islam may at last have a chance to encounter the prophet *Isa* as he is set before us in the gospels.¹⁶

¹⁵ Andrew Walls, 'The Mission of the Church Today in the Light of Global History', Paul Varo Martinson (ed.), *Mission at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, 387.

¹⁶ Since completing the article I have discovered the important work of Lamin Sanneh on the subject dealt with here. See his *Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996) and *The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism* (Boulder, Colorado: West View Press, 1997).

THE LAST WORD

Robbie F. Castleman

In the liturgy of our congregation's service of worship, we have a time for a 'silent confession of sin' followed by a generalised corporate confession led by the pastor. This is followed by a declaration of forgiveness from a passage in the New Testament. The response to this exercise of confession is a time of sung and spoken praise to the Lord for his forgiveness. My son, Scott, pointed out one day that the part he always had trouble with was how short the personal confession time was. He was just getting started and then was swept away into forgiveness. He always wanted more time to really 'get everything out!' I was preparing to commiserate with him, agree and talk about sin and confession when he said, 'But I've begun to realise that's how confession is supposed to be in the Scripture. That's how God cuts short our confession. Just as the prodigal son gets started, the father cuts him short. He knows it all and it's enough that repentance had brought him home!'

What an outrageous idea! God interrupting our heartfelt confession, our evidence of repentance with his own Good News! The wayward child of the Father wanting to work through his whole prepared and earnest speech, being interrupted and invited to a party in his honour! Preparing to be a hired hand, and ushered to the head table instead! Ready to be a servant and reinstated as a son! Yes, this is a picture of God's grace, the Good News that is always bigger than the bad news I confess.

As I reflected on this insight of my son, I remembered the biggest lesson about confession and the recognition of sin that I ever learned. This lesson was a parallel to Scott's and it came at a time when I became aware of a long-buried sin that I had only become aware of when I was forty-something years old! I was certainly heartbroken to see its long-term influence on my life, and really struggled with the idea of 'how bad I must be if it took God this long to show me this sinful attitude!' I was in a self-recriminating mode of spiritual flagellation when I read these verses in the middle of Exodus 23:29, 30.

I shall ... drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. I will not drive them out in a single year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased enough to possess the land.

In an instant of insight that didn't seem like a revelation of flesh-and-blood, but the Father's voice, I realised two things. First, God takes his time in showing us sin that is embedded deeply in our fractured character. He does this because *if any of us saw all of our*

sin all at once we would indeed be desolate. We can't really handle the awful truth about our sinfulness all at once and survive. Indeed, this is what it means to die to ourselves, to be crucified with Christ and yet live. And in the particulars built on this theological confidence, God is patient to show us what he sees.

Secondly, I realised that I hadn't come to this point in my Christian life because I was an awful and self-deceived back-slider, a fraud to the core, a fake at the Christian life. (This gives you some insight into my state of mind and heart as I beat myself up over the recognition of this latently discovered sin!) No, this was God's time for me to see this sin, repent of this sin and confess this sin *because* I was growing as a Christian, as an earnest disciple. I had 'increased enough to possess' the promise on the other side! This time became a time of encouragement and progress in my sojourn of faith, not a marker of failure and disobedience. It was all a part of God keeping his promise to bring me 'to completion in the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6).

I remember that day like it was yesterday and in the reflection of my son in his own time of confession-cut-short-by-grace, I could hear the Father's voice again. I could smell the fatted calf, see the table set, and know once more for sure what it was to be declared 'alive' again, robed in borrowed righteousness, bejewelled by God's goodness.

Those of us who study and teach the faith are sometimes very aware of hypocrisy and unrighteousness in our lives. We often allow ourselves far less grace and forgiveness at a time of repentance and confession than we extend to others. I hope this *Last Word* reminds you of God's delight in interrupting our prepared speeches of contrition and acts of breast-beating. Whether we are Martin Luther sleeping on a cold floor, the prodigal son rehearsing on the road home, or my son frustrated with having the confession time always seem too short, God breaks into our life's liturgy with joy and the Kingdom's party begins again!

Book Reviews

Old Testament

Culture, Entertainment and the Bible

George Aichele (ed.)

JSOTSup. 309, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 229 pp., h/b., £46.00/\$92.00

Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts: Contributions from the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation

M. Daniel Carroll R. (ed.)

JSOTSup. 299, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 273 pp., h/b., £49.00

These two volumes share an interest in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of the Bible. Most of the essays in the Aichele volume were presented at a Semiotics and Exegesis section of the 1998 SBL meeting, which took place in the rather bizarre setting (given the nature of 'cultural critique' in the papers) of Orlando, Florida.

From the first article, the book is a mainly successful attempt to have some fun with the often overly serious enterprise of biblical interpretation in the academy. That said, even in the most entertaining pieces there is an undercurrent of serious critique. Questions about our own perceptions of biblical texts are often framed through analysis of retellings of these texts. This is a potentially useful exercise, though its aim in this volume is not always clear. For example, Heard asks the valuable question, 'What do we wish our children to emulate in the Bible?' But why ask that question here?

For those interested in accessing interesting retellings (perhaps better 're-performances'; as, e.g., Vander Stichele), there are some unusual and provocative examples here (notably from Leneman and Kramer). Walsh's essay offers a useful 'gathering' of portrayals of God in recent literature (with some surprising conclusions re God's recent psychological profile). Disney certainly comes in for a critical thrashing in two of the essays (Rowlett and Graham; ironic in the Orlando setting). While these raise interesting questions in relation to biblical presentation and cultural reception, they are not as rigorous (in terms of the precision of, e.g., ideological criticism) as those of Tarlin and Runions. These final essays of the book stand out with their subtle methodological analysis, especially Runions, who critically relates Numbers 16 to harrowing personal experience.

The repository nature of the Aichele volume will be useful to those interested in cultural reception of the Bible. However, for a more rigorous introduction to just how we assess those readings, readers would be better served by the other volume under review.

The Carroll R. volume was conceived by former students of John Rogerson as a collaborative project on the application of social sciences in biblical studies, a subject on which Rogerson is something of a world authority. It seeks to fill what Carroll R. identifies in his Introduction as a 'conspicuous lacuna': that is, the lack of awareness in the biblical guild of the complexity of sociological tools of study. It is full of useful survey-type essays, most of which attempt to map

sociological approaches in specific contexts and (sometimes) with case studies.

The essays by Rogerson and Porter are the most specialised. The former investigates the dialectical approach of Habermas's tutor, Theodor W. Adorno. Rogerson finds a daring and sincere quality in Adorno's attempt to construct meaning from unpromising 'negative' sources, such as the book of Ecclesiastes embodies. Porter's entry is not as accessible. In the most specialised work of the volume, Porter argues for a more rigorous model of socio-linguistic analysis, one which takes account of 'interpersonal semantic relationships' on an individual basis. This does not fit well with the rest of the volume, in that there is no broader dialogue with the larger discipline of biblical studies and little attempt to make it accessible to non-socio-linguists. While it is clear that cultural context should be analysed to help to understand the 'semantic structure' so important to Porter's approach, it is less clear why the whole enterprise is as valuable as he implies.

The other authors all offer useful methodological reflections. Brett reflects on the relationship of models of intention in interpretative theory to diachronic analysis, suggesting a complexity that demands a plurality in approach. West deals in his familiar territory of South-African liberation theology and asks some hard questions about ideology: Is it recoverable? How can we read the 'discourse of subordinate groups' in the public script of the Bible? (Though some concrete examples of interpretation would have helped West's case.) Dyck helpfully outlines the varied manifestations of what we call ideological criticism, and distinguishes between its descriptive and hermeneutical forms. He goes on to look at the (seemingly unpromisingly) ideologically loaded text of Ezra 2, in which he discerns a struggle for Israelite identity. Carroll R. calls for a recognition of the

complexity of 'popular religion' by way of analogy to the socio-cultural perception of religion in Latin America. He develops the helpful notion of certain biblical texts as 'ethnographic report', subject to the same hermeneutical problems. He then applies this to the 'popular religion' of the book of Amos, challenging previous attempts that have depicted the ideological struggle too simply.

The Carroll R. volume is a clarion call to recognise the inherent complexity of the so-called sociological tools of analysis that are regularly employed in biblical studies. In this it achieves its aims admirably, and is certainly the more methodologically rigorous of the two. To be fair, the Aichele volume does not purport to be more than an experiment in the growing field of biblical/cultural studies. I am certain, however, that most of its writers would have benefited substantially from reading the Carroll R. volume.

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The Psalms: An Introduction

James L. Crenshaw
Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001,
187 pp., £9.99/\$15.99

This is a rather patchy introduction to the Book of Psalms. At the start, Crenshaw sets out his purpose: 'I examine the nature of the several collections of psalms, look at comparable texts in the Bible and elsewhere, study different approaches to the Psalms, and take a close look at four psalms [73, 115, 71, 24] as an indication of the rich treasures awaiting diligent readers' (ix).

Part 1 (Origins) discusses the individual collections within the Book of Psalms and outlines psalmic material outside the Psalter itself. Crenshaw's examination of the Davidic psalms is relatively brief, considering they constitute half the

Psalter, and he is sometimes unnecessarily dismissive of a psalm, e.g. he judges that Psalm 51's 'restriction of sins to the vertical dimension hardly applies to David', and that Psalm 52's 'application to an event in David's life seems forced'. On the other hand, he offers quite a rich treatment of the Asaph and Korah groups. Part 2 (Approaches to the Psalms) assesses the contribution of modern interpreters, and here it is refreshing to read a book that is not dominated by Gunkel's form-critical analysis, though that is given its proper place.

Particularly illuminating is the chapter on 'Psalms as a source of historical data', aside from the somewhat random nature of the observations on supposed parallels in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Crenshaw's notes on individual psalms vary in quality. Psalm 23 is given an insightful exposition, but Psalm 1 is described as 'Pollyannish', Psalm 119 is criticised for spending 'a lot of time ... uttering tautologies' and the use of Psalm 110 in the book of Hebrews is dubbed 'speculation'. Such remarks tell the reader more about the author than about his subject.

Crenshaw offers a reasonable discussion of the thorny issue of the imprecatory psalms, citing C.S. Lewis and Erich Zenger, who is said to '[understand] these prayers for vengeance as affirmation of divine integrity in the face of strong evidence to the contrary'. But here, as elsewhere, his approach is too anthropological, and does not show sufficient respect for the divine authorship of the Psalms.

Crenshaw is not afraid to swim against the scholarly tide, and aptly observes earlier in the book that 'the approach [of Westermann and Gerstenberger] enables readers to see the dark shadows of uncertainty in scholars' minds and to recognise arbitrary efforts to give answers when the literature resists any rational

explanation for its present shape and content'. So when he comes to an extended excursus on 'Wisdom Psalms' (a category he disputes), Crenshaw offers a detailed rebuttal of the theories of Kuntz and Whybray. But this kind of extended discussion is better excluded from a so-called 'Introduction', and some of it is repeated anyway in the following section on 'artistic and theological design'.

Another surprising inclusion in the Introduction is the substantial expositions of four psalms in Part 3. Notwithstanding the criticisms of Crenshaw's work that I have offered, these 'readings' are stimulating, especially with regard to the question of the afterlife in Psalm 73, and the linking of Psalms 24 and 15.

A few anomalies seem to be present in the book, such as contradictory statistics on pages 4 and 15, and the frequent (and unheralded) adoption of Hebrew verse numberings.

Crenshaw's book contains many helpful insights into the Psalter. But an evangelical reader will want a good deal more on the overall message of the Book of Psalms, not least from the perspective of the NT, which in Crenshaw is relegated to just a single sentence.

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The Divine Drama: The Old Testament as Literature

J. Dancy

Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2001,
800 pp., £17.50/\$35.00

This is a rather curious manifestation of the Bible-as-Literature school. It is intended to rescue the Old Testament from the long list of unread classics. Dancy knows this is a difficult task, for the 'general educated public' will find about half of the OT not worth reading, being tedious, incoherent, or obscure. His solution is to select

about 30% of the OT and 15% of the Apocrypha, choose a convenient English translation (AV, RSV, REB, NJB, NRSV), and add assorted introductions and brief notes. The notes are a mixture of historical critical comments (often somewhat dated or selective), literary insights, and theological judgements. The tone is generally positive and helpful, although from time to time the author is compelled to point out the inadequacies and infelicities of the text.

I am not averse to this project in principle, and would be extremely pleased if the educated public was intensely interested in reading extensive chunks of the Bible. I just haven't seen much evidence for it – even well-motivated Christians find it hard to grapple with the OT. I myself would have pruned the selection more drastically and added some pictures to help readers enter imaginatively into the text (which is also Dancy's hope). The extra space could also be used to explore how different readers have imagined, understood and applied the text (see the superb J.L. Kugel *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era*, Harvard University Press, 1998).

I would also tackle, albeit in a highly selective way, those genres that obviously bore the author. My experience is that, with sufficient patience, these often turn out to inspire the most incisive commentary upon the contemporary world. There is a law that I have found fruitful: the more obscure and difficult the text, the broader and more imaginative the introduction. Because the author has applied a strict aesthetic criterion in his selection of a canon within a canon, he has neither the motivation or perseverance to tackle the larger interpretive challenges (contrast the work of Mary Douglas).

There are many good and useful things in this book. However, the author's limited interests will

probably leave unsatisfied those who approach the Bible as more than a great work of literature.

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The Descent from the Mountain Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–40

Martin Ravndal Hauge

JSOTSup. 323, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001,

362 pp., h/b., £56.00/\$88.00

This delightful sequel to close literary readings like that of Moberly's *At the Mountain of God* (1983) comes from a professor of Old Testament at the University of Oslo.

Chapter 1 begins with 'The Outlines of a Story'. In three theophanic episodes the ascent of Moses culminates in the descent of God (Exod. 19:1–24:2; 24:3–31:18; 35:1–40:38). A fourth episode (32:30 – 34:28) has a similar structure of encounter, preparation and theophany, and is therefore not secondary even if it interrupts the narrative flow. All these theophanic scenes culminate in visions of God.

Chapter 2 focuses on characterization of actors and reversals of roles in a dramatic plot, which narrates how God descends in a traveling sanctuary despite insurmountable obstacles. Hauge's key observation is that in Exodus 40:36–38 Moses is excluded from the tent after God has descended. This and other elements are evidence of democratization, secularization, sanctification, and materialization in the tradition.

Chapter 3 describes 'The Apotheosis of Moses'. In Hauge's reading of Exodus 32:30 – 34:28 Moses usurps God's role, yet is cut down to human size in order to emerge as 'the divine light in horned character' (171). Like other heroes he is dismissed and then exalted.

Chapter 4 deals with 'The Compositional Technique of Parallelism'.

The erection of the dwelling is mentioned several times (Exod. 40, Lev. 8, Num. 7). The second reference is immediately followed by the tragic death of Aaron's sons, and then by Moses and Aaron together presenting the laws on cleanness (Lev. 10:2, 11:1). The third account culminates in Moses entering the holy of holies (Num. 7:89). Literary parallelism thus underpins the theological centrality of the divine dwelling.

Chapter 5 broadens the scope to trace 'The Cyclical Character of the Sacred Events' before and after Sinai, and treats the revolts in Numbers 11–17 at length. Hauge focuses on the role shifts of YHWH, Moses and the people in story cycles. A masterful postscript reflects theologically on a connection between whoredom in Numbers 14:33 and obedience in Numbers 15:38–41.

Readers who still retain a 'fateful emphasis on categories of "original" and "secondary"' (11) are hereby warned! Hauge's close reading continues the good work of Moberly and others. Students need not fear technicalities in this very practical exploration of textual structures and patterns. However, Hauge's readable style comes at a price: information in footnotes is not substantial, and one easily gets confused when multipage 'summaries' do not sharpen the argument but add additional observation. I could happily live with half the length, less repetition and more focus, but my students might disagree!

I have enjoyed reflecting for hours on Hauge's provocative readings. I do not agree with his readings of Exodus 19, 32 or 40:36–38, yet I have been carried along in stimulating company. Descend, seek and you shall find, no doubt in different directions, but certainly in the tracks of Hauge

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**An Elementary Grammar of
Biblical Hebrew**

Edwin C. Hostetter,
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000,
176 pp., p/b., £14.95/\$24.75, h/b., £53.50/\$84

Introducing Biblical Hebrew

Allen P. Ross
Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001,
565 pp., h/b., \$39.99

Like most language teachers, I would love to have the time and energy to write my own text-book. Here I would deposit all the gems of knowledge and technique gleaned over the years, and correct all the faults of books used in the meantime! So far I've used four different grammars, scrutinised many more, returned to a faithful classic (Weingreen), and yet remain unsatisfied. Is one of these the answer to my search?

Teaching Hebrew alongside Arabic and Akkadian in an Oriental Studies faculty is obviously very different to teaching it alongside ethics and missiology in a theological college or seminary. Students in the latter have less background knowledge and less time available. So there is plenty of room for different types of grammars. Which are these?

Hostetter's book is more for the purists. It adopts traditional language and a comprehensive, syntactic approach. Thus it covers Hebrew grammar in three logical sections: nouns and particles; strong verbs; and weak verbs. Each section tries to cover its grammar fully, even if it relates to elements not yet introduced. It has 34 chapters, each concluding with very brief exercises.

Unfortunately it has two major didactic faults. First, the order of the first half is hopeless. Students must plough through 13 chapters before reaching the most basic form of the verb, the *Qal* perfect. Meanwhile they study pausal forms in chapter 2

(having barely mastered the alphabet), Rafe in chapter 5 (though they will never meet it), and the object marker in chapter 8 (long before the verb)! It may be logical to put all the grammar relating to nouns and particles together, but it is didactic folly: teachers will be frustrated, students will be bored, and classes will empty. Secondly, the presentation is terrible. Most of the explanation is discursive, with very few tables. Vowels are presented in a single list, vowel-consonant combinations in a running text, nouns discussed without the simplest tables of masculine/feminine or singular/plural, and the complicated explanation of nominal plurals will make all but the bravest quake. Those who persevere will be relieved to find that verbs fare somewhat better, with tables in the text and full paradigms at the end.

Students need several things in a text-book: a good order, starting with basics and progressing to details; good visual presentation, for immediate learning and later back-reference; and good exercises, with repeated practice of common forms. Sadly, there is little of this in Hosterter. It might be usable by Semiticists, but certainly not by seminarians.

Ross's grammar, by contrast, is completely different in every respect. From first glance, it is obviously written by an experienced college teacher, who has thought carefully about order of material, style of explanation, division into chapter-lessons, exercises for students, etc. It is larger, over three times longer, and more expensive (even through Amazon, since it is hardback only). But you get far more for your money, and would spend as much on Weingreen. A short Part 1 (Signs and Sounds, 6 chs) introduces the basics; the main Part 2 (Forms and Meanings, 34 chs) covers the essential grammar and syntax; and a very useful Part 3 (Texts and Contexts, 14 chs) gives readings from Genesis

with more advanced explanations. This is complemented by Part 4 (Study Aids), with glossaries, full paradigms, index, one-page summaries of every chapter (Lesson Reviews), and 12 blank pages for vocabulary lists etc. These last two features are welcome innovations, and will be extremely helpful for many learners.

The book is very well signposted throughout, including contents summaries for each chapter. The Hebrew font is large and clear. Explanations are well worded, managing to be both simple and thorough. Tables abound, and some highlight unexpected forms (e.g. guttural verbs, p. 89). The exercises look well balanced, with translation into English and into Hebrew (essential for serious learning) roughly equal in length until chapter 32, when the latter fades out. And students will certainly appreciate the 'mechanical parsing method' presented for both regular and irregular verbs

Several features delight the eye, e.g. one learns the 'ordinary' article a chapter before the article with gutturals, the Infinitive Construct a chapter before the Infinitive Absolute, and numerals before irregular verbs. Some features cause raised eyebrows, e.g. suffixes are presented in the order third-second-first person, and the 'converted imperfect' is taught as the preterite. A few features may even cause furrowed brows: the 'historical vowel chart' is too complex for chapter 9, suffixes on singular and plural nouns in the same lesson look indigestible, as do the suffixes on verbs (always a nightmare to teach). And inevitably there are typos, though I've spotted very few (41 for 40, p. 69; feminine dual, p. 71).

Altogether, Ross's grammar contains all the essentials of a good text-book, and many welcome extras. I'll certainly give it a go.

Philip Johnston
Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law

Bernard S. Jackson

JOTS^{Sup.} 314, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000,

332 pp., h/b., £53.50/\$84.00

How are the laws of Moses treated in current scholarship? How do we interpret 'an eye for an eye'? Such questions are brilliantly addressed by Bernard Jackson of Manchester, an international expert on near eastern, biblical and Rabbinic law.

This book presents 'a set of pilot studies of the semiotic dimensions' of law (20). Jackson first explains how a new semiotic or communicative approach can trace the roots and essence of biblical law. In chapter 1, following Greimas, he proposes that meaning is explained in terms of expression, social knowledge and universal significance, and that the central key to unlock biblical law is found in 'narrative typifications of action' (28). Chapter 2 develops Austin's speech act theory into distinctions between orality and literacy. Early biblical laws are oral speech acts embedded in narrative contexts. The 'apodictic' forms are more primitive than the 'casuistic' forms in their oral setting of domestic teaching, and this is supported by their visual imagery as 'direct inspiration from God' (67).

Jackson next explains how writing changes law. In chapter 3 he argues that early law retained an 'oral residue' and exploited this in its use of typical images of thieves and murderers. They were 'self-executing laws' which provided objective tests to resolve local disputes and avoid costly court-arbitration. This explains why the death penalty could be negotiated. Chapter 4 broadens this approach to larger discourse units of paragraph length in Exodus 21–22, and traces various developments in legal drafting (abstraction, consistency, multiple variables, clause-combination, elaboration, systematisation, motivation).

Chapter 5 discusses the medium of written law in the Near East and the Bible, and the development from monumental inscriptions to tablets and books.

Law raises broader issues such as irrevocability and moral values. In chapter 6 Jackson claims that law originated in concrete rights, while the role of Moses as lawgiver is expressed in terms of royal and divine authority. In chapter 7 he modifies Greenberg's 'postulate' that life is an absolute value in biblical law, paying more attention to each text's precise literary form in searching for its world-view.

Jackson then broadens his perspective to historical and theological features of law collections. Chapter 8 explains repetition among laws from a narrative perspective, as giving force and validity to the communication. Repetition is found in chiasm within law codes and between laws and stories. In chapter 9 he presents a narratological study of the covenants from Genesis to Joshua in terms of Greimas's ideas on contract, performance and recognition. He strongly attacks the alleged covenant renewal in ancient Israel, and provides many innovative and suggestive readings. The Genesis covenants do not renew, but rather reassert who is to inherit the promise. The hereditary covenant of the patriarchs is reinforced in Exodus. The covenant did not even have to be renewed after the golden calf incident. Deuteronomy is a recognition of the covenant of Horeb, and the Moab covenant is about reading and succession. Even Joshua 24 is not a renewal, but a recognition of the new role of Moses and the fulfilment of the promises. Finally, in chapter 10, Jackson argues strongly, though not always clearly, that the rabbis were right in their interpretation of 'a life for a life'. The victim's family could opt for compensation, with the offender working for their household rather than being executed.

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Jackson's study is a commanding introduction to biblical law and its current scholarship, to which he is a major contributor. His new semiotic theory is not lost in the technicalities of Greimas, but is instead a rich use of semantics, pragmatics and discourse as well as speech act theory, communication theory and sociology.

I am less happy with his traditional views on historical-critical dating of the Pentateuch which informs most of his work, even if he has learnt a lot from recent approaches. More importantly, I fear that he reads a modern Western cultural practice into an evolutionary model for development from orality to literacy. I would also argue for an earlier date for writing in Israel (cf. 136–37).

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Lutheran School of Theology,
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**The Bible, Theology and Faith:
A Study of Abraham and Jesus**

R.W.L. Moberly

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000,
xii + 263 pp., £14.95

Walter Moberly, Lecturer in Theology at the University of Durham, England, says, 'My concern in this book is the interpretation of the Bible as the foundation, and primary resource, of Christian faith and theology' (2). He wants to work out this concern while retaining the insights of modern biblical scholarship. He is trying to do what many biblical scholars have long-since given up doing, and some claim should not be done, namely to bring together the study of the Bible in the Academy and the Church so that they can enrich one another. For this to be possible, Moberly argues, it must be recognised that the Bible is not an arbitrary collection of books, but a 'confessing construct' of the Christian Church (or the Synagogue in the case of the Hebrew Bible). Secondly, it needs to be accepted

that studying the Bible as 'Bible' requires being open to the question of religious truth. This means seeking to understand what it says about the nature of God, and what this implies about ourselves and how we should live.

Moberly sets out four 'hermeneutical presuppositions' for interpreting the Bible so as to nourish Christian faith. The first is that biblical interpretation cannot be separated from the question of how we should live. One must ask what the text might 'mean today' and not just what it 'meant originally'. Secondly, since God is not a 'person' or 'object' accessible to scientific study, it must be accepted that speaking about God is problematic. The Bible does it through analogies drawn from human experience. His third presupposition follows from this, namely the importance of 'mystery' in theology. By this he means recognising that the more you know about God the more you know you do not know. For this reason there should be an openness to fresh study and understanding of the biblical text. Finally, there is the importance of the 'rule of faith'. Moberly expresses this as the need to set our understanding of the biblical text within the context of the life of the Church. Within the framework of these presuppositions the Bible should be studied using all the appropriate technical skills of modern biblical scholarship, while engaging with current issues (ideological, moral, theological) with the aim of 'the transformation of human life through engagement with God in Christ' (44).

Most of the book demonstrates Moberly's proposal for how biblical theology should be done by actually doing it. He studies a key OT text, Genesis 22, in order to uncover what it says about God and the appropriate human response to God. A study of the theme of Jesus as the Son of God in Matthew's Gospel follows this. Moberly shows how this can be related to the central theme of

Genesis 22, that of divine testing and faithful human response. Finally, he gives 'some brief and tentative remarks about possible relationships between the kind of Christian interpretation of the Bible I have been exploring and other contexts of life and thought' (238f).

This is a rich study which interacts with a wide range of scholarship, past and present. It amply demonstrates that a Christian theological approach to biblical interpretation can be academically rigorous and still nourish Christian faith and life. It is to be hoped that others will follow his lead and develop this approach further.

Ernest Lucas

Bristol Baptist College

The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their nature, theology and rationale

Jiří Moskala

Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000, xv + 484 pp., \$19.95

This useful volume is a dissertation completed in 1998 under the supervision of Jacques Doukhan at the Adventist Theological Seminary. This issue is especially relevant to the Seventh-day Adventists, whose approach to OT law has been stricter than that of many other Christians. The work exhibits both strengths and weaknesses of the genre. The strengths include a detailed, 96-page look at the status questions of clean and unclean animals and food, and a 100-page bibliography up to 1998. Both show that the problem of Hebrew dietary laws has been a vexed one for a long time. The weaknesses include no attempt to be 'user-friendly', with no indexes of any kind.

Moskala surveys previous study in two ways, chronologically from the pseudigrapha to the present, and thematically, discerning 14 different

rationales which have been proposed to explain the biblical dietary restrictions. The third chapter looks at the texts themselves. First there is a partial exegetical study of Leviticus 11 exploring literary context, literary structure and lexicon. Here he usefully categorises types of cleanness, noting in tabular form which are natural and permanent, and which are acquired and temporary. He also spends considerable time indicating intertextual links between Leviticus 11 and various other texts (Gen. 1-2, 3, 6-9; Deut. 14:3-21), including parallels and divergences in vocabulary and theme. On the basis of these links the author proposes that the food laws can best be understood within a nexus of creation-fall-new creation. This means that the dietary restrictions are creational and permanent in value rather than cultic and thus temporally or culturally bound. A key link he sees is with the prohibition of the consumption of blood and its relationship with death.

The fourth chapter is theological, looking at aspects of the character of God and creation, and developing a theology of eating. He summarises by stating that 'the leitmotif for the Pentateuchal dietary laws ... is respect of the Creator' (344).

The volume is a welcome study of a difficult though vital issue: the relationship between the Testaments, or the Christian and the law. At times its simple approach feels like a fresh breeze, but the approach is also problematic. While Moskala says that his approach is diachronic rather than synchronic, he nowhere addresses issues related to the authorship and integrity of what he terms 'the Mosaic dietary laws'. How does his comparisons between Leviticus 11 and texts attributed by mainline scholarship to J, P and D take into account the critically espoused development of tradition? While a lack of source critical discussion on one level was refreshing, on another it was

troubling, since there needs to be dialogue with, and critique of, alternative contemporary views. The subject also raises other questions which he does not even acknowledge, much less address. One example is the difference in periods of uncleanness of a mother who has a boy or a girl baby. While this is not the central issue of the project, if the difference is raised by the study, it should be addressed. A positive aspect is the eagerness to address the NT and contemporary practice. The author is not content to keep the two horizons of then and now separate, even in a dissertation.

Moskala is to be thanked for tackling this important issue, ably summarising the state of scholarship, and pointing us toward ways to move forward. The volume should be in serious theological libraries and will need to be consulted by all doing work on Leviticus, law and gospel, and Christian ethics.

David W. Baker

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Proverbs Interpretation

Leo G. Perdue

Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000,
289 pp., h/b., \$15.00

The last few years have seen the publication of several new commentaries on Proverbs, including Murphy, Van Leeuwen, Clifford, Fox (chs. 1-9), and now Perdue. And more are in the pipeline. The renewal of interest in OT wisdom literature is gratifying, but with so many new commentaries appearing, they need to be really good to secure a place on the shelf.

Perdue has already established himself as an authority on OT wisdom. The strengths of his earlier work, such as his emphasis on wisdom, imagination and metaphor, are here brought to bear on Proverbs. In his introduction Perdue expounds

wisdom as knowledge, imagination, discipline, piety, order, and moral instruction. He emphasises that wisdom moves beyond observation and brief sayings to the imaginative construction of a comprehensive worldview. In line with the *Interpretation* series, Perdue not only provides useful summaries of the current state of critical research, but also includes a substantial discussion on Proverbs for the church, and each section of commentary has a discussion of its theology.

There is much here that is very helpful. Scholarship in general has become more aware of Proverbs as a book, and this theological and literary awareness has moved historical critical scholarship along in all sorts of ways. However, one could wish that Perdue was clearer conceptually on how the different ingredients he identifies in wisdom fit together. How does wisdom as empirical knowledge relate to imagination, and how do both of these relate to the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom? Reading Proverbs as a whole, the fear of the Lord appears to be foundational, but in Perdue's reading it appears as one element among others and sits uneasily with an emphasis on natural knowledge. Perdue often describes the knowledge aspect of wisdom as a sort of empiricism, a view which Fox would rightly contest. Perdue somewhat anachronistically describes wisdom as dynamic and open to change. For example, he asserts that 'it was inconceivable for the sages to think there were moral absolutes that were unconditionally and eternally true, irrespective of the concrete situations of life' (7).

Perdue notes the connection between 1-9 and 31:10-31 as an inclusio, but this overarching structure is not exploited to full advantage in his exegesis of ch. 31. Maybe Proverbs is more integrated than he thinks. For Perdue, 1-9 is the most theologically incisive part of Proverbs, while the sayings of 10-31 for the most part

embody simple observations. This fails to take full account of the literary shape of the book as a whole and the vital literary context in which previously oral proverbs have been placed.

This commentary provides useful summaries of critical work on Proverbs and identifies vital topics for its interpretation. However, I suspect that readers of *Themelios* will find Van Leeuwen in *The New Interpreters Bible* a more helpful and accessible combination of exegetical and theological insight.

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Transmission of Biblical Texts in Qumran: The Case of the Large Isaiah Scroll 1QIsa^a

Paulson Pulikottil
JSPSup. 34, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,
2001,
240 pp., h/b., £50/\$80

Pulikottil's study focuses on the numerous variants that exist between the large Isaiah scroll (1QIsa^a) and the Masoretic Text (MT), in order to analyse changes that were made *intentionally* by the scribe of 1QIsa^a. The first stage is the identification of variants unique to 1QIsa^a. Pulikottil discounts those readings that show clear evidence of scribal error, and *assumes* that the remainder result from intentional changes. He then classifies these variants according to four primary types of change: harmonisation, to ensure grammatical or conceptual consistency within the immediate context or other passages of Scripture; explication, including both explanations of unclear text and the scribe's own interpretations; modernisation of language; and contextual changes (barely distinguishable from some harmonisations). In each case he details the range of grammatical and other changes that were made to achieve these ends.

Next Pulikottil analyses the interpretative contribution of the scribe, concluding that he intended to present a text that was historically and theologically accurate, rather than one identical to his source. In the process, he identifies a range of theological themes which motivated the changes, with one or two examples of each. Finally, Pulikottil seeks to identify the context which has given rise to the scroll. On the basis of a few shared concerns, he associates the scroll with the *yahad* (= community) scrolls, including 1QS, 1QM, the Damascus Document and the Pesharim (despite the diversity of contexts in which and for which these were composed). The nature of the *yahad* is not further specified, and so merely confirms the broad context which most scholars would have assumed prior to this study.

The author's ability to generate plausible explanations for the substantial number of intentional changes that he proposes, and his careful classification of them, is masterful. It is unfortunate, though, that this has been built on an *assumption*, namely that *all* unique variants should be treated as intentional unless demonstrably arising from scribal error. The substantial number of variants for which a plausible explanation is offered lends credibility to his assumption, but failure to explore alternative explanations (i.e. scribal error, or an original/primitive reading in 1QIsa^a) means that the study can do no more than suggest that intentional changes by the scribe *may* have been a significant cause of variants in 1QIsa^a. The lack of a table of all variants, together with indications of which variants have not been analysed and why not, makes it even harder to assess the force of his evidence.

Pulikottil argues, with limited evidence, that the creative scribal policy of the 1QIsa^a scribe represented normal scribal activity in the final centuries BC, and that the

scribal aim of merely replicating a source text followed the standardisation of the text in the late first century AD. However, his arguments concerning the clear superiority of the MT in Isaiah, despite its manuscripts being a thousand years later, and concerning the source text of 1QIsa^a containing none of the intentional changes, suggests that the creative scribal activity claimed for 1QIsa^a may have been the exception rather than the rule.

Ted Herbert

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Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics

Cyril S. Rodd

London: T. & T. Clark, 2001,
xiv + 402 pp., h/b., £29.95

This stunning text is the fruit of a lifetime of study. Rodd's essential thesis is that OT ethics are far more alien to us than biblical scholars usually recognise (hence the title). The attempts of Christian scholars to reappropriate OT ethics through some overall systematic framework only ends up by distorting them. What the OT actually offers are narrow windows through which we glimpse parts of a panorama, most of which is forever beyond our view. Thus Rodd organises his book as almost disconnected glimpses of this strange land, and resists attempts to harmonise OT ethics or see their current relevance (ch. 1).

His first two windows are those of ritual purity (ch. 2) and honour/shame (ch. 3), which were not sharply distinguished from 'ethics'. He then examines adultery, to illustrate the great difficulties in determining the relationship between law, social norms, actual behaviour, the views of biblical writers and those of the actors in the stories (ch. 4). The notion of 'righteousness' usually refers to conformity to the prevailing social

customs of Israelite society (ch. 5). However, there are glimpses of a 'righteousness' not grounded in Israelite society nor in divine laws but rather in 'human nature' and 'natural law' (ch. 6).

Rodd moves on to critique those who make the conscious imitation of God a central motive for ethical action in OT literature (ch. 7). He then argues that the Ten Commandments cannot be regarded as the fount of Pentateuchal laws, or as principles of a wider ethic. Rather, they are directed to a narrow section of Israelite society (wealthy males), even if their present context broadens their application to all Israel (ch. 8).

The next two windows (chs. 9, 10) are fascinating studies of intention and motivation in OT ethics. The attention to motive often draws OT laws closer towards what we call 'ethics', although the motivation to follow a command *because God gave it* cannot, claims Rodd in Kantian tones, be considered an ethical motive. The interweaving of ethics, law and religion in this 'strange land' is manifest again in the study of sanctions (ch. 11).

The most distinctive feature of OT ethics for many is the prohibition on lending at interest. But Rodd sees it as the extension of a concern for the poor found across the ANE and thus not as unique as it first seems (ch. 12).

Five chapters then follow which aim to illustrate how the concerns and moral views of academics distort their studies of OT ethics. Thus the diverse OT attitudes towards the poor (ch. 14) are not as similar to 'enlightened' thinking today as is often claimed. Ancient Israelites did not have moral problems over war (ch. 15), animal welfare (ch. 16), the environment (ch. 17), or the position of women (ch. 18), and handled these issues in a quite different way.

So how can we use OT ethics today? Rodd argues that the only way forward is to abandon the notions of biblical authority, inspiration, canon and normativity, and to leave the biblical texts in their own worlds. It is only in their very strangeness that they can offer an alternative vision of life.

This book is breathtaking in its depth and breadth of learning. Each chapter provides a very clear overview of the current debate in OT scholarship on its topic. I can think of no better place to go for a reliable summary of issues and arguments. Individual chapters are clearly structured and accessibly written. Tribute must also be paid to the very measured judgements Rodd makes on so many issues. He never simply dismisses his opponents, but always engages them in gracious but uncompromising debate. It is gratifying to see how many evangelicals are taken seriously in the discussions here.

That said, no orthodox Christian could ever endorse Rodd's recommendations. It seems to me that he offers a hermeneutic of despair. He so distances the horizons of text and interpreter that the text disappears off into the distance, passing beyond contemporary relevance. Rodd says that we can still visit the strange land, but one has to ask, Why bother? He says that its very strangeness is its virtue, since it offers a different ethical model from the one we start with. But on every occasion when Rodd notes a difference, he simply asserts his own modern views as incompatible with the ancient ones. So again one has to ask, How does its difference make any valuable contribution to our ethical lives? 'Rodd's Route' is simply a call to give up on the task of seeing contemporary relevance in OT ethics. Crucially, he assumes that re-reading texts in the light of the expanding biblical plot-line is to misread those texts (thus he resists canonical re-readings). However, it seems to me that such a canonical hermeneutic is to respond to a dynamic present in the original texts.

Rodd presents many important challenges to evangelical ethicists, but we must rise to these challenges and not simply 'throw in the towel'. There is still a huge amount of material in this text for which evangelicals can be thankful.

Robin Parry
Carlisle

Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and its Covenantal Development in Genesis

Paul R. Williamson,
JSOTSup. 315, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,
2000,
309pp., h/b., £55.00/\$88.95

Contrary to many previous interpreters, Paul Williamson makes an excellent case for interpreting the two covenants of Genesis 15 and 17 as distinct yet related. In doing so he also demonstrates that a synchronic reading is not only legitimate, but also the best method for understanding both literary intricacies and editorial intention.

Williamson first identifies the problems: previous two-covenant explanations of Genesis 15 and 17 have been inadequate and confusing, while literary and theological connections between chapters 12, 15, 17 and 22 have been largely ignored. He then surveys previous interpretations of Genesis 15 and 17, in four interpretative categories: (1) a single covenant in two stages; (2) a covenant in chapter 15 reaffirmed in chapter 17; (3) the same covenant in different sources; (4) two distinct covenants. Christian and Jewish interpretations of all periods are surveyed thoroughly (if somewhat laboriously).

Williamson carefully analyses the third category of source-critical interpretations, and finds them unconvincing and inadequate. He then examines the fourth category, synchronic interpretation, and

argues cogently that the two covenants are distinct yet related. Here he builds on the insights of his supervisor Desmond Alexander, and offers astute analysis of synchronic interpretations.

In chapters 4 and 5 Williamson offers a detailed analysis of the two covenant episodes, and demonstrates that the promises described in them are distinct: one focuses on the national blessing of descendants and land, the other on the international blessing of nations and kings; one would be fulfilled unconditionally, the other would require human activity. Thus the final editors intended that 'each pericope ... serve a specific function within the wider Abraham canvas' (119). These two chapters are an excellent exercise in good exegesis.

Chapter 6 further explores the difference between the two covenants, notably the subtle differences in content, expression and emphasis and, most significantly, the time/literary gap between the 'covenant between the pieces' and the 'covenant of circumcision'. While chapter 17 shares common promissory threads with chapter 15, it 'transcends this guarantee of "seed" and "land" by both broadening and narrowing the promissory focus' (212). For instance, 'seed' is both broadened to encompass a multitude of nations and narrowed to a particular line. 'Thus the two covenants are not as unrelated as their respective promissory foci might initially suggest' (212-13).

Finally, Williamson argues that the programmatic divine promise of 12:1-3 is expanded differently in chapter 15 (national blessing; cf. 12:1-2c), and chapter 17 (international blessing; cf. 12:2d-3). Thus two different covenants ratify two distinct promises. Further, the covenant of chapter 17 is actually ratified in chapter 22 through the sacrifice of the ram and the subsequent divine oath. Thus 12:1-3 and 19:16-18 form an inclusio binding the whole of the Abraham

narrative by two major promissory themes: that Abraham is the physical father of a 'great nation' and the spiritual father of 'all nations'.

Williamson has made a significant contribution, both to the legitimacy of synchronic reading and to the literary and theological interpretation of the covenant episodes of Genesis 15 and 17. He claims that this has 'widespread ramifications' for understanding subsequent divine-human covenants in Genesis-Kings. However one may ask whether the final editor(s) of Genesis 12 understood the royal 'seed' in whom the nations would be blessed as David or as a future Messiah. Is the latter a Christian reading which goes beyond their intentions? There are some huge hermeneutical issues here which go beyond a synchronic reading of Genesis, and these are not discussed. While it is true that, with every addition to the 'canon', previously recorded themes might acquire 'surplus meaning' unintended by authors or editors; but to assume that this is implied is to stretch synchronic reading beyond its limits. Otherwise, the merits of this book are too many for a teacher or student of theology to ignore.

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Reclaiming the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of Waldemar Janzen

Gordon Zerbe (ed.)

Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2001,
xii + 265 pp., \$16.00

This volume is a collection of essays in honour of long-time professor, scholar and dean at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg. In an opening tribute, Gerbrandt highlights the breadth and depth of Janzen's life as 'Formative Professor, Distinguished Biblical Scholar, Direction-Setting Dean and Mentor to Students'. Hopefully this will capture

the imagination of young biblical scholars embarking on careers in the confessional academy.

Janzen himself is allowed to set the tone through the republication of his essay: 'A Canonical Rethinking of the Anabaptist-Mennonite New Testament Orientation'. Here he confronts the prevailing indifference to the OT within his own tradition and, drawing on the insights of canonical criticism (Childs, Sanders), calls it to embrace it as scripture. The rest of the book traces the impact of Janzen's passion on the Mennonite tradition, as former students, colleagues and friends present 16 articles on various OT-related topics.

In the first section, many superb articles address foundational hermeneutical and ecclesiological issues with attention to the relationship between the OT and homiletics, systematic theology, biblical theology and methodology. Of these, readers will be most familiar with the work of Elmer Martens. He provides an excellent review of the history of biblical theology, revealing the trend towards embracing both testaments, and calls for a rethinking of three crucial issues. First we need to rethink the idea that the OT-NT relationship is the problem, since the Bible could be divided as easily into three sections (including creation to Abraham) as two. Secondly, we must rethink the concept of progressive revelation, which reflects modernist progress models, and adopt instead the concept of cumulative revelation, in which the OT remains valid. Thirdly, we should rethink our methodological options, and embrace techniques from intertextuality. These proposals truly contribute to the vision of both Janzen and this *Festschrift*, and provide a hermeneutical foundation for 'reclaiming the Old Testament'.

The second and larger section consists of various essays on particular OT themes and passages. These touch on issues both valued and controversial

within the Mennonite tradition: worship (Doerksen), literary and feminist studies (Reimer), imprecation (Harder), missions (Guenther), true and false prophecy (Epp-Tiessen), political advocacy (Weaver), farm economics (Daught), Jubilee (Ollenburger), forgiveness and reconciliation (Zerbe). Especially noticeable here is the consistent link between biblical text and Christian ethics. This must delight Janzen, who himself wrote *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (1994).

The final four essays mine the OT for theological stones to form a solid foundation for Christian ethics. Weaver draws on the commission of Moses as a foundation for current political advocacy, reminding us that wherever 'we find ourselves engaged in God's work of setting people free from oppression, that is where we will find God' (197). Daught leads us through various royal texts (Judges, Samuel, Kings) as well as the Joseph novella to confront modern 'gods of productivity and efficiency' in our global economy (206). Ollenburger treats Pentateuchal legislation on the year of Jubilee as a powerful metaphor, reminding us of 'God's passion to free people from all kinds of enslavement' (234). Finally, Zerbe reveals the striking similarity between the two testaments on the theme of forgiveness, before summarising core values for forgiveness today.

While some may find a volume on Canadian Mennonite interpretation of the OT less than enticing, this volume grants biblical scholars a unique perspective. Here they can observe various hermeneutical struggles and opportunities within the controlled environment of a particular tradition, and hopefully find much needed encouragement to persevere in scholarly OT study within confessional contexts.

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New Testament

An Introduction to Revelation A Pathway to Interpretation

Continuum Biblical Studies Series

Gilbert Desrosiers

London and New York: Continuum, 2000,

129 pp., £9.99/\$15.95

This little book sets out to offer a Christian approach to the hardest book of the Bible. It repeatedly emphasises that in spite of all problems of interpretation Revelation is God's authoritative word for his church, based on true divine revelation. It starts with some remarks on the use and abuse of Revelation.

After presenting the setting, the characters and the story line in chapter 2, Desrosiers discusses the diverse interpretative approaches. He fails to distinguish Premillennialism and Dispensationalism and still mentions Hal Lindsey rather than Tim LaHaye as main representative of the latter. The fourth chapter lumps together matters of genre, authorship, life setting and structure, while the fifth chapter under the heading 'New Interpretative Approaches' includes not just narrative criticism and the study of the use of the OT (designated as intertextuality) but also liberation theology and feminist theology. Chapter 6 tries to show the relevance of Revelation for today's church, and here Desrosiers presents some of the theology of the book as well as a very brief history of interpretation. Chapter 7 is an original 'how to start reading' as well as a guide to commentaries and other studies, which are regrettably not classified by outlook. The book helpfully ends with a bibliography and two somewhat selective indexes (omitting e.g. John Calvin and Jerry Falwell).

The information given is at times very basic, such as when the term 'genre' is explained (39) and when the OT

prophets are listed (44). It is characteristic of this book that Desrosiers does not soon take sides but carefully presents the options and points to the weaknesses of each of them, leaving it to the reader to find a way forward. An exception to this practice is that the positions of the liberationists and the feminists are presented without critical discussion. Chapter 7 also shows rather clearly where the author's heart is.

Apart from cases where I disagree with a given interpretation, such as that of the expression 'in the spirit' (98), two points of criticism need to be mentioned. First, some conclusions are insufficiently argued, such as when John is labelled as a wandering prophet (48); when it is said that John had knowledge of the geography of Palestine (also 48); when all letters in Antiquity are characterised as occasional (53); and when the much later Merkabah mysticism is proposed as a source of John's spirituality (96). Second, the information is presented in a way that sometimes looks disintegrated and repetitive. Some examples of this practice are: *a*: The discussion of the interpretative approaches stands apart from the treatment of the question of genre. *b*: An outline of Revelation is given before the discussion of the structure of the book and the idea of recapitulation. *c*: The issues of plot and characters occur twice (chs 2 and 5), as does the figure of Joachim of Fiore (32, 103). The information regarding the life-situation of Revelation's first readers is even scattered over many pages. A tutor using the book in a class will need to show the interrelations.

These things said, this book has an atmosphere of respect for the Scriptures which contributes to its being very suitable for introducing not just students but also interested church members to the last and most neglected book of the Bible.

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The Early Christian World

Philip Esler (ed.)

London: Routledge, 2000,

xxvi, ix + 1342 pp. (2 vols), £140.00/\$200.00

This is a large and wide-ranging discussion of Christianity in the period 30–430. It does not set out to describe Christian literature or theology but rather, to quote its editor, to offer 'a map of the rich phenomenon of early Christianity understood in the closest connection with the social context in which it was born and grew to maturity'.

The book consists of a number of essays categorised in nine broad sections. Section (1), 'The Context', begins with a chapter in which Esler argues that the Mediterranean world did have a regional identity, and that this was recognised by its inhabitants. This justifies the study of the Mediterranean world as one entity, and successive chapters survey life in the Roman Empire, Graeco-Roman religion and philosophy, and Jewish tradition and culture. Section (2), 'Christian Origins and Development', moves from Galilee, through Jewish Christianity to Paul, the Gospels and the development of the Church through to the fifth century. These sections set the scene for the rest of the volume when other contributors add further depth to issues raised in these chapters or discuss how the earliest manifestations of Christianity did (or did not) come to have a lasting influence.

Subsequent sections then discuss what might be considered everyday issues as well as intellectual concerns. Among the former are discussions of social class, ethics, the place of women, the way in which the house church functioned and travel and communication. Among the latter are issues such as the development of doctrine, and key thinkers discussed both as individuals (e.g. Tertullian) and within categories (the Apostolic Fathers, or the Apologists).

Diversity within Christianity is discussed both in terms of regional differences and of movements within Christianity. Thus Sheila McGinn opens the section on internal challenges to the Great Church with a judicious essay setting out the reasons why many scholars are increasingly reluctant to speak of heresy in the period prior to Nicaea.

Attention is paid to physical and archaeological evidence as well as to that of texts, and the two volumes are lavishly illustrated throughout.

This is a large book, and the width of its coverage makes it difficult to interact with questions of detail in a short review. One question that might be raised is whether all contributors pay as much attention as the editor suggests to the context of the individuals or the movements that they introduce, but this is a minor point.

Also minor are quibbles that might be raised about the selection of some of the key thinkers. It is perhaps surprising that Perpetua and Felicitas receive a chapter to themselves when (say) Justin and Irenaeus do not, but (as the book notes) they are the only women to do so.

Three key strengths of this book may be highlighted. First, there is the breadth of its coverage. It seems difficult to think of any essay topic likely to be tackled by an undergraduate that is not discussed in this work, although one notable omission in the light of recent scholarship is any significant discussion of education, books, scribes and readers. The clear organisation of the book makes it readily accessible as a reference tool, and there are full and recent bibliographies and good indices. Second, the scholars who have written each essay have often produced monographs or other important studies of the topic elsewhere. This makes expert opinion easily available in small doses. Obvious examples include Christine

Trevett, who writes here on Montanism, or Eric Osborn who writes on the Apologists, but there are also many others. Third, the volume embraces material that is often studied discretely as 'New Testament' or as 'Church History' and 'Patristics'. In so doing it helps to breakdown the artificial boundary that has been placed between NT and Patristics, and offers a more integrated way forward for future teaching and research.

This is an excellent book that is likely to be of benefit to all students of early Christianity. It serves in many ways as a companion volume to Everett Ferguson's *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (Garland Publishing, 1997). Both are invaluable as introductions to Early Christianity and the world in which it developed, and the different format of each (one an encyclopedia; the other a collection of essays) complements the other. No good library should be without either work, and it is to be hoped that the publishers will bring out a paperback of Esler's two volumes at a price affordable to students as they did for the work of Ferguson.

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Studies on John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship

Andreas J. Köstenberger
New York and Bern: Peter Lang, 2001,
xiv + 378 pp., h/b., £43.00/\$67.95

The author of this book is Professor of New Testament at Southeastern Baptist Seminary in North Carolina. The title suggested to me a review of recent scholarship on women in (or feminist approaches to) the Fourth Gospel. In fact it is a collection of the author's previously written essays, all but one already published elsewhere, divided into two parts, 'Studies on John' and 'Studies on Gender'.

'Introduction to John's Gospel' forms a concise, evangelical overview of

historical background, literary features and theological emphases. 'Early Doubts of the Apostolic Authorship of the Fourth Gospel in the History of Modern Biblical Criticism' demonstrates how the shift from believing in, to rejecting the son of Zebedee as author depended on a change of presuppositions rather than on any new evidence. 'A Comparison of the Pericopae of Jesus' Anointing' applies verbal aspect theory to the various Synoptic accounts to show how John focuses more on Judas' treachery; Mark and Matthew, on Jesus' instruction for disciples. 'Jesus as Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel' stresses the centrality of this title over against perspectives that emphasise solely John's 'high Christology'. 'The Seventh Johannine Sign' argues that the temple cleansing, not the walking on water or resurrection or miraculous fish-catch, completes John's perfect number of events that publicly reveal God's glory in Christ and are explicitly called signs. 'The "Greater Works" of the Believer According to John 14:12' points to the fundamental superiority of the new age, not the extensive nature of the worldwide mission, as the better deeds Jesus predicted his followers would perform. 'The Two Johannine Verbs for Sending' shows that *pempo* and *apostello* function synonymously for John. 'The Challenge of a Systematized Biblical Theology of Mission' applies insights from the Fourth Gospel to dispute 'incarnational' mission as a viable category.

The first two chapters in Part II refute Roman Catholic claims of apostolic origins for priestly celibacy and of 'the mystery' in Ephesians 5:32 as support for marriage as a sacrament (*mysterion* here points forward to 'Christ and the church'). The remaining five chapters illustrate various hermeneutical fallacies employed in the literature (mostly on the egalitarian side) on gender roles in the NT, sum up the author's exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 (women are

prohibited from being permanent pastor-teachers or elders), and then buttress that exegesis with more in-depth analysis of certain specifics: the structure of 2:12 ('neither infinitive a nor infinitive b') implies that the two activities are either both positive or both negative (in this case, both positive); 2:15 refers to the general need for women to adopt traditional domestic roles (as over against the Ephesian heresy); and an actual survey of what women do or don't do in Acts and the Pauline letters shows them in numerous important roles save that of pastor-teacher or elder).

The only essay I find essentially unconvincing is the one on signs – surely the miraculous nature of the undisputed six is a more significant criterion than any of Köstenberger's. The author's interest in John grows out of his doctoral dissertation under Don Carson at Trinity, Deerfield; his essays in this area will in general be less controversial though no less significant. I would modify his complementarian exegesis with respect to gender roles so that Paul is only restricting women from the single office of overseer-elder. But what is most remarkable of all about this volume is that a young scholar, only eight years removed from the completion of his Ph.D., should already be reprinting a collection of recently published articles, and that in a series so little-known and so expensive that it will not substantially broaden the circulation of his views.

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The First and Second Letters to Timothy

Jerome D. Quinn and William Wacker

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000,
918 pp., h/b., £42.99/\$65.00

In the 1993 edition of his *New Testament Commentary Survey*, Don Carson commented that the Pastoral Epistles 'are not very well served by commentaries in English', and that was manifestly correct. However, this 'lack of service' is apparently in the process of being remedied with the appearance of a number of English language commentaries on these epistles and the news that several others are in preparation. Recently published commentaries include Luke Johnson on 1–2 Timothy in the Anchor series and Marshall's weighty ICC volume, while in the pipeline are volumes by Towner (New International Commentary) and Köstenberger (the revision of the Expositor's Bible Commentary). Those researching and preaching the Pastorals have a wealth of information coming their way.

This commentary by Quinn and Wacker appeared near the head of this new stream of commentaries. Jerome Quinn dedicated himself to a study of the Pastorals and contributed the Anchor commentary on Titus. His work on 1–2 Timothy was originally to have been in the Anchor series, but at his death the work was not yet complete. William C. Wacker, one of Quinn's students, worked up and completed Quinn's notes, and the commentary was taken up by Eerdmans to inaugurate a new series, the Eerdmans Critical Commentary.

The commentary itself displays the strengths of Quinn's earlier work on Titus. It is full of detailed lexicographical comment, and he pays more attention to repetitions and literary patterns than many. There is also a good deal of detailed background material, and Quinn seems especially strong on French sources.

The introduction of the commentary is lifted directly from the introduction from the Titus volume, so there is no new argumentation regarding his view of authorship (non-Pauline), purpose, etc. Wacker admits that he has not been able to keep up the bibliography as he worked on Quinn's notes, so more recent works are not included.

The layout of the commentary is not particularly helpful. For example, the commentary bears the mark of its original intention, having the distinctive division of 'Notes' and 'Comments' found in the Anchor series. This division on the whole is unhelpful, requiring one to look in two places for information on the same verse and leading to repetition. One may hope the ECC will not continue this arrangement. Also, the transliteration of Greek words is questionable in such a detailed technical work. Surely those who will take the time to wade through such detail will be able to read Greek. Also, the use of the commentary is made more difficult by the fact that there are no Scripture references at the top of any page to indicate where you are in the letter. Since the verse numbers in the text are not in bold print either, I spent a good deal of time simply trying to locate the relevant section. This compounded the fact that it was difficult to get the flow of the text. Lastly, Wacker notes that he had to compose from Quinn's notes the 'Notes' sections from 1 Timothy 4:6 onwards. It seemed to me that the 'Notes' section was less complete and helpful in 2 Timothy than in 1 Timothy. This may be due to Wacker handling the material differently than Quinn did or may simply be due to referring the reader to previous sections on words which occur in 1 Timothy. In general, it seemed to me that the commentary on 2 Timothy was not as good as that on 1 Timothy.

Finally, this commentary will be a useful source for those doing detailed research on the Pastorals but is not likely to be of great assistance to the busy pastor or general student.

Because the commentary is so technical and dense the time required to mine out the useful points would not be worth it for most. Thus, while the commentary has its place, and the technical scholar cannot ignore it, it is not likely to be the first choice for a commentary on the Pastorals.

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Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme. (Second Edition)

H. Räisänen,

London: SCM Press, 2000,

xvi + 288 pp., £14.95.

This is an updated version of Räisänen's 1990 work of the same name. The structure is also the same, and the book consists of a history of research (the 'story') and a second part outlining some of the key points which the author feels should be taken into consideration in NT theology (the 'programme'). The principal additions to the new edition consist of forty pages on works published in the 1990s, and major rewriting of parts of Räisänen's 'programme' that he felt were misunderstood. He has the grace to admit that the misunderstanding of his discussion of 'religious experience' was partly his own fault. The new section on works from the 1990s, however, is the major new element, as Räisänen claims that the situation in scholarship has 'dramatically changed' since he wrote the first edition.

The 'story' is subdivided into three historical periods. The first runs from Gabler (end of the eighteenth century) to Wrede (beginning of the twentieth), and explains the course of the development of NT study among both liberals and radicals. The second period runs from the end of the First World War to the 1980s. Unfortunately for Räisänen, tragedy struck after the Great War when NT

ideas were viewed as authoritative again! During this time, only a faithful few, according to Räsänen, kept alive the vision of Gabler to keep the exegetical and the theological tasks separate from one another. Krister Stendahl and Robert Morgan are given as two examples. The third part of the history-of-research describes 'developments in the 1990s'. Only one scholar here, Gerd Theissen, receives really fulsome praise from Räsänen, while the biblical-theological approaches of Brevard Childs and Peter Stuhlmacher are particularly criticised, as are many others, for being too conservative. Räsänen is suspicious above all of those who attempt to harmonise the various elements of the NT. This will come as no surprise to those who know Räsänen's work elsewhere. In his work on Paul, for example, Räsänen will often leap at the first sign of surface differences to conclude that Paul's thought is riddled with contradictions, both on minor and major issues. There is little attempt here, in my judgement, to engage properly with those who offer a more optimistic picture of the coherence of the NT.

Räsänen's account of the history is, in some ways, comprehensive. (The bibliography is a useful resource.) His linguistic skills mean he covers a wide geographical as well as chronological sweep. On the other hand, great conservative figures from the past, like Adolf Schlatter, are given short shrift, and a number of important schools of thought from earlier days, such as those who adopted a salvation-historical approach to NT theology, are given scarcely any attention. Räsänen's historiography is a reminder of how much accounts of history are shaped by theological concerns, although Räsänen is at least open about some of those concerns (4). I found it intriguing that Räsänen sees NT theology as dominated by conservatism in its approach, while I find the exact opposite.

It is Räsänen's 'outline of a programme' (the second part), however, that is most disturbing. Räsänen considers whether NT theology should address the church, or the wider world, and strongly criticises those who take the first approach. One could perhaps understand this criticism: biblical scholarship should, after all, function as *proclamation* to the world, and not merely be part of an in-house discussion. But Räsänen is even more strongly opposed to this idea of NT scholarship being proclamation (156). For Räsänen, 'The truly appropriate horizon for biblical study (or any other discipline for that matter) is humankind as a whole ...' The future of humankind depends on the capacity of different nations - which to a considerable degree means different religions - to get on with one another' (155). The primary goal, Räsänen tells us, is in fact 'world peace'.

Needless to say, Räsänen's goals here are shot through with ideological commitments which are his own choices, and Christian scholarship should feel under no obligation to fall into line with those personal choices. For true Christianity, unlike for Räsänen's humanistic version, 'the future of humankind' depends not on everyone getting on with one another, but on the faithfulness of the God who has revealed himself definitively in Christ.

For the vast majority of readers, it would be far more useful to examine Peter Balla's *Challenges to New Testament Theology* (Tübingen, 1997, and now available from Hendrickson). I would particularly recommend the writings of Adolf Schlatter as classic conservative accounts. Happily, these have just been translated into English and published by Baker, entitled *The History of the Christ* (vol. 1) and *The Theology of the Apostles* (vol. 2).

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The Epistles of John

David Rensberger
Westminster Bible Companion, Louisville:
Westminster John Knox, 2001,
viii + 130 pp., £9.99/\$15.95

The rapidly growing series of 'Bible Companions' from Westminster Press in fact consists of commentaries for 'the laity' (vii). As far as I can see the contributing authors are all working in America and none of them are explicitly evangelical. The volume under review here is one of the slimmest so far because it only deals with the seven brief chapters of the three epistles attributed to John. Rensberger also published a commentary on these same Epistles in the Abingdon NT Commentaries series in 1997.

As always in the Bible Companions the text of the NRSV is printed and then explained passage by passage rather than verse by verse; yet Rensberger regularly offers an alternative translation in his comments. In accordance with the non-technical nature of the series there is only a brief bibliography (which does include books by Evangelicals). Basic things such as the fact that the NT was written in Greek are explained rather than assumed (87).

The brief introductions (first to the three epistles together and then to each one individually) show that Rensberger thinks an elder from the Johannine community wrote the three little documents shortly after the year 100 against a background of docetism. Here as in the commentary proper structural as well as theological questions are discussed. Other regular features in the commentary are emphasis on the lack of clarity in many of the author's sentences and brief glimpses into the texts' reception history.

There is one major problem with this book. Although his tone is respectful and empathic throughout, Rensberger does not endorse the opinions

expressed in the letters as a matter of principle. For example, in the comments on 1 John 2 we read: 'By identifying "the antichrist" with his opponents, the author set a fateful course for the Christian treatment of theological disputes' (37). In the third epistle this approach has the awkward consequence of leaving it open whether the author or his adversary Diotrephes is in the right. Because of this attitude to scriptural authority the book cannot be recommended without qualifications. It needs to be read with a discernment that 'the laity' might not have.

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Church History

Baptism and the Baptists, Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Britain

Anthony R. Cross,
Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000,
xvii + 530 pp., £29.99

In this massively documented book – some chapters having over three hundred footnotes – Dr Cross sets out to 'examine the breadth, depth and variety of the theology and practice of baptism as practised by twentieth century Baptists' (454). He largely limits himself to 'those Baptist churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain ... the ministers serving those churches and those in membership with them' (2). He conducts his examination within the context of the Ecumenical Movement on the ground that the twentieth century is distinctively the ecumenical century.

Dr Cross divides his study into three periods: 1900–1937, 1938–1966 and 1967–1999. In the first period the theological debate centred upon the twin issues of the mode and subjects of baptism. In the second, Baptists

began to respond to the discussion of baptism initiated by Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. Here the works of Alec Gilmore and George Beasley-Murray are important, both of whom espoused a much more 'sacramental' view of baptism than was usual among British Baptists. In the last period, 'which has witnessed unprecedented developments within the domestic ecumenical scene' (4) Dr Cross surveys such varied responses as shared buildings and an inclusive membership in which both infant and believers' baptism are recognised.

At the end of his massive study Dr Cross comes to the conclusion that 'there is no single Baptist theology or practice of baptism, only theologies and practices' (455). He sees this as resulting from 'Baptist ecclesiology which continues to tend towards independency, each local church and individual minister exerting their liberty in the administration and interpretation of Christ's laws' (455) – a dubious conclusion, as witness the diversity over baptism within the episcopal Church of England.

The great strength of this book is that the author has not confined himself to examining the views of Baptist scholars and theologically trained ministers. He draws extensively upon articles and letters published in the Baptist Times and upon popular books and pamphlets. Thus he shows that at the grass-roots many Baptists have not followed the much more sacramental approach to baptism advocated by their leading scholars. And the extensive documentation that he has provided, which often includes discussion within footnotes, will make Dr Cross's book a most valuable tool for students of the subject and the period.

I am, however, left with some criticisms. First, in confining his research to churches and ministers within the Baptist Union of Great Britain Dr Cross effectively overlooks the two co-operating Unions of churches in Scotland and Wales, and

the non-cooperating Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland. One effect of this decision is to underestimate the numbers of closed membership churches in Wales, and also the fact that a 'sacramental' view of baptism has a long and continuing history in the Principality. He also hardly notices the Strict Baptists and the growing number of Reformed Baptist churches outside of the Baptist Union. He misses altogether the significance of the republication of the 1689 Baptist Confession in the late fifties and subsequently.

Second, Dr Cross ignores the important strand of Baptist apologetic that runs from Thomas Patient in the seventeenth century, Abraham Booth in the eighteenth, and C.H. Spurgeon in the nineteenth, and to which I made a modest contribution in my *Children of Abraham* (1973). This apologetic argues covenant theology to a Baptist conclusion and, judging by the fire that continues to be directed against it from paedobaptist writers, is still of importance in the continuing debate with Presbyterians in Scotland and Ireland, and to a lesser extent with Anglican evangelicals.

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A History of English Christianity 1920–2000

Adrian Hastings
London: SCM, 2001,
lxi + 720 pp., £25

Fifteen years after it was first published, Adrian Hastings' *History of English Christianity* remains the standard work in its field, unchallenged to any serious extent by other perspectives. His own Roman Catholic background is evident throughout, and he gives that church a more prominent role in English life than writers from other backgrounds would be inclined to do. At the same time, he underplays free church

Protestantism, and in particular, he has little or nothing to say about the remarkable rise of 'pentecostal' or charismatic influences right across the board. Nevertheless, Professor Hastings is by no means uncritical of his own religious inheritance, and he does not hesitate to point out that the Roman Catholic Church has declined even more severely than the other major Christian denominations in the past forty years.

A second edition of the book, with only minor changes, appeared in 1987 and a third in 1991, which contained an additional chapter dealing with the 1980s. For the fourth edition, that chapter has been moved to the front of the book and supplemented by another section on the 1990s, which contains the bulk of new text.

Professor Hastings admits that it is impossible to prophesy what will happen next, and therefore extremely difficult to give a balanced assessment of the most recent period. For the major churches, it has undoubtedly been a time of considerable internal turmoil and continued decline in institutional terms, but there also significant signs of renewed life (like Alpha, for example) which Professor Hastings does not mention. He is quick to point out how English historians have revised the past to such an extent that the Protestant Reformation can no longer be taken as a given, but he fails to notice the equally strong revival of interest in the Protestant theology of the English Reformers, especially of Thomas Cranmer.

Nevertheless, it seems that Professor Hastings' conclusions can be endorsed in at least two important areas. The first of these is Roman Catholicism, which he portrays as enjoying a new respectability and influence in establishment circles, largely thanks to the efforts of a few individuals like the late Cardinal Basil Hume, but which he also realises is in catastrophic decline at the grassroots

level. He recognises that the most vibrant leadership among the young is almost all Protestant, and Evangelical Protestant at that, though he warns against making too much of this, since young Evangelicals have a way of going off the boil and becoming more liberal establishment figures as time goes on.

Evangelical Protestantism is the second area where it seems that Professor Hastings has hit the mark, and given his distance from, and general lack of sympathy towards that position, he must be congratulated for his perception. His words on this subject should be carefully pondered by every reader of *Themelios*, however uncongenial they may find them to be. A sample (xlv) will show just how painfully accurate he can be: 'It seems characteristic of Evangelicalism both to appeal especially to youth and to make rather grand claims in regard to its advances ... Many young Evangelicals fall away or merge sooner or later with the wider believing community, escaping the grip of its too often rather juvenile theology and spirituality ... The consequence is that Evangelicalism looks like a tide always claimed to be just about to come in, yet never quite reaching the shore with the force proclaimed.' Here is a judgement which Evangelicals need to take to heart if they ever expect to be more than a marginal influence on modern English church and society. Whether they are capable of doing so and rising to the challenge which Professor Hastings confronts them with, may well determine the shape of English Christianity in the century which is just now beginning.

Gerald Bray

Beeson Divinity School, Alabama

Systematics and Philosophy of Religion

The Essential IVP Reference Collection CD-ROM

Leicester: IVP, 2001,
£99.99

I already had 'hard copies' of most of the books in this collection but received them in electronic format with great anticipation. I was looking forward to spending time trying out this method of accessing their contents. I have not been disappointed, this is an outstanding resource.

There is no printed manual with the software other than installation and back up notes on the inlay. Nonetheless, the CD comes in a large, well-designed box. Presumably this serves no function but to make a single CD feel that it is really worth its asking price of nearly £100. This price is worth paying when one considers the titles included. These are: the *New Bible Dictionary and Commentary*, the *New Dictionaries of Theology and Biblical Theology*, the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, the *New Bible Atlas*, the *Bible Background Commentaries* and the *Hard Sayings of the Bible*. Furthermore, the *Dictionaries of Jesus and the Gospels*, *Paul and his Letters*, the *Later New Testament* and *New Testament Background* are included which would alone be worth more than the cost of the CD. The only obvious title missing from the collection is the *Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*. Many of these volumes have already proven their worth throughout the evangelical community and little needs to be said about their content here. The recently published *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* is a particularly creative and engaging volume for preachers and teachers of the Bible.

I was disappointed that the only supplied Bible is the AV with

apocrypha. Other translations such as the Message or NRSV can be unlocked at further cost but the NIV does not seem to be available. However, the CD is compatible with the 'Logos Library System' which means it can work alongside other Logos Bible software.

The software was very easy to install under Windows 98. It will work with any version of Windows on a Pentium PC with 16 MB Ram and 20 MB hard drive space. Having installed the software there are very clear guides to introduce the capabilities of the browser and how to use it. It is fairly easy to use and the titles benefit from many hypertext links. These allow references to be followed up throughout an individual volume or across different books. This facility quickly demonstrates the power of this format. To pursue a theme like 'Jerusalem and eschatology' becomes a delight. Searching a single theme is straightforward with a printed book but searching combinations of ideas or images is much more difficult. The electronic format makes such searching simple. The search engine allows for logical operators which allows words to be combined or excluded. It will search either selected books or all the books in the collection. References may be viewed in their own individual frames on the same screen. In this way several books may be displayed alongside each other and, linked to the Bible, very quick searches are possible.

The software is also able to take notes from the user and store these in various formats either as part of the books themselves or as distinct files. With just a little use the collection can become a customised centre for personal study, sermon preparation or academic research.

The software does have limitations that emerge with use. Some dictionaries allow entries to be accessed through the list of contributors while other volumes do not. This reflects the fact that the books have not been standardised when assembled into the

CD collection. The maps cannot be manipulated and the form in which the text is displayed has only two settings. Furthermore, even with the Bibles that may be unlocked the software does not really offer academic Bible study capabilities. There is no literature using original languages. The collection would need to be used alongside other Bible study software for it to be a scholarly aid. However, the most serious limitation for this user does not lie with the software but with hardware. I find prolonged reading from a monitor something of a strain. This is not a real problem for reference literature, which only tends to be used for short articles and entries. Nonetheless, I will not yet be giving away my printed copies!

Chris Sinkinson

Fordingbridge, Dorset

The God of Miracles, An Exegetical Examination of God's Action in the World

C. John Collins

Leicester: Apollos, 2001,
219 pp., £11.99

This is a clear, well-written book, which offers a critique of several key metaphysical claims about divine action in the world from an exegetical perspective. That is, Collins sets out philosophical claims about God's interaction with the world, and tries to ascertain which (if any) of the candidate theories approximates to what the Bible has to say on the matter. Collins takes up issues in philosophy, theology, linguistics and science (via apologetics). Consequently, the book has an interdisciplinary feel. The author, a specialist in Hebrew Philology, gives a careful argument in the exegetical chapters, and a fair rendering of the philosophical material.

There are however a number of areas where things are perhaps a little too

neat. The taxonomy of views on divine action skates over some important distinctions that have been the subject of some philosophical discussion in the literature. To give an example, he does not distinguish between continuous creation, and occasionalism, although there is no entailment between the two views, and some debate about whether key thinkers (like Descartes) held one or the other (or neither). Nor does there seem to be enough on the distinction that can be made between secondary causation and divine concurrence in secondary causes, which are distinct issues.

In addition, the author does not always make plain his own philosophical assumptions. For instance, he makes use of common sense as a basic notion in his critique of views like occasionalism, but fails to register that this is itself a contentious epistemological issue (and not a recent one either).

Finally, the conclusion he draws about causality in Scripture (against occasionalism and 'providentialism') appears somewhat simplistic. Even if he is right and the Bible speaks in language which is unmistakably causal (and I think his argument is persuasive in this respect), it is not at all clear what is meant by cause either by the author, or by the Scripture, beyond the fact that there are divine and mundane causes at work in the world. Nor does Collins make clear the hermeneutical problems that arise in this regard.

Take the occasionalist's case: occasionalists could (and usually do) have a high view of Scripture, and yet believe that Collins has not proved his case. Even if the Bible appears to speak with one voice about secondary causes, it does not follow (logically) that secondary causes obtain in the world, any more than Biblical talk of God repenting necessarily means that God is mutable or in time. It could be that the Biblical authors, not intending to offer a metaphysical

account of how things are, record an approximation when the truth of the matter is quite different. Nor need this interfere with inspiration. God might inspire the Biblical authors to write in such a way knowing it is only an approximation to how things really are, in the same way as they speak of the 'arm of the Lord', or 'God repenting' in approximate ways. This depends upon the conception of religious language at work in Scripture. This is an issue that Collins, in his lucid volume, does not take up.

Oliver D. Crisp

King's College, London

How to Read T.F. Torrance Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology

Elmer M. Colyer

Downers Grove: IVP-USA, 2001,
393 pp., \$24.99

The necessity of a critical introduction to the theological thought of Thomas F. Torrance is undeniable. Apart from books concentrating on specific aspects of Torrance's oeuvre, one still sensed the need for a more panoramic exegesis. Colyer's attempt is to provide precisely such a 'local hermeneutics' of Torrance's work. Hence the promise of such a book.

The book is divided into four parts. Three of them deal respectively with the persons of the Trinity. The fourth one presents Torrance's views on the Trinity as such and on the character of theology. This is a helpful arrangement for the undergraduate student who is attempting to study the intricate theology of Torrance. Colyer deals in turn with: the dogmatic aspects related to the three persons of the Trinity; the importance of relation for Torrance's metaphysics; his critical realism and so on.

Yet despite its very introductory nature, designed particularly to throw light on the more difficult aspects of

his thought, the book is plagued by a fundamental methodological lapse. The author makes certain procedural choices which actually do a disservice to Torrance himself. There are a number of such misgivings: Colyer chose not to consult such vital sources for the writing of any introduction as correspondence, background material, conference papers, lecture notes and so on. The justification that is offered is that this would prove 'detrimental to careful and comprehensive delineation of Torrance's theological vision' (20). Furthermore, what is of interest for Colyer seems restricted to the later work of Torrance. The present reviewer doubts whether one can provide a local hermeneutics without going 'deeper' into the influences that have shaped Torrance's texts.

Not only does Colyer isolate Torrance's published work from his unpublished material, but he also chose not to take into consideration the criticism wrought by his arguments. The book, he maintains, is primarily descriptive rather than critical. One is reminded painfully of this on every page when almost all of the quotations and the references are from Torrance's texts. One may wonder whether insulating Torrance from engagement with his critics amounts to a good description of his thought, as one may indeed wonder what sort of hermeneutics can still maintain a rigorous distinction between description and criticism.

In light of the above, the book will not figure prominently in the scholarly exchanges about Torrance's theology, yet it might provide the undergraduate student with a reference tool to Torrance's views on specific topics.

Adonis Vidu

University of Nottingham

Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies

William A. Dembski and Jay Wesley Richards (eds)
Downers Grove: IVP-USA, 2001,
280 pp., \$19.99

Princeton Theological Seminary has always been known as a prestigious centre of theological learning. It has also been a seminary that has undergone profound change. In the nineteenth century the evangelical luminaries, Hodge and Warfield, made it a focus for Reformed theology. In the twentieth century that heritage gave way to the mainstream liberalism of the day. This book is evidence that the process of change is still underway and that, whatever the next stage might be, there are good grounds for evangelical optimism.

A number of students at Princeton formed the Charles Hodge Society. This student-led group presented regular papers seeking to re-establish the credibility both of evangelical theology and the practice of apologetics. They also revived the Princeton Theological Review, a journal that had ceased with the shifting agenda of the Seminary. This book is instructive both because of the essays themselves and what they represent. The essays are learned and insightful. The collection as a whole represents a way for evangelicals to respond to the liberal and post modern agenda.

The major essays of the collection are by William Dembski, Raymond Cannata, Jay Wesley Richards, Michael Bush, Leslie Zeigler, Gary Deddo and Matthew Frawley. The essays were themselves papers given at the Charles Hodge Society meetings. Subject areas include apologetic methodology, the doctrine of Scripture, the incarnation, the challenge of feminism and Darwinism. One might note with surprise the absence of any essays dealing directly with the issues of religious pluralism or the problem of evil. However, the

subjects covered are handled in an engaging way with plenty of reference to contemporary debates. The arguments are scholarly and yet remain accessible even to those unfamiliar with the subject areas.

A flavour of the running theme in the book is the claim by Dembski and Richards that the 'secular academy sets ground rules that doom Christianity from the start' (15). The academic climate of Princeton, and perhaps most secular theological departments, is inherently opposed to evangelical theology. This is because the secular institutions generally assume a naturalistic framework. Divine revelation and miracles do not happen or, if they do, are not open to scientific methods of enquiry. If this is true then the proper apologetic response cannot simply be to refer to evidence or biblical texts. Apologetics must engage with the presuppositions of modern and postmodern thought. In their different ways, the authors provide just such an apologetic. They refuse to play by the rules of the secular academy. Zeigler points out that feminists, eager to revise the Christian concept of God, assume that any picture of 'God' always has its origins in the human mind. In contrast, an evangelical theology will put divine revelation first and put our concepts of 'God' to the test of Scripture; 'the meaning of the metaphor has to be sought in the story of the *One whom Jesus called Father*' (186). Even if one has had bad experience of fathers, the Scriptures must still determine what true fatherhood means in relation to God. This kind of apologetic exposes basic assumptions of the feminist movement, such as the bias against revelation. In similar ways liberal and radical treatments of the incarnation, virgin birth and human origins are also exposed as based upon faulty foundations.

This volume is to be highly commended and will be of particular help to students studying in non-

evangelical environments. Taken as a whole it is highly instructive to reflect on what the contributors were trying to do. The Charles Hodge Society represents a foray of robust evangelical thinking into the realm of mainstream liberalism. In the process they demonstrate how evangelicals can be both courteous and critical in their response to secularism.

Chris Sinkinson

Fordingbridge, Dorset

John Donne

Man of Flesh and Spirit

David L. Edwards

London and New York: Continuum, 2001,
xiii + 368 pp., h/b., £20.00/\$29.95

David Edwards' recent book, written for non-specialists, gives an account of the life and work of the English poet and preacher, John Donne. The first part of the book locates Donne in the literary and historical context of the late 16th and early 17th centuries and then gives an outline of his life (chs 1-4). It presents in short form much of the material to be found in R.C. Bald's *John Donne: A Life* (2nd ed. OUP 1986) which remains the standard biography. The next two chapters look at some of the secondary literature on Donne starting with Walton's *Life*. Chapter 6 is devoted to a critique of John Carey's cynical and secular *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (Faber and Faber 1990) and P.M. Oliver's *Donne's Religious Writing* (Longman 1997). Carey holds that Donne was a cynical careerist who suffered psychologically throughout his life because of his 'apostasy' from the Roman church. The rest of the book examines Donne's poems (chs 7 and 8), his relationship with his wife (ch. 9) and his sermons (ch. 10).

Donne was a complex and not wholly likable character who can give the impression of being too clever and rather insensitive. Nevertheless, Edwards' reading of Donne is sympathetic, though he is

far from an unqualified admiration of his subject (viii). Edwards is a liberal Anglican (Episcopalian) minister who finds much in the Christianity of the reformation period (including Donne's) distasteful. This is especially clear in chapter 10 where for instance Edwards notes apologetically that 'Donne treated himself and all who listened to him as sinners' (336) and views Donne's sermons on hell as regrettable rants (342). Edwards also repeatedly criticises 'the joyless creed of Calvinism' (57) which he sees as 'cruel' (319). This hostility towards orthodox Protestantism (mixed with occasional error) is the least satisfactory aspect of the book, though a basic knowledge of the Reformation period is enough to be able to correct Edwards' caricatures. Extraordinarily, Edwards claims that the OT contradicts Copernicus' view that the earth moves round the sun (180).

Should you read a book about John Donne? Edward's book is encouraging in that it shows (incidentally) that evangelicals are part of the mainstream of the church whereas modern liberals (like Edwards) have to rewrite the script in several vital places. Further, Donne's life can be read as an example of God's grace transforming an imperfect man: his early sexual (pornographic?) poetry giving way to his later Holy Sonnets. However, this is probably a book to borrow rather than buy.

James Palmer

Cambridge

Salvation

Timothy J. Gorringe

Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000,
viii + 113 pp., £4.95

This is the eighth book in the *Thinking Things Through* series, which aims to 'help Christians to think through their faith'. Written in a very accessible prose and presupposing no previous knowledge of the subject, except

perhaps faint memories, this volume may also be used in study groups, for which the author has provided some useful discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

Gorringe divides the book into two parts, one dialogical and the other theoretical. The aim of this is to point out the relevance of the topic for everyday life. While the dialogues are somewhat unrealistic and forgettable, they provide the reader with a non-technical introduction to the issue of salvation. The second part is supposed to be a drawing together of conclusions, as it is in the very nature of dialogues to be inconclusive. The late modern dialogical tradition in literature betrays a preference for a plurality of voices, which replaces the unitary authorial perspective, characteristic of earlier literature. A series of voices play themselves into a cacophony of sounds, none of which should be taken as the legitimate one. To a degree some readers may live the same experience of undecidability when reading both the dialogue between Rebecca and Tom and the concluding theory. A plurality of views replaces a single view. This makes the book particularly fertile for discussion since the participants may just as legitimately identify with either of the characters in the narrative.

Gorringe teaches salvation by looking at some of the biblical and historical metaphors that strive to express what is taking place in the process. While not offering any resolution to the debates between various views, he exhibits a preference for some of the more contemporary, especially political views. Salvation must also entail a concern for the environment, for the liberation of women, and it must include an element of social justice. The assumption is of a holistic human being, whose salvation involves the vindication of both spirit and body. To the author's credit, such a political take does not obscure the actual ontological change in the person's relationship to God.

To sum up: while some pastors and group leaders may differ from some of the views entertained by Gorringe, the manner in which he presents them is non-offensive and modest. *Salvation* does offer a good guide and introduction to the doctrine of salvation for the lay person.

Adonis Vidu

University of Nottingham

Theology Through Preaching

*Colin E. Gunton,
Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 2001,
214 pp., £14.99*

This book is a collection of sermons from the preaching ministry of one of the most significant theologians in Great Britain today. This alone would make it of interest, but in addition one's appetite is further whetted by the criticism voiced in the preface of the 'tendency to introduce a radical separation between theology and preaching, divorcing ... the intellectual and the rhetorical', which 'performed a great disservice to both activities, separating the one from the life of the church and the other from the world of the academy' (viii). To those who share this concern – a concern we should share – this book will be a valuable pedagogical and practical aid in the school of biblical and doctrinal preaching.

There are 30 sermons, on a variety of topics in the collection, the centre of which in terms of arrangement and of substance are eight sermons dedicated especially to explaining the life and significance of Jesus Christ. The focus is always biblical and doctrinal and it is generously interspersed with observations and illustrations that spring from wisdom amassed from a career of thinking about the central matters of faith. Not all the conclusions he draws will win total agreement (for instance, his discussion of men and women in 1 Corinthians 11 was unconvincing for this reader at least), but his

procedure of theologically thinking these issues through in the pulpit is surely right.

The style is easy for the reader of whatever theological competence since the sermons here are short and accessible. The sermon given in memory of the writer's deceased grandchild is particularly powerful and moving, and throughout the sermons show Gunton's heart and passion for theological truth to reach all aspects of his listeners' eyes. The book would also function well as an introduction to Gunton's thinking in general, since what he writes as a professor he can share as the preacher. The trinitarian and christological concerns, not to mention the emphasis on the need for a robust doctrine of creation and eschatology, come across clearly and are shown with some of their pastoral import. As Gunton says in the introduction, the theologian who preaches becomes a different type of theologian, and we see some of this dynamic in action with the unbreakable relationship in these sermons between academic contemplation and congregational application. Those who are looking for pointers as to how a modern creedal theology informs the office of the pastor-teacher can learn much from the content and approach of the examples here.

In addition Christoph Schwoebel offers a very fine introduction outlining theological bases for preaching. It is, in his words, a biblical, pastoral, doctrinal and congregational task, and practitioners would benefit from his remarks on how to succeed in this venture. One can only hope that this collection will provide a stimulus to theologians and preachers alike not to be content with either homiletical platitudes or theology disengaged from the life of church teaching and devotion. The task of the church requires, in Schwoebel's view, a preaching ministry that is relevant to the crises

of love, faith and life that afflict God's people in this age, and it is relevant doctrinal and biblical preaching that will be the means of this divine grace.

Iain Taylor
Oxford

The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought

Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper (eds.)
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000,
xxviii + 777 pp., h/b., £40.00

Specialist dictionaries like this one are a godsend to students. Experts sum up in comparatively few words the most significant things they need to know about a given subject, giving an introductory overview, and potentially removing the need to spend hours ploughing through full length books on the topics. 'Benedictine thought' in 1200 words, 'ethics' in 1800, 'joy' in 1000, 'New Age' in 800, and 'sacrament' in 2400! And at the end of each article a book list, right up to date and generally pretty full. What more could you ask for?

Perhaps a few book tokens from Auntie Maud, since there's no paperback edition and the price is high. But maybe it's not so bad when you view it as less than 7p an article.

That sounds good if you're going to use all the 600 articles. But what are the chances that the articles you want will be included in this volume?

On the whole, pretty good. All the obvious ones are there; the expert team of editors and contributors has made sure of that; but, of course, not everything's there. And some things have been lumped together and so don't get an article to themselves, and have to be hunted down with the help of the very full index.

So, for example, Taizé, Teilhard de Chardin, William Temple, Paul Tillich, and so on, all get an article to themselves, while Frederick Temple,

Alfred Lord Tennyson, Tertullian, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and the like, get mentioned in the index, generally with multiple cross references.

I confess I thought this unfair to Tertullian. But in any dictionary like this the editors have to adopt some policy in order to limit the number of articles. Their policy has been to:

- major on ideas rather than on historical facts.
- provide major overview articles on the development of Christian thought through the centuries.
- provide a series of articles on regional and denominational theologies, and on key themes in theology, philosophy and ethics.
- limit the articles on strictly biblical material to issues of major significance.
- strictly limit the number of articles on individuals, except for twentieth century thinkers.

It's for this reason that Tertullian doesn't get a section to himself, but is consigned to the index. But there he gets no less than 40 cross-references. Not all of them work, however. The first I tried was 'Latin theology', but that article assumed Latin theology started in 300 and so ignored Tertullian. The cross-referenced article 'Pre-Constantinian thought' was more helpful, however, and gave him some 500 words.

The list of contributors is impressive in terms of scholarship, and covers a wide theological range, representing denominations from Orthodox to Quaker, and theological positions from evangelical to agnostic. My feeling is that evangelicals are somewhat underrepresented, but they are certainly there, and it's especially good to see someone like Kwame Bediako of Ghana included.

The introduction claims that the academic level of the articles is introductory and 'accessible'. Many of them are, provided the reader is

willing to think and read the material with care. The number of times the writers get a little too technical for comfort is, mercifully, limited.

This book won't answer all your questions or write all your essays. But, along with parallel dictionaries it's well worth consulting, and even worth the investment of those book tokens from Auntie Maud.

Peter Hicks

London Bible College

Faith with Reason

Paul Helm

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000,
xvi + 185 pp., h/b.

The tension between faith and reason has a long and convoluted history. Paul Helm has done much to show that there is reason to have faith, and that religious faith can be intellectually respectable. This study is an addition to that work. Helm seeks to show that such faith can and should be discussed, and assesses the success of recent treatments of faith in religious epistemology. His main dialogue partners are Alvin Plantinga's 'Reformed' Epistemology, and the cumulative case for theism (hereinafter CCT) characterised by Richard Swinburne and Basil Mitchell. These two approaches to faith dominate the field, and it is particularly useful to have a volume that deals with them in such a careful and lucid manner.

This, however, is by no means an exposition of existing ideas. As well as dealing with the epistemic or evidential aspects to religious faith thrown up by these two ways of conceiving faith, Helm tackles the fiducial component of religious faith. He distinguishes between faith in the God of theism, and the God of Christianity. Belief in the Christian God *involves* a person, (in how one behaves for example), in ways that theoretical belief in a philosophical

God does not. Nor is religious belief wholly different from other kinds of trust in, say, the stability of my bedroom floor, or a suspension bridge. There is parity between such common sense beliefs and religious faith.

Finally, Helm tackles faith and praxis. He focuses on the relationship between faith and virtue, and whether a person who is a scoundrel can also be a person of faith.

The following comments pertain to the epistemic/evidential aspects of this study. It is interesting that Helm, a Calvinist, develops a coherentist account of religious belief. That is, he argues that the CCT position fits with a view of religious faith that is web-like, with certain important beliefs more central than other, peripheral beliefs. This is in stark contrast to Plantinga's 'Reformed' account of weak foundationalism, where some beliefs (in God, for example), are simply a given, for which no argument is necessary: such beliefs lie at the foundations of a person's epistemic structures. One question this raises involves the extent to which adherence to a particular theological tradition involves related commitments to certain epistemological structures.

Helm takes issue with Plantinga's use of Calvin too. The *sensus divinitatis* (sense of the divine) is not about the justification of the rationality of religious belief. It is to do with the proper functioning of our moral natures. If our moral nature is vitiated, that will affect what we are willing to consider as true about God, and the faith, or lack thereof, that ensues.

Two notions lie behind much of the argument of this account of faith. First, that our beliefs, including religious beliefs, are 'person' relative. For instance, what I find convincing, you may not, for a range of different reasons. Secondly, Helm invokes the (William) James principle: 'a rule of thinking that would absolutely

prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth, if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.' Religious faith is just such a 'kind of truth' that is often ruled out of court *a priori*, in violation of this principle.

There are several other interesting and carefully nuanced lines of argument that this book pursues, which cannot be outlined here. Suffice to say that this is a valuable addition to the literature, and should be read by anyone with an interest in the philosophical foundations of, and justification for, religious faith.

Oliver D. Crisp

King's College, London.

Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth

George Hunsinger

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000,
375 pp., h/b., £25.99/\$39.00

George Hunsinger has already firmly established himself as one of the very few reliable guides round the cathedral of Barth's theology. 'Grace that is not disruptive is not grace.' Hunsinger takes his readers on an exploration of the relationship between traditional doctrine and radical politics. He points out how in recent decades orthodoxy has been set against progression in the theological world. Hunsinger wants to display the fruitful marriage between the two in the lifelong work and writing of Karl Barth. The book is a collection of essays that Hunsinger has produced over the last 20 years.

The book is divided into three sections. The first deals with Barth's political theology, the second with his doctrinal theology and the third with his ecumenical theology.

The first section was the most immediately stimulating for the seasoned Barthian. The monotone political flavour of these chapters is

balanced by Hunsinger writing from a culture in which an equally monotone, but different, political theology enjoys the consensus. In the first chapter Barth is brought into conversation with Rene Girard. Whilst Girard's theology is unorthodox his pacifistic passion can be more securely anchored within a theology of the Cross. In chapter two the social critique of Liberation theology is placed under the microscope and found wanting in its lack of appreciation of the divine-human axis of the human condition. In the third and fourth chapters we are forced to think through the challenge of the German Church struggle for today. Although the essays are aimed at America quite specifically, much of the material is easily grasped. We can look with horror at the evils of Hitler's Germany, but do we stand up against the obvious (though socially and politically popular) evils of our own governments, with their culture of war and exploitation. The fifth essay, comparing Barth's view of the state with John Howard Yoder is a compulsory read. I have rarely encountered such a careful analysis of the material.

The second section of the book begins with a general essay on Barth's Christology. He has been criticised for being both Alexandrian and Antiochian, so Hunsinger guides us through the dialectics that Barth sets up. The second essay on Barth's doctrine of the Spirit was the first I turned to. There is much to be learned from this in developing a fully rounded pneumatology. It is *koinonia* that is established as the essence of the Spirit's work. In chapter eight we are taken into Barth's doctrine of eternity. Hunsinger guides us into the complexities of Barth's thought in which the three-fold being of God is reflected in a three-fold understanding of eternity. We are taken on an exploration of Barth's doctrines of Scripture and hermeneutics in chapter nine. This is a good chapter for those struggling with the standard

evangelical dismissal of Barth. Perhaps the weakest chapter in the book is chapter ten on the doctrine of Hell. Here Hunsinger seems to be far too lenient on Barth's equivocation.

The final section of the book widens the studies to general questions of ecumenical theology. The first of these papers plunges deep into Barth's widespread use of the principle of *koinonia*, then uses this to throw light upon the theological argument between Balthasar and Rahner. The essay entitled 'What Karl Barth Learned from Martin Luther' is possibly the most gripping essay in the volume. Barth's passions seem so much clearer when viewed through Luther in this way. Hunsinger suggests five areas of Luther dependence: Christocentrism; the suffering God; the Word of God; the Christian as *simul iustus et peccator*; and grace and freedom. Chapter thirteen demonstrates how ultimately Barth and Lindbeck are separated at a deep level. Chapter fourteen is a somewhat useful paraphrase of the Barth-Harnack correspondence, taking us to the final chapter. This is an uninspiring analysis of Carl Henry's debate with Hans Frei.

This book is essential reading for anybody who appreciates Karl Barth. George Hunsinger is able to show off and examine Barth with an impressive thoroughness. The book shows just how much Barth has yet to offer theological studies.

Paul Blackham
London

Invitation to Theology

Michael Jenkins
Downers Grove: IVP-USA, 2001,
278 pp., \$19.99

There seems to be something about recent North American theologies that the most orthodox among them feel they have to engage in full prolegomena, that they do dogmatics

in the style of apologetics. Thus we get a definition of theology as 'the essential business of faithful reflection on human life lived consciously in the presence of God' (17). A symptom of this 'making theology relevant' is in citing Athanasius as if his theology were a Barthian one of revelation, making the divine *known* in the world, or to allude to Bonhoeffer in the neat but almost trite re-phrasing of 'What is theology?' as 'Who is theology?'. Then there is the slightly embarrassing tendency to think that jazz music is now 'cool' for Christian theologians: 'jazz and blues performances are best for understanding the doctrine of *perichoresis*, although a good string quartet will do the trick' (93) and there is a name-checking of Miles Davis for good measure. We also get sound-bitey theology: 'God, as the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas has said, *has his being in communion*' (172), which then gets too simply associated with Barth's 'analogia relationis'. How this fits with the approval of T.F. Torrance's Barthian view that 'Spirit' 'applies to the whole being of God' is not spelled out.

In some ways this works better as pastoral theology, and that is probably the right place for it. Henri Nouwen's idea of the Trinity as like a circle containing a cross has a nice symbolism. There is a kind of soft evangelical triumphalism: for example in the reproduction of J.B. Torrance's theological diagrams from his Aberdeen lectures, along with the references to J. McLeod Campbell – the point being that there is not just a gospel offered, but an envelopment of humanity into God. However this is not made very clearly – in general, there is all too often a mass of historical side-tracking and rhetorical flourishes at the expense of clarity.

Another example of hyperbole is on page 202: 'Clearly the centuries-old and bitterly divisive *filioque* controversy pales in significance in contrast to the stunning recent developments in the ecumenical

dialogues on the Trinity', meaning the WARC-Orthodox dialogue. The author claims a Western victory in what sounds like T.F. Torrance's terms 'that the Holy Spirit proceeds ultimately from the triune Being of the Godhead'.

There are helpful moments throughout this book: the reminder from Klerkegaard that faith is more 'subjective' the more it surrenders to the divine Object. The position of Schweitzer's criticism of liberal theologies is handled well. The Fatherhood of God is stressed and helps this theology to feel confident, assured, reassuring. However I'm not sure it really helps the would-be theologian to wrestle, fight, pray, let alone get back to the Bible's expression of the great truths. *Themelios* readers would do better with Migliore or Gunton.

Mark Elliott

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Faith, Science and Understanding

John Polkinghorne

London: SPCK, 2000,

xvi + 208 pp., h/b., £11.99

Sir John Polkinghorne's reputation as an influential 'scientist-theologian' is now well-established through his substantial programme of books. His latest offering is another 'further thoughts' volume (xi) (the first was *Reason and Reality* (SPCK, 1991)), in which he revisits issues in the burgeoning field of the relationship between science and Christian theology.

Part 1 begins with a defence of the value of knowledge for its own sake, and its essential unity, based on the conviction that knowledge is the exploration of a created reality, itself given value by the love of its creator God, who is one. Science and theology, in their differing domains of experience, are concerned with the search for truth, attained by the formation and evaluation of motivated

beliefs. For Polkinghorne, these concepts are the foundations on which the life of a university should be built: if theology does not make its own distinctive contribution, the enterprise of higher education is incomplete.

Polkinghorne reiterates his commitment to critical realism, in both science and theology, as a middle way between intellectual certainty (of the Enlightenment, modernist variety) and intellectual doubt. Science is not driven into a despairing relativism by the collapse of modernity. 'The most helpful philosopher of this middle way is ... Michael Polanyi' (33). Furthermore, Polkinghorne advocates a 'generous, comprehensive and non-reductionist account of human experience': so, for example, 'we should not exalt science at the expense of art' (28).

Such affirmations are undoubtedly welcome. However, the discussion of the role of revelation remains problematic and unsatisfactory from an evangelical perspective. For Polkinghorne, revelation (including the Bible) is a meaningful record of encounters and experiences, and reflection upon them, rather than the communication of unchallengeable propositions (ch. 2). These alternatives are set up tendentiously, and conveniently avoid a nuanced evangelical doctrine of revelation and Scripture, which is not mentioned at all. Furthermore, faced with the 'apparent cognitive clashes of the world faiths', Polkinghorne's position leaves him with little to say in the way of resolution (65).

Chapter 4, a useful discussion of design in biology, acknowledges that the revival of teleological issues has raised important and significant questions. However, for Polkinghorne it seems premature to conclude that an essential irreducible complexity in biological systems has been firmly established by the 'intelligent design' movement of Behe, Dembski et al.

Part 1 concludes with further remarks on a number of issues, including a concise critique of the pantheism expounded by Philip Clayton in *God and Contemporary Science* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

Part 2 'is concerned with what was the dominant issue in the science and theology debate in the 1990s: How may we conceive of divine agency in a way that respects the integrity of the scientific account of the process of the physical world and which also does justice to the religious intuition and experience of God's providential action in history?' (xiv). A key concept in the discussion is the idea that creation was an act of divine kenosis (ch. 6). Chapter 7 is quite demanding in its exploration of the nature of time and the possible links between scientific, metaphysical and theological ideas. It provides an interesting outline and analysis of four main approaches, with a closing note on process thought.

Part 3 offers some engagement with contemporary thinkers (Wolfhart Pannenberg, T.F. Torrance and Paul Davies), and concludes with a brief survey of the history of science and theology in England.

Overall, then, this is a stimulating and enjoyable book, worth reading, but requiring awareness of, and critical engagement with, the parameters of Polkinghorne's synthesis.

Philip Duce

Leicester

Revelation and Story Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story

Gerhard Sauter and John Barton (eds)

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000,

ix + 204 pp., £15.99

Whilst lacking an overall perspective or even, in places, a continuity of theme, this collection of nine papers is a thought-provoking discussion of a variety of theological and

hermeneutical concerns about revelation. The book finds its origin in a three-year series of biannual meetings between members of the Oxford and Bonn theology faculties, long linked in partnership, and here engaged on a 'collaborative research project'. The editors express the hope that through this process the British and German sides of the discussion have understood each other better and with more sensitivity than is usual. Indeed Stanley Hauerwas contributes a foreword which points out that British and Germanic approaches to 'revelation' have traditionally been so distinct that 'this book should not exist'.

But exist it does, and in theory at least one looks forward to seeing what common ground the typically systematising approach of the Germans might find with the traditional British reluctance to do more than discuss possibilities and potential. In practice, I was disappointed that there is relatively little evidence of a new mutual comprehension and even less of a clearly defined way forward. The concluding chapter, perhaps significantly entitled 'The Productive Vagueness of an Untranslatable Relationship', sees Caroline Schröder acknowledging the difficulty of even locating the topic of the conferences: was it 'revelation and story', or was it 'Geschichte und Offenbarung'? The German version of the book, we are told, retains 'story' as a loan-word. Perhaps both sets of contributors envisage 'story' to mean something like the (theological) 'content' of the biblical narrative. There is, says Schröder, an agreed commitment to work with the final form of the text and not seek to 'go behind it', but, as she avers, it is a little hard to pin down precisely what this cuts out.

Short of synthesis, however, the book offers all kinds of interesting alleyways and proposals. The German contributions evince a concern to take seriously the nuanced theological meditations of the biblical story

through such figures as Luther, Schleiermacher and Balthasar. Gerhard Sauter's opening chapter contains some excellent hermeneutical orientation via the claim that God is the key to the Bible, and he offers three 'doctrinal polarities' which aid Scripture reading: spirit and letter; law and gospel; and promise and fulfilment. Ernstpeter Maurer tackles philology, translation and interpretation in dialogue with a careful reading of Schleiermacher which seeks to move beyond the simple grid of psychology and grammar. He concludes with a theological hermeneutic of 'trinitarian structure' centring around God's objectivity; the liberating presence of the divine subject, and the spiritual creativity of language.

The British contributions, on the whole, consist of caveats and reservations, so perhaps not as much gulf-bridging as imagined has taken place. Paul Fiddes provides a fascinating comparison of John's Gospel and *The Tempest*, particularly their open-ended, audience-involving epilogues, in order to see how far non-biblical stories can also be vehicles of revelation. Graham Ward spins typically radical and orthodox rings around the notion of allegory, marshalling Aristotle and Gregory of Nyssa to the task of challenging the story/revelation polarity. Probably the nearest the book comes to constructive synthesis is Robert Morgan's lengthy piece entitled 'Does the Gospel Story Demand and Discourage Talk of Revelation?' His answer: yes, both ways, since it emphasises the revelatory significance of Christ and his death and resurrection, but then invites us to a discreet narrative distance away where the gospel stories circle around revelation in veiled and unpredictable ways. A personal view: Morgan's piece is probably the one for the average reader to start with, and is the most realistic assessment of the possibilities and pitfalls of the story/revelation link.

Overall, then, more a sense of a work in progress than a theological achievement. All the ingredients are here; there is much to chew on; but the cake is not yet fully baked.

Richard Briggs

All Nations Christian College

Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification. A Challenge to the New Perspective

Peter Stuhlmacher. With an essay by Donald A. Hagner

Downer's Grove: IVP-USA, 2001, 108 pp., \$12.99

Peter Stuhlmacher's Spring 2000 lectures delivered at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama represent his 'last word' on a subject extremely close to his head and heart over decades of NT research. This reviewer was able to be present when Herr Stuhlmacher delivered his lectures and they are now available in IVP's handy paperback edition.

Stuhlmacher's three lectures are more a correction to the 'new perspective on Paul' than a refutation of it. But they constitute an exegetical alternative to key assumptions that lie beneath it.

Chapter one grounds justification in the final judgement of God as understood in the OT and in the inter-testamental literature, especially Qumran. Justification is also *creative*: 'God's righteousness in the Old Testament and early Judaism means, above all, the activity of the one God to create welfare and salvation in the creation, in the history of Israel, and in the situation of the (end-time) judgement' (19). Stuhlmacher's interpretation, parallel but not identical to Ernst Käsemann's, is to link God's *creatio ex nihilo* with his creation of righteousness in the cross-enabled effective declaration of justification.

Wilhelm Wrede and Albert Schweitzer's early-20th century re-

interpretation of Paul, by which justification was understood to be a 'subsidiary crater' within his thought, is refuted by Stuhlmacher's argument that 'justification for the apostle is the quintessential structural law of God's gracious work in salvation history' (30).

Chapter two outlines the familiar claims of E.P. Sanders, Krister Stendahl and James Dunn, and to a lesser extent N.T. Wright, that Paul was misinterpreted fundamentally by Martin Luther. They wish to wrest from our eyes the 'Reformation spectacles' that made Paul's struggle to enlarge the 'boundary markers' for the Gentile mission into an analogy for the Reformer's struggle against late medieval Catholicism. Stuhlmacher criticises Sanders' 'covenantal nomism' as being a one-sided or overly-concessive depiction of Judaism's soteriology. He also sees the 'new perspective' as evasive on the relation of justification to the final judgement. Stuhlmacher accuses the 'new perspective' of truncating Paul (44).

The heart of this book is found between pages 44 and 53, in the section entitled 'The True Perspective on Paul'. Pauline eschatology affirmed a cosmic justification in the coming establishment of the Zion - βασιλεια Paul saw himself playing a personal role in the final time-table. 'Paul thought and taught as a converted Jew whom the exalted Christ had enlisted in the service of worldwide preaching of the gospel of God's kingdom' (52).

In chapter three Stuhlmacher discusses justification as a biblical theologian. He holds a high understanding of Christ's blood-atonement and sees Christ for Paul as a corporate, representative figure. He also sees justification as *powerful*: we are different because of our justification pronounced and enacted through baptism. Justification is therefore substantially transforming.

Stuhlmacher is not satisfied by the imputation-argument of many traditional Lutherans (and Protestant Anglicans, for that matter). On this point, he wishes to bind together participatory views of Christian existence with forensic or *simul peccator et iustus* (sic-PZ) views. Stuhlmacher wants to be faithful to Paul's *entire* message.

The Pauline doctrine of justification is the *doctrine about the implementation of God's righteousness through Christ for the entire creation* (Stuhlmacher's emphasis) ... This doctrine therefore shows in its own way both that and how God will bring the first and second petitions of the Lord's prayer to their fulfilment (73).

A strong and very useful essay by Donald Hagner constitutes the appendix to these Stuhlmacher's lectures. Hagner is able, as an American scholar rather than a post-Holocaust German one, to be less velvet-gloved with the 'new perspective on Paul'. He understands first-century Judaism to have been *synergistic* (I would say, semi-pelagian), and is therefore more comfortable with the idea that Paul criticised his inherited religion as being more law-oriented than Christianity. Hagner also sees Paul's assessment of the human condition to be more negative than Judaism's. This is a crucial point! 'In short, while Judaism is nomocentric, Paul is christocentric' (98).

Interpreters who have hoped for a technical knock-out delivered by Peter Stuhlmacher to the 'new perspective on Paul' may not be satisfied by this marvellous book. The book is not so much a riposte as it is an alternative system. Stuhlmacher understands the NT, anchored in its most prolific author, to be a thoroughly eschatological view of life and history. Justification becomes the *cantus firmus* for an integrated field-theory of past, present, and future.

My only question is: How well does the cosmic, creative, and times-spanning version of justification *preach*? How is it to be 'packaged' for the purpose of having a riveting effect in the local fellowship and congregation? I think Herr Stuhlmacher's book could use a second appendix: the homiletic and present pastoral implications of Paul's message.

Paul F.M. Zahl

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Kierkegaard

Julia Watkin
London: Continuum, 2000,
120 pp., £12.99

Julia Watkins has produced a mostly satisfying book on the nineteenth century Danish thinker, Soren Kierkegaard. In her introduction she sets out her aim to 'introduce Kierkegaard the Christian thinker' (2). This is a fine and welcome objective, and part of a movement in recent years to reclaim Kierkegaard for constructive Christian theology (see the work of C.S. Evans, M. Rae, D. Law). Aside from Kierkegaard's monumental influence on Karl Barth (most famously in his Romans commentary (99)), as Watkins correctly points out, Kierkegaard has been largely misrepresented as merely the father of twentieth century atheistic existentialism (1). Watkin's purpose is to correct this view, and set out the *Christianness* of Kierkegaard.

In chapters one and two Watkins begins by setting Kierkegaard's work in its historical context, and provides a brief introduction to the cultural, political and religious scene of 'Golden Age' Denmark, as well as describing Kierkegaard's family background. While useful, I was frequently distracted and annoyed by Watkin's overly convoluted sentence construction.

Watkin continues in chapters three and four by seeking to delineate Kierkegaard's 'world-view'. Here, she nails her colours to the mast and argues that 'the structure of argumentation in his writings reflects his personal commitment to a Christian world-view' (23). While this is a much disputed position (cf. G. Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, London: SPCK, 1997), she provides sufficient evidence to support this position. However, I think her efforts at explaining the character of this worldview would not be particularly clear to a newcomer. Her account of the basically Lutheran structure of Kierkegaard's soteriology is sometimes a little muddling, although the point about this connection is generally well made: 'the individual is unable to reach the standard set up in the Christian life-style, and the figure of Jesus now becomes important as the redeeming Christ who both reveals the nature of God's goodness and yet makes good the deficiencies of the sinner' (26).

Watkin's goes on in chapter five to detail Kierkegaard's concern with the common threats to human freedom, found in those obsessed with the everyday (56), and in those seduced by the 'life of the senses' (57). Chapter six has a helpful exposition of Kierkegaard's views on the tensions and demands on living the God-centred life, and the ways in which Kierkegaard overcomes the problems associated with Lessing's 'ugly ditch', namely 'whether one can rest the question of one's eternal blessedness on a historical claim' (83). In *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard argues that faith and not intellectual assent is the basis of eternal life, and with this modern mind is placed on the same level as the contemporary of Jesus in seeing the 'contradiction of a man claiming to be God' (83). With this Kierkegaard is attacking the view which sees reason independent of revelation as that which is sufficient

to determine the truthfulness or untruthfulness of the testimony of sacred history.

Watkin concludes with an interesting discussion of Kierkegaard's influence on subsequent theological and philosophical thought (ch. 6), and a few thoughts on what he might add to an ecumenical dialogue (ch. 7).

On the whole, I found Watkin's book on *Kierkegaard* to be a mixed bag. While there was clearly great familiarity with the material, it was not always presented very well. However, it is a welcome contribution to the efforts to bring Kierkegaard back into the theological fold.

Jonathan Norgate

Aberdeen

The Cambridge Companion To Karl Barth

John Webster (ed.)

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000,
xiii + 312 pp., £13.95/\$19.95

This book is not designed as an introduction to the theology of Karl Barth for the undergraduate who is commencing studies in 'contemporary theology'. This is not to say that the book may not be of aid to such; only that this is not its purpose and is therefore not reflected in its nature. For those evangelicals who desire such an introduction, the relevant works of Berkouwer, Bromiley or Torrance would be more appropriate. This work, however, is not the product of a single mind, having eighteen chapters, each of which is written by a different author, and each of which deals with various areas or aspects of Barth's thought. The bulk of these pertain to the specific *loci* of systematic theology; hence, there are chapters on such expected key topics as revelation, the Bible, the Trinity, election, creation and providence, Christology, salvation, humanity, the Holy Spirit, and the Christian

community. (Eschatology does not receive a separate chapter of its own, possibly reflecting the unfinished character of Barth own writings on the subject.) There are also contributions on Barth's thought regarding ethics, politics, pluralism, feminism and postmodernism.

The non-introductory status of this companion to Barth is revealed in three more ways. First, each chapter is fairly complex and dense, and assumes some prior knowledge of at least the language, if not the issues involved. Of course this differs in degree from chapter to chapter, but generally the point stands. Second, and with the same caveat as above, it is true to say that each author seems to be in substantial agreement with the theology of Barth. They are at times critical of certain aspects of Barth, or wanting to qualify what Barth has said in certain ways, but fundamentally, they are more than merely appreciative of the contribution Barth has made to the theological landscape. Third, the editor remarks in the Preface that the book has grown out of a very definite academic context – that of the re-appreciation which Barth's dogmatics is enjoying in the English speaking world over the last thirty years after his death. The motif of re-evaluation in the light of half a century or so of scholarly scrutiny is very much to the fore. Hence the first chapter asks how Barth should *now* be read and interpreted, while the last is an autobiographical account of one prominent theologian's 'personal engagement' with Barth during the course of his intellectual lifetime to date (Alasdair I. C. Heron).

This having been said, all contributions are of a good quality in that they are well written – i.e. informative, stimulating and readable – and well documented. Each chapter concludes with helpful suggestions for further reading. The general Index is also satisfactory. Recommended as an intermediate textbook for those with

some basic knowledge of the subject matter and surrounding issues.

Allen Baird
Ballymena

Ethics

Life Together: Family, Sexuality and Community in the New Testament and Today.

Stephen C. Barton.
Edinburgh and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2001,
xiv + 256 pp., £16.95

This is a collection of twelve essays, all previously published in various journals or symposia. Three essays arose from the author's involvement in the *Something to Celebrate* document that was produced by a Church of England working party (this caused controversy at the time because it affirmed that various arrangements, including co-habitation, might constitute 'family life'). The other essays are on sexuality and community, with a concluding piece on biblical interpretation. There is a considerable amount of interaction with recent literature on the subject. Barton correctly denounces idolisation of the biological family (e.g. p. 48), but offers a refreshing vision of the family as 'household church' (14–16). Throughout there is an emphasis on community, and the people of God living out the ethical teachings of the Bible (eg. p. 60). The concluding chapter deals with New Testament interpretation as performance. Barton is right to criticise a model of biblical interpretation which is based in the academy, divorced from the reality of church life, often dismissive of the great sweep of church history (both eastern and western) and proudly neutral, privatised and individualistic.

There are a number of points at which the realities of modern life seem to hit up against the Biblical text – for example the issue of co-habitation,

and the legitimacy of same-sex sexual relationships. Those whom Barton describes as conservative fundamentalists (or loyalist Biblicists) end up – he says – flattening out the Bible and making it boring (62). He is equally critical of liberal historical critics who end up divesting the Bible of all coherence and authority (62). Rather than begin with Scripture, Barton argues we should, begin with experience – which will avoid biblicism of either a loyalist or critical kind (67).

Conveniently, this approach avoids the need to make dogmatic judgements on controversial issues such as co-habitation or homo-sexuality. Therein lies the weakness of this book. It fails to provide a clear definition – what is a family? If two gay men produce a child when one of them inseminates a third party, can they adopt the child and form a real family? Many such questions confront us today. Dr Barton provides 256 pages of interesting discussion, but no clear answers (just as the *Something to Celebrate* document graciously refused to offend anyone). Sometimes even secular commentators get weary of such resolute avoidance of absolutes. Recently Melanie Phillips wrote: '[churches in Britain] often merely replicate the moral equivocations of secular society. The Church of England in particular has succumbed to much of the relativist agenda and the culture of excuses that lie behind the erosion of moral norms' (*America's Social Revolution*, p. 70).

Barton does not identify those he accuses of being fundamentalist, loyalist biblicists. Perhaps he refers to those who assert that same-sex sexual activity is wrong, or those who condemn pre- or extra-marital sexual activity? But it is wearisome to encounter the old straw man of a polarisation between truth and love. He argues persuasively that the Bible must be 'played out' by the people of God, just as a Beethoven symphony or a Shakespeare play must be performed, not just discussed in

the classroom (60). Would anyone seriously argue with that? But to say that proper Biblical interpretation is *more than* a careful examination of the text surely does not mean that it is any *less than* that. To imply that those who maintain a high view of the authority of Scripture fail to live an ethic of love evokes memories of the situation ethics of the 1960s – 'don't judge! just be loving!' Such efforts to accommodate permissiveness accelerated family breakdown and its devastating individual and societal cost.

Sharon James

Leamington Spa

The Revival of Natural Law. Philosophical, theological and ethical responses to the Finnis-Grisez School

Nigel Biggar and Rufus Black, (eds.)

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000,

xviii + 299 pp., h/b., £47.50

John Finnis and Germaine Grisez give their names to a 'school' of renewed attention to Natural law as a source for ethical reflection. One of the chief interests of this renewal, and the assessments of it here assembled, is the extent to which this is a theological enterprise at all. Whilst John Finnis is a professor of jurisprudence, his colleague Grisez, is a moral theologian whose major (on-going) work latterly takes the title *The Way of the Lord Jesus*. Although Finnis and Grisez are Catholic, the editors and various contributors also see the importance of a Protestant engagement with natural law possibilities. Indeed Biggar contributes an essay, in keeping with his previous scholarship, which demonstrates that the most vehement opponent of 'natural theology', Karl Barth, nevertheless had covert recourse to thought in keeping with a natural law approach.

The book is divided into three sections: Part I – Philosophical Issues; Part II – Theological Dimensions;

Part III – Moral Fields; and these are preceded by an introduction to the new natural law theory. Beyond this introduction, one is thrown fairly quickly into the discussion so this is really a reference book for the student of Christian ethics rather than the casually interested reader. Partly because of the desire to produce a rationally grounded philosophical theory of ethics much of the discussion runs to important, but heavy semantic and theoretical definition. The theory stakes out a claim that certain basic goods (seven or eight) are self-evident in the project of human flourishing. Principles of practical reasonableness can be formulated to then produce moral norms in particular situations.

Whilst all the contributors affirm an ethical realism that underlies the natural law project they variously criticise the precise list of basic goods, the coherence of the school's theory in the norms derived by practical reason and the insufficient theological grounding of the project. I choose the word 'variously' advisedly because although Biggar bravely attempts to draw together some conclusions these cannot count on much unity given the very diverse treatments and concerns of the authors, approaching from the fields of sociology, psychology, philosophy, medieval studies and theology. For what it's worth this reviewer finds the project an interesting systematic treatment but one which does not really call upon the theological resources that it claims to own. Much more could be made of creation-order and Christian moral knowledge in Christ. The school's normative conclusions that support the Magisterium of the Catholic Church look forced, a point which a number of contributors develop.

If the revival of natural law is going to be a foundationally Christian enterprise that can converse with other ethical traditions, rather than a universalising philosophical revival

that converges with some Christian positions, more openness will be needed as to the particular Christian presuppositions that inform theology, philosophy and ethics.

Andy Draycott
Coimbra, Portugal

Biology and Theology Today

Celia Deane-Drummond
London: SCM, 2001,
xxii + 248 pp., £16.95

This book, by a professor in theology and biological sciences at Chester College of Higher Education, 'is designed to be accessible to undergraduates and those interested in issues of public concern, including the new genetics and environmental issues' (xi).

Refreshingly, the author resists the popular views that science and theology either belong to separate domains, or are 'complementary' perspectives on the same domain, including creation. Such models render genuinely creative dialogue impossible, because they minimise or ignore key issues: that science as practised shows a religious dimension, shapes our culture, and has values which feed off, and influence, that culture; that religious beliefs can be the object of (social-) scientific study; and that the mutual influences of science and theology are often largely unnoticed (xv-xvi).

To begin, chapter 1 surveys how human perceptions of the natural world have changed significantly over the centuries, and then asks how far such syntheses are compatible with the contemporary practice of science. Chapter 2 asks questions about values in science and also introduces 'the twin focus of the book': genetics and ecology. Chapter 3 explores genetic engineering and its applications, along with areas such as cloning, in order to ground subsequent ethical and theological

discussion. Chapter 4 examines the responses to genetic engineering by the churches, and argues that the ecumenical dialogue may be developed further through rediscovery of the Wisdom traditions of the church, particularly in Aquinas and Russian Orthodoxy. Chapter 5 then reflects on theological issues in the genetic modification of food, and the cloning of animals – and possibly humans. Chapter 6 grapples with approaches to ethical dilemmas in genetic engineering (consequentialism, deontological ethics), and seeks to develop Wisdom as an alternative ethical base.

Chapter 7 marks the transition to a new way of approaching biological science, in examining the controversial Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock. The extent to which Gaia becomes ideological reflects the philosophical presuppositions of the scientists involved, and Chapter 8 moves into theological, philosophical and ethical debates surrounding Gaia.

Gaia is especially significant in the work of some feminist theologians, who also draw on postmodernity and the deconstruction of science. Chapter 9 explores a subject much neglected in typical science-and-religion texts – the role of women in science – with a historical perspective and surveys of feminist critiques and philosophies of science.

Chapter 10 gathers up the themes of the book and argues for a holistic approach to science, informed by the current debates in the humanities rather than dismissive of them. It is rightly affirmed that science can never become totally value-free, even if its goal is to become totally objective. However, 'while there are some scientists who acknowledge the culture of all science and realise that this culture will help solve the questions it sets itself, many ordinary practising scientists still see science as somehow being a superior form of knowledge, beyond culture' (212).

Indeed they do – and the same could be said for some commentators on science and theology.

In sum, the new biology challenges our anthropology – how we think about our relation to God, humanity and the earth; and 'Wisdom, as an anthropological term as well as a theological term, reminds humanity of its frailty before God. For the Wisdom of theology is also the Wisdom of the cross' (220). Overall, then, while one might disagree with some statements or aspects of the analysis, or wish for more interaction with evangelical contributions to the debates, this is a valuable, stimulating and challenging book, well worth reading by anyone grappling seriously with the issues.

Philip Duce
Leicester

On Human Worth

Duncan B. Forrester
London: SCM, 2001,
307 pp., £17.95

This is really a book about 'equality'. Human worth is focused on in the title because a prior decision about the worth of human beings is fundamental to any theory of equality.

The book is in three parts. The first part entitled 'Equality Today' has two chapters – the first, ('Meanings'), contains a very helpful analysis of the possible meanings of 'equality' and the second ('Convictions, Theories and Theologies') an outline of the history of the concept from its roots in Christianity and Graeco-Roman philosophy through its secularisation to contemporary Labour Party dogma.

The three chapters of part 2 entitled 'The Christian Shape of Equality' examine the concept of 'Biblical Roots' (ch. 3), and its history in the Christian tradition up to the nineteenth century (ch. 4, 'Shoots of Christian equality'). Chapter 5, 'Modern Theologies of Equality' examines the Christian

socialism of R.H. Tawney, Liberation Theology and the concept of equality in modern Roman Catholic social teaching.

Part 3, 'Fruits of Equality: Practices and Policies' deals with the practical implications of the theory discussed in the first 2 parts. Chapter 6, entitled 'Egalitarian Lifestyle', deals with the personal implications of a Christian commitment to equality while Chapter 7 deals with its implications for the church ['The Inclusive Church']. The final chapter, 'Equality and the Politics of Inclusion' looks at the implications for public policy with particular focus on the concept of social exclusion and health.

There is much to be commended in this volume. Not only does it show that the Christian faith has social and political implications but it also proves that one of the key concepts of contemporary thinking about the nature of a just society, that is, the essential equality of human beings, is a Judeo-Christian concept. If nothing else, this gives us a right as Christians to speak in the public sphere from which secular humanists have been trying hard to exclude us. Having stolen our Christian equality suit in the nineteenth century, Forrester is right to claim that, having almost worn it out, secularists should now be prepared to listen to Christian advice as to how to make a new one.

Unfortunately what is said about how this should be done in the practical third part of the book is not as inspiring as the theory. It is not difficult to challenge our self-indulgent Western lifestyle but without a strong eschatological perspective, which Forrester lacks, we will never break free from our bondage to mammon. Then, it is easy to get depressed when thinking about the church and bemoaning the fact that it is not what it should be. While not denying the visible church's many failures there is also a lot of good news if one looks for it. One feels that the volume would have benefited a lot

from greater contact with socially active evangelicalism at this point.

Finally, another virtue of this volume is a large number of very good quotes. The following statement by a Leveller leader in 1685 just before his execution for taking part in the Monmouth rebellion should whet the appetite: 'I am sure there was no man born, marked of God above another; for no man comes into the world with a saddle on his back, neither any booted and spurred to ride him.'

Dewi Hughes

Theological Advisor, Tearfund

The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics

Robin Gill, (ed.)

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, xv + 290 pp., £13.95/\$19.95

The contents are divided into three sections: the first treating *The Grounds of Christian Ethics*, followed by *Approaches to Christian Ethics* and *Issues in Christian Ethics*. The greatest service the editor, Robin Gill, has performed, (I am particularly bearing the evangelical student in mind), is to include the paper by Rowan Williams entitled *Making moral decisions* at the head of the discussion. Williams is clear that reflection on ethics must be thoroughly theological. It is interesting to note that an earlier draft the paper was presented at the 1998 Anglican Lambeth Conference of Bishops – a conference made principally notorious by debates over homosexuality. Observing clear disagreements amongst Christians, Williams acknowledges that 'living in the Body of Christ is, in fact, profoundly hard work ... our moral decisions involve a risk ... they are risky precisely because we are trying to hear the truth' (12). Students need to learn that they 'cannot escape the obligation of looking and listening for Christ in the acts of another Christian who is manifestly engaged, self-

critically engaged, with the data of common belief and worship' (13). This is exactly the challenge *Themelios* readers must heed as they read on and encounter different ways of expressing Christian thinking; and then seek to formulate their agreements and disagreements in a Christ-shaped way.

There follow essays looking at questions of the authority of Scripture; the Old Testament; the New Testament; gospels; and epistles as separate sources for Christian ethics.

Part two covers Natural law, virtue ethics, gender, liberation ethics, a Jewish perspective and a consideration of other faiths. Stephen Pope's essay on Natural law overflows with 'isms' that only the initiated 'natural lawyer' (sic, 93) might be expected to grasp without explanation, whereas Jean Porter's chapter on virtue ethics provides a helpful history of this newly reinvigorated line of study.

The issues covered in part three are the questions of war, the arms trade, social justice and welfare, ecology, business and economics, world family trends and medicine and genetics. Michael Northcott's chapter on ecology and Duncan Forrester's on social justice stand out as explicitly theological cases helpfully made. Others can be thought to be provocative but it is not always clear that the thoughts are provoked by theological considerations. Christian ethics must be more than sociology done by Christians. We might generously suppose, that for the sake of balance, all sides of the argument are presented, but seeing clear moral judgement being exercised would help the reader. If shared language is a concern of the Christian body, as Williams asserts, (14) but 'not a form of relativism' then I would have liked to see more writers putting themselves at the risk 'involved in any serious decision making or any serious exercise of discernment' (11).

As a reference volume mapping the state of the academic discipline this is a valuable book. Each chapter carries its own footnotes and references, but there is also a very useful eight page select bibliography at the end that will give students some 'where now?' indications. To start us engaging in distinctive Christian moral reasoning there is much to chew on, swallowing some and gaining a few new tastes along the way.

Andy Draycott

Coimbra, Portugal

A Critique of Pastoral Care (Third Edition)

Stephen Pattison

London: SCM, 2000,

278 pp., £14.95

Since its first appearance in 1988 *A Critique of Pastoral Care* has been recognised widely as a foundational book in the study of contemporary pastoral theology. This edition incorporates the original text of the first edition, the 'Afterword' added in the 1993 edition, and the complete text of what originally appeared as a *Contact* monograph, 'A Vision of Pastoral Theology: In Search of Words that Resurrect the Dead'.

For those unfamiliar with the earlier editions of the book, the Afterword provides a commentary on Pattison's thinking on each of the original chapters. In it he identifies areas with which he might now disagree, or in which his convictions have been strengthened, or areas which require further thought and investigation.

The opening contention of the book is that 'an uncritical attitude to pastoral care is indefensible, irresponsible and even dangerous'. In the place of such non self-reflective pastoral practice, Pattison argues for the necessity for pastoral carers to gain proper perspective on their work, which by contrast 'prevents boredom, stimulates innovation, impedes

unhelpful naivety and gives a sense of direction and purpose to pastoral care' (Introduction).

Chapter one examines questions of definition. Chapter two then gives a brief overview of developments in contemporary pastoral care theory, particularly in the USA. There follows six chapters with a variety of headings (e.g. Ethics and Pastoral Care; Discipline and Pastoral Care; The Bible and Pastoral Care) each of which explores the nexus between theory and practice.

The style of the Essay that now concludes this volume is in marked contrast to the rest of the book. Its aim is 'to stimulate, interest and provoke', for the purpose of reopening discussion as the very nature, goals and methods of pastoral theology. The style is in keeping with the aim. It is full of image, symbol, metaphor and simile, raising more questions than it answers.

The book has considerable strengths. Firstly, it embodies the very model of reflection for which Pattison argues. In reading the original chapters, the Afterword and the Essay, the reader is given an insight into the author's own journey and his awareness of the processes this has involved. These bear testimony to the flexibility and plurality of approach for which Pattison seeks to enthuse us in the Essay. Secondly, the book continues to provide students of pastoral theology with a thoughtful interaction with many of the contemporary issues, trends and writers in the field. Thirdly, the book discusses key areas of both content and process in pastoral theology, and endeavours to explore the relationship between them. This continues to be necessary, since the tendency is often to divorce these elements, thus resulting in mere pragmatism.

One cannot review the book, however, without being aware of some of its weaknesses. The 'compilation' approach does not make its themes

easy to follow, and I would have preferred to see a more integrated reworking of the book, rather than simply a reissuing of component parts. In addition, the book suffers from a lack of integration at key points. The question of definition is a prime (and foundational) example of this. The original definition of pastoral care that is offered in chapter one (13) is essentially biblical. This definition is questioned in the Afterword (195) and lost altogether in the Essay, by which time the relativist and pluralist approach, latent in much of the book, is completely to the fore. The establishment of criteria for raising a thoughtful, biblical and irreducibly Christian critique of pastoral care in such an environment becomes increasingly difficult.

Noel Due

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Uncommon Sense – God's Wisdom for our Complex and Changing World

John Peck and Charles Strohmmer

London: SPCK, 2001,
362 pp., £14.99

Uncommon Sense – God's Wisdom for our Complex and Changing World is based on the clear Biblical understanding that all of life comes under God's purview, that everything must be submitted to him and the measure of his word, and that therefore there is nothing that we might do – whether paint a picture or run a business or govern a country or study geography or boil an egg – that should not be radically affected by God's priorities and wisdom.

This ought to go without saying. However, the 20th Century British Church, evangelical and non, was hobbled in its discipleship, in its evangelism and in its efforts at social transformation by theologies and praxis that ran counter to this holistic view. The university world was no

exception. As one former UCCF executive put it, 'I could practically guarantee that I could go into any CU in Britain and not find a single person who could give me a theology of the subject they were studying to degree level'.

As such Strohmer and Peck's book is timely. They make a strong case for an integrated view of the whole Biblical life and show how all decisions, policies and actions spring from some view of right and wrong, of meaning, of value, and therefore that everything carries values which are either consistent with Biblical revelation or not. Their concern, however, is not simply with right thinking but with Godly living. As such their goal is to help the development of Biblical wisdom. And Biblical wisdom manifests itself in action, not merely in mental assent, just as truth in the OT is not just something you *know* but something you *do*.

So Strohmer and Peck develop and illustrate a method for 'wisdom living' in the 21st century. Here they call us back to the Bible but not to locate proof-texts or superficially attractive parallels with contemporary contexts, but rather to a grasp of the fundamental Biblical categories and their application to contemporary situations. So for example, faced by questions to do with corporate business, their approach is not to look for a Biblical equivalent – there really isn't one – but to ask questions about what is involved in corporate business – work, relationship, wealth generation and distribution, etc – all of which are categories addressed by the Bible. This, in turn, is underpinned by their understanding of the centrality of Christ as the Logos, the ultimate authority and primary lens through which to view human activity. So business 'by the Book' must also be 'Gospel-shaped'. This means that is partly a rescue, 'a saving operation'. Profit is a key measure but not its only goal.

The new contribution, which is anticipated by Calvin's sphere theology and De Kuyper, is a tool they call 'Modal Theory'. They break down human living into 15 categories – religious, ethical, juridical, economic, societal, linguistic, aesthetic, historical, rational, psychical, biological, physical, kinetic, spatial, number. All fifteen are in turn submitted to Christ. Strohmer and Peck encourage us to use these categories to help us generate the right questions about a policy, a book, an event, a habit as well as to avoid the reductionism that makes 'religion' and 'morals' the only criteria for analysis. This is both common-sense and scriptural. For example, the Bible gives not one reason, but five why the children of Israel did not succeed in clearing all the former inhabitants out of the land. It was not just a failure of faith (religion) but also related to technology, ecology, education and social relations. Similarly, part of the solution in an office frazzled by fractiousness among the employees might not be to call simply for a greater manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit but to recognise that the desks were too close and people couldn't help bumping into each other. So in this example we might seek to discern God's principles in the rational, the biological, the spatial and the aesthetic categories – all areas that God has created – and which might be explored to create design that is likely to maximise human harmony.

There is no question that Strohmer and Peck are on to something important here and no doubt that there are many helpful insights. Still, the book is somewhat repetitious and it feels as if it could have been a hundred pages shorter. More importantly, I was not convinced that they had mastered their own method. They encourage the reader to use the helpful index to dip and dive around the book and explore issues we're interested in. Good idea, but when you do this you don't usually come up

with anything very satisfying and often with the confession that this isn't their area of expertise and that someone else could take it further. Rightly, they want to teach us to think but I came away wanting them to work through some more examples in depth to give me a clearer sense of how.

All that said, this is a helpful book in an area where very little has been done for a long time. Strohmer and Peck are charting new territory and it would be wrong to nitpick at these pioneer cartographers for not illuminating every inch of the path. They have held up quite a bright lamp. And I for one am grateful for it.

Write on.

Mark Greene

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Christian Ethics and Human Nature

Terence Penelhum

London: SCM, 2000,
xii + 115 pp., £10.95

This short book, based on a lecture series, is a professional philosopher's stab at defining Christian ethics and its more interesting tasks for the contemporary pluralist world. The heartbeat of Penelhum's definition of human nature seems to be a modern psychology of individual desire based around Joseph Butler's 'conscience': a remarkable coincidence, in fact, with modern individual ethical autonomy (7). Concern with the fact of religious pluralism (ch. 3) is uncomfortably coupled with a recognition that we, that is all humans, of any faith or none, are part of 'Nature' and so the problem of anthropocentrism and the environment gets an airing (ch. 4).

Given the demands of the Christian Ethic (ch. 1) do we actually have the capability to fulfil these? (ch. 2). It seems, following a reading of Pauline anthropology from Romans 7

that the human problem is not doing what we know is right. This is something that other religions share to a greater or lesser extent. Penelhum finds pluralism extremely attractive but ultimately incoherent, so (reluctantly?) settles for a fairly broad Christian inclusivism (against the clear but uncharitable exclusivism).

What then can we do with the embarrassment of choices in the pluralist world? The answer is to disambiguate using the common fund of scientific knowledge that we have available to us. Scientific education and ethical awareness of the environment mean we must re-assess the contribution that a solely Christian diagnosis of the problem of humanity gives. Hence chapter four, which takes in rejection of a traditional doctrine of the Fall in favour of some sort of existentialist notion of anxiety (91), and becoming the image of God in our capabilities (89). All this is in deference to evolutionary theory. The author posits the need for preservationist rather than conservationist attitudes. This is all very well but we should be careful before adopting a highly 'question-begging' thing called 'Nature' that must be preserved from human contamination. Just where does scientific knowledge and evolutionary theory get the positive data to talk of 'Nature', still less of 'natural order'? (92). Enlightenment rationality is calling the shots here and leading to a poor 'pick and mix' ethic. Does this need to be the inevitable outcome for a lecture series founded by the legacy of a John Albert Hall 'to stimulate harmony between the Christian religion and contemporary thought' (v)?

Why is it that those who would reject so easily the orthodox belief of the Christian tradition and its biblical warrant still feel free to hold onto a *Christian ethic*? When describing a Christian ethic in chapter 1, Penelhum claims to be aware of the peril of taking Jesus' ethic out of its

historical context (6). The impression we are left with however, is that the God of the Christian ethic is not the God of this historical Jesus or the self-revealing historical God of Israel that Jesus knew. Is this not philosophically driven Marcionism?

The transposition of a lecture series to book form can be a hit and miss affair stylistically. It hits as we are drawn into a conversation in progress through the book, it misses in that, without the sympathy of being the live audience. Our conversation partner leaves us a little sold short on value for money, as an interesting question-raiser, with argumentation chiefly deployed for the ear and not the eye. Something a little less would be a fairer price in this case. As it is the book is a lacklustre affair which fits loosely together in a such a way that makes for less than compelling reading. It could have done with more disambiguating.

Andy Draycott
Coimbra, Portugal

Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family

Rosemary Radford Ruether
London: SCM, 2001,
294 pp., £15.95

This is a strongly feminist interpretation of the history of the family. Ruether begins with an analysis of the anti-family family strands in the New Testament, then looks at the Patristic era, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the Victorian era and the twentieth century. The 1960s – viewed with horror by the religious right as the opening of a flood tide of permissiveness – she sees rather as the decade of ‘boundless hope’ as the old oppressions of capitalism, patriarchy and hierarchy were challenged (155). Finally, she reimagines family policies, arguing for the recognition of all sorts of family patterns including cohabiting couples and gay families. Liturgical rites

should legitimate teenage couples sleeping together before they are ready for permanent commitment, and should recognise divorce. Ruether wants a sexual ethic based on care and friendship. ‘Sexual morality and immorality thus cease to be a question of a fixed institutional boundary between marriage and non-marriage, and become, rather, a process of growth towards relationality and away from exploitative use’ (219–20). A truly caring live-in teenage relationship or gay relationship would be more valid than traditional marriage where there is a differentiation of gender roles, as hierarchy is inherently demeaning.

The family in historical discussion becomes a nose of wax to be shaped according to the author’s prior conviction. Ruether is opposed to the ‘traditional’ family. Her use of history is extraordinarily selective, purely theoretical, and, unsurprisingly, matches her case exactly. A more balanced historical treatment, dealing with real people and taking account of recent historical research would provide a more nuanced story. Even a fairly basic trawl through primary sources shows that Ruether has only given one (dark, oppressive and misogynistic) side of history. To read the extant love letters between many Puritan couples proves that passionate love, mutuality, and companionship are not at all incompatible with a ‘hierarchical’ understanding of marriage. And Amanda Vickery’s recent fine work (*The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England*, 1998) analyses the correspondence and journals of six Georgian families to give a heartening picture of mutual affection and esteem alongside a ‘traditional’ pattern of gender roles – as well as a far less restricted view of women’s roles than had previously been presented.

Feminists have for years said that the nuclear family is a recent innovation. There are aspects of the so-called traditional family which crystallised

during the last one hundred and fifty years. But the nuclear family is universal (George Murdock in *Social Structures* analysed 250 different societies, and found it to be the basic grouping). Although the nuclear family is often represented as modern, and extended families as old fashioned, recent historical scholarship shows this to be a myth. (Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World From the Black Death to the Industrial Age*; Peter Laslett, *The World we have lost - further explored*, 1983, 91ff). The myth is even repeated by evangelical writers such as Rodney Clapp (*Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options*, IVP, 1993).

Certainly Jesus placed the Kingdom as a higher priority than the biological family. Jesus is Lord - not parents, nor husband. If they forbid allegiance to him they must be 'hated' in comparison to him. But to jettison the creational pattern of a man leaving his parents and being united to his wife is blatantly selective use of the biblical evidence, which ignores God's plan for the family enshrined in the fifth and seventh commands, which indicate that the basic building block of society is mother and father, in a covenant relationship, with the responsibility of bringing up their children.

Sharon James
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Missiology

The Origins of Christendom in the West

Alan Kreider (ed.)
Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001
xvi + 371 pp., h/b., £24.99

Alan Kreider uses the introduction to describe how this scholarly book came into being. On the initiative of the Missiology of Western Culture's History Group fifteen scholars from

eight countries met in Paris in 1996 to discuss the origins of Christendom. The objective was to gain a missiological perspective on the history of Christianity in the West.

For their purposes, the group understood Christendom as 'a civilisation in which Christianity is the dominant religion and in which this dominance has been backed up by social and legal compulsions' (p. viii).

The group of scholars came from diverse backgrounds representing the intellectual traditions of eight countries, many ecclesial backgrounds and such varied fields of study as ancient history, theology, missiology and liturgical studies. Together they attempted to think missiologically. The result is this interesting volume.

The treatment of topics is orderly. Three scholars write under the general heading of 'Aspects of Conversion'. Kreider defines 'conversion' and reviews changing patterns; R.L. Testa illustrates these from Northern Italy; Ramsay MacMullen describes the largely unwilling spread of Christianity from the fourth to eighth centuries and its paganisation.

Three church historians, two working in Austria, one in Wales, and an Irish monk contributed to Part Two, entitled 'Change and Continuity in the Christianisation of Europe'. They review the sociology of pre-Constantine Christianity; the preservation of early Christian features in monasticism; the changing relationship of charism and church office; the role of women in the Christianisation of the West.

Part Three moves to consider 'Liturgy and Christian Formation in the Advent of Christendom'. Everett Ferguson traces the changing relationship of catechesis and initiation; Paul F. Bradshaw reviews the effects of the coming of Christendom on early Christian worship; David F. Wright shows how

the struggle against heresy led to Augustine's commitment to infant baptism and its effects upon the church.

Rowan Williams and Antonie Wessels write in Part Four entitled, 'Theology and Inculturation'. In 'Defining Heresy' Rowan Williams deals with how the meaning of heresy developed and in 'Comparative Inculturations' Antonie Wessels sets out two contrary approaches to the Christianisation of Europe: namely, Christian faith against culture and the more common, Christian faith transforming culture.

Finally, Kate Cooper contributes the 'Epilogue: Approaching Christendom'. She emphasises the diversity of early Christian communities in contrast to the Eusebian idea of pristine early unity for 'the development and enactment of Christian community is always culturally specific, influenced by – and, in turn, influencing – the concrete and material conditions of society around it' (361). Cooper lists what the historian can know about early Christianity and suggests that what we do not know is more substantial: the role of the laity, the dynamics of patronage and money, the crucial role of martyrdom and the attitude to violence. At the conclusion of a volume in which historians have sought to think missiologically, she emphasises the need for historians and missiologists to learn from each other.

The book has many strengths. Both Kreider and Cooper make reference to many of the writers and comment on their contributions. Each chapter is preceded by a summary of its contents. Footnotes which include interaction with recent scholarship, the index and list of contributors enhance the value of the book. With a topic so wide-ranging and with the contributions of so many specialists of such varied backgrounds the editor has created a surprising unity. The accessibility of contributions varies. Some chapters pre-suppose a knowledge of Graeco-Roman

history, of Latin and of specialist terminology. The volume is a valuable resource concerning the relationship of Christianity and culture and 'the continuities and changes in Christianity as Christendom came into being'.

Christopher Rowland summarises, 'the attempt to chart the course of the formation of Christendom has opened up new perspectives on the emergence of Christian Europe. This distinctive, and most welcome, collection ... illuminates the pressing challenges facing churches in a post-Christian era'.

Elizabeth Clark

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Death or Glory: The Church's Mission in Scotland's Changing Society

David Searle (ed.)

Fearn, Rosshire: Mentor & Rutherford House, 2001,
144 pp., £9.99

This book honours the work of Dr Geoffrey Grogan the former Principal of Glasgow Bible College. The eight pieces were originally given as papers at a joint Scottish Evangelical Theology Society/ Evangelical Alliance Scotland conference held in 1996 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Evangelical Alliance.

David Wright's foreword sets out the challenge starkly: 'Churches are dying in Scotland in the infancy of the twenty-first century of the Christian era'. Against this backdrop the first six papers assess historical background (David Bebbington and William Storrar), contemporary cultural trends (David Smith) and missiological implications (Peter Neilson, Albert Bogle and John Mackinnon).

Bebbington looks at 'Mission in Scotland, 1846–1946'. He charts the major contrast between Victorian and

post-Victorian church growth and asks us to look afresh at Victorian approaches to mission. William Storrar covers 'Mission in Scotland from 1946'. Relying heavily on Bosch's *missio Dei* theme he identifies cause for present optimism if the triumphalism of past approaches to mission gives way to a more humble rethinking of what it means to work *with* God in a post modern context. David Smith helpfully examines the Culture of Modern Scotland and also calls for a humble and penitent church prepared to face rejection and suffering.

Three papers written by three of Scotland's leading evangelists give more concrete expression to some of the implications for mission. Peter Neilson looks at 'Communicating the Gospel in Scotland Today' while Albert Bogle and John Mackinnon provide case studies based on local church and para-church experience. Neilson writes with characteristic insight in his challenge to overcome the barriers that hinder the church reaching the unreached. Bogle and Mackinnon's ideas will not be new to everyone but provide tangible evidence of steps taken to adapt to today's culture.

The final two papers are of a more general nature. Chris Wright's paper on 'The Church as God's Agent in Mission' expertly guides us through the biblical teaching on mission based on the premise that 'The Abrahamic covenant is the fount and origin of biblical mission in its redemptive sense' (108). The church inevitably has a missionary role and therefore must be a distinctive and inclusive community.

David Anderson's closing essay takes up the issue of revival. He attempts to define the signs of revival expressing limited agreement with Iain Murray's criticism of Revivalists. He seeks to apply his analysis to contemporary Scotland and draws hope for a significant work of God in Scotland from increased incidences of united prayer. Tentative optimism is

tempered by the assertion that revival may only come through pain for the church.

The publishers, presumably recognising the potentially limited market for a book about the Scottish church scene, draw on English and Irish Church leaders for acknowledgements. The book certainly justifies a wider audience. Much of the analysis is relevant to the UK scene and the proposed responses also have more general validity. We must be grateful for any attempt to bring a historical/theological understanding to the challenge of our mission.

The book has the positives and negatives of any compilation. It has strength in the stimulus of its diversity but suffers from lack of coherence. More connection between analysis and action would have been useful. If there is a common thread it is one of hope in the midst of crisis.

Andy Bathgate

Scripture Union, Scotland

Book Notes

A History of Israel and the Holy Land

M. Avi-Yonah, (ed.)

New York: Continuum, 2001 Revised edition,
375 pp., h/b., £25.00/\$35.00

Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land

A. Negev, S. Gibson, (eds)

New York: Continuum, 2001 Revised edition,
560 pp., h/b., £20.00/\$39.95

These two volumes from Continuum are presumably intended for a general (perhaps older) readership, with a conventional feel, good quality paper and plenty of black-and-white illustrations. They are presented as revised editions of older works. However, the revisions are disappointing in several ways, and the resulting products are of limited scholarly use.

The History's apparent editor Avi-Yonah died in the 1970s, yet no revision editor is named or explanation given, despite the last chapter relating events up to 2000. There are many photographs, but some look dated even for the 1970s. There are no scholarly references in the text, no footnotes, and no bibliography. Chapter 2 and half of chapter 3 cover the biblical period to 70 AD (sic), making about a third of the book. Early history largely follows the biblical text, though with the conquest occurring in waves. The rest gives a useful summary of post-biblical history of the land, with an inevitable if unobtrusive Jewish perspective. Helpful for a first read of 'Holy Land' history, but not a basis for academic study.

The Encyclopedia starts a little better, with a named revision editor, list of contributors, and many recent as well as older illustrations. However, all the articles are unsigned, so there is no

way of checking who wrote what. And there are no bibliographies anywhere, so no means of following up information. The updating is often minimal, with only a summary list of recent excavation (in Megiddo) or excavators (in Jerusalem). Surprisingly for a Jewish publication, dates are still BC/AD. Often the information given is disappointingly brief (as for Qumran), and in many cases the reader is much better served by the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. There is often an unquestioning acceptance of the biblical text (as for Massebah) in a way which ignores recent and heated archaeological debates. Some areas of current interest are unrepresented: there is no entry for Figurines, and I found nothing on the highland settlements. A possible first source for summary information, but any serious student will quickly need to complement it from elsewhere.

Biblia Hebraica Leningradensis

A Dotan, (ed.)

Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001,
1264 pp., \$49.95

This is a handsomely produced new edition of the Leningrad Codex. First published in 1973, it has gone through several corrected reprints, and now appears in a pleasing Hebrew font and a handy size. It is as faithful to the manuscript as possible, and an appendix lists the few uncertain readings (less than one per chapter). Other minor variations and standardisations (including repositioning Chronicles) are explained in the introduction. Like its exemplar, this edition presents only very few texts as poetry (Exod. 15, Deut. 32, Judg. 5, and Pss. 117, 118:1-3, 119, 135:19-20, 136).

The overall size is midway between large and small editions of BHS. The font size is similar to the small BHS, but wider word-spacing makes the text more immediately readable. The

font is also slightly larger and heavier than in the recent JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. For those wanting a clear, non-annotated edition of the Ben Asher text, BHL (as it may be called) is now the best available.

This edition aims to be both 'scientific' (in the Ben Hayyim tradition) and liturgical. On the one hand, it benefits from decades of meticulous and loving research on the minutiae of the Masora, claiming to correct minor errors in BHS on numerous occasions (though no list is given). On the other, it includes the traditional Jewish liturgical divisions of the text. However, it may fall between two stools, since its lack of critical apparatus hampers scholarly use, and its classroom look may limit religious use.

First and Second Kings Then and Now

John W. Olley
Australia: Morling Press,
153 pp.

What relevance does Israel's history have to Christians today, especially the indigestible books of Kings? And how can we make the connections? Here a senior evangelical Australian scholar rises to the challenge and presents an attractive series of studies. These would be very suitable for student and other well-motivated Bible study groups, or for sermon preparation. After a useful introduction to Kings, there are nine studies, on (normally) 2-4 biblical chapters and with particular themes, e.g. 'Buildings and God', 'Revolution and God'. The text is well written, with good quotes and pithy illustrations. Each study ends with discussion questions which open up the material and apply it tellingly to contemporary Christian life. I look forward to seeing it more widely available through a British or American publisher.

Philip Johnston
Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

The Theology of the Gospel of Luke

Joel B. Green
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001
[1995],
xiv + 170 pp., £11.95

The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians

James D.G. Dunn
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001
[1993],
xv + 161 pp., £11.95

The Theology of the Book of Revelation

Richard Bauckham
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001
[1993],
xv + 169 pp., £11.95

These volumes are three notable contributions to CUP's 'New Testament Theology' series; a series which is now well-established, well-received and nearly complete. These are reprints of the original publications and contain no new material, but their very nature as engagement with the biblical text means that they have not dated significantly. Both Green and Dunn wrote their volumes effectively as theological introductions to their commentaries on Luke and Galatians respectively and these books provide an accessible entrance to both the thought of the biblical writer and the general perspectives of the commentator. Bauckham's volume has virtually become a modern classic, in which he draws theological riches from this document which is alien to so many modern readers in such a way that the reader is both informed and awed by the grandeur of the seer's vision. No theological student (or pastor or teacher of theology) should be without it. It is good to have the opportunity to

commend these volumes to those who have not yet discovered them.

The Jesus Debate

M.A. Powell

Oxford: Lion, 2000,
238 pp., £8.99

This is the paperback edition of a book which has been published in the UK under a different title from its US counterpart. The American publication, entitled *Jesus as a Figure of History*, was reviewed in issue 26.2 of *Themelios* by Kent Brower, and since there is no difference between the text of the American edition and that of the British edition I will simply recommend to the interested reader that he or she should read Kent's review. I would only add my own commendation of this book as an excellent, accessible introduction to the most recent 'Life of Jesus research' and a warning not to be misled by the differing titles. Good as this book is, you really don't need two copies!

First Corinthians

B.N. Fisk

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000,
vi +114 pp.

This book is part of the *Interpretation Bible Studies* series and is intended to provide a study guide suitable for use by groups or individuals. Although it is written with reference to the *Interpretation* commentary series, and Richard Hays' volume on First Corinthians in particular, it is designed to be used independently.

The book is well presented. The sections of text are suitably short, well written and divided by eye-catching headings. There are a number of black and white photographs and illustrations and there are frequent text boxes, usually containing a brief quotation either

from Hays' commentary or one of a good range of other volumes. Other boxes indicate specific references for further investigation, sometimes suggesting evangelical resources but more often pointing to mainstream scholarship. Each unit concludes with several 'questions for reflection' which generally go well beyond requesting the obvious and might prompt very thoughtful discussion. The bibliography at the end of the book is reasonably short, generally accessible and remarkably diverse: Henry Bettenson, Gordon Fee, Kenneth Grahame, Luke Johnson, C.S. Lewis, Sophocles, J.R.R. Tolkien and N.T. Wright all line up together! Finally a brief but imaginative leaders' guide provides useful help to those who bear that responsibility.

As this is a study guide and not a commentary, it obviously cannot be exhaustive, but it is nonetheless somewhat surprising that only selected portions of the letter are dealt with in the guide. It was a bit disconcerting to look for the treatment of Paul's glorious passage on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, only to find that the guide stops at the end of chapter 14!

This guide could well be used with profit in a group Bible study. It is not as conservative in its historical and theological judgement as many such guides, but discerning readers will be prompted to engage with the biblical text.

The Johannine Literature

B. Lindars, R.B. Edwards and J.M. Court
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000,
324 pp., £16.95/\$28.50

The *Sheffield New Testament Guides* series has incorporated numerous quality introductions to the various NT documents, which have been widely used by teachers and students of the NT over the past decade. The problem with such introductions, of

course, is that they quickly become dated as research moves on. In an attempt to retain the full value of these guides, the publisher is reissuing them in a new format, in which several guides are grouped together into a single volume and a leading scholar provides an introduction to the particular selection of biblical documents. In this case the guides gathered together were written by the late Barnabas Lindars (the Gospel according to John), Ruth B. Edwards (the letters of John) and John M. Court (Revelation). Lindars' volume was originally published in 1990, Court's in 1994 and Edwards' in 1996. The bibliographies found at the end of each chapter (annotated throughout in Lindars' section, mainly without annotation in the other two sections) have been updated to include material from the late 1990s but no attempt has been made to update the original text.

Culpepper's introductory essay briefly comments on genre, authorship, text, language and style, use of the OT and thought. Lindars is disappointingly dismissive regarding the historical foundation of John's account (e.g., 'To me the Beloved Disciple is a creation of the evangelist in order to serve a specific function.' p.43) but he does give the reader a useful overview of the scholarly debate. His chapter on the theological themes of the Gospel is helpful. Edwards' discussion of the Johannine letters provides concise evaluation of a number of thorny issues with clear presentation of evidence and arguments. There are theological chapters on Christology, the love of God and 'Sin, Forgiveness, Judgment and Eschatology.' Court, in his section on Revelation, draws on a variety of methods and makes the drama of the text his primary concern.

While readers who already possess the original editions of these guides will probably not want to buy this new edition for the sake of a few updated bibliographies, those who are new

to them will find here a useful contribution to their learning (even if that is through disagreement).

Allstair I. Wilson

Highland Theological College,
Dingwall

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themelios

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