



REGENT'S REVIEWS

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From the editor...

Welcome to the new issue of *Regent's Reviews*! This first edition of the relaunched Regent's Reviews takes its cue from the 400th year of Baptist people with a particular focus on books written by Baptists or reviewed by Baptists. In recent years there has been a growth in books published by Baptist theologians, and as the contents of this edition shows Baptists are writing on a wide range of topics from ecclesiology, spirituality, disability, science and systematic theology.

Regent's Park College through its two centres – The Centre for Christianity and Culture and The Centre for Baptist History and Heritage – is also marking this anniversary this term with a series of lectures on Baptist origins and we hope to include reviews of work published from this lecture series in a future edition.

Before we get to the reviews, please allow me to give you some background on this new version. After a two year hiatus, several Fellows of Regent's Park College, Oxford began discussing reintroducing the journal in 2008. These conversations spilled out of the Senior Common Room and into the earshot of some postgraduates. There was wisdom in letting the idea float among postgraduates because they (or should I say 'we') often bring new enthusiasm to projects. Thus, in Trinity Term 2009, Andy Goodliff and I were given the task of bringing a new issue of *Regent's Reviews* to print. With new faces putting it together, there are some changes in the latest iteration of an Oxford institution.

First, the new version of *Regent's Reviews* is not actually in print. You are likely reading this on your computer screen, or you have printed it yourself after having received it electronically. We decided that an electronic format will be easier to produce, distribute, and read than its print cousin. In turn, readers can enlarge or shrink the pages to their hearts content. The issue can also be quickly distributed via email and redistributed by forwarding the message. They will be archived on the [Regent's Park College website](#). Readers can also print just one section or review, rather than the whole issue. We hope the features of an electronic distribution outweigh any inconveniences.

Second, in this new electronic version of *Regent's Reviews*, we seek to reach a wider audience. Originally part of a Book Club, the printed version was designed to offer reviews in a slightly different format to academic journals and always with an eye to the needs of those engaged in pastoral practice. We hope that a new online version will be read and valued by a wider constituency. If you are reading this but were not on our distribution list, please send an email to [me](#) and I will add you to the distribution.

I hope you enjoy our first *new* issue.

Peace,
Matthew Tennant
Kilmarnock Baptist Church
Kilmarnock, Virginia (USA) &
Regent's Park College, Oxford

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Review Essays

C. Stephen Evans.
*Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love
 Divine Commands and Moral
 Obligations*
 Oxford: Oxford University
 Press, 2004

In the Preface to his meticulous *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*, C. Stephen Evans writes, 'I am convinced that this book will serve at least two audiences: those interested in Kierkegaard studies, and those simply interested in moral philosophy generally', (vii). This early delineation between prospective audiences foretells the fundamental divide in Evans' book: the first part examines in detail what contribution Kierkegaard makes to a divine command theory of obligation, whereas the latter part places this reconstructed 'Kierkegaardian' approach in conversation with contemporary alternatives. At the heart of the text, however, is Evans' desire to construct an account of divine command theory which is admissible and persuasive in public discourse. Over the course of the entire book, Evans' interlocutors are Anglo-American moral philosophers more so than Kierkegaard scholars, and his intent is to demonstrate how a version of divine command theory, as found in Kierkegaard, can meaningfully describe universal human obligation.

In both his examination of Kierkegaard's ethical vision (if such a thing exists) and his evaluation

of contemporary alternatives to Kierkegaard's theory of obligation, Evans makes significant contributions. In the first part of the text (understood by this reader as Chaps. 1-9), Evans' thesis examines the potential of a 'divine command theory of obligation', which for Evans is an approach that synthesizes elements of divine command theory and a sort of Aristotelian teleology. A secondary thesis in this part displays this synthesis in Kierkegaard's own corpus. Specifically, Evans contests the invocation of *Fear and Trembling* as a paradigmatic example of Kierkegaardian ethics. In contrast, Evans suggests that a more appropriate indication of Kierkegaard's own views (as opposed to those of his pseudonyms) might be found in *Works of Love*. It is here, for Evans, that the multiplicity of ethical 'types' in Kierkegaard manifests itself most clearly. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard stresses the teleological element to human existence – only in loving others (and ourselves) rightly can we become that which we were meant to be. This Aristotelian strain within Kierkegaard's corpus seems at odds with the divine command ethos of *Fear and Trembling*. Evans' response is again two-fold. First, Evans suggests that Kierkegaard's point in *Fear and Trembling* is more about the notion of faith than it is about the ethical. Second, Evans appeals to the pseudonymous nature of *Fear and Trembling*, suggesting that Climacus, as the author of *Works of Love*, is more representative of Kierkegaard's own view than is Johannes de

Silentio, the author of *Fear and Trembling*. These premises allow Evans to then re-work a vision of Kierkegaard's ethics which integrates both divine command and teleological properties. When people work on behalf of others, they are participating in becoming what God has called them to be. Through this process of becoming they achieve both happiness (as the fruit of fulfilled purpose) and obedience (as the proper response to God's call). An additional facet to Evans' depiction of Kierkegaardian ethics is his insistence that everyone is called to love the neighbor. Therefore, although ethics is not 'universalizable' per se, the command to love the neighbor is interwoven into the very fabric of humankind. Thus, some semblance of morality is available to all in equal measure through general revelation. With this tip of the hat to natural law Evans is now able to further suggest his divine command theory of obligation to the public sphere, since it requires no special dispensation of God to perceive.

The second part of Evans' book (Chaps. 10-12) investigates the ways in which a 'divine command theory of obligation' compares to contemporary alternatives. Evans brackets out other religiously-based ethics, favoring instead engagement with secular utilitarian, naturalist, and relativist perspectives. Here Evans' own indebtedness to the recent divine-command tradition of moral philosophy becomes pronounced, drawing heavily on Robert Adams, Philip Quinn, and John Hare. Despite the fact that

Evans dedicates only three chapters to the issue of 'alternatives', it becomes clear that his ultimate concern is expressed in those chapters. Chapter 10 examines what Evans denotes as the 'evolutionary naturalist' position, exemplified by Larry Arnhart's *Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature*. At the core of Evans' critique of evolutionary naturalism is its inability to prescribe universal moral obligations. A consequence of this problem is that evolutionary naturalism is unable to adjudicate between two parties who each assert their perfectly natural desires. Thus, Evans cites slavery as a prime example: a male slaveowner naturally wishes to express his dominance over a slave, as male dominance is one of Arnhart's 'natural desires' (233). Conversely, the slave naturally wishes for freedom and independence. Since evolutionary naturalism is unable to describe in greater detail how to arbitrate such a conflict of natural desires, Evans suggests that universal obligations are necessary in the ethical life. Chapter 11 wrestles with humanistic naturalism, a view presented by Evans through David Gauthier's *Morals by Agreement*. As Evans notes, Gauthier represents the latest installment of the social contract approach to ethics. Particularly problematic for Evans is Gauthier's anthropology--he understands persons as 'rational maximizers'--which means that each person pursues whatever course of action offers the most good for the least bad (253-254). In theory, persons are morally restrained by limiting the

ways in which they hurt others, since hurting others can have negative effects for the self over time. However, Evans' main thesis questions the binding power of an ethic which depends on the actions of others. If one could take advantage of another with no chance of being detected, according to Gauthier, there is no prohibition against doing so. Evans' next competitors are moral relativism and nihilism. Proponents of these positions, in this chapter represented by Gilbert Harman, are in the unenviable position of establishing morality in a totally relative context. Harman's position, as one who wants to preserve some obligation while yet acknowledging the total relativity of any such moral framework, is especially difficult. Harman suggests that one is bound by the agreements one makes to others within the frameworks one inhabits. Even more specifically, one is only 'bound' to honor an agreement to another if the self is convinced the other will honor their end of the bargain. Evans quickly notes that while Harman may wish to preserve obligation, he is unable to do so, due to the fact that he cannot provide any reason for someone to honor a commitment they have made (294).

It is difficult to find fault with Evans' book--it is coherent, well-argued and his breadth of knowledge is impressive. If one were forced to take issue with some aspect of the text, for me it would be the 'two-part' feel of the book. Evans skillfully directs his reading of Kierkegaard to emphasize those points that he will

make in the latter chapters of the book, but the project comes across, at times, as forced. Even further, it seems that Evans' argument would change very little, if at all, if Kierkegaard was left out completely. It is for this reason I suspect that Evans' overall aim is not so much a particular interpretation of Kierkegaard, but the creation of an ethic which can be taken seriously within the public square. This minor critique aside, Evans' invocation of Kierkegaard adds flavor and a familiar figure to the debate about the use of divine command theory. Furthermore, since Kierkegaard's own ethical vision is so complex (especially considering his frequent pseudonymous authorship), using his corpus as the groundwork for an ethic is a worthy challenge. In sum, Evans excels at drawing in the casual reader to the pertinent arguments in the respective fields he moves through. Evans' clarity makes this text accessible to the student, yet also relevant to scholars of Kierkegaard and Anglo-American moral philosophers. These significant benefits make Evans' book well-worth the read.

Clark J. Elliston
Regents Park College, Oxford



Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, Eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism 2*

Studies in Baptist History and Thought, Vol 25

Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2008

The excellent series, *Studies in Baptist Thought* continues to provide a valuable resource for all those studying Baptist theology, and amongst the most important in the early publications was Cross and Thompson's *Baptist Sacramentalism* of 2003, Vol 5 in the series. A significant strand of Baptist thought in England and the United States, given wide expression in this series, welcomes a sacramental theology as expressing a forgotten and long-standing dimension of Baptist thought. We were not simply the functionalists and anti-sacramentalists that popular belief so often portrayed, but miners of a rich seam of sacramental theology rooting us in the bigger story of Christian theology. It is True that not everyone welcomes this idea, and it remains controversial to this day (the Southern Baptist Tom Nettles calls it a 'corrupting influence' in Baptist thought), but it is the understanding of church and the nature of God's activity in the world that has growing influence. I welcome this second volume of essays on Baptist sacramentalism as it contributes to the debate in a substantial fashion.

Francis Schussler Fiorenza, a Roman Catholic scholar provides a warm commendation in the foreword, noting how the volume is dedicated to the memory of

Stanley Grenz, one of the most prestigious contributors to the earlier volume of essays who died in 2005. This more recent collection of essays range from treatment of biblical material by Sean Winter and J Ramsey Michaels, through theological under-girding provided by Chris Ellis and John Colwell, to exploration of specific sacraments, in Anthony Clarke's discussion of open communion and Anthony Cross' essay on baptism. On the way there are historical studies from the patristics of Gregory of Nyssa (Steve Harmon) to C H Spurgeon (Peter J Morden) and ecumenical conversations with Roman Catholics (Paul Fiddes) and The Churches of Christ (Stanley Fowler). As Philip Thompson notes in his introduction, 'Baptists engagement with ... sacramental theology is not a passing fancy, a strange aberration, something that will run a quick course and pass quietly out of sight and mind'. (p.xvii) It has deep roots in Baptist thought and is orientated towards vital questions of the nature of the church, Christology and the Christian life.

Chris Ellis argues that sacraments as 'embodied grace' helps us to understand worship as a rehearsal for a way of understanding the whole of life as gratitude and relationship, while orienting life towards the spiritual realities that worship illuminates. In similar broad terms, John Colwell argues that the sacramentality of the church lies in its mission, being sent into the world as the Father sends the Son: 'the church mediates Christ's presence and power through the

agency of the Spirit; but the church is not Christ and Christ is not the church'. (p.52) Colwell takes issue with the beliefs that Miroslav Volf attributes to Smyth. Volf argues in *After our Likeness* that the presence of Christ in the church for the sacramental traditions of both West and East (epitomised by Ratzinger and Zizioulas) lies in the sacraments themselves, but for the Free Church tradition, it lies in the assembly of the church, its concrete relationships ('where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst', Matt 18:20) But for Smyth the unity of the church was grounded sacramentally, not simply in the unmediated immediacy of 'fellowship'. The church is the sacrament of Christ's presence within the world, but only as it is always oriented to the grace that enables it to be the church, 'it can only hope in prayer for the fulfilment of promised presence and transforming grace'. (p.59)

Michael Bird argues that baptism and the Lord's supper are sacramental only in so far as they participate in Jesus Christ. He is correct, I think, in attributing Baptist anxiety to questions of who can be baptised and how to enact it, rather than what it actually does, which if thought about at all, is defined in a *via negativita*: it does not confer salvation. It is rather a 'sacred act' as it is incorporation into the church, an act of faith, a symbolic dying and rising with Christ and the consummation of conversion. But does it effect what it symbolises: incorporation into Christ? He does not go quite that far. In similar

fashion with the Lord's supper, it embodies the memory of Jesus' life and death and it creates solidarity in the new covenant community, but Bird is anxious that it should not be seen as anything that works *ex opere operato*, for the word to describe that is 'magic'. Rather these divine-human acts 'since the Holy Spirit facilitates our participation in the reality of salvation'. (p.76) It is this moderate affirmation of a sacramental theology that probably characterises most evangelical Baptists who do not subscribe to the anti-sacramentalism that is rooted in a fear of Catholicism. However, I am not sure that it goes far enough.

From my own research, the link between openness to ecumenical dialogue and sacramental theology is empirically strong. It comes as no surprise then to see an ecumenical thread running through this collection of papers. Sean Winter argues from a close reading of Romans that it is possible for Baptists to accept the validity of infant baptism, even if our preferred mode is for believers only to be eligible for its practice. Winter was Moderator of the Baptist Union of Great Britain Council that declined to 'welcome' the report *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity: Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation*, 2005, merely 'receiving it', primarily because it seemed to a vocal group on Council that it legitimated infant baptism.

Graham Watts' paper, addresses an aspect of religious experience much-ignored by protestant theologians. He argues

for a theology of sacred space that avoids the dangers of some emerging church theology that merely celebrates the majesty of creation as 'holy' as well as the antithesis of the spiritual warfare dogma of 'territorial spirits', with its dubious biblical warrant. Instead, Watts grounds his theology of sacred space, a sacramental account, in the Trinity, where Christians speak responsibly about immanence, omnipresence and transcendence, precisely the concepts necessary for any account of sacred space. Watts' conclusion is a theology of encounter and experience, rather than a phenomenology of religious experience, so beloved by the religion students. While this might seem merely an interesting byway in sacramentality theology, I suspect it is actually of some importance in the 'emerging church', with its greater emphasis upon creation and incarnation. If there are places hallowed by prayer and encounter (and I think there are) then this provides some theological rationale for their existence. At the least, it might warn Baptists against too readily dismissing 'place', not least in their architecture, and merely baptizing the mundane and the downright ugly in some misguided dismissal of the experience of place.

Paul Fiddes argues for a cautious affirmation of the way in which God uses the material world to confer his gracious presence. Steven Harmon explores the way in which Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century uses Scripture in his *Catechetical Oration* and argues affirmatively for a Baptist sacramentality of the Word as the

initial sacramental event: if God meets us in the ink on paper and words heard by our ears as Scripture is read and heard, then he might also meet us elsewhere in worship. Gregory provides the theological language for Scripture's sacramentality, and this has utility for Baptists in particular.

Baptists should welcome this collection of papers. The trajectory of changing beliefs about sacramental theology amongst British Baptists, at least, ensures that this takes its place alongside its predecessor, *Baptist Sacramentalism*, as essential reading in studies in Baptist history, theology and thought. Not only does it assist the ecumenical journey that Baptists have begun, it also deepens their theological self-understanding.

Paul Goodliff
Baptist Union of Great Britain

Pastoral Theology

Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), *Under the Rule of Christ*
 Dimensions of Baptist Spirituality
 Regent's Study Guides 14
 (Smyth & Helwys, 2008)

A wise person told me once, 'never review a book written by someone you know'. Unfortunately the advice came after I'd agreed to proffer my thoughts on the latest in a series of publications written jointly by the Principals of the six Baptist Colleges in Great Britain, all of whom I know, to some extent or other.

Previous writing projects from this talented collective have demonstrated a creative engagement between historical Baptist traditions and the current challenges facing their Denomination and the wider Church. I am pleased to say that, for the most part, *Under the Rule of Christ: Dimensions of Baptist Spirituality*, continues that fine pedigree.

The seven authors involved (there was a change of Principal at one College during the gestation of the book) wrote in response to a request by the Baptist Union Retreat Group to whom the project is dedicated. That Group had perceived a growing interest in Christian spirituality, but noted that a distinctive Baptist outlook was absent from the milieu of published options. This book certainly goes a long way to redress that imbalance. It offers a uniquely Baptist perspective, or more accurately, series of perspectives, on spirituality as it has been practiced through the various dimensions of attentiveness, suffering, discipleship, scripture, communion and mission. Each subject is examined in chapters that are carefully researched and clearly presented, none of them failing to deliver enlightening facets of how Baptists nurture and express their beliefs. Particularly engaging in this regard was Richard Kidd's more personal reflections on the 'Spirituality in Suffering'.

Spirituality is a subject which is difficult to explore in any tradition and especially so among Baptists. The authors believe that the uniquely Baptist contribution is

how, as communities of faith, they live together 'Under the Rule of Christ'. The title was chosen deliberately to convey a subtle double meaning of 'rule'. The foundations of this are given by Paul Fiddes in the preface. Reflecting on Chagall's painting, 'White Crucifixion' he writes:

The cross carries the inscription in both Latin and Hebrew, "Jesus Christ, King of the Jews" indicating rule as power and authority; but the crucified figure also acts as a rule in the sense of a "ruler" to measure things, laid flat over the landscape of turbulent events beneath it. This is Christ the measure of all things." (p viii)

The intention seems to have been to set the book's trajectory into ardent engagement with God, the Church and Creation, with Christ as the measure of the discussion. But this is exactly where the project stumbles and the reader's dissatisfaction begins. If the subtleties of this double theme had been further developed, and if the ways in which the various dimensions of Baptist spirituality are held together had better captured the collective fervour of the authors, then the book might have delivered so much more: it could have been both the medium and the message of Baptist collaboration lived under the Rule of Christ. Instead the titular theme was largely ignored and when invoked, it often felt like a late revision that arrived long after the patterns of writing had been set. It is this omission that

leaves the reader longing for something that is both more spiritual and more Baptist.

This important publication undoubtedly marks a good beginning to a subject too often absent from Baptist conversation. Yet it is difficult to avoid the feeling that as a whole, this book could have offered more to Baptists who sought to deepen their own spirituality and to those outside the Denomination who wondered what was unique to this tradition. While each contributor has much of value to offer, the book as a whole seemed to lack a coherent passion that spirituality 'lived under the Rule of Christ' was the mother-tongue for Baptists discourse. However, it may be said that in that failing the writers leave all Baptists with their greatest challenge.

Craig Gardiner
Calvary Baptist Church, Cardiff

Crawford Gribben. *Writing the Rapture*
Prophecy Fiction in
Evangelical America
 Oxford: Oxford University
 Press, 2009

The phenomenal success of the 'Left Behind' series written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B Jenkins has brought end-times speculation both into and beyond the mainstream of contemporary Christian writing. However, many who have purchased these novels or watched the films remain unaware of the long tradition of 'prophecy fiction' which precedes

them. In this fascinating study, Gribben traces the development of the genre from its emergence as an articulation of *dispensational premillennialism* in the closing years of the nineteenth century, through its impact on the political understandings of twentieth century evangelicalism, to its current manifestation as a populist apologetic for conservative Christianity.

Gribben demonstrates how prophecy fiction offers an alternative narrative for the faithful, providing an emphasis on imminent global transformation which critiques the dominant social, economic and spiritual systems of Western civilisation. Yet for all its ambivalence towards Western culture, the dominant consumers of prophecy fiction have remained Christians deeply enmeshed in that same culture. Far from providing manifestos of radicalism, these works tend rather to endorse political conservatism, with direct action focussing around movements seeking to establish national morality. The radical transformation of society will occur with the coming end-times events, and this expectation of decisive divine intervention evokes a sense of dislocation and isolation in the 'elect', whose role becomes primarily that of remaining morally pure and steadfastly faithful in a world which is fundamentally hostile to their perspective.

Gribben identifies the founding father of the prophecy fiction movement as J.N. Darby (1800-82), whose dispensationalist scheme was popularised through its inclusion in the *Scofield Reference Bible* of 1909. This key

text provided the theological framework for a proliferation of stories set against the backdrop of an imminently ending world. Into this already complex pattern of predictions the establishment of the state of Israel in the middle of the century introduced another highly significant strand.

The publication of Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970 was a milestone, crossing over from devotional to populist in its appeal. Lindsey identified the political events of his time as direct fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and then offered a series of predictions about events which were shortly to ensue. The 1972 film *A Thief in the Night* took Lindsey's schematisation of the end times and dramatised it into an overtly evangelistic fictional narrative, aimed at provoking repentance on the part of viewers. The *Left Behind* series of the late 20th and early 21st centuries continues this tradition of fusing theology, politics and spirituality, aiming to simultaneously educate, motivate and evangelise.

For those wanting to understand the development of prophecy fiction, or to locate their own reading within a broader framework, Gribben offers a scholarly, readable and comprehensive account. Whilst in many ways sympathetic to the works he examines, Gribben is not uncritical of their weaknesses, concluding that all too often, 'unbelievers are there to be resisted, not served or saved: the Cross is no longer enough'.

Simon Woodman
South Wales Baptist College.

Barry Harvey. *Can These Bones Live? A Catholic Baptist Engagement with Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, and Social Theory*
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008

Barry Harvey teaches theology at Baylor University in Texas and is a member of the 'Manifesto' group of North American Baptist theologians along with fellow 'Catholic Baptists' such as Steve Harmon and Curtis Freeman. In this provocative and often difficult book, Harvey offers something of his own manifesto. It appears in classic prophetic form: diagnosis followed by renewal of vision.

The diagnosis is the hardest part of the book to really summarize. This is partly because Harvey cites a wide variety of sources and partly because the insights he gleans from those sources are not woven into the argument in such a way as to offer the reader a clear narrative line through it. The basic claim is clear: the church now finds itself dis-membered. By this Harvey means that the church has lost its connection to the truthful narrative of God's apocalyptic action by means of its entrance into a 'power-sharing arrangement' with the secular authorities. This fundamental false step means that the church is ill equipped to relate appropriately to history, culture, society and creation itself. In short, the church fails to be the church and so is unable to name the world as the world.

The renewal of vision that Harvey seeks has as its end the remembering of the church. In five stimulating chapters he explores the church's relationship to Scripture, the nature of doctrine, sacramental existence, spiritual formation and pilgrimage. These chapters are constructive, provocative but continue to operate at the level of 'vision' rather than offering much specific guidance as to how it all might look in practice.

This 'vision' is both the book's strength and weakness perhaps. Because Harvey's work is so deeply theological, his vision of what church can, or, ought to be transcends the North-American context from which he writes. Although rarely named as such the theology that emerges is Baptist through and through, and British Baptist theologians will profit from engaging with it. However, ministers looking for some suggestions as to how all this makes a difference in the daily life of a local congregation will need to work hard to make the connections. This is a valuable work, by an important voice in contemporary Baptist theology. It will reward the careful reader who is prepared to do some work.

Sean Winter
Uniting Church Theological
College, Melbourne

Roy Kearsley. *Church, Community and Power*
 Ashgate, 2008.

In his introduction, Roy Kearsley (Tutor in Doctrine, South

Wales Baptist College) says that 'those training for appointment to church leadership, nearly always want to dwell longer than time allows on discussion of the meanings and dangers of power' (p.10). Concern about power--who has it and how it is used--are important questions and, as Kearsley emphasises, local church communities are not immune to power struggles. This book is a study of power in the church with special regard to the work of the 20th century French philosopher Michael Foucault.

After an introductory chapter identifying the issues, the second chapter argues for understanding the church as a *koinona*, before chapters 3, 4, and 5 trace the debate about what is power and the church's shift in understanding from 'power over' to 'power to'. Here Kearsley engages closely with Foucault and the three main variations of power found in his work: sovereign (rule of monarchy/government), disciplinary (by which he means a systemic conditioning of thought by culture or state policy), and micro-power (power relations present in family and smaller interest-groups). This engagement with Foucault then moves to considering the impact this has on the church and a claim that leaders especially must be attuned to the different power relations at work within the church and the values that emerge from being followers in the way of Jesus. Kearsley emphasises strongly that 'there can be no easy refuge [for the church] in mere repetition of spiritual slogans' and that 'spiritual activities' can 'become useful

camouflage, covering up chronic, classic, social symptoms of power imbalances' (p.94). Throughout the book, he repeats his concern that the sociological reality of the church is not denied.

Chapters 6, 7, 8 explore issues of power and freedom, power and the Spirit, and authority in the church. Here, in addition to his encouragement that we understand power as 'power to' and 'power with', he adds a further phrase in 'power through', most notably he suggests that power *through weakness* is the work of the Spirit. Kearsley argues that authority in the church should not be expressed as a 'power over'. He writes, 'Theologically power is transformed in truly Christian sources from purely "power over" to "power to" (healthily transform), "power with" (the community of the *koinonia*), "power from" (the Spirit of humility and solidarity in Jesus), "power through" (vulnerability and perhaps weakness)' (p.192).

The book is a fascinating and scholarly work which requires careful reading. It is a rewarding book and certainly fulfils Kearsley's aim of 'expos[ing] and inspect[ing] the subtlety and complexity of power as a concept' (p.11). He demonstrates that simple definitions of power are unhelpful when power pervades every group and relation and that, without due attention, power in church, like any community, can be very destructive. Kearsley's repeated references to the 'Jesus way' might need more unpacking and gives the book the feeling of the beginning of a longer-term project,

which has the potential to be very interesting.

Andy Goodliff
Regent's Park College, Oxford

Sally Nelson. *A Thousand Crucifixions*
The materialist subversion of the church?
Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2009.

Sally Nelson was the Whitley lecturer for 2009, and this is the publication of the lecture given at various of the Baptist Theological Colleges and at the Baptist Assembly. As such it is a short piece of work, some 36 pages. Nelson writes from the perspective of her theological study, her experience as a hospice chaplain and the mother of a severely disabled daughter to offer a personal and moving reflection on the contemporary experience of suffering. The subtitle of the work points to the way that a materialist and consumer culture has so valued individuality and supposed normality that these perspectives have unwittingly shaped the church's understanding of those who suffer and therefore, are perceived as different through their suffering.

Nelson dialogues with a whole range of authors in the lecture, Hauerwas, Volf, Soelle and McFadyen representing something of the breadth. She begins by looking at the nature of suffering, recognising it to be always contextual, often imposed from without and leading to isolation,

but suggesting that, despite how some may feel, that it is never meaningless. She then proceeds to discuss the nature of persons, drawing here on McFadyen to argue for an understanding based on dialogue: I am who I am because I am (and have been) addressed by others (including God) and respond. Not only does this challenge the all too individualistic culture, it challenges us to think about the way we may develop or assault another's identity, so forming them as a person, by the nature of our own dialogue with them. Nelson suggests that one way to think of suffering is as exclusion from this dialogue that forms the sufferer.

Various thoughts are then weaved together, including questions of theodicy, the nature of God, particularly those thoughts that derive more from Greek philosophy and the experience of those who suffer from significant medical issues within a system in which they are reduced to being patients. The challenge Nelson sets before the church is to be communities in which the stories of those who suffer can be heard, and transformed, and where some of the pervasive but dehumanising aspects of modernity can be challenged. This vision would then be one for human community that the church could, imperfectly but prophetically, set before the world.

This is a moving and inspiring piece of theological reflection, which is rightly and helpfully shaped by both the pain and hope that Nelson herself feels and has known. As a parent myself of a daughter with special needs there are moments in the

book, especially the very end, which are deeply poignant. It is also wide ranging in the issues it touches. In this way, at only thirty five pages long, it necessarily functions as a stimulus to further thought and reflection rather than being an attempt to treat these wide ranging issues in a full and systematic way. There are related issues that perhaps might have been included, given more space and time. Nelson, for example, speaks helpfully about those moments when suffering is to be embraced and can be transformed, which is at the heart of the cross of Jesus. But in the cross and resurrection, there is also a right protest against suffering, and holding together both acceptance and protest is a further challenge, theologically and pastorally. It deserves to be read and considered an impetus to further study and reflection.

Anthony Clarke
Regent's Park College, Oxford

Roger Standing, *Re-emerging Church Strategies for reaching a returning generation*
 Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2008

Roger Standing has wide experience of ministry in contemporary society, beginning as a Methodist evangelist in northern England, continuing as a Baptist minister in the multi-cultural sprawling south London suburbs and then as a regional minister in the prosperous

southern counties. Standing is now Tutor for Mission, Evangelism and Pioneer Ministry at Spurgeon's College.

It was in reflecting on his experience of resuming a youthful passion for Norwich City Football Club that it occurred to him that in Britain the church was potentially about to encounter a new phenomenon in mission, the prospective return to active faith of the 'baby-boomer' generation. This well-known 'bulge' in population following the second world war, from roughly the late 1940s to the early 1960's, was perhaps the last generation in Britain to have widespread contact with organized Christianity in its formative years. The 1950s form an exception to the general decline of church-going in Britain from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, a 'blip' that perhaps reflects the quest of a post-war generation to make sense of its experience in the light of the Christian story. The somewhat stark statistics suggest it has been down hill all the way since then. Indeed, it is the thesis of Callum Brown (in his book *The Death of Christian Britain*) that this, in his view, irreversible situation can be dated almost exactly to 1963, the end of the Boomer years.

In the coming decade this Boomer generation will face retirement and the sometimes pressing existential questions which each older generation must face in its turn. Standing's thesis is that a good number of such people might be prepared to return to the faith of their youth, provided that the churches are willing and prepared to welcome this cohort of

the population which has for decades been at the fore-front of personal choice and the creation of a consumer society. In part this thesis is provoked by the interesting results of the 2001 British Census in which some 72% self-identified as 'Christian', although the debate continues as to the real significance of this self-understanding.

In an engagingly written presentation Standing offers a number of case studies as the basis for his thesis in which he identifies nine characteristics of 'Boomer' spirituality with which the church must reckon if it is to make the most of a perhaps unique opportunity. These characteristics include the motif of 'journey', the primacy of choice and suspicion of institutions in all guises, questions about patterns of leadership, the significance of both music and media (unsurprising for the 'rock 'n roll' generation), the importance of experiential aspects of life and social justice and the challenge of discipleship for a generation brought up to believe that 'all you need is love'.

In the main body of the book each of these nine characteristics is discussed using a variation on the pastoral reflection cycle – WHAT – What happened, Highlight the issues, Articles of faith and Taking action. If nothing else, the volume is valuable in introducing such a structured model of theological reflection to those for whom such analysis might be unfamiliar. Each of these chapters follows a similar pattern, with biblical reflection, one or more case studies, opportunity for group reflection and encouragement to

take action. At the end of each chapter are some concluding observations which draw out some of its implications. The case studies are well-chosen and illuminating of the whole raft of issues faced by both potential boomers as well as those who have remained and become deeply enculturated in the life of the church. This book would form an excellent basis for discussion in deacons' meetings and for some churches home groups too. Inevitably in a volume of this type some issues are only able to be treated at an initial level, but there are pointers as to where deeper exploration might begin.

Nicholas Wood
Regent's Park College, Oxford

Rob Warner. *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001*

A Theological and Sociological Study. Studies in Evangelical History and Thought
 Paternoster, 2007

As a church minister who has been in mainstream evangelical life over recent decades, it is easy to identify many of the trends Warner discusses, which include changes to styles of worship, the growth of the Evangelical Alliance and the rise of Spring Harvest. But Warner's book is more than an historical overview.

Warner takes the quadrilateral of evangelical convictions proposed by David Bebbington in his seminal history, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*

(conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism) and dynamically reconceptualises them as twin rival axes, with the entrepreneurial pragmatists majoring upon the conversionist-activist axis and the more theologically orientated majoring upon the biblicist-crucicentric axis. Starting from the Second National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966 where D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' apparent call for evangelicals to leave mixed denominations was publicly refuted by John Stott, Warner argues that the contested polarisations of evangelicalism led to a fragmentation which opened the door to a new highly pragmatic, non-reflexive and vigorously assertive form of evangelicalism, most notably seen in Clive Calver's appointment as General Director of the Evangelical Alliance in 1982 (leading Warner to create the term 'Calverism'), which relies on an unsustainable diet of vision inflation, entrepreneurial rhetoric and ecstatic spirituality.

Although the process of research saw Warner transition from the perspective of an 'observing participant' to a 'participating observer' any characterisation of this book which disregards it as the negative comments of a former adherent is unwarranted. This is serious sociological analysis rooted in historical research. Certainly there are questions that could be posed to Warner's analysis. Was the 'mid-twentieth century hegemony of Calvinistic conservatism' really as uniform as he suggests? Are there not other trends in evangelicalism such as the rise of black and ethnic majority churches

or growing global influences which are of greater significance? Are the predictions for the 'obdurately exclusivist' neo-conservatives overstated or will their roots in the theologies of the reformation provide a tradition which enables a fresh articulation of the 'faith once delivered'? Nevertheless Warner's observations are timely and perceptive.

The book points to several issues pertinent to ministry, not least because Baptists have been a strong recruiting ground for the Evangelical Alliance. The development of large organisations should not be confused with spiritual blessing, outward success is not the same as transformation and hyperactivity can, all too easily, become a cover for spiritual poverty. As a Baptist Minister, who believes strongly in the local church, I also wonder if pan-evangelicalism, with its affinity for para-church organisations, inevitably downplays and displaces the centrality of the local church.

This book is based on Warner's doctoral thesis and the writing style is sometimes weighty. I found repeated footnotes referring to interviews without detailing the interviewee immensely irritating! Nevertheless this book is worth the effort and is one which every evangelical minister needs to read. Warner has done us a great service by providing an insightful analysis of our recent past and raising important questions for the future of evangelicalism in England.

Neil Brighton
Poynton Baptist Church



Worship

Christopher J. Ellis.
Approaching God
A guide for worship leaders and worshippers.
Norwich: Canterbury Press
2009

Thank God for Chris Ellis! He has written an excellent and timely book to help all of us to reflect more carefully on the event of worship in the free church tradition. 'All of us' includes both worship leaders and those members of our church communities who are seeking a deeper understanding of the question: what on earth are we doing in worship? And where is God in it all? In an era when conflict over worshipping styles continues to dominate the letters pages of the Christian press, Chris Ellis has pierced through it all with an accessible, thoughtful and helpful study on worship in all its dimensions.

This is a very practical book, rooted in good theology, strong Biblical themes and a wide experience in worship leading. The section titles reveal the deeper rhythms of his concerns:

Beginnings--understanding the vocational aspect of leading worship, that this is a ministry; Meanings--that the words we say, the silences we keep, the things we do, the order in which we do them and the manner of our doing of them carry meaning for the worshipper, and for God; Journeying--that the event of worship takes the people of God on a journey of experience, mood, tone, all expressing gathering, praise, confession, listening to the Word, responding to the Word, intercession, meeting around the table and then being sent with a dynamic flourish into the world to live and work to the glory of God; Reflecting--highlighting the importance of prayerful review of our leading of worship in order that we may exercise our ministry more fully.

The whole discussion is firmly focused on the worship of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. Ellis also clearly recognises the effects of worship on the worshipper--that participation in worship is a powerfully transformative act for individuals, the church community and the world. He explores why we worship, who worship is for and how life and worship are deeply interconnected. He outlines the reasons why a patterning to worship is important, and how that journey of worship might be planned. He then looks at the various components of worship, explaining in clear and robust terms why they matter and how they might feature in a worship event: Praying--two excellent chapters on how to lead public prayer well (a crying need for

many churches at the moment), together with outlining types of prayer; Singing--recognising that non-conformist churches have used song to express sound doctrine, and how the old might be blended with the new in life giving ways; Scripture--how we meet God in Spirit breathed texts read well; Preaching--two very good chapters given to the art of preaching, various genres of preaching, and some down to earth advice on how to communicate clearly; and the Eucharist--the place of meeting God in each other gathered around the table sharing the gifts of bread and wine. Ellis underlines the strong link between remembering the presence of Christ in the past, present and future together with the ethical implications that sharing in this meal has for behaviour and life choices. Latter chapters cover the opportunities given to the leaders of worship through wider horizons--using congregational responses, drama, visual symbols and multi sensory worship, and discovering the template of the Christian year as an aid to a rich journey of worship. The penultimate chapter focus on how we are challenged and changed by worship in many dimensions, and this would be a very helpful chapter for all ministers and worship leaders to think through and pray with carefully. The final chapter is a very helpful glossary of Christian language, uncovering the richness of our linguistic heritage, which accompanies an appeal to not dumb down the language of prayer, sermon and song, which

can leave congregations bored with blandness.

Chris Ellis has provided us with a book that will refresh our thinking, provoke our understanding, and challenge our practice, especially if we have become so familiar with worship leading that we've stopped thinking about it. He is non-partisan in terms of worshipping style, generously affirming all forms of worship that are offered sincerely and done well. It would be an excellent book for every minister to explore with worship leaders and all those eager to know more about why the act of worship is such a central part of our life together.

Sian Murray Williams
Bristol Baptist College

Spirituality

Ian Stackhouse. *The Day is Yours*

Slow Spirituality in a Fast-Moving World

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008

The readable, little volume, *The Day is Yours* is a welcome break from the pragmatic world of Christianised management theory, Christian-culture analysis, or preoccupation with the latest mission-shaped project. And yet it addresses powerfully and simply the pressures faced by Christian communities struggling to proclaim the Gospel in the contemporary world.

The introduction, critiquing contemporary hyper-active culture,

covers familiar territory but does so amusingly, and without bitterness, cynicism or pretence. What does it mean to be hurried so quickly from the cradle to the grave without ever feeling free to stop and wonder where we came from or where we are going? And how might we hear the voice of Jesus in such a world? Stackhouse makes no attempt to attach bible verses to the pagan obsession with time management. Instead he invites us to celebrate Sabbath.

His ten page treatment of the Sabbath is surely one of the best available. Highlighting what Karl Barth called the 'monstrous range' of the Sabbath command, Stackhouse also unpacks the genuine and counter-cultural hope that true Sabbath celebration entails in our over-busy world. In fact, this superb chapter sets the tone for the second part of the book, which is structured around praying at different times of the day.

"If a 24/7 world has all but obliterated the rhythms of night and day, then a crucial aspect of Christian witness in this next generation is to restore them." There are no formulae here though, no set prayers, no 'how to' lists. The author instead portrays such a beautiful picture of God that readers are drawn to find their 'rhythm' of prayer, to encounter this God, this Lord of time and space. The final chapters help to root these rhythms in the real world. Sensitivity to praying differently at different times of the day enables a particular kind of attentiveness to God, the world, and God-in-the-world.

In a book about what it means to live 'in time', the word eschatology hardly appears. But the entire book is an eschatology, 'realised' in the sense that it becomes real in the life of the Christian community. The kind of person that we become by unreflective complicity with the 24/7 world is very different to the kind of person whose days are structured around a rhythm of prayer. This, in turn, is equally true of the Christian community and of the world.

Each moment being pregnant with eternity (and yes, all the orthodox fixed points of eternity are still in place!) means that we receive the future as a gift, rather than see it as a new territory waiting to be conquered.

This gives rise to astute theological insight. But this alone, is not what makes the book serious theology. Perhaps the greatest merit of this volume is that the reader is not being taught about a thing called theology or spirituality. If read with the attentiveness it deserves, it functions less as a book than as an experience. Stackhouse has produced heavyweight theology, in accessible language, in a way that cannot be read dispassionately. To read this book is to be drawn into the liberating, life-changing world of Sabbath celebration.

Simon Perry
Bloomsbury Central Baptist
Church, London



Biblical Studies

Stephen Finamore. *God, Order and chaos*
René Girard and the Apocalypse
 Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009

We are fortunate indeed that Baptist scholars are in the forefront of recent writing on the *Book of Revelation*. Alongside Simon Woodman's fine SCM 'Core Text' volume, we now have Stephen Finamore's book based on his doctoral thesis on Girard and the Apocalypse. It is a very fine book – and if you are serious about understanding the bible's last words, you will need to add it to your library.

Finamore begins with a magisterial overview of the way *Revelation* has been read and understood from the Church Fathers to the present day, and follows a chronological account with a helpful typology of the different approaches adopted. Even though many commentators either offer more than one way of reading the book or have approaches which leak across the boundaries, this typology is useful and will provide a helpful framework for reading commentaries. We also consider whether the visions of Revelation are sequential, cyclic or spiral in the way that they relate to one

another, and other significant interpretive issues.

The second chapter is an introduction to the work of René Girard, the twentieth century literary critic. It is the clearest and most coherent introduction to Girard that I have come across. Girard, working first from texts but also drawing on the tools of other disciplines such as social anthropology, suggests that all human culture is established and maintained by violence driven by a mimetic or imitative impulse and the rivalry that this engenders. When the tension spills into conflict, this is dealt with by scapegoating an innocent party, an individual or community, and their murder allows the status quo to continue. There is a repeated pattern of order--chaos--scapegoating violence--and order re-established. Human culture remains unaware of this pattern and indeed its rituals and myths are often designed (subconsciously) to mask it. However Girard also suggests that the Judeo-Christian scriptures, in particular the Gospels, expose the lie at the heart of human culture, and that Jesus' witness to the truth breaks down the false mimesis of violence and invites us into an imitation of a new way. The account of Girard's work is followed by a discussion of his critical reception in such spheres as anthropology, literary criticism, feminism, and theology. Here, as in the review of writing on revelation, Finamore's scholarship, breadth of reading, and lightness of touch in handling difficult ideas, is deeply impressive.

Girard's theories have often seemed somewhat speculative to me, and Finamore does not completely dispel this impression. His discussion is clear and fair, and he frequently admits that Girard's approach could be considered reductionist. In fact, one might use more critical terminology: this metanarrative might be considered totalising, or even 'violent,' in its forcing history and texts to fit the pattern. And, because Girard argues that inhabitants of culture are unaware of the violent mimesis at its core, there is a sense in which one feels that the theory is unanswerable--you either see it or you don't, and remain captive to the culture--or conformed to the standards of this world, I suppose the Apostle Paul might say. However, Finamore does make a very strong case indeed for Girard's theory to be taken seriously as a tool which--while not explaining every aspect of human culture--is certainly valuable in analysing the way we are.

Having been introduced to Girard we return to *Revelation* and Finamore tests his Girardian reading on the text. Focusing on the terms of 'witness' and 'conquer', we see that Jesus is seen in Revelation as the witness to the truth whose unmasking of the lie conquers and breaks the cycle of violence which have come to mark the human condition. *Revelation* invites its readers to see the world differently, to see it as it is. This reading is mapped out against key texts, with chapters 4 and 5 presenting the book's essential message, and the chapters which follow unpacking the summary given there. If it

does not convince you at every step it will certainly stimulate your thinking and challenge your previous understanding of this most exotic of NT texts. Along the way we get helpful diversions into *Romans* and the NT's atonement imagery.

While I have not become a complete convert to Girard, I have found this book among the most stimulating I have read in long while. What we need now is for Finamore to write two more: a scholarly preacher's commentary on *Revelation*, and another book examining atonement from a NT perspective. There is one reader here waiting eagerly for them!

Rob Ellis
Regent's Park College, Oxford

Joel B. Green. 1 Peter and Ruth Anne Reese. 2 Peter & Jude

The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary
Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2007

In *Regent's Reviews* 26 the first two volumes of a new commentary series, entitled *The Two Horizons New Testament Commentaries*, were reviewed; these were the commentaries on *Colossians and Philemon* by Marianne Meye Thompson and *Philippians* by Stephen E. Fowl. Here we consider two further volumes within the series, and they continue the innovative approach adopted in the earlier ones. Once again the aim is to

allow the modern preacher, teacher, and reader to engage the biblical text in a way that is helpful and supportive for Christian living. The commentaries are divided into three distinct, but interlocking, parts: an introduction in which traditional matters of authorship, date, purpose of writing, etc. are dealt with; a commentary section in which the text is outlined and discussed in easily digestible chunks; and a theological horizons section in which various angles and insights arising from the text and inviting fresh appropriation of it are explored.

Joel Green's volume on *1 Peter* represents a new venture for him, at least in terms of published commentaries. Green, who is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Fuller Theological Seminary, published a full-bodied commentary on *Luke* within the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* series in 1997. He has also contributed a number of detailed studies on themes arising from *1 Peter*, all of which set him in good stead for applying his hand to the task at hand here. Green calls the 'introductory' section of his commentary an 'Orientation', and although it is disproportionately small (only 11 pages long), it is crucial for determining the direction that he goes in for the rest of the book. Essentially Green suggests that the perspective of *1 Peter* is best viewed as one preoccupied with learning how to live faithful Christian lives in the face of the dominating and competing power of imperial Rome. Our task, in appropriating the message of *1 Peter* for us today, is to learn the

lessons the letter offers, to identify our equivalent of 'Roman Babylon' and to live accordingly. It is a challenging thesis, and one that makes the reader eager to find out more and read on. The commentary section of the book is much more substantial (174 pages), and there is much that is valuable and helpful within it. But for me, the most interesting section of the book is the third section (containing approximately 200 pages), which is entitled 'Theological Horizons' and has a dozen excurses under three sub-headings, namely 'Theology of 1 Peter', '1 Peter and the New Testament', and 'Engaging Theology with 1 Peter'.

A good indication of how the commentary section functions can be gleaned from the discussion given to 1 Peter 5:12-14, which includes the all-important verse 13 ('She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark'). This is a crucial paragraph for determining not only the authorship of the letter, but its setting, and provenance, not to mention the identity of John Mark. Green gives six pages to a discussion of these verses, linking it to the opening lines in 1:1-2 (Green describes this as an *inclusio* – page 181), and notes several ways in which the place of the Christian community within the larger context of the Roman world is to be understood. He stresses how important the idea of 'strangers' or 'exiles' is to Peter's mind, and suggests that the reference to 'she who is in Rome' is a way of highlighting the kinship of the Christian community of

Rome ('Babylon' is a cypher for Rome) with the Christians living in the diaspora in the Anatolian region, i.e. the areas of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (see 1:1). According to Green, the identity of 'my son Mark' is impossible to determine with certainty, and not all that important at the end of the day. Much more engaging is the 'kiss of love' mentioned in verse 14, which Green describes as having a ritualistic quality about it, suggesting that it 'concentrates Peter's theology of love and redemptive images of household life, as it helps to construct the very reality it intends to represent' (page 186). As stated above, the twelve excurses in the third section of 'Theological Horizons' contain some of the most interesting ideas within the commentary. For example, there is a short excursus of five pages entitled "'When You Suffer as a Christian": Peter's Perspective on Suffering' which readily lends itself to use as a bible study or even a sermon series on the topic. There is also a short excursus on "'This is Now ... the Second Letter I am Writing to You" (2 Pet 3:1): 1 and 2 Peter' in which Green tries to offer an interpretative strategy of reading 1 and 2 Peter together theologically, fully recognizing the scholarly difficulties in seeing them as arising from the hand of the same apostolic writer. This leads us to consider the second of our commentaries.

Ruth Anne Reese's volume on *2 Peter & Jude* continues the basic structural outline adopted in Green's volume, with the discussion being divided into the

three parts noted above (an Introduction section, a Commentary section, and a section on Theological Horizons). In this case Reese, who is an Associate Professor at Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, handles 2 Peter and Jude separately, with each of them having the three-part treatment independently. Interestingly, the order in which the two letters are treated is reversed from that given in the title. The title clearly is a reflection of the canonical sequence of the two, whereas the reason why Reese discusses Jude first within the commentary is not entirely clear. Of course the literary similarities which exist between Jude and 2 Peter 2 readily invite a comparison between the two epistles at large, but this is no reason why Jude has to come first. In point of fact, Reese offers about the same amount of discussion to Jude as she does to 2 Peter (roughly 100 pages each), despite the fact that Jude is much shorter than 2 Peter (25 verses as compared to 61 verses). I suspect the real reason for Reese starting with Jude is that this epistle interests her more, and probably was her doctoral research topic (her only other book of which I am aware was on Jude). Interestingly, Reese does go against the grain of much recent scholarship and makes a case for Petrine authorship of 2 Peter, mainly on the basis of an interpretative strategy which focuses on reading 1 Peter alongside 2 Peter. Similarly, Reese tends towards the traditional view which sees Jude as one of the brothers of James, and hence of Jesus Christ himself; this

also means that she dates the letter quite early, between 70-90 CE. There are some interesting excursions within the book, notably one on 'The Theology of Jude in Contemporary Contexts', which attempts creatively to apply insights from Simone de Beauvoir to a discussion of social categories of 'the Beloved' and 'the Other' within church life, and one on 'What Sort of People Ought We to Be?: Jesus, Ethics and Eschatology' which employs ideas of Jurgen Moltmann to a discussion of the eschatological perspective of 2 Peter.

Both commentaries contain a fairly comprehensive bibliography, and indexes of authors, subjects and scriptural texts.

**Larry Kreitzer,
Regent's Park College, Oxford**

Mikeal C. Parsons. *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*
Hendrickson Publishers
Peabody, Massachusetts,
2007

This is the fourth and final volume in a series of helpful introductions to the gospel writers. The other three are Warren Carter's *John: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (1996); Francis Moloney's *Mark: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (2003); and Warren Carter's *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (2006). Parsons, who is currently a Professor at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, is well-

placed to round off this series with his study of Luke and has published a number of specialized studies on Luke-Acts, including *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context* (1987), *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (1993) and *Body and Character in Luke and Acts* (2006). Indeed, some of the material within this new book has already appeared in other places, including contributions to New Testament monographs, festschriften and academic journals. Still it is good to have a number of Parson's scholarly contributions here brought together under one title, and there is a coherence, albeit somewhat forced at times, to what is offered here.

The book contains seven chapters, mainly arranged under three headings corresponding to the three terms of the sub-title – Storyteller, Interpreter and Evangelist. This means that throughout the discussion the focus is on aspects of Luke as an author, and *not* on Luke as a text. Thus, the book is not really suitable for someone who is primarily interested in a chapter-by-chapter, verse-by-verse commentary on the writings of Luke. It is important to note that Parson does not limit his discussion to the gospel of Luke, but frequently widens it to include the Acts of the Apostles, particularly when a thematic link extends from the Gospel of Luke to Acts. In the end, Parson's book does offer some very interesting thematic studies of Luke-Acts, even if the packaging of it as a book on the

gospel of Luke is misleading, not to say downright deceptive.

I was particularly intrigued by the two chapters under the heading of 'Luke the Storyteller', especially since it is commonly remarked that the gospel contains some of the most memorable stories of the life and ministry of Jesus. However, the discussion of this aspect of Luke's gospel is disappointing, and seems to misfire somewhat. For one thing, it seems driven by a desire to compare and contrast Luke with ancient Graeco-Roman rhetoricians and rhetorical exercise books (known as *progymnasmata*). This is all very interesting as far as it goes, but I remain unconvinced of its value in allowing us to get to the heart of Luke's story-telling technique. True, the opening paragraph of Luke 1:1-4 gives the appearance of just such a rhetorical strategy built within it, and could arguably support the exploration of such techniques (the introductory paragraph is discussed in Chapter Two). But I find it difficult to agree with Parsons that Luke can be accurately described as a practitioner of Graeco-Roman rhetoric.

Two of the chapters that constitute the discussion of 'Luke the Interpreter' offer material that is much more recognizable as getting to the heart of the matter, particularly for a pastor or teacher. Chapter 5 is entitled 'Interpreting Jewish Traditions: Jerusalem and the Suffering Servant', and Chapter 6 is entitled 'Interpreting Christian Traditions: Parables and Paul'. These two chapters offer much that will inspire and give the

reader something new to consider. There is a very interesting discussion, for example, of Luke's own narrative voice in the travel narrative parables, notably those that come from the 'L' tradition (i.e. material that comes from Luke's special source and does not have parallels in Matthew or Mark). I also found some valuable comments are made about the five so-called 'twinned parables', namely The Good Samaritan/The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, The Shameless Neighbour/The Unjust Judge, The Rich Fool/The Rich Man and Lazarus, The Returning Master/The Dishonest Steward and The Barran Fig Tree/The Lost Sons (pages 119-121). These would lend themselves to a short sermon series.

Finally, the one chapter in the third major heading, 'Luke the Evangelist', is entitled 'Reconstituting the People of God: The Examples of Peter, Cornelius and Others'. This is an in-depth study of Acts 10-11 and 15, one that sees the central characters, Peter and Cornelius, as being intimately involved (through a series of seven structured scenes) with the question of Gentile inclusion within the people of God. If you are looking for a challenging and thought-provoking study of the Cornelius story, this is an excellent starting point. To my great surprise, this was the chapter of the book I liked the best.

The book contains full indexes of modern authors and scriptural texts, and has a bibliography of 22 pages.

**Larry Kreitzer,
Regent's Park College, Oxford**

Simon Patrick Woodman. *The Book of Revelation*
London: SCM, 2008

The Apocalypse of John is not the kind of text that gives the impression of being in need of protection. The work's rhetorical mode is quite clearly one of confident assertion in relation to 'what must take place' (4.1). Letter and vision, prophecy and apocalypse, image and metaphor all combine in this work by 'pounding its audience with image after image, special effect after special effect. And in so doing, it seeks to transform the way they look at the world in which they live.'

But Revelation does need some interpretative protection, and Simon Woodman, who understands this text so well, whether as an ancient apocalypse, formative influence on subsequent church history or ongoing resource for theological reflection, is an excellent guide to its use and misuse. In short, in this volume he provides an excellent, accessible guide to anyone who wishes to engage in detailed study of this complex text.

The book is divided into three sections. The first part offers an orientation to Revelation as a whole. Woodman skilfully and with enviable brevity steers the reader through the basic terrain of scholarship: what kind of text is Revelation? What are the most appropriate ways of interpreting it? How do we make sense of its main structural features? For those who need it, there is a clear account of the possible relationship of Revelation to human history. The following chapter, turns into an

excellent summary of the whole work in which Woodman helps us to discern the role of the narrator in the text.

Section 2 is perhaps the most creative part of the work. Woodman suggests that greater attention to the main characters in the heavenly drama portrayed in Revelation will help us discern its central themes. In this he largely succeeds, and anyone looking for a structure around which they might develop four sermons on Revelation, could do a lot worse than work with the material in these chapters. The chapter on the 'Forces of Evil' should be required reading by anyone who claims to understand the identity of the beast!

Section 3 picks up themes from Revelation that Woodman believes are relevant to issues of contemporary discipleship. The counter-imperial identity of the Church, perspectives on economic and environmental questions, and the challenge of martyrdom are all explored sensitively and with one eye on the present challenges facing the church. If I have a criticism, it is that Woodman does not directly address the issue of violence in Revelation, although there are comments that implicitly suggest potential ways of treating that thorny issue hermeneutically.

In that as in other areas that are discussed in this lively, helpful treatment, Revelation does need some protection. Too often it has been used to prop up notions of divine action, prophetic activity, historical description and Christian mission that take no account of its contextual location in the fraught world of the earliest Christian

movement, and in the fascinating genre of literature that we call apocalyptic. Through a mixture of careful scholarship and engagement with contemporary culture Woodman manages to offer the reader an invaluable guide, and to offset in the text much of the interpretative protection that it needs.

Sean Winter
Uniting Church Theological
College, Melbourne

Theology & Philosophy

John E. Colwell. *The Rhythm of Doctrine*

A Liturgical Sketch of Christian Faith and Faithfulness

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007

We should be greatly indebted to John Colwell, until recently Tutor in Doctrine at Spurgeon's College, for this engaging and refreshing 'dogmatics in outline'. As this sobriquet (it's my term, not his) might suggest, at points his book feels quite Barthian in tone: Colwell layers complex sentences in an attempt to nuance his expression, and the whole has a lively 'preached' feel to it, even when we are attending to a finer point of Aquinas or Luther. Colwell tells us that he owes a great debt to Stanley Hauerwas – from whom he learnt that theology and ethics are inseparable, and that they are learned (or at least, 'internalised') more in worship than in the classroom. So Colwell

experimentally orders his brief dogmatics not around the creed, but around the church year – beginning with Advent and arriving at All Saints' Day, via Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Passiontide, Easter and Pentecost. He does not dwell on Trinity Sunday because, he says, as with 'the entirety of Christian theology' the Trinity should be in every part of the book.

Most of the main themes of theology and faith are touched upon through the seasons of the year, and a basic account is offered of the doctrine of God, Christology and Pneumatology. While the Trinity is present throughout, there is no attempt to enter into the more speculative side of Trinitarian theology: Colwell declares that he wants to work from Scripture, from the narrative, much as Moltmann insists we should (though I could find no mention of Moltmann here). In the final chapter one might expect some kind of treatment of 'eternal life' but we do not explicitly get this – though we do get some exploration of the 'communion of saints'.

Along the way there are some excellent, if tantalisingly brief, discussions of various theological issues. We have the connection between the sacramentality of midnight mass and the incarnation explored in the Christmas chapter; in Epiphany we discuss the nature of Scripture in the light of postmodern understandings of texts and readers, and a theological understanding of all communication; a discussion of atonement features in the Lent and

Easter chapters, and the latter has a cogent critique of penal theories; also here, an examination of Jesus' maleness in the light of some feminist critiques is illuminating; in Pentecost we touch on supposed 'natural revelation' and explore the relevance of OT wisdom ideas for understanding the Spirit; in the final chapter we briefly examine 'Christendom' and also Colwell's qualification of pacifism in living in the 'real world'.

The whole is, as I say, refreshing and readable – preachable too, for that matter. Which is not to say that we might not have a few minor gripes. The index is not good, for instance – neither of the two brief discussions of divine causality are referenced there for instance, and the references to major thinkers are often incomplete. Ironically given the structure of the book, doctrines of the church and ministry receive a less focused treatment than in more conventional systematic theologies. It may have been possible to make an even closer link to the liturgical year: we have collects at the beginning and end of each chapter, but few other references, really. Still, in such a brief work with such a big canvas, I suppose editing choices have to be made – and none of these faults spoils a good read – and Baptists, particularly but not exclusively, have much to learn from this linking of doctrine and liturgy.

Rob Ellis
Regent's Park College, Oxford

Pieter J. Lalleman (ed.).
*Challenging to Change
 Dialogues with a radical
 Baptist theologian*
 London: Spurgeon's College,
 2009

Challenging to Change is a collection of essays, thirteen in all, presented to Nigel Wright, Principal of Spurgeon's College, together with, as is common in such books, a selection of tributes and a bibliography of Wright's principal publications. It is a rich book, containing short but well written pieces on a variety of themes. Its publication is important for a number of reasons. First, Wright has been a significant figure in recent Baptist life in the UK. Secondly, this collection brings together work from a number of people who are contemporary theologians within the Baptist tradition, and thereby offers some windows into a variety of current issues.

As the subtitle suggests, all the essays are in some way dialogues with work that Wright has previously published, adding to it, building on it and, in places, offering some gentle critique. Many of the chapters take as their starting point a particular idea drawn from one of Wright's own books. This is the theme that connects them together, for in other ways the subject matter of the essays is quite diverse. We find, quite rightly, the contributors playing to their strengths. So it is no surprise, for example, that Stuart Murray writes on church planting, Tom Smail on charismatic renewal, Derek Tidball on the nature of evangelicalism and Ian

Randall on recent Baptist history. This book offers the opportunity to develop more general thinking in a particular way. There are also chapters which give insight into wider projects. Paul Goodliff's chapter on ministry as inclusive representation offers a foretaste of his recent doctoral work on the nature and understanding of ordination. This piece of research will be significant for the ongoing development of Baptist self-understanding, and it is good to have an early glimpse. In fact, the subject of ministry and leadership receives the most attention in the book, with chapters by Chris Ellis and Rob Ellis both picking up this point.

Some chapters are clearly part of a longer ongoing dialogue. Paul Fiddes, for example, writes on evil and nothingness, drawing on the two versions of Wright's books (*The Fair Face of Evil* [1989] and *A Theology of the Dark Side* [2003]), as well as a common admiration for Barth and his views of nothingness and the shadow side. I remember a morning in College nearly twenty years ago when Fiddes and Wright dialogued together, soon after *The Fair Face of Evil* had been published. Here Fiddes continues the conversation but very much in general agreement with Wright--as they were twenty years ago, to the consternation of the students! In a previous chapter, John Colwell, until very recently a colleague at Spurgeon's, pursues the nature of freedom in relation to Church and State, and argues that we need to critique modern notions of absolute freedom, and particularly the notion of freedom of religion that

derives from the Enlightenment separation of private belief and public action. Once again Colwell builds on Wright's ideas, but the chapter still suggests that there could have been fascinating discussions in the Spurgeon's staff room.

Other chapters are a historical perspective on the nature of relating among Baptists through the centuries, written by Raymond Brown, some reflections on John 3 by Alistair Campbell, and a dialogue with Wright's ecclesiology by Steve Holmes. The book closes with Pat Took's research into the origin of the phrase 'the crown rights of the Redeemer' in the work of John Knox and the meaning we may find in it today.

Challenging to Change is a good book and certainly one worth reading. Its diversity means that, practically, the chapters are quiet short and self-contained. But its breath will offer a whole variety of insights into contemporary issues in Baptist life.

Anthony Clarke
Regent's Park College, Oxford

David H. McIlroy. A Trinitarian Theology of Law In Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann, Oliver O'Donovan and Thomas Aquinas (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).

The government, for all the professing Christians in the cabinet, does not 'do' God. Public administration, most public debate and academic discourse, including

some which passes for theological and biblical studies, seem stuck in a sterile methodological atheism. Christian wisdom built on centuries of reflection about the nature and role of the law, the state and government is derided. Such is the extent to which talk of God has been excluded from the public realm that it sometimes seems as though the death of God has become the only agreed foundational reality.

In such a context it is interesting to observe the stirrings of fresh Christian thinking in a range of disciplines, which is psychologists engaged with human createdness, geographers concerned with spiritual landscapes and, in the case of this book, an advocate concerned with the purposes of human law.

McIlroy is a Christian barrister. He has previously addressed issues of law and justice from a biblical perspective. In this work he addresses them in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity. The argument takes the form of an engagement with three well-known theologians and concludes that human law has a necessary, positive, but limited role to play in the provision of 'shallow' justice. 'Deep' justice is a sanctifying work of the Spirit. Human law may play a part in pointing towards this deeper justice but can never produce it. As a whole, the work is an excellent example of theology being applied to a significant human discipline and generating fresh insights into its true objects.

There are points at which McIlroy, as a lawyer and someone who is a legal system insider, betrays a view of the law which

some may regard as overly positive. There is little reflection on the way law functions to preserve the *status quo* and reinforce existing distributions of power and wealth. Indeed, there is a tendency to reify the law so that it can be interpreted without reference to the networks of power relationships of which it is part. Although McIlroy discusses Moltmann and O'Donovan, in the end it is Aquinas who provides the dominant voice, and it seems too often that the perspective offered is one readily associated with Christendom. It might have been interesting to read the author's engagement with a post-Christendom perspective or with one of the liberation theologians.

Too often it is simply asserted that human law points back to the goodness of the original creation and forward to an eschatological *shalom*. McIlroy clearly argues that this *ought* to be the intention of those who draft laws and administer. That it *is* so seems questionable. Even that this is law's tendency may legitimately be doubted.

There are references throughout to the crucifixion of Jesus. At one point Moltmann's insistence that it be seen as divine identification with the victims of human legal orders is affirmed, but the insight is not developed. Perhaps this might offer the beginning of a reading of human law from a rather different perspective.

So, while there are points at which the argument of this book might be challenged and others where its insights might have been developed in other directions, it

remains a very worthwhile piece of work. It is an example of applied theology, undertaken by an experienced practitioner, asking significant questions and offering thoughtful and well-considered answers. As such it is a very significant contribution to the growing movement offering constructive theological engagement with other academic disciplines and with civil society.

Stephen Finamore
Bristol Baptist College

Michael Pfundner & Ernest Lucas. *Think God, Think Science*
Conversations on Life, the Universe, and Faith
Paternoster, 2008

Karen Armstrong, writing in *The Guardian* on 12th July 2009, addressed the current emphasis on belief as assent to rational truth. She noted that ancient peoples understood the world through both *logos* (reason or science) and *mythos* (dealing with emotion and experience). As such a story of the origin of the cosmos was recited at times of crisis or sickness, when people needed a symbolic influx of the creative energy that had brought something out of nothing. Thus the Genesis myth, a gentle polemic against Babylonian religion, was balm to the bruised spirits of the Israelites who had been defeated and deported by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar during the sixth century BCE. Nobody was required to 'believe' it; like most peoples,

the Israelites had a number of other mutually-exclusive creation stories and as late as the 16th century, Jews thought nothing of making up a new creation myth that bore no relation to Genesis but spoke more directly to their tragic circumstances at that time.

Ernest Lucas and Michael Pfundner seek to address this same issue through a consideration of cosmology, evolution, the Bible, Christ and faith, in a book they describe as a "starter for the layperson." While being an introduction, there are few issues that are not met head on and dealt with in a comprehensive and helpful manner. The clear thinking and careful communication skills of Ernest Lucas are evident throughout the text in answer to the prompting and insightful questions of Michael Pfundner.

They recognize the key question: 'Is the Christian message of a benevolent creator, an intentional universe and a life that has meaning still defensible?' They highlight the opposing positions for the Catholic Church of reason = science versus the faith = Church, and for the Protestant Church of reason = science versus the faith = Bible. From the viewpoint of the 17th century Catholic Church the scientific discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler undermined the philosophical system of Aristotle, on which church doctrine was positioned, while in the 19th century a growing scientific academy felt oppressed by the Church leading to the anti-clericalism of Victorian England.

Lucas identifies the emergence of two opposing

authorities, scientific truth and biblical truth, which in our post-modern world lead to conflict. There is an insular, self-centred view that the only truth is my truth. This position is held by some who study scripture, but is also prevalent in Western culture at large. Lucas encourages both scientists and theologians to read the philosophy of science, which raises questions about presumptions and methodology, while also revealing the danger of removing the theological framework on which all modern science is based.

The authors begin their exploration of modern cosmology with the question: given the size of the universe is belief in a personal God still tenable? Lucas helpfully notes that our significance in a vast universe is not dependent on size but on relationship. This is developed in a conversation about God's revelation through incarnation, and of the Genesis account of creation as God's creative relationship with our ordered existence.

In tackling the evolution of life the authors explore the mixed reception in both the scientific and theological communities to Darwin's discoveries, and rehearse the evidence for evolution through modern genetics, before returning to the issue of biblical interpretation as the key factor in the debate. They point out that even Calvin asked 'Who was Cain's wife?' and saw Adam and Eve as a representative couple faced with the challenge of whether or not they will obey God. The authors accept that Creationism is sincere in its desire to be faithful to

Scripture, but maintain that this position ends up failing to take the Bible seriously.

Throughout the discussion the authors maintain a clear biblically-based Christian belief. They recognize the influence of Enlightenment rationalism in Bultmann's demythologizing of the Gospel and in the approach taken by those searching for the historical Jesus. These approaches fail to recognize that the primary message of the Gospel is spiritual, delivered by God incarnate, who came to proclaim the rule of God – the power and presence of God in people's lives.

For those of a non-scientific disposition seeking to gain an understanding of the current debate between science and faith, this text will provide all that they need in a short, clear, and easy-to-read book.

John Weaver
South Wales Baptist College

Derek Tidball, et al (*eds.*).
The Atonement Debate
Papers from the London
Symposium on the Theology
of Atonement
Zondervan, 2008

This book brings together papers presented at a symposium organised by the Evangelical Alliance and the London School of Theology to consider afresh the biblical, theological and pastoral rationale for the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement. Long held by evangelicals to be the central or

key interpretation of the cross, the 20 contributors were invited to present their views on the atonement in response to the issues raised by Steve Chalke and Alan Mann in their book, *The Lost Message of Jesus*. Chalke and Mann argue that the depth of damage that has been done and is being done through the distortion, misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the purpose of the cross under the label of penal substitution makes the theory pastorally and missiologically inappropriate in the present times. In a context setting first chapter, Hilborn notes that whilst they are not the first within evangelical circles to critique the theory they have "significantly popularised the dissenting voice" within the evangelical alliance. This book seeks to engage with the debate provoked by Chalke and Mann in a constructive way.

The book offers four approaches to understanding the logic and relevance of the theory: biblical, doctrinal, historical, and contemporary perspectives on the theory.

The biblical section is interesting to see that most of the contributors in the opening Biblical section acknowledge more than one metaphor of atonement within scripture and show sympathy for more than one theory of atonement. However, in their treatment of the texts they do not utilise contemporary hermeneutical methods and approaches in ways that allow for a creative conversation between biblical text and contemporary context. With the exception of Steve Motyer's chapter on the message of the

book of Hebrews, in which he insists that penal substitution is not in the author's mind at all, the biblical arguments for penal substitution, using key Old and New Testament texts, are all carefully argued, but without saying anything particularly new or surprising.

In the doctrine section a number of the contributors--as in the biblical section--argue for a combination of theories rather than confining themselves to penal substitution alone. But some go further and recognise the real problems presented by the penal substitution theory for contemporary society. There is a genuine engagement here with the arguments for and against the theory and more than a hint that the centre ground of evangelical faith--penal atonement theory--needs to be radically rehabilitated.

The contemporary section is a lively and original set of papers offering some new ways of thinking about penal atonement in

a postmodern culture. Given the admirable aims of the book, and the trend amongst many of its contributors to broaden and open the discussion one might have expected a more reflective final piece drawing out the trends and possibilities for further reflection within the evangelical family. In fact the book ends with a classic robust defence of the theory of penal substitution, which whilst very well argued, gives the curious impression of closing down rather than opening up the debate.

As a whole this book reflects a real appetite within evangelicalism to engage in creative and open discussion about atonement theology. Rather than ditching penal atonement--which is Chalke and Mann's proposal--there is plenty of energy here for critiquing and re-articulating penal atonement in ways appropriate to the current mission context.

Myra Blyth
Regent's Park College, Oxford

Books Received

- Trevor Dennis, *The Book of Books: The Bible Retold* (Lion, 2009), 480pp.
- James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning From Jerusalem. Christianity in the Making Vol. 2* (Eerdmans, 2009), 1347pp.
- Ian Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe and the Middle East* (European Baptist Federation, 2009).
- James M. Reniham, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705. Studies in Baptist History and Thought Vol. 17* (Paternoster, 2008).
- Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859-2009* (OUP, 2009), 566pp.
- Linda Wilson, *Marianne Farningham: A Plain Woman Worker. Studies in Baptist History and Thought Vol. 18* (Paternoster, 2008).
- Nigel G. Wright, *The Real Godsend: Preaching the Birth Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2009), 121pp.