



# REGENT'S REVIEWS

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## Editorial

This edition of *Regent's Reviews* sees reviews of some recent big biblical commentaries, as well as some textbooks to Paul, Evangelical Theology and Christian Ethics. We also welcome our first review of a novel, written by the new chaplain at Robinson College, Baptist minister Simon Perry (until recently a minister at Bloomsbury Central). In amongst all this are reviews on the theology of Tom Wright, the ethics of evangelism, religion and celebrity culture, anabaptism, churches saying sorry, and how to do Christian ethics in public. Something for everyone!

As the end of 2011 comes in sight, it has been a good year for theology in our Baptist colleges with lots of opportunities to reflect. Many of our colleges are experimenting with one-day conferences with topics on inclusivity, universalism, preaching, and children and communion. In addition the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage has now organised three Saturday conferences on Baptist history. At the end of the summer was the latest Baptists Doing Theology in Context conference, held this year at Regent's. These conferences have been going over ten years in different forms and its good to see that alongside the colleges, the Baptist Union and BMS we're involved in its organization this year, with its need heading of Hearts and Minds. Look out for a future conference in the summer of 2013.

Andy Goodliff

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**Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), xii + 214pp**

Genesis 1-11 is one of the most exhaustively studied, endlessly fascinating portions of the Bible, and Joseph Blenkinsopp is one of the best-known and most respected OT commentators in modern times, with at least two previous books on the Pentateuch to his credit among his wide repertoire of publications. The combination of a veteran commentator and a vintage biblical text is something that always generates high expectations in the reader, and this offering from Blenkinsopp's pen on the so-called Primeval History does not disappoint. The title of the book reflects an acknowledged understanding of Genesis 1-11 which traces the ebb and flow of the narrative from the creation stories of chapters 1-3 via the degradation and destruction that comes about in the flood in chapters 6 and 7 to the re-creation in chapters 8 to 11, and Blenkinsopp's commentary follows the contours of this understanding. As a 'discursive commentary', it is written in a continuous, narrative style on larger blocks of text rather than on individual verses, and aims to provide an interpretation with the thematic coherence which can so often be missing from more atomistic treatments of the text. That is not to say that the commentary is devoid of technical details, but where they are included they are used in a way that supports the exposition of the central theme, instead of becoming an end in themselves. Indeed, the whole commentary is founded on a wealth of knowledge and on years of engagement with the biblical text and its interpreters down the centuries, but it is a commentary for the sake of the text and not for the sake of the scholarship. Its discursive style means that it can be read with profit as a book rather than simply consulted for factoids like an encyclopaedia, although it is at times quite densely written. Nevertheless, some examples of the kind of insights it contains will certainly indicate what a worthwhile volume it is. The opening chapter sets the Primeval History in its ancient Near Eastern context, stressing the stories' seriousness of purpose and their relevance for modern readers in trying to make sense of the disjointed and damaged world in which we live. This seems to me to be an admirable way of treating the text: it respects the narratives for what they are and affirms their value as such, without trying to force them into an historical paradigm that raises more interpretative problems than it solves. Two motifs that Blenkinsopp highlights from the biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources are that of humans' continual falling away from some primordial perfection – quite the opposite of more modern views of human 'progress' – and that of the continued presence of chaos, however good the created order might appear to be. This same thoughtfulness about the presence and manifestation of evil is evidenced in Blenkinsopp's fourth chapter, on Cain and Abel; here, Blenkinsopp comments on how the genealogies of Cain's descendants raise questions about technical progress divorced from morality – a modern issue indeed – and in a section on how Jewish and other interpretative traditions have filled in the gaps in the Cain and Abel story presents much thought-provoking material on the persistence of evil. Indeed, for Blenkinsopp, the central question of Genesis 1-11 is how evil could have established itself so quickly and pervasively in a creation that God declared good, and his reading of the text addresses this issue in a way that will prove extremely helpful to those who are called upon to answer that question, whether for themselves or for other people. Highly recommended as an addition to the serious biblical student's library.

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**Larry W. Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), xiii + 152pp.**

This is a timely study. When confronted with the so-called New Atheism (Dawkins and co.), Christians commonly respond by saying something like, 'The "God" you denounce is not the "God" I believe in.' So what "God" do we believe in, and how can the New Testament and the theological study of the NT help us?

Strangely enough, "God" has been a neglected topic in NT theology. Partly this is because recent scholarship has tended to focus on individual NT writers and to magnify their differences with a zeal they would not own, so that it has had difficulty talking about 'the NT teaching' on anything. Partly it is because the lack of a systematic doctrine of God in the NT has led people to think that its authors have little distinctive to say and that what they do say can be regarded as a mere prolegomenon to the great creeds and debates of the fourth and fifth centuries. At a popular level many Christians have focused on Jesus in song and prayer in such a way as to neglect the Father it was his joy to please.

Hurtado sets out to correct these misperceptions. After a review of recent scholarship he provides three substantial chapters setting out the NT understanding of God, of Jesus and of the Spirit. In line with his earlier published work he sees the worship offered to the Father and Jesus as the key to appreciating what is distinctive in the NT understanding of God. 'Jesus is so central to the understanding of "God" in the NT that one cannot speak adequately of this "God" without explicit reference to Jesus. Likewise, one cannot adequately worship "God" without including Jesus explicitly as a divinely authorized recipient of worship.' (p. 46). Similarly, '[The] remarkable link of the Spirit with Jesus reflects a significant development in the discourse about God, the divine Spirit bearing now a double identity as agent and mode of the presence and activity of "God" and serving in very similar ways also on behalf of the risen Jesus.' (p.93) This, as he says, involves 'a significant "mutation" in Jewish devotion to the one God.' (p.71), and justifies our speaking of the 'triadic' shape of God discourse in the NT, even while acknowledging that this has yet to produce a fully-formed doctrine of the Trinity.

In his conclusion Hurtado argues that what the NT says about God is both coherent and distinctive. Despite differences of emphasis, the NT writings display coherence in their understanding of God. Notably that he is to be worshipped and trusted as Father, the Father of Jesus (esp. John) and the Father of believers (esp. Matthew). All the NT writers agree that "God" is the "God" of Israel and the biblical tradition over against the radical ideas of Marcion. 'If we simply compare NT texts with one another, the distinguishing emphases are apparent and interesting. But if we compare any NT texts with some other early Christian writings that genuinely exhibit the more radical diversity of beliefs about "God" that characterised Christianity in the second and third centuries it will become clear that the corpus that constitutes the NT reflects a broadly shared standpoint on the matter.' (p.98) It is also a distinctive standpoint. The early Christians challenged both Roman polytheism and Jewish monotheism and their writings present a challenge also to traditional Christian doctrine that theologians need to take account of. 'The NT texts offer a body of discourse that presents a more dynamic view of God, with the focus on divine actions rather than the more static categories of philosophically influenced theology of later centuries.' (p.112) In particular the ideas of divine immutability and impassibility which were a given for Greek philosophical thought are called in question by the cross and resurrection of one who is to be worshipped together with the Father and the Spirit.

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**Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (eds.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T.Wright* (SPCK, 2011), 294pp.**

There are two Tom Wrights: N.T.Wright, the academic biblical scholar and Tom Wright, the more popular author, increasingly widely known for his '....For Everyone' series that has become the new 'Barclay'. This book is most definitely about N.T.Wright. They are, of course, one and the same man, now Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St Andrew's, formerly Bishop of Durham, and prior to that pastor and academic in various guises.

This collection of papers by Jeremy Begbie, Markus Bockmuehl, Richard B.Hays, Edith M.Humphrey, Sylvia C.Keesmaat, Nicholas Perrin, Marianne Meye Thompson, Kevin J.Vanhoozer and Brian J.Walsh (the contributors reads like a Who's Who of New Testament studies) seeks to engage with the work of N.T Wright in New Testament and Christian origins. There are in addition two important new essays by Wright, one on the theme of the historical Jesus, the other on Pauline studies.

From the mid-nineties onwards, with the publication of *Jesus and the Victory of God* in 1996, Wright has proved a significant, if controversial voice within New Testament studies. He is pre-eminently a historian of the New Testament era, rather than a theologian, and insists that the search for the historical Jesus is both possible and critical to the beliefs of Christianity. He is adamant that Jesus must be situated in the context of Second Temple Judaism, and that in that context he is not the individual's Saviour of popular evangelical pietism, so much as the critical voice addressing the religious world of his day. 'He wasn't floating free somewhere in mid-air. He was precisely living in the midst of it all' (p.126). Rather, he was, '....a public figure making a public announcement' (p.127). The context for Tom Wright's academic work over the past decades has been the various attempts at a search for the historical Jesus. Rejecting the attempts by Bultmann et al (and especially his heirs, The Jesus Seminar) to get behind the text to 'the real Jesus' (often such a minimalist and shadowy figure as to be nigh invisible), Wright was insistent that history be taken seriously, and that there was much in the study of Second Temple Judaism that would illuminate that history. This he learnt from Ben Meyer, whose *The Aims of Jesus* was seminal in Wright's emerging scholarship, and found there that the critical realism of Meyer's approach was conducive to the 'Third Quest' approach Wright adopted, using the hypothesis-and-verification method.

The trouble with a search for 'the Jesus behind the Gospels' is that the Jesus we find all too easily is made in our own image. So what are the gospels actually all about? Wright argues that they are written to convince their readers that Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, but that 'he really inaugurated the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of Israel's God – on earth as it is in heaven.'(p.133)He proceeds to argue that there is no split between the event of the cross and the proclamation of the kingdom. For the Evangelists, 'the kingdom is the project which is sealed, accomplished, by the cross, on the one hand, and the cross is the victory through which the kingdom is established, on the other' (p. 143). Furthermore, the resurrection is not so much a ticket to heaven as the truth that 'Jesus is alive again, therefore a new creation has begun; therefore we have a job to do' (p.149). This conviction lies near the heart of the other Tom Wright, the very 'political' Bishop, who is engaged in the work of the Kingdom coming here on earth as it is in heaven, and worked out in the public policy issues of the day. 'And Jesus himself calls us to follow him, and calls us thereby into the wide open world, the world where God remains sovereign and vulnerable, the world of historical reality, the world of tomorrow's challenges: God's world, the world over which Jesus is already Lord and to which he will return to set all things right at last' (p.158). There's Tom Wright the preacher!

That essay by Wright follows chapters where Meye Thompson asks why Wright neglects the Gospel of John in *Jesus and the Victory of God*; Richard Hays reflects on a particularly spat with his good friend Tom Wright over the character of the Search for the Historical Jesus; a curious (postmodern?) dialogue between Keesmat and Walsh about Jesus and the Justice of God; and Perrin's analysis of Wright's theological method. To each paper Wright offers a short response. However, it is Wright's own paper, referred to above, polemical, sharp and penetrating in its scope, which is the highlight of the first part of the book.

The second part opens with a paper on the reasons why Tom Wright has become so important for emerging church (Tom Wright himself seems bemused by this, after all he is a middle-aged

representative of traditional church: you do not get more traditional than the Prince Bishop of Durham!) Begbie finds that Wright's unlikely role as *ressourcement* for this inchoate movement is rooted in five features of his ecclesiology: it is integral to Wright's theology (God's saving actions involve, at their heart, the formation of a community); it is eschatological, by attending first to the new creation (the Father's sending of the Son to Israel is now transposed into the Son's sending of a Spirit-empowered people into the world, which is why Wright's attention has been focussed most recently on Christian character in his *Virtue Reborn* (SPCK, 2010)); it is cosmically situated; it is material, which reflects much of Wright's suspicion of dogmatics that has not done its historical homework (and I agree with Begbie that there would be much to gain from Wright engaging with the Reformed dogmatics of Barth, Torrance and Gunton, which may happen more easily with his move to St Andrew's, to which the spirit of King's London has moved since the untimely death of Colin Gunton) and, therefore, political; and it is improvisatory, so that a vision begins to open up 'congruent with Wright's eschatological and pneumatological thrust, of the church being faithful to a God-given script that climaxes in the presentation of Jesus Christ, and in line with Scripture's witness, being enabled by the Spirit to improvise in contingent ways that are appropriate to diverse circumstances.' (p.197)

Markus Bockmuehl asks 'Did St Paul Go to Heaven When He Dies?' and takes on the bracing views of Tom Wright on the life after death. Bockmuehl wants to affirm that believers do go permanently to heaven when they die, even if their final destination is with a resurrected body. Wright responds with both an observation that he has made a category error in the content of 'heaven' and a theological error in admitting the word 'permanently.' This engagement with the theme of *Surprised by Hope* is typical of this collection of essays: attention to detail is robust, the tone bracing, and the presentation fascinating.

Vanhoozer looks at Wright's understanding of justification. This chapter is a tour de force of memorable metaphors and images, apart from anything else (and there is much else). 'The elephant... the problem of biblical studies overturning received theological views – is indeed in the room. In fact it is stampeding through our big evangelical tent, kicking up sawdust and overturning the tables of the doctrine changers' (p.236). 'Conservative evangelicals are happy to profess the Protestant mantra 'always reforming' at least in theological principle. Yet in practice they often behave like people who are all for building homes until, having settled in a new neighbourhood, they then want all further development to stop. So too with doctrinal development' (p.238). Absolutely! What Wright wants is for the faith to be controlled by Scripture, not Scripture controlled by dogmatics.

And so to Wright again, on St Paul. After a brilliant exposition in *nuce* of Pauline theology through the Letter to Philemon, Wright explores the theme that 'the central symbol of Paul's worldview is the united community' (p.265). This single family, created in Christ Jesus, is the heart of Paul's message. This one, united family tells the world that Israel's God is God, and that Jesus is Lord and Caesar doesn't run the show anymore. Here again, in this closing chapter, we have Wright the theologian as preacher. It is barn-storming stuff! Wright has understood clearly the importance of the debate about the meaning of *pistis*, faith in Christ, or faithfulness of Christ, and united both meanings. Wright is here challenging the claims of Caesar to be Lord, and declaring instead that Jesus Christ is King, the Messiah of Israel's longing come in the flesh and coming again. After the academic debate of the seminar room or lecture hall, it is rather refreshing to enter the room where the pulpit is central.

If Wright is one of the most influential biblical scholars of our day (and he is) and one of the most imaginative advocates for Christians to engage fully in our world (he's that too) then this collection of essays is an important milestone on the journey of contemporary evangelicalism. If it is not to pick at the scabs of its futile little disagreements, something of this book's tenor and imagination is just what is required. The 'conservatives' will hate it... for all of the reasons why I love it!

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**Stephen Kuhrt, *Tom Wright for Everyone* (SPCK, 2011), 146pp.**

If the life's work of Professor Wright, either as the academic NT Wright, or the popularist Tom Wright, has been to bring history and theology together in order to bring the insights of the academy and the church together, then Stephen Kuhrt's book on Tom Wright is an essay on the bringing together of Wright's theological insights and the life of a particular local church, Christ Church, New Maldon, of which he has been successively curate and vicar. Firmly in the Fulcrum stream of Anglican evangelicalism, this is close to Wright's own ecclesial home turf: evangelical, but not narrowly so, and better conceived of as 'catholic' in its determination to belong to the great tradition of the church that wants to take Scripture seriously on its own terms. The book begins with a survey first of Wright's career, then of the context in which his work has flourished. This is followed by chapters that summarise his theology, and expound it in pastoral, missional and ecclesial contexts.

The chapter that outlines Wright's career, from evangelical student to chaplain and academic, cathedral dean to bishop, and now returned to a chair at St Andrew's is fascinating. It explores the deep ambivalence with which the two worlds that Tom Wright straddles view him. Currently he has been almost ignored by the conservative evangelical oligarchy. He has spoken at neither the most recent Lausanne Conference in 2010, nor the most recent evangelical Anglican conference (NEAC5), and given his undoubted status as the leading evangelical biblical scholar, this is extraordinary, and says a great deal about the petty power struggles of evangelicalism in the West. He is *persona non grata*, because, I suspect, he fails to privilege the faulty dogmatic structures of conservative evangelicalism over the actual message of the Bible: hugely ironic, given the claim by evangelicals that they are the custodians of a biblical faith. On the other hand, much academic biblical studies in Universities also fails to take him with the seriousness he deserves, perhaps because he is simply too popular (heaven forbid that an academic should be popular), too evangelical and had given so much energy to the ecclesial roles he has fulfilled as a senior Anglican Bishop. He is simply too critical of the 'scholarly consensus' still heavily indebted to mid-20th century scepticism about the truth claims of the Biblical narratives. The suspicion at both ends of the spectrum is pointedly illustrated by this,

There are stories from the deeply conservative Anglican diocese of Sydney, Australia, for instance, of theological students reading Wright's books in their study rooms without their tutor's knowledge! Within 'critical Oxford' a number of theological students I knew during my time there also felt a similar reluctance to admit that they had consulted the work of one regarded by their tutors as a 'fundamentalist' (p.10).

Kuhrt proceeds to outline the questions that Wright's biblical and theological enterprise addresses: the nature of Christian hope, the resurrection, the evangelical treatment of the atonement, and its attitude to biblical scholarship, for instance. Questions that are then answered in the chapters that outline Wright's theology. This acts as a very helpful 'primer' for those unfamiliar with Wright's work. The questions that Kuhrt raises are viewed through the lens of his own upbringing as an evangelical Anglican, and provides the personal character of this chapter. In outlining Wright's theology, Kuhrt sometimes makes shortcuts that lead to some shortcomings. For instance, in describing Wright's 'critical realism', he says that this is an approach that Wright 'describes' as such. It reads as if this is of Wright's own devising, but actually he acknowledges the origins of this significant philosophical approach in the work of Roy Bhaskar, an approach that Bernard Lonergan has developed widely amongst North American Catholics. Again, while it is true that Wright places a great emphasis upon worldview, but to call this story is misleading. In fact Wright is quite suspicious of narrative theology and the school that developed in Yale by Hans Frei and others. This is the danger in summarising the work of such an extensive writer as Wright in just 33 pages!

Three chapters follow that explore how Wright's theological enterprise translates into pastoral practice and missional initiatives in the church of which Stephen Kuhrt is vicar. The closing chapter reads like a manifesto to encourage the evangelical Anglican world to take Wright and the concerns he addresses seriously, a project that the group Fulcrum is also engaged with.

This is a helpful little book that provides a primer for the non-specialist approaching Tom Wright's work for the first time. Perhaps those who use his '... For Everyone' bible notes, and who want to know something more about the man behind the notes and his theological project. For those already familiar with Wright's more academic work, this book will have limited value, as indeed it is not intended for the academic world as such.

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**Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 1; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1152pp**

One of the problems with the 'standard' commentaries on Matthew is that they are multi-volume, very expensive and contain too much information for typical sermon preparation. This new volume in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series, by widely-published evangelical scholar Grant Osborne, goes some way towards remedying this. However, it is hardly small at over 1100 pages and very heavy. It would need to be read on a desk, but makes up for this with large print.

The intended audience for the commentary is primarily preachers and 'overwhelmed pastors' who have little time for sermon preparation (p.14). Osborne describes his motivating question as, 'What would I want to know as a pastor preparing a sermon on this passage?' (p.22). This is reflected in his introduction, which begins with concerns about preaching and how to put a sermon series together. The majority of the rest of the short introduction focuses on hermeneutics. This could be off putting to some readers, with descriptions like, 'The basic process is quite simple. 1. Do a structural analysis... and then the "actantial" units of the story itself...' (p.26). Readers are directed to Osborne's other published works for an explanation of this. However, the idea of beginning the commentary with how to interpret is a very valuable addition in a series aimed at preachers, who have seldom been taught this.

Osborne considers Matthew to have been most likely written by the disciple of that name, and around 65-67 CE. He argues for Markan priority and Matthew's use of 'Q', but surprisingly does not mention the possibility of Luke's use of Matthew. His introduction seems to challenge the de facto position of historical-criticism as the primary means of interpretation: '[the gospels] are not just brute history; they are history seen through theological eyes... In the gospels theology comes alive and is dramatized in story form.' (p.21). However, this is not reflected in the commentary in the way that might be expected. He does not even mention, for example, the possibility that Matthew's infancy narrative could be theology presented as history, but assumes historicity with theological reflection. Nonetheless, the structure of this commentary series offers more than simply historical-criticism.

Each section of Matthew is introduced by its 'Literary Context', in which the passage is placed within its wider context in the Gospel, and is accompanied by a helpful diagram which links the particular passage to the Gospel's outline given in the introduction. This is followed by the 'Main Idea' which is a paragraph summarising the purpose of the passage. I am undecided on the helpfulness of this element, as while it serves to orientate the reader who is unfamiliar with the passage, it will tend to prejudice particular readings which favour this 'main idea'. The author's own translation is given in a structured format so that phrasal relationships within the text are represented by the way it is laid out on the page. 'Structure and Literary Form' provides an explanation of the way the passage fits together and its relationships with the other Synoptic gospels. The 'Exegetical Outline' is a summary of the structure and contents of the passage, which would particularly suit a certain style of preaching. As would be expected, the largest element is the 'Explanation of the Text', which begins with a summary and then proceeds phrase by phrase, giving the English translation followed by the Greek. On average, this works out at one or two separate comments per verse, of around 100 words each. Finally, the distinctive element of this commentary is the 'Theology in Application' which seeks to bring out a number of generic theological points such as might be found in a sermon. For example, the baptism of Jesus has seven theological points, such as 'Recognition of our unworthiness before Jesus', 'A Trinitarian

emphasis', 'Baptist Important in the Process of Salvation'. They tend to reflect Osborne's theology, but could provide starting points for further reflection. A sample of this structure can be found on the publisher's web site ([www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)).

At times, Osborne takes a mediating position in discussions. For example, after listing nine possible ways of interpreting the ethics in the Sermon on the Mount, he sides with the view that it offers 'a goal' for disciples today, but the commands will only be fully observed in the eschatological Kingdom (pp.159-60). This tends to mean that the commentary does not offer startlingly new insights, but does give a fair appraisal of many debates in scholarship. The commentary concludes with a helpful 20-page discussion of the Theology of Matthew under broad headings like Christology and Discipleship.

Osborne's commentary on Matthew would be a useful addition to a preacher's collection, particularly for those who share his theological compass. It should be noted that this title is also available as an ebook.

Ed Kannen  
University of Durham

**Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 536pp**

It is said that Luther picturesquely declared, 'At the University of Wittenburg, we fire our stoves with the epistle of James.' This commentary on the letter by Scot McKnight would keep the fires going for some time – weighing in at a significant 500 pages including indexes – but it would be a terrible shame to put this work to the same fate. Appearing in the well-established and respected New International Commentary on the New Testament series (NICNT), McKnight's volume replaces James Adamson's 1976 commentary, and more than doubles its length. This, in part, is due to a resurgence of interest in the letter of James in recent years, countering the view of the epistle as the 'junk mail of the New Testament' (p.9). Baptist scholars have played their part in this development, with Ralph Martin (Word Biblical Commentary) and Wiard Popkes (Theological Commentary on New Testament) contributing major commentaries. Along with others, they have established a tradition which engages both scholarship and discipleship. McKnight's commentary stands in this tradition, as 'an ecclesial commentary', having been written for pastors, preachers, and teachers (xi). This commentary is particularly interesting for Baptists, as McKnight is an Anabaptist, whose popular writings reflect a christocentrism commensurate with Baptist thought. This can be seen in McKnight's comment that, 'The ethics of James are not simply contextless listings of advice but theologically and christologically-shaped exhortations' (p.40).

In a long introduction, McKnight suggests that James was written in part in response to reports of Paul's missionary work in Asia Minor (p.2). The letter also seeks to read the Torah in the light of the Messiah. Moreover, it is a subversive document (p.3) in which the reader must face the discomfort that the letter causes the prosperous and powerful. The two themes of James are 'God' and 'ethics' (p.40). These are not the most illuminating categories but perhaps, at the most general level, do describe the twin, and not unrelated, foci of the letter. The focus on God, according to McKnight, calls attention to the ambiguity ('confusion' [p.42]) of the referent of the term 'Lord', since it can be to God (e.g. 1:17) and to Jesus (e.g. 2:1). This raises questions for the authorship and date of the letter (see below). The ethical focus has particular resonance with traditional Baptist values since it has a communal and socio-economic shape, amongst others (pp.45-6). McKnight calls this, 'Torah observance in a messianic key' (p.47). This is typical of McKnight's light literary touch, another example being his description of the use of the Jesus' tradition in James as giving a "wiki" version of various sayings of Jesus' (p.27).

McKnight chooses to ignore the diverse range of possibilities for the genre of James, and instead focus on the structure, seeking to see what emerges from the text itself rather than forcing it into a literary straitjacket. In practice, however, the structure is a relatively loose one, with distinct units connected by topic such as might be found in the Jewish wisdom tradition. He spends an unusually long

time considering the historical James and the significance of such a person having written the letter. This is all the more surprising when his conclusion is that ‘the arguments for traditional authorship are... hardly compelling’ (37), but are to be preferred to those against the letter having been written by the brother of Jesus. On this basis, McKnight dates the letter to the 50’s, prior to James’ death but after the Pauline message has become known. This in turn implies an early development in messianic Jewish circles of the kind of Christology that has been traditionally assigned to a later date in a more Gentile environment.

The commentary itself is divided into firstly large sections which in turn subdivide into smaller sections made up of individual verses. The larger sections begin with a short, summarising introduction. Each small section starts with the author’s own English translation, with differences from the TNIV and NRSV being noted. The commentary then goes verse by verse. Each verse is considered at length with typically a few pages each, along with extensive footnotes. This is the format of the series as a whole, but can be off-putting when the preacher is only seeking the main points. However, McKnight rather offers a level of detail that should help to answer almost all questions about the text. Greek is generally left to the footnotes, and where it appears in the main body, it is always transliterated. The exegesis and theological reflection are combined, which makes finding individual points more difficult, but gives the impression of an ongoing conversation with the text, this being McKnight’s aim (‘Read James’ being his first command to the reader! [p.1]).

Some of the distinctiveness of McKnight’s approach can be seen at times, such as his focus on socio-economic issues, certainly present in the text, but highlighted in the commentary. For example, it is not difficult to see the ‘trials of many kinds’ in 1:3 as persecution, but McKnight goes further in the light of the letter to describe them as ‘economic injustice and oppression’ (p.75). Moreover, part of the trial, he suggests, was the ‘need to resist the desire to resort to violence (4:1-2) to establish justice (1:20) and peace (3:18)’ (p.76). A similar emphasis can be seen in 2:8, which is typically generalised but which McKnight considers to refer specifically to the poor (i.e. neighbour = poor), and which is a ‘royal law’ primarily due Jesus’ emphasis on this command (p.207). The commentary is wary about defining the relationship between faith and works (2:14-17), which McKnight considers to be the kind of generalised good works found in the Torah, interpreted through the lens of Jesus. Therefore, James requires, according to McKnight, a faith that confesses God as one and Jesus as Messiah but which is ‘accompanied by deeds of mercy toward the marginalized’ (p.229).

In spite of its careful, detailed scholarly approach, much of this commentary is similarly challenging and inspiring to the life of the Christian and Church, not least because this is the nature of James’ letter itself. However, Baptists in particular should find an affinity with the approach taken and many of the conclusions drawn. In this light, it is intriguing that McKnight should have concluded a publicity piece on his commentary by saying, ‘James is one of us.’ Thankfully, both the letter and this commentary ensure that James will not be too silent or too sympathetic a presence in our midst.

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**Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) xxvii + 490 pp.**

Most commentaries on Romans include fifty pages of introduction dealing with such matters as the occasion, date and purpose of the letter. Dr. Longenecker has written a book of almost 500 pages dealing with such introductory questions alone. The size of the forthcoming commentary can only be guessed at! The present volume deals faithfully with the non-controversial matters of the authorship, integrity, occasion and date of the letter, and then devotes considerable space to developing a distinctive view of the persons to whom and the purpose for which it was written. Appeal is made throughout the book to the study of ancient rhetoric as a tool for explicating the kind of writing Romans is and how it would have been received by those who first heard it read. Useful sections make clear Longenecker’s

position on key points of interpretation, what is meant by 'the righteousness of God', 'justification', 'in Christ' and '*pistis Christou*', and how we should evaluate the 'New Perspective', to name a few. The book concludes with a hundred pages analysing the letter section by section so as to make clear the central thrust and structure of Romans.

The thesis advanced by Longenecker in this book is that Paul wrote to a predominantly Gentile church but one that had received the gospel from Jewish Christians and looked to Jerusalem as the Mother Church. Paul wrote as someone who saw himself as the Apostle to the Gentiles to embrace the church within his sphere of ministry and, as he says, 'so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. (1:11) That 'spiritual gift' is identified as Paul's distinctive understanding of the gospel, and is to be found in the central section of Romans, chapters 5-8. This will come as a surprise to many readers. We have been brought up to read Romans as an attack on Jewish legalism, and to see that attack as principally contained in chapters 1-4. Longenecker, in line with the New Perspective, believes that in these chapters Paul is stating what he believes he and the church hold in common with the best Jewish thought of the time: the impartiality of God, the common plight of Jew and Gentile under the power of sin, the impossibility of self-salvation by works of the law and the necessity of God's grace, now seen by Christians to be manifest through Jesus. All this Paul believes to be common ground with his hearers on the basis of which he can go on to explain his unique insight into the life of peace with God in the power of the Holy Spirit, which it is the main purpose of the letter to make plain.

This is an intriguing thesis deserving of careful consideration. It goes without saying that it is advanced with great learning in dialogue with a wide range of scholars (though the work of N. T. Wright receives scant attention), but I predict that the downgrading of chapters 1-4 and of justification by faith to the status of a ground-clearing, introductory theme is likely to meet considerable resistance. We await a full presentation of the case in the promised commentary.

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**Simon Jones, *The World of the Early Church: A Social History* (Oxford: Lion, 2011), 192pp.**

There are lots of really good things about this book. It is clearly written, it is laid out in a friendly and accessible way, it is well bound, and it is full of interesting and relevant illustrations. There is an introduction followed by eight chapters which treat the urban context of the early church, the types of homes found in the city, plus material about politics, culture, family, household economics and religion. All these are helpfully discussed.

The book is not intended to be a significant contribution to scholarship. It is a summary of the work of others intended for those wanting an introduction to the topic. It would make a good text for a GCSE or 'A'-Level student or for a congregation member who expressed an interest in the background of the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul. It might also provide a useful refresher course for some pastors.

Jones's method is to discuss what is known about different aspects of the urban empire and then to show how this might impact our understanding of selected New Testament texts. This is generally done in a helpful way and makes useful contributions to outlining the contexts against which some of Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians and Thessalonians must be understood. Perhaps the most helpful parts are the simple presentations of the patronage system and of the way in which honour was understood, together with a helpful discussion of the way in which these things are addressed by the gospel.

Overall then, this is a successful project. There are however, a number of places where the text needs better editing. Some bits of data and significant quotations get repeated. The text tells us that Plutarch was a Roman writer but the caption to his portrait says he was Greek. Admittedly both may be true but this hardly helps the beginner. Then, on p.56 we read that a third to two fifths of the empire's population were slaves but later on pp.67 and 99 it is said to be 16-20%; about half the previous figure;

the book contradicts itself. (The former figure may be correct for Rome itself). Next, the focus of the book is understandably on the Pauline churches, however, there is no acknowledgement that there was a church in Jerusalem nor that we know something of missions other than Paul's. Are these not a part of the world of the early church? Then, without any discussion of the issues the writer treats Acts as an historical account and all thirteen of the letters ascribed to Paul as though his authorship were never in doubt. Yet at the same time other New Testament texts that might yield data, such as Revelation, go almost unmentioned. Finally, there are no references given in the text. This is fine for a popular book but on the odd occasion when Jones makes a questionable assertion, such as on the size of the urban population which might expect to earn enough to have a surplus, the lack of a reference means the data cannot be checked.

The criticisms listed are relatively minor. This book achieves its goals and is written in a very appropriate way for its target audiences. It is a very good introduction to the issues.

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**Stephen Westerholm (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Paul* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2011), 632pp**

This is a staggeringly expensive book. But the eye-popping price ought not to distract from opening its covers. So we will return to the question of value for money later. The first thing to say is that this is a broad and handsome volume is that it is arguably the most comprehensive introduction to Paul ever produced.

Justification for that bold claim is found just by scanning the contents section. While there are all the usual suspects – reviews of Paul's life, writing style, each of the letters, the textual transmission of the Pauline corpus – there are also chapters on how Paul has been read through the ages and the legacy he has left not only in theology but also in the wider culture. So there are first rate essays on the legacy of Paul in art and literature, readings of Paul by contemporary European philosophers and African readings of the apostle.

There is insight aplenty for every reader. Westerholm has assembled a stellar cast of scholars with a brief to elucidate the content and impact of Paul's message through history. While Westerholm acknowledges in his introduction that Paul is read more widely than just Christian circles, in the end, he argues, it is 'the power of Paul's message to create communities of faith and to transform the lives and thinking of their members' that makes Paul's writing so important.

In a short review, it is impossible to assess such a wide-ranging volume (37 chapters over 604 pages of text), but for me the highlights include Rainer Riesner on Pauline chronology (reprising in just 21 pages his magisterial account of the apostle's life and the issues associated with dating it) and Gerd Theissen's review of the social setting of Pauline Christianity. Indeed this chapter is the best introduction to the debate I have read, judiciously reviewing most of the key contributors it as well as offering a concise summary of his own view. In particular, he is very good on how the evidence from Acts can be used to supplement what Paul tells us about the communities he founded. On Acts, Stanley Porter offers an excellent outline of the difficulties that arise in harmonising Luke's life of Paul with that of the apostle himself, concluding that Luke is not a disciple of Paul but an independent author with his own theological agenda who none the less tells Paul's story in a way that does not contradict the one we find in the letters. The general essays are of a uniformly high standard. Dunn on Paul's gospel, Wagner on the use of scripture, Gathercole on Paul's Christology each offer a succinct and lively synthesis of the issues.

The essays on the individual letters are a slightly mixed bag. While Chester and Gaventa are excellent on Galatians and Romans respectively, Heil on Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians borders on the eccentric. Chester steers a clear and incisive path through the thickets of the debate between the Lutherans and followers of the New Perspective as each has grappled with Romans; the chapter's only

weakness is that a conclusion summarising the letter would have been helpful. Heil, on the other hand, offers a view of the three letters sent to Western Asia, that they were chiasmic in structure and each functioned as an 'oral performance within a liturgical assembly' (p.90). This is an interesting idea but it is offered without any justification and without reference to other approaches to these letters.

So, this is a very worth-while collection of mostly top-notch articles by a group of scholars at the heights of their powers. But how many people will actually get to read any of it? At £110 for a 615 page volume (including indices), it is staggeringly expensive. The IVP *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, a 1000+ page compendium of some excellent evangelical scholarship on the apostle's life and work, costs £39.99. It is to be hoped that Blackwells can find a way to put this excellent scholarship into the hands of as many readers as possible. If they do this, some of these essays could set the agenda for Pauline studies in some areas for many years to come and all will offer every student of Paul – expert and novice alike – much food for thought and further reflection.

Simon Jones

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**David F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 239 pp**

The history of theological education does make an interesting topic and an amusing one. In the 1960's UK departments of theology went out of their way to challenge evangelical Biblicism and knock it out of them, so as to replace that with 'the assured results of critical scholarship'. This consisted of such creedal items as Martin Noth's amphictyonic theory of the conquest of Canaan, and that axiom of OT studies 'J,D,P and E' flowing assuredly from German source criticism. Rabbi Louis Jacobs opined that some of these theories might as well have been graven on Moses' stone tablets, so certain were they! And now, well Noth's theory seems to have disappeared, and our old friends J,D,P and E are similarly antiques and not so certain after all. It is rather funny that those theologians who did ask questions of such 'assured results' were the conservative evangelicals, learned in their Hebrew, and they were barely allowed into the groves of theological academe. Theology in the UK was respectable when critical and enlightened, Barth was considered by English professors of theology as a simplistic fundamentalist, although not by the Scots.

David Ford is now saying that theology needs to change and is changing. The matrix of the book is chapter 8, 'New Theology and Religious Studies', in which he urges a morphing together of Christian Theology and RS, that is the study of all faiths and their insights. He describes the 2000 QAA benchmarking statement as taking this route, although my reading of the QAA statement is that it affirms different curricular types for university theology, the more critico-historico type and the more community based cultural type. QAA urges a range of provision and not a confusion of the two, whereas Ford seems to be urging a template of a new cultural-descriptive type, to use Lindbeck's term, and a dropping away of the 'Berlin' critical model. 'Scriptural reasoning', that is faith traditions getting together with their various sets of Scriptures to gain insights, without the application of western critical apparatus, is now urged – imagine the reaction of the biblical studies professoriat of the 20th Century to this proposal! No more JDPE, no more Bultmannian form criticism, just read the texts and 'don't mention the critics.' In fact some scholars today, such as Brueggemann, say that the whole critical domination of biblical studies has been a sort of oppression by a closed group of experts, whose work needs deconstructing as a sort of power play over ordinary Bible believers.

David Ford's new vision of a pluralistic religious theology fits in well with the changing face of UK society and the diversity agenda of say, the Parekh Report's vision of the UK as a community of communities, jostling in colourful fellowship together, the Indian model of a nation state. We should respect each other's traditions, and further should see each others' scriptures as equally truthful. Here we may feel just a little uncomfortable. Are we being led into a cultural relativism, are questions of truth being kept off the table, are we not allowed to disagree with the Koran or apply critical methods to it? John Wansbrough's London University book *Quranic Studies* 1977 applied critical methods to the

Koran and concluded that the text had de-narratised the biblical stories into direct commands. This book is now hard to get, and now would probably be considered 'offensive'. And this is a major point: is truth and open questioning going to be a casualty of the new cultural-religio future of theology, as the 'Berlin' model is banished? Evangelical students may have been 'offended' by their teachers who tried to 'knock their faith out of them', but was it a bad thing that they had to face up to real and honest questions? The Berlin model was overly secularist and detached, Barth was right to challenge the great von Harnack about what theology really is about. But Barth would not have wanted an abandonment of critical textual scholarship, nor of philosophical debate, in his quest for faith seeking understanding. So I am myself cautious about this future of Christian theology: I dislike arid reductionist critical interpretation, but fear that Ford's agenda might be risking cultural religious relativism, which may suppress, or suffocate important and difficult questions. I believe Louis Jacobs might have agreed with me!

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**Douglas Farrow, *Ascension Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), xiv + 177pp**

This short volume is offered by its author as a briefer, more accessible, and more specifically applied representation of his previous book, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), itself the revised version of his PhD dissertation completed at Kings College, London. Following an introductory Preface, Prof. Farrow conducts us skilfully and engagingly through the biblical doctrine of Christ's bodily ascension, its revision in non-physical terms (both in the Eastern and Western traditions), and its earlier more straightforward acceptance especially in the work of Irenaeus of Lyons together with its more recent advocates. But the chief focus of this volume is with the significance of the doctrine, together with the significance of its gnostic revisions, and this not merely (and most obviously) for an understanding of the continuing particularity of the identity of Jesus, but similarly for understandings of ecclesiology, ecclesial politics, and eschatology.

As with most attempts to render academic arguments accessible, the gap between the academy and the pew is probably underestimated here and, regretfully, I can think of clergy and current theological graduates who would struggle with some of these foreshortened arguments. Rather too much is taken for granted with theologically and philosophically loaded terms such as eschatological and immanentist: that the ascended Christ is to be located eschatologically is almost certainly correct but, especially in a volume dedicated to explore and defend this idea, the claim requires far more specific and sustained unpacking than here is offered.

But I cannot help but suspect that the brevity at this point together with the broad and undefined use of words like particularism, immanentism, and gnosticism is motivated by the secondary (or perhaps primary) aim of asserting Roman Catholicism – and there usually is no more robust and uncompromising apologist than a recent convert. Since his move to Canada Douglas Farrow has become a Roman Catholic and in this revisiting of his doctoral theme he applies his reaffirmation of the ascended Christ's bodily particularity to issues of ecclesial presence and absence, to an understanding especially of eucharistic presence, to reverence for Mary, and to a defence of papal authority. There is much here that is provocative and maybe even attractive but the brevity of these trenchant assertions is matched by sweeping dismissals of the Protestantism that comprises Farrow's roots: the distinctions in an understanding of the Eucharist between Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin are highlighted without reference to the astonishing similarities (almost as if Calvin is using the notion of a spiritual presence in a gnostic sense); Petrine discipline is commended without discussion of Jesus' apparent rejection of all hierarchies; and immanentism becomes a vice of which all Protestants are guilty (can Douglas Farrow so quickly have forgotten the emphases of his doctoral supervisor, Colin Gunton - profoundly Protestant

emphases that nourished Farrow's own understandings and have issued in an identifiable school of thought?).

The central thesis of Farrow's work, here and in his earlier book, is a crucial and timely correction to continuing 'gnostic' trends in contemporary theology. Much of what he says in commendation of Roman Catholicism is worthy of careful, if critical, response. But these virtues are sadly obscured by general and counter-productive dismissals that insult his would-be Protestant allies.

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**Bruce Epperly, *Process Theology – A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), pp**

This expanding series (in which our own Tim Bradshaw has a book on Pannenberg) gathers together a number of themes and major influences – Tillich, Pannenberg and Balthasar sit alongside Christology, Eucharist and Theological Anthropology in the list of titles. Now Bruce Epperly's introduction to Process Theology should go some way towards helping those who find this subject perplexing – or even bewildering. Clearly structured and lucidly written, Epperly also has the gift of finding down to earth examples to unpack what might otherwise be complicated and abstract ideas. Though I have some reservations about the book's angle of view, I heartily recommend it to all those who want to familiarise themselves with the theological ideas inspired by Alfred North Whitehead's thought.

In some ways it is something of a surprise to see a volume on Process Theology at all in this set. When I studied in the States and then did my doctoral work on Whitehead in the 70s and 80s some were already saying that it was a passing fad. However in California, specifically at Claremont, Process Theology has embedded itself as a theological perspective with an on-going vitality. Through the work of John B. Cobb Jr and David Ray Griffin in particular, the school's influence – in the US, at least – remains significant. The Center for Process Studies at Claremont helps to keep the flame alive, and through such web sites as Process and Faith (to which Epperly is a regular contributor) aims at making Process thought accessible and meaningful to pastors and preachers. But in the UK at least, the influence of Process Theology is now largely indirect. Our most well-known home-grown Process thinker – David Pailin – does not feature either in the index or the bibliography; Paul Fiddes' work also owes a debt to Process thought, but is not referenced here; and so it comes as no surprise that my own *Answering God: Towards a Theology of Intercession*, which has 'process fingerprints' throughout, isn't mentioned either! (Norman Pittenger - resident at King's Cambridge for so long - does feature in the book, though was Canadian.) This gives the book an unmistakable American feel, but also tends to limit its discussion to what John Macquarrie used to call 'the more fundamentalist Process thinkers' – those who adhere strictly to Whitehead and Hartshorne. This may give an accurate picture of Process Theology in its neat form, and of Claremont's approach; but some readers may have wanted to trace the influence of Process thought (which is, I think, considerable) in a more general way: perhaps that was beyond the scope of this compact volume. However, related to this, Epperly does tend to speak of process theology and process theologians as if referring to a monolithic approach to theological issues, as if they speak with one voice on most issues. This is, I suspect, misleading – and in the chapter on life after death is admitted to be clearly inappropriate.

To whom might Process Theology appeal? Epperly is to be congratulated for his direct style, and he is clear that many adherents will be those disillusioned or badly served by more conservative theologies, particularly those which stress a controlling, or vengeful deity. Incidentally, Rick Warren's theological assumptions are critiqued tellingly in this light – a good example of how Epperly grounds his discussion of big theological ideas in everyday spirituality. In the opening chapter he picks out a number of themes which might see people drawn to process perspectives: the problem of evil; providence more generally; eschatology; theology and science. Though he correctly defends the need for Whitehead and others to have developed new terminology for new ideas in the first place, Epperly gives an exposition

of their main ideas with a minimum of that technical language which is often found so off-putting. When necessary he explores some of the more difficult ideas with acumen: his discussion panentheism is an example; and the Whiteheadian notion of a mental pole to all reality, sometimes (though not by Epperly) termed panpsychism, is helpfully discussed in terms of the re-enchantment of nature. This is an example of how Epperly also (re-)locates Process thought in terms of the zeitgeist at the start of the twenty-first century. He enthusiastically embraces the label 'postmodern' for this theology.

The key chapter is the second, 'A Truly Personal God', for it is unsurprisingly from its doctrine of God that all else follows for Process Theology, and all its key themes are focused here. Whitehead is noted as saying that one's character and conduct flow from one's key convictions. Asks Epperly: 'Do our images of God promote what Whitehead called 'world loyalty' or do they encourage intolerance and sectarianism? Do our images of God encourage creativity or destruction? Do they inspire love or hatred? Are they defined primarily by loving partnership or by coercive power?' [p. 31] Epperly then expounds the Process doctrine of God, with its arresting redefinitions of perfection, power, relatedness, compassion, prayer, and so on. In this section, and in developments later, there may be the odd surprise for some readers. For instance, miracles can still be made sense of, says Epperly, within this framework as 'intensifications of God's healing energy as a result of the interplay of God's visionary power and energy, our prayers, and the conditions of those for whom we pray' (p. 60). Later he will say something similar about the miracles of the Gospel narratives, adding in the uniqueness of God's relationship to Jesus.

Drawing heavily on Cobb and Griffin, Epperly outlines the contours of a Process Christology which has a strong Logos feel. But he is perhaps too keen to underline the distinctiveness, and its resonances within the Christian tradition, and a little too reluctant to face down the more considered critiques which have been offered. Like many early Patristic Christologies, this Logos account seems binitarian rather than Trinitarian (the slim chapter on the Spirit and Trinity does nothing to dispel this, even as it admits that Process thinkers – all of them, apparently – think that the dipolar nature of God is more fundamental than the Trinitarian); and the charge that the notion of Logos becomes a kind of a-historical cipher for 'creative transformation' could also be profitably addressed. But Epperly is strong on the virtues of Process thought, and his chapter on faith and science offers a coherent commentary on a doctrine of creation which embraces evolution without excluding an open teleology.

Process ethics are presented as fundamentally global and ecological – though there is an interesting middle path walked through the (American) minefield on abortion, as well as sensible treatments of such subjects as euthanasia. The chapter on the church includes a biblical hermeneutic and affirms 'the unique revelatory power' of Scripture (p. 127). It also swats away the 'left behind' phenomenon in discussing eschatology and mission. It is in the chapter on life after death that the supposed unanimity of Process Theologians breaks down: Epperly says that 'Process theologians have tended to be silent about survival after death primarily because process theology is this-worldly in orientation' (p. 135). The more, to my mind, compelling critique of traditional notions made by Hartshorne (and Ogden) is also alluded to but not really weighed – that our belief in life after death is a form of (sinful) self-interest. He then makes a tentative case for what Whitehead called 'subjective immortality' – though he also insists that the 'process' must continue after death too if that's the case, for where there is life, there must be process. We are always becoming, never fully at rest. He then explores some explanatory images of immortality while always keeping pluralistic context of theological discussion (and mission) in view.

There is much to commend this book: a little too American in some respects, it might have helped its readers to see the influence of Process thought more widely; and a little too uncritical at some points, too. However, for a cogent, lucid, well-illustrated, grounded, passionate, comprehensive introduction to one of the most lively and influential schools of theological thought of the last fifty years, Epperly's book does its job very well.

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**Gerald R. McDermott (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 524pp**

This book is a sign that evangelical theology is being taken with increasing seriousness and might be seen as a parallel volume to Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007). Here is the recognition that evangelical theologians have grown in number, stature and influence and even where they may not be agreed with cannot be ignored. This publication is emphatically a handbook not a dictionary, covering 32 areas ranging from the traditional theological themes one might expect to contemporary approaches to race, sexuality, gender, economics and the like. It is unfortunate that all but one of the contributors are male given that able women evangelical theologians are also growing in number. Most are also North American, but there is a good representation of European and Asian scholars, including Henri Blocher, Oliver Crisp, Simon Chan, Trevor Hart, Alister McGrath and Timothy Tseng. The North Americans include some outstanding and creative voices such as those of Kevin Vanhoozer (Scripture and Hermeneutics), Mark Noll (What is 'Evangelical?') and Scott McKnight (The Gospel). The book is largely descriptive, charting the changes among evangelicals and the points where they are likely to hold fast to distinctive positions. Yet authors do not hesitate to point to areas where new thinking needs to be undertaken or new paths trod. Notable in this regard is the article on Politics by Eric Gregory of Princeton. He calls for evangelicals to transcend their current weakness in this area by engaging seriously with political theology drawing on older theological sources. Inevitably, many of the articles are heavily weighted to the particular concerns of American evangelicals. This is true even when Europeans are writing. McGrath's article, as an example, is over-preoccupied with responses to the theory of evolution, although he does a good job of showing how evangelical thought has by no means been uniformly opposed. Likewise, the introduction by the editor leans strongly towards demonstrating the difference between fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Although all of this is useful it does not properly reflect where British evangelicals have come from, nor what their current concerns might be. All in all, therefore, there is a certain mismatch between a book which reveals many of the concerns of North America and the Oxford University Press imprint with its quintessentially British associations.

Individual articles thoughtfully reflect the predominantly conservative approach evangelicals take to issues of sexuality and gender. Overall they reveal a high level of evangelical self-confidence allied with a capacity for self-criticism. This is a combination that suggests the possibilities of further creative development.

This is a book worth having if you wish to bring yourself up to date in a brief space of time with what evangelical people are thinking. British evangelicals might be surprised in a variety of ways either by the conservative views held by other evangelicals or by their 'progressiveness'. Certainly I found myself at certain points not wanting to be associated with some of the views that pass for evangelical. At the same time I was grateful for the careful, informed and judicious approach taken by the contributors and pleased to think that we are being served by such scholarly and dedicated interpreters. The interesting speculation might be as to what such a book would look like in twenty years time, and who the contributors might then be.

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**Robert W. Jenson, *Canon and Creed (Interpretation)* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 136pp**

Robert Jenson is often referred to as America's 'greatest living theologian'. One suspects that this accolade is awarded not only on the basis of his deeply learned works of dogmatic theology (at the head of which stands his two-volume *Systematic Theology*) but also as a result of Jenson's concern and ability to make theology live for the sake of the life of the church. He may be known to some readers as

the author of the delightful *Conversations with Poppi About God* a record of theological conversations held with his eight year old granddaughter.

*Canon and Creed* straddles these two sides of Jenson's work. It is deeply informed by a lifetime's work in the riches of the formative Christian thinking of the 2nd-5th centuries. But the book is written because Jenson believes in the vitality of the topics under consideration. He begins by asking whether anyone these days really lies awake at night wondering about the relationship between canon and creed. Surely there are more pressing concerns for the church (controversies over human sexuality; dwindling influence and resources etc. etc.) His response to this diversion of attention is typically robust: 'alienation from canon and creed may be occasioned by, and in turn occasion, alienation from the church's reason for existence. If we cannot say what it means for the affairs of the church that we have these particular Scriptures, or what convictions center and delimit the life of the church, or how our Scriptures and convictions work together, how do we make an identifiable community?' (2-3).

So the book sets about warding off this 'alienation' by means of a set of reflections on the nature of the church's Scriptures, the regulating function of doctrine, and the relationship between these two aspects. The three parts of the book each offer a journey through the issues. Part I contains five chapters exploring the meaning of the terms 'canon' and 'creed' with particular attention paid to the process that led to the collections Christians know as the Old and New Testaments and, subsequently, the rule of faith and the Apostles Creed. Part II examines the ways in which this initial 'tradition' is extended by means of the more formal notion of 'the canon', the later ecumenical creedal statements (essentially those of Nicea-Constantinople and Chalcedon), and episcopacy. It is here that Baptists might find themselves bristling with anxiety, as Jenson (Lutheran that he is) locates the teaching authority of the church firmly in the magisterium of the church's Episcopal structures. Although this seems rather un-Protestant, Jenson makes the fair point that in many churches the alternative has been to treat theological faculties as magisterial, 'with decidedly mixed results'. Indeed! Part III offers a series of readings of biblical texts (Genesis 1:1-5; Luke 1:26-38; Mark 14:35-36) in which the creed provides a 'critical theory' intended to secure insights into the text that more historically-oriented approaches simply miss.

I found these journeys worth taking, not least because Jenson is always concerned to show the reader not only what is there (in the history or the text), but why it is there, theologically speaking, and what difference it makes that it is there. The net result is a book that brims with reminders of things that the church (and its ministers) are constantly in danger of forgetting. Jenson insists on the importance of Israel and the Old Testament for understanding Christian identity (the key question to ask is not why and how the church took over Israel's scripture but whether and how Israel's scripture is able to accept the church). The inextricable link between the development of the New Testament and the development of the 'rule of faith' is constantly stressed. In ways consistent with earlier articulations of the nature of the Christian gospel, Jenson here defines the New Testament Gospels as a single, long, expanded form of the confessional proposition: 'Jesus, the one who...and who...and who...is risen'. Biblical scholars will also find here a considered articulation and worked examples of the relative merits of the historical critical method, and its relation to the explicitly theological kind of exegesis that Jenson calls for. In some ways the book constitutes an extended plea for a reversal of modernity's separation of biblical/historical study and theology an account of the relation between truth and tradition that we now should regard as a 'suicidal error' so as to rebuild our confidence in the truth of the Christian story. At these points, Jenson the 'greatest theologian' speaks with the clarity of a prophet. This is a book that might help the church to recover a sense of its own identity. But the further aim is to help the church to speak the gospel, and that is a good a reason as any for reading it.

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**Nigel Biggar, *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), xvii + 124pp**

I am really glad to have read this book, although I did not begin to recognise that this would be the case until well into the third chapter. It is written with very careful attention to language, and its argument reveals all the precision of a skilled philosopher. Some might call it pedantic - that is what I struggled with in the opening sections – but, in the end, precision delivered its reward and the overall experience was very satisfying.

The architecture of the book and its core thesis are easily grasped. Basically, Bigger seeks to propose a 'third way' for doing Christian ethics: one that veers neither towards those methods that use their sources of authority (especially scripture) in excessively prescriptive ways, nor towards those that 'sell out' to opinions off the shelf in contemporary contexts to such an extent that they lose everything distinctively Christian. Bigger describes himself within the book as an orthodox evangelical, but not one who is trapped in conservatism; committed to listen attentively to the wisdom of those who speak from beyond the formal boundaries of church, but one who is still free and keen (humbly) to name his own contribution from within its bounds.

Chapters One through Three are very much setting the scene and defining terms - which is either pedantry or good philosophical rhetoric. Chapter One begins the search for the 'third way' around an axis of integrity and distinctiveness. Christian ethics, argues Bigger, need not attempt to stake out the entire territory of ethical wisdom as if it owned the whole estate, but can with integrity listen to and learn from those who have developed their expertise in other fields. Chapter Two develops the argument by locating Christian ethicists in the same domain of the 'partial and provisional' as those who work at issues from the perspective of Augustine's 'earthly city' - so there is rightly a consensus, even if sometimes tense. Chapter Three explores the 'publics' within which ethical conviction can take shape. This properly includes the church, the academy, the state - indeed the whole 'secular' context. Bigger is anxious to redeem the word 'secular' which now commonly designates the religion-free zone, seeking to re-instate its ability to describe the full Augustinian 'saeculum', the age between the Resurrection and the Eschaton, when religious and non-religious must live alongside each other and negotiate a common life. On this model, the 'secular' is everywhere ambiguous, plural and provisional – the setting in which Bigger's overall thesis wants to find its voice.

Chapters Four and Five begin to map the new territory. Chapter Four proposes a 'third way' of behaving, properly self-consistent with Bigger's own chosen ethic. This is tolerant and respectful of others, but ready when necessary to do so 'on its own grounds and sometimes in its own way'. The final Chapter is titled 'So, What Is the Church Good For?' - and the answer is (briefly) that the church has an important contribution to make to the overall ethical life of the human community, and that it has enough commonality with the rest of humanity to do so in language and concepts that, handled carefully, can communicate this contribution without necessarily being halted at a chasm between the religious and non-religious worlds.

These proposals, whilst presented in a fresh and compelling form, are less than entirely original; but along the way, some of the more thought-provoking material arises in dialogue with other major writers. The main foil for Bigger's argument is the work of Karl Barth, which he encourages us to re-visit with a distinctive critical lens; but significant excursions in dialogue with Thomas Aquinas, Jürgen Habermas, Stanley Hauerwas, Knud Løgstrup, John Milbank, Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Rahner and more briefly with others are extremely stimulating.

There are, for example, several pages in conversation with Habermas. In the Chapter entitled 'Which Public?' Habermas is introduced as a strong voice from the late twentieth century championing the consolidation of secularism (as popularly defined), on the basis of which it might appear that the days in which Christian ethicists will significantly influence public debate are all but over. Bigger introduces us, however, to some recent writings in which Habermas demonstrates an increasingly sympathetic response to the point of view of Christian believers. Bigger then uses this as a platform from which to explore some of the statistical evidence now available concerning the standing of

Christian and other religious voices in contemporary British culture, finding in the exploration, rightly or wrongly, some evidence to support his own real and growing confidence about being heard in the modern world. It would be good to think he is right.

Bigger's overall proposal is gathered under the title 'Barthian Thomism'. Thomas Aquinas provides the noun, making it clear that natural theology is to be taken very seriously indeed as the consensual bridge between religious and non-religious ethics, rooted in a robust theological anthropology. Karl Barth provides the adjectival qualifier, making it clear that Christians (Barth would say 'church') really does have insight to share that is not accessible apart from the perspective of a faith community. This insight, argues Bigger, whilst distinctive and crucial, should always be offered with humility, because the anthropological common denominator between those who define themselves within and those beyond the Christian community is that all are '*simul iustus et peccator*'. It is this combination of confidence and humility, skilfully articulated, that appeals to me most in this book.

The outcome is a formula for behaving in public, which is keenly attentive to voices both inside and beyond the church and its diverse communities. It proposes an approach to Christian ethics that is not shy to locate itself counter-culture, when that is genuinely appropriate, but takes no delight in contradicting popular mores simply for the sake of being different. I think I need to read this book again now, to get best value out of the parts I read whilst still resisting its overall style, not then in touch with its attractive overarching thesis.

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**Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Second Edition, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 569pp.**

In 2004 the first edition of *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* was published. Seven years later there is already a second edition. The importance of this 'text-book' companion is its novel approach to its task: it considers the Christian moral life to be shaped by the practice of Christian worship and liturgy. After four introductory chapters by Hauerwas and Wells, that explain why Christian ethics was 'invented' and why it should be studied through worship, the chapters follow the pattern of Christian worship: gathering, praising, reading and listening to scripture, interceding, being baptized, sharing peace, offering, breaking bread, being blessed and being sent (there are more chapters than I suggest here). Each of these ingredients or elements of worship are then means of exploring the various traditional foci of Christian ethics – for example: race, gender, punishment, disability, justice, politics, poverty, abortion, cloning, marriage and sex, peace and war, euthanasia, genetics, family and children. Ethical discussion is grounded in the performance of liturgical action, although some chapters do this better than others. There is much then that can enable those in ministry to help congregations see that the Christian moral life is connected precisely with the worship of God: worship is a means of moral formation; that is, the more we participated and allow our lives and desires to be shaped by practices of Christian worship, the more we will become persons and communities of character that will be able to navigate the moral questions of our day.

The contributors to this Companion are all friends and often former students of Stanley Hauerwas and provide an impressive line-up of many of the leading North American theological ethicists – Philip Kenneson, Amy Laura Hall, Kevin Vanhoozer, Charles Pinches, William Cavanaugh, M. Therese Lysaught, David Matzko McCarthy, Paul Wadell, Stephen Long, Stephen Fowl, Joseph Mangina and Michael Cartwright, amongst others. There are sprinkling of British names: Sam Wells himself, Luke Bretherton, Tim Gorringer, Nicholas Adams, Ben Quash, Michael Northcott and Rowan Williams, who provides an Afterword.

The difference between first and second edition are an additional sixty pages, which come from seven new chapters (three of these replace chapters from the first edition), and two re-written chapters.

There may be better introductions to Christian Ethics (Wells himself has written one with Ben Quash and was reviewed in earlier edition of *Regent's Reviews*), but there is not a better example of why any attempt to place an 'and' between worship and ethics, as if they were two unrelated disciplines, should be resisted. If you can't afford this second edition (which I'm guessing will be most), and you can't wait for the paperback version, which I am sure will follow at some point, get a copy of the first edition. This is a must-have book on the minister's bookshelf.

Andy Goodliff

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**Matthew Rose, *Ethics with Barth: God, Metaphysics and Morals* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010) 234pp.**

In *Ethics with Barth* Matthew Rose offers an innovative interpretation of Karl Barth's ethics. From the outset Rose acknowledges the challenge before him; Barth as both one of the most studied theologians of the 20th century and yet also one of the most caricatured. Furthermore, Barth's ethics is often cited as one of the weaker areas of his thought. Undeterred by these obstacles, Rose proceeds to suggest a 'natural law' reading of Barth's ethical thought. Rose's reading is creative and nuanced, revealing a relatively unique way of reading Barth's contributions to ethical discourse. The result is a text helpful for those being introduced to Barth's ethical thought and those sympathetic to the resurgence of natural law theories within Christian ethics.

The first part of *Ethics with Barth* (Chaps. 1-3) develops the central thesis of the book: that God is the measure of human beings, but God measures human beings according to their humanity. This thesis contains two key moves. First, it is God who determines and gives form to human beings. This giving of God is unquestionably good, because God is forever faithful to himself and consistent. Rose writes, 'God's eternal law is one that includes the vindication, renewal and perfection of humanity in its very telos...God is metaphysically incapable of acting a way at odds with human flourishing' (p.35). Second, this human flourishing consists of being ever more human. In contrast to accounts of theosis, the divinely-bestowed vocation of human beings is not to become divine but to become human. God's command for humankind is to fulfill a vocation of creatureliness. Because it is God who commands humankind's movement towards creatureliness within a world he has also called into being, there is some coherence between ethical life and life in the world. This coherence is developed in terms of creation and covenant. Rose writes, 'As one long preparatio evangelica, the world is structured in view of these coming events [in salvation history] and continually points toward them' (p.57). From this reading of Barth Rose argues that grace does not destroy creation's nature but perfects it; it is the completion and fulfillment of creation's 'essential nature'.

The second part of *Ethics with Barth* (Chaps. 4-8) explores the content of God's command to creatures. Rose suggests that, 'God's command is nothing other than the divine nature itself interpreted with reference to human action...the command is the unchangeable, eternal law of God understood in its bearing on free human activity' (p.93). In accordance with the first part of Rose's text, God's command is for human beings to live according to their essential, or deepest, natures. However, if human beings are commanded to 'be what they are', what does this mean? First, human beings are free creatures. Ethics underwritten by coercive power are unacceptable. Instead, human beings are persuaded by the command to exist with and for other creatures. God is uniquely persuasive for human beings because of God's intrinsic commitment to human flourishing. In contrast to common depictions of both divine-command theory and Barth's thought, Barth's God is no despot. Second, human beings are teleologically constituted. Their nature orients towards Jesus Christ as the true 'I' (p.116). Therefore, obedience to Christ contains the fullest expression of human fulfillment. This fulfillment of the human being is a return to oneself in moral subjectivity. Rose emphasises that for Barth this possibility does not rise within the human being in itself, but instead comes through revelation (p.131). This revelation does not, however, remove human beings from the world, but locates them within it. Rose writes, 'The art of living well is...a form of life requiring a passionate worldliness' (p.152). Third, human life is unequivocally social. It is governed by 'directions' which promote the 'co-humanity' of humankind. Barth develops directions of 'man and woman', 'parents and children' and 'neighbours near and far' to describe this co-humanity. Fourth, human life is marred by sin. Evil is the 'shadow' that flees before God (p.177). It has no existence of its own, but only follows God's 'Yes' to creation. These themes within Rose's reading of Barth contribute to his overall depiction of Barth as putting forth a vibrant eudaemonist account of Christian moral thought.

Matthew Rose's *Ethics with Barth: God, Metaphysics and Morals* is an attractive text for two particular groups of readers. First, for those interested in Christian ethics generally, and those interested in natural law or eudaemonist approaches to ethics specifically, it offers a stimulating account of how God relates to the moral coherence of the world and the fulfillment of human nature. Second, those who have only encountered Barth

from afar will benefit from a wide-ranging approach to the themes within his thought. Given the breadth of Barth's work, both chronologically and thematically, such distillation of prominent features is much appreciated. While the book is recommended for a general audience, this is not to say that all will engage it with equal benefit. Those who have engaged Barth with in depth will undoubtedly glean more (and find more to contest) than those hearing Barth's voice (through Rose) for the first time. In any case, Rose's book contributes to discussions within Christian ethics and is a valuable addition to the bookshelves of educated laypersons and scholars alike.

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**Neil Messer, *Respecting Life: Theology and Bioethics* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 236pp.**

As both a theologian and a scientist, Neil Messer brings depth of insight to complex debates about bioethics. His scientific explanations of cloning, for instance, are sharp, crisp and easy to follow. His theological reflection is less clear, but winds its way competently through a particular theology of public engagement on issues such as cloning.

For many people, cloning seems unnatural, and when something seems unnatural it is easy to conjure up arguments against it. In so doing, Messer seems not to have listened fully to the voice of nature: for life to flourish, the gene pool must stay open to new gene combinations (as in sexual reproduction), not simply duplicate itself (as in cloning). For sure, cloning does happen in nature: most plants can clone themselves, and often do so when they have failed to reproduce. Could this be why cloning goes against our natural instincts for life? It's a question he almost raises. From here he might begin a fruitful theological exploration both of cloning and of our natural instincts.

All too often, however, theological convictions lead theologians prematurely to try and articulate theologically why cloning is unnatural. They then find themselves having to justify quoting Scripture at the world. A large part of Messer's book is given over to doing precisely this: the demand for a Christian hearing in the public space, now that the glory days of Christendom have passed. As such, the book seems to imply that the demand for one's own voice to be heard is more important than acquiring a voice worth hearing.

Messer explores a range of issues in a similar vein, and certainly makes you think. The book is well worth a read in this sense – not because of his conclusions, which at times are hard to unravel and with which I happen to disagree. It is, however, only through following Messer's theological tour through complex public issues that I have learned why I disagree. It is, without doubt, a tour worth taking.

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**Hans Reinders (ed.), *The Paradox of Disability: Responses to Jean Vanier and L'Arche Communities from Theology and the Sciences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 183pp.**

Today there are many projects, residential and non-residential, faith-based and secular, in which people with disabilities of every sort are accommodated. Things have moved on since the days in which 'spastics' (and others) were shipped off to special homes and never seen again: removed from the public gaze, and with the inconvenience of their existence quietly forgotten.

In spite of this unquestionable improvement regarding our most vulnerable members of society, I still feel anxious for my disabled child's future when I reflect on some of the adult care projects I have seen. I am not talking here about deliberate abuse or neglect, like the horror stories exposed on the BBC's Panorama last year. I am talking about the vague social belief, often below the radar, that 'good is being done to' the disabled population. 'Aren't those carers lovely?', a church member asked me of one of our local community care facilities. I remain uneasy. The thought does not leave me that, with the very best of intentions on the part of the carers and the authorities, the recipients of the care are still regarded as somehow 'less than'. I do not want this future of otherness for my child after I have died.

Jean Vanier's first L'Arche community was set up in Trosly-Breuil, northern France, as a place where disabled and non-disabled live together in community. The vision has been refined and has grown but at its core is the belief that being disabled does not mean exclusion: rather, we learn deep lessons about humanity from one another, 'receiving other people as God's gift'.

This collection of essays was written as a project funded by the John Templeton Foundation to ask precisely what there is to learn from people with disabilities. The consultation took place in March 2007 at Trosly-Breuil and involved theologians, scientists and social scientists. I was won over at an early stage by editor Hans S. Reinders' own comment: 'To look at other people's brokenness and limitation without seeing our own is a gesture of power; to acknowledge our brokenness and limitation in the face of theirs is a gesture of community'. Exactly. The rest of the book unpacks, in short stand-alone essays by a variety of contributors, what this interpretation of community might mean. Vanier, reflecting on his own learning process in L'Arche, reminds us that we do not possess life, but we receive it. Obvious, yet something we overlook every time we make a value judgement about another person.

Recurring themes in the essays are the human tendency to identify difference between ourselves and others, and our obsession with cognitive and rational skills in the contemporary West. John Swinton makes a fascinating connection with the contemplative tradition, reminding us that knowing God can never be a rational exercise. Kevin S. Reimer discusses the moral transformation that can take place in L'Arche by an inversion of the presumed teaching norm: the core members of the communities (the disabled people) over time teach the able-bodied assistants a different way of life. Reimer describes this process as one of maturing, and notes that the learning is not rational, but morally intuitive. Pamela Cushing addresses the radical acceptance of the caregivers by the core community members and observes that the potential for people with developmental disabilities to make a positive contribution to culture is completely missed by the general public (which assumes that rational and cognitive ability is key to personhood).

The sense that L'Arche is radically countercultural pervades the whole book and makes me long to claim this ground as fertile Baptist soil. Could we be brave enough as a tradition to confess our addiction to rational process, to a cerebral grasp and expression of faith, and to our entrenched activism? Along with our commitment to every member ministry, which logically should include the disabled, we should be a denomination on the margins: this is what radical dissent is all about. In practice, our outreach to the disabled is less about being in community than about helping 'them': a view of the other that distances and excludes in spite of our sincere desire to be compassionate. This book challenges us to see that we may have missed the point, and perhaps it is because, as Vanier suggests, we are afraid of confronting our deepest fears, exposed by the weakness and vulnerability of the disabled.

This book is for everyone and anyone with an interest in the theology of disability.

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**Jeremy M Bergen, *Ecclesial Repentance. The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts* (London: T&T Clark, 2011) 338pp.**

The act by which a church body makes a public declaration of apology or repentance for past policy and practice is a relatively recently phenomenon. But it has become increasingly widespread over recent years, and has certainly become part of the story of the Baptist Union of Great Britain when in 2007 its Council issued an apology for the transatlantic slave trade.

This book sets out to examine ecclesial repentance, to give an account of where it has happened and what has been said, to try to make theological sense of statements of apology, to explore what this has to say about the nature and identity of the church, and to ask whether such acts have meaning and integrity. It is a very thorough study, written with great clarity; and it is an important book, not least because many questions are asked about the validity of a church issuing an apology on behalf of all its members for something that may have happened several generations earlier. Yet, as Bergen says, the fact is that churches are repenting – and so we need to try to make sense of what is going on.

In the first half of the book, Bergen examines key examples of where public acts of repentance have been made. These relate to the disunity of the church, sins against the Jewish people, the legacy of Western colonialism, and a range of more specific issues such as sexual abuse by clergy and the dignity of women. He draws on a range of documents from both Catholic and Protestant traditions, but this reveals one of the inevitable limitations of a study such as this. It is the structured, hierarchical denominations that tend to make and develop official pronouncements. There is a genuine commitment to be as broad as possible, and Baptist statements are given proper consideration, but the weight of evidence means that much of the analysis centres on documents such as one issued by the Catholic Church entitled 'Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past'.

This, in turn, means that much of the second half of the book exploring some of the doctrinal questions and implications is also shaped by particular ecclesiologies. So, for example, there is a lengthy discussion of how the church can be both holy and yet sinful, and with it the attempts by Catholics to argue that the church repents only of the sins of its members because in itself it is incapable of sin. Such arguments will strike many of us as both unconvincing and evasive!

Yet there is much here that is rich and deserving of careful attention. The exploration of what it means for the church to have continuity over time through the communion of saints helps make sense of why the church needs to repent of sins committed long ago by people who thought they were doing good. The reflection on Miroslav Volf's memory and remembering draws attention to the vital practice of developing truthful memories, which has as much to do with God's intended future for those divided by pain as with any accurate historical recollection. And there is a helpful discussion on the importance of the church nurturing a sense of collective responsibility as opposed to collective guilt.

Though Bergen gives us glimpses of the stories of pain and division that led to acts of ecclesial repentance, this is primarily a theological and ecclesiological exploration of the issues. And it makes a strong case for the church confronting its past. But ultimately the limits of the book left feelings of dissatisfaction. In the end, apologies have to be lived out. The detailed arguments over what words spoken by the church actually mean only succeed in pouring doubt on their integrity. Reconciliation requires that justice be done. The voices of those who have been hurt, excluded and abused need to be heard, not least by those wanting to repent. All this is the substance of another book – and yet without it, the theology provided by Bergen will not bring healing and peace.

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**Elmer Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defence of Ethical Proselytising and Persuasion* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), 285pp.**

Thank God someone is addressing this issue. The very fact that so little has been written on the theme of the ethics of evangelism is itself an indication that we've got evangelism wrong. The first priority of evangelism is to bear faithful witness, to communicate the message of Christ in a Christlike way; our primary concern is not results, success, effectiveness. When we get these priorities wrong evangelism itself gets screwed up.

What we have in *The Ethics of Evangelism* is a careful and thorough if at times rather plodding attempt to address those critics who claim that proselytising is inherently unethical, that it is, among other things, disrespectful to seek to persuade people to convert. The author is convinced of two things: that too often evangelism is in fact unethical and that it absolutely need not be. It is desirable to seek conversions and it is possible to do so in an ethical way.

After a careful definition of terms Thiessen offers us a survey of motivations for proselytising followed by a reflection on the reasons why evangelism has become an increasingly controversial activity. We are then given a number of examples of unethical proselytising before the author draws on the likes of Kant, Kung, Rorty and Rawls in an attempt to inform an approach to constructing a pragmatic ethic of proselytising. Thiessen hopes this approach will win respect from people of all faiths and those of no faith – a bit optimistic this, I reckon.

The next section seeks to refute a range of objections to proselytising. Thiessen takes on issues of epistemology, freedom, integrity, the individual and social nature of human being along with a range of broadly liberal misapprehensions as a way of clearing the ground for a set of positive proposals. It is these proposals, a list of fifteen criteria for evaluating proselytising, that are the heart of the book and probably the most useful section for those engaged in evangelism including church leaders seeking to encourage their own congregations.

The book has many strengths. I appreciate the exposure of special pleading and question-begging on the part of some critics of evangelism and the discussions of persuasion and interfaith dialogue were especially helpful. Thiessen's critique is consistently even-handed and carefully nuanced. However, I am not convinced that *The Ethics of Evangelism* will have the impact that I would like it to have. Unfortunately the style is hardly gripping and it falls between the stools of a genuinely rigorous academic treatment of the subject and one that seeks to have a broader appeal.

Despite these reservations I welcome this book enthusiastically, I hope that it will receive a wide readership, not least amongst church leaders. I am convinced that the evangelistic malaise that has descended on our churches is due in no small measure to a loss of nerve on the part of Christians who are not comfortable with the very idea of evangelism let alone some of the approaches that were once popular. We need to expose and

eschew deceptive, manipulative, high pressure techniques and recover confidence in speaking of Christ in a Christlike way. May this book help us along the way.

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**Paul E. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (London, SPCK, 2011), 222pp.**

This is a well researched and detailed book on how the rhythm of the Christian year as we currently know it came about. Bradshaw and Johnson focus their attention on the first four centuries of church practice, and using a wide range of sources from a variety of geographical regions seek to determine the development of church order and practice.

They begin with the early Christian relationship to the Jewish Sabbath, and outline how Sunday became commonly known as the 'Lord's Day' for worshipping communities, whether and how the Eucharist was celebrated, and the emergence of lectionaries prescribing certain readings for certain times of the year. The story of the church in marking itself out as 'not that' – which we see again throughout church history, particularly in the Reformation, is seen here as the early communities in some regions rejected any practices considered too Jewish, which led to any number of restrictions on observation of Sabbath rather than 'Lord's Day.'

The dating of Christmas (25th December or 6th January) is explored through outlining two differing means – the History of Religions hypothesis, arguing that the dates were determined through a christianising of pagan feast days; and the in-vogue Calculation hypothesis, arguing from the date of Jesus' death (March 25th or April 6th) that the date of his birth can be determined. This includes an interesting observation on how time was viewed – and that years of life were considered whole years and not parts of them – making the link with December and January easier to understand.

The dating of Easter and the emergence of Holy Week, Lent and Pentecost, together with the appropriate place of baptism reveal a shift in emphasis for the whole season from a time of Easter commemorating the death of Jesus to one which held his death and resurrection.

The book then ends with two chapters outlining the importance of the cult of the saints and martyrs, and on the veneration of Mary as *Theotokos*.

For those who really like to know facts and details, this book will be a delight. There was much that I learned. Yet there was an underlining question left unaddressed. For those who want to know why all this mattered – the book is strangely silent. Why did the church fathers regard a standard view as important? Doubtless, the centralising tendency was intended to deal with heresies and unhealthy practices, but it also resulted in control and power being exercised to bring flourishing communities into line.

Bradshaw and Johnson note at one point that the agenda for standardising of the Christian year be it in the east or west would not have been high on the agenda for most congregations. The majority of them would have found far more important the marking of anniversaries of the deaths of local forbears of faith, holding birthday parties at their graves, including them in communion as they poured wine over their resting places, as they re-told their stories, learned from their example and gave expression to a strong belief in the communion of saints – unseparated through death. This, along with the wonderful recounting of the excerpts from the journal of the Spanish nun Egeria, who describes her experience of the Jerusalem church at Easter in such moving words, gave the book its human touch. Interestingly, Bradshaw and Johnson note that the experience of local congregations has not tended to have been heard in the forming of tradition and practice – which has been the domain of the early church fathers, and others in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They acknowledge this to be a lack which is slowly being corrected by contemporary liturgical scholars – and which we must surely welcome.

The book poses challenges for our contemporary church life. The cycle of fasting and feasting led to different experiences of dependence on God. In a consumer driven world, how might fasting from the acquisition of things and the giving up of food teach us to rely on God? How might our feasting be genuinely shared with the wider community? In the Baptist tradition, instead of needing to create engaging forms of worship for each passing week, could we focus on simple, relational weekly rhythms and yet celebrate the festivals really well? How might the early church's deep concern about making disciples before and after baptism shape our preparation and formation? Can communion be restored to its mealtime roots? Do we know the stories of the saints who have gone before us from our church communities? What could they teach us of Jesus and the way of the cross?

This was an engaging book of particular interest to those who want to know how we've got to where we are in our patterns and practices in church life.

Sian Murray-Williams  
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**Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (eds.), *Dissenting Praise Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 299pp.**

This book, available in paperback, consists of an editors' introduction, nine essays by various authors, and four bibliographies, two listing principal 18th and 19th C denominational hymn collections for England and Wales respectively; the third printed collections of dissenting hymn music from 1662-1800 and the fourth more general references to dissent and its history, all no doubt invaluable for research.

The essays are of varying interest and usefulness for the general reader. The three about the influence of Josiah Conder and W. Garrett Horder (Congregational) and James Martineau (Unitarian) on their denominational hymnodies were not particularly relevant to me, nor I suspect to most Baptists.

Among the others, I appreciated the first on the development of hymnody in the 17th C, including controversies about whether worship should include hymns, or only metrical psalms, or spiritual songs improvised under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. (Were the poetically and grammatically crude words improvised by Katherine Sutton in the mid 1660s really the Holy Spirit's inspiration?)

The Spring is come, the dead is gone,  
Sweet streams of love doth flow;  
There is a Rock that you must knock,  
From whence these streams do go.

I have asked similar questions about "words of prophecy" in "charismatic" worship in recent years!) Hymns often found a way in at the Lord's Supper, where the Gospel accounts speak of Jesus and the disciples singing a hymn before leaving the upper room.

J.R. Watson turns his attention to the "father of English Hymnody", Isaac Watts and how his hymns reflect dissenting emphases. I was delighted to see Watts' verse on the Bible, anything but fundamentalist:-

The volume of my Father's Grace  
Does all my Griefs asswage; (stet)  
Here I behold my Saviour's Face  
Almost in every Page.

Then follows an essay on how Philip Doddridge's hymns were circulated. They were originally written to recapitulate the message of a sermon (something well chosen hymns can and perhaps should still do). Even in the 1740s, the author's original words were altered by others, for reasons of theology, taste and intelligibility - still an activity that arouses controversy!

Ken Manley, an alumnus of Regent's Park College, writes on the Baptist John Rippon and his books, designed to supplement a basic diet of Watts, who he believed provided inadequate material on some topics, including "the Characters of Christ - the work of the Spirit - the Graces and Christian Tempers - the Parables of the New Testament - the Ordinance of Baptism..... Ordinations, - Church Meetings - Meetings of Prayer - Annual Sermons to Young People". What would he have thought of the inadequacies of Mission Praise or Songs of Fellowship! He was ecumenical in his selections, including works by Anglicans and Wesleyans.

The essay on the music of hymns surveys the changes over the years, developing from a few psalm tunes in limited metres, to more elaborate tunes and tunes borrowed from popular sources. The final essay recounts the history of Welsh hymns from the earliest days to the rugby stadium. Once again, Watts is the father figure, though through translation of his hymns into Welsh.

Over all, this book provides reminders of at times the painful struggle which gave rise to the great English Hymn tradition. Some past issues remain very much alive; the rights and wrongs of altering the original author's words; objective theological content against personal emotionally driven material; populist against more formal; performance (worship led by - for? - choir, organ, worship group) against participation by all; proper liturgical use of hymns, including special ones for the Lord's Supper, didactic hymns to teach theology or Christian behaviour, against blocks of adoration or love-song material. While worship cannot stand aloof from

popular culture, its pattern should be defined by theological reality and the nature of God, not the norms of today's world. Getting this balance right has always been difficult, and the hymn tradition made it possible. It seems as if we may be living through its death throes, at least so far as many Evangelical and Charismatic congregations are concerned. Does what is taking its place get the balance right?

Michael Ball  
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**Viggo Mortensen and Andreas Østerland Nielsen (eds), *Walk Humbly with the Lord: Church and Mission Engaging Plurality* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 2010), 314pp.**

This book is a series of papers given at a conference at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, entitled Church and Mission in a Multireligious Third Millennium. The conference formed part of the ongoing centenary Edinburgh 2010 celebrations. Like Steve Bevans, who enthusiastically endorses the book, I wish I had been at this conference. The papers published in this volume do not all represent the conference title but do reflect the book's title. They are divided into four parts. Let me give you some brief snapshots of what is included in each section. Firstly comes 'History and Future of the Missionary Movement' which includes an excellent paper by Brian Stanley where he sympathetically applies the wisdom of hindsight to the Edinburgh 1910 conference. Ken Ross gives us an interesting account of the methodology used in creating the Atlas of Global Christianity as well as some of its recurring themes. The second section is 'Christianity in Contexts of Plurality' in which there is a lengthy piece by Stanley Hauerwas entitled, 'Beyond the Boundaries: The Church is Mission' followed by two thoughtful responses. This is vintage Hauerwas where he argues that the church is not merely an agent of mission but that the church is the new Christian community; the good news and that this is indeed the mission. He claims that salvation is ecclesial and invokes Yoder in support while taking issue with Nathan Kerr who argues that to make the church constitutive of mission is a mistake. Not all will agree with Hauerwas that the church is in fact mission as this seems a romanticised view to some. The third section is entitled, 'Ecclesiologies of Mission – Considerations in Context' with some important reflections on Empire by Bryan Stone, and various other articles on wide ranging contexts from Fresh Expressions in UK (will they go stale?) to the church in Canada, in East Germany and a fascinating piece by Bishop Rumulshah, of Pakistan reflecting on the church as a minority. The final section (my favourite) is entitled, 'The Future of Missiology' – a much anticipated discussion by missiologists! Mika Vähäkangas gives a good survey of the field and gives a pertinent warning to missiologists to keep their theological learning deep as well as outlining the bridge building task between various fields that missiologists can offer. Andrew Walls offers the image of missiologists as magpies, subversives and intellectual brokers. Guder concludes the volume with the vital question as to whether the missional mandate of the church applies to seminaries.

As a theological educator myself, I was very struck by one of his concluding remarks, 'The Christian vocation to be Christ's witnesses does not operate by a time clock or take effect upon graduation. It is hard to imagine how we could equip our graduates to equip congregations to be faithful to their missional calling, if that calling does not shape our life as a seminary' (p.312). Indeed. My only criticism of the book is that there are very few women contributors (two out of twenty seven) and even fewer from the Majority World (one) which makes me think that the task for church and mission to engage plurality is as real as ever.

Cathy Ross  
Regent's Park College, Oxford

**Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), 191pp.**

In recent years, programmes such as The Monastery, The Convent, and The Big Silence have explored how counter-cultural practices of faith communities offer a challenge worth our attention to the materialism, noise and busyness which engulfs much of modern living. *The Naked Anabaptist* opens with the suggestion that Christians of other traditions are embracing practices and convictions of another '500-year-old voice from the margins,' that is Anabaptism.

In *The Naked Anabaptist* Stuart Murray seeks to offer a straightforward, 'warts and all' introduction to Anabaptism. As such this will probably offer most to those new to Anabaptism. Murray seeks to address questions such as 'what is an Anabaptist?'; 'Where did Anabaptism come from?'; 'What do Anabaptists believe?'; 'Can I become an Anabaptist?'; and 'What are the differences between Anabaptists and Mennonites?'

The book begins by dispelling some of the myths around Anabaptism before offering 7 core convictions of Anabaptism. Much of the rest of the book is then given over to fleshing out these convictions, before offering a history of the early Anabaptists and a discussion of the weaknesses and limitations of the tradition.

Perhaps the key to understanding renewed interest in Anabaptism is to be found within the core convictions themselves, with the demise of Christendom, a state of affairs in which the church became associated with wealth and status and found itself at the centre of society, rather than at the margins where Jesus was likely to be found. Although Murray doesn't want us to throw the baby out with the bathwater, the weaknesses of Christendom are highlighted here, its demise is celebrated and the new opportunities this state of affairs brings are highlighted. Now to identify oneself as a Christian is increasingly a matter of active choice and the emphasis of Anabaptism on practice, not least in the areas of spirituality and economics and creation care do speak well into our modern age.

Also helpful here was the way in which Anabaptism can fit well with our understandings of faith as a journey, with people taking longer to decide if they will become followers of Jesus. The tensions between open-edged and welcoming, not pressurising people into belief or behaviour, whilst at the same time not allowing believing, belonging and behaving to become disconnected, hence rendering discipleship optional, is discussed.

Those who have read and embraced the *After Christendom* series will find little here that is controversial or surprising, but this does offer a helpful distillation and exploration of Anabaptist convictions, whilst for those coming to it fresh, perhaps discovering that they have felt the convictions of a radical faith in their hearts, this will provide a helpful introduction to a people who have shared that longing.

Andrew Jackson  
Highbridge, Somerset

**Lloyd Pietersen, *Reading the Bible after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), 211pp.**

'God said it, I believe it, and that settles it!'

Lloyd Pietersen's book asks a simple question in response: really? (As if reading a book, or library, of texts as old and as diverse as the Bible could ever be that simple.)

The book is part of a series being produced by Paternoster looking at how the demise of Christendom affects the contemporary church and its mission. Pietersen's argument is that a post-Christendom reading will help Christians reconnect with the radical, counter-empire, message that runs through the biblical texts.

An overly long list of contents reveals that the book is divided into 3 parts. The first gives an historical overview, setting out quite simply how the church moved from the margins to the centre, with much (but not all) of the blame laid at Constantine's door. As a consequence the Bible came to be read increasingly as a text confirming the status quo rather than as a critique of wealth, power and privilege. One of the exceptions to this move to the centre were the Anabaptists and chapter 4 gives a helpful introduction to some key principles of Anabaptist Bible reading which Pietersen returns to as pointers for the church today.

In the second and longest part, reading the Bible, there is an introductory chapter on Jesus as the centre of biblical interpretation, before the whole of the Bible, divided into widely recognisable categories of writing, is summarised according to key themes that will support a post-Christendom reading. The main point Pietersen makes about Jesus as the interpretative lens through which all of Scripture needs to be read is an important one. However he doesn't demonstrate this enough in what follows.

Much of the material in the chapters discussing the biblical books reminded me of the Fee and Stuart book 'How to read the Bible for all it's worth' but without being as thorough. For anyone who hasn't read that book, or who is unfamiliar with Walter Brueggemann's work on the Old Testament and NT Wright's on the New, Pietersen's will provide useful if brief summaries that will be worth referring back to more than once. However as part of the project on helping the church to read the Bible after Christendom they don't seem to do enough to convince. Repeatedly I found myself asking, how is this a post-Christendom reading? Or, show me how reading this through the lens of Jesus affects and alters the conclusions I/we might reach?

The final part of the book, contemporary applications, contains two excellent chapters on reading the Bible for spirituality and reading the Bible for mission. Readers who get frustrated, as I did at times, with the middle part of the book should persevere because it is worth it. Pietersen seems to have saved some of his best thinking for the end. In the chapter on spirituality Pietersen explores ways to converse with the text as a group of believers ready to ask what we find difficult as much as what is helpful. And the penultimate chapter takes key biblical texts (from Leviticus, 1 Samuel, and Philippians) and uses them to explore a missional response to economic, military and moral issues in the contemporary world. More of this kind of engagement with specific texts, read from the margins of post-Christendom, would have added greatly to the book's overall usefulness.

Overall this is a short book packed with information and some very useful insights. It will raise lots of good questions but not provide enough help with finding the answers or (better in this context) a way forward. It is very easy to read, although Pietersen makes some assumptions that could alienate general readers (for example, will those unfamiliar with Borg, Crossan and others understand the motif of domination system?), and will be helpful for those who have done little thinking about how our reading of the Bible is distorted by the baggage we bring, personally and culturally.

Readers who have already begun to engage these questions will find probably find that, helpful as some of the book is, it doesn't go far enough. Having said that the reader is invited to continue the discussion via the After Christendom Forum hosted by the Anabaptist Network: [www.postchristendom.com](http://www.postchristendom.com).

Ashley Lovett  
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**Dan Collison with Shelley Barsuhn, *Church in Translation: Vibrant Christianity in your Time and Place* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 222pp.**

The premise of Collison's book is clear. Although God is unchanging and his truth endures to all generations, the context in which this truth is received is changeable and changing. In such circumstances the church has a responsibility to reinvent both itself and the form of its message in order to remain relevant to its current generation. This is, therefore, a book about inculturation: the church's engagement with its locatedness in time, place and people and the influence of those cultures on the understanding of its teachings.

The author proposes that all expressions of church (though probably claiming roots in scripture and a return to a valid historical ecclesiology) have their origins in specific places, times and cultures. He contends that, over time, they will tend to experience greater degrees of disengagement with the popular culture in which they were first rooted. Within the church community, of course, this disengagement may be seen as a positive strength: remaining aloof from any prevailing moral decline and faithful to approaches that have been used by God in past generations. According to Collison, however, the reaction of those outside the church to this process of disengagement will be that, unless the church takes extraordinary steps periodically to re-establish its cultural engagement, the context will progressively ignore the church and push it to the margins of relevance.

Collison's response is to offer a series of short, topic-based essays to enable us to identify and reframe the core truths of Christianity to fit a twenty-first century context. These topics are written in a popular and accessible way, each offering a toolkit of questions that ministers (or is it congregations?) can use to explore the topic for themselves. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I found the chapter on cultural re-engagement the most interesting: calling the church to 'grapple with discomfort.' Taking Acts 10/11, the author explores the way Peter had to grapple with the discomfort of finding his cultural foundations at odds with the way God was crossing cultures to reach people He loved (echoes here also of Jonah and Nineveh).

I found this book accessible and I agree with both its main contention and its prescription that the church must engage in the pain of serious self-examination and reinvention. I have two criticisms. Firstly, it is that this book aims to make both a theological argument as well as providing a practical handbook for exploration of the argument across many issues. This is hard to do well. As a young MP, Harold Macmillan made an early speech to the House of Commons on unemployment and its possible cures. Later in the evening Lloyd George came up to him and explained that, though an interesting speech, it was evident that the future Prime Minister had no real grasp of presenting a compelling argument: 'Yours was an essay, a good essay, but with a large number of separate points. Just say one thing.' Aside from being excellent advice to young preachers, this has an application here too. My second criticism is that the concept of reinvention to fit a single, twenty-first century culture is too simplistic. Each church must identify and explore for itself the many cultural influences that shape it; two churches sharing adjacent locations may have very different influences upon them.

Nonetheless, I commend this work. It is readable and could prove useful to churches willing to explore and confront their relationship with culture and context.

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**Pete Ward, *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion, and Celebrity Culture* (London: SCM, 2011), 163pp.**

Weighing in at just 132 pages plus indexes, *Gods Behaving Badly* is a slim volume, but not a lightweight one. The book sets out to examine the phenomenon of the use of religious language within celebrity culture.

Whether it is dedicated celebrity gossip publications such as *Heat* or the BBC's coverage of the deaths of Michael Jackson and Amy Winehouse, it seems that religious tradition provides the linguistic tools reporters need.

This book begins by mapping the use of religious language in relation to celebrities, and the pervasiveness of this across the media (and social) spectrum. A key question asked in the book is whether our society's obsession with all things celebrity constitutes 'celebrity worship', and whether this celebrity worship can be described as a kind of new religion.

Ward eventually settles on the description of celebrity worship as a 'para religion': it has many elements in common with religion, but not enough to be considered religion per se. The followers of 'celebrity worship' certainly do not appear to self-identify as religious and indeed, when asked, many of the most seemingly intense devotees responded negatively to this suggestion. An interesting image in the book is of the Elvis Presley fanatics who, when asked, state clearly that Christianity is their religion; their love of Elvis may take the form of a devotional life but, according to their own self-understanding, it is not their religion.

Another, perhaps uncomfortable, truth revealed in this book is the extent to which we are all participants in this para-religion. Even those of us who scoff with derision at *Heat*, reality TV shows and the ubiquity of celebrity gossip columns are, according to Ward, 'playing the game.' We know what is going on, and we have opinions on it, so we, too, can be said to indwell the celebrity 'para religion'.

This is not a theological book, and it does not chart a clear path toward working out what some of the theological implications of celebrity worship might be: this is left to the community of readers to work out for ourselves. But the book does offer some tantalising pointers. For in celebrity culture, we the people manufacture gods in our own image; we exalt them and worship them, but we also mock them; we are aware that our gods will likely fall from grace, and we are interested in hearing every detail when they do. Theological language is always, to some extent, borrowed from our wider lexicon and then imbued with new meaning within the context of theological discussion. Nonetheless, as the 'regular' meaning of these words evolves, so too – often unintentionally and imperceptibly – does the theological meaning. As theological language and celebrity culture become ever more inseparable, what does the future for Christian theology look like?

As Ward himself finally reflects, '[A]s theological themes are incorporated into this discourse of the meaning(less) in celebrity worship, they are subject to change. These changes are a clue to the future of religion in contemporary culture, both for ill and for good' (p.132).

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**Simon Perry, *All Who Came Before* (Eugene OR: Resource Publications, Wipf and Stock, 2011), 224pp.**

You killed my brother, but now his blood must be avenged. You tortured my friend, but now it is your turn to suffer. You blasphemed against God, but now the honour of his name will be restored. My life is not important; what matters is freedom for my people, revenge for my murdered family, and the honour of my God. So speaks the freedom fighter. So speaks the terrorist. So speaks Yeshua Bar-Abbas, the 'son of the Father' determined to make his life count against the might of the Roman empire.

*All Who Came Before* is a gripping first-century historical thriller, which follows the story of Yeshua, a Rabbi's son ('Bar-Rabbas') from Egypt, who journeys to Palestine to avenge the brutal murder of his brother at the hands of Roman soldiers. He soon joins with others who are similarly motivated to exact revenge against the Romans for their degrading treatment of the occupied Jewish nation. Between them they enact a daring plan to strike at the heart of the Roman occupying power base.

Perry brings to his writing a freshness and readability, and draws on his own experience as both a biblical scholar and former soldier. Meticulous in its attention to historical detail, this book offers a riveting exploration of violence, terrorism, retribution, and religious fanaticism. As such, it brings to life the turbulent world of the first century in ways which speak with urgency and clarity to the world of the twenty-first century. The peaceable kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is ultimately seen as the only viable alternative to ever increasing spirals of suffering, while the violence of the cross offers a compelling challenge to any who would seek to perpetuate the 'myth of redemptive violence'.

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