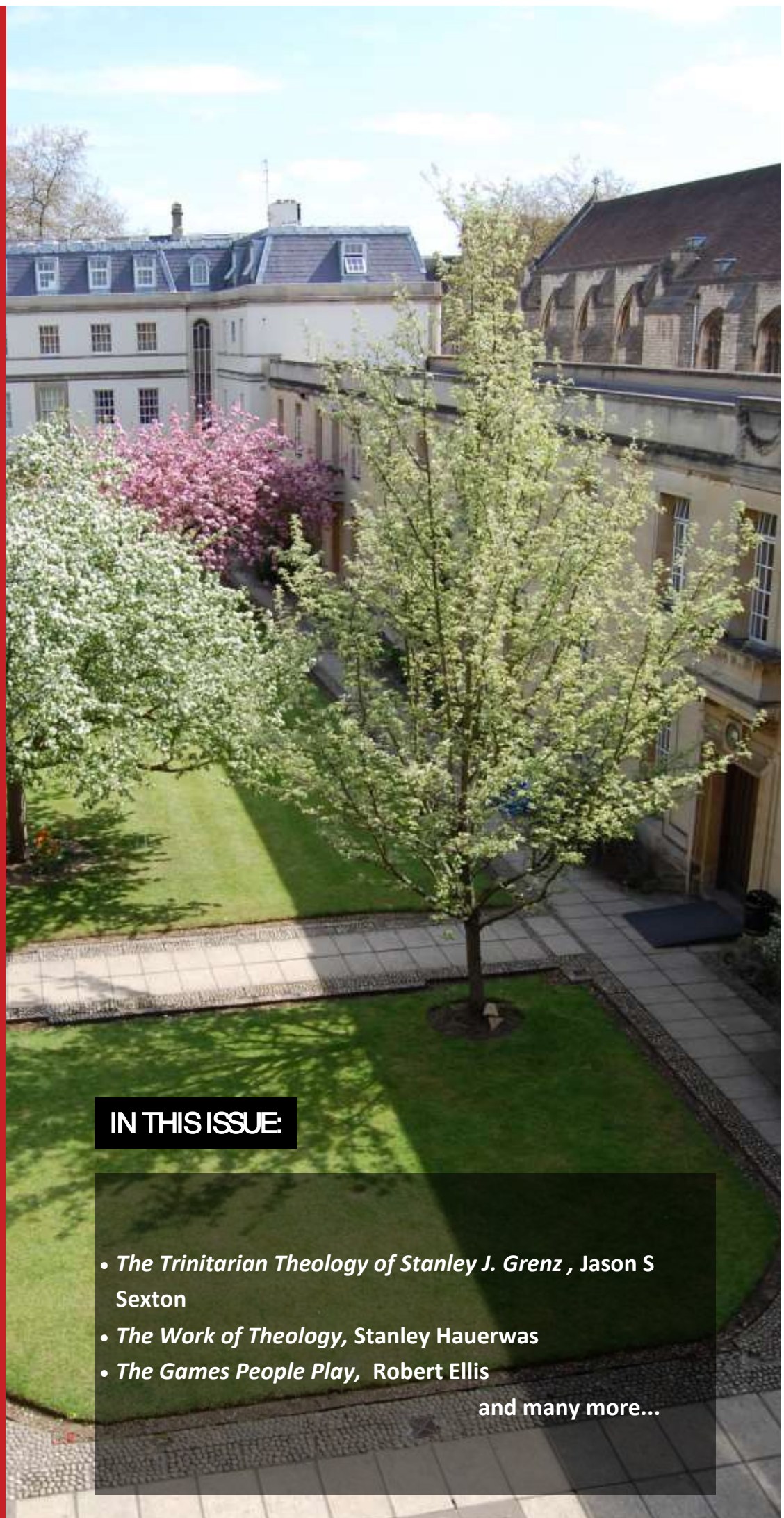


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# Reviews

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- *The Work of Theology*, Stanley Hauerwas
- *The Games People Play*, Robert Ellis

and many more...

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**Paul Cumin, *Christ at the Cruc: The Mediation of God and Creation in Christological Perspective* (Pickwick Publications, 2014), 236pp.**

It is commendably candid for an author to admit the weakness of his work in his initial acknowledgements (p.viii) though the ambitious scope of this book could be viewed as its strength as much as its weakness. As both title and subtitle suggest, the aim of the book is to consider the manner in which a series of Christian thinkers, from the past and the present, have sought to comprehend the relationship between Creator and creation through a Christological lens (though for some of the authors considered the mediatorial work of the Spirit must be held alongside the mediatorial work of the Son – and, in at least one case, the notion of mediation is less than wholly appropriate to this Creator/creature relationship).

Following an introductory chapter that sets an agenda, chapters are devoted in turn to Irenaeus, Cyril of Alexandria, John Philoponus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Robert Jenson, John Zizioulas, and Colin Gunton. The strength of the book is the summary it offers of the contribution of these authors, bringing to our attention aspects of their thought that have sometimes been overlooked or the significance of which has been less than fully appreciated. In this respect the book is immensely stimulating and helpful – the discussion of Jenson, for instance, is one of the clearest summaries of his thought this reader has encountered. But this breadth of scope is at the same time, as the author initially admits, the book's weakness and that in two conflicting respects: if the aim of the work is to survey the range of approaches to Christological mediation there are some surprising omissions (Jonathan Edwards, for instance) but, on the other hand, chapter length snapshots of such significant thinkers, without prejudice to the perception and brilliance of some of these summaries, inevitably frustrates the desire for more sustained encounter with each of them. These weaknesses, of course, are common to all such attempted surveys in their inevitable conflict between breadth and depth. But the weaknesses are perhaps compounded here with respect to style. This book assumes much and demands much, leaving one pondering the identity of the intended reader: such surveys are helpful to the undergraduate or informal theological reader but this is hardly an easy read, whereas a scholarly readership will be frustrated by the gaps of both breadth and depth.

It is the purpose of conclusions to conclude and, initially, the concluding chapter helpfully summarises the contributions that have been considered, their weaknesses and their strengths, but the author then indulges in some intriguing kite-flying not wholly justified by the discussions that have preceded, leaving this reader pondering whether a more satisfying (and distinctive) book would have explored these possibilities in conversation with the previous authors rather than appending them with insufficient anchorage in the preceding discussion.

It may seem a trivial comment, and I realise that the compiling of indexes is laboriously mind-numbing for an author, but the lack of indexes frustrates the reader who wants to revisit aspects of a work. In all other respects, notwithstanding a few typographical slips, the book is beautifully produced.

*John E. Colwell*  
*Budleigh Salterton, Devon*

**Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2011), 804pp.**

It's getting on for a quarter of a century since James Dunn wondered if a commentary on Romans was a kind of initiation test for Professors of New Testament. The stream of candidates stepping up to be tested shows little sign of drying up. The commentaries, monographs and articles pile up. The Apostle Paul's theology remains highly contested and Romans is the primary battleground. Hultgren's moderating contribution to the debates is a major commentary that is not part of a series and therefore unconstrained by the associated structures and templates. It seems to have emerged from years of teaching rather than an editorial invitation and is none the worse for that.

This is a very good commentary. It is based on a thoughtful fresh translation of the text, it demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the field and the key issues, and its bibliographies are extensive. Nevertheless, it is not overlong nor unduly technical and so it could be a great use to a working pastor.

A competent introduction establishes the context and takes seriously both Paul's own situation and plans, and the story, so far as it can be traced, of the Roman Christians to whom the letter is addressed. Each section of the letter gets a brief introduction followed by sections of both general and detailed comments. The author's translation shows awareness of the many significant textual variations and so the verse by verse discussion stays fresh.

Major theological and exegetical issues are touched on in the commentary but in depth discussion of them is reserved for the eight appendices. These contain thoughtful and well-argued, if not always wholly convincing, discussions of questions such as the meaning of the phrase 'the righteousness of God' (it depends on context); human sexuality (the Bible knows nothing of the modern idea of sexual orientation and should not be read as though it does); the *pistis Christou* debate (the traditional objective genitive understanding is ably defended); the translation of *hilasterion* at 3.25 (the typological 'mercy seat' is advocated); and the identity of the 'I' who speaks in Chapter 7 (the section discusses what it means to live under the Law in order to be righteous and its author draws on his own experience but does so from the perspective of being in Christ).

The commentary is clearly written and demonstrably draws on years of experience of carefully defining and presenting the issues to students. There is an impressive determination to allow theological questions to have the priority and not to insist that anthropological questions dominate the interpretation. Furthermore, since the author is convinced that Paul is writing, in part at least, to persuade his hearers to support his proposed journey to Spain, the missionary concerns of the letter are kept helpfully to the fore.

One of the scholars cited on the dust jacket draws particular attention to Hultgren's interpretation of the 'weak' and the 'strong' in Chapters 14 and 15. He argues that Paul is not actually addressing a live issue among the Roman Christians but rather that this is a piece of rhetoric through which Paul affirms the values that he shares with his hearers. Paul makes use of a form of diatribe, clothed in paraenesis, to set up a conflict that he can then resolve advocating the position he knows the Roman believers would want to hear from him. He uses this to establish that there is a great deal of common ground between them and so persuade the hearers to support his mission. This is an intriguing suggestion. It is interesting that rhetorical readings often tend to have this kind of outcome. However, it is worth

considering that the parties mentioned in the text might naturally divide along judaizing and non-judaizing lines and that the discussion of these issues does slip at 15.8 into a reference to Jews and Gentiles. There is at least a case for thinking that the issues discussed may have been real ones in the Roman churches.

In conclusion, this is a clear, helpful and balanced single volume commentary. It will be of interest to anyone preparing to teach or to preach on Paul's Letter to the Romans.

*Steve Finamore*  
*Bristol Baptist College*

**Michael J. Gorman, *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement* (Cascade, 2014), xii+278pp.**

Gorman's aim is to redirect the focus on atonement to what he argues is the ultimate purpose of Jesus' death, namely the creation of a transformed people, who live out a (new) covenant relationship with God together. Beyond claiming that Jesus embodied this new-covenant life in his faithful and loving death, Gorman argues that mechanics of atonement are largely a mystery. His approach entails drawing out key 'new-covenant' themes from Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deuteronomy, and exploring how these themes are linked to the death of Jesus in the New Testament. Those who participate in Jesus' death through baptism are transformed in such a way that they are enabled to live out the new-covenant practices of (1) cruciform faithfulness in witnessing to the gospel through suffering, (2) cruciform love that serves others and shows hospitality to the weak, and (3) cruciform peace in a violent world.

The advantage of Gorman's approach is its comprehensive character: 'new covenant' becomes a category that integrates the theology of atonement with ecclesiology, ethics and mission. There is a strong emphasis on how the 'new-covenant' people should behave: practical living trumps arcane theories about the atonement and this book provides a welcome corrective to the sometimes acrimonious 'atonement wars' that have been waged in recent years over orthodox definitions of the atonement. Furthermore, 'New Testament' does of course mean 'new covenant' and so Gorman is absolutely right to use 'new covenant' as the lens through which to interpret the NT writings.

Yet the phrase 'new covenant' is only found in Jeremiah 31, in Luke and Paul (in their accounts of the Last Supper), in 2 Cor. 3 and Hebrews; according to Mark and Matthew, Jesus' didn't mention the new covenant at all. So, does Gorman claim too much for the 'new covenant' as an integrating theme? Maybe he does: he spreads his net wide to include Ezekiel and Deuteronomy in discovering nine characteristics of the 'new covenant' community, and these characteristics are then identified as 'new covenant' themes throughout the NT; sceptical readers may feel there is too much generalisation here. In defence of Gorman, it may be said that making the argument tighter would probably have made the book less accessible. Nevertheless, there are times when the argument does need tightening up, as when Gorman claims (p.206) that 'we have discovered that in all of the Gospels, Jesus' death effected forgiveness (one aspect of the new covenant)'. Really? That is neither self-evident in Mark's Gospel, nor is it carefully argued or established in the book.

But perhaps I am just being grumpy: I thought this would be a book on atonement (a reasonable assumption, given the sub-title), but it isn't really – at least not as 'atonement' is generally understood - and I found this a little bit alienating. However, if you are looking to

explore the 'new covenant' roots of the New Testament and what it means to live as the people of the new covenant, then this is well worth a read.

*Tim Carter*

*Brighton Road Baptist Church, Horsham*

**Ruth Edwards, *Discovering John: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (SPCK, 2014), 258pp.**

This is an expanded second edition of a shorter version of *Discovering John*, first published by SPCK in 2003. The new edition has the feel of a much more substantial book, being larger in all dimensions, but with more generous typesetting which makes the second edition much easier to read, it is about 60 pages longer on content, although a significant part of the extra length is absorbed in the 76 pages of notes, bibliography and index of the second edition. It is also one of the first two volumes in a wider collaboration between SPCK and Eerdmans entitled 'Discovering Biblical texts' which aims, according to the Eerdmans website, to 'offer readers compact, up-to-date, and student-friendly introductions to the books of the Bible and their structure, content, theological concerns, key interpretative debates, and historical reception.' The other volume already published is on Matthew's Gospel, by Ian Boxall, who like Edwards has taught at Oxford University, and further studies on books such as Mark, Romans, Genesis and Exodus are promised soon.

The structure and the majority of the content of the revised version of John is the same as the original with some additional material and some minor rewriting. There are the same thirteen chapters with the same titles, apart from chapter 2, where 'The Reception of John's Gospel' becomes 'Interpreting John: strategies for reading', but even here the main contours of the two chapters are the same. What there is in addition is throughout both an account of and reference to the developing scholarship of John in the first part of the twenty-first century, and two new excursuses at the end, the first on the text of the Gospel, offering a brief overview of the transmission of the text with comments on key textual differences, and the second on the question of eye witness testimony, which is prompted by Richard Baukham's book and engages with both his and other recent work.

Edwards' approach is firmly rooted in the historical-critical method, although alert to alternative scholarly approaches. The more narrative approach of Culpepper and Stibbe, for example, are included but overall historical issues dominate. Such an approach is probably the most sensible for the kind of book this is, but it means a reader would need to look elsewhere for significant or detailed discussion of other approaches. Table 1 at the end of the book offers an overview of the structure of the Gospel, drawing in part at least on Bultmann's description of the two halves of the Gospel as the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory, but there is little discussion of how the Gospel as a whole might work as a narrative.

The book is arranged thematically with early chapters on more background issues such as authorship, sources and intended audience, before moving onto chapters based more on the content of the Gospel – miracles, Christological titles, the passion and resurrection, the relationship between Jesus and God and other characters in the Gospel – followed by a couple of wider interpretive chapters based on the relationship between Christians and Jews, based around charge of anti-semitism, replacement theology and the challenge to Jewish monotheism. Such a structure works well in exploring key issues which could then be explored further by engagement with a variety of commentaries on specific texts.

Edwards' approach is generally to explain the issues and set out some alternative positions rather than to argue very strongly for one particular theory or reading. So the chapter on the contested questions of place and date of authorship and intended authorship comes to the cautious conclusion that much is uncertain but the Gospel was aimed at a broad Jewish-Christian audience but within and beyond the church. Such a position is unremarkable, but to arrive this point the previous twelve pages cover significant ground both thematically and in the historical development of scholarship.

Like the first edition, this is a well-written, very readable and informative book. In the vast scholarship on John – Edwards makes the well-made point in her preface that the ever increasing volume of published work makes keeping abreast of the whole field now virtually impossible – this book is an academic primer. It would be very suitable for undergraduate level students, and I have certainly used it like that. This appears to be the key market. It would alert the reader both to the important issues in the text but also to the significant areas of Johannine scholarship with the kind of engagement with the wider field that points the way for the reader to delve deeper. But it is clearly, and helpfully, an academic primer that assumes and expects the kind of level of engagement with the discipline of biblical studies provided by an undergraduate theology course.

If you have the first book then there probably is not sufficient in the second edition to need it, but as a good academic introduction or re-introduction to the Gospel this would make an excellent choice.

*Anthony Clarke*  
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**John N. Collins, *Diakonia Studies: Critical Issues in Ministry* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 296pp.**

This is a collection of fourteen chapters and articles, published by John N. Collins between 1992 and the present. Two of the chapters are previously unpublished, four are taken from his book, *Are All Christians Ministers?*, three come from the journal *Ecclesiology*, and the remainder from other publications. In general, I do not like this recycling of work which is becoming more common. However, in this case, Collins has produced a valuable sifting and summation of the research that has spawned over 70 books and articles. His work has generated much discussion in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist churches, to name but a few. However, although his work has been engaged with at an academic level by a few British Baptists (e.g. especially Rob Atkins and also within my own Whitley Lecture), I am not aware of more popular or denominational engagement.

This is unfortunate, because Collins is asking fundamental questions about what the New Testament writers understood by 'ministry' or 'service' (*diakonia*), and applying it to the contemporary church. In particular, Collins has sought to show that the biblical writers understood 'service' (which Collins views as an often unhelpful translation) to be a representative or go-between role, without any intrinsic emphasis on humble, menial or charitable activity. This has, in turn, generated debate about the role of the deacon, historically and today. In a time when many are asking questions about ministry, his work should be part of the discussion, and this collection of articles provides a helpful overview.

The book is divided into three parts. The first looks at how the understanding of *diakonia* changed from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, particularly noting some of the debates over Collins' own contribution in 1990 with his first work on the topic, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting*



*the Ancient Sources*. The question of how the biblical word *diakonia* shaped understandings of ministry is explored in particular, along with the effects in the German Lutheran Church whose charitable service wing, Diakonie, is based on one such understanding which is challenged by Collins and his successors. The second part is the heart of the book, and goes back to the New Testament to explore a number of key texts featuring *diakon-* words. These include texts from the Gospels (e.g. Mark 10:45 and the role of Jesus as 'servant'), Acts (e.g. Acts 6:1-6 and the calling of the Seven), and the letters (e.g. 1 Cor 12 on ministry and gifts). Collins is highly critical of traditional interpretations of many of these passages, calling them 'mass misreadings of the Scriptures', which, 'have no place in a church' (53). The aim of this part, then, is to show the general consistency of Collins' view through the New Testament, compared to traditional interpretations, as well as to provide a foundation for the third part of the book. This final section, entitled *Toward Ministry for the Twenty-First Century*, is more of an exploration of a theology of ministry than a 'how to' guide. It explores such issues as ordination and lay ministry, and the role and function of deacons in the three-fold order of ministry. It is here that Collins' own church affiliation, as a Roman Catholic, is most evident. This should not put off Baptist readers, however, as the different perspective is itself illuminating. However, these chapters also show ecumenical understanding and the final piece considers the development of different models of the diaconate through the centuries.

Inevitably in a collection of works that were written separately, there is a degree of overlap between some of these articles, which can be frustrating. However, I can also imagine that this could be useful for readers coming to his work for the first time, to reinforce the key ideas. Although I would take issue with some of Collins' readings of New Testament passages, I nevertheless think that his conclusions are broadly correct. There is no question that Collins' ideas need to be engaged with by all those writing in the area of ministry. This book serves as a valuable primer to the range of those ideas, although I suspect that many of its readers will then want to progress to his other works. It is to be hoped that a paperback version of *Diakonia Studies* will become available, as this would engage an even wider readership among church leaders, which the work warrants.

*Ed Kaneen*  
*South Wales Baptist College*

**Dorothea H. Bertschmann, *Bowing Before Christ – Nodding to the State? Reading Paul Politically with Oliver O'Donovan and John Howard Yoder* (T & T Clark, 2014), 226pp.**

This book is the product of a PhD thesis at the University of Durham and is published in the Library of New Testament Studies. Dorothea Bertschmann is of Swiss origin and now lectures in New Testament at Durham. As might be expected, the book has all the hallmarks of a carefully crafted doctorate. In two chapters it sets out the distinctive theologies of O'Donovan and Yoder in regards to church and state and then offers careful readings of Philippians 2 and Romans 13 in the light of their political theologies before setting out a concluding chapter.

O'Donovan and Yoder are often seen as occupying two ends of a spectrum with O'Donovan the champion of engagement and involvement with the state and Yoder as the critic standing over against it. In fact the two have much in common. Both, in Bertschmann's view, are writing from within a Christendom framework, either for or against. Both occupy a position on the state I would describe as Augustinian-Lutheran – restraining and punishing evil. The state is there as a means of judgment for one and of coercive containment of evil for the other. For the one, the state is necessary in ordering society and so becomes a legitimate sphere of Christian involvement, with Christians attenuating its more brutal elements; for

the other the state is 'outside the perfection of Christ', is essentially characterized by violence and so is to be kept at a critical distance by the church. Yet for Yoder, by living as the faithful community goodness might permeate out from the church into the state to make it better than it might otherwise have been. For both the state is necessary in the present age and the church benefits from what it does even while it awaits the full coming of the kingdom of God in which none of its present shortcomings are to be found.

In their different ways both O'Donovan and Yoder are political theologies that seek to work out a coherent understanding of the relation of church and state. On turning to Paul, Bertschmann concludes that the apostle makes no attempt to do the same. He is overwhelmingly conscious of the Lordship of Christ in the church and his future cosmic dominion and this is almost the sum total of his horizon. He does not offer a Yoderian type of critique of the coercive state but sees that the authorities have a respected place in doing some good. Christians have nothing to fear from it if they do good. Yet although he offers no critique and offers no suggestion that the gospel message should impact the world of politics, he does leave loose ends when he promulgates the cosmic and future lordship of Christ. Political theology is in effect pulling at these loose ends to explore areas that Paul leaves untouched, and does so as an extension of the doctrine of Christ's rule. An extended quote might help here: 'Paul knew the church to be a tiny and politically powerless minority. He set the scene for a church which is at the same time vulnerable and confident, at once powerless and connected to ultimate power, both at the periphery of world history but also at the centre of God's story in the world. He set the scene for a church, whose imagination and obedience is bound by its Christological vision, but also for a church, which can positively relate to the political rulers' business and affirm it from its own perspective of faith, without giving it an all too meaningful place in its defining eschatological narrative' (p.185). In this the author finds some guidance in our present post-Christendom conditions.

PhD's typically strain after objectivity and so have a tendency to become impersonal. It is a feature of this thesis in its published form that it has some winsome moments. I particularly enjoyed Bertschmann's affectionate dedication of the book to her deceased father Felix, her appreciation of the children of Durham Cathedral's Sunday School and their 'surprising angles to theological questions', her expressed gratitude to our own Ed Kaneen (South Wales Baptist College) for his hours of meticulous proof-reading (I only found one typo), and, most of all, the spirit of serious and scholarly Christian discipleship found in this work.

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**Jason S. Sexton, *The Trinitarian theology of Stanley J. Grenz* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 226pp.**

Sexton's book is an examination of the theology of Stanley Grenz, one of the prominent evangelical (and Baptist) theologians in the world until his death in 2005. It owes its creation to Sexton's view that there had been a paucity of interaction with Grenz's work after his death, the availability of unpublished material to give further insight into his thought and his work's trajectory, and the recognition that the way others had interacted with Grenz's writing was not consistent with the main themes of Grenz' thought. The book therefore sets out to provide an exhaustive treatment of his writings and to examine the main features of Grenz's theology; arguing that the primary feature was the doctrine of the Trinity which gave structure and shape to his methodology, theology and ethical engagement.

Grenz's project has been controversial, with labels such as 'post conservative' and 'post evangelical' being attached to it despite Grenz own belief that he was thoroughly evangelical.

Sexton sets out how the three principle sources for Grenz's program were scripture, church history and the contemporary context. The interrelation of these then giving his work a distinct shape in three theological motifs: trinity, community and eschatology. Community refers primarily to the redeemed community in Christ; the church springing forth from God's divine community and eschatology looking forward in anticipatory hope of the redeemed community and the moment when God's rule becomes an irrefutable reality. In his early years these thoughts move towards maturity through interaction with Pannenberg's work and while Sexton argues that he did not follow Pannenberg uncritically he was influenced by his ideas in the 'provisional, public, scientific, pious and postfoundational shape' of his theology.

Sexton's book is worthwhile because it is a detailed, well-argued overview of the themes and contours of Grenz's work (which I will not try and summarise here) and will be welcomed because of this. No doubt some will pick areas where they feel some aspect of Grenz's work or faith has not been given enough treatment but Sexton's desire to read Grenz charitably (though not uncritically) and allow his writing to speak for itself makes this an important contribution.

Reading this book as a working minister it was good to see Sexton giving attention to how Grenz' Trinitarian theology gave rise to his ethics and how his understanding of *Imago Dei* influenced his understanding of human sexuality (including homosexuality, transgender issues, women in ministry and business ethics). His attention to culture, both as a shaper of theological discourse and as the context in which the gospel is proclaimed are also important). Grenz has been described as 'the evangelical trinitarian thinker' seeking to bring the doctrine of the trinity as the heart of the Christian understanding of God to bear on the proclamation of the gospel. In addition, for those who are less familiar with Grenz's work the breadth of thinking and depth of reflection in this book are challenges to us in our ongoing development.

In this context Sexton's book is a valuable contribution to the re-evaluation of Stanley Grenz work and a worthwhile read for those reflective ministers wanting to think about how Trinitarian theology interacts with the world, ministry and mission.

*Neil Brighton*  
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**Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), xvii+212pp.**

Let me begin by making two deliberately provocative claims. First, I doubt there is any one piece of Christian teaching that is more central to correctly understanding the gospel than the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Secondly, I doubt there is any one piece of Christian teaching which, if it is not carefully stated, is more liable to cause fundamental *misunderstanding* of the gospel than the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Why do I make these claims? Because the gospel announces to us who God is and what God has done.

If the gospel really is good news, then it is so radically new that it lies beyond all that we can 'ask or imagine'. Anything less would not tell of grace, of the God of grace, of the Son of God who was crucified by us and who was raised for us. But that is not, I suspect, the direction in which much of our thinking in this area leads. Many presentations of the doctrine of creation in apologetics, in catechesis, and in preaching trade on the doctrine of creation's alleged provability from Big Bang cosmology. (I know: I and others dear to me have been guilty of this mistake.) The Big Bang, it is argued, shows that the cosmos had a beginning. But to talk

of there being anything *before* the beginning is nonsense. So, it is concluded, since space and time came into existence along with everything else, the Big Bang points to, or supports, the view that a supernatural agent brought creation into being from nothing – *ex nihilo*.

This is a bad argument. The questions it raises can lead to serious misunderstanding of what the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing affirms and of the role it plays within Christian teaching. For, who is this creative supernatural agent? Is his/her/its act of creation arbitrary; is he/she/it to be trusted for the flourishing of creatures? Is a deity whom we reach by argument and evidence really *beyond* all that we can 'ask or imagine'? Is this deity the God of the gospel? And what if Big Bang cosmology turns out to be false, as some contemporary cosmology suggests it may; whither the deity and whither apologetics, catechesis and preaching based on a falsehood?

How we spell out the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing is vitally important to how we express the gospel, and in the previous paragraphs I have tried to indicate this. As I write this review of his most recent book, Ian McFarland is taking up his post as the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University. One thing we can be sure of is that under his tenure of that post, neither doctrine nor the gospel will be sold short. One of the weaknesses of Christians in the recent period has been that our teaching, especially on the doctrine of creation, has been tailored to apologetic demands, whether of science or of the offence of suffering. McFarland's book is the best that I have read in a long while on this pivotal Christian doctrine, not least because, by having the God of Jesus Christ front and centre of its argument, and by being deeply informed by Scripture and our greatest ancestors in the faith, it successfully (if unsurprisingly) avoids these mistakes.

The book is a wonderfully rich retrieval of the tradition in which Christian doctrine, especially that of creation, is grounded in God's self-disclosure as it is announced by the gospel. And this means that, in adopting the strategy he does, McFarland is able to show how the Christian doctrine of creation from nothing has major contributions to make not only to our preaching of the gospel, but also – precisely because he is so persuasive on getting our doctrinal priorities straight – to correctly orientating our understanding of science and our ministry to those who suffer. I was first put onto this profound and stretching book by a very enthusiastic first year undergraduate. Any minister who wants to deepen their intellectual love of God will be blessed by it and it would make an ideal book for study by a group of ministers.

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**Braden P. Anderson, *Chosen Nation: Scripture, Theopolitics and the Project of National Identity* (Cascade, 2012), 228pp.**

What is it that gives a nation its identity? And what does national identity mean for the church and its mission?

Questions of national identity have dominated the news in recent months. Think, for example, of the ongoing debate around Scotland's independence from the rest of the United Kingdom. What is it that makes Scotland different? Or think of the way that, in England, questions relating to housing, education and healthcare have been re-framed as questions about the UK's relationship to the rest of Europe and levels of immigration. For many within UKIP, the concern is that the 'indigenous English population' (sic) is being disadvantaged in these areas because too many 'foreigners' are being allowed in. Even a more modest political

programme speaks about ensuring that those who want to live in these islands share our 'British values'.

Anderson's book is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of nationalism from a theological perspective. It is a subject that he thinks Christian theologians have not given proper attention, thus leaving the Church with little to offer by way of critique. This is, in part, he argues because of a failure to distinguish between ideas of nation and state. For Anderson, the state is far more of a political idea, one to do with governance and boundaries, than the nation. Thus while a fair amount of writing exists on the Church as an alternative *polis* to the state, particularly from the likes of John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas and their students, there is almost no treatment of the Church's response to narratives of national identity. This is a particular weakness for Anderson because, in his North American context, this means that Christians have been blind to the ways in which nationalism has undermined the Church's call to be a witness to the kingdom of God.

The book is made up of seven chapters which can be split into three parts. The opening three chapters offer a survey of recent theopolitical scholarship, nationalism studies, and the appropriation of theological themes in nationalist narratives. As well as Yoder and Hauerwas, Anderson surveys the work of William T. Cavanaugh, who he commends for coming closest to dealing with national identity as a theopolitical issue. Where Cavanaugh falls short, in Anderson's view, is that he concludes that nationalism is essentially a state-sponsored project, thus overlooking the significant contribution made by non-state actors. Turning his attention to nationalism studies, Anderson is critical of the tendency of many in this field to attribute the nationalist narrative to certain elites with a, usually political, agenda. This fails, he argues, to take account of the extensive ways in which the Church (in his American context) has been involved in articulating the narrative of 'one nation under God.' Of those nationalism scholars who do consider this, it is Anthony Smith's understanding of the nation as an alternative 'political religion' that he finds most helpful. For Smith, nationalism acts as a 'salvation narrative' by appropriating particular theological themes, usually that of biblical Israel, and fusing them with a nation's founding stories, 'to create a vision of the present nation that portrays it, in part, as a fulfilment of those traditional theological narratives' (p.55).

In chapter 3, Anderson asks whether theopolitical scholarship has failed to take the nationalist move seriously because it has not fully discerned a theopolitical reading of Scripture. This leads into the second part of the book, made up of chapters 4 and 5, in which he sets forth what he believes to be the theopolitics of the Old and New Testaments respectively. At the heart of Anderson's argument is the conviction that God called Israel into being as a witness to the other nations, evidencing what life looked like under his rule. He notes, particularly, the way in which Israel is called to come out of Egypt, rather than be given its identity within Egypt. Israel is a covenant nation, its identity and politics uniquely determined by its relationship with God, and not by any precedent from the surrounding nations. That Israel was not to be like the other nations is what makes the request for a king a significant turning point in the story, and thereafter the primary grounds of the prophetic critique of the nation. If this is true, Anderson believes, then any nationalist narrative that appropriates the motif of biblical Israel is immediately suspect, because it has failed to take account of Israel's covenant identity, and the ways in which covenant was forsaken in the pursuit of power and security like the other nations.

In the chapter on New Testament theopolitics, Anderson attempts to show how God's covenant with Israel is not only 'secured in and through Christ', but that the Church is then engrafted into Israel as a 'theopolitical community ... whose purpose, like Israel's, is to proclaim and embody God's reign on earth' (p.128). To support his thesis, he turns to a

reading of 1 Peter, and the way in which the covenant identity and mission of Israel are appropriated by the author as constitutive of the Church. The significance of this is that the Church has a unique role in the world, to bear witness in its life and mission to God's reign through Christ, and this role cannot be usurped by any nation or other body. Anderson notes for the reader the points at which his theopolitical reading of Scripture is in dispute with other theologians. One such criticism, that he attempts to rebut, would come from Oliver O'Donovan who argues for a more favourable reading of Israel as a monarchy, particularly with a view to David's reign as a fated period in the nation's history. Whatever the reader makes of Anderson's conclusions, his attempt to read the Old and New Testaments through the lens of theopolitics makes these chapters the most important part of his book. His argument is well-made and deserves to be carefully considered.

The final part offers a critique of the American context from which Anderson writes. Chapter 6 looks at the contribution the Christian Right has made to a nationalist narrative which selectively reads both biblical themes and national myths. Chapter 7 considers two theologians, Stephen Webb and Richard Neuhaus, whose work similarly attempts to defend American exceptionalism, through a reading of the Old Testament that again sees America as taking on Israel's role in the world. The chapters make for interesting and at times frightening reading but their applicability to a British audience is limited. What is useful is the way in which Anderson critiques their claims in the light of his theopolitical readings of the Old and New Testaments. In this, these chapters, serve as a lesson in the mistakes that are easy to make if we do not take seriously the Church's role as God's unique witness to life under his reign. Think, for example, of the tendency in some quarters to refer to Britain's 'Christian heritage' that has somehow been lost and needs to be recovered.

For a doctoral thesis turned into a book, Anderson's text is engaging and easy to follow throughout. This is particularly so because he provides helpful summaries of his argument at the start of each chapter. As such the lengthy engagements with other academics should not prevent the reader from staying with the overall thread of the study. That said this is not a book for bedtime reading nor possibly for those coming to political theology for the first time. It is nonetheless a fascinating book and one that might become more significant for the British context as debates around national identity, and particularly what this is in the light of immigration and questions around European membership, do not look like going away.

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### **Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Eerdmans, 2015), 293pp.**

Hauerwas has written over 30 books. He is now 75. One shelf on my bookshelf is no longer enough to contain the Hauerwas corpus. He shows no signs of slowing down his output. The requests to lecture and to offer papers keep coming. And as he says in the chapter on retirement in this present work, 'now can I retire from being a theologian?' In 2010 Hauerwas published *Hannah's Child: A Theological Memoir*, which tells the story of how Stanley Hauerwas became Stanley Hauerwas. In his work since 2012, the book *Approaching the End* and now also *The Work of Theology* there is both a sense of Hauerwas revisiting earlier themes of his work and also tackling issues he's never addressed.

*The Work of Theology* is perhaps one of Hauerwas' most book-like of books. Hauerwas famously writes essays which then are gathered together as a book, but here every chapter begins with the word 'How' and is centred on issues on how to think, write, act and be a theologian. They are individual essays, but share a common task. We might notice also the

title uses the word 'Work' which resonates with his earlier work on discipleship and theology as a craft and in this book perhaps we have something of Hauerwas the master theologian (but not the 'best' as he was named by Time magazine in 2000) offering a guide to those who would be his apprentices.

For the first time in his career, spanning 40 years, we are offered an essay on Hauerwas and the Holy Spirit, something his critics, even his most generous, have argued he needed to given attention to. At the same time, another essay on character returns Hauerwas to the beginning and his PhD thesis published as *Character and the Christian Life*. We are offered a chapter on rights, which we expect Hauerwas to dismiss, and a chapter on whether he likes being called a political theologian. Like *Approaching the End*, we have more reflections on the subject of Protestantism. While being a Protestant, Hauerwas writes Christian theology, not Protestant ethics, that is Aquinas is as important as Barth or Yoder. There are unlikely sounding, although in Hauerwas' case perhaps not, chapters on being ironic and being theologically funny. (I'm with Sam Wells in thinking this chapter wasn't as funny as I'd hoped.) Other treasures are a chapter on theology and ministry (a must read for ministers and college tutors), how to "remember the poor", how to the tell time, how to think and write theologically. The book ends with a postscript in which Hauerwas responds to Nicholas Healy's recent (*Very*) *Critical Introduction* to Hauerwas.

What this collection shows is Hauerwas is first and foremost a reader of theology before he is a writer of theology. Every essay of Hauerwas, and this collection is no different, is an insight into what's on Hauerwas bookshelf and those thinkers, whether his peers or students, which are important for us to hear. The chapter on the Holy Spirit is in many ways an argument to read Eugene Rogers' *After the Spirit* and likewise the chapter on poverty his dependent on the work of his former students, like Kelly Johnson's book *The Fear of Beggars*.

One chapter that made this reader sit up was the chapter on theology and ministry. Hauerwas shows how theology has become unnecessary or unimportant for the task of ministry, partly because theologians generally write for other theologians rather than for the church. Hauerwas again sings a familiar tune, whether he argues that those ministry are in the 'business of word care' (p.115), so in all the tasks that are given a minister, none is more important than that of helping the church speak and think theologically. The theologian's work is to offer their work to aid those in minister in this task. As an aside, the chapter ends with a gentle dismissal of how painful it is to read a certain kind of book that remains popular in certain circles.

The chapter on rights is helpful in the context of a wider conversation about human rights taking place within the UK and globally. Hauerwas sees a place for rights, but is concerned when the become too determinative or try and make them do too much work, they are 'part of our moral toolkit', but not the whole of it. The chapter on poverty is a challenge to go beyond charity at a distance. The chapter on how to write a theological sentence helps see the important of how a few words can say a lot. If you've never read Robert Jenson, Hauerwas introduces to a brilliant sentence, and he takes you through a tour of some of his sentences that have become part of our theological furniture. The postscript shows how Healy's book in one sense offers not a full engagement with Hauerwas' work, Healy is selective in what he includes, and Hauerwas I think shows that the charge he is not theological, does not stand. Typical Hauerwas he takes what Healy thinks is the problem with Hauerwas' work that it produces only 'unsatisfactory Christians' and suggests it is a 'nice suggestion for how all Christians might think about their lives' (p.267). The only thing that is surprising in this sentence is Hauerwas' use of 'nice'!

I recommend reading Hauerwas to everyone (I recently got the church reading group at Belle Vue reading *Resident Aliens!*) and this book is no exception. Hauerwas makes the work of theology both a joy and a challenge. In the chapter on ‘the “How of Theology and Ministry’, Hauerwas presents us with a letter he received from a student he had lectured. In the letter the student says Hauerwas had asked them what he should write about. So I’ll end with a few suggestions: how do we go about the task of theology in light of the work of Kameron Carter and Willie Jennings? How do we go about the task of being parents in the church? And how might we go about valuing the hymn in Christian theology and ethics (*In Good Company*, p.251n.20)?

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**Anthony C. Thiselton, *A Lifetime in the Church and the University* (Cascade, 2015), 114pp.**

Anthony Thiselton is world renowned biblical and systematic theologian in the Anglican tradition. He is most famous for his work in hermeneutics and his commentary on 1 Corinthians. More recently he has been produce a helpful volume on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and is about to publish a one-volume systematic theology with Eerdmans. This short autobiography though is something of a disappointment and I’m not sure why it was commissioned. Both Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas have published autobiographies in the last ten years. Moltmann’s *A Broad Place* was a typical autobiography with the story of events and achievements, but his life and his theological work made it an interesting read. Hauerwas’ *Hannah’s Child* was a work a theology, which has been compared to Augustine’s *Confessions!* Thiselton’s is an account of events and achievements, and perhaps for the devoted Thiselton fan or perhaps one who is interested in doctrine commission of the Church of England, this will make an interesting read, but it’s not a riveting read. I would have been interested in reading in reading his reflections on the writing and research of his 1 Corinthians commentary, which is *tour de force*, but he makes no mention of it.

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**Kevin Durrant, *The Earth Will Teach You* (Wide Margin, 2014), 171pp.**

This is an excellent commentary on selected biblical passages, which offers insight and creative engagement with the natural world and our life within it. Kevin Durrant (a Baptist minister in Gloucester) tells us that the text began life as a series of sermons. Each of the resulting chapters provides the reader with material for discussion in Bible Study groups and for sermons. The author explores the ways in which each biblical writer expresses their understanding of God’s presence in nature and of nature as our teacher. Through pertinent contemporary illustrations, stories and poetry each of the chosen passages is brought to life in new ways.

Durrant challenges the reader to listen to the wisdom that comes through the voices of the natural world; for him the whole of creation is sacramental. His first sermon reflects on Balaam’s donkey who sees the danger, while Balaam’s pursuit of money has blinded him to God’s truth. Durrant comments that now the animals are warning us as we blindly travel towards environmental destruction.



In addressing the lesson of the soil from which we are formed and to which we will return, he helpfully suggests that our shoes are symbolic of our separation from the earth and our failure to respect the limits of nature, for example exceeding a 2<sup>0</sup>C rise in average global surface temperature. He moves the argument forward as he discusses the cursed ground and our addiction to high consumption, which is preventing the ground in many poor countries from enjoying God's blessing. He rightly maintains that an exhausted land is best addressed through God's principles of Sabbath and Jubilee.

Durrant insightfully points out the value God places on the animals, the first place of Behemoth and Leviathan showing us God's pleasure and glory. But then when we consider the animals in Noah's Ark there are those that we would not have chosen to rescue because they are dangerous or annoying, yet to God they are all valuable.

Our worship of God is likewise skewed; Abram worshipped God at the sacred oak (Gen.12:6), but we soon replaced God's presence in nature with human constructed temples (Acts 7:48-50). Durrant does not find this surprising as Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) demonstrates our lack of imagination, motivation and wisdom. Our focus is on ourselves and our selfish enjoyment of the world's riches. Durrant observes that in so doing we fail to hear the challenge to live out the 'benevolent characteristics of our identity' in Christ. We have changed the meaning of economy, derived from *oikos* (meaning household) and *nemein* (meaning manage), so that instead of community finances, fairness and justice, we have the bottom line of the company or political accounting. In the light of what we learn from creation, this author asks how we should live in consideration of God's gracious gift of the common goods. He challenges us to move from 'me' to 'everyone'.

Sadly, Durrant reflects that we don't hear the voices of nature because of our disconnection with the rhythms of God. He encourages us to benefit from the God-given rhythms of the seasons and of day and night, which our modern industrialised world has blurred. He concludes that we need to hear the wisdom that God offers to us through the voices of nature, for example God speaking to us through the decline and extinction of species.

His final thoughts are close to my heart as he draws a parallel between Hezekiah's buying off of the Babylonian threat in exchange for 15 years of personal peace and prosperity (2 Kings 18:13-16, 20:4-19) with our desire for several extra years of energy-rich living through the fracking of shale gas. Like Hezekiah we ignore the possible catastrophe. He concludes that we have the testimony of two witnesses: scripture and nature supported by science. He stresses that we will be foolish to turn deaf ears to the voices of nature, which are for us the voice of God.

I wholeheartedly commend this book to preachers and teachers, and to anyone who wants to find biblical help in addressing environmental issues.

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*Bedford*

**Larry J. Kreitzer (ed.), *Step Into Your Place: The First World War and Baptist Life and Thought* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, 2014)**

**Gordon L. Heath and Michael A.G. Haykin (eds.), *Baptists and War: Essays on Baptists and Military Conflict 1640s - 1990s* (Pickwick Publications, 2015), 246pp.**

When the words 'Christianity' and 'War' are mentioned together, many people's mind immediately think of Quakers and their opposition to warfare. It is, therefore good to see the

study of Baptist positions, theologies and experiences being examined in these two publications. Much has been made of the current series of public commemorations to mark the First World War and it is, therefore, highly appropriate that the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies has produced, *Step Into Your Place*, a book which examines British Baptists and their experiences of, and views of, the First World War. This publication links well with the second which is examined in this essay, *Baptists and War*, produced by the Canadian Baptist Historical Society Series. This publication examines Baptist views of, and involvement in, various conflicts across the globe over nearly four hundred years.

It is important to note that the Great War, which united much of the British population, at times to a hysterical level, had a profound influence on Baptist thinking concerning war and a Christian's role in it. This change in thinking is discussed in numerous places, including Ian Randall's chapter 'Baptists and the First World War: The Place of Pacifism' and Brian Talbot's chapter, 'Scottish Baptists and the First World War'. Throughout the book, the invasion of Belgium is regularly drawn out as a key factor which caused the significant shift in thinking in the British Baptist world from being very hesitant about war (if not fully pacifist) to supporters of the war. However, it is emphasised that conscription proved a step too far for many in a denomination proud of its support for voluntarism and liberty of conscience. John Clifford and F.B. Meyer were amongst those who worked to defend these principles during the war period.

Gethin Matthews' chapter 'The Responses of Welsh Baptist Churches to the First World War' identifies the particular 'trauma' which the war proved to be for Welsh non-conformists and how the war debate was very much wrapped up in the debate around the disestablishment of the Church in Wales and wider state/church relations. With Welsh non-conformists particularly hesitant to 'sign up', it allowed Churchmen an easy chance to criticise their perceived lack of patriotism. The reluctant support given by many chapels, Matthews' argues, can ultimately be seen as one of the reasons for the sharp decline in chapel attendance after the conflict had ended as 'the denominations were perfidious, prostituting their principles in the illusory pursuit of influence' (p.107).

It is very pleasing to see a detailed study of Baptist chaplains during the War include, and Neil Allison helps illuminate the experiences of a hitherto forgotten group of men. The need for spiritual and pastoral support for non-conformist soldiers only began to really come to the nation's attention shortly before the conflict commenced, due to the work of some of the non-conformist MPs elected in 1906. War time recruits to the armed forces from across the theological spectrum made the need for Baptist chaplains an issue which could not be ignored, although it is important to note that there was no concept of a 'professional' Baptist Chaplain during the First World War - chaplains were ministers of churches and often still answerable to their churches. The War did much to break denominational barriers, with troops attending shared communion services, chaplains caring for troops from denominations other than their own, and chaplains sharing messes. War has very few, if any positive outcomes, however perhaps small instances of improved relations between denominations was one of them?

The final chapter of *Step Into Your Place* sees Gordon Heath take a brief, but highly informative, look at Baptist 'Attitudes and Actions' to war across 400 years. Whilst not particularly linked to the more focused topic of the First World War addressed in the preceding chapters, it does place the discussions about British Baptists and the First World War in their wider context. It also links very well to the second book featured in this review, *Baptists and War*, which is partly edited by Heath, along with Michael Haykin.

Anthony Cross states on the first page of his chapter on 'Baptists, Peace and War' that is impossible to answer the question 'what do Baptists teach about war' (p.1) as opinions are so varied. The book concludes with Nathan Finn, whose chapter focuses on the Vietnam War, stating a very similar view by quoting the old cliché that 'where two or three Baptists are gathered together, one finds at least half a dozen opinions' (p.225). Despite the various views expressed in the collection, Cross' chapter does give a good grounding of the historical context for some of the attitudes to war expressed by Baptists by examining the two main traditions – pietism and patriotism.

As 2015 is the bi-centenary of the death of Andrew Fuller, it is particularly interesting to see a chapter devoted to his views of the Napoleonic War, a side of Fuller which we hear little about normally. Paul Brewster Sr. helps gives us the opportunity to view the great man from a different angle. Whilst early nineteenth century English Baptists were not particularly supportive of the American War, they did generally approve of the war against Napoleon and, unsurprisingly, Fuller was an influential figure in the debate. Brewster takes the reader through a sermon by Fuller which focused on his view of the war and through the sermon we see his 'qualified patriotism', with references to Biblical passages such as Jeremiah 29:4-7.

When examining the history of Baptist attitudes to war, as with much examination of history, it does not take long to discover behaviour and views which make us, as twenty-first century believers, squirm and wonder how some of our forefathers could adopt certain viewpoints. Such instances occur in both of the books reflected on here, for example, in *Baptists and War*, Canadian Baptist support for British imperial 'adventures' in Africa and simplistic idea that imperial expansion could mean expansion of the Gospel, T.T. Shields' over obsessiveness with the war and adoption of a disastrous style of militaristic leadership for his church, and, examples from the *Step Into Your Place*, of ministers such as the Rev. John Williams who preached in military uniform and was a very enthusiastic recruiter for the armed forces. Whilst it would be easier and more 'comfortable' to exclude such accounts, it is absolutely the correct thing to include them. We should not hide from awkward history, as it is only by examining it in the light of Gospel Truth that we ensure we do not make the same mistakes as those who went before us did.

When examining war and the issues around it, some of the most insightful and also poignant accounts are not the great debates by denominational bodies, or the writings or sermons from influential Baptist figures, but the individual stories of 'ordinary' Baptists who, in whatever circumstances, nation, or period of time they lived in, had to decide whether or not to fight, for example, Ben Meyrick a student at Bangor Baptist College who sentenced to two years' imprisonment after his request for exemption as he was ministering an congregation on Anglesey was refused and, in *Baptists and War*, and the account of two Australian Baptists who took differing views to whether it was right to participate in the Second World War.

*Baptists and War* is clearly very different in scope and approach to *Step Into Your Place* – it examines a wider range of conflicts, examines far broader questions of Baptist involvement, or non-involvement in war, and it is far more international in its scope – but both publications are of equal value to scholars, and indeed to any Baptists who are wrestling with such issues in a world which seems to be in a permanent state of war and terror.

War is clearly a weighty issue, there can surely be no greater decision for someone to take (leader of ordinary citizen) as to whether to be actively involved in war, but I shall conclude this essay on a lighter note by saying the broadest of smiles came to my face when I read Gethin Matthews' wonderfully cheeky comment about David Lloyd-George, that '[he]

regularly broke at least one of the Ten Commandments' (p.87).

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**Robert Ellis, *The Games People Play: Theology, Religion and Sport* (Wipf & Stock, 2014), 323pp.**

If you have a love for sport, whether as a competitor or spectator, then this book should not be overlooked. Do not be deceived by the basketball on the cover (a result of American publishers), as the sporting focus is wide ranging, with much time devoted to the experience of cricketers and footballers. It is not a light read, but a serious theological undertaking that spans 290 pages. There is great depth in Ellis' analysis of play and sport that is informed as much by systematic theology as it is by history and the experiences of sportsmen and women. It is probably the first and last time that Irenaeus, Luther, Tillich, Total Football and the Oxford Cricket Board will feature in the same bibliography.

To start with *The Games People Play* is a fascinating exploration of the relationship between religion and sport through the ages. However, as you progress through the book it becomes much more than that as Ellis explores the theologies of play, sin and salvation and applies them to the sporting arena. The result is a compelling argument that sport has taken on the role of religion for many people in modern society. Ellis proposes that as we play sport we participate in God's playful creativity, and that through sporting moments of transcendence we can experience God.

The book has 6 chapters that build towards the concluding practical theology of sport. The first gives a brief history of sport, starting with examples of sacred sport in the Mayan and Native American cultures as well as the ancient Olympics. It is clear that sport and religious experience were inherently combined, so here in these early pages is a clear indication of where the book is headed. Ellis then explores the relationship between Christianity and sport through the centuries, including the rejection of it by the Patristics and Puritans, before sports really became cherished as character building activity in the Victorian era.

In the second chapter Ellis analyses sport in contemporary society, addressing the formation of modern sport as we know it. He gives a balanced account of the influence of business in the growth of sport acknowledging the benefits of a 'business imagination' whilst recognising the wary attitude that the church in particular has had towards the potentially corrupting influence of money. Sport and consumerism, and sport and the media are then addressed, as well as the issues of sexism and racism in sport. This lays the groundwork for the third chapter that specifically focuses on the relationship between religion and modern sport. He demonstrates how the growth of modern sport has coincided with the gradual decline of religious observance in the UK, and suggests ways that sport has in some ways replaced religion.

It is then that the book enters its most challenging sections (especially if, like me, you find philosophy to be hard work) as Ellis seeks to define more closely religion and sport, and then in chapter four gives a theological exploration of play, outlining the differences between play and sport. Here the Pauline sporting imagery is considered, as well as the theology of creation and Sabbath rest. The likening of play and sport to Barth and Kung's experience of Mozart is particularly enlightening here, as is the realisation that play and sport in particular create their own world, with their own time and eschatology.

For me the book comes to life in the closing two chapters. They are enlightened throughout by the experience of sports players and spectators. Ellis offers a very good critique of sinfulness in sport when the desire to win at any cost takes over, not only addressing the problem of cheating, but also highlighting such issues as the increased domestic abuse that occurs after particular football matches. There is a great amount of depth and reflection in this book, and it feels as if no stone is left unturned. The final chapter focuses on the possibility to experience God in sport, as participants and spectators seek moments of perfection and transcendence.

In cricketing terms, whilst this book would be better compared to a five day Test Match than a 20 over dash, it is well worth running the whole race and completing it, for the rewards are great. It has transformed the way I consider sport and given a much greater awareness of sporting history. If nothing else, the next time I run in to bowl for Heywood Cricket Club I can do so safe in the knowledge that I am participating in the playful creativity of God. As I seek to bowl the perfect ball, I do so not only seeking a wicket, but more aware of the transcendent experience of God I yearn for. And as we experience defeat once again, we can return next week certain in the hope of resurrection, for ultimately Christ will be victorious.

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**Philip Sheldrake, *The Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality and the Urban* (Wiley Blackwell 2014), 210pp.**

Exploring both historical approaches and contemporary theology is always going to be a project that appeals – to me at least. Doing it on the subject of “city” and, for this minister of a city centre church trying make sense of what that might mean when most resources are focussed on suburban or rural, and it has to be something that is taken seriously. Point out that it is written by Philip Sheldrake, a well-known and highly esteemed writer on spirituality, and this is a must-read.

The book is divided into two parts, firstly examining the history of Christian thinking about cities, starting with a helpful and accessible discussion of Augustine and his theology of “Two Cities” and moving through the medieval period, the reformations and ending with significant 20<sup>th</sup> theological thinking, especially that of Michel de Certeau, a new writer for me. The discussion in these chapters is not just reporting what people have thought, but exploring the way in which Christians have thought and have lived theologically in city communities – and have critiques such communities. The second part of the book explores issues of pace, of art, of hospitality and of the virtues we need to cultivate to live together.

This is not a how-to book. It is not a resource for mission in city centre. It’s not an attempt to work out how to be church in and for a city or in particular a city centre. Rather, it is a deep resources of thinking, praying and reflecting on what it means to live and look for God and the Kingdom in a context where most of the time the interaction is with strangers, where most encounters are short-lived and where often the church is one of the stable communities, but is also one of the separated and in Western Europe at least, one of the contested ones.

It’s not a light read. But it repays consideration and rereading, and it offers resources and possibilities to think about what it means – and will mean – to live as city-zens in a world in which, by the end of 2025, 70% of the world’s population will live in cities. These are issues

that matter, and this book is helpful introduction to thinking theologically about them.

*Ruth Gouldbourne*

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**Ralph McMichael (ed.), *The Vocation of Anglican Theology* (SCM Press, 2014), 320pp.**

Here we have an anthology on core theological themes: Trinity, Christology, Anthropology, Church and Sacraments, and Eschatology. Each is written by an Anglican either American or British, and two contributions are posthumous. All of the essays are valuable and interesting, none says anything particularly new, and the whole symposium has the feel of looking back at a golden age rather nostalgically – despite claims to the contrary. The structure of each essay is that the essay discusses the topic, and also points to some relevant Anglican authors, and then we are given a few pages of classic sources from the Anglican family of theology. Figures such as Jeremy Taylor, Richard Hooker, F.D Maurice and John Henry Newman are prominent, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Michael Ramsey and Austin Farrer, with some less well known authors also used.

The editor, Ralph McMichael, is an American Episcopalian and he sets the ball rolling with an essay on method and asking what exactly is Anglican theology. ‘The vocation of Anglican theology has its source in Scripture, its shape in tradition and its imaginative future through reason’ (p.24), he says, although he does not ask the question raised by Newman before he quit Canterbury for Rome, which was basically how do we know which traditions are normative for the church, which particular tradition might give us this shape to Scriptural interpretation. For McMichael ‘tradition is the way Scripture is present in this theological movement’, a kind of spirituality approach, but he gains more specificity in explaining John Jewell’s defence of the English Reformation by its appeal to Scripture together with the Patristic tradition – an appeal that Newman struggled and squirmed to overcome when he shifted to the Papacy as his infallible determinant of truth. Simply the fact that such Anglican thinkers as Jewell, Andrewes, Keble and Hooker are discussed throughout the book makes it worthwhile, especially for Anglicans who are rarely inducted into this tradition, which sees itself only as part of the church catholic and as sharing the ancient tradition and Scriptures with the other churches. McMichael sets the tone with a basically historical theological telling of Anglican theology.

The very well known patristic scholar Richard Norris contributes the second chapter on The Trinity, posthumously. This essay will be a draw in itself, and is a helpful clear presentation of Trinitarian doctrine and development. For example his discussion of person and hypostasis in relation to the Trinity is admirably clear, explaining the patristic terms and their meaning. Again this is important historical theology, looking back at a great shared tradition and affirming that it makes sense and that Anglicanism affirms this along with many other churches. His Anglican sources demonstrate this commitment and he adds Dubose, 1911, to his selection, a figure not previously known to me I confess.

Rowan Williams writes on Christology and gives us the essence of the Christian belief about Jesus and God, in particular on two diamond pages, 88-89. The incarnation was no mere quick change routine, to paraphrase his more sober language, but reveals ‘God as everlastingly a relation of giving, receiving and giving out again’, in person like agencies we call Father Son and Spirit – the second ‘is the agency of divine love that receives in love and gives back to the Source what has been given’. In Jesus God breaks through the skein of human selfishness and fear, taking hold of a human identity and forming it in every respect to be a vehicle of divine agency – right from the very start which is what the virgin birth of

the creed is saying. His selected Anglican sources are Hooker, Taylor, Butler, Gore, Dix and Mascall – a trajectory from Elizabethan to Anglo-Catholic liturgy and doctrine. His bibliography for further reading is both Catholic and Protestant however, Barth, Calvin, Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and Pannenberg all feature, as does Macquarrie alone from the Anglican stable.

Kathryn Tanner writes on theological anthropology, and takes the track of a sacramentalist shaping to this view of humanity, the Spirit at work not only in bread and wine eucharistically but in humanity more widely. Human nature is rather like impressionable wax, shapable in all sorts of ways, we can image what we worship and desire, or, moving outside Dr Tanner's analogies, to cite Orwell's O'Brien as he tortures Winston, human nature is infinitely malleable. Humans, happily, can reflect on themselves and 'have the power to cultivate or discourage those natural drives and tendencies that they start out with whether they like it or not, making efforts, for example, to alter their intensities through stimulation or neglect, or efforts to rework the way they figure in one's life as a whole' (p.117). We are plastic and multi faceted beings. Postmodernists, she says importantly, 'caution more broadly against the insistence on a self identical, coherent character, rigidly predicated on the exclusion of others so as to promote protective postures that degrade and sever human connection with them. And they lead us to question the ethical priority of self discovery, as if the truth about oneself – who one originally was, one's given nature or identity – could determine all by itself what one might become, one's place with the world and the character of one's responsibilities in sovereign independence of any unpredictable entanglements with human and non-human others beyond one's control' (p.118). Dr Tanner then pleads for a priority of the body in its plasticity, and rejects spirit-matter dualism, our materiality is essential to our being in the image of God. We cannot become a proper image of God, but we can attach ourselves to this image and identify with it, by attachment not by imaging or corresponding with the divine. 'Humans show off, so to speak, the light that is the divine image itself – and in that sense are good images of God themselves – by exterior illumination, by glowing with a light that remains another's and not by some phosphorescent assimilation of that light into their own natures as some now (sic – I presume a typo for new?) property' (p.119). Now this is extremely close to Barth's famous treatment of grace shining on creation rather as the headlights of a car at night light up the road for us: I confess surprise at finding this note of distinction and union in such a liberal Anglican set of essays, from an American Episcopalian, and am very glad to read it! I note she cites Barth in her bibliography. Barth's note of divine self correspondence in Christ, taking us up, *Aufhebung*, seems also close to Tanner's vision. The upshot of these themes of plasticity, shaping and attachment to the divine second person of the Trinity is that we are a very resistant image to Christ's imaging of God the Son, and that the eschaton alone can soften our calcified 'natures' or whatever term we are left with.

The essay concludes with an articulation of the entwining of the gifts of the Son and the Spirit, offering the Father what he has given and giving these goods to us, from the Father. This is a Trinitarian vision of incarnation and of humanity. There is mention of the cross of Christ as empathy with the burdened and dying, but this is a vision of salvation by incarnation, descent and ascent, in Eastern mode, essentially a model of healing which barely, we might argue, needs the death and resurrection of Christ as fundamentally saving moments in the destruction of sin. Whether the plasticity of humanity is a sufficient interpretation of our being made in the image and likeness of God is a question to be asked, are we just potential to be shaped by our cultural circumstances, is a constructionist account of things enough or do we need more substance at the core of our being as created in the divine image?

Mark Chapman next explores the Anglican doctrine of the Church, and I am glad to report does justice to the history of the subject and full justice to the deep problems of ecclesiology

currently experienced by Anglican Churches globally. He points out that initially the Church of England's ecclesiology was to endorse the episcopal mode of church government as the best available, although not un-churching other sister Reformed churches. Now however this has altered and hardened into a criteriological norm required of all churches for 'full visible unity', basically recognising Rome and Constantinople as churches but not the great Protestant churches any longer – thus departing from Hooker's view and moving into a much more bureaucratic model. The irony is that neither Rome nor Constantinople recognise Canterbury as a true church, while Lutherans and Presbyterians do.

Chapman concludes with the deep problems of the 'Anglican Communion' which is not 'a' church but a family of churches, with less and less 'glue' holding them together. Gary Bennett's 'Crockford's Preface' of 1988 issued a *cri de coeur* of an old fashioned Anglo Catholic who saw the erosion of the Book of Common Prayer as a unifying liturgy and the growth of widely differing regional churches each promoting what they wanted by way of modernisation. He foresaw fragmentation and liberalisation, a departure from his beloved catholicity. He was right in that the Anglican Communion has grown apart, has rejected efforts to form some sort of unitive quasi-papal authority globally, and now hopes that voluntary adherence to a Covenant will keep the churches from splitting off. Chapman speaks of Anglican churches around the globe as 'contained catholic churches', and rightly questions the ecclesiological coherence of this concept, as do most of our ecumenical dialogue partners. The largest number of Anglicans in the world now are said to be Nigerians: but there is no essay in this symposium from the 'global South', a much more evangelical set of churches, facing dire problems of Islamic aggression and generally opposed to blessing any form of homosexuality. While Chapman does not cover those topics specifically, he gives his readers the honest picture of where Anglicanism is now as a church.

The next essay is by Ellen Charry, 'The Beauty of Holiness: Practical Divinity', and discusses Anglican spirituality, especially concerned with grace, holiness, sanctification and justification. She applauds Newman's *Lectures on Justification* and essentially embraces Turner's view that Newman's attack on evangelical teaching was entirely successful in pinning on his opponents the charge of a nominalism, a mental assent about a truth of being justified detached from actual holiness in Christ, the old Roman Catholic polemic of holding 'a legal fiction' and trusting in one's own faith for salvation rather than grace. Newman's polemics are subtle, but it is hard to agree that 19<sup>th</sup> Century English evangelicalism did not regard their lives as given over to working out their status as sons and daughters of God through the blood of the lamb. The philanthropy of the century, from abolishing slavery to Shaftesbury's Factory Acts, to schools, to the re-founding of nursing, to caring for prostitutes, in all these grace was expressed in good works – trusting in Christ crucified and risen meant also the imperative of love. Newman must surely have known the distinction between *assensus* and *fiducia*, mere knowledge and living personal, relational trust, the essence of evangelical faith in the risen crucified Lord, in the fellowship of the saints. Newman was the great polemicist of his century, and not a man imbued with generosity or charity towards his opponents in the mode of Hooker, Taylor, Herbert and those Anglican divines lauded rightly by Dr Charry.

Kenneth Stevenson, alas posthumously, contributes on the sacraments and uses 'trajectories' as his organising principle for: participation, consecration, Christ as sacrament, contemporaneity, and conversion. Stevenson ponders seven sacraments as against the two dominical sacraments of baptism and eucharist which he rightly says have a width of interpretation in Anglicanism, with a 'bare memorialism' at one end of the continuum and 'an exaggerated view of transubstantiation' at the other! The book ends with Christopher Beeley, an American Episcopalian, on eschatology, not a topic in which Anglicanism has a distinctive view, and that is probably natural given that the tradition in England, pre and post Reformation, has been closely linked with the kings and government, and has never had



to go through the kind of trials of the German or Russian churches under Nazi and Soviet savage persecution. The essay is a very helpful overview of the topics and major theological contributors.

There is much helpful exposition of the faith, and Anglicans make much of the fact of their sharing of the patrimony of theology, liturgy and church praxis, including Scripture and the Fathers, with all the churches. This is used as something of an explanation for the lack of substantial tradition of systematic theology in Anglicanism – William Temple remains excellent, and John Macquarrie, but we don't have the likes of Barth, Pannenberg, Moltmann, Balthasar and so forth. Anglicanism does have a strong tradition of theological writing on science and faith, which is absent from the book, and likewise also on the arts. As an Anglican from birth in England I found this symposium just one dimension of this family, that of the warm liberal and mildly 'catholic' type, always very porous to the modern western mores. Evangelicalism is more or less a footnote, even an embarrassment to be moved away from. In fact I would recommend Oliver O'Donovan's *On the Thirty Nine Articles* as a reliable commentary on the Articles and their interpretation. I am surprised that there is no essay on sexuality in this basically liberal reading of Anglicanism: that is after all the one topic for which our churches are known globally and over which so much debate and neuralgia has been generated, raising core ecclesiological as well as ethical questions, not to mention hermeneutics. Dr Tanner's anthropology of plasticity needs to be deployed in this regard, (as in the 1995 *St Andrews Day Statement* and follow up set of essays *The Way Forward?*). The big question for English Anglicans is how the establishment will and should be changed as the years go by, with a new monarch who is very 'multi faith' and far less definitely Christian than our current Queen, with total political secularism, and with 'other' faiths being encouraged and Christianity dampened down by governments. The Church of England faces deep change, but seems blissfully unaware of this. We can only hope the future is not some intoned 'contained catholicity' for a liberal coterie who enjoy colourfully attired clergy, but an outward looking evangelical Anglicanism of a pastoral kind, open to all for the cure of souls.

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**Lina Andronovienė, *Transforming the Struggles of Tamars: Single Women and Baptist Communities* (Pickwick, 2014), 288pp.**

How many of us involved in church life are aware that our churches may not always be the most welcoming and supportive places for single women – whether they are young, widowed, divorced or single by choice – and yet do little in ways of addressing it. There is perhaps a sense of awkwardness, helplessness and sometimes blindness by those with responsibility of cultivating church life. This new book from Lina Andronovienė (Tutor at the Scottish Baptist College) is a welcome study.

Andronovienė explores how the narratives that the church tell about human flourishing are not that far from the narratives of wider culture. The narratives associate happiness in marriage, sex and having children. This is what we say whether explicitly or implicitly to the 35% of those in our congregations who are single.

Having set out the issues, she explores in part two the theological problems of the happiness narrative. This includes an important chapter that challenges the primacy of family and romantic love that are perpetuated in our culture and in the church. Andronovienė follows this by unpacking the vision of the happy life and the happy Christian life. A final chapter in part two listens to the voices of feminist theology in terms of what they offer to the issue of singleness.

Part three is an attempt to offer some solutions or answers to how baptistic communities might alter that attitudes and practices in relation to single women. Here Andronoviené turns to the concept of practice as described by MacIntyre and others. The practice of community formation is primary, the practice of marriage and family are secondary. Marriage, Andronoviené argues, needs to be re-Christianised and so find its appropriate place within the church, rather than before or beyond the church. This is followed by a helpful discussion of sex and sexuality. Andronoviené argues that sex is everything – ‘the sum total of all things’ – and at the same time is no insignificant that is can be ignored (p.186). She moves from sexuality to bodiliness and the importance of touch and intimacy: ‘for the community following the One for whom touch was an inseparable part of his ministry, there is a task of learning, and practicing, safe and healing ways of touching (p.195). I can image certain folk in church getting uncomfortable at this point and this is precisely why we are happier not addressing the issue of singleness.

The final two chapters focus on two more ways churches can address singleness. The first is the practice of friendship. Here Andronoviené engages with an renewed interest in the theology of friendship that has taken place in recent years (see studies by Hauerwas, Wadell, and Meilaender). Friendship is often seen as inferior to marriage or familial love and to agape neighbour love. The importance of friendship within the church needs to be recaptured. Friendship is shaped by the virtues of commitment, particularity, mutuality and vulnerability. What would it mean to see the church through the lens of friendship rather than the family? The final chapter examines the place of ‘suffering’. There is a suffering, especially amongst those who are involuntary-single that the church must seek to alleviate and eradicate (p.223). Andronoviené identifies also a ‘suffering-love’ to which we must give attention. She carefully articulates this and argues for its place within the community of the church as part of what it is to be Christians, recognising its ‘redemptive and life-giving qualities’ (p.250).

*Transforming the Tamars* reads like the PhD thesis it began life as. Each chapter sets out the argument to follow and each chapter summaries the argument made. Despite its PhD-required style, Andronoviené offers a helpful book, which can aid churches reflect on the stories they tell of happiness and the kind of communities they are forming and the place, welcome and support offer to single persons. A church in which all can flourish is surely one in which single persons are not overlooked, where marriage and family life are put in their proper place, and where friendship is encouraged and cultivated.

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**Andy Alexis-Baker and Tripp York (eds.), *A Faith Encompassing All Creation: Addressing Commonly asked Questions about Christian Care for the Environment* (Cascade, 2013), 178pp.**

William Willimon, writing the afterword to this collection of essays, imagines that the first question of the Master in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) to be, ‘What have you done with what you have been given?’ Indeed, for Willimon, this is surely the question of a good and gracious God upon humanity in relation to the created world.

In this collection of essays this question, ‘What have you done?’ is approached with a forcefulness that then leads to ‘What will we do?’ Both questions are uncomfortable yet handled theologically well throughout each essay, enabling the reader to hear the arguments with the respect they deserve.

The writers are as diverse as the topics - from a former Pope writing on peace and creation, to a Brazilian urban farmer asking questions about the environment and our responsibility, to a graphic designer for an Anabaptist seminary exploring the challenge of violence within creation - giving the reader a wide ranging perspective within Christian tradition on how we are to approach creation care from a Christian perspective. What seems to be universal, however, across the spectrum of these essays is that each writer perceives there to be a problem - whether it is how much meat we consume and the impact that has upon creation (Chapter 4) or species extinction (Chapter 5), to a wonderful essay on our care for trees and plant life based on an exploration of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (Chapter 10).

Creation and humanity then, are intrinsically linked according to each writer, the connection between God, humanity and creation one of 'indivisible relationship' (p. 154). This collection of essays is valuable in helping the Church understand from a theological and anthropological perspective what our response might be to the ecological challenges that lay before us, challenges that simply cannot be ignored if we have a Christological vision of the created world. Brenna Cussen Anglanda argues in Chapter 3 that the New Testament witness of the salvific purposes of God within creation are bound up in human salvation, creation groaning (to use Paul's language) waiting for God to bring humanity to redemption, 'The life of a Christian, then, must witness to this holistic ethic and reflect the awareness of the interdependence of human life and the created world.' (p. 31)

Without doubt there is an eschatological vision throughout these essays, each seeking to ground their belief in creation care in the vision of Christ reconciling 'all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (Colossians 1:20). Yet the writers are not dismissive of the concerns and questions raised by those worried that if we start focusing on nonhuman creation we will end up worshiping creation rather than Creator and be more concerned about plants and animals than human souls; they handle such concerns, hoping to root their arguments in the depth of Christian tradition so that the reader might be more theologically and biblically informed on nonhuman creation care.

A book like this could certainly lead to nihilistic guilt as we examine how we have abused creation, yet by the end of this collection of essays we have a thoroughly Gospel centred hope, a hope that encourages us to learn and live more faithfully, a faithfulness that *might* lead the Church, in regard to creation care, to hear the voice of the Master saying, "Well done good and faithful servant."

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**Michael Volland, *The Minister As Entrepreneur: Leading And Growing The Church In An Age Of Rapid Change* (London: SPCK, 2015), 158pp.**

One of the tensions of modern day ministry is that between the desire of the pastor to be 'soul friend' to the congregation and a seemingly irresistible push towards being seen as the managing trustee. The chief executive of the local church, in other words. This is particularly the case among current approaches to mission which adopt a social enterprise model: a holistic approach in which churches are integrating mission with the delivery of goods and services. The rationale underpinning this approach is that fewer and fewer people are likely to drop-in to an Old Time Gospel Service, no matter how faithful the preacher or fervent those praying. Much more likely - and appropriate to this society, at this time - is that people whose immediate needs are addressed in a focused way by Christians reflecting the love of God will be drawn towards the motivation of those who have helped them. If

undertaken with respect and not solely as a pretext for proselytising, then this is a wholesome and godly model.

In *The Minister as Entrepreneur* Michael Volland offers the concept of entrepreneur as both a gift of God to the church and a model for others to emulate. Resisting the idea that the only value of enterprise in a church setting is to seek funding to repair the roof or to make up a shortfall in the funds to continue to employ the youth worker, the author proposes that many kinds of ministry and mission would benefit from a more entrepreneurial outlook.

Most of us will be able to identify key players in our churches or denominational structures who we might properly describe as entrepreneurs. These are the people with seemingly boundless energy, superb networking skills and the capacity to envisage (and realise) what few others might dare to dream. Such folk are quite rare – perhaps helpfully, since they can be quite hard work! Volland brings together biblical and theological analysis and offers us some worked examples to demonstrate that the concept has a good grounding in Christian understanding. He also offers a range of potential applications. He argues that in times like ours – of discontinuous change – an entrepreneurial approach is not merely warranted but essential.

Volland is Director of Mission at Cranmer Hall, Durham. He is also a practitioner in the field, working as missionary to a number of local parishes. This helpfully links scholarship with practical experience. He hopes to persuade ministers and others engaged in provoking and nurturing missional activity to function more as entrepreneurs. It seems to me that this book will further convince those who already tend towards his understanding but that it will make much less impact among those who are more introverted or traditional in their outlook. By including small group discussion questions, here is a chance to open up the theme for wider discussion among PCCs, diaconates and circuit meetings.

*Ivan King*  
*Church from Scratch, Southend-on-Sea*

**Malcolm Doney (ed.), *How Healthy Is The C Of E: The Church Times Health* (Canterbury Press, 2014), 160pp.**

It is now very much the national received wisdom that the dear old Church of England is facing an irreversible decline and imminent death. It is pointless, one might feel from the prevailing commentary, for Archbishop Justin Welby to buy any green bananas – they'll take longer to ripen than the remaining time allotted to his hapless church's existence. But is it true? Or are reports of the death of the Anglican church premature?

The *Church Times* decided it was time to give the C of E a thorough medical. So they commissioned 35 experts, drawn from a range of disciplines, to offer their own perspective on the patient. The list includes academics, researchers, parish priests and missionaries. The topics that they considered took into account congregations, leadership, governance and social influence. How is the church doing? Does it still have signs of life? The contributors are a mixture of Anglicans (in fact the contents page reads like a list of some of the most currently influential names in the Church of England). In addition, there are some 'cultural Anglicans' – atheists or agnostics who love the Anglican tradition including Simon Jenkins, the former editor of *The Times* who compiled the towering coffee table guide to *England's Thousand Best Churches*. Peter Brierley of the eponymous church-watching consultancy will be a figure known to Baptists too.

The experts were invited to diagnose the patient and then to prescribe some remedies. Not everyone agreed about precisely what is wrong or what needs to be done, but a clear and compelling consensus emerges that the C of E is indeed in a life-threatening condition: the patient is in need of urgent medical attention! Each of the expert contributors is given relatively little space to develop their perspective and argue their case. The short chapters are very readable and the range of views is quite wide, reflecting (correctly in my view) the complexity of the issues.

I am glad that this collection was commissioned. I found it helpful and it is clear that most of the contributors – including agnostics – have a warm affection for the Anglican church. However, having considered the various expert opinions, where is the ‘case conference’ in which the debate takes place? Can the patient be saved or is palliative care the only option? Although there is a brief ‘afterword,’ readers are left to assemble their own synthesis. Perhaps this is appropriate to the C of E, which has a hierarchy with so many checks and balances that it seems hard, at times, to see what life-saving surgical interventions might be permitted.

A final thought would be to ask how an approach like the one taken with this work might benefit other denominations. *Beyond 400*, a similar collection of perspectives assembled for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Baptist churches in England, had much shorter contributions but led, in some cases, to a very lively debate within parts of the Baptist Union.

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**David J. Bryan, *Jesus - his home, his journey, his challenge: A companion for Lent and Easter* (SPCK, 2013), xiv + 113pp.**

The above work is a short one, but it is not intended to be a quick read. From the very beginning it is made clear that the author has a thoughtful approach and wishes to evoke a similar thoughtfulness in the readers’ minds. I say ‘readers’ because this book is designed to be used for reflection by both individuals and groups, providing questions to consider for yourself or to discuss with others. A variety of tools are employed, not just prose; readers are also introduced to poetry as well as encouraged to seek out particular pieces of art and film.

Essentially, David Bryan explores the geographical, cultural and religious background of where Jesus grew up, specifically the area of Nazareth, and from that foundation imagines what Jesus’ journeys towards Jerusalem might have been like: How would one from the countryside react to the scale of the cities? What tensions would one experience moving through an occupied land? Etc.

Following this unifying thread the book is densely packed with ideas and moves through a variety of themes. The first chapter sets the feel of the book while setting the scene of Jesus’ adopted home. It outlines such things as what life in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Nazareth can best be estimated to look like, or what its nearest urban centre would have been like (Sepphoris – a town missing from the gospel accounts). The treatment of these questions is not as deep as a text book might give, but the aim of this book is obviously different. It is here, then, that the questions begin to come from the author to stir thought: What does home mean you? How would this home have influenced Jesus?

Chapters 2 through 4 mainly tackle one particular journey of Jesus, the trip to Jerusalem at age twelve. The potential routes and physical challenges of the journey are described, and particular thought is given to the idea of the borders and boundaries that were crossed during the party's travels. These topics give rise to questions on such themes as culture shock, discrimination and prejudice, tangling with the power of society at large, and the readers' own journeys of faith.

The next two chapters form a contrasting and complementing pair. Chapter 5 contains what one might expect from a book about Jesus with a devotional edge in that it focuses on the challenge that Jesus issued outwards through his teaching. In this case Bryan narrows the discussion down to Jesus' command to love our enemies. Here is a particularly interesting inclusion of the opinions of a variety of commentators from different faiths on these words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew. The suggestions for discussion/thought here include such things as the practicalities and practical-ness of peaceful resistance.

If chapter 5 focused on Jesus' challenge given outwards then chapter 6 flips the direction and looks at the challenges the author perceived Jesus to receive from those he met on his travels. Bryan looks at three encounters in which he argues that Jesus can be perceived to be faced with something which challenged him and his thinking. All three are stories of healing but draw in such themes as the barriers illness creates in Jesus' culture, or the divisions of ethnicity and gender present at the time. Bryan puts forward the case that the experiences were ones of learning for Jesus and as such sources of learning for Jesus' followers today. However, this chapter is not the clearest in its approach or argument; it is not always clear what the author thinks the challenge was, nor how strong is the basis for his particular interpretation.

The seventh and final chapter moves on to reflect on the story of the woman at the well of John 4 and the state of modern day Sychar (also called Schechem or Nabulus). This provides a platform to encourage the readers to consider inter-faith relations. Israel is a place of faiths and conflicts, now as it was then, but it is not the only place in the world, and nor is it the place in which most of the book's readers will live, work and interact with others. Bryan wishes to ask his readers to think of their part in finding peace in this world.

All in all the book has much to commend it. It is perhaps a bit too short and could have done with a bit more description and reflection from the author himself to generate responses, but equally it can be said that its simplicity leaves space for the reader to think, and usefully so. As such it will fit the reader who wants something to aid reflection as opposed to simply read through.

*Ben Dare*

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**John Moses, *Divine Discontent: The Prophetic Voice Of Thomas Merton* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 211pp.**

I began to write this review on the day when Pope Francis addressed a joint meeting of Congress in the United States. In what was an historic speech he highlighted two inspirational figures; Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Workers Movement in 1933, which led to a network of communities devoted to prayer, solidarity with the poor and to peace and Thomas Merton. Both Day and Merton have influenced my own life and ministry and that of the Northumbria Community from our beginnings. Pope Francis, in many ways reflects Merton's emphasis on prayer, deep spirituality, social justice and a

disdain for sanctimony and religious or political protocol that gets in the way of compassionate humanity, the fruits of love for God.

Merton is a fascinating character and one whose writings have inspired and influenced many believers. His famous, bestselling autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, tells the story of a sad childhood. Orphaned at six and fifteen by the death of his parents, he endured a lonely adolescence and a wild young adulthood, all of which led to a dramatic coming to faith in Christ and conversion to Catholicism. This transformation in his life led him to becoming a monk in a Trappist monastery in Kentucky. His autobiography, published in 1948 sold 600,000 copies in hardcover, surpassing 1 million copies shortly after its paperback release. The book revealed early on that he was a talented writer and poet and able to communicate movingly about lots of life and faith issues.

His writings encourage people to seek God, discover the joys, gift and grace of prayer and contemplation. His well-known books, *No Man Is An Island* and *New Seeds Of Contemplation* have helped millions of people in their devotional life, Catholics, Protestants and many spiritual seekers. He pioneered what he called, "Contemplation in a World of Action", anticipating the discovery or renewal and popularity of meditation in our contemporary world. He worked tirelessly for social justice and peace. He was someone who gave permission for Christians in the West to look to the East. It was his respect of other Eastern traditions, including Buddhism that led many to write him off as a heretic but he remained Christo centric and true to his Catholic faith. Pope Francis described Merton as "a man of prayer, a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time and opened new horizons for souls and for the Church. He was also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions."

*Divine Discontent* by John Moses is a book that I highly commend. It's the book I wish had been published years ago when I was beginning to discover the riches of Merton's many writings. Written to celebrate the centenary of Merton's birth, it provides the reader with an opportunity to discover or be reminded again of the endearing and enduring life and contribution that comes from the heart and pen of a remarkable man of God. It is a book that will whet the appetite of all those who have not read Merton to do so. It is not a quick or easy read but a careful and considered reading and reflection will reap many rewards. The book provides us with a map of Merton's character and his calling. To understand Merton as a person, significantly helps us to understand his calling and particularly his prophetic voice.

It's author, John Moses, is the Dean Emeritus of St Paul's Cathedral and the title of the book is very apt for Thomas Merton was a discontent throughout his life. In many ways he was an irritant, a controversial character and certainly somebody who didn't comply with many things. I find it really interesting that somebody who was called to a life of solitude had so many interactions with other people, both within the monastery and on his many travels. He was constantly discontented, always looking for something more. A paradoxical character; loving solitude, living as a solitary within a hermitage in the grounds of the monastery yet accompanied by friends on many occasions. The ultimate gift however that Moses defines, of Merton, grows out of his prophetic calling. The things he felt, saw, imagined, the things he fought for and fought against all come from his prophetic calling.

Rowan Williams, another great influence on our own Northumbria Community through his writings, writes a brilliant foreword to the book. He writes, 'A coherent and comprehensive reminder of why Merton has mattered and still matters so much to so many diverse readers. He remains hard to categorise, a dangerous ally for anyone looking for support for any kind of party. At his best - and there is so much that is his best - he diagnosis as no one else both the spiritual and the political dis-eases of the post-war world, and we can still recognise the problems. But equally he displays wonderfully the richness and resourcefulness of the

renewed world of the gospel.'

Moses, in a very informative way, takes each of the areas of Merton's discontent, observing the insights, challenges and perspectives of Merton on many life and faith issues. In a very erudite way, the writer reveals Merton's understanding of the inner life, the affairs of the human heart, together with how they connect with the outward affairs and happenings in the world. I read this book at the same time I was reading Jonathan Sack's excellent book, *Not In God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* and found myself thinking how we could do with a modern day Merton, someone who could understand deeply and communicate authentically about the struggles within the human heart that spill out in the consciousness of religious fundamentalists, Islamic extremists, etc. Someone who could read the signs of the times, and make the connection between the human heart and human behaviour. At a time when the issue of nuclear armament is back on the political agenda here in Britain, we would do well to revisit some of Merton's writings on war, peace and nuclear non-proliferation. He refused, even when ordered by the abbot general of his order, to stop writing against militarism, nuclear armament and war. He was committed to peace and nonviolence at a time when his views were denounced, as indeed such views would find hostility today.

We can view Merton as we might view some of the Old Testament prophets; they carried something of the pain and heartache in their own lives and were a challenge and pain to their contemporaries, both within the religious community and those outside. They too, often, like Merton, carried a brokenness in their own lives, that far from undermining their calling, added validity and authenticity.

The book is essentially divided into two parts. The first, foundational part of the book, in a detailed way, gives us a picture of what it must have meant to be a spiritual companion to Merton. To have been his abbot and guardian must have been an incredibly difficult task. To direct somebody who is so restless would be exhausting and Moses, tellingly reveals the Thomas Merton who would be very difficult to live with. A restless discontent, challenging, disturbing, provoking and unsettling. If you just read the first half of the book you would be given an understanding of someone who, quite frankly, is a bit of a pain to himself and others. We are given a picture of somebody who is struggling to embrace a calling to silence, solitude and contemplation with the fruit of such are calling, which is to feel the pain, suffering and brokenness of the world.

However, the second half of the book, reveals the gift and genius that comes from this broken, seeker of God. The gift of someone who wrestles with key life and faith issues. Someone, who out of his brokenness, is able to offer insights and illuminate the paths for many on their journey of life.

Merton, says to us today, that the way to address the challenges and problems of our own and that of the world is by going deeper into our own hearts, by seeking God, by the practice of prayer and contemplation that transforms the heart and informs our thinking, attitudes and behaviour. By going inward we find a way to live outwardly. He dismantles any false divide between prayer and social action, between devotion and the social implications of the gospel.

What we see clearly through the book is that Merton's discontent is something that is stirred by God. It is in the discontent that the ways of God can be known and his will be done here on earth. The astute yet subtle way that Moses portrays Merton as a difficult, uncomfortable prophet helps us to see the conflicts, contradictions and paradoxes that those who have such a calling carry.



The book is very helpfully laid out. I personally found the chronology of Merton helpful, providing useful background before journeying through the various aspects of Merton's discontent; as a monk, writer, contemplative, social critic, ecumenist, etc. There are also extensive notes and quotes from many sources for those who wish to learn more about this fascinating character.

The book invites us to look again at the man and his message and in so doing challenge our ideas about the world, the prevailing culture, the abuses of power, the issues affecting us in relation to war and peace, the institutions, state powers and individual freedom. We will learn much about the relationship between contemplation and action.

The discontented prophet died in 1968 at the age of 53, a tragic death, electrocuted by a faulty fan in his hotel room in Bangkok. We can but wonder what he may have contributed had he lived longer but we can nevertheless draw wisdom and inspiration from his prophetic voice that speaks so powerfully to us today.

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**Santha Bhattacharji, Dominic Mattos, Rowan Williams (eds.), *Prayer And Thought In Monastic Tradition: Essays In Honour Of Benedicta Ward* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 368pp.**

This is a *Festschrift* in honour of Benedicta Ward SLG, who for the wider audience is probably best known through her translations and work on monastic literature of the desert fathers and mothers. The 21 scholarly essays written by some of her friends and colleagues explore themes surrounding Benedicta Ward's particular interest in the Desert Fathers and medieval church history.

The essays are presented in chronological relation to the development of monastic life from its earliest beginnings through to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and for example explore Bede's view of the Eucharist and how the cultural experience and perception of liturgy and rite seems to be more formative for one's understanding of the Eucharist than what is taught about it. Another essay looks at Bede's relationship to women religious whom he recognised not only as being called to a life of prayer but also to be actively engaged in preaching and religious education, albeit only in instituted roles of spiritual leadership as in a community in contrast to those ordained to orders of priest and bishop. Given that in some streams of Christianity the question of whether or not women can occupy roles of spiritual leadership that include teaching is still argued about, this is an encouraging read.

As a Companion of the Northumbria Community, a new monastic, dispersed community which draws inspiration from Celtic and Desert spirituality I found of particular interest 'Rethinking the History of Monasticism East and West: A Modest *tour d'horizon*' (p.3ff). This essay explores why the usual narrative about both the eastern and western origins of monasticism might not be as accurate as previously thought and actually has created an unhelpful polarity between the concept of desert and city. It was interesting to read that neither is St. Antony any longer seen as the founder of eastern monasticism nor did St. Benedict write the *first* rule for monastic life in the Latin West but rather likely developed his rule from his *Lectio Divina* of earlier monastic literature. It is suggested that even before St. Antony, men and women (and not only in Egypt but also at other places in the East) were already leading a recognised monastic life, more often than not in close proximity to a village or town, or even within a city and at times in the context of a family. This indicates the existence of a close and even symbiotic interaction between monastic figures and secular

communities before more established forms of monastic life became the norm. A stimulating and provocative thought for 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians who feel a calling to live a monastic life in an urban environment without being part of a locally rooted community!

The relationship between the 'world' and the monastery is looked at from a different angle in the essay 'Turning the World Upside-Down' and examines the Theology of the Spiritual Life of St. Peter Damian, a reforming, medieval Benedict monk. It explores the paradox of Christ praying for his disciples to be protected from a transitory and hostile world, and yet dying for the entire world, not just for the Church or even for all humanity. Here, the monastic or eremitical life is not seen as a flight from the world but *for* the world, especially as each individual in their fragility and struggles with weakness and vice becomes a microcosm of the 'world'. The writings of Damian remind us that it is precisely our wounds and our failures that make an authentic spiritual life possible; exemplifying that Christ's redemptive work indeed turns the world upside down. Another paradox is explored in what Damian describes as the discovery that in some mysterious ways those who embrace the call to solitary life for the sake of Christ find themselves 'far from being alone (...) plunged into the very heart of the life of the Church' (p.146).

The last essay which was written for Benedicta Ward as a *sister of Jesus*, rather than the scholar, by one of her fellow Sisters of the Love of God (SLG), explores the Messianic Figure in the Song of Songs, a biblical text that traditionally has been interpreted as an image for the union of the soul with God which has been the foundation of Sr. Benedicta's spirituality, life and writings. The reader is invited to rediscover the power of the Song of Songs which 'at the present time (...) is a dead text, killed off by its interpreters. The loss to monasticism is the most serious consequence of this death' (p.311). By drawing on links to descriptions of the Beloved in other contexts, such as biblical or early Jewish mystical literature, one is encouraged to read the Song of Songs in the vertical. I found the discovery in that essay that the term given to Jesus in the synoptic gospels at his baptism and transfiguration correctly translates as "*This is my son, the beloved*" of great value, as it speaks to me in a somewhat deeper way than "this is my beloved son" about my own beloved-ness in the eyes of the Lover/Beloved and expresses a mutuality of longing and love, as it is so beautifully depicted in the Song of Songs.

In summary, although at times I got a bit lost in scholarly detail, depth and Latin, for me as a lay woman, this bundle of essays in honour of a contemplative, scholar and teacher as Benedicta Ward is described in the final chapter, holds many treasures that the authors have drawn from the life and 'example of good ones of old' as we pray in the Northumbria Community's evening prayer. Treasures which inspire and invite us to follow Christ today, in new and maybe better: re-discovered pathways of old.

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**Darren Sarisky, *Scriptural Interpretation. A Theological Exploration* (Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 276 pp.**

What happens when Christians read the Bible? This is the question that Darren Sarisky explores in this revision of his doctoral thesis supervised by John Webster at Aberdeen. His answer engages with questions of where interpretation takes place and what is happening when Christians read Scripture, rather than the more frequently asked questions of how Christians do hermeneutics. This imitates Charles Taylor's placing of moral questions for modernity in spaces of ontology and identity – the moral space in which questions of what is

right to do find their heuristic location. Sarisky transforms this into questions of hermeneutic space, and especially questions about the community in which the Christian asks those questions: the Church.

In hermeneutics it has become commonplace to foreground reading as a kind of conversation between the reader and the text, and it is no doubt accurate to affirm the presuppositions readers bring to a text, but biblical interpretation, or reading the Bible, is theologically not an equal conversation: it is, at least in part, a confrontation of the reader by God. The biblical text deserves the reader's deference, and so a theological hermeneutics is necessary if Scripture is not simply a human religious book. So, the argument of this book engages with hermeneutical space. But it also engages with time, a second sphere in which Scripture is read. The community of the Church is a space in which the Bible is read, and eschatological hope is a time that orientates that reading. These two basic heuristic tools shape the argument.

In order to deepen that argument Sarisky engages in conversation with Basil of Caesarea, who together with Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa comprise the Cappadocian fathers who have exercised such renewing influence upon late Modern theology and are the three most significant theologians of the late fourth century (and whose significance to Eastern Orthodoxy cannot be under-estimated); as also Stanley Hauerwas and Rowan Williams (reflecting the two metaphors of 'space' – Hauerwas, and 'time' – Williams).

Basil is selected because of his focus upon pneumatology, notably the work of the Spirit in God's self-revelation in the economy of salvation: God the Father is known through the Son and in the Spirit. For the purposes of the argument of this book, this means the Christian reads Scripture by means of the Spirit's action. 'As the Spirit indwells the reader, or, when the human subject participates in the Spirit, the Spirit conforms the interpreter of the Bible to the *res* of the text' (p.7). Thus, the Christian's sanctification and the subject matter of the text are of a piece.

The choice of Basil is controversial, not least because there have been allegations that he fails to achieve a satisfactory account of the unity of God in his doctrine of the Trinity, so concerned is he to achieve clarity regarding their distinctive persons, and that in his emphasis upon the requirement of the believer to master the passions before they can approach the Spirit, which has been described as semi-Pelagian. These criticisms by Beeley and Jaeger are addressed by Sarisky in Part 1, with its close reading of Basil. It also describes how Basil's understanding of reading the Bible is of theological significance for a Modernist culture. Reading Scripture is to engage in Biblical *paideia*, learning. The Bible is 'God's presence textually mediated; it is not a direct engagement with God, but one that allows human beings to see "as in a mirror darkly"' (p.129), and Basil's theological anthropology gives him the confidence to believe that the Christian is enabled, by his participation in the image of God, to know God and to enjoy unencumbered fellowship with God, termed 'deification.' Here is the space of hermeneutics (humankind's nature) and the 'time', or teleology, of hermeneutics, namely to be conformed by the Spirit who indwells both Scripture and the Son to the One who is the goal of that journey, the eternal Son. This reading takes place within a community that reads Scripture 'between the times' of Christ's advent and the *eschaton*. Here is the role of tradition, without which 'personal reading' is fraught with danger. The Bible is the Church's text before it is the Christian reader's text. Here is a counter to the hyper-individualism of so much post-Enlightenment and Late-Modernity culture (including within the church), and possibly one of the greatest defences against the ecclesial curse of our age- fragmentation and scism that are accepted with such resignation that they seem normative of the church, a kind of unholy fifth 'mark' of the Church.

Part Two moves to discussion of two major theologians 'of retrieval': Stanley Hauerwas and Rowan Williams. Sarisky turns to Hauerwas for his situating of the reader within the distinct historical context of modernity, a significant change to the culture that Basil inhabited. He returns to Hauerwas later in the argument because of his focus upon church practices. In between, he looks at Williams for what he has to say about the text of Scripture and its interpretation. The sum might be described as Hauerwas and Williams abetted by a retrieval of insights from Basil.

Modernity, says Hauerwas, is that time when people believe they have no story, so choose one for themselves. Celebrating human freedom, this assumption that people do not inherit a tradition is fundamentally at odds with the Christian understanding that we inhabit a story, a narrative about Jesus Christ. Our story by which we find our identity is not chosen, but given. His account of readers situates them in this story. This has similarities with Basil. Sarisky critiques Hauerwas in finding his account lacks a necessary degree of contingency in light of the *eschaton*: the reader only gains full knowledge of God in the *eschaton*, when we know that we are known (Paul's Corinthian conversation). This leads to an over realized eschatology, unlike Basil, who has a strong orientation toward the future. For instance, Basil says that the church must teach its members to stand for prayer on the Sabbath because that posture reminds them of eternity, and this all too easily forgotten in the midst of everyday life. In chapter 5 we have a clear and elegant account of Hauerwas' arguments about Modernity and freedom in regard to Scripture.

The following two chapters turn to Rowan Williams, especially his notion of time. Where Modernity wants to discover 'timeless truths', Williams argue that all attempts at finding a meaning in life or accounting for reality is dependant upon 'a brief succession of contingent events in Palestine' (Williams, *Wound of Knowledge*, p.1). No claim to knowledge can be asserted as definitive, for just as the Word entered history, so the process of interpreting this event occurs in history as well. There is always more to know. Through Scripture Christians reflect upon how they learn the language of their tradition in order to understand what Scripture is. This process is true also of the composition of the Scriptures: they reflect one another, react and enter into dialogue with one another, and thus time has its place within Scripture also. The various Biblical books can be read as different voices, establishing a multiplicity of perspectives within Scripture (challenging those attempts to smooth everything out into one harmonious voice that finds its organising principle derived from outside Scripture itself, be that *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, or God's way of salvation is by way of penal substitution). Williams is wary of overly confident claims to have understood Scripture (I am reminded of the story of the response of the dogmatist to those in his class who answered in the affirmative his question 'have you understood the doctrine of the Trinity?' with 'you have clearly not understood the doctrine of the Trinity at all!') Williams argues that Scripture bears witness to the Triune God, and that it initiates new possibilities of life. Jesus is a questioning presence that orients people to the Father. This dynamic account of the generative power of Scripture is illustrated by the four accounts of the passion in the Gospels: these are genuinely four different perspectives on the same events of Holy Week, and attempts to harmonise them are to be resisted. The discussion of Williams in this chapter is rich and illuminative, determinedly holding onto the Scriptures as human documents through which the Risen Christ, nonetheless, speaks to us. The incarnational analogy applied to Scripture is vital. Scripture is written over extended time, and the learning that we derive from it also takes time, both individually and in the Christian community, subject to interpretation.

Chapter seven turns, therefore, to William's interpretative principles. 'Books or dramas or music that allow us to mature in their company have a very particular role for us; because they are not exhausted by one reading or hearing, they tell us that there is more to be found, that we have a future with them which we cannot predict or control in full.' (Williams, *Why*

*Study the Past?*, p.94) So, texts of the Bible demand time if we are to inhabit them properly. First, an analogical reading is necessary if readers are to recognize parallels between a biblical narrative and their own context, but this is made possible because the God to whom today's readers relate is the same God as that of the Bible. Historical-critical reading of the text does the community a service, since it brings to light differences between various accounts (in contrast to Hauerwas, who is more sceptical of the value of historical criticism.) Sarisky recognises the indeterminacy in William's theology, his withholding of closure, of always allowing space for something else, something new. This might be frustrating in an Archbishop, but is superbly rich in a theologian: Williams is, I suspect, far too neglected as a theologian by Baptists especially.

A final substantive chapter before Sarisky comes to his summation and conclusions concerns Hauerwas once more, and his emphasis upon the ecclesial setting for reading Scripture, and a desire to incorporate tradition in the reading of the Bible, as indeed Basil and all of the Patristic writers do. Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre have opened the way for a reappropriation of the *disciplina arcani* of the early church. Those who have been formed in the ecclesial community, through the practices of worship and the liturgy, are able to undertake proper exegetical reasoning. Interpretation of Scripture takes place within a web of practices, 'The Church is the community that tells Christ's story by being itself the continuing story of Christ; embodying the story of Christ in the circumstances of its day' (Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, p.146). Sarisky affirms this turn, but is critical of Hauerwas' tendency to speak of 'the Church' when he should (like Basil) speak of 'God.' 'Basil has a tradition-informed view of biblical reasoning, yet he does not marginalise God in the process' (p.200).

Reminded that this book is derived from a doctoral thesis, the first eight chapters wrestle with others' interpretative patterns: Basil, Hauerwas and Williams. Chapter 9 gives Sarisky's own constructive account, in summary, 'The reader is one who needs formation and receives it from the text of Scripture. Reading with the eyes of faith and in the power of the Spirit represents the process of formation, and the ecclesial community is the social content in which this unfolds' (p.205). The possibilities of such formation are rooted in Basil's distinction between human beings as made 'according to the image of God' and Jesus Christ as 'the image of God' full stop. Salvation enables human beings to actualize the potential that they have as made in the image of God, and use their intelligence and ability to choose in order to attain to a level of genuine knowledge of God. In this the agency of the Spirit is vital, sanctifying the person (not alone, for he/she works with the Son and the Father) and the fullness is eschatological. Pages 205-211 convey a succinct theological anthropology that is both Scriptural and orthodox: worth finding, even if you cannot afford the price of this book. What follows is a statement about inspiration of the text (Scripture yields genuine knowledge, even if such knowledge is incomplete and 'shadowy' (for we now see as in a glass, darkly.) In his analysis of what it means to be a reader of Scripture, it might be fruitful to consider this in the light of Barth's doctrine of the Word, but Sarisky restricts himself to his conversation partner, Basil.

The summary is found on page 232: human beings are situated within the world of the Bible, and conformed by the text and the Spirit to their proper end, conformity to Christ. Reading is a spiritual affair, effecting purification, and the church is the social context within which that reading occurs.

I am glad that I have had the opportunity to review this book. It deserves far wider readership than I suspect will occur, given the high cost of purchase, and so librarians, make sure you buy a copy for your students, and perhaps a paperback will come out at some point, making it more affordable. Questions of how we read Scripture and to what end lie

somewhere near the heart of those strategies that will enable the church to sustain its life in the darkening ages that are upon us.

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**Katie Edwards (ed.), *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 208pp.**

The question of whether our society is biblically literate lies at the heart of this book. If by 'biblical literacy' we mean a systematic knowledge of the text of the Bible, such as used to be gained through a Sunday-school education, then clearly the answer is 'no': most people don't know the Bible in that way. If, however, by 'biblical literacy' we mean that there are biblical tropes and images, ideas and characters, which can be referenced or alluded to without further explanation, then the answer is most surely 'yes'. For Christians fond of bemoaning the demise of the Bible, this may come as something of an unwelcome shock, as it turns out that what has happened is that the Bible has simply shifted beyond the control of the church. It hasn't disappeared from our culture, it's just that those who used to determine the extent of its use can no longer do so.

The various contributors to this edited volume critically examine a variety of ways in which the Bible functions within culture. From popular to highbrow, from comedy to politics, news of the Bible's demise has been greatly exaggerated. In the opening chapter, Máire Byrne untangles the intricate web of interdependence between Roman Catholicism and Irish identity, showing how the Bible has become confined largely to the classroom and the church as a result of its status as a 'holy' or 'sacred' cultural artefact. James Crossley continues the national-political theme with a foray into the role of the Bible in English political discourse, identifying three key ways in which the Bible may be conceived. The 'Liberal Bible' is the Bible of Margaret Thatcher's Good Samaritan exegesis, it is the Bible of Tony Blair's tolerant society where 'love of neighbour' is paramount, and it is the Bible of David Cameron's socially liberal 'Christian country'. Meanwhile, the 'Cultural Bible' lends its weight to implicit nationalism, as biblical themes and phrases keep intact the language of the King James Bible, filtered through the great literary traditions of Shakespeare and Scott, to form a cultural Christianity beloved even by polemical atheists such as Richard Dawkins. The 'Gove Bible', a copy of the King James Bible presented to each school child in honour of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication, crystallises the alliance between political conservatism and the Cultural Bible. Thirdly, we meet the 'Radical Bible', which has featured in English political radicalism from the Levellers to the Chartists, to Marx, to the Labour party constitution, to Tony Benn, to the Occupy Movement.

In the next chapter, Iona Hine takes the volume into the academy, juxtaposing those who would teach the Bible from religious motivations, with those who would do from a literary perspective. Matthew A. Collins then offers an analysis of the way the Bible features in the popular television series *Lost*, finding a 'surprising prominence of biblical allusion (both implicit and explicit) throughout', concluding that the Bible is found rather than lost in *Lost*. Amanda Dillon moves away from popular media to more 'unusual places', and examines the role of the Bible in Street Art (graffiti). Alan W. Hooker then takes a turn to the decidedly mainstream, drawing on the diversity of religious and biblical imagery in the music and videos of Roman-Catholic-educated pop-superstar Madonna, showing how she casts herself as both Eve the redemptrix and Christa. Robert Myles continues the exploration of popular culture, with a chapter on *The Simpsons*. From Homer's 'God is my favourite fictional character', to Ned Flanders' 'I've done everything the Bible says, even the stuff that contradicts the other stuff', this cartoon aimed ostensibly at a younger audience is seen to

encompass a complex engagement with the biblical text. Themes of judgment and retribution dominate the next chapter, as Caroline Blyth offers a reading of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* in conversation with the Levitical law code. Finally, Christopher Meredith lightens the tone with an analysis of the way comedian Eddie Izzard engages the Bible in his anarchic stand-up routines.

In conclusion, on the evidence of this volume alone, it seems that the Bible is alive and well as a cultural commodity. Whilst people may no longer read the Bible in the way they once did, in seventeenth century English printed in two columns in a black-bound book (as Gove's Bible still has it), they do still read the Bible... They read it through film and television, through comedy and music, through politics and education. If biblical studies is conceived as the discipline of the study of the way people read the Bible, there may well be life in the old dog yet.

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**Paul S. Fiddes & Günter Bader (eds), *The Spirit and the Letter: A Tradition and a Reversal* (Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 278pp.**

'The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life' (2 Cor. 3.6) is a fairly worrying dichotomy for those who would seek to combine a life of Christian faith with the discipline of scholarly reflection. In this volume, edited by Fiddes and Bader, ten chapters by different contributors offer a series of engagements with both letter and spirit. Whilst Paul the Apostle may have set 'letter' and 'spirit' in opposition to each other, there is a long tradition within Western Christianity of seeking to reunite them, as scholars and theologians from Origen to Augustine to Luther to Derrida have grappled with these concepts, and in so doing have helped to shape to the afterlife of the Pauline text. Indeed, it is intriguingly suggested in this volume that in many modern instances it is now the letter which gives life, while it is the spirit which kills. The contributors to this volume engage the conversation between these two poles, seeking to negotiate letter and spirit in dialogue with the interpretative tradition.

This is a work of serious and detailed scholarship, with each chapter offering a nuanced and complex interaction with the topic. It is the fruit of many years of labour, and calls for careful reading. Half of the chapters are in translation from German originals, and all have been part of an ongoing research dialogue between the University of Oxford and the Protestant faculty of theology in the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn. In the opening chapter, Fiddes and Bader explore the claim that it is 'the ability to distinguish between spirit and letter' that 'makes a theologian a theologian in the first place'. They suggest that the polarisation between the two is unnecessary, and that a faithful reading of Paul is to see the spirit inscribed in the behaviour of the Christian community.

The first main section of the book is entitled 'Spirit and Letter: A Tradition', and it begins with a study by Michael Wolter, who traces the trajectory of 'spirit' and 'letter' in the New Testament focussing particularly on 2 Cor. 3.6, Rom. 2.29, and 7.6. He concludes that 'letter' is not to be understood as a simple synonym for the entire Jewish law, but rather as *inscribed words*, whether they be the ten commandments, or the 'letters of recommendation' of Paul's opponents. Robert Morgan then turns to modern biblical interpretation, and explores the implications of Origen's hermeneutical correlation of 'letter' with literal interpretation, and 'spirit' with allegorical/spiritual interpretation. Morgan notes that 'spiritual' readings have almost disappeared from modern biblical scholarship, becoming confined to confessional contexts, and against this he suggests a new hermeneutical application of Paul's antithesis whereby both poles are reclaimed as 'essential in Christian study of scripture'. In the next

chapter, Wolfram Kinzig points to the Christian tradition of creedal formulation to offer an exploration of 'faith' as a 'written creed'. If Paul rejects 'letter' for 'spirit', his followers turned spirit back to letter again in their attempts to encapsulate faith in words. Kinzig suggests that 'the spirit congealed into the letter and faith coagulated into formula', before noting that, paradoxically, the creeds functioned as mediators of the spirit, with the spirit breaking through the words that sought to constrain it. Morwenna Ludlow next turns to Origen and Augustine, building on Morgan's observations about Origen's hermeneutical reading of letter and spirit. She concludes that the language of 'sign' (letter) and 'meaning' (spirit) adopted by Augustine allowed him to break through the text of scripture to a lived experience of the love of God.

The second main section is entitled 'Letter and Spirit: A Reversal', and here the book begins to unpack ways in which letter and spirit function within the contemporary context. Paul Fiddes offers a playfully profound reading of 'Derrida, Augustine and Film' in late modernity, where the letter of the text is seen to have the capacity to outlive spiritual readings of it. He suggests that the pairing of 'spirit' and 'letter' has areas of overlap with that 'voice' and 'text' in film studies discourse, and that the narrative movement contained in the underlying 'story' can transcend the media through which it is mediated, pointing to the ultimate story that lies beyond. Günter Bader's chapter explores the thought world of Schleiermacher's speeches 'On Religion', whose polemic against 'dead letters' informs his assessment of Judaism and Christianity. Michael Meyer-Blanck then invites a consideration of preaching as 'conversation in the spirit', by examining the interplay between letter and spirit in the homiletical task. Jochen Schmidt offers Franz Kafka as a way of negotiating the 'crisis of meaning' that has taken place in late modernity.

The concluding section of the volume, entitled 'Spirit in the World', comprises a single essay by Oliver Davies, who sets out his 'distinctively systematic-theological response with respect to the polarity between "spirit and letter".' He notes that Paul's second letter to the Corinthians has its own place within the 'new creation', and invites consideration that in the very words of the text itself, letter and spirit come together in a way analogous to the Eucharistic presence of Christ within the body of his church. He suggests that text and spirit combine through the activity of the Holy Spirit, as life is drawn from letter, and as words breathe spirit. Ultimately it is the act of the creative S/spirit that endlessly generates meaning from matter, as the church learns to 'read' the world.

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**David Goodhew (ed.), *Towards a Theology of Church Growth* (Ashgate, 2015), 243pp.**

*Towards a Theology of Church Growth* was a fascinating book to come to as an accredited evangelist. One might be tempted to assume that evangelists are very gung-ho about church growth, which they see as an unqualified good for which to strive. Reading Goodhew's book made me realise, however, that I had like many other Christians internalised the narrative of decline and become quite pessimistic, even defeatist in my attitude to church growth. The articles in this book were a helpful challenge.

Contributions come from a range of disciplines. Chapters by Mark Bonnington and C. Kevin Rowe explore church growth in the New Testament. Bonnington examines the dichotomy, which he sees as false, between a concern with numerical church growth and a concern with Jesus' proclamation that the Kingdom of God was come. He concludes that these are complementary concerns; that churches are called both to make disciples (and hence grow



in number) and to bring God's kingdom on earth. Jesus preached good news to the poor, but then he went to the cross to give up his life for humankind. Rowe describes the all-encompassing life-changing ecclesiology of Acts, where church growth is creatively subversive, resulting in more and more people living transformed lives distinct from the culture around them.

Alister McGrath, Martin Warner and Graham Tomlin consider church growth from the perspective of eschatology, incarnation and pneumatology respectively. McGrath helpfully points out that an eschatological perspective can protect the church from being overly concerned with the currents and trends of the culture in which it finds itself, as we realise that this too will pass. He warns against an eschatology which sees our present world as transitory and hence disposable, instead arguing that the world will be transformed at the end and that we should even now work toward that transformation which has already been inaugurated. Warner's contribution comes from the catholic tradition of the Church of England. He views church growth from the standpoint of the eucharist and argues that growth should be numerical, yes, but also in the deepening of relationships with God, others and creation around the Lord's table, and rooted in Christ. Tomlin puts his finger on a tension I have often felt between the sense that there is a lot of work to do in mission and yet that it is all ultimately up to God. He stresses the importance of calling on the Holy Spirit, recognising that we are entirely dependent on him and that he cannot be controlled. Further, Tomlin proposes a cross-centred pneumatology; not that the Spirit gives us what we might humanly regard as 'success' in growing our churches, but that the Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of one who died on the cross. Mission should hence be rooted in suffering and the cross.

Five further contributors consider church growth from different points in church history. Ivor Davidson takes us back to the early church; pre-Constantine, numbers remained relatively small, and the marginality of the early Christian communities may be an encouragement to a western church which, as it is always being told, is declining. Sr Benedicta Ward examines the Celtic mission of St Aidan and St Cuthbert, which arose out of a life of prayer and contemplation – again, a focus on the sovereignty of God in mission. There is an interesting point of connection here with Tomlin's view of mission as led and directed by the Holy Spirit. I was most amused by Miranda Threlfall-Holmes' puncturing of the myth of the Middle Ages as the 'golden age' of church attendance – apparently there were many complaints then about the level of people's churchgoing. She describes the missionary activity of St Francis, so often seen as the figurehead for 'evangelism without words', who yet was very energetic in teaching the Christian story. Ashley Null reveals the Reformation Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to be an early advocate of contextualisation, zealous as he was in promoting the importance of the people reading Scripture in their own language. Like all the Reformers, he was passionate about Scripture, believing it to have 'converting power.' This made me think of the many times I have seen large posters at train stations with verses from the Bible, and wished at the very least that a translation other than the King James Bible had been chosen. People need to read Scripture in a language they understand. Like Threlfall-Holmes, Dominic Erdozain challenges the myth that 'everyone went to church' in the past, in his survey of church growth in Britain, 1750-1970. He likewise contests the secularisation thesis that maintains that it is going to be downhill all the way. I found his challenge to this 'theology of doom' extremely helpful, having swallowed the assumptions of the secularisation thesis hook, line and sinker.

The chapter I found most interesting was David Marshall and William Glass' consideration of proclamation in a multi-faith society. They argue that churches tend to engage in dialogue with other faiths or in proclaiming the Christian faith: rarely both. I was very taken with their argument that dialogue requires that we state our point of view – otherwise it is not true dialogue. This chapter helped me to understand the reluctance I sometimes feel in

evangelism (despite being an evangelist!), sensing that I am in some way being arrogant by seeking to persuade others of the truth of my Christian worldview. Dialogue with people of other faiths, or of no faith, requires that we are honest about what we believe, in order that a conversation can take place. Proclamation of our beliefs, however, also requires the humility to listen to and engage with another's views.

This book offers encouragement to those who (like me) can be timid in evangelism and disheartened by the depressing statistics of church decline. It underpins efforts to grow churches with a substantial cross-centred theology and a historical context which is supportive of these efforts and which suggests a more hopeful view of future possibilities. I heartily recommend it.

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**Tom Wright, *Surprised by Scripture* (SPCK, 2014), 240pp.**

“My intention is to pay the fullest possible attention to scripture in both its details and its broad sweep, and to allow the biblical writers to set the agenda rather than forcing on them a scheme of thought that does not do them justice. This task is made harder still by the traditions of thought, prayer, spirituality, and ethics in various parts of the church. My aim is always to allow scripture to enter into dialogue with traditions, including those traditions that think of themselves as biblical, with scripture”.

This explains in Wright's own words the background to this collection of sermons and lectures. He goes on, in this introduction to a seminar delivered at Windsor Castle on eschatology and ecology, to declare that it is his belief that both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in its various branches have been sub-biblical in their treatment of these two areas and by implication other areas where distinctive biblically insight can be given.

So we are in familiar Wright territory as he seeks to call us towards a more profound biblical base to our trust in the Christian Hope and its relationship to the future of life on this planet. Other chapters consider the relationship of religion and science, politics, the ordination of women and the future of the human being.

I confess I was not ready to be impressed. I have never been drawn to selections of previously given material. It smacks of publisher opportunism especially using a title which is a lazy parallel to a previous book i.e. *Surprised by Hope*; with its echoes of C.S. Lewis. Does Wright have aspirations to emulate one of his heroes? I'd wish him to move into Christian apologetics first.

But here is an opportunity to appraise Wright's own criteria for the proper use of scripture. If you know his material it is all rather familiar. Yet it might kindle the interest of anyone who has not read much of his recent work and wonders why he can be a divisive thinker especially among the Evangelical tribes. For what could be more threatening to firmly held convictions than letting the scriptures speak for themselves?

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**Jenny Baker, *Equals: Enjoying Gender Equality in all Areas of Life* (SPCK, 2014), 141pp.**

In this book Baker address the question of gender and gender equality for a wide audience. Baker explores what equality is and what it is not; the science of being masculine or feminine; and the experience of inequality. The second half of the book then seeks to offer what equality might look like at home, in marriage, as parents, in work and within the church. This is an excellent example of practical theology.

The book would be a useful one for those getting married or who are married to both think through the issues of living together, decision making and parenting and to provide examples of how it might be differently. The chapter on church would be useful to be read by those in leadership in the local church, but also those who hold wider roles, especial those involved in planning conferences and workshops.

Having recently read Joanna Jepson's story in *A Lot Like Eve*, and aware of friends who are women in Baptist ministry and conscious of still the wide readership of Grudem, Piper and Driscoll, there is still a task to do in overcoming the unbiblical and theological views of the place and role of women that are presented by those *in* the church. One story Baker tells is of women vicar who arrives in a new aprish and makes contact with the local *Baptist* minister who was male. When they meet, the Baptist minister's wife is present, because on principle he couldn't meet someone of the opposite gender on his own! As Baker notes this views women as persons to be afraid of that make it difficult for women and men to work together and they give the impression that male ministry is the norm and allow men to hold control of who is allowed power and opportunity (p.127). At the same time there is a wider issue of gender stereotyping that takes place in society, for example in the area of children's toys.

Jenny Baker's book is a call for those who are Christians, especially those of us who are men, to not pretend this is not an issue or perhaps not an important enough issue. This is a matter of the gospel. The strength of Baker's book is she offers stories and examples of how we might live differently. If you don't have a church library, start one, for this is a book worth making available and encouraging our congregations to read.

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