



# REGENT'S REVIEWS

APRIL 2011

2.2



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## Editorial

Since the end of February, when it's publicity began, there has perhaps been one book in Christian circles that has been the topic of conversation across twitter, facebook, and numerous blogs: *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* by American megachurch pastor Rob Bell. The subject of the book is pretty obvious from its subtitle. The questions, even before its publication at the end of March, focused on whether Bell had moved beyond evangelical orthodoxy, and in particular had he embraced universalism. If you were hoping for a review of the book, you will be disappointed – although one may appear next time – but hopefully that disappointment will be tempered by a review of a much more interesting, and dare I suggest scholarly, book, *'All Shall Be Well': Explorations in Universal Salvation and Christian Theology, from Origen to Moltmann*.

Alongside *'All Shall Be Well'*, this latest edition of *Regent's Reviews* offers a rich feast of reviews on recent publications within the areas of doctrine, biblical scholarship, practical theology and church history. Enjoy!

*Andy Goodliff*  
Editor

**Terry J. Wright, *Providence Made Flesh: Divine Presence as a Framework for a Theology of Providence* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 266pp.**

The notion of primary and secondary causation has a long history in attempts to explicate the mode of God's action in the world. Particularly associated with Thomas Aquinas, it also undergirds Calvin's account of divine providence. It is an appealing concept in that it seems to offer a way of considering any intra-mundane event or activity as having both divine and creaturely agency. However, the problem comes when we try to explain the relationship between the two. As Terry Wright shows in his admirable 'set up' here, the boon of being able to associate God with every creaturely action is at least qualified by appearing to give God equal 'credit' for bad things as well as good. I have argued elsewhere that this position actually teeters strangely towards a form of pantheism because ultimately we seem bound to say that everything that happens is an expression of the divine will, all creaturely events are expressions of God. As Wright puts it, in relation to Aquinas and Calvin, 'if God *identifies* his action with secondary causation, whether by delegation or accommodation, what ontological distance exists between him and the world...?' (p. 96).

Terry Wright's book, which began life as a PhD thesis at Spurgeon's College, gives a coherent and sometimes technical account and critique of the primary/secondary cause position especially as it appears in Calvin, and then offers a new model for conceiving of divine providential activity in the world. The book is sometimes, as is often the case with theses-become-books, a little rarefied, but it is also penetrating and novel. If you are interested in the core theological problem of God's action in the world (why would you not be?) it will make a rewarding if occasionally demanding read.

After his initial exploration of the problem, Wright gives an account of Calvin's view of providence. It is marked, he suggests by an almost dualistic account of God and the world. God 'needs' secondary causes to be present in the world, but he never satisfactorily accounts for the way primary and secondary causation interact beyond mere assertion that both have their integrity. The particular weight he puts on these matters is perhaps due, suggests Wright, to Calvin's concerns to see off the philosophical opponents of his day and in doing this he fails adequately to ground his view in Scripture. But his views are influential in ways that might not have been anticipated – Wright suggests that both the emerging scientific enterprise and the theological position known as Deism may both owe a debt to Calvin. An examination of the so-called 'causal joint' (the point of interaction between divine and creaturely agency), conducted with reference to some of the debates between theologians and scientists, further convinces Wright that this whole conceptuality is flawed. One aspect to which Wright does not direct much attention is the possibility that the relationship of primary to secondary cause (or, preferring Barth's language, *causa divina* and *causa creatrix*) is always the same in form but not in content. Wright comes to close to discussing this with regard to Polkinghorne's view, and Process thought could be assessed in a similar way.

The positive position advocated by Wright has the merit of being clearly based in Scripture, and of speaking of the Triune God rather than some abstract 'philosophical God' as seems to be the case in some discussions. He admits that it does not solve the problems he has already identified, but suggests that it offers a more satisfactory framework in which they might be addressed. The next part of the book unpacks this: God's presence in Israel, in Christ, and in the church through the

Spirit receives extended attention, with extensive Scriptural reference alongside theological discussion. Wright wants to shift the focus of the doctrine of providence away from the traditional threefold scheme of conservation (sustaining the world from moment to moment), cooperation (accompanying creation in its activity) and governance (moving creation to a particular end) towards a focus on God's faithfulness to creation. Providence becomes 'God's sovereign action within creation to remain faithful to his promise that the world in its entirety shall be the place of God's presence' (p.167, repeated p.191 and p.218). This certainly changes the tone of the debate, and takes Scripture more seriously. It is less clear that it also makes significant progress on the question of how God's activity interacts with creaturely activity. Further, by focusing on Israel and the Church, alongside Christ and the Spirit, Wright appears to be taking the risk of narrowing the interest in divine activity to the human sphere. However, Wright admits that all he is trying to do is set out a framework within which a doctrine of providence might be pursued, rather than actually pursue it.

The doctrine that begins to take shape is not only Christocentric, but also one which has its heart in a particular (sacrificial) reading of the significance of the cross in making atonement. God intends to actualise his presence throughout the 'world', and this is not God's will mediating his presence through secondary causes but 'something that happens through creaturely faithfulness made possible and guaranteed by his own, faithful action' (p.219) – it is Trinitarian as well as Christocentric. His conclusion does attempt to give suggestions about remaining problems, and in his suggestion that God's presence is more *intense* in some events than in others (p.230) he comes closest to addressing my form /content distinction. He admits that two considerable 'how' questions remain – how we know in which events God might be more intensively present, and whether this also furnishes us with clues about how God acts in such events. We might hope that Wright will return soon to these and similar questions, and press on with a doctrine of providence within the parameters he sets out in this book.

*Rob Ellis*  
*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Gregory MacDonald (ed.), *"All Shall Be Well": Explorations in Universal Salvation and Christian Theology, from Origen to Moltmann* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 439pp**

When this book arrived universalism seemed only to be in the background, spoken of in hushed or dismissive tones. As this review is sent off the subject has been blown open through the publication of a book by Rob Bell, an American pastor and is now the hot topic of conversations, blogs, articles, and shortly (no doubt) more books. What an appropriate time for such a useful book as *All Shall Be Well* to be in our hands!

This collection of essays sets out to explore rather than defend Christian universalism. It does however want to suggest that universalism need not be seen as heresy, and wishes to encourage its acceptance in authentic Christian debate.

What it achieves superbly is to lead the reader through the surprising variety of approaches to universalism. Contained within are seventeen chapters where a different contributor investigates the theology of a certain thinker (or pair of thinkers).

These thinkers, which include names many would recognise: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Julian of Norwich, Schleiermacher, Forsyth, Barth, von Balthasar, Hick, Moltmann, plus those less familiar, each have their own unique contexts, backgrounds, experiences and goals, which means that there are not seventeen descriptions of the same thing.

This book demonstrates that those who are named universalists can be grouped together because of the similar conclusions which they reach regarding the eventual restoration of all people, but cannot be assumed to have more than that in common. Indeed, some essays showed their subjects to primarily utilise philosophy, others the biblical witness, others revelations received from God. There are differences between what the thinker considers to be knowable, with varying degrees of hope and certainty, and assorted opinions on the need to be dogmatic or not. There are striking contrasts between the theological journeys that each makes towards universalism, for example: for some love must be the firm guiding principle above others; for another it is God's justice that must be satisfied first and foremost; another wishes to see no conflict between them. There are also differences between the concepts of hell employed, including: an eternal possibility still; a temporary place where either God is the severe punisher or humanity's suffering is self-inflicted; while for others the idea of post-mortem suffering is reprehensible. Some were accused by contemporaries or present day reviewers of having weak doctrines of atonement, while others constructed their thoughts precisely on the Cross and Resurrection.

Each of the contributors also has their own unique approach to their subject. Some spend time with the history and personality of the thinker, others dive straight into the arguments and their consequences. The critical engagement is largely thoughtful and varied; the same problems are not rehearsed repeatedly in each chapter. This is testament to the variety of approaches contained within and the equally varied sympathies and concerns of the contributors (it is the subjects and not necessarily the contributors who are selected for their universalism).

This book will help to grow an understanding of the rich complexity of this area of Christian theology. Those reading this book who previously had a relatively narrow conception of the nature of universalism may have their opinions broadened and become more appreciative of the diverse questions that lead people to consider this viewpoint. However, the stories and questions within also speak of the fearlessness and humility demonstrated by various individuals in their quest for truth and dialogue. Their example serves as an inspiration for all theological wrestling, both personal and communal. Needless to say, I am glad I read this book.

*Ben Dare*

*South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff*

**Suzanne McDonald, *Re-Imaging Election: Divine Election as representing God to others and others to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), xx + 213pp.**

Why yet another book on the theme of election (particularly a published academic dissertation)? Has not the Western Church, since Augustine, expended enough paper and ink on this impenetrable enigma? Why does Calvin, having told us not to lose ourselves in this labyrinth, not pay better heed to his own advice? And why do so many of us persist in the same futile pursuit? In the Introduction to this volume, Suzanne McDonald offers a personal explanation for finding the theme compelling –

an explanation which resonates with this reviewer since my own research had a similar focus for similar personal reasons (and, on being confronted with this explanation again, I am forced to ponder why that which I once found so engrossing no longer grips me to anything like the same degree).

In this instance, the reengagement with the theme is amply justified, and this principally for two reasons. In the first place Dr. McDonald offers us succinct and perceptive summaries of the doctrine as it has been understood by John Owen and, contrastingly, by Karl Barth. There have been a number of explorations of Barth's distinctive approach to the doctrine in the second volume of the *Church Dogmatics* but Suzanne McDonald does us the service of setting this understanding against his more traditional understanding as it is found in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, thereby drawing attention to some degree to those factors that prompted Barth so radically to change his mind. Strangely there have been rather less engagements with John Owen's exposition of the doctrine though the classic Reformed position has probably never been expressed more thoroughly nor in a way that renders its difficulties so starkly. Over three chapters Dr McDonald summarises these contributions in a manner that identifies some of their strengths, weaknesses, and theological consequences, drawing attention in particular to the pneumatological weakness of Barth's later and mature position. I doubt that there is much that is new or ground-breaking here, but the summaries and criticisms are presented with commendable succinctness and clarity.

In Part Two of the book, the central two chapters, the author explores biblical notions of election, engaging with a range of scholars including Brueggemann, Bauckham, Wright, and Seitz, and concluding with the isolation of three 'guiding principles' for a re-imagining of a doctrine of election: first that '*God sets apart an elect people as the means by which his purpose of blessing will be fulfilled in the face of human sinfulness*'; secondly that '*representation is a significant category through which to understand the nature and purpose of election*'; thirdly that '*the believing community and the believing community alone can be described as elect in Christ*' (pp.113f.).

This third guiding principle, taken without reference to the first two, might suggest that the double predestination classically expressed by Owen has triumphed in McDonald's thinking, but the final part of the volume, two chapters together with a brief epilogue, effect a qualification of this final 'principle' by the principles of universal blessing and representation that issues in an understanding that is probably closer to the mature Barth but without his pneumatological weakness: it is not that all humanity are elect in Christ, it is rather that all humanity are represented in Christ and in the church as the representative elect community as a means of universal blessing – and, as with Barth, we are simply not in a position to presume the final outcome of this representative blessing. As a 'parable' of how a community can represent the relational personhood of another McDonald ponders the personal dynamics of dementia where 'the unique identity and personhood of someone... can be preserved... as it is held in being for them... by others' (p.160). I'm not entirely convinced by the 'parable' since relational definitions of personhood are notoriously problematic when the means of relating are inhibited (and that is not just through dementia). Neither am I convinced that the collapse of anthropology into Christology (as in Barth) is a fault to be avoided for the preservation of 'the full distinctiveness of the elect community' (p.180) – but I gladly and gratefully concede that Suzanne McDonald has contributed something original and intriguing in a debate that is in danger of growing stale and stagnant.



One final negative comment, and that directed to Eerdmans as publisher rather than McDonald as author. The book is well produced and edited but an Index that seems to exclude all footnote references is less than helpful in a work that deserves to be consulted for many years to come within this continuing academic debate. To belittle such a worthy contribution by the brevity of its index is unnecessarily insulting.

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

**Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 232pp**

Soren Kierkegaard is one of the most exciting, influential and – at times – incomprehensible Christian thinkers of the nineteenth century. Those who have wrestled with his writing may find him elusive (writing under a variety of synonyms), unbalanced (since he was trying to redress the imbalance he perceived in his own cultural context) and unclear (until the recurring themes of his writings gradually emerge into clarity).

Kierkegaard is often credited (or blamed) for existentialism, a concept far more widely discussed than understood. He is likewise accused of individualism by those who read him more as a systematic theologian than a prophetic figure. But his influence upon twentieth century theologians (especially Barth, Bultmann, Brunner and Bonhoeffer) as well as philosophers, (from Heidegger, through Sartre and Derrida) is undeniably deep. In fact it was Ludwig Wittgenstein who is reputed to have said of Kierkegaard, ‘he is far too deep for me.’

Anyone then, trying to introduce the reader to a figure as complex as Kierkegaard, faces a daunting task. But Murray Rae brings this Danish thinker to life in a way that is not only comprehensible and clear, but exciting and insightful. An obvious familiarity with primary and secondary literature, coupled with a broad knowledge of the context in which Kierkegaard lived, makes Rae a competent guide through his writings.

Rae leads the reader through a personal narrative of Kierkegaard’s life, his troublesome relationship with his father, his failed engagement, and his belief that he was living under a curse. In so doing, by the time we arrive at a discussion of Kierkegaard’s literature, we are already getting to grips with its significance.

The Kierkegaard portrayed by Rae is certainly no systematic theologian in the traditional sense, but appears rather as a prophet. As such, his work cannot be understood outside the context of that to which he was reacting. Nevertheless, through the course of his commentary, Rae not only steers us through his teachings in relation to the issues of his own day. He also reveals something of a systematic substructure running throughout Kierkegaard’s writings, as he labours to relate ethics, the church, and the Christian life thoroughly and radically towards the insufferable otherness of Christ.

The prophetic strain in Rae’s portrayal surfaces most clearly in his summary of the philosopher’s varied and controversial writings, as he claims that ultimately, ‘Kierkegaard retreats and his reader is left alone before God.’

Regardless of whether Kierkegaard is to be regarded as a theologian, Rae’s account portrays a thinker who relentlessly gave himself to exploring, not so much the

creedal dimensions of Christian belief, as the relationship between the believer and the figure of Jesus Christ.

The lively and lucid manner in which it is written, leave the contemporary reader in little doubt about the relevance and value of Soren Kierkegaard in our own world.

*Simon Perry*

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**Ian A. McFarland, *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xvi + 238pp**

It's some years since I much enjoyed reading Alistair McFadyen's *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) and was therefore fascinated to receive this further discussion (if not defence) of an Augustinian understanding of original sin. Both are excellent books – and the one probably should not be read without reference to the other – but both are very different treatments of the subject. Whereas McFadyen considers the explanatory value of the Augustinian doctrine in relation to the horrors of holocaust and abuse, McFarland offers a more traditional and extraordinarily thorough description and discussion of the doctrine itself. There have been several discussions of the Augustinian doctrine but it would be hard to imagine this present discussion being bettered for its meticulous treatment both of Augustine and his subsequent interpreters and critics. The book is divided into three sections: part one, comprising two chapters, sets the scene by identifying the problem of original sin and by carefully describing Augustine's response to the problem (avoiding the pitfalls of caricature into which so many more cursory discussions lapse); part two, comprising three chapters, attempts to 'reconfigure' the debate with reference to the seventh-century monothelite debate and, specifically, Maximus' insistence that Christ possesses both a truly human and a truly divine will - an issue considered in McFarland's previous works: *Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001) and *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); part three (three chapters) presses the insights of part two into a reconstruction of the doctrine of original sin with more nuanced understandings of the human will, human nature, and human personhood. While unapologetically academic in style, I found this to be most engagingly written and there are few academic books over recent years that have brought me as much pleasure and provoked my thinking to such a degree. No one wanting to engage seriously with this theme could afford to overlook this discussion, its interpretations, its criticisms of alternatives, and its positive propositions. However, this glowing recommendation is not without a couple of qualifications.

In the first place, those unconvinced by McFarland's previous defence of dyothelite Christology will not be convinced here and, to a significant degree, his defence of a reconstructed Augustinianism is dependent upon his engagement with this seventh-century (largely Eastern) debate. The problem is not with the 'orthodoxy' of the position if matters have to be expressed in this way but rather the problem is whether it is helpful (then and especially now) to express matters in this way, to speak of properties such as 'natures' and 'wills', less still a 'natural will' and a 'gnomic will' as if they were 'somethings'. Let me not be misunderstood: I affirm a

Chalcedonian definition of Christ as a single person in two natures but, with so many writers both before and since the Council of Chalcedon, I struggle to identify what precisely is meant by person (*hypostasis*) and, more especially, what precisely is meant by 'nature' (*phusis*). I therefore struggle to follow Maximus' argument (and MacFarland's consequent argument) that 'will' is a property of nature rather than person. Even within an academic background the argument is unpersuasive and I suspect that a contemporary discussion of original sin must find more accessible and convincing ways of expressing human properties.

Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, the Augustinian account of original sin tends to define humanity firstly in Adam and only secondly in Christ (or, in its Federalist version, either in Adam or in Christ) and though the monothelite/dyothelite debate roots the wider discussion Christologically, and though in introduction McFarland clarifies that the doctrine of original sin is properly soteriological, this treatment still falls short of beginning with Christ in its definition of sin. Arguably even Karl Barth fails to follow his own Christo-centric principle through sufficiently radically at this point: if our place in sin as sinners is defined by the fact that Christ has taken our place then any truly Christian doctrine of sin and of original sin must be more thoroughly rooted in him and in our humanity as his humanity defines it. There is so much of promise in this discussion in this respect – notwithstanding the previous criticisms of traditional terminology – but, for this reader at least, the discussion still falls short of a radically Christological doctrine of sin.

One final comment: the book's subtitle identifies the work as a 'meditation' – there is much here that is historically and theologically rigorous but little that I found to be meditative.

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

**Daniel Migliore (ed.), *Commanding Grace: Studies in Karl Barth's Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 255pp**

This set of essays arise from lectures given at Princeton Theological Seminary 2008, and the structure of the book puts them into pairs, the second essayist responding to the first, with the former tending to take up a slightly more critical view of Barth's position than the latter. This shape works well and produces some fine discussion, as we shall see. Daniel Migliore gives a very useful and wide ranging overview of the shape of Barth's ethics, rooted as they are in the triune God. The discipline of theological ethics, for Barth, is no abstract matter but connects to the questions of the identity and activity of God. Migliore quotes Barth tellingly from his very last fragment of the *Church Dogmatics*: 'The command of the one God is centrally the command of the Lord of the covenant, in which the action of sinful man is determined, ordered, and limited by the free grace of the faithful God manifest and operative in Jesus Christ.' Here is indeed the core of Barth's ethics, the self revelation of the divine grace in the narrative of the way of the Son of God into the far country. The question many ethicists have asked is whether this is too narrow a lens through which to engage in the ethical task.

The topics chosen by our sparring partners in the book are as follows. Nigel Biggar and Eric Gregory engage on the desirability of Barth being opened up to wider resources for Christian ethical thinking. William Werpehowski and John Bowlin

ponder the place and role of the state and war in Barth's ethics, seeking to clarify Barth on just war theory. David Haddorf and Todd Cioffi also look at politics and ethics, the former explaining Barth's preference for democracy, the latter agreeing but opining that Barth favoured democracy on the economic grounds that it best helped the poor. Timothy Gorringer and Katherine Sonderegger produce a very interesting pair of essays on criminal justice in relation to Barth's doctrine of atonement. Gorringer is known for his commendation of restorative justice and rejection of judgementalist blame. He finds Barth's doctrine of redemption largely free of the divine vengeance and yet finds talk of punishment lingering as a regrettable residue. Sonderegger writes a nuanced reply, agreeing with much of Gorringer's analysis but thinks he has ultimately opted for an exemplarist reading of Barth which cannot stand – to use the words of William Temple rather than Sonderegger herself, Jesus has done absolutely everything for us, our role is to believe that and not worry about judgement undertaken for us. The book is worth the money for these two essays alone.

Kathryn Tanner discusses Barth's lack of prescriptive programming for economic ethics, much as Moltmann has done. Christopher Holmes responds that basically it is a grave mistake to hitch one's theological wagon to what may be a fad of the age: and 'National Socialism' was one that only Barth saw through at the time, we recall: I am with Holmes on this! Paul Nimmo and Jesse Couenhoven discuss Barth on freedom and love, his doctrine of election and Trinity: again two powerful articles.

So quite a packet of high level theological ethical discussion is given. The editor rightly laments the lack of discussion of abortion, suicide, euthanasia and homosexuality, perhaps another conference might ensure these are discussed. For my money Barth emerges from this exercise impressively. A pity no essayist from the collection 'On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa', from a practical situation of apartheid oppression, could have been given a voice – Barth was curiously helpful in that utterly real and awful situation it seems.

*Timothy Bradshaw*  
*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and His Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 376pp**

This is a magnificent book. It is also, alas, not one many ministers will be equipped to read. In an earlier volume, *Nicaea and its Legacy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), Ayres sifted an astonishing amount of scholarship to give this generation its definitive statement of the fourth century debates, replacing Hanson's magisterial *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*. At the same time he offered some sharp comments concerning the prevalent accounts of patristic Trinitarianism theology used by contemporary theologians. Now he displays at least equal levels of erudition, if (thankfully) a substantially lower level of polemic, to give us as authoritative an account of Augustine's Trinitarianism as we are likely to receive.

For the minister with average levels of theological education, the key take-home point is this: the account of Augustine as distorting the Nicene Trinitarian settlement with an overly-strong doctrine of divine unity, suggested first by De Régnon in 1898 and still regularly repeated (at least by non-specialists), is wrong in almost every detail. Augustine's theology was as thoroughly Trinitarian as any of the

Greek fathers of the fourth century, with a strong emphasis on the irreducibility of the three persons, and a complex and satisfying account of their communion-in-unity. In this, Ayres is summarising, but also contributing to significantly, a scholarly trajectory that spans three decades now, and giving that trajectory what will surely be its definitive summary statement in English. Augustine was one of the greatest, and most faithful, interpreters of the Trinitarian doctrine codified by Nicaea and Constantinople.

This reading is accomplished by paying sustained attention to the whole of Augustine's corpus, in its historical development, rather than just looking at *De Trinitate* as if it were a crystallisation of Augustine's mature position. Further, the intellectual context is significant: if one reads the minor Latin theologians, of whom most of us have never heard, then Augustine can be located within a living tradition of exegetical debate that was seeking to address apparently pro-Arian texts of Scripture and to find convincing exegetical rebuttals. Augustine (like almost every great theologian) was primarily an interpreter of Holy Scripture, and his Trinitarian theology will never be understood if read outside of this exegetical context.

Ayres divides his book up into three parts. The first, chh.1-3, addresses the development of Augustine's Trinitarianism. This is formidably technical and involved in its arguments; Ayres essentially wants to argue that the 393 work *De fide et symbolo* is in fact of decisive importance for understanding Augustine's development, and that this has never previously been adequately noticed. The second part, chh.4-6, is largely about our knowledge of God's life, Augustine's epistemology was shaped by his Christology, and his well-known accounts of the soul's ascent to contemplate the divine life must be read in this light. This theme recurs in the closing chapters, 11-12, which focus on the practice of contemplation recommended in the second half of *De Trinitate*. The third part, chh.7-10, discuss Augustine's mature account of the triune life. He rejects 'genus-species' analogies, instead developing an account of the Spirit as the unifier of the divine life. These are the chapters to read for anyone wanting to know how her recent theological education misrepresented Augustine, but they are not easy reading.

Ayres will not find a very wide readership; he writes as a specialist for specialists. In fifteen years' time, however, many of the books that were the staple of my theological education fifteen years ago will be gathering dust, completely replaced by others telling a very different story about Augustine and the Trinity. This book by Ayres will be a key catalyst in that process of revision.

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**Michael P. Jensen, *Martyrdom and Identity: The Self on Trial* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 224pp**

This rich and intricate book by Michael Jensen deserves a wider audience than I fear it may attract. Clearly the outworking of an impressive doctoral thesis, it wears its learning a little heavily at times, yet it will reward the careful reader with challenging insights into what it means to be a Christian.

It is often said that the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw more Christians martyred than all the previous centuries combined. Yet the concept of martyrdom, in the western church at least, is more often seen as the catastrophic exception to the norm rather than the

compelling paradigm of personal identity. Jensen questions how this can be, given the foundational narrative of Jesus Christ, a saviour who was falsely accused and executed by the authorities of his day. Jensen believes that to be shaped by those events, if even to the point of death, should be the normative, if counter-intuitive characteristic of every Christian.

To make his case, Jensen clears a path through contemporary critiques of martyrdom: particularly those offered by the philosopher Charles Taylor and the author Salman Rushdie in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. Jensen argues that their criticisms of martyrdom as an inauthentic or destructive expression of human identity do not stand against the Christian claim that faith is only authentically expressed through an affirming notion of martyrdom as seen in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

This takes us to the heart of the book: the martyrdom of Thomas Becket as articulated in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. With great literary dexterity attention is focused, not on the death of the Archbishop, but on the temptations that precede it. These offer Thomas alternative choices of action that would avert his murder, but could compromise his identity as a living witness to Christ.

The first temptation, the lure of pragmatic safety and comfortable ease, is one that is very real for Thomas in his situation with Henry II but also has compelling parallels for much contemporary Christianity. The second also carries a similar resonance. Thomas is offered the opportunity to collude with royal power, if he will then submit to the authority of the King. This is an invitation to narrate one's identity in terms of political activity but asks Jensen, at what cost? "Can the Christian self be understood in terms of citizenship of the world if it is to be true to its essential cruciformity?" (p.75). He believes not: such alliances compromise a narration of the self in Christ. The third temptation parallels the second: but rather than collusion with the King, Thomas is enticed to make allegiance with a conspiracy against the tyranny of the Crown. This is the opportunity to forge an identity through the actions of idealism. The final temptation is the appeal of everlasting renown. In the face of impending murder Thomas is invited to narrate himself into the role of hero and saint. In this, martyrdom its self becomes a temptation because it may satisfy one's pride and result in recognition by others.

Jensen concludes that the choices offered to Thomas (and also to us) seek to entice the disciple into a constructed identity that is 'concrete, recognizable and achievable.' But if the Christian is to be constant to the narrative of Jesus then they must trust in the providence of God, diligently receiving the identity given to us in Christ and resisting the other possible selves that emerge from more alluring alternatives.

Erudite and compelling, Jensen has written a tour-de-force on the nature of the Christian self. But given that it is the very self he puts on trial, this may also prove to be an unsettling book for many. His questions refuse to rest within the page and his arguments have an existential urgency that demands personal attention. Any reader should be prepared to wrestle with themselves.

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**Nigel G. Wright, *Jesus Christ – Alpha and Omega* (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2010), 203pp**

This is Nigel Wright's third little book for the Bible Reading Fellowship, following studies on the Holy Spirit, *God on the Inside* (2006), and on the gospel birth narratives, *The Real Godsend* (2009). This book sees Wright turn his attention to Jesus Christ. The book is also published as a book for Lent, and provides a reflection for each day through Lent. Divided into two parts – a journey of discovery, which provides a wide-ranging exploration of the person and work of Christ arising out of the biblical testimony; and a journey of discipleship, which with the first journey in mind, asks what this means for us, particularly the events of Holy Week, as disciples of this whole Christ. The book also includes a set of questions for group or personal reflection.

In this, and the earlier books, Wright is not attempting to do new theology as such, but providing a readable and accessible introduction to the Jesus Christ that Christians confess. In this regard it stretches the narrow and perhaps one-sided views of who Jesus is and enables a larger vision to be presented. Wright writes as the gifted communicator that he is and the book is a great short introduction to Jesus, for those who are either at the beginning of their Christian faith or much further on.

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**Lindsey Hall, Murray Rae and Steve Holmes, *Christian Doctrine – SCM Reader* (London: SCM, 2010), 576pp**

Something that often struck me as a theology student was the real deficit of good readers in theology. There are a number of readers that focus on particular areas within theology, and there are a number of excellent text-books (such as the Wiley-Blackwell series which includes *The Modern Theologians*), but when it comes to a reader to introduce the student to 'Christian doctrine' broadly, rather than specific doctrinal inquiries, the bookshelves seem rather thin.

Of course, one book could never introduce one to the whole of Christian doctrine, even superficially. If, however, we view specific doctrines as part of a coherent whole, rather than as stand-alone disciplines, then it makes sense that there should be a reader to introduce the student systematic theologian to this whole. This reader seems to me a worthy candidate.

The legacy of Colin Gunton is evident from the very beginning of this reader – rather than a section on the unity and nature of God followed by a section on the Trinity, the division is merely temporal: The Doctrine of God in Patristic Development, followed by The Doctrine of God from the Reformation to the Present Day. Both sections mingle extracts that are more Trinitarian with those more concerned with the nature of God. The result is a much more integrated introduction to the doctrine of God than is usual, and the Trinity takes a much more central place in proceedings. I think this is a praiseworthy approach.

It is also refreshing to see feminist and liberationist theologies being treated within broader sections of doctrine – such as within sections on the doctrine of the Church or the Work of Christ – rather than being lumped together at the end as a kind of addendum on novel theological innovations. If this represents the mainstreaming of

these strands, and a recognition of the contribution they make to the wider discussion, then this is a very encouraging development.

If I were to raise one criticism of this reader, it would be one anticipated by the editors in their general introduction: the reader is unapologetically reformed. Most of the sections seem to be divided up with 30-50% pre-reformation and 50-70% post-reformation extracts. Where non-Protestant voices are included in the post-reformation parts, they are too often those rather obvious inclusions who serve as the context for a Protestant doctrinal development or movement. The editors, however, acknowledge this quite frankly in their introduction, and it is probable that this does reflect the state of theology syllabi in many British universities.

That this reader seems to reflect theology syllabi, of course, is what will make it such a valuable tool for students. It is a well-structured volume including some very carefully chosen extracts that should whet the appetite of the reader, and encourage her to read more widely around the subject. It also manages to fit an impressive number of voices into each section, which is likely to introduce the student to more perspectives than can realistically be included in the average university doctrine module. I wish this reader had existed when I was still a student.

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**Robin Parry, *Lamentations. The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 272pp**

The intention of this series of commentaries is a theological reading of the text of Scripture, with its 'series' title referring to the work of Gadamer as one of the pre-eminent theoreticians of hermeneutics of the last century, whose 'two horizons (that of the text and that of the reader) gave the title to Anthony Thiselton's re-working of his doctoral thesis, *The Two Horizons*, that brought the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Wittgenstein to the attention of biblical students in the 1980s. In a theological reading of Scripture, those two horizons approach the fusion that marks effective interpretation in a particular and focused way, foregrounding the theological concerns and presuppositions of the interpreter, rather than the concerns for textual matters, or socio-historical insights, that preoccupy commentators in the historic-critical traditions which most evangelical interpreters have bought into.

This way of engaging with Scripture is particularly important when reading *Lamentations*, as Parry says, '*Lamentations* was not written *by* Christians, nor *for* Christians. The theology of *Lamentations* is not Christian theology' (p.2). Yet it is a part of the Jewish Scriptures accepted by the earliest churches as their Scriptures, and so as well as listening to 'the text's distinctive, pre-Christian voice' (pp.2-3) one has to 'bring that voice into dialogue with God's revelation in Christ to discern how God is addressing the *church* through it.... So, our aim is to hear the distinctive theological voice of *Lamentations* but, in the second part, to hear how the acoustics change when that voice is heard in the Cathedral of Christ' (p.3).

In the introduction Parry fulfils the normal expectations of commentators, discussing matters of authorship, date and place of composition (probably not Jeremiah, but written in that context, sixth century, during the period of exile, and written in Judah by those 'left behind after the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of its key citizens' (p.5). The poems of *Lamentations* were composed for public liturgical



rituals of lament, it is widely suggested (although we have no evidence to confirm that) and the character of lament has much in common with the wider Near Eastern traditions, giving it a wider horizon than simply Judah's experience: 'while the suffering of Judah has unique dimensions, it is not utterly unlike the suffering of wider humanity' (p.9). Questions of poetic forms, structures in the book and its canonical status are discussed. Christians tend to follow the Septuagint, placing the book after Jeremiah, reflecting the conviction of the LXX editors that Jeremiah was its author. The Masoretic Text, by contrast, places it in a section of the writings known as the Megilloth (festival scrolls) right after Psalms and Proverbs, and at the head of a group of texts that follow (Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles) that are about exile and return. Both placements point to theological insights that will be picked up in the commentary that follows.

The theology of Lamentations is described from the standpoint of various key modern studies, beginning with Gottwald in 1954, and continuing with Bertil Albrekson (1963), who agrees with much that Gottwald suggests, but finds the key in the contrast between the belief that Jerusalem was inviolable and the real experience, 'the brutal facts', of suffering. Westermann (1990) places the form of lament as the key theological motif, while F.W.Dobbs-Allsopp (1997) sees the book as a tragedy, undermining the ethical vision of the Deuteronomic, prophetic, Wisdom and Zion traditions. Here a 'traditional theology' is 'exposed as unable to handle the reality of the crisis'(p.22). Tod Linafelt (2000) argues that the book aims 'to solicit horror and compassion from its readers... it is about survival in the face of unbearable horror. The absence of God throughout the book leaves an open wound for later readers to deal with' (p.23). For Kathleen O'Connor (2003) the book teaches us how to pray with honesty as we face horror full in the face - how to pray when God is silent. Paul House (2004), Elizabeth Boase (2006) and Carleen Mandolfo (2007) complete the survey.

Parry argues that covenant is the context within which the theme of sin and punishment must be understood. The focus is not on the sin so much as on the terrible suffering of the people, and the ultimate cause of that suffering, for Lamentations, is God. 'The buck stops with him' (p.30). 'Both genuine freedom and strong sovereignty are affirmed, and it is left to later theologians and philosophers to try to make sense of the resulting tension' (p.31). But because in the end YHWH is the only one in whom hope might be found, the sense of despair turns to prayer. 'We might not like this theology', says Parry, 'but if we are to hear Lamentations on its own terms, then I suggest, this is how things look' (p.31).

What follows, almost half of the book, is then a detailed commentary, which requires some knowledge of Hebrew to make the fullest use of its insights, but not essentially so. This is a good, textual commentary, relating the text to its context. The final third of the book explores the theological horizons of the book in some detail. These horizons include its liturgical use (Christians, for instance, use it in the service of *Tenebrae* during the Thursday through Saturday of Holy Week) and its biblical context in Jeremiah and Second Isaiah. In its political context, the book is about the impact of empire, and the use of massive imperial force to overwhelm stubborn nations, seen from the perspective of the victims. A substantial part of this section contrasts the valiant man of Lamentations and Christ. Matthew, for instance, portrays Jesus on the cross as playing the same role as Lady Jerusalem (p.183) The use of the book in Holy Week is key to its place in Holy Saturday theology, especially as espoused by Alan Lewis in *Between Cross and Resurrection*. The anger of God is discussed, as is divine suffering. Finally, the place of lament in Christian spirituality

(in St John of the Cross or St Gregory's *Pastoral Rule*, for instance), and in responding to suffering, is developed.

Lamentations is probably one of the least read or preached Scriptures today. It sounds and feels alien to the 'praise-dominated' worship of much contemporary church life. However, it is a vital reminder that life is not all blessing and joy, and for many, the experience of God is precisely one that resonates with lamentations. Buy the commentary (its good value at under £15) and explore the book, and preach theologically from it. Congregations might just appreciate a dose of theological and spiritual reality, and provide them with the voice of lament that is a missing ingredient in so much contemporary worship.

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**J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1122pp***

This latest addition to the long-running and highly regarded NICNT series replaces the previous commentary written by Leon Morris (1971, 1995). The first thing to be noted is that, in keeping with other volumes in the series, this is a substantial work running to nearly 1,100 pages including indices. However, it is not an inaccessible commentary. Rather, it is carefully balanced, systematically structured, and well written. After an introduction which includes a thorough discussion of the authorship question (conclusion: anonymous), the commentary itself follows the standard form of verse-by-verse exposition, with each section building on the author's own translation of the Greek text.

Ramsey Michaels seeks to engage the biblical text at face value, remaining deliberately undistracted by the minutiae of 'background' questions. Consequently, his commentary allows the reader to encounter the text in its canonical form, and to engage with it as a coherent literary work of inspired genius. Significant themes are introduced as they appear, and key metaphors in the gospel, such as 'light' and 'life' are explored in appropriate depth. Contested issues are presented in an even-handed manner, with reasoned conclusions offered. For example, in the debate over whether it is Jesus or Pilate who is seated on the judgment seat (19.13), Michaels suggests that to place Jesus in the seat would create an extension of the 'mocking' scene whereby Jesus the prisoner is forced to ape the judgement of Pilate, something which is out of place with the solemnity of Pilate pronouncing his reluctant verdict of death. He therefore concludes that it is Pilate who seats himself in the judgment seat (p.940). The commentary engages with an impressive breadth of Johannine scholarship, and the footnotes provide detailed opportunities for those wanting to follow through the insights on offer. The inclusion of quotations from hard to locate Jewish, Greek and Roman sources is especially useful. Students and scholars will appreciate the way in which the commentary synthesises the fruits of critical engagement with its analysis of the biblical text.

This is a very fine commentary, which is both accessible in its style and scholarly in its scope. Those seeking a companion to a sustained engagement with the text will find much here to satisfy. One can sometimes feel, after engaging with a detailed commentary, that the biblical text itself has receded or fragmented. This is not the case with Ramsey Michaels' commentary on John. His approach and style

shed new light on the text, allowing it to be encountered in new ways, but all the while preserving the integrity of the underlying text itself. This is a commentary which respects the gospel of John, and which will be welcomed by scholars, students and pastors alike.

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**Neil Richardson, *John for Today: Reading the Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM, 2010), 153pp.**

*John for Today* is an introduction to the Fourth Gospel intended for readers who have little or no knowledge of the scholarly debates of the last half century. They are assumed to find John difficult to understand compared with the Synoptics, hard to believe and generally unattractive, being (as they suppose) other-worldly, sexist in vocabulary, exclusive vis a vis other religions and anti-semitic. Richardson sets himself the task of dispelling this impression and of showing that the Gospel contains an attractive portrait of a Jesus who makes known to us a loving God we can believe in today. 'John's story', he says, 'is the story of Love's invitation to Life' (p.34).

The book consists of five chapters. Richardson begins with a short exposition of the Prologue, understood as the author's guide to all that follows. From this we learn that the Gospel is the story of a mission, a father sending his son, a drama that is played out while we the spectators know more than the actors, and the story of a trial – but who is in the dock? The second chapter deals with questions of authorship and reliability. The author hides behind the figure of the Beloved Disciple, who is portrayed as a model disciple. 'John carried on where the other Gospel writers left off' (p.47). His account of Jesus is faithful rather than historical, the words of Jesus being extended by later Christian reflection. The author and his community (why is John always credited with having a 'community'?) moved from Judea to Ephesus after the destruction of Jerusalem, which accounts for the mixture of Jewish and Greek perspectives and the mixture of historical tradition and later reflection.

The third chapter seeks to defend the Gospel against its 'cultured despisers'. At the same time Richardson wants to lead his (more conservative?) readers away from interpretations that might give the critics ammunition. So, for example, he objects strongly to the phrase 'in the world but not of it' as fair summary of the Gospel's stance. Christians are not of the world but they are sent into it, as Jesus was, and must never forget that God loved the world. Similarly, John 14:6 should not be interpreted to exclude from salvation those who do not make a Christian profession, and 'there are better ways of witnessing than arguing for the uniqueness of Jesus' (p.81). Readers will have to decide how convincing they find this.

The fourth chapter purports to bring us to the heart of the subject, but I found it too brief to do justice to the great themes of John's Gospel which it attempts to cover. It starts with a discussion of how Jesus can be fully human and fully divine, roughly corresponding to the first four chapters of the Gospel. The next section deals with the controversies of chapter 5-8. Chapters 9-17 are discussed under the heading of 'Community of Love', and the trial, death and resurrection of Jesus are seen to be the climax of the Gospel and the revelation of Christ's glory. We are told that the trial scene is 'an imaginative reconstruction, but no less powerful and inspired than a

more historical account' (p.118), which pretty much sums up Richardson's view of the Gospel as a whole.

The final chapter, *The Message of John's Gospel for Today*, sees the abiding value of John to be that he presents a Christ-like God, and as such makes a valuable contribution to contemporary debates about God. To sum up in Richardson's own words:

'John's Gospel carries on where the others leave off, developing what is sometimes only implicit or less developed in them. The writer stands back from the controversies of Jesus' ministry, reflects on the experiences of his own community, and gives us his searching critique of the religious and worldly opposition to the light who comes to save. Christian readers of the Gospel should not, in the first place, direct these critiques at anyone but themselves: 'if the cap fits...' If we read the Gospel with that kind of humility and self-criticism, then we shall be more able to receive its Jesus-centred message: here is One who reveals the very character of the invisible God, and who offers to satisfy the world's deepest hunger and thirst' (p.151).

That is well said, but I am interested in history and I would have liked to see more attention given to the contribution of John to our knowledge of the historical Jesus and to the pressures facing the church in Ephesus at the time of its writing.

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**John Ronning *The Jewish Targums and John's Logos Theology* (Peabody: Hendrickson/Alban, 2010), xx + 315pp**

No Johannine scholar would question the importance of John's concept of the Logos to his overall aim in the gospel; it remains, arguably, his most important contribution to christological debate within the first couple of generations of the Christian movement. However, the question has always been how we are to interpret the significance of this Logos idea of 1:1-18? From whence does John derive this creative innovation, and, more importantly, to what can we compare it? This volume seeks to address precisely that question, by suggesting that the Jewish Targums might offer an interesting, if not incomparable, comparison. Its author, John Renning, is a lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament at John Wycliffe Theological College in South Africa, and as such is well-qualified to offer new insights into John's Semitic background. Jewish Targums are frequently overlooked by many New Testament scholars, generally I think, because of unfamiliarity with them. Essentially Jewish Targums are Aramaic commentaries on the Old Testament text, and as such they offer potentially crucial insights into how the first-century world of Jesus and his contemporaries understood scripture (recalling of course that Jesus' mother tongue was Aramaic!). Ronning here makes a case for suggesting that John may have even derived his Logos concept on the Aramaic idea of the Word (*Memra*), suggesting that the Aramaic Targums offer an essential clue into interpreting the foundations of the Logos concept itself. Ronning makes an impressive case and includes a detailed discussion of how the various surviving Targums contribute to the discussion (there are three main Targums which figure here: The Targum Onkelos; the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan; and the Targum Neofiti – including an impressive chart of how these three compare to the gospel of John to this effect). There is much that is of

interest here although I cannot help but feel that the book is somewhat mis-titled. The title suggests that the focus is on the Logos and John 1:1-18, but in fact the book covers much more than that, such as a good discussion of the idea of Jesus as the Man from Heaven (the 'above-below' tension found throughout the gospel), the 'I Am Sayings'. In short, the book is much more informative about Johannine theology than the title suggests. I cannot help but feel that this is a somewhat mis-named (and this mis-marketed) title. It might have been better entitled *The Jewish Targums and the Interpretation of the Gospel of John*. This strikes closer to what the book offers to an understanding of the Gospel. In short, an engaging study, well worth considering.

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**Mark D. Given (ed.), *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle* (Hendrickson/Alban, 2010), 224pp**

This book is a collection of essays which set Paul's thinking against a variety of backdrops and examines important topics within Pauline studies. The essays include Warren Carter's overview of Paul's engagement with the Roman Empire (in which there is a rediscovery of the Apostle's critique of imperialism) and Jerry Sumney's examination of the nature of Paul's opponents. There is a very interesting survey by Cosgrove of the Apostle's view of ethnicity in Pauline interpretation and Deborah Krause interacts with Paul's view of women. Inevitably, "Paul and the Law" rears its head with Das giving a roadmap for identifying key landmarks in the debate and Nanos (in a long chapter) continuing to find the New Perspective's view of Judaism inadequate, insisting that "what Paul would find wrong with Paulinism is that it is not Judaism." The final chapter again treads the well-worn path of Paul's link with rhetoric and contrasts classical and post-modern rhetorical criticism.

This book is to be welcomed for two reasons. Firstly, in an academic discipline which has been guilty of a polarised and polemical debate regarding "old" and "new" perspectives on Paul, this work shows the range of "other" perspectives with which Paul was interacting and which are worthy of attention. As such it also warns those at either pole to be cautious of holding these views with such inflexibility. Secondly, the essays contain, at points, broad overviews and history of interpretations of many of the areas of Pauline scholarship which have been minimised by the strength of polarised debate. As such it will prove a useful resource for students of biblical studies who wish to follow the history of debates regarding the apostle's influences and theology but have come to such debates when the initial furore has abated.

On the downside, the collection tends to be a fairly prosaic (if not tedious at times) read and lacks the spark which should be present when Pauline hermeneutics is discussed. I can see only the most devoted Pauline scholars reading this work from cover to cover. Neither does the collection, as a whole, hang together well, and a final short chapter pulling threads together would have been appreciated. Yet the book does give the impression that Paul's world has a multitude of undiscovered diamonds, and for that I commend the effort.

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**Thomas E. Phillips *Paul, His Letter, and Acts* (Peabody: Hendrickson/ Alban, 2009), x + 243pp**

This study is offered by Thomas Phillips, a Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. Phillips has written previously on the Acts of the Apostles, which gives an insight into the starting point for this particular study on 'those brackish waters where the Paul of Acts meets the Paul of the letters (page 1). The book contains six chapters, which are logically and systematically set out: the first two considering theoretical issues and the latter four dealing with more textual-based discussions. In each of the last four chapters there is a discussion of what Phillips describes as the 'Pauline Data Set' as over against the 'Acts Data Set'. Not surprisingly, the discussion contained in chapter 5 on 'The Paul's Place in the Church: The Participants in the Jerusalem Conference', is perhaps the core of the discussion given the debate about the relationship of Acts 15 to Paul's letters. The relative roles of Peter and James figure significantly here. For me, however, it is the final chapter on 'Paul's Associates, His Converts and Apollos' which is the most interesting. The importance of Apollos as a key figure within the life of the Corinthian church is woefully under-discussed by NT scholars, and I rather suspect that in heaven Apollos will be one of the early Christian leaders applauded by the heavenly host. Phillips notes that 'neither Acts nor Paul's letters record any obvious conflict in the personal relations between Paul and Apollos' (page 188). All of which suggests that in the person of Apollos, we may have an example of an early Christian leader who managed to remain on the good side of Paul the apostle, arguably one of the more difficult personalities to live with among the early Christians. This idea, in itself, makes this book worth looking at! Personally, I have long been intrigued by Martin Luther's suggestion that Apollos was in fact the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, and wonder what connection there might be between that letter and the general Pauline corpus on such an assumption. There has been something of a revival of interest in Pauline authorship of Hebrews (particularly in the US!), but might the idea of Apollos as the author be a more mediating position?

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**Ben Witherington III, *Revelation and The End Times: Unravelling God's Message of Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press/Alban, 2010), 112pp**

This short and accessibly written book will be useful to those seeking an antidote to the dispensational 'left behind' approach. It approaches the text thematically, and has five key sections. The first of these, *The Character of Biblical Prophecy*, sets the prophetic message of the book of Revelation in its wider context of prophetic traditions from both within Israel and other ancient near eastern cultures. Witherington notes that 'it was the task of the prophet to call God's people to account' (p. 6), rather than to pursue a predictive agenda, and this leads him to formulate a methodology for interpreting Revelation: 'what the text meant then is still what the text means today. And what it could *not* possibly have meant in the first century A.D. or before, it does *not* mean now.' (p.11).

The second section, *The Return of the King*, addresses the subject of the parousia, and helpfully sets the book of Revelation within a broader context of eschatological expectation, leading to a warning to avoid date-setting, coupled with an encouragement to persevere in hope. This reviewer would have valued greater attention in this section to the concept of realised eschatology. The third section, *The Other World – Heaven and Hell*, addresses the issue of the fate of those who die before the parousia. Once again the wider context is explored, including the gospels and Pauline writings, and the Jewish/Greek background to the concepts of Gehenna, Sheol and Hades. This section includes the story of an American man who was certified dead but who after regaining consciousness was able to recount his experience of heaven ('we are talking a real miracle', p. 43), and this is offered as a parallel to Paul's visionary experience recounted in 2 Corinthians 12.2-7. Throughout this section, Witherington seeks to construct a 'biblical' account of Heaven and Hell, of Satan and demons. After effectively exploding a few myths, the overall presentation concludes with an expectation of end-time judgment which includes eternal reward for the righteous and the repentant.

The fourth section, *Raising the Dead*, engages the concept of resurrection, and starts by asserting that 'resurrection is not reincarnation, going to heaven, or immortality of the soul' (p. 67). What resurrection *is*, according to Witherington, is the receipt of an eschatological body, which is 'immune to disease, decay, and death' (p. 68). The final section, *The Afterlife – The rapture, The Millennium, and The New Heaven and The New Earth*, seeks to further address the nature of the resurrection experience. After a useful analysis and dismissal of 'rapture' theology ('there is no theology of the rapture to be found in the New Testament anywhere', p. 91), Witherington locates the 'tribulation' as the experience of the suffering church in every generation. A premillennial perspective is then offered, which locates the millennium as coming after the parousia, after the salvation of 'all Israel', and after the resurrection of 'the righteous', but before the resurrection of 'unbelievers' and the final judgment on 'Satan and the lost' (p. 95). All this is then followed by 'the new heaven and the new earth' which is presented as the future destination of the faithful. This book will not be for everyone, and some may find themselves dissatisfied with an analysis that errs on the side of biblical conservatism. However, it will be welcomed by others as offering a helpful and credible alternative perspective on the book of Revelation and end times theology.

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**Michael F. Bird, *Crossing Over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Peabody: Hendrickson/ Alban, 2010) xvi+208pp**

The question of whether Second Temple Judaism was an actively missionary religion has exercised scholarship for years. Historians seeking to account for the evangelistic fervour of early Christians have often cited Jewish missionary activity as the reason for it. In this splendid book, Michael Bird, closely and critically explores the evidence for Jewish missionary activity and generally finds it wanting.

He takes as his starting point the observation that 'Christianity was a missionary religion' (p1) and that Jewish hope in the OT was universal in its scope, affecting the fate of all the nations of the world. The issue under review is whether

that hope drove second temple Jews to evangelise their Gentile neighbours. 'I am pursuing the topic of precisely how "missionary" Judaism was prior to the advent of the early Christian movement and what influences Jewish proselytizing had upon the early Christian mission.' (p.7). Broadly, his conclusion is 'not much' on both counts. In this he stands in agreement with Martin Goodman and Scott McKnight against the earlier consensus of Adolf Von Harnack and A D Nock.

Bird offers a succinct examination of the evidence in debate with others, and a very helpful compilation of a range of original source material on which the discussion is based (for this alone the book would be worth its cover price). Having introduced his topic – including a very helpful summary of the debate over whether the Greek word *Iudaios* should be rendered 'Jew' or 'Judean' – he begins his substantive argument by examining what is meant by 'mission' and 'conversion'. He convincingly shows that changing one's religion is as much a social as a spiritual decision. He argues that becoming a Jew is ultimately about 'identification and incorporation into the Jewish ethne' (p.24). For men this almost certainly involved circumcision, though Bird surveys the evidence from Philo and Josephus to show that there was much debate about this. Along the way, his discussion throws shafts of light on Paul's attitude to circumcision in Romans and Galatians. He examines evidence for the existence of 'god-fearers', a group so important to Luke's presentation of the expansion of the Christian movement, and concludes that there is good evidence for a loose group of Gentile hangers-on of the synagogue who could be given this label.

Examining Palestinian Judaism in all its forms, Bird concludes that attitudes towards Gentiles were largely hostile. Turning to the diaspora, he finds evidence that Jews attempted to accommodate themselves to a religiously plural world without on the one hand compromising their cardinal principles or on the other seeking to convert their neighbours. Both Philo and Josephus are shown to have argued for the reasonableness of the Jewish way of life but not to be seeking converts.

His examination of the New Testament evidence for a Jewish mission tackles Matthew 23:15 (concluding that the Pharisees were attempting to win Jews to their form of Judaism) and the efforts of Jewish-Christian missionaries to persuade Gentiles that Paul's law-free gospel was inadequate. He suggests that there is scant evidence for competition between Christian and Jewish missionaries in the pages of the NT.

His book is a well-judged and carefully constructed argument that convincingly demonstrates that second temple Judaism, though diverse and open to Gentile adherents, was not a missionary religion in the way that early Christianity was. The book concludes with an attempt to account for Christian missionary zeal in terms of Christology and eschatology which led to what Bird calls an 'inclusive sectarianism'. This term, which requires far more unpacking than he offers in the final three pages of his conclusion, suggests an understanding of God's action in Christ leading to the emergence of a distinct social group, a 'third race' as Aristides put it, with the universalist aim of encompassing every nation. King Jesus reigns and the whole needs to hear about it – hence mission.

*Simon Jones*  
*Bromley Baptist Church, London*



**Christopher Morse, *The Difference Heaven Makes: Rehearing the Gospel as News* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 160pp.**

This book seeks to explore the premise that 'the references to heaven in the Bible have more present day significance than is routinely associated with the word today' (p.ix). In doing this, Christopher Morse enters into a hotly debated and little-understood arena. From 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die' to 'heaven is a place on earth' (Belinda Carlisle), to 'heavens above', the concept of heaven undoubtedly deserves this second look. Morse offers a scholarly and detailed analysis, alongside an array of fascinating heavenly tidbits; for example, did you know that the planet *Uranus* gets its name from the Greek word for heaven *Ouranos*?

The term 'heaven' occurs in the Bible six hundred and seventy five times, and yet Morse notes that 'remarkably few' of these correspond to the popular notions of heaven as a place 'up there' to which people go when they die (p. 4). Rather, the view of heaven found in the gospels is, he suggests, 'less about a place we go than one that comes to us, less about a post-mortem afterlife than about life here and now, and less about a timeless, static state than about a timely taking-place' (p. 5). Heaven is therefore to be understood as the in-breaking kingdom of God; the kingdom of heaven. This view of heaven as that which is 'coming into being' can be contrasted with that which is 'passing away', the kingdom of 'hell'. Heaven and hell are not therefore alternative destinations for eternal souls, they are rather biblical terms to describe the ongoing transformation of the world from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God. Hell is passing and heaven is coming to pass.

Morse asks his readers to 're-hear' the language of heaven, and suggests that it should be heard as 'coming', as 'created', as 'a community', and as 'a kingdom at hand'. This is followed by an analysis of the theology of heaven, evaluating four key responses: 1) hearing of heaven literally, 2) hearing of heaven as myth, 3) hearing of heaven as saga, and 4) hearing of heaven as promise (p. 27). It is in this final response, characterised by the heavenly voice proclaiming 'surely I am coming soon' and the earthly response 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22.20), that Morse finds the most fruitful way forwards as the promised advent 'reveals the future's commitment to the present' (p. 47).

Morse next addresses the question of 'the reality of heaven', and concludes that whilst heaven 'does not fit our prevailing frames of reference for talking about the world' this does not mean that heaven lacks reality, but rather that 'reality may be more than our prevailing frames of reference' (p. 72). This perspective 'from beyond' is seen to have ethical implications, as those who follow Christ participate in God's will being done 'on earth as in heaven' (p. 95). The final chapter addresses the question of what difference our understanding of heaven makes, and concludes that the difference is *hope*. In the midst of a chaotic, troubled, violent world, the kingdom of heaven is 'at hand', it is in-breaking into the present. The hellish world is passing away, the new world is coming to pass. New life in Christ is the hope of heaven in the face of death.

This is a very interesting book, which engages a deep and complex issue in a way which is thoroughly engaged with a breadth of scholarship whilst remaining accessible and readable. It repays careful and thoughtful reading, and will stimulate reflection in creative ways.

*Simon Woodman*  
*South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff*

**Martyn Percy, *Shaping the Church: The Promise of Implicit Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 193pp.**

Martyn Percy's latest book mostly collects essays and papers given over the last decade around the common theme of implicit theology. The essays, divided into three sets of three with an introduction and conclusion, challenge the reader to examine the theology implicit in ecclesial practice rather than simply write ecclesiology 'from above' (as it were) according to some ideal blueprint. Percy asks, 'What is the relationship between the acknowledged propositional truths that order ecclesial identity, and the more hidden and mellifluous currents that might shape the life of the church?' (p.1). What we get is a set of essays which are full of insight and which offer a good deal of stimulation on current issues. There are some frustrations, for Baptists at least, in the very Anglican nature of Percy's concerns, and the essays perhaps show their variegated provenance in being somewhat more or rather less directly concerned with the question of implicit theology.

In the first essay, for instance, on baptism, there is a very clear focus on the beliefs which are embedded in the practice – beliefs as likely to have their origin 'outside' rather than 'inside' the church's tradition (though Percy is always careful to suggest that he thinks this distinction more problematic than slogans sometimes indicate). In fact, we have very little discussion of, or interest in, any 'official' theology of baptism at all. But his analysis of the theology implicit in the practice of parishes and clergy is astute and illuminating. The essay on baptism may need some translation for Baptist utility, and the essay which follows, on confirmation, might also seem unpromising at first. However, its discussion of conversion might be profitably considered by all in evangelical traditions. An essay on eucharistic practice in a culture where Christianity appears in retreat ends in the exhortation to 'relax!' and allows Percy to recite his case for the resilience of Christianity in culture once more.

The second set of three essays is the most ecumenical (i.e. the least exclusively Anglican) in focus, and I found them the most helpful. The 'Fresh Expressions' movement is considered, and critiqued as a manifestation of consumerism. His exploration of whether 'the Fresh Expressions movement is a form of collusion with a contemporary cultural obsession with newness, alternatives and novelty, rather than the recovery of a lost theological, missiological or ecclesiological priority' (p.70) is penetrating. But what also marks it out is that Percy analyses the theology implicit in the practice of fresh expressions, and having exposed it, critiques it rather more than some of the ideas which surfaced about baptism, for instance. There must be the possibility here that he found those (baptismal) ideas more conducive to his churchmanship than those discovered in fresh expressions – but the imbalance in treatment is noteworthy. In general, my only significant criticism of the book is that Percy does not always scrutinize the implicit theology he unearths, nor offer a model for how such scrutiny might be undertaken: what we sometimes end up with is theology with a descriptive rather than a normative feel. But here, discussing fresh expressions, he makes a not entirely unfriendly case for caution regarding new expressions of church, and also some telling comparisons with homogenous church growth theory.

The next chapter asks 'can there be liberal church growth?' and offers some grounds for optimism, as well as hints about strategy, for those congregations that feel uncomfortable about both common assumptions on growth models, and also the

sociological determinism which suggests that congregations without hard boundaries and rigid creeds are less likely to reproduce themselves. These themes are revisited in another chapter on 'organic growth.'

The final set of essays takes us back into more clearly Anglican territory – with discussions of leadership, ministerial formation, and polity. The treatment of leadership, owing a good deal to Simon Western, is very helpful: when so much leadership discourse among Baptists is popular and trite, it is a delight to engage with a rigorous and well-informed writer. From Western's assumptions and ideas we move to Aidan Nichols and the more familiar theological notions of prophet, priest and king – but the journey from one to the other is stimulating – not least when it faces the challenge of how leadership can both sustain and transform the church. The final chapters on ministerial formation and the place of emotion in church polity feel slighter, though they too have some helpful material which both illuminates Anglican identity as well as some issues on formation. The conclusion seeks to gather up the strands and remind us of the theme – the significance of the theology 'present in informal practices and nascent beliefs' (p.159).

Percy's book will not be to everyone's liking: his preoccupations are Anglican and his writing style sometimes florid or complex. But he is a canny observer of the current ecclesiological and cultural landscape, is robust and rigorous if still partisan, and well read. It would take a closed or lazy Baptist reader not to get something of value from this volume, and many will find themselves stimulated and encouraged by it.

*Rob Ellis*

*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney & Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 192pp.**

In the last edition of *Regent's Reviews* I was glad to commend Helen Cameron's helpful book *Resourcing Mission* (SCM Press 2010) and now Helen, together with her fellow researchers at Heythrop College and Ripon College, Cuddesdon, has put us further in her debt. *Talking about God in Practice* aims to develop both a method for 'action research' and offer a new model for theological reflection. But this is very far from the abstract discussions about concepts and methodology into which, ironically, so-called 'practical theology' too often becomes entangled. Rather these approaches are developed out of particular research undertaken in partnership with actual expressions of current Christian life. Three of these appear as case studies in this volume: St Mary's, Battersea, a local Anglican Parish; the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth; and Housing Justice, a Faith-Based Agency, campaigning on matters of homelessness and inadequate housing provision. This demonstrates something of the range of contexts which this approach potentially encompasses.

Action Research is an established model drawn from the social sciences but here it is combined with an original mode of theological reflection which attempts to listen to what the authors call 'four voices' within the Christian community which, though distinct, are also 'interrelated and overlapping' (p.53). These are respectively designated as Normative, Formal, Espoused and Operant theologies. Operant theology is the theology actually reflected in the practice of the group in question;

related to this is the Espoused theology of the group, those principles and frameworks by which they believe they act (whether or not that proves to be the case in practice). Behind these lie the Normative sources of theology such as the scriptures, creeds, and liturgies of the tradition in question, which inform the Operant and Espoused theologies, and that are expressed through, and in dialogue with, the Formal theology of the professional theologians and the scholars of other disciplines with which theology is itself in dialogue – traditionally disciplines such as philosophy, history and literature, but increasingly, and especially for Practical Theology, the disciplines of the social and natural sciences as much as the humanities. This innovative method seems to me a welcome addition to the toolkit for theological reflection and a useful adjunct to the tried and tested variants of the pastoral reflection cycle with which many readers will already be familiar.

This model for reflection and the associated action research methodology are offered with some caution, recognising that such voices are never discrete, nor often simple, but interact with each other and with the contexts in which the faith is being expressed and put into action. The rest of the book is given over to explicating the outworking of this approach with a careful introduction to the process of Theological Action Research (TAR) which is then illuminated by the helpful case studies to which I have already referred. The volume concludes with an initial evaluation of TAR, recognising that the project is still in its early stages, but inviting the reader into the process of both the development and assessment of the approach. This in itself models the inclusive and collaborative style which typifies the work as a whole and to my mind is one of its most attractive features.

Highly recommended for both theologian and practitioner – and especially for the practical theologian!

*Nicholas Wood*  
*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Jonny Baker, *Curating Worship* (London: SPCK, 2010), 192pp**

I have been interested in this new language of 'curators' for those responsible for worship since coming across it the work of Mark Pierson (who is incidentally a New Zealand Baptist minister), via Jonny Baker, the author of this study. *Curating Worship* is in some ways a follow up to Baker's early book, co-written with Doug Gay and Jenny Brown, *Alternative Worship* (SPCK, 2003). This book is less practical and more focused on the idea of curation, but it is part of the same alternative worship conversation, which has been taking place in the UK since the early to mid-1990s.

Worship as curation is a move away from front-led worship leading, to the creating of artistic and dramatic spaces that enable people to worship, which rely on the participation and interpretation of those who experience the space. The worship leader – and more often than not – it is a group of worship leaders (Baker is not sure he is happy with the language of leadership in this context), act like curators, paying attention to the making of worship spaces 'for encounter, for experience, for reflection, to change speeds, for pray, for questions, for exploration, for meditation, for provocation, for moments of epiphany' (p.7). Curating worship has obvious links with the arts, in all their breadth, not just music – in fact, alternative worship generally shuns away from singing together. Music is used, but often as background and in order to create particular moods.

After a short introduction to how the language of curating worship is being used, the main body of the book is a series of interviews with worship curators. For those who have a knowledge of the alternative worship movement (of which Jonny Baker's blog is a fantastic source), some of these names will be familiar – Kester Brewin, Sue Wallace, Steve Taylor and Pete Rollins, partly because they are authors of books in this field or through their widely read blogs. These interviews help ground and provide examples of what curating worship looks like and the way it is practised – for example, Steve Collins (a professional architect) discusses design, Martin Poole (of advent beach hut fame) discusses creating public worship spaces, Pete Rollins and Jonny McEwen (from Ikon) discuss curating worship in the form of theodrama, which sees worship as performative, and in their case, often provocative.

As someone who likes to dabble a little in curating worship, there was much I found helpful in this book. There is I think important need for this kind of worship, which engages with the senses, beyond just the auditory, and finds a central place for the poets, the artists, the storytellers, the moviemakers amongst us, to help us engage with and be shaped by the Christian story. Having said, there is also a need for some critical conversation, which engages with the potential weaknesses of this kind of worship (this so far has been limited) – perhaps Baker and SPCK could commission a follow-up book – which looks not to be derogatory, but be a critical friend. On another note, since the publication of Baker's book, Mark Pierson, who I mentioned above, has authored his own book *The Art of Curating Worship*, which will be interest for those who want to engage with this further.

*Andy Goodliff*  
*Belle Vue Baptist Church, Southend*

**Ogbu U. Kalu, Peter Vethanayagamony, Edmund Kee-Fook Chia (eds.), *Mission After Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press / Alban, 2010), 178pp**

It is widely agreed that the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 was one of the most significant events in the church history of the twentieth century. Indeed it is sufficiently well known simply to be referred to as 'Edinburgh 1910', due partly to Temple Gairdner's influential account of the event of that title. The Conference was in many ways a watershed, bringing to a culmination the endeavours of the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary movement, which Kenneth Latourette famously characterised as 'The Great Century' of Christian mission, but also anticipating many of the issues facing the mission of the Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and giving birth to the ecumenical movement. It is appropriate then that the centenary of the occasion should attract considerable attention over the last year which saw a number of celebratory events and several commemorative publications. *Mission After Christendom* is a useful contribution, both to the celebrations and to the debate, from three theological schools in Chicago working together under the banner of the Chicago Center for Global Ministries (CCGM), an appropriately ecumenical collaboration representing as they do Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed perspectives.

The terrain looks very different for mission a century on from Edinburgh 1910 and this volume helpfully charts some of the key features of the new global map. These include significantly changed understandings of the role of women, the place of

the poor, the quest for racial justice and ecological sustainability and dialogue between religions and cultures. All of which might be characterised as 'bottom up' approaches, which interestingly parallel the shift in emphasis over the same period in systematic theology, from 'top down' perspectives on the Incarnation to 'Christology from below'. This change of perspective is also happily represented in the diversity of contributions to this book with perspectives from women, and from people from the majority world including Africa, Asia and Latin America. The range of contributions also illustrates the changed flow of mission over the last century: 'from the Rest to the West' as it is often expressed, which aphorism forms the title of an interesting chapter which addresses the major shift in the centre of gravity of contemporary Christianity to the 'Global South'. When Edinburgh 1910 was convened 80% of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North America; a century later 60% of the world's Christian are to be found in Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, culturally and economically the West is still dominant and this creates a number of challenges for mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of these are addressed in this contribution of one of the editors of the volume, Peter Vethanayagamony, who, in his own migration from Chennai to Chicago, personally embodies this change.

Among these is the fact that many of the vital growing churches of the South are more conservative, both theologically and ethically, than the declining church of the North and West. The mission emphasis of such churches also tends to focus on personal evangelism and church planting rather than on matters of social justice. But they do so with considerable success. The largest church in Cologne is a Korean foundation; the largest church in London is of African origin; the largest church in Europe is in Kiev, but started by Nigerian migrants.

New patterns of mission are also affecting the historic churches of the West. The United States remains the largest provider of overseas mission workers, although it is also the destination for the majority of missionaries from the rest of the world. But rather than offering a life-time of service (which historically in too many cases was all too short) many contemporary western missionaries are involved in short-term mission, a change that Robert Priest traces to the second half of the twentieth century and which, he argues, offers a 'new paradigm of mission'. He recognises that such patterns raise important questions about the benefit, and indeed the beneficiaries, of such mission, but suggests that it can be understood in terms of the development of social capital, especially so-called 'linking' (rather than bonding or bridging) social capital, but also as an exercise in resource sharing – just plain old fashioned 'capital' then – as well as creating the possibility of developing leverage for social change. However, one of the legacies of an earlier generation of mission lives on: colonialism. Although most colonies have long since regained their independence, colonial attitudes and anxieties live on, especially in Asia. This is helpfully addressed by Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, in a thoughtful and thought-provoking essay on mission as dialogue in the Asian context, in which he draws on the important work of the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris. Chia seeks to integrate inter-religious dialogue with the equally pressing dialogue with and for the poor, to whose desperate plight colonial systems have all too readily contributed. In a memorable image he talks of the need for the church to be baptized in the 'Jordan' of Asian religions, and confirmed by the 'Calvary' of Asian poverty (p.153). Only in this way he argues can we move from the church *in* Asia to the church *of* Asia.

This volume is a worthy contribution to the Edinburgh 1910-2010 debate. The themes are well-chosen and the various contributions are both accessible and

engaging, pointing the reader to important issues and vital questions for the mission of the church in the third millennium of her continuing task.

*Nicholas Wood*  
*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship. Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 201pp.**

Neil Pembroke is a pastoral theologian from Brisbane who has published previously in the area of shame. In this his latest book, he argues that pastoral care can and should take the form of liturgy. In other words, the regular liturgy of the Church, its worship, eucharist and prayers, is a normal mode of delivery of pastoral care. This I have argued myself in *Care in a Confused Climate* as well as in *With Unveiled Face*, so I was immediately attracted to this extended study of the theme.

The ways in which liturgy can be considered a dimension of pastoral care, and a mode of its delivery, are fourfold. Liturgy, first, enables the worshipper to be reconciled to God in confession and in overcoming the terrible destructive power of toxic shame by living under the gaze of God's gracious affirmation. Secondly, lament provides the language to express suffering (complaint) and the courage to pray our anger. Thirdly, the 'final word in every situation belongs to God and it is always one of hope.' (p.89) so liturgy provides witnesses to that hope, albeit, often in an ironic tone, as those suffering from depression know only too well. Finally, the eucharist builds community. The danger in the language of community and service is what Pembroke calls unmitigated communion, an unhealthy disregard for self. This is countered by the communion encountered in Christ, and reflected in the eucharist.

Each section is illustrated by helpful prayers, it is extensively supplied with end notes and there is a full bibliography, which illustrates the depth of academic analysis with which Pembroke approaches this subject. This is not a lightweight book, although that should not imply it is a difficult read. It is well written, approachable and important, not least since it addresses one of the most significant pastoral dilemmas, the gap that has grown between the tasks of pastoral care (often viewed as an individual and essentially therapeutic enterprise) and the rhythms of worship and liturgy in the church. Seeing pastoral care as worship is vital, but enabling it to be fully rounded is more challenging in an environment where 'praise' and the 'feel-good-factor' predominate. For liturgy to be truly pastoral, room must be made for lament, for confession and for the ironic, lest oftentimes it does as much harm as good.

*Paul Goodliff*  
*Baptist Union of Great Britain*

**Stephen Wright, *Alive to the Word: A Practical Theology of Preaching for the Whole Church* (London: SCM, 2010)**

It is the subtitle of this book which offers clues to its content, that is Wright's desire to connect preaching first to the wider sphere of practical theology, and second to write a book that is much more than a manual for the preacher, but to encourage the

whole church to engage in and reflect on what is happening at this moment. Wright states clearly that this is not intended as an introduction to preaching (of which there are plenty) but as a tool for theological reflection for those who engage in preaching, as speakers or listeners. This is the practical theology angle, for Wright draws on a familiar reflective cycle – drawing the exact pattern and terminology from Richard Osmer's *Practical Theology: An Introduction* – to shape the book. It is interesting that Wright adopts an understanding of practical theology (p xii) in which belief shapes practice but not vice versa. Many practical theologians would want also to ask how practice might shape understanding and belief.

In many ways this would appear a hugely ambitious project, and the subtitle is making quite significant claims. Practical theology tends to focus on smaller concrete moments of practice – perhaps a sermon or a particular, individual preacher. Given the huge complexity and diversity in the practice of Christian preaching over 2000 years, Wright then is having to make choices all the way through as to what he will include in the reflection cycle and what exclude.

In the first section (Osmer's Descriptive Empirical task) Wright attempts to describe something of the history of preaching and its contemporary functions in thirty pages. To do the first he categorises preaching in three contexts: the gathered congregation, speaking to the nations and those outside walls. The four contemporary functions he offers are: shared worship, contemporary culture, theology and pastoral care. Having to cover so much ground in so little space it is unclear why these categories are chosen, and also quite what Wright means by describing the four functions as 'functions'. He also describes them as contexts, which seems more accurate. Nevertheless, there are some interesting reflections, for example on theology in the church, in the academy and in the 'ordinary hermeneutics' of individuals.

The second section (Osmer's Interpretive task) brings alongside this history and contemporary practice thinking from philosophy, media studies, psychology and sociology. This seemed to be the strongest section of the book and contains much that would help a preacher reflect on her or his practice. It does not assume too much familiarity with these disciplines, but offers very helpful insights into areas such as the nature of communication, the use of language and the sociological function of identity forming. These would help add greater depth to anyone reflecting on a future sermon.

The longest section is the third (Osmer's Normative task) in which Wright seeks to set out a theology of preaching. He stresses the self-communicating nature of God and the development of biblical patterns of speaking for God. Alongside helpful impulses to reflect again on what our sermon might be 'doing' to the congregation, and how we ensure our preaching remains good news, a significant theological concern through these chapters is on the nature and role of the Bible and its relationship both to God's self-revelation and our preaching. Wright stresses the significance of Christ as the Word, and sees Scripture as the authoritative witness to revelation. Although Wright begins the section offering a dialogue between theology and wider disciplines, this section could have been strengthened by taking this dialogue further.

In the final section (Osmer's Pragmatic Task) Wright first addresses the whole church – thus the concern of the subtitle – before then addressing the preacher. Concerned for the missionary task of the church, Wright offers a helpful overview of the debate about the future, or re-visioning, of preaching for a postmodern context, giving the reader options for further exploration, and taking a position which respects the vital importance of context and so eschewing any one universal answer.



The vastness of the task Wright sets himself means that, despite the four-fold pattern of the reflective cycle, there are occasions when the inclusion of some material and not other has a slightly arbitrary feel, and this reviewer remains unconvinced that it is possibly to apply such a tool of practical theology to so vast a subject as preaching in its entirety. But as Wright hopes, there will be plenty in the book with preachers will find helpful and insightful as they reflect on their own practice, and so the book fulfils this aim.

*Anthony Clarke*  
*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Geoffrey Stevenson (ed.), *The Future of Preaching* (London: SCM, 2010)**

This book is a selection of generally short essays, fourteen in all together with an afterword and appendix in just over two hundred pages, from a wide variety of authors – all practitioners and a number involved in teaching and training preachers. The book is divided into three sections: contexts, practices and people with the majority of space devoted to the middle section. Given the various critiques of preaching, especially in monologue form, the authors all affirm in different ways the positive, even exciting future they foresee.

As in any collection of essays there is something of a mix, in style and depth and insight. Generally the flavour of the book is one of breadth rather than depth, touching on a wide variety of issues, and in a number of cases raising the questions and pointing to areas for reflection rather than sustained argument. This of course is partly due to the limited space for each essay. Given that the various contributors were addressing on different ways the same basic question about the future of preaching there are a number of points of agreement or overlap – depending on your perspective. So except to encounter several times the rhetoric of Barak Obama, the example of stand-up comedy and the rebirth of narrative and story-telling.

The first section, Contexts, is generally descriptive, looking at the context for preaching in modern culture and then something of the nature of preaching in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Charismatic and Black Church contexts. They tend to be frustratingly brief, with the first and last being exceptions. So Roger Standing looks at the way preaching always has been and must be contextual, wrestling with both Scriptures and contemporary culture. He offers a helpful brief resume of postmodern culture and some of its links to preaching, and has the first chance to discuss oratory, story and stand-up. While this is important one wonders whether those who might buy this book will have read this before. Ian Stackhouse's reference to Spirit hermeneutics, in the chapter on Charismatic Utterance, in distinction to the historical-grammatical method opens up intriguing questions but these are not explored further.

The second section, Practices, offers some slightly longer and more in depth chapters, some of which are clearly distinct, while others occupy similar ground. Margaret Withers offers some very practical guidance on preaching in all-age services, Paul Johns on preaching on the news and Richard Littledale on engaging with technology. Ian Paul discusses the language used in preaching, and although suffering slightly from going over ground covered earlier makes an important case for recovering the metaphorical and poetic in Scripture and in preaching. Looking at the future use of the Bible in preaching, Stephen Wright offers a thought-provoking account of the way that the form of the Bible has changed and is changing, from

separate, sparsely available documents through to a Canon, a printed book and now a download on a smart-phone. Form affects the way we read and Wright helps preachers to begin to think through this aspect of technology. The opening essay in this section, the longest in the book, has one central argument – that a sermon should ‘do’ theology in context, and help the congregation to ‘do theology’, based on a practical theology model, but, perhaps in good post-modern style, touches on many other issues in a slightly disconnected way.

The final section, *People*, looks at the people doing the preaching. Leslie Francis looks at preaching and personality type and for those unfamiliar with his earlier book on personality type and Scripture, this offers a useful summary and introduction. Susan Durber offers food for thought on the inner life of the preaching offering the refreshing encouragement not to be so dualist as to distinguish so sharply between the inner and the outer life, and to have the confidence to preach as the people we are. In the final chapter Geoffrey Stevenson looks at how preachers might be formed drawing on educational and well as spiritual insights. He proposes ‘a community of agreed sermonic enterprise’ – his version of communities of practice familiar from social learning theories. Despite the rather opaqueness of his title, he opens up a vision of how preachers might learn together. David Schlafer, in an afterword, pursues this further offering his own experience of such communities and the appendix offers something of an agenda for meeting together in this way. This is certainly a very needed corrective to too much individualism in both learning and practice.

Ultimately one of the questions raised by reading the book as a reviewer is to ask who the book is aimed at. In this case I am not entirely certain. It would seem most appropriate for those who are engaged regularly in preaching and want to reflect on their practice further. Some chapters may restate the familiar while others will push in new and different directions. As is often the case in a collection of essays all readers will find various, if different parts, insightful and challenging.

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**Timothy Bradshaw, *Chaos or Control? Authority in Crisis in Church and State* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster 2010), 368pp**

Was it prescience or luck to publish a book considering the place of Christianity in the public sphere at a time when the UK government seeks to pursue its ‘Big Society’ agenda?

Bradshaw notes Western society is in the midst of a period of rapid change. Whilst Liberal Democracy arose from Western Protestantism, and its doctrines of social morality, Christianity is now being marginalised by an intentionally secular society. Bradshaw likens this to a Christian tree, which grew to produce the social capital of the British nation state, but which has been deliberately cut down by secularists; a costly act of vandalism with the unintended consequences of chaos or control. The libertarian conscience stresses freedom for the individual, denying respect for any other public good, leaving the state stuck between the chaos of unlimited autonomous freedom or of centralized control systems. Alongside this, the state is redefining itself as ‘multicultural’ leading it to become tolerant of intolerance, particularly the totalising claims of Islam. Nevertheless, Bradshaw’s analysis is open

to question. Democracy is not solely the product of Western Protestantism, having roots in Ancient Greece, India and elsewhere, so secularisation will not inevitably mean the demise of liberal democracy.

It is not just society that is in flux according to Bradshaw. The church is also a patient needing healing, not realising how deep the suffocating poison of secularism has penetrated. He argues Christians are silent and collude with secularisation regarding silence as a virtue, the result of choosing not to impose our views on others. This sickness is most noticeable in the churches' understanding of sexual behaviour where the crisis of values threatens to split the Anglican Communion. Again we might want to qualify this; throughout history churches have used their resources to revisit ethical issues, but often this has also reflected changes in wider society. Perhaps the re-examination of questions of sexual behaviour is following a similar pattern to those of the role of women or of slavery?

Against this backdrop Bradshaw directs attention towards a 'strong hope' in the Spirit; working at all levels in the freedom of individuals, who are then shaped by the form of Christ thereby orientating society to the goal of the creator. In contrast to the purpose of Islam, which is to implement Islam, the Trinitarian God reveals freedom and form, unity and diversity. The way of Jesus transforms structures by continual indirect influence, an authority grounded in freedom not necessity that shapes society to fulfil the loving purposes of the creator. A thriving Christianity is therefore vital to maintain a blend of individual freedom and diversity with the form needed for an ordered humane society.

The last part of the book suggests how the Church of England should respond as Bradshaw believes its future is critical for the culture of England. Personally, as a Baptist, I question the presumption that the Anglican Church should have a privileged place. After all, it was the development of separatism and non-conformist groups that caused Liberal Western Democracy to grow as it did, a diversity of Christian voices promotes plurality and freedom.

This is an important book, encouraging consideration of faith in the public square and analyzing the culture of both church and world. It is timely as the UK grapples with a public spending squeeze, refocusing public services and creating opportunities for churches and charitable groups to be more directly involved in shaping society. Meanwhile events in the Middle East and North Africa raise questions about how far democracy can develop in predominantly Islamic countries. This book helps Christians to reflect on these issues and respond to them.

*Neil Brighton*

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**Martyn Atkins, *Resourcing Renewal: Shaping Churches for the Emerging Future* (London: Epworth Press, 2010), 268pp**

Sometimes the Church seems like a close relative who lacks social graces. While loving her very much, knowing what she is at her best, you often wish that she wasn't around, her manner appearing to do more to hinder a witness to Christ than enhance it. What are we to do about the Church? How can we help her be the witness to Christ that God wants her to be?

It is this question that Martyn Atkins addresses in *Resourcing Renewal*. Originally published by Inspire in 2007 it has been reissued by Epworth Press because

of its popularity among students of church growth and renewal.

The impetus for this book is the author's conviction that God is a missionary God and his people are a missionary people. And while Atkins acknowledges that God's mission is a broad one he believes that enabling people to encounter Christ is the essential heart of it and he deliberately narrows his definition of mission around that.

The early chapters explore mission-shaped ecclesiology, picking up the centrality of kingdom-thinking and the value of bottom-up approaches, and conclude among other things that fresh expressions of church are both normative in Christian history and for missiological reasons to be desired. This does not mean, however, that Atkins rejects the inherited church. On the contrary he concurs with Rowan Williams that our times require a "mixed economy" and so perhaps it's not surprising that the rest of the book is weighted towards helping the inherited church rediscover (or renew) its mission-shape.

The middle chapters rehearse the challenges of living in a postmodern world, his analysis here unlikely to offer anything new to those who've read almost anything else on the subject, and look for clues and hints that show a readiness for renewal to meet these challenges in inherited churches. In chapter 6, Atkins highlights the importance of service that is not sloping from the church towards a particular need or needy group in society, but is rather a level sharing which has the effect of transforming all parties by the encounter. It is not what the Church can do for you but what we might do together.

Having set out his thesis, for mission-shaped Church, and surveyed the ground both around and within current church life in the UK, Atkins uses the remaining chapters to look at what renewal might mean in the areas of evangelism and ministry, and then in the penultimate chapter whether there might be a framework to facilitate it. In the chapter on evangelism he suggests a return to the ancient practise of catechesis with its emphasis on forming disciples. At first this sounds like a backwards step but as he unpacks what he means we see that once again the past has much to teach us even if we need to contextualise her lessons for our day.

One of the strengths of the book is that it does not offer a "here's what you have to do" approach, as if it was ever that easy, but rather seeks to identify key questions and offer thoughtful answers on how to resource renewal primarily in the inherited church context. And yet to get to the end of the book full of questions and possible answers on a broad range of topics might be quite debilitating. Where and how do we start to work all this out? This is what makes the framework offered in chapter 10 so useful. In this Atkins identifies 3 primers for renewal, drawn from Vatican II, and reflects on them under the headings of identity, purpose and mission context. Who are we? Why are we here? And, when and where do we live? These are good questions and engaging with Atkins' reflections would be a useful exercise for any church to work through.

Anyone who has read around the subjects covered in *Resourcing Renewal* might not find a lot that's new in here, but by bringing them together Atkins' book could help facilitate a discussion which is more joined-up than might otherwise be. For anyone just starting out with mission-shaped ecclesiology this book is a great place to begin.

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**John Colwell, *Why Have You Forsaken Me? A Personal Reflection on the Experience of Desolation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 170pp**

In his *Why Have you Forsaken me?* John Colwell offers a personal reading of Psalm 22. In so doing, he has produced a book which, both in form and content, brings the reader to the heart of theology. As a whole, the book is lively, short, easy to read, and keeps the subject matter close at hand.

It begins with a personal story in which the author traces the contours and history of his own experience of depression, as a particular example of how the absence of God feels. More intriguingly, how that divine absence is experienced alongside the call to be the pastor of a church and lecturer in a theological college.

Although the author concedes that readers may wish to skip the first couple of chapters to get to the real theology, humility prevents him from stating that to do so would miss the point of the entire book. There is a uniqueness to this little volume which makes it read almost like a novel. The end of the book will read entirely differently had you not followed the path beaten by the earlier chapters. One has the sense that we are not being taught theology, so much as led out of the lecture room and into the storms of the real world, in order that we might glimpse, and more importantly, feel, something of the desolation felt by Jesus.

From the cross, Jesus cried out with words that any right-minded, clear-thinking, second-person-of-the-Trinity would never choose. But as Colwell leads us ever nearer to the cross to hear those words for ourselves, he has already slowly and skilfully shaped the way that we will hear them. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

By the time Colwell brings these words from the lips of Jesus to contemporary questions of our day, we can already feel what is coming. And yet we are forced to read on, in the same way that we want to see the villains in a Dickens novel receive their comeuppance. Those questions include: the nature of contemporary worship habits, especially in Baptist circles; the legitimacy of 'penal substitution' as a way of understanding the atonement; the impassibility and the suffering of God; the presence and absence of God. These questions are properly explored with Colwell's usual competence and critical tone.

But the greater theological engagement within this volume is woven through the manner in which it is written. The author's style seems to suggest that, just as the Israelites emerged from Egypt and Jesus from the tomb, so good theology emerges from the experience of hardship and suffering. For sure, the experience of reading this book leaves the indelible impression that other, drier, more objective and less personal engagements with theological ethics, are secondary and derivative by comparison. We need more of this kind of communication, in both our libraries and our pulpits.

*Simon Perry*  
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**Robert E. Johnson, *A Global Introduction to Baptist Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)**

This is an ambitious book. Recognising that, more than many church traditions, being Baptist is particularly sensitive to context and history, Johnson attempts to tell the story of Baptists around the world. He argues that traditional ways of recounting the history, starting from an Anglo base, and using that as the determining factor in the shaping the whole story is too limited. Therefore, he attempts to take seriously the polycentric nature of Baptist identity, arguing that the way in which the different contexts in which Baptists begin and continue, in different nations, shape what he calls their “traditioning sources.” He argues that these traditioning sources are different, and so lead to different – though profoundly related – Baptist identities. As he points out in the final chapter “Statements [of belief and practice] can be associated with particular communities of Baptists at specific times in history, but almost every statement would either be challenged by or nuanced differently by some other body of Baptists. The most we can talk about is certain tendencies in Baptist belief and polity.” As a conclusion, he outlines the five “tendencies” that he believes hold Baptists together as a community with some common identity; freedom of the local faith community to determine its own theological definitions; valuing the need for individuals to pursue truth in terms that are meaningful to them in their context; an innate sense of the inadequacy of living by somebody else’s definitions; the capacity to adapt and allow previously marginalized voices to be heard – this being the case especially in mission-founded contexts; the drive to form communities, and the need to find ways of doing that in different ways. Underlying the whole argument is the conviction that a central part of being Baptist, however it is expressed in different contexts and cultures – and times – is the dream of a better world, the Kingdom – and the drive to embody that. This central theme is very helpful in accessing the different stories that Johnson tells.

The bulk of the book is a chronological narrative, with the story of each period being told from the point of view of the different geographical centres of Baptist life. In each section he also includes a subdivision looking particularly at the role and experience of women – a practice both helpful and irritating. This allows us to hear often untold parts of the story, but at the same time reinforces the idea that the women’s story is not part of the mainstream but has to be addressed separately. Of course, this reflects the continuing struggle of all historians to tell untold stories, and it is surely better to do this than to lose the women’s stories altogether. Nonetheless, it remains awkward.

Johnson divides the history into foundations, emerging traditions, the frontier age and the age of proliferation. This allows him to group stories, and to enable comparisons and differences in the various contexts to emerge.

All in all, this is a deeply worthwhile project, and very well effected. There are niggles of course. Although most of the time, he distinguishes well and properly between England and the UK, allowing the other nations’ stories to be told, there are times when he conflates English and British, and not always helpfully. This may be a small thing in itself, but it raises concerns. When the story I know is inadequately told, I am left wondering about the accuracy of the bits of the story I don’t know. However, these quibbles aside, this is an important book. In what we are regularly told is an increasingly globalised community, we can easily assume that those who share the same name also share all the same presuppositions and emphases – or, if they don’t, that they are wrong, or have misunderstood. In this book we have a

resource to understand where we stand together, and where and why we differ. And to appreciate the breadth and delight of being part of such a diverse community which yet witnesses to the same dream, that of life fulfilled through the promise of God made present in Jesus.

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**David W. Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), xii + 315pp**

This is how to write an introduction to Baptist history *and* thought. David Bebbington's style is easy and accessible to those who have no previous knowledge of Baptist history. I have already run a course in Baptist history using it as the main students' text, and it has worked superbly well, with students commenting on its accessibility and clarity. This is, quite simply, the best introduction to Baptist history available.

Sixteen chapters of around twenty pages are lightly referenced with endnotes and accompanied by a short bibliography at the end of each chapter, and sixteen illustrations are interspersed throughout the book, though in a book on global Baptists more would have been nice and some maps useful.

The structure of the book is particularly helpful. Following a brief introduction, the opening chapter of the story (chapter 2) sets the Baptist movement within the context of the sixteenth-century Reformations. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 then explore the relationship between the first Baptists and continental Anabaptists, the General and Particular Baptists, and the effects of the Evangelical Awakening in both Britain and America in the eighteenth century. The following chapter examines the tensions among nineteenth-century Baptists, followed by two further chapters on theological liberalism and social problems in society bringing the coverage up to the twentieth century.

Once these chapters have told the story of four centuries of Baptist witness, focusing on Britain and America, Professor Bebbington provides four chapters that take the book into the realm of Baptist life *and* thought. Chapters 9 to 12 examine issues of Baptists and race, the role of women in our churches, the doctrines of church, ministry and sacraments, and religious liberty. This makes the book so much more than a history of the Baptists, for it is at the same time an excellent introduction to Baptist theologies. Chapters 13 and 14 pick up the themes of Baptists and foreign mission and their spread globally, and it is in the latter half of the book that the coverage broadens beyond Britain and America to encompass the worldwide Baptist movement. The penultimate chapter is a most useful and thought-provoking discussion of Baptist identity, and the final chapter pulls together the history and themes so ably discussed throughout the volume.

Professor Bebbington has a rare gift of communication, able to write in an easy and readable style without sacrifice. Underlying the text is a wealth of knowledge and breadth of insight, and the author is able to distil all this in a way that the reader new to Baptist history and thought is not left floundering. The book is the product of teaching Baptist history in the classroom and this makes it a wonderful and invaluable teaching aid.

And this brings me to my one criticism – though not of the book, but the publisher. Now the book costs £34.99 (\$39.95), though it can be bought for less online. Even when discounted by the publisher when the book was first published, £21 was a lot for an introductory text, and this will deter potential readers in our churches, and, at a time when students are buying fewer books than in previous times, ministerial training in our colleges provides little time for reading around a subject and our students have less money to spend on books, I fear that this book will be passed by on the other side. Should this be the case, it will be a terrible shame, as this book is an indispensable asset to the teaching of Baptist history and thought.

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**Morna D. Hooker and Frances M. Young, *Holiness and Mission: Learning from the Early Church About Mission in the City* (London: SCM, 2010), 128pp**

A renowned New Testament scholar and an eminent theologian deliver a series of lectures on Mission and Holiness, looking for lessons for today's church from the remarkable growth of Christianity in the urban centres of the Roman empire. Intriguing.

Morna Hooker, offers an account of mission in the scriptures from Israel through Jesus to the New Testament church. She detects a common thread originating in the call to God's people to be Holy as God is holy. This Holiness is social holiness, a particular people living an ethically distinct life in the midst of other peoples, thus pointing to the reality of God and offering an embodied invitation to come, know and worship. Words alone, whether proclamation or personal testimony, are not enough. Witness is dependent on corporate godliness, ecclesial bodying forth of Christ the God-revealer.

According to Hooker, living the holy life in a city offers particular challenges. The Bible is ambivalent about urban living. From Babel through Babylon to Rome the city is a place of alienation, corruption and hubristic rejection of God. Both Jesus and his followers *meet the challenge of* urban godlessness and in so doing *offer a challenge to* the cities that sought their death. Yet in the vision of Zion restored and Babylon/Rome become the heavenly Jerusalem, scripture offers us assurance that God isn't done with the metropolis. So, the church today is called to *meet the challenge of the city* and to *offer a challenge to the city* by living otherwise, thus pointing to the promise of the city, God's promise.

In her treatment of early church growth Frances Young also emphasises the significance of holiness, the quiet, distinctive, engaged presence of the first Christian communities. She recognises that early Christian mission took many forms including demonstrations of power through exorcism and healing, remarkable confidence in the face of death and verbal announcement of gospel. But it is the presence of Christian networks both like and unlike Roman institutions, quietly overlapping the structures of society and offering a place to belong, a sense of identity, practical care and a distinctive philosophy that gets most of the credit. The church grew because it was an articulate, attractive anomaly.

Young then ventures beyond Constantine when the booster rocket of state of approval carried church growth into stratospheric dimensions. She offers us a welcome, nuanced rendition of an oft told story – church moving from household to



basilica, from lifestyle to religion, from radical alternative to the mainstream, from simplicity to flamboyant dazzle. Mission becomes enculturation and growth through conquest; organic, grass-roots life becomes top-down establishment and as society is Christianised, the church is de-Christianised.

And the implications for today? What is called for is an integration of verbal witness and embodied witness, rooted in social holiness. We could do worse than allow Marshall McLuhan to provide commentary on Leviticus: be holy as I am holy – the medium is the message.

All in all then not a bad little book. Not bad, but not great. I can find nothing with which to take exception in Hooker and Young's exposition and I approve their central message but I'd hoped for more. A book by these two commended heartily by James Dunn and David Ford is one that I was eager to read but one that taught me very little. All too familiar. I was much more impressed by the Kreiders' *Worship and Mission after Christendom* which tells a similar story and offers a similar vision. Still, I'll probably use Hooker and Young as a set text for my first year course on mission. It's short, clearly written, reliable and makes some important points; ideal for those beginning to study missiology. If that's how you see yourself, go ahead but if you want more than an introduction I'd look elsewhere.

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