

# Regent's Reviews

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology by Doug Gay**
- **The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry by Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean**
- **The New Testament for Everyone by Tom Wright**
- **The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology edited by Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs**

and many more...





## Editorial

Welcome to another edition of *Regent's Reviews*. This is another diverse set of reviews on the bible, theology and practical theology. In this edition you will find reviews of two new books on youth ministry, the *Oxford Handbook to Feminist Theology*, several of the latest Tom Wright books and much much more.

We are pleased also to be reviewing an important set of essays on Baptist hermeneutics, *The 'Plainly Revealed' Word of God?* with contributions from Paul Fiddes, John Colwell, Chris Ellis, Sean Winter, the editors Simon Woodman and Helen Dare, and more. Alongside that is a review of the recent festschrift for Brian Haymes, *Questions of Identity* with contributions from Steve Holmes, Ruth Gouldbourne, Nigel Wright, Alan Kreider and more. Both these books show Baptist theology is in a healthy state. This is in no small part to the contribution and influence of Paul Fiddes who turns sixty-five at the end of this month. For the last thirty years, Paul has been the leading theological thinker amongst the Baptist community, both in the contributions he has made in terms of Baptist theology (see *Tracks and Traces*) and in theology in general (see *The Creative Suffering of God, Past and Present Salvation* and *Participating in God*, amongst others). Paul was also the first editor of *Regent's Reviews*, and so we are grateful to him for the example he has set, the encouragement he has given, and the thinking he has offered us.

We look forward in the future to reviewing and engaging with some of the (many) projects he is working on at the moment.

*Andy Goodliff*  
*Editor*

## Table of Contents

<b>'Come Out My People': God's Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond by Wes Howard-Brook (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010, distributed in the UK by Alban books), 525pp.</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Early Christian Letters for Everyone – James, Peter, John and Judah by Tom Wright (London: SPCK, 2011), 224pp</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Revelation for Everyone by Tom Wright (London: SPCK, 2011), 227pp</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Parallel Lives of Jesus: Four Gospels, One Story by Edward Adams (London: SPCK, 2011), 195pp</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Book that Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology by Walter Brueggemann (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011, distributed in the UK by Alban books), 228pp</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>'Getting Saved': The whole story of Salvation in the New Testament edited by Charles H. Talbert, Jason A. Whitlark and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), xii+324pp</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology edited by Michael T. Dempsey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), x + 301pp</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The Modern Theologians Reader edited by David F. Ford &amp; Mike Higton with Simeon Zahl (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 450pp</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology edited by Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 608pp</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Justice in Love by Nicholas Wolterstorff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 284pp</b>	<b>31</b>

<b>Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology</b> edited by Rachel Muers and David Grummett (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 274pp	34
<b>Learning to Speak Christian</b> by Stanley Hauerwas (London: SCM, 2011), 322pp	38
<b>Questions of Identity: Studies in Honour of Brian Haymes</b> edited by Anthony R Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne (Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Series Vol. 6; Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011), 272pp	41
<b>Denomination: Assessing an Ecclesiological Category</b> edited by Paul M. Collins and Barry Ensign-George (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 177pp	43
<b>The 'Plainly Revealed' Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice</b> edited by Helen Dare and Simon Woodman (Macon, Georgia: Mercer, 2011), 312pp	46
<b>Understanding The "Imago Dei": The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann</b> by Dominic Robinson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), x + 192pp	51
<b>The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology</b> edited by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 626pp	54
<b>The Bible, disability, and the church: a new vision of the people of God</b> by Amos Yong (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 161pp	56
<b>Speaking Christian: Recovering the lost meaning of Christian words</b> by Marcus Borg (London: SPCK, 2011), 256pp	59
<b>Youth Ministry: A Multi-faceted Approach</b> edited by Sally Nash (London: SPCK, 2011), 160pp	61
<b>The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry</b> by Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 352pp	64
<b>Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology</b> by Doug Gay (London: SCM, 2011) 123pp	66

<b>Prophetic Dialogue, Reflections on Christian Mission Today</b> <b>edited by Steven Bevens and R Schroeder, (Maryknoll:</b> <b>Orbis, 2011, distributed in the UK by Alban books), xi</b> <b>+194pp</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor by Ben</b> <b>Witherington III (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011),</b> <b>166pp</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Fear and Trust: God-centred Leadership by David Runcorn</b> <b>(London: SPCK, 2011), ix+114pp</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results by Lovett H</b> <b>Weems Jr and Tom Berlin, (Nashville, NB: Abingdon, 2011,</b> <b>distributed in the UK by Alban books), xvi + 110pp</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>And God Spoke to Abraham: Preaching from the Old</b> <b>Testament by Fleming Rutledge (Grand Rapids, MI:</b> <b>Eerdmans, 2011), xiv + 421pp.</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in The</b> <b>Modern World by Abby Day (Oxford: Oxford University</b> <b>Press, 2011), 256pp</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Sharing Possessions by Luke Timothy Johnson (Eerdmans:</b> <b>Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 170pp</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Living Without Enemies: Being Present in the Midst of</b> <b>Violence by Samuel Wells and Marcia A. Owen (Downers</b> <b>Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 143pp</b>	<b>85</b>

**The New Testament for Everyone by Tom Wright  
(London: SPCK, 2011), 570pp**

Another version of the bible? Do I need another one? Does the church need another? But then this is one from Tom Wright. It is the collective outcome of his understandably popular 'New Testament for everyone' series.

Wright has set out to deliver a translation which is both modern and yet faithful to the 'original' Greek. This is not a modern paraphrase, such as the *Street Bible* or *The Message*. It is faithful and yet up to date, for example in being gender neutral.

The translation reads very well and compared to other versions, the flow of the sentences are fantastic. The pages are laid out like a novel (one column per page), which again I think adds to refreshing the way you might read the text. Not only that, the language is incredibly accessible and this is what makes this a real asset in bible texts. Considering how intellectual and complicated some of Wrights other books are, he has clearly stuck to the remit of keeping the NT available for everyone and this translation does this extremely well. I work with people who have very low literacy levels. The *Good News Bible* would have been my go to translation to give out, but I think this one is just as accessible and offers far more in faithfulness than the *Good News*, while combining the modern virtues of the paraphrases. I can see that regardless of the reader's ability, any new reader of the bible would find this a great 'first' copy of the NT.

I would also advocate the use of this version for a seasoned follower. I think any new version can help you work harder at reading the text. Wright's interpretation and translation of certain words means that it makes the reader work the text harder if they are in anyway familiar

with the bible. I've often had this and the NIV in the other hand and thinking 'now that's interesting, why that word?'

Whist advocating this version it does have two simple practical drawbacks. Firstly, it is really big for just a New Testament! In the world of slim line bibles who is going to be caring around a chunky NT hardback? [A paperback version is due out later this year.] I guess in an age when people will have bibles on their phones and ipads etc, this removes one of it's limitations, for those who can afford the technology. The second issue is it's only the NT which has the obviously draw back of only being half a bible, so it will not ever be pew bibles, which is a shame as the text reads so well and could be a great asset read in public.

So a good version and one I'd recommend. I think the church could be enriched by being exposed to this version in both public and private life. However, until it's to put together with the OT for everyone, but I'm not sure how much use it will get, other than being another bible version on the ministers self.

*Rich Shorter*  
*Harold Hill, Essex*

**'Come Out My People': God's Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond by Wes Howard-Brook (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010, distributed in the UK by Alban books), 525pp.**

In many ways I find myself extremely sympathetic to the overall goal of Howard-Brook's project. His purpose is to encourage his readers to read the Bible carefully and to heed its summons to forgo the religion of empire with its trappings of power and hierarchy and to embrace the religion of creation. The former is, he claims, characterized

by cities, temples, patronage, suspicion of outsiders and an economy based on money while the former is centred on villages and wilderness, is egalitarian, inclusive and has an economy based on giving and bartering.

In one way Howard Brook is taking the cosmic battle between good and evil out of the heavenly places and into the pages of the Bible. Here different texts serve different masters; some liberate and some oppress; some are a true reflection of the purposes of God and others distort God's purposes. Thus some parts of the Bible are read as supporting the wrong religion or as being compromised by it. Lining up for the wrong team are the deuteronomistic history, the pro-Temple post-exilic prophets, Ezra-Nehemiah and most of the Wisdom Literature. Battling for the good are Genesis, Exodus, most of the pre-exilic prophets, Deutero and Trito Isaiah, assorted apocalyptic texts, the gospels, Paul and the Apocalypse.

At every turn presumptions are made. Genesis is read from an exilic context as though it were an elaborate allegory. Much the same happens to Exodus. Lots of it turns out to reflect the rebellion of Jereboam who parallels Moses while the Rehoboam corresponds to the new pharaoh who enslaves the population. Meanwhile, in the New Testament, Paul himself is forgiven for his occasional failure to grasp the full implications of his own radical insights but the authors of the deutero-Pauline letters, especially the Pastorals, are treated with some suspicion.

So this is an interesting exercise in biblical theology with the Bible being read as the locus of a dispute between two forms of religion. As a result the Bible is read against itself with a theological criterion allegedly derived from one part of the Bible being privileged as the measure of the rest. As such the book is creative, readable, intriguing and



well worth engaging with. Whether it is exegetically or hermeneutically defensible is a different question. Are we justified in reading texts as allegories of events which seem to have happened much later? Is there some danger that we are reading 21<sup>st</sup> Century social, ecclesial and missional arguments back into the Bible? And, perhaps most significantly for the contemporary disciples of Jesus to whom the book seems to be addressed, is a spirituality which deprecates the urban and idealizes the dependence of hunter-gatherers on the abundance of creation going to be a serious option in a world of six billion or more?

Nevertheless, it seems to me that Howard-Brook is on the side of the angels and that this intriguing book will take us back to the Bible's text with renewed enthusiasm and fresh insights.

*Steve Finamore*  
*Bristol Baptist College*

**Early Christian Letters for Everyone – James, Peter, John and Judah by Tom Wright (London: SPCK, 2011), 224pp**

To provide an entirely new guide to the New Testament is an immense task and yet each of Tom Wright's *For Everyone* series guides are compact, useful for study and delightful to read. His regular use of anecdotes and charming short stories provide light and joy to each reflection. Somehow, Wright manages to combine easy reading with academic rigour providing the ideal balance for busy ministers preparing for sermons and thinking Christians alike. This series is accessible to all and always interesting to read for personal and study use. Each pericope of text is freshly translated by Wright and given a

short commentary including an introductory story followed by a brief exposition and then occasional challenge to the reader. The *For Everyone* series is easy to navigate with well-presented pages, a clear and concise index and glossary. The helpful glossary can be found towards the end of the book and provides good explanations of complex topics or themes. Throughout the text, the glossary is highlighted in a bold typeface, which alerts the reader to the extra information available to use.

Wright's recent edition *Early Christian Letters for Everyone* provides the same down to earth approach to the books of James, Peter, John and Judah. Wright introduces the reader to the world of the early Christian church, where he highlights that the message of Jesus was meant and is still meant for everyone to hear and understand. He encourages the reader to see the early Christian letters as breathing into the early Church a 'fresh air of delight in a new-found faith, hope and life.' Throughout the text he shares with the reader a generous view towards its original authors, and so guides with a light touch through the more testing passages of 1 Peter, for example, with much grace. Wright holds both the authors of the various letters to account and all the meanwhile challenges our post-modern readings of the texts. He helpfully illuminates biblical and cultural practice at the time for example in relation to the enslaved and presents a fresh challenge to Christians considering modern enslavement. This study guide achieves exactly what it sets out to do with insight and warmth, a helpful book indeed.

*Ruth Moriarty*  
*Poynton Baptist Church*

**Revelation for Everyone by Tom Wright (London: SPCK, 2011), 227pp**

Tom Wright's acclaimed and popular 'for Everyone' (New Testament) series comes to a conclusion (fittingly) with the publication of *Revelation for Everyone*. The format will be familiar to those already acquainted with the other volumes, and comprises Wright's own rendering of the biblical text interspersed with explanatory comment. The translation is contemporary without being clichéd, scholarly without being obtuse, and will be especially appreciated by those who want an accessible rendering which is alert to the complexities of the original Greek. It is worth noting that with the completion of the series it is also now possible to buy a one-volume compendium of Wright's translation of the entire New Testament (The New Testament for Everyone), printed without the explanatory sections found in the individual volumes.

In the introduction, Wright sets the tone for his commentary: 'This book in fact offers one of the clearest and sharpest visions of God's ultimate purpose for the whole creation, and of the way in which the powerful forces of evil, at work in a thousand ways but not least in the idolatrous and tyrannous political systems, can be and are being overthrown through the victory of Jesus the Messiah and the consequent costly victory of his followers' (x-xi). Those familiar with Wright's other work will recognise echoes of his theological perspective here, and this continues through the volume. However, at no point does his commentary become overwhelming or inaccessible. Rather, we catch frequent glimpses of Tom Wright the gifted preacher, offering relevant illustrations from the contemporary world, and consistently bringing the world of the first century to bear on the world of the twenty-first century in ways that challenge and inspire.

*Revelation for Everyone* will be especially useful for those seeking an accessible introduction to the potentially overwhelming book of Revelation. Preachers and small group leaders may well start here before moving on to more detailed commentaries, and individuals wanting to get to grips with a book they have previously avoided will do well with this volume.

*Simon Woodman*  
*Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London*

**Parallel Lives of Jesus: Four Gospels, One Story by  
Edward Adams (London: SPCK, 2011), 195pp**

Dr Edward Adams is Senior Lecturer in New Testament Studies at King's College London. His previous publications in eschatology and the cosmological language of the New Testament have been well received in the scholarly community. However, as far as I know, this book, which is also available as an e-book, is his first aimed at a more popular audience and, for what it contains, is very reasonably priced.

It is a book about the canonical Gospels, and how they might fruitfully be read together to give a rounded picture of Jesus. The book aims, 'to enable readers to engage with these texts in terms of their oneness and plurality.' It is divided into three sections. The first 40 pages offer a general introduction to the Gospels, in which some of the commonalities and differences between them are set out. It also introduces narrative criticism, the method which will undergird the rest of the book, as a way of making sense of these disparate elements. Helpful illustrations from film, television and literature are used to communicate the ideas. This latter chapter could be

helpful to preachers who want to gain a greater understanding of what are often intuitively recognised elements of Gospel passages.

The second section takes the structured set of questions raised by narrative criticism (e.g. what is the plot, who are the characters, what narrative techniques are used?), and asks them of each Gospel in turn, not in canonical order, but in the order in which they were probably produced (i.e. Mark, Matthew, Luke, John). Each Gospel receives approximately 20 pages. The narrative method provides a helpful framework for identifying key elements of each Gospel for purposes of comparison. For example, the ways in which each Evangelist characterises Jesus, the disciples and the religious authorities are examined in turn. However, some elements tend to be rather basic (e.g. the Plot is basically a restatement of the narrative of each Gospel). This might be useful to beginning students, but is less likely to be so for preachers (one would hope).

The third and final section looks at six episodes drawn from the Gospels in parallel, which average around 10 pages each. This is a useful section as it demonstrates by worked example the benefits of reading the Gospels alongside each other. The examples have been cleverly chosen to include something relevant from John in most of them. However, I am unconvinced of the benefit of the many references to the transliterated Greek text in this section. It raises questions about the intended audience, and rather undermines the value of using the English text in the parallels, hence undermining the confidence of the non-Greek reader to perform the analysis for themselves.

In a sense, if we imagine the Gospels laid out next to each other in four columns, the second section encourages reading *down* the page to discover the individual

emphases of each Gospel, while the third section encourage reading *across* the page, comparing the shared accounts to see how each Evangelist represents them. This latter section, naturally, builds on the former. Each chapter has suggestions for further reading, and the book concludes with a bibliography. For an introductory text, an index and glossary would have been helpful too, as occasionally, terms are used without explanation (such as 'idiolect', p.140).

I would have liked some further reflection on the 'shared story' which Adams indicates emerges from the four distinct Gospel narratives. This is what leads to the 'One Story' in the subtitle and results in 'a singular Jesus *multiply* rendered' (p.189). But what is this shared story? Adams briefly suggests that it corresponds to the preaching of the early church (pp.33, 188), but this was earlier than the disparate Gospels which combine to create it. Moreover, how does this shared story relate to the historical Jesus, if at all? Adams does not seek to answer this and, to be fair, his methodology is not typically interested in such questions, although he claims that it is possible to use narrative criticism while 'maintaining a keen interest in the historical realities and processes behind the texts' (p.25). Such an interest will not be met in this particular work.

Comparisons are inevitably invited between Adams' book, and that of his colleague in New Testament Studies at Kings, Prof. Richard Burridge. Burridge's book, *Four Gospels, One Jesus* is now in a second edition and is also published by SPCK (2005). Adams makes frequent reference to this work, even listing both editions in one section of further reading (p.37; probably a mistake, since only the first edition is mentioned in the bibliography). Both of these books take a literary approach to the



Gospels, both seek to affirm one common story. Burridge's book is more obviously aimed at a church audience, with its emphasis on viewing the Gospels through the traditional images of human, lion, ox and eagle. Adams, on the other hand, features his valuable third section in which the Gospels are compared in parallel. The latter might be useful for an introductory Undergraduate course (indeed, I have used it for this), or even adapted to a church course. Certainly, a preacher might benefit from considering Adams' method. However, because of the narrow focus on narrative criticism, which ultimately helps to avoid confusing the reader, *Parallel Lives of Jesus* would need to be supplemented by other introductory works on the Gospels to get a full picture.

One well-known online book seller incorrectly lists the subtitle to *Parallel Lives of Jesus* as: *A Narrative-Critical*

*Guide to the Four Gospels*. This, it turns out, is an excellent description of the book, and if that is what you are looking for, it will serve you well.

*Ed Kaneen*  
*Durham University*

**The Book that Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology by Walter Brueggemann (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011, distributed in the UK by Alban books), 228pp**

Reading a new book from Walter Brueggemann is, for me at least, like hearing a new CD from my favourite musicians. I am pretty sure from past experience that I am going to enjoy it, yet at the same time I remain expectant that it will take me in new directions and deepen my appreciation of their craft. This latest offering from this prolific Old Testament scholar on the twin subjects of biblical authority and theology readily fulfils those expectations and is in that regard no real surprise. Indeed aficionados will know that as a statement of the author's thinking it is not even that new: it effectively comprises a series of essays first published between 1992 and 2002 and brought together in 2005 (in hardback) to bring to a wider audience Brueggemann's critical engagement with contemporary discussions on the Old Testament. And while the author certainly addresses an extensive array of modern biblical scholarship, if sometimes repeating old ground in separate chapters, the book remains essentially his personal variation on that famous theme of Karl Barth: the nature of the 'strange new world' that is found within in the bible. Brueggemann's claim is to have explored this world (at least tentatively and in part) and his purpose is to guide others through the network of renewed

‘relationships and signs’ that gives ‘order and form’ to the lived reality of the text within a Christian community.’ In all that, he does accomplish his task most admirably: he draws the academic and non-specialist alike into the pressing matters of biblical scholarship and how they concern the church, its mission and place within the world. He does all this in a fresh and accessible style, often revealing his personal convictions and struggles and while he may sometimes wear his undoubted scholarship lightly, he does so only to remain consistently pertinent for his widest audience.

The book is structured into three distinct sections to aid the reader in this exploration of the strange new world. The first of these contains three chapters concerned with the nature of biblical authority. The later parts, chapters four to thirteen focus on the broad developments of 20<sup>th</sup> century biblical theology and Brueggemann’s particular contribution to it through ‘conversations’ with other leading scholars.

The first chapter ‘Biblical Authority and the Post critical Period’ establishes Brueggemann's conviction that biblical authority has little to do with questions of authorship, inspiration or revelation, but rather is concerned with how, ‘in a pluralistic world like ours, concrete communities can be authorised to love, act and hope in a matter that may at times oppose the accepted norm.’ As such, he claims the Bible can be received and its authority evidenced ‘only in communities of obedience and praise which, with marvellous indifference to categories of explanation, act with power, courage, freedom and energy, toward a new world envisioned, imagined, and promised in this text.’ Chapter 3 examines biblical authority in the light of the Church’s task of interpretation and revisits Brueggemann’s critique of the ecclesial and academic tyrannies that have

historically sought to press the text into service for their own dogmatic agendas. But it is his profoundly personal and biographical reflections in chapter two that may most encourage the casual reader and challenge his contemporaries in the academe. Here he admits that any interpretation inevitably reflects the deeply held passions of the one engaged in writing but also suggests that these passions are to be discovered in our self awareness of the wounds and burdens each person and community carries with them. Interpretation then 'is not the reiteration of the text but the movement of the text beyond itself in fresh ways, often ways never offered until this moment of utterance.' Here Brueggemann reflects on his familiar theme of the imagination in biblical authority and submits that this is 'the capacity to entertain images of meaning and reality that are beyond the evident givens of observable experiences' ... it is the 'hosting of 'otherwise''. So he concludes that 'every serious teacher or preacher invites to "otherwise" beyond the evident givens, or we have nothing to say' (p.28).

Brueggemann himself has plenty yet to say and it is Part Two of the book that forms the bulk of the academic work with six essays examining Old Testament theology in the twentieth century. The primary focus throughout these chapters, often recapitulated in each, is the far-reaching work of Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. Again and again these are assessed in response to Barth's 'strange new world'.

His fourth chapter is a clear and useful overview of developments in Old Testament scholarship in the 20th century, particularly in its response to Barth and in Chapter five he moves on to examine the influential work of Gerhard von Rad. Here he maintains his demand that any theologian must be interpreted within their

biographical context and thus explores Von Rad against the backdrop of German National Socialism and the theological difficulties of problem of supersessionism. This is developed further in chapter 6 through his exploration of the place of Creation in Old Testament theology and brought into sharp relief through the comparison of the Nazi ideology of "blood and soil" to Canaanite Baal religion. This says Brueggemann is why Von Rad largely ignores the place of creation in the beliefs of ancient Israel. What is important for him in this is how well this illustrates how (at least until Claus Westermann) that simple either/or dichotomy between history or nature, the ethical or the cultic became a dominant model of for articulating the standard categories for Old Testament theology. And again what Brueggemann finds significant in Westermann's subsequent alternative to that dichotomy is that it emerges in the social upheaval of the late 1960s and early 70s. He goes on to examine the theology that benefitted from Westermann's break from the past noting writers such as Bernhard Anderson, Jon Levenson and James Barr. Through them Brueggemann celebrates how Old Testament theology has been revitalised in its relationship with science particularly concerning ecology today and how it has restored its appreciation of the more 'feminine world' of daily engagement with nature.

Chapter seven is an 'ABC' of American contributions to Old Testament Theology with Brueggemann engaging with Bernhard Anderson, James Barr and Brevard Childs. He quickly concludes that by the 1960s the Old Testament Meta-narrative was essentially established as being covenantal in nature but that the subsequent decades saw this begin to unravel through fresh contextual approaches to interpretation such as those offered by Phyllis Trible's feminist hermeneutic. Without becoming overly defensive of his own position, Brueggemann engages critically with

the work of Anderson, Barr and Childs concluding that their differences are actually an illustration of the current vitality of their shared discipline.

The penultimate chapter in this section deals with the contemporary arena of more contextual approaches to Old Testament theology. Here the author begins by examining some of the modernist perspectives that see the text as 'an oppressive ideology of social control' and goes on to show how writers such as Childs fear the fragmentation of meaning and so respond by seeking to conform the text to their existing rule of faith. Finally he looks at the postmodern perspectives of scholars such as Wesley Kort and identifies their fear that under the aegis of the church the text has been reduced to a sameness that lacks power. Refreshingly Brueggemann concludes that common ground and 'provisional alliances' can be found between these groups and that in fact suggests that each can only be strengthened through a critical listening to the others.

Brueggemann proceeds with this appeal in the final section of the book: his 'conversations with other theologians.' He begins in chapter ten with the simple argument that if scripture is to breathe new life then its interpreters would do well not just to listen to one another but to go further and avoid what he describes as 'the Christian propensity to closure'. The ensuing chapters, his engagement with J. Richard Middleton and Brevard Childs, allows the previously enthralled reader a more critical view of the wider response to Brueggemann's own thinking. Here Childs is particularly critical of Brueggemann's work, comparing it unfavourably to Gnosticism, but the author's response is capaciously gracious as well intellectually rigorous acknowledging that they both share need for one another in the common calling and responsibility of interpreting the 'book that breathes new life.'



If this book were that new CD from a favourite musician it would be savoured through many repeated listens. As it is, each essay from this highly respected theologian deserves a similar attentive reading and care filled reflection and I suspect that each re-reading undertaken will continue to offer something fresh and invigorating for the theological mind.

*Craig Gardiner*  
*South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff*

**‘Getting Saved’: The whole story of Salvation in the New Testament edited by Charles H. Talbert, Jason A. Whitlark and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), xii+324pp**

The thesis of this collection of essays is that the NT writers agree in seeing the faithfulness of the believer as sustained by the grace of God. Adopting the ‘getting in’, ‘staying in’ terminology of EP Sanders, the writers maintain that staying in and finally attaining to the age to come are alike dependent on God’s enabling. This they call ‘New Covenant Piety’, taking up Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant as a time when God would write his laws on the hearts of his people. Talbert’s opening essay poses a strong and convincing challenge to Sanders’s contention that Judaism of the period was not typically legalistic. He shows how Paul sees God’s grace as enabling obedience as the believer is clothed with Christ, so that the Christian life is a matter of grace from start to finish. This is then shown to be the case also for Ephesians and the Pastorals and for Hebrews. There is a chapter on each of the Gospels, and also on James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter and Revelation, each of

which is shown to express the same New Covenant Piety but in interestingly different ways. The result is an attractive volume that brings together essays that might otherwise be lost in the pages of obscure journals, and deals with an unusually broad range of NT texts. The thesis is of pastoral relevance and the diligent preacher is likely to find encouragement to dig deeper and range wider.

*Alastair Campbell*  
*Abingdon*

**Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis by Keith L. Johnson  
(London: T & T Clark, 2011), 244pp**

Keith Johnson has done a great service to the Barth reading public, a constituency that seems to be growing: he has taken one of the most technical problems in Barth's theology and rendered it comprehensible. He has also shown its importance for Christianity and for the Protestant-Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue.

The *analogia entis*, the analogy of being, a key Roman Catholic philosophical concept, came to be a point of debate between Barth and the Roman Catholic theologian. Erich Przywara in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Barth came to think that Przywara's doctrine of *analogia entis*, was the fundamental reason for rejecting Roman Catholicism, and indeed famously stated 'I regard the *analogia entis* as the invention of the anti-Christ...' [CD I/1 p. xiii ]. Why was this? Basically Barth, in close and friendly ecumenical contact with his dialogue partner and his detailed explication of the doctrine, had come to understand it as validating natural theology. Przywara's work taught that God the creator had established knowledge of God and relationship with God outside of Christ's justifying grace. This, for Barth, left out the fallen condition of mankind as sinners and instead teaches a continuity of nature with grace which is at the heart of the analogy of being. Barth thinks Przywara offers a continuum of being, with God at one end and humanity at the other, capable by its own intrinsic being of sliding towards the divine, with no break of sin and judgement. This break was of course at the core of Barth's rejection of liberal theology in his *Romans*, 1922.

Indeed it is also close to the heart of Barth's curiously fierce debate with Brunner over natural theology, when

the latter got a very clear Nein! from the former. The context of all this was the febrile atmosphere in Europe and the rise of fascism and its traumatic effects on the churches. Barth has been accused of just misunderstanding the Roman Catholic doctrine and the Polish Jesuit Pryzwara. But Johnson's book carefully shows that Pryzwara did in fact lever up the doctrine to an ontological doctrine which includes the analogy of proportionality, a way of describing how we can speak of God: for Pryzwara the *analogia entis* includes the analogy of proportionality and becomes a metaphysical concept. Johnson painstakingly yet interestingly, argues from the texts that Barth was in fact not mistaken about Pryzwara's teaching, and in opposing it was responding from a Reformed Protestant classical position. Barth points out that for Pryzwara revelation can be read directly off created reality by humanity, and he rejects this as he had rejected the liberal version of the same assumption.

Johnson shows that this concern of Barth's not to allow grace and nature to blur together into an ontology which renders the gospel unnecessary is the reason for his move to *Church Dogmatics* from his initial efforts in *Christian Dogmatics* [1927] which 'existence', he came to see later, occluded The Word as the centre of dogmatics.

Readers will enjoy this well researched and well written book as it clarifies and explains a complex issue, and a debate still of deep importance to any serious Christian theology.

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

**Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology edited by Michael T. Dempsey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), x + 301pp**

No one with a serious and continuing interest in the theological contribution of Karl Barth will be unaware of the raging debate for which this collection of essays provides more than one summary together with further significant contributions - indeed, the debate continues beyond this volume and, sadly, has become rather more heated and acrimonious. In essence the debate focuses on the significance of Barth's identification of Jesus Christ as the subject, as well as the object, of election and was prompted by Bruce McCormack's contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, expressing a radical interpretation of Barth that he has subsequently developed and that has been challenged, principally, by Paul Molnar and George Hunsinger.

By this point I expect to have lost the interest of several readers: an elementary grasp of hermeneutics should be sufficient for us to know that we cannot have access to Barth's intentions beyond his text and, though historical scholarship is undoubtedly enriched by detailed and nuanced discussions of Barth's (or anyone else's) theological development, for most non-specialists such scholasticism is of merely marginal interest - which is a great pity since the questions raised within this debate and commendably rehearsed in this collection of explanatory and exploratory essays are far more compelling and foundational than mere historical analysis and, as such, predate Barth, albeit in rather different form. If Jesus Christ is not just the object but also the subject of election, electing God as much as elected man, might not this imply that that there is no God above or beyond the One who is *for us* in Jesus Christ, that the humanity of Christ is

eternally chosen by God, and that, accordingly, God's essential being as Triune is a consequence of this eternal decision of election? But would not this reversal of the ordering of election and Trinity forfeit the freedom both of God's election and of God's being, relating God to creation (or, at least, to Christ's humanity) by necessity rather than by grace? But, on the other hand, can the freedom of God thus envisaged be maintained without implying arbitrariness, without precisely implying a God other than and beyond the One who elects us for himself in Jesus Christ?

Here again, then, we are confronted with the problematic nature of the language of freedom and necessity, with the age-old question of the relation between divine being and divine action, and with the sheer impossibility of comprehending an eternal before and an eternal after. And, if I hesitantly can venture a comparison, in this question of divine necessity and freedom perhaps we are engaging with an enigma similar to that of the sinlessness of Christ's humanity: what is the force of the '*could not*' in the affirmation 'Christ *could not* sin'? Can this '*could not*' be maintained without prejudice to the reality of his temptation (without prejudice to his freedom to sin)? Might not the language of coherence and consistency be preferable here to the absolutist and essentialist language of freedom and necessity? And is theological debate ever constructively furthered by asking hypothetical questions? If it is in any sense true that the God of the gospel *could not* be God without us surely this '*could not*' is a matter of consistency rather than necessity. You may have little interest in the nuances of Barth scholarship but if these questions don't interest you I wonder why you are reading this publication.



And if such questions do engage you, regardless of your interest or otherwise in Barth scholarship, your thinking will be stimulated by this collection of essays that regularly move beyond the historical questions to the truly theological and philosophical. As with all such collections there are weak spots and there are highlights; there are occasions when the protagonists speak past each other and address caricatures of their respective positions, but there are also instances of

penetrating insight and perceptive observation from contributors at the edge and at the centre of this debate.

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

**The Modern Theologians Reader edited by David F. Ford & Mike Higton with Simeon Zahl (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 450pp**

This is a cornucopia of very well judged selections from significant and usually interesting theologians mostly Christian, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The book acts as a companion to *The Modern Theologians* edited by David Ford and Rachel Muers (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Wiley Blackwell, 2005). The selections are at most ten pages each, often less. The pages are wide and double columned, which probably means even more value for your money. I make it 79 selections in total. We might say that the selections are on a continuum starting from the predictable classics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - Barth, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, de Lubac, Rahner and von Balthasar – and ending with theology and other faiths, then finally the arts. It is hard to see any movement that has been missed out unless perhaps that of 'Queer' theology (for which avid readers, if so minded, might turn to the Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology series, *Theology and Sexuality* edited by Eugene F Rogers, Jr. and its journeying into such matters).

The selections are classified in seven parts and the classifications themselves are of interest. Part 1 gives us 20<sup>th</sup> C classics, part II 'theological responses to modernity in Europe and the USA'. This has five sub sections: Germany, Pannenberg and Moltmann; Britain, T.F Torrance, D.MacKinnon and Rowan Williams; USA, Richard

and Reinhold Niebuhr. The geography then gives way to sub section D 'The contemporary scene: re-appropriating traditions', entailing liberalism, post-liberalism' systematic theology after Barth, and Roman Catholic theology post Vatican II. Phew! The authors in question include Whitehead, Lindbeck, Frei, Jungel, Jenson, Lonergan and Pope JP II. On then to section E of Part II, an interesting category, 'Texts, Truth and Signification', populated by Bultmann, Ricoeur, Dalferth, Pantinga, and post moderns de Certeau and Marion. I guess the British side of me would have liked to see say contributions from Anthony Thiselton and Francis Watson, perhaps even Don Cupitt. The one blemish in the text appears alas on p.168 where Rudolph Bultmann becomes 'Richard' Bultmann in bold headings – I wonder if this could be a product of a digitisation type of glitch inserting itself, spell checking it wrongly, who knows, but the really intertextual geeks would of course see nothing wrong with such 'Erring', according the Mark Taylor deconstruction of theology and texts? Here I stray out of my depth.

Part III is 'theology and the sciences', Polkinghorne, Murphy, de Chardin, and Haight. Part IV concerns 'theology, prayer and practice', including the golden oldie Evelyn Underhill, Simone Weil, Tom Oden and Nancy Eisland. Part V is 'particularizing theology', that is contextual theologies, from feminism, black, Latin American, African, South Asian, East Asian and post colonial perspectives. Such a wide set of selected readings is very useful for the reader who wishes to keep abreast of developments, but cannot possibly have time to read each topic in any depth. Part VI is 'global engagements', ecumenical theology, Eastern Orthodoxy, Pentecostal and Evangelical theologies, including John Stott. This indicates the concern to include not simply the technical theologians but those important for wider public relevance. Part VII

gives us 'theology between faiths' and here are some of the sharpest aperitifs on offer, with Hick and Barnes, and Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist authors and topics. A really good pairing is Kenneth Cragg on Islam, then Seyyed Hussein Nasr, an Iranian Muslim teaching in the USA. Cragg probes the theme of sheer power in Islam, divine power and the cause justifying such practices as 'truce breaking', Nasr argues for the historical finality of Islam and for the Koranic teachings on Jesus – not mentioning that the Gospel of Barnabas seems to supply these. Part VIII on the arts has a rich contribution from Begbie on music.

We can say this is an intriguing collection, a total newcomer to theology would surely be interested in at least some of the menu, a more experienced theological consumer would surely have gaps filled in from authoritative sources.

The overall effect is to give the reader a set of rich tasters, and the range is so vast that very few 'professionals' will have a knowledge of all the types.

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

**The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology edited by Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 608pp**

You should never judge a book by its cover. Some covers, however, clearly aim to cause a reaction. Within minutes of collecting *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, I was surrounded by a heated discussion of the appropriateness – or otherwise – of the female 'Christa' on the cross depicted on the front. The book remains as provocative when read; even as a fairly ardent feminist I was amazed

by the comment 'as a Goddess-worshipping lesbian feminist, I found that no mainstream Jewish denomination fulfilled my spiritual needs' (p.53).

Written from many perspectives, this book is a collection of chapters describing – and responding to – the challenge of globalisation to feminist theology. It is a feminist work more than it is a theological one; its concern is exclusively that of the plight of women in religion, rather than seeking to deal with those issues in the light of a doctrine of God. It would therefore seem easy for us to dismiss this work as having little to say to evangelical Protestantism; from the opening chapter Serene Jones allows that Christian feminist theology is only a subsection of what they are considering to be feminist theology. Space is given for those who want to conceive of God as loosely as a nebulous “the Divine” and the book is broad enough to include a whole chapter on “Feminist Theology and the Jewish tradition”. Whilst this diversity of viewpoints is not something to critique, as it takes seriously critiques levied at western feminist theology regarding the presumptive universalising of the issues of white western women, I did often struggle with the arrogant tone of these viewpoints: every contributor is female and the authors hold to an epistemological privilege of women, which I dispute. It is deeply frustrating that a work guised as a “handbook” enhances a stereotype of feminist theology being anti-male, only the domain of women and too often nothing to do with God.

Yet, whilst it would be easy to reject this work as irrelevant to our theology in a British Baptist context, it would also be wrong to. In many places the Handbook provides an interesting and contemporary challenge to our perspective. The first section of the book about the ‘Changing contexts’ of theology seriously considers the

effects of globalisation on people's worth, showing how too often our attempt to celebrate difference has been corrupted through commercialism: the exotic is now something exciting to entice consumers to buy new products. This challenge that we are led to see 'other' people as a consumable part of a market system is a powerful critique of western society from an alternative theological perspective. Elsewhere, Briggs provides an eloquent description of the role of science in popular culture as the means of salvation, which television communicates to us as a modern day 'sacred text', and how being able to conceive of different realities in science fiction empowers and enables us to conceive of a reality in which gender can look different. She returns this challenge to feminist theology: in our reality do we believe that gender dynamics can look different? In one of the final chapters, Berger discusses women and rituals, concluding that, whatever the critiques of 'feminist' rituals, it is now apparent that a multitude of Christian women practice their faith in gender-specific ways. She leaves us with the argument that is imperative 'to (re-)connect with the many ways in which women make meaning within a given faith tradition and its established worship life' (p.542). For the significance of these points, at the very least, it is worth moving beyond the lazy stereotyping or easy controversy of the Christa on the front cover and to actually open the book. It certainly is a thought-provoking read.

*Beth Allison*  
*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Justice in Love by Nicholas Wolterstorff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 284pp**



This is the companion volume to *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* in which Wolterstorff developed an account of justice understood in terms of rights based on the worth which human beings have as creatures loved by God. The book is divided into four parts. In the first part he argues that Anders Nyren, Soren Kierkegaard and Reinhold Niebuhr misled twentieth century Christians into thinking of God's love and the *agape*-love which God calls human beings to show in terms of benevolence. In Part Two Wolterstorff develops his own account of *agape*-love as care. The account is similar to that developed by some Christian feminists but Wolterstorff gives little acknowledgement of their direct influence, if any. In the third part, Wolterstorff discusses the question of forgiveness, clearly a central matter of pastoral concern. In Part Four, Wolterstorff addresses the question of the justice of God's love, which he approaches by way of a re-interpretation of Romans which challenges *both* the Reformation reading *and* the New Perspective on Paul.

Wolterstorff argues that the overarching theme of Romans is neither 'justification by faith' nor 'God's covenant faithfulness' but rather the defence of God's justice (p.243). Wolterstorff then proceeds, in his interpretation of Paul, to challenge the traditional understandings of the doctrines of election, atonement and justification by faith.

For Wolterstorff, the picture of the courtroom is constantly present in Paul's mind as he writes the letter to the Romans (pp.257-258, 262-263). At first glance it seems as if the figure in the dock is God. Paul is concerned to justify God's offer of justification to the Gentiles (pp.244-245). However, for Wolterstorff, the key question is what happens to human beings who are in the dock. Are they declared innocent because of Jesus even though God knows they are guilty? Wolterstorff rejects this

interpretation as plainly false (p.263). Wolterstorff dismisses the idea that human beings are freed because Jesus has already borne their punishment as unjust (p.265). What is left, according to Wolterstorff, is the idea that people are justified when God decides to dismiss the charges against them, on account of their faith, even though God knows and they know that they would be found guilty were God to press the charges. Wolterstorff does not, however, sufficiently explain why he rejects the possibility that God finds people guilty of the charges but then chooses to pardon them, to commute the sentence of death, a possibility which has at least as much exegetical support as his favoured interpretation, not least the example of the release of Barabbas and Jesus' word to the penitent thief in the gospels.

Upon completing the book this reader was left unclear as to which way the argument runs. Does Wolterstorff's account of forgiveness depend on his exegesis of Romans: read Romans like this and you must understand forgiveness as I have understood it, or does Wolterstorff's exegesis of Romans depend on his account of forgiveness: think of forgiveness as I have and your eyes will be opened to read Romans like this?

Wolterstorff's writing is lucid, his insistence on uniting philosophy, theology and biblical exegesis within a single work is exemplary, and his contribution deserves to mark the debate about justice, love and forgiveness in the twenty-first century just as much as Nygren did in the twentieth.

*David McIlroy*  
*Spurgeon's College, London*

**Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology edited by Rachel Muers and David Grummett (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 274pp**

Christianity in our times appears to have surprisingly little to say about eating. It is surprising both because of the wealth of biblical material about eating (in both Testaments) and because one of the central practices of the Church is the breaking of bread. Yet this is a book about eating and, specifically, about the eating of meat. It is a collection of essays from scholars in a range of fields, including theology, philosophy, sociology, politics and classics. Each reflects from different perspectives on aspects of the basis for a Christian vegetarianism.

The perspectives on offer vary greatly, from Michael Beer's contribution on the role of vegetarianism in the writings of Plutarch and how this influenced some early Christian thinkers to Erika Cudworth's essay on ecofeminism and the role of meat eating as a reflection of male sexuality which reinforces patriarchal socio-political paradigms.

A theme which runs through many of the essays is that the Christian tradition contains within it abundant resources for dealing with contemporary manifestations of concerns about animal welfare, public health and food scarcity. It is also clear that we are largely not using them.

The contributions show how the Church has had much to say at particular points in its history about dietary practice generally, and meat avoidance specifically. Broadly speaking, vegetarianism has been conceived in various times and places both as an essential element of Christian piety and as a dangerous heresy. Teresa M. Shaw sheds some light on this range of opinion in her chapter, noting

that '[t]he heresiological distinction between valid food abstinence and heresy rests on whether abstinence (especially from meat) is long-term, required (not merely advocated) or 'arrogant', and whether or not it affirms or disparages bodily life in general and procreation in particular'. This notion that Christian vegetarianism is valid for some but should never be said to be essential for all at all times appears to be common to many of the contributions in this book.

Reasons for meat abstention in particular communities of Christians have varied. They have included a belief that the violence of butchery normalises violence toward other human beings and a belief that the properties of meat excite the passions. More recently, as Samantha Jane Calvert notes, the discovery that a meat-free diet seemed to reduce the desire for alcohol led to strictly vegetarian meal provision in Salvation Army 'homes for inebriates' until as recently as the 1920s.

One rationale for Christian meat abstention which, to judge by this collection of essays, seems to be noticeable by its historical absence is concern for the welfare of animals themselves. Even when treatment of animals does form part of an argument, it is the implications for the human psyche or spirit which tends to be of primary concern. This may be unsurprising. But what is then surprising is that it appears to have been Christians – particularly those from the dissenting churches – who provided much of the support for the modern vegetarian movement and were even, according to the book, behind the establishment of the Vegetarian Society. This, as in the case of the Salvation Army, was often – though not exclusively – linked to tee-totalism and other 19<sup>th</sup> Century Evangelical social causes.

Daniel Dombrowski asks a number of thought-provoking questions in his 'argument from marginal cases'. He begins by noting that we treat animals in ways which we would never dream of treating fellow humans, and asks what it is that distinguishes us from the animals. He then deconstructs these distinctions, drawing on 'marginal cases' of humanity. For example, if it is rational thought which distinguishes humans from animals, he asks, why then do we not treat human children, the comatose or the mentally ill as we treat animals, since it could be demonstrated that they exhibit no more rationality than the animals? Dombrowski develops the idea of the 'moral patient' – creatures which cannot be said to be rational enough to act as moral agents or participate in a moral contract but who, nonetheless, are capable of experiencing the unjust moral decisions of others through their capacity to feel physical and emotional pain. This category, he argues, is where human beings typically locate the 'marginal' examples of infants, the comatose and the mentally ill and it is a category which must logically be extended to animals. We are left with a stark choice: either we must stop mistreating animals or we must admit that we have no basis other than an irrational 'species-ism' to support our current practices.

Another theme in this collection is the importance of the meal as communal, socially-constitutive act. Throughout human history, meals brought people together, and the sharing of a common food culture bound society together. In most societies, meat did not form part of the quotidian diet for the majority of people, and the consumption of meat often involved ritual elements. Vegetarianism, similarly, was socially constitutive in that it established the otherness of the practicing community and reflected their rejection of the wider society, from the Pythagoreans to Celtic monks. It is perhaps interesting to note that those

who abstained from meat were commonly referred to as 'Pythagorians' until as recently as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Michael Northcott, in one of the more compelling chapters of the book, points to a loss of a sense of collective participation in the Eucharist. He argues that early Eucharistic practice was a full meal in which all members of the church shared equally and were constituted as equally necessary parts of the body of Christ. Things soon started to go wrong with this ideal, though, as Paul's letters to the Corinthians make clear. By the time we reach our present times, argues Northcott, the Eucharist is no longer a meal in which all participate at table, but has become a performance in which the congregation have a bit-part toward the end. This loss of collective engagement in some ways parallels our loss in the West of the sociality of meal times, where far more of our food is consumed in front of a screen than in front of other people.

Both Northcott and Nigel Pleasants point particularly strongly to the radical change that meat production has undergone in the last century or so. Historically, few animals were kept solely for their meat, and meat was often the final useful contribution of an animal that had primarily been kept as a working animal or to provide milk or eggs. The rapid industrialisation of meat production in the West, which has led to animals whose entire life cycle takes place in a small cage without ever seeing the sun, may go a long way toward explaining the sudden emergence and urgency of the argument from animal suffering. Whilst we must not romanticise the lot of pre-modern animals, they argue, we must also recognise that modern industrial agri-business is a significant paradigm shift in the human relation to animals.

Ultimately, the book does not come out either in favour of Christian vegetarianism or against it, and, as noted above, many of the contributors ultimately conclude that vegetarianism should be viewed as adiaphorous although some do emphasise an extra responsibility incumbent upon those of us who live in the West. What this book does do is to raise a series of deeply difficult questions designed to make all of us think much more thoroughly about something we all do more or less daily. And that, I think, makes it a book which deserves to be read. And with both paperback and Kindle versions now available, hopefully it will be.

*Ashley Beck*  
*London*

**Learning to Speak Christian by Stanley Hauerwas  
(London: SCM, 2011), 322pp**

Those familiar with the work of Stanley Hauerwas will not be surprised to hear that *Learning to Speak Christian* is, in Hauerwas' own words, a 'rag-tagged book of essays' rather than a conventional monograph. It does not, he argues, add up to 'anything so grand as "an argument"', but rather, by drawing together these particular writings in this particular way, Hauerwas tries to show the interrelatedness of his thought – to demonstrate that he was only able to preach this sermon because he wrote that essay. This is a book of essays, then, but also of sermons and addresses, and it is arranged into three sections.

The first, 'Learning Christian: To See and to Speak' includes Hauerwas' reflections on what is often called 'the problem of religious language' – that all human language falls short of the reality of God and yet that we must

nonetheless use it to speak of God. Here, Hauerwas sets out a view of theology as a craft which must be learned by apprentices from masters who are steeped in its traditions. It is necessary to be trained in what Hauerwas calls the 'grammar and reading habits' of the Christian community so that we can learn what we mean when we say the word 'God'. In his compelling commencement address to Eastern Mennonite Seminary in chapter 6, Hauerwas indicates the importance of learning the traditions of the Church to his own journey: 'to the extent that I have learned to speak Christian I have done so because I have had to teach others how Christians in the past have spoken.'

The second section, 'The Language of Love: From Death to Life' Hauerwas characterises as dealing with 'more "normative" matters'. There are a number of sermons on what love may – or should – mean, including an amusing suggestion from a sermon given at a wedding that perhaps reflections on learning to love our enemies, rather than 1 Corinthians 13, would provide more helpful and realistic guidance to newly weds. Chapter 13, 'Finite Care in a World of Infinite Need' unpacks Hauerwas' approach to medical ethics in a helpful way, and sets out what could be described as his normative argument, that is, how medical ethics ought to be.

The third section, 'Habits of Speech Exemplified: Some Teachers', sees Hauerwas engaging with thinkers such as H. Richard Niebuhr, Alasdair MacIntyre, Thomas Aquinas, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Catholic Social Teaching. By means of his engagement with these thinkers, Hauerwas demonstrates some of the multitude of influences on his work and unpacks some of his thinking on the virtues, on friendship and on the necessity of the Church.



It is the necessity of the Church, I think, which is a key thread running through all of the reflections in this book. For be it learning to talk about God, to live lives of virtue, to love and have friendships, to offer care to others or to act in service of society – all themes explored in this book – it is our location within the community of the Church which, for Hauerwas, makes our behaviour ‘sustainable’. That sermons are included in this collection seems, in light of this, to point directly to this necessity of the Church as the proper location of theological thought.

Hauerwas is deeply critical of attempts to accommodate Christian theology and ethics (which he does not see as separable) to the world without reference to their location within Christianity, a project he describes as ‘doomed to failure’. Our lives, he argues, only make sense if we have narratives available that make our lives fit within the narratives of a community. It is these narratives which make sense of our actions, of the ‘story’ of our lives. And so removing Christian ethics from references to this narrative history renders them unintelligible. As Hauerwas sees it, ‘the worst betrayal of the task of theology comes when the theologian fears that the words he or she must use are not necessary.’

This is a book which aims to show the theologian and, perhaps more importantly, the Christian how the words we use when we talk are necessary. That when we use religious language, we cannot say what we are saying without using religious language; and that to use religious language we must be trained in the grammar and habits of that language by masters of a living craft tradition steeped in what past masters have said before them.

This is a challenging read, at times, but Hauerwas’ mixing up of the academic with the homiletic ensures that it is

always a compelling one. For those familiar with Hauerwas' wider work, this book clarifies and rearticulates helpfully some of what might be called "Hauerwas' issues." But it is also a book which should appeal to anyone with an interest in religious language, and how we are to learn to use it –to learn, that is, how to 'speak Christian'.

*Ashley Beck*  
*London*

**Questions of Identity: Studies in Honour of Brian Haymes edited by Anthony R Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne (Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Series Vol. 6; Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011), 272pp**

This excellent collection of essays, written in honour of Brian Haymes, is an example of health in contemporary Baptist life. Most of the essays are by Baptist scholars, some of whom are in pastorate and others in academic roles, with helpful contributions from the Mennonite Alan Kreider and Anglican Christopher Rowland. Together they represent the range of scholarship and interests that Brian has but also reflect the importance of people like him to the church: ministers who are both pastoral and theological. Ministers whose preaching is the fruit of an intellectual struggle with the questions of the moment, attentive to a close reading of the Biblical text and serious in their application to Christian ethics and discipleship. If those of us who serve as ministers in the local church could emulate Brian our churches would be richer for it.

This volume, being one of a series produced by the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, is a timely

contribution to current denominational life in the UK. Four hundred years since the founding of the first Baptist church in London, Baptists in England and Wales are reflecting on where God is calling them and how to organise their life together for mission and ministry. Stephen Holmes chapter on 'Knowing the Mind of Christ: Congregational Government and the Church Meeting' is one example with his reflections on the practice of church meetings and the need for us to live out painful and alien practices which embody our values.

Inevitably, in any collection, particular chapters will have greater impact; influenced by one's own theological prejudices and (in my case) personal friendship with some of the contributors. For me, Sean Winter's chapter 'Ambassadors for Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:20): Ministry in the New Creation is a particular highlight forcing me to review a passage which has been increasingly important to my understanding of atonement, ministry and mission.

For a reader in pastoral ministry who struggles to find time for reading among the other demands on their time this book is a tonic. It provides the opportunity to reflect on a range of questions that are central to our calling and identity as disciples of Jesus Christ, whether Baptist or not. The chance to consider, with Ruth Goldbourne, the power of the motherly action of God in birthing us or a reading of the book of Revelation, with Simon Woodman, that invites us to understand the imagery of fire and burning as tending towards a hopeful theology of non violence.

Whether you are a Baptist or an Anglican, with Anabaptist sympathies, academic leanings or simply someone who wants to think about what it means to be part of the church of Christ this is a book which is worth the read.

*Neil Brighton*

*Poynton Baptist Church*

**Denomination: Assessing an Ecclesiological Category  
edited by Paul M. Collins and Barry Ensign-George  
(London: T & T Clark, 2011), 177pp**

In a supposedly 'post-denominational' age it is surprising, but not inappropriate, to find a book on the subject of denominations. This book, which is Volume 11 in the series *Ecclesiological Investigations* edited by Gerald Mannion, opens up the subject of what the category 'denomination' might mean and whether it is a use or a hindrance. The compilation owes its origin to a session of the Ecclesiological Investigations Group of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago in 2008.

The core of the book is in the first two chapters with what remains being elaboration or rejection of the category in a variety of traditions including Baptist, Lutheran, United Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic. Most of the authors and their churches-of-reference are American. Although all of this is interesting, the real interest is in the dialectic of the first two chapters which constitute a sharp if amicable stand-off between Barry Ensign-George of the Presbyterian Church and Paul Avis of the Church of England. In short, Ensign-George, and indeed other writers at the Protestant end of the spectrum are relatively hospitable towards the denomination category whereas Avis, and later Peter de Mey who writes from a Roman Catholic perspective, are hostile.

Reading the first two chapters was definitely for me one of those occasions when you find yourself reasonably convinced by the first argument and then have it pretty

much overturned by the second leaving you wondering what you think. Ensign-George argues that in the adventure of being church, somewhere between its global and local manifestations there exists a beneficial and necessary category and experience called 'denomination', his own Presbyterian grouping being an example. This he describes under the five categories of contingent, intermediary, interdependent, partial and permeable. Though regarded by some as abhorrent, denominations are a reality and as such need to be understood as theologically and practically legitimate, potentially among the good gifts of God to the church. They belong to the precarious and provisional status of the church in this age. Some who write in this volume prefer the more dynamic language of movements, but denominations allow for various responses to the grace of God all of which are faithful and legitimate even in their difference. They reflect the diversity of creation and of church in which there continues to be differentiation into tribes. Granted that the intermediate dimensions of church life are underdetermined in the NT and not much is said there to guide us, we nonetheless emerge with a positive understanding of denominational life which many on the Protestant wing of the church would gladly affirm and benefit from. Understood in this way, especially as permeable, denominations need not obstruct the cause of Christian unity. They may not be perfect, but they do 'fill a hole' (even if only provisionally) for which many are grateful; and they fit well within the tendencies towards associationism and privatisation of complex modern societies.

None of which is a good thing, according to Paul Avis, formerly General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England. This is because the word denomination is not a biblical, nor a theological, nor an

ecclesiological term. It is not derived from the Christian tradition nor does it have specific theological content nor is it good for churches to describe themselves with terms that do not belong to God-language. All of this should lead us to be wary of it. Case closed, then. Instead, it is a sociological term and it carries immense baggage much of which is not welcome. Denominations belong to a fragmenting church which in turn has become about because of toleration. For Avis, to tolerate is to relativise, and to relativise is to privatise, and public doctrine cannot be relative. Avis cites Owen Chadwick to the effect that toleration leads to a free market of opinions and Pannenberg to the effect that as a consequence the public integration of meaning is lost.

For a Baptist it appears strange that toleration should be blamed for such a doomsday scenario. The logical inference seems to be that to have an integrated society which shares a sense of meaning, and therefore ethics, you need to revoke toleration and return to religious monopoly. This inference is made all the more likely when Avis goes on to deny that the Church of England is in any sense a denomination. To call it this would reduce the established church to just another relativised denomination. Denominations are in fact a standing rebuke to the churches, which have failed to heed the prayer of Jesus that the church be one. So: a denomination is emphatically what the Church of England does not want to be. It does not see itself as one option among others but as 'the authentic church', with Anglicans not seeing why other churches are needed when they could find a happy home in the local parish church where all are welcome and none are turned away, and where there is nothing to offend Christians of goodwill (p. 30). At this point one marvels at how history and life can be so differently interpreted! Presumably Avis' perspective is that the

Church of England is itself so tolerant and benign that were it once more to be trusted (by other churches rather than the state) with the religious monopoly it truly deserves (as the authentic church) all other denominations would be granted respect and acceptance under its capacious canopy. That seems to be the intent of his words on p.32: 'Anglican churches do not need to dismiss or devalue the claims of other churches; they do not need to make an exclusive claim for themselves or to unchurch others'.

Avis is a considerable theologian. He is coming from a very different place from many of us and working this out takes a bit of effort. There is much to think about here. It's a pity that with a price tag of £60 not many are likely to buy the book, but that need not stop us thinking about the issues.

*Nigel G. Wright*  
*Spurgeon's College, London*

**The 'Plainly Revealed' Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice edited by Helen Dare and Simon Woodman (Macon, Georgia: Mercer, 2011), 312pp**

This book arises from a consultation held in Cardiff in January in 2009 in which a number of Baptist scholars, mainly from the UK, met to present papers and discuss the question of Baptist hermeneutics. Those papers, together with two additional pieces not given at the conference, and two concluding responses from other traditions are brought together in this significant volume. Essentially the book weaves together thoughts around two inter-related questions: Is there such a thing, or such things, as specifically Baptist hermeneutics and if so, what might

they look like. Or to put it in other words, how should Baptist read the Bible as Baptists?

There are twelve main papers, together with a short additional response to one paper and the two concluding reflections. Contributors include figures such British Baptists as Paul Fiddes, Rex Mason, Chris Ellis, John Colwell and Sean Winter, together with contributions from overseas from Mikael Parsons, Alan Culpepper and Parush Parushev. The editors have grouped the papers into five sections, generally with three papers in each:

- Baptist Biblical Engagement reviewed
- Baptist Biblical Encounters Analysed
- Baptist Biblical Hermeneutics Explored
- Baptist Interpretative Difference Negotiated
- Baptist Hermeneutics in Wider Perspective

Whereas this has a neat and tidy structure and pattern, the content of the papers is not so easily and neatly divided. While there are certainly similarities of approach between different papers, there is certainly some sense of seeking to bring a structure to a more disparate set of contributions.

It is worth saying that this is not a book which, for the most part, offers an introduction to issues of Baptist hermeneutics. It is written by academic scholars mainly for academic scholars, and a number of the papers are a demanding read, requiring considerable theological literacy. This is not a criticism of the book – this is an important subject which demands searching theological debate – simply a recognition of potential readers. Rex Mason' article is typically clear, and the slightly mischievous twinkle in the eye comes through. The first part of his article offers something of an introduction to



hermeneutical issues. Helen Dare's later article on reading the Bible in the fray of church life is also particularly accessible. She proposes four strands of biblical interpretation which come together in a rope: devotional, textual and analytical, practical and confessional. This sets out a useful and helpful overview of different types of approach, although belies the complexity of hermeneutical possibilities within these four approaches.

It is also worth saying that it is not meant to be a comprehensive guide or an attempt at a systematic development of Baptist hermeneutics. Rather it is a collection of papers which offer different perspectives on some aspect of the theme, with some papers overlapping and some papers taking us in different directions. So, for example, the first section offers three, mainly historical accounts of Baptist engagement with Scripture, the last two of which explore the very significant Baptist contributions to the scholarly study of John's Gospel and the Old Testament. In the first paper in section 2 Chris Ellis proposes a hermeneutic of encounter, which he sees as primary theology. This involves a focus on the congregation hearing the Word in creative and imaginative ways rather than a close study of text - clearly in some tension with the preceding papers, and also with the very academic feel of the overall project. The book does not attempt to reconcile any conflicting views - that is the task of the reader. A further topic which then needs to be explored in the light of the different papers, is the role that theologians should play within our Baptist churches, bringing some kind of creative tension between close attention to the text and the congregational hearing of the Word.

Although there are definitive answers to the question of Baptist hermeneutics, and John Colwell characteristically

begins by questioning whether we should even look for a Baptist hermeneutics and whether there can be a distinctly biblical hermeneutics at all, there are a number of strong themes which come throughout the book. These are, notably, community and covenant, the Christological foundation together with the on-going work of the Spirit and the place of faith. All three papers in the section on Baptist Interpretative Difference Negotiated, by Simon Woodman, Helen Dare and Sean Winter, explore in different ways the nature of Baptist communities which are the central locus of interpretation together with Simon Perry's earlier paper on pragmatism and community in Lewis Misselbrook's Bible study notes. Discussion of a Christological hermeneutic has a focus in Ian Birch's paper but is picked up in many other ways, and differing views of the work of the Spirit are significant aspects so the chapters by Ellis, Parushev and Colwell. And the papers in the first section together with Rex Mason's later chapter relate critical scholarship to the life of the church, in a way that shows that the faith of both the theologians and the wider church and the needs of the faith community were central to the motivation and on-going work of Baptist theologians. Brian Brock in his response describes this as negotiating a dual citizenship.

It is not then surprising that there are also a number of references to the Baptist Union Declaration of Principle, and ecclesiological foundations and perspectives come throughout the book. For this reason Mikael Parsons' chapter on the way the book of Acts has been read by Baptists is a helpful starting place.

It is also interesting to note the influences that appear in a number of different papers. The work of Karl Barth, with his suggestion that the Bible is a place of encounter rather than simply a deposit of teaching, and Stanley Fish, and his

insistence on the role of reading communities, loom behind much that is written, both explicitly and implicitly. James McClendon has also been influential for some. The nature of the papers means that much of this is taken for granted, and there is certainly the scope and need for a more fundamental and at times critical engagement with some of these views, especially the work of Stanley Fish.

The book ends with two reflections from those beyond the Baptist community. Brian Brock's piece is particular helpful, offering some further theological reflections on all the papers, drawing out significant areas of convergence alongside issues of divergence, and then beginning to move the discussion on. It is an important and helpful contribution to the book and definitely a chapter to read.

This is a stimulating book which repays the time given to it, but it is perhaps most important not to see this as something finished, but as the invitation to further reflection and discussion. As the book notes, how we read the Bible together has changed in church worship over recent decades and is one of the most pressing questions our churches face. William Lyons, who finds the discussion here exciting and stimulating, begins the very last chapter wondering why it has taken the Baptist tradition so long to produce something like this volume. The greatest challenge now is to enable the discussion continue in such a way that it draws in an ever wider circle to reflect on our Baptist practice.

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

**Understanding The “Imago Dei”: The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann by Dominic Robinson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), x +192pp**

Robinson’s published doctoral thesis is a thoughtful, analytical and passionate presentation. The author believes it is essential to understand how the concept of “*imago Dei*”, or “image of God”, informs, inspires and encourages the practical actions of human beings today. However, Robinson is not content simply to describe an ideal picture of that image. Rather, he wishes to consider what humanity looks like now, in its fallen state, and what the path to wholeness might look like. This book aims to be about the transformation of reality.

The first chapter seeks to present some of the context of the *imago Dei* debate, with the reader being led through the creation accounts of Genesis, Augustine, Irenaeus, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, the Council of Trent, and Vatican II. Here Robinson considers the *imago Dei* in the context of creation, fall, and how humanity will reach its destiny. At this stage we discover that, in the journey towards perfection, the author desires to balance Christ’s saving work with a person’s own actions.

Somewhat predictably, Robinson, whose tradition is Roman Catholic, most openly criticises the positions of the Protestant Reformers, believing their views to neglect the contribution a person can make to their own journey into salvation. A similar pattern emerges when continuing to discuss the backgrounds of the three theologians of the book’s title: Robinson states that, while not wishing to understate the significance of the others’ input into the debate, it is (the Roman Catholic) von Balthasar who he believes best retains the above mentioned balance. Nevertheless Robinson does not give the impression of a

partisan work. Rather his work can be understood as a fully understandable excitement for the tradition he best understands and loves which enthuses the reader with the potential it contains.

Chapters 2-4 form the bulk of this book, each one considering in depth the *imago Dei* in the work of Barth, von Balthasar, and Moltmann respectively. Again, Robinson is seeking a theological view that underpins both the necessity of Christ's "descent" to rescue humanity, and humanity's "ascent", through love for God and community, to seek out God and its own future.

In looking first at Barth, Robinson considers there to be a welcome focus on the work of Christ in humanity. However, while Robinson thinks that there are some threads of humanity participating in God's mission, he suggests that Christ's work is so emphasised by Barth that he largely removes humanity's ability to contribute meaningfully to its own growth towards perfection. This, says Robinson, is partly down to Barth's misinterpretation of Augustine's views on humanity's abilities.

Coming to von Balthasar, Robinson sees here a different interpretation of Augustine, namely one that allows for greater participation by humanity in the redeeming work of God. Also highlighted is the relationship Robinson sees between von Balthasar's formation of the *imago Dei* and earlier theologians, especially Barth: the primacy of Christ expounded by Barth is taken by von Balthasar and combined with the themes of participation from his own tradition. For Robinson, this is a highly fruitful approach.

Finally, in Moltmann's work, Robinson appreciates the great value that is given to humanity and all creation though his doctrine of creation. The onus on humanity to

participate in God's relation-building work is also valued. However, Robinson sees here a lack of attention to themes such as God's otherness and humanity's weakness. Consequently, Robinson feels that Moltmann does not sufficiently emphasise humanity's need for Christ's descent. For Robinson, Moltmann serves as an example of one who has not learnt the lessons of Barth and von Balthasar's emphasis on rooting the image of God in Christ and Christ's work.

Robinson's conclusion is that the *imago Dei* is at its best when it speaks of humanity's fallenness *and* special dignity, as well as God's work to redeem people *alongside* people's active growth through reciprocation of that love. He then continues to explore how this might helpfully be included into the life of the Church.

Robinson seems to rely heavily on his own reading of the three theologians (or at least there is little referencing of secondary sources) and as such the analysis appears to be largely his own. As skilled as it is, Robinson's reading of these authors would be aided by a more explicit and thorough discussion with the wider theological community. Those more sympathetic to the work of Barth and Moltmann would surely enable deeper engagement with Robinson's criticisms of the two.

Nevertheless, this is an interesting and enlightening work. Robinson has an obvious passion for a view of the *imago Dei* that informs humanity's understanding of God's love for it *and* the potential for humanity's response of love. This makes it a book to be recommended.

*Ben Dare*  
*Broad Haven Baptist Church, Pembrokeshire*

**The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology**  
**edited by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Wiley-**  
**Blackwell, 2012), 626pp**

In recent years the discipline of practical theology has fast become a major stream of theological reflection, alongside Christian doctrine and ethics. It has been there for much longer under different and related guises – applied theology, pastoral theology – but it is ‘practical theology’ that now dominates. Its roots partly lie in the pioneering work of the Baptist theologian Paul Ballard. From a UK perspective, two books have been important in grasping the focus of practical theology, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, edited by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (2000) and *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat (SCM, 2006).

This *Companion* has wide scope. It has fifty-six chapters (all around ten pages in length) and it is surely the most definitive definition of what practical theology entails to date. The editor Bonnie Miller-McLemore has divided the book into four parts. She says in her introduction that ‘practical theology as a term refers to at least four distinct enterprises with different audiences and objectives’ (p.5). Practical theology is ‘a *discipline* amongst scholars and an *activity of faith* among believers’ and it is ‘a *method* for studying theology in practice and it is a *curricular area* of subdisciplines in the seminary’ (p.5). Each part then explores each of these enterprises.

The *Companion* begins with practical theology as a way of life – that is activity of faith – and with seven chapters that are ‘illustrative’ of how faith produces activity and meaning in the mundane. The *Companion* covers suffering, healing, playing, eating, loving, consuming and blessing.

Miller-McLemore here subverts the usual tendency to concentrate on theology as an academic discipline and here puts first and foremost practical theology as theology done in reflection on what we might term the 'everyday'. These chapters open up and also model how practical theology might engage in exploring faith in the everyday, where perhaps we have often see such things as a separate from faith.

Part two has seventeen chapters on methodology. This is a comprehensive list of the different ways practical theologians carry out their task of analysis using the likes of psychological theory, hermeneutical theory, ritual theory, scripture, ethnography, feminist theory and many more. Practical theology uses a diverse number of ways of theological reflecting. Part three explores practical theology in the context of the 'curriculum', that is, practical theology in terms of ministerial formation. Chapters here cover pastoral care, homiletics, worship, evangelism, and more, as well as the other traditional theological disciplines – systematic theology, historical theology and biblical theology.

Part four approaches practical theology as an academic discipline. Chapters here cover the global development of the discipline in Britain, the US, Europe, Brazil, South Africa, West Africa and more. Zoë Bennett provides a helpful history up to the present day of practical theology in Britain. In addition are four chapters exploring it in terms of traditions – Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. The other group of chapters here look at various issues that the discipline of practical theology as focused on – race, gender, postcolonialism, economics, disability, and religious pluralism.



When this *Companion* is printed in paperback it will be an important addition to the shelves of those who teach practical theology or ministers as well as those engaged in ministry themselves. While most chapters offer a survey and description of the current state play in their area, they offer excellent bibliographies and show that practical theology as an academic discipline and a work of the church is here to stay. In fact, we might come away from this book asking what is not practical theology, so broad is the scope offered here. While there is a current glut of companions, handbooks and readers from theological publishers – see similar series from Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, T & T Clark and SCM – there are few, I think, that offer the reader something new. This *Companion to Practical Theology* (like its sister *Companion to Christian Ethics* edited by Stanley Hauerwas and Sam Wells), offer a new way of seeing the subject, with sets of essays that are informative, novel, and take theology in new directions.

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

**The Bible, disability, and the church: a new vision of the people of God by Amos Yong (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 161pp**

Amos Yong is extremely well qualified to write a practical theology of disability – he is an able theologian and also the brother of Mark, who has Down's Syndrome. This book is a short and accessible read, and is much more general in its scope than Yong's earlier volume, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, although there is still a detectable bias towards 'intellectual disabilities' (in the UK we would probably say

‘learning difficulties’) over physical or sensory disabilities, probably because of Yong’s personal experience.

Yong describes his hermeneutical process as having three key stages: (i) that being made in God’s image necessarily includes diversity; (ii) that we should not use disability to define a person; and (iii) that churches should not apply indiscriminate healing on the assumption that there is something inadequate about the disabled person.

He approaches his task by tackling the embedded Christian perspective that disability is an affliction in a fallen world. He examines some Old Testament texts on holiness (*eg* Deuteronomy 28), which he believes have been internalised to subordinate those with less than physical perfection. He notes the ‘normate’ (able-ist) tendency to focus on a model of a God who is without blemish. Next Yong moves to the New Testament and discusses some of the healings of Jesus, reading them as the restoration of the disabled person to society. He also offers an analysis of some normate readings of the stories – for example, our assumptions that ‘dark’ is bad and ‘light’ is good, with reference to blindness. Yong also explores some alternative implications of Pentecost which challenge our normate linguistic assumptions. Multiple senses were engaged in the pouring out of the Spirit, not just the speaking of foreign tongues – people also heard, felt, and saw strange phenomena.

Yong then moves into the Pauline epistles, and in particular examines Paul’s inclusive theology of the body, and his challenge in 1 Corinthians 1 to the strong, rich and clever, who are put to shame by the weak, poor and foolish in whom God’s glory is revealed. He argues for a preferential reading of the biblical material towards those

with learning difficulties and poses the question: is his reading a disability Christology or just proper Christology?

Finally Yong considers the impact of our eschatological understanding. If heaven is a place solely of perfection and joy, how will that affect our view of disabilities now – and is it possible that Christians may want to heal the disabled ‘sufferer’ because the church is meant to be the precursor of the heavenly community. In fact the disabled person may not be suffering, unhappy, or unfulfilled.

Yong makes a well argued case, but (in spite of my personal commitment to the community of disability) I wonder whether he overstates some points - for example, his reading of Jacob’s limp as positive - although perhaps that is simply my embedded able-ism coming to the fore! I do like Yong’s suggestion that the weaknesses of the present body will be gloriously transformed, and that ‘weakness’ thus offers a greater potential than ‘strength’ for reflecting the glory of Christ.

In his discussion of the eschatological community Yong also suggests that there has been inadequate theological reflection on the implications of the scarred resurrection body of Christ. I wonder if it would be more true to say that there has been such reflection, but attention has not been sufficiently paid to it! There are additional writers not referenced by Yong in this (admittedly short) volume who have offered helpful reflection, though perhaps discussed in the context of suffering rather than disability, which might (for Yong) render them unacceptably ‘normate’. For example, I would have liked to see reference to Dorothee Sölle, Paul Fiddes, James Alison, and Christopher Newell.

The blurb on the back cover describes the book as ‘The first comprehensive biblical theology focused on

disability'. I think this might be an overstatement of the case: many of the ideas have been articulated elsewhere, although almost certainly not together in one place, or in such a readable manner, which for me is the selling point of the book. It is time that the church

grappled seriously with its attitude towards disability and Yong's book can only facilitate the process.

*Sally Nelson*  
*Wetherby Baptist Church, Yorkshire*

**Speaking Christian: Recovering the lost meaning of Christian words by Marcus Borg (London: SPCK, 2011), 256pp**

If you take a literalistic view of Scripture and the Christian faith, you are likely to conclude within the first few pages that Marcus Borg's *Speaking Christian* is not for you.

Borg asserts that religions are like languages. To be Christian is to speak Christian – a language which most people do not speak or understand. Like most linguists, Borg also believes that the language is given its meaning by the context – or framework – in which it is spoken. Clearly, this would already be problematic for anyone of a literalistic bent, for whom words have a single, simple meaning – one which is already known.

However, Borg goes on to assert his belief that Christian language is usually interpreted through what he terms the "Heaven and Hell Framework." This, he believes, has fundamentally distorted Christian self-understanding.

Thus, for example, “*Salvation* now refers to life after death; it is about going to heaven. But in the Bible it is seldom about or afterlife; rather, it is about transformation this side of death.”

This thesis is set out in the first two chapters of the book. For the remaining 200 pages, he begins the task of reclaiming some of the foundational terms of the Christian faith. Salvation, The Bible, God, Jesus, Easter and Sin are among the concepts explored in subsequent chapters. All are re-interpreted through Borg’s “Historical-Metaphorical Framework.”

Sadly, though, this is where I lost interest in what Borg describes as a “Christian primer.” The book is aimed squarely at the North American market where, Borg asserts, literalism is in the ascendancy. Unfortunately, I fear, few such readers will have got beyond the first two chapters. For those of us who already share Borg’s historical-metaphorical approach, what follows is too basic, too introductory to hold the attention.

The chapter on God, for example, attempts to move the reader from the common understanding of God as a ‘being’ who exists outside human experience, ‘in heaven,’ and who capriciously chooses to intervene in human affairs when it pleases *him*. Rather, Borg wants us to understand God as ‘Sacred Presence’ – woven into the fabric of the universe, both immanent and transcendent, experienced in human life. Schubert Ogden and the process theology movement have devoted lifetimes to exploring this understanding of God. Borg gives it just nine pages – coincidentally, exactly the same length as Wikipedia’s entry on *panentheism*.

Borg is clear that he is attempting to ‘redeem’ Christian language, to ‘save it’ from the literalistic interpretation which he believes dominates the North American church.

He glosses over the central question as to whether such a task is achievable. He allows that some have found the language of Christianity irredeemable. However, he does not explore their reasons for doing so in any depth. He simply chooses to attempt to redeem the language because to do otherwise would be, in his thinking, to step outside of the Christian community which is shaped by its language. He thus dismisses those of us who view the re-invention of language as one of the central tasks of the theologian.

The other glaring omission in this book is any engagement with feminist or other liberative critiques of our language. It is now some forty years since writers such as Sally McFague and Rosemary Radford Ruether began to ask fundamental questions about the patriarchal bias inherent in our 'God-talk.' Borg does not even consider the validity of the question, let alone address it.

Borg concludes that what is at stake is the heart of Christianity. He clearly believes that he has a radical vision of a re-invented church engaged in God's mission of transforming this world. Yet by ignoring these two fundamental questions, I am left wondering whether Borg's church looks remarkably similar to the church he is attempting to leave behind.

*Tim Presswood*  
*Openshaw, Manchester*

**Youth Ministry: A Multi-faceted Approach edited by Sally Nash (London: SPCK, 2011), 160pp**

Training for ministry often involves either theological education or equipping with skills. But those who talked to me as I approached ordination, and who have mentored

me since, have talked to me about how important character is. In other words we train and equip people for doing ministry, but perhaps pay less attention to who they (we!) are as ministers. This works on two levels: on one level it's about character, the need to be of good character. But on another level, whilst we might consider what we do with those we work with, rarely do we reflect on who we are to them; in other words what is our identity in ministry?

In this book various practitioners reflect on identities in youth ministry. Dr Nash describes the identities as metaphors and suggests that they can encourage and assist reflection on practice. The contributors write from different perspectives, and denominations, so the approaches and styles vary. Each chapter has something to offer but two were of particular interest. L'Arche founder Jean Vanier defined love as the capacity within each one of us to reveal the beauty of others to themselves and Sam Richards discusses the significance of this task in her chapter on the youth worker as "Mediating Mirror", reflecting to young people who they are and who they are becoming, and so affirming them as good and valuable, supporting them in their journey to adulthood. The final chapter from Iain Hoskins (Centre Director of Bristol CYM and fellow Accredited Youth Specialist) is a welcome reminder that ministers of all kinds need to be constantly refreshed and refilled both physically and spiritually and offers suggestions for how this might be enabled.

The chapters are a helpful blend of theology, secular youth work values, models and practical suggestions. My only criticism would be that I felt that chapters were often a brief overview but given the space available this is inevitable.

This would be a helpful book, not only for someone starting out in youth work or ministry, but also for those working with them and employing them. Paul Fenton, Principal of Oasis College, commented in February's *Youthwork Magazine* that there is often a mismatch of expectations between church employers and employed youth workers and that this can lead to a lot of frustration and unhappiness. Some reflection together on this book might be helpful in enabling communication and understanding about those expectations before it all ends in tears. It easily introduces a lot of key models and concepts with which qualified youth workers will be familiar and might therefore give youth worker and church some common language to help their understanding. As a qualified youth worker I found some timely reminders of things Sally taught me when I was a college and I then promptly forgot.

The potential usefulness of the book goes beyond that though. I know that there are a lot of books about ministerial formation, but do any of them frame the discussion in terms of roles and identities in the way the contributors to this book have? One of the features of the recent TV comedy *Rev* is that it highlights that those ministering to adults are expected to fulfil multiple roles (all with consummate skill!) and that this can be stressful, to say the least. An opportunity to acknowledge that, and reflect on it by naming some of the roles and identifying the values, attitudes and skills needed to fulfil them in the way this book does, might be a helpful process for ministers in other situations.

*Sarah Fegredo*  
*West Bridgford Baptist Church*



**The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry by Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 352pp**

*The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* is a book of practical theology for youth workers and ministers to help resource youth ministry to be Christ focused and to be oriented towards eschatological ends. The goal of this book, as is the goal of all practical theology, is to make intentional connections between reflective theological thinking and practical ministerial action and to continually inform one another. Root and Dean advocate that this practical theology is done with young people and therefore helps shape both theology and ministry towards the young people.

Root and Dean focus on a youth ministry that brings together both the relational-social dimensions of life as well a biblical theology in order to ensure that our vocation or call takes seriously the joys and mess of life together with the nature of God in the midst of all this. By advocating this the “style” of youth ministry could be one that allows young people and practitioners to persevere with the sufferings of life in a broken world, rejoice with those that find healing and release and be honest with our questions about faith.

The book is essentially divided up into two halves. The first half of the book is an exploration of various theological themes while the second half seeks to take these themes and explore how they are applied or impact the practice of youth ministry, whether that’s looking at issues like sin, sex, summer camps, nature trips, short-term mission and mentoring. A specific example of this practical theology can be found in “Holding On to our Kisses - The Hormonal Theology of Adolescence (Chapter

10) where Dean's theological reflections on the nature of spirituality and sexuality and how in youth ministry these two issues cannot be looked at in isolation - in fact are deeply connected is a welcome voice to support, challenge and encourage practitioners to be reflective ones.

There will be aspects of this book that you agree with and others that you don't, as is the case with much theology and practice. But the aim of the book is not to merge together all theologies into one master theology, rather it is to reflect, engage and explore how our theological thinking and processes can and should impact our practice of ministry.

There will always be "theologies" of youth ministry rather than a simple theology of youth ministry. These different theologies arise from different conclusions regarding what God communicates through Scripture, creation and revelation. They also come because we all have different conversation partners along the way within our own Christian traditions and because "doing" youth ministry is done in so many different and diverse contexts. As a result it's not so much a book that should change our theological thinking to be the same as Root and Dean's but to help us engage in a broader conversation.

What is good about this book is that it begins a conversation that will hopefully get youth ministers and practitioners not only thinking but talking and engaging theology on a deeper level that in the end will benefit the young people we serve and build up God's kingdom - which after all is why we are here. This book is full of potential - not because of what it contains, although that is good, but because of the conversation it begins.

*Jon Bishop*

*Croxley Green, Rickmansworth*

**Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology by Doug Gay (London: SCM, 2011) 123pp**

Regular listeners to Radio Four may be familiar with *The Long View*, a programme which regularly attempts to gain new perspectives on contemporary issues by placing them in the larger context of history. It's an approach which never fails to be instructive, reminding our present generation that we are not the first to encounter the questions which challenge or perplex us.

Doug Gay's *Remixing the Church* offers readers an important long view on the Emerging Church phenomenon and provides a measured and insightful analysis of a movement which can sometimes be vulnerable to caricature but also an overestimation of its own significance. (Am I the only person who thought it took a certain amount of hubris from Brian McLaren to write a book called *A New Kind of Christianity*, comparing his work to Luther's nailing of the 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg?).

The strength of Gay's work lies in a breadth of knowledge of Church history which is accessibly conveyed, and which enables him to reflect on the emergent movement in a thoughtful and informed manner. His material is presented in five phases of reflection: auditing, retrieval, unbundling, supplementing and remixing. This methodology enables him to tell the story of a movement which is far less about deconstruction and reinvention than some of its detractors might have us believe, and far more an attempt to draw upon a wide range of traditions and thinking from across the worldwide Church. Gay himself acknowledges the

selective nature of this exercise, and the way in which it has sometimes left the emergent movement vulnerable to being squeezed from all sides of the theological spectrum.

The book begins with an overview of Barth's compelling idea of churches who continually audit one another, offering alternative perspectives to each other, meaning that out of this process 'no church will remain unscathed.' As different strands of the Church hear God speaking through one another, so the one Church will emerge. It is from this starting point that Gay can present the picture of an emerging movement which has audited, retrieved and unbundled not just for itself, but on behalf of the wider body. Of particular interest to Free Church readers will be his overview of Miroslav Volf's *After our Likeness*, including his call for these churches to lay down their 'protest' identities in exchange for a genuine willingness to enter into ecumenical dialogue, including at a local level.

On a few occasions, Gay can appear to be overly optimistic about the long-term impact the emergent movement might have. His reflection on 'unbundling' concludes with the suggestion that the emerging church can become a more significant bridge between Protestantism and 'catholicism/ orthodoxy' that seems unlikely in the light of the issues of power he has just addressed. But this is only a minor criticism of a book which packs many insights into just 120 pages, and offers them with wisdom, humility and generosity, as well as a genuine desire to facilitate further conversation about the unity and mission of the Church. It is also worth noting how the language of auditing, retrieving and remixing might be of value to British Baptists, at a time when we are considering major questions of how our own past might inform our future.

*Trevor Neill*

*Yardley Wood Baptist Church, Birmingham*

**Prophetic Dialogue, Reflections on Christian Mission  
Today edited by Steven Bevens and R Schroeder,  
(Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011, distributed in the UK by  
Alban books), xi +194pp**

This collection of ten essays is vintage Bevens and Schroeder – the fruit of many years of theological reflection on, teaching of and engagement in mission. Four of the essays have appeared elsewhere although have been reworked for this publication and six are new, representing their 'latest thinking about the theme' (p.3).

The notion of 'prophetic dialogue' is a red thread that runs throughout all the essays. For Bevens and Schroeder it expresses not only a theology of mission but also a spirituality of mission. It encapsulates their understanding of mission as: participation in the mission of the Triune God, liberating service of the Reign of God and proclamation of Jesus as universal Saviour. Their aim is to advance missiological thinking on the theme of prophetic dialogue as a key to understanding mission theology and practice today. In the fourth essay, 'Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' they explain that this concept emerged, as a compromise, from the General chapter of their Order, SVD (Society of the Divine Word) in 2000. The Asians wished to speak of mission as dialogue while the Latin Americans, from their context, saw mission as needing to focus on the prophetic so a compromise was suggested, 'prophetic dialogue.' Apart from chapter 6, every essay is written in the first person plural which reflects not just a stylistic choice but also communicates the way mission is best reflected upon and enacted – in community. Regent's Park College readers may be particularly attracted to the

book's cover which is a photo of a sculpture entitled 'Homage to Matisse' expressing the dance of the Trinity. Immediately one thinks of Paul Fiddes' excellent work, *Participating in God*, where Matisse's *Dance* appears on the cover.

Indeed, the title of the first chapter is 'The Mission has a church, An invitation to the dance' where they clearly explain that mission precedes the church and it is not that the church has a mission but that mission has a church – might this be mission-shaped church? They write, 'What it means is, first, that the church is not about the church. It is about what Jesus calls the Reign of God' (p.16). A timely reminder for us all. So what might mission as dialogue mean? In chapter 2 they offer a series of images – the missionary as treasure hunter, guest, stranger and entering someone else's garden. I loved the chapter on entering someone else's garden (chapter 6) – perhaps it is my age and stage of life where I enjoy looking at gardens and pottering in my own tiny plot. Schroeder uses this image to reflect on his time in Papua New Guinea and Justin Martyr's concept of *logos spermatikos* (seed-bearing word) to represent the presence of truth in each cultural garden. He then goes on to consider why and how we enter another's garden and what do we actually do in the garden. This metaphor is then applied to home – what happens in our own garden after we have experienced another's garden? Chapter 9 is a short history of Christian mission through the lens of prophetic dialogue. For example, did you know that recently a collection of Christian sutras (a Buddhist literary style) from seventh century China was discovered – reflecting contextualization of Christianity in that multi-religious context.

The book is interesting and accessible. It has good endnotes and a full bibliography for further reading. It has helped me to root and locate mission more solidly as part of my daily discipleship. And now, when I look at gardens, I do not just see flowers, fruits, weeds and riots of colour; I also see cross-cultural fertilisation and mission.

*Cathy Ross*  
*Regent's Park College, Oxford*

**Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor by Ben Witherington III (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 166pp**

The declared aim of this work is to offer a primer for those wishing to explore a Biblical theology and ethics on how we productively spend our time. It fits into what is a relatively undeveloped area of modern theology and its publication would appear to be timely, given that the review copy arrived at the same time as another publisher announced three further entry-level works on the subject. The book is readable and the author anchors his assertions in scripture. It is written by a professor of New Testament theology at a North American seminary, who skims the landscape of the subject taking as a starting point the matter of vocation.

Does vocation extend to all work rather than simply the ministry and the professions? Work remains something of an awkward topic among evangelical Christians. For despite being widely known for our work ethic, I still detect something of a dualistic view which separates necessary, mundane 'work' from a professional career and, at the pinnacle, a vocation to Christian ministry – "full-time Christian service", so celebrated. This book leaves me with

unanswered questions about work that is unfulfilling, repetitive and barely meeting someone's material needs. Is this what God intends for humankind and, if not, what sense can we make of life as it is?

A work such as this needs to offer a general tour of the topic, opening up different strands for further, more specific and expert exploration. Having had one's interest aroused, where now? To aid this, an index and a bibliography are essential tools. Sadly this work lacks both which is much to its detriment. It may be that the topic is insufficiently developed in the wealth of literature – hence the emergence of several new works - but without a bibliography, more detailed footnotes and suggestions for further reading we are left with nowhere to go to progress our exploration.

Where the author moves beyond a general coverage, it is to take issue with one of the major theologians of our time, Miroslav Volf. He specifically disputes Volf's view that work should be seen more as a gift of grace than as a vocation. A pedantic point is that on different pages he references Volf's work in two different ways. The most cited work is Gene Veith's *God at work* but I am unfamiliar with this and it is hard to comment on its suitability.

Issues relating to work/life balance and retirement are of great and practical significance to so many in our churches, so an interesting chapter considers the place of work in our culture and asks how a Christian ethic can mould a societal view of work. To what extent are Christians being driven by the way our modern world now works? How can we live out the values of Christ in this regard? Having read the book I remain unsure.



I am also unclear as to who might be the intended reader. I doubt it would help anyone who is used to thinking theologically and I wonder how well it would hold up in competition with some of the other entry-level publications now appearing.

*Ivan King*  
*Church from Scratch, Southend*

**Fear and Trust: God-centred Leadership by David Runcorn (London: SPCK, 2011), ix+114pp**

**Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results by Lovett H Weems Jr and Tom Berlin, (Nashville, NB: Abingdon, 2011, distributed in the UK by Alban books), xvi + 110pp**

Of the writing of books on leadership, and Christian leadership, there is no end! But in an area often marked out by theological shallowness and Biblical naivety these two books are welcome additions. Both are short and do not claim to be overviews of the whole subject, but in different ways offer a more narrowly focussed, but very helpful approach.

Runcorn's book is essentially an exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel. He talks through the book about the need for attentiveness in leadership, and this is mirrored by his own attentiveness to the text. It is somewhat of a relief to find a book on Christian leadership which takes the Bible seriously as a text. Rather than the more simplistic readings of David as the hero, by paying such careful attention to the nature of the narrative form and the language of the text, Runcorn shows how such deeply subversive nature of the text, always questioning and

overturning such views. In this respect Walter Brueggemann, among others, is a key exegete on whom Runcorn draws.

Rather than the great structural leaders of the community – Samuel, Saul and David – basking in the glory, Runcorn suggests that this subversive text actually highlights both the character and examples of more marginal figures and also gives a significant role to the whole community. So the very first chapter questions the character of Samuel, who in the end is something of a failure, while highlighting the faith and determination of a woman, Hannah. Later it is Jonathan who is presented as the real example of both faith and godly leadership – the ideal king who as a leader gives way to others. Runcorn also shows that the text deliberately contrasts the heroic model of leadership with the non-directive leadership of the community, suggesting that the crisis in leadership witnessed in the narrative is really a crisis in community, a ‘collective abdication from shared responsibility’ (p.41).

This is not simply a presentation of exegesis, and Runcorn makes links throughout with the contemporary experience and expectations of leadership. There are helpful thoughts on connecting the present with the past, on the consequences of making choices, and a discussion of the text alongside Fowler’s stages of leadership.

There are a number of points when the author opens up issues which are simply left in the air, especially the role of God in the narrative. What was God doing, for example, in the appointment and rejection of Saul and what made the significance of this be for our doctrine of God and understanding of leadership? Given the centrality of such questions it is disappointing that Runcorn does not tackle this more head on, rather than leave us with the more

tantalising thought that appointments go wrong even for God. But this is a book well worth reading, and perhaps may then prompt some sustained and insightful preaching from 1 and 2 Samuel.

By contrast Weems and Berlin take one particular Biblical motif, which becomes the dominant theme of the book, which as the title suggests is fruitfulness. Rooted in the belief that fruitfulness is part of the character of God the authors develop the theme that fruitfulness is therefore a key aspect of human lives. This image, they suggest, with its basis in Scripture and the doctrine of God will help the church move on from the impasse between success and faithfulness. Fruitfulness is connected to faithfulness and offered as an alternative to success, especially success so often connected to personal advancement. Our faithful lives should have some impact and make some difference.

This suggestion, explored in the first couple of chapters, is the most significant and important aspect of the book. After that it does become something more of a 'how to' book. In later chapters there follows an interesting distinction, for example, between vision, as God's vision which is discerned corporately by the whole congregation and the vision of the leader, which the authors find to be a more secular pattern. There is also some reflection, particularly in the American scene, on the distinction between ministry and leadership in a long established congregation with its own history, and in a congregation where the 'founding pastor' remains as the senior pastor, and who carries the history and tradition of the church very much in their one person. Given that many of the most influential American churches are still in the second model of founding pastors, and so many British churches are in the first category these are important distinctions and need attention. There is, later, a chapter, on leading

yourself which rehearses some of the significant issues in sustaining ministry and not burning out.

A slight frustration in these later chapters is that they are at times theologically light and more theological reflection would be welcome. The authors, for example, tell a number of personal stories to illustrate their conviction that receiving and following a 'God-sized' vision is important. While recognising that similar projects end in failure, their accounts are all 'success stories', even if at times it seemed the project was not manageable. Yet the book begged the question of when better planning is needed and when trust in God's provision is right. Also in the light of Runcorn's book and its theological exploration of failure, it would seem that the notion that God is behind that which is fruitful and indeed successful, but not that which fails, is too simplistic a theology. One further issue which could have added to the book is the recognition of the connection between ecclesiology and leadership. The authors come from the Methodist context in America, and write out of that experience, and there are times when their particular ecclesiological structures come through. Whereas some aspects of leadership, such as leading yourself, are very transferable to all church contexts, others are much more shaped by ecclesiology.

But overall this is a useful book especially for the theological motif of fruitfulness which it offers.

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

**And God Spoke to Abraham: Preaching from the Old Testament by Fleming Rutledge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), xiv + 421pp.**

Endemic Biblical illiteracy amongst Christians today is especially evident when it comes to the Old Testament, that ancient, raw, and oftentimes obscure body within our scriptures; and this is a fact compounded by the frequency with which it is avoided or fudged in the pulpit. *And God Spoke to Abraham*, a new anthology of sermons by Fleming Rutledge, is an encouraging bucking of this trend and provides a refreshing register with which to engage with those less-thumbed pages to the left of Matthew's gospel.

Rutledge was one of the first women to be ordained to the Episcopal priesthood in the United States (1977) and has since gained a reputation as a powerful itinerant preacher. Whilst the reader is denied the strong and somewhat hypnotic Virginian accent with which she delivers her sermons in life, the rhythm and lyrical flare of her language comes through beautifully in one well-crafted sermon after another. Whilst fully conversant when it comes to scholarship – a fact particularly evident in those sermons delivered in academic contexts – generally the sermons are clear, accessible, and engagingly evangelical. The book can function as a treasure trove for preachers looking for fresh angles on, or flavours from, Old Testament texts, but can also equally be used as an aid to personal spirituality – the relative brevity and standalone nature of the sermons rendering them convenient for devotional use. The volume includes a twenty-five page introduction in which Rutledge explains her working theology of the Old Testament ('the operating system for the New Testament', p. 2), some reflection on homiletics, and a few matters of house-keeping with regards to the organisation and arrangement of the collection. The sermons then proceed, compiled in the order with which their primary text appears in the canon; and the bold, colourful conversations with characters such as Abraham,

Elijah, Job, Ezekiel and Daniel begin.

Rutledge's Episcopalian context, with its emphasis on the lectionary, often means she artfully weaves in secondary texts into her primary focus, including strands from the New Testament, and thus fosters a mature and convincing Biblical Theology. Like any good preacher, she also draws on numerous other sources, both ancient and modern and this endless marriage of 'texts' – whether literary, political, mundane, historical and above all Biblical – nurtures a rich and nuanced intertextuality to her work. She is particularly adept at bridging the ditch between what is often dismissed as an opaque, inaccessible ancient text, and the modern context (her first collection of sermons published in 1999 was tellingly entitled *The Bible and the New York Times*). A fascinating feature of *And God Spoke to Abraham* is that the sermons are drawn from a thirty-five year period (1975-2010) and are peppered with allusions both to historic events in the news or media (e.g. breaking news from the O J Simpson case, or the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina), as well as to features of her immediate context (e.g. drawing on Moby Dick in a Nantucket pulpit, or trying to persuade students at a High School in Virginia that Christian faith is more than just 'a program to make you masturbate less', p.108). Her sermons are in this way thoroughly incarnational; we can witness the Word becoming flesh in a particular context. The power of this is summed up by the introduction to one message delivered to a church who were celebrating their Sesquicentennial: 'Although the very particular circumstances of this sermon have been retained – or perhaps because they have been retained – it declares a message for the people of God at any time and in any place.' (p.196)

In another sermon she brings greetings to a prosperous

university church from two elderly ladies she met at a 'little church in the wilderness' (the sermon's title, pp.138-145) and then proceeds to identify them with the unnamed widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, who with her handful of meal is plucked out of obscurity to host Elijah, the archetypal 'firework' prophet. Touches like these lend a thrilling intimacy to the pages which breathe new life into both the stories of scripture and the raw text of everyday life. At the same time she remains panoramic. To use a phrase from the same sermon, she sees preaching as something that must necessarily remain 'grounded in theos, the living God' (p.144), and thus firmly places the entire *dramatis personae* of her sermons within the context of 'the mighty works of God [that] continue apace' (p.145). This doxological flavour runs throughout the collection, reflecting her strong belief that preaching should return to being 'theological' rather than 'anthropological', that is, a mode of discourse that seeks to articulate 'divine agency' rather than 'human decision' (pp.8-9). The title of the book 'And God Spoke to Abraham', taken from Gen. 12:1 and explored in the first sermon of the compilation, is chosen for precisely this reason: 'God is the subject of the verb [...]; it's God who makes biblical history' (p.29), not us. This emphasis cauterizes her sermons, burning away the anthropocentric hype and sentimentality that can all too often ooze from the pulpit.

In many ways this characteristic echoes the Hebrew Scriptures she seeks to engage, which, in their down-to-earth holiness, their raw, reverent, terse and lyrical way, themselves echo the God who stands mysteriously behind them. Rutledge's voice is thus a valuable one for helping us to rediscover how the obscurity of the Old Testament is a quality which can be formative rather than repellent, as too many assume today. It is precisely the beautiful

strangeness of these Biblical texts that can draw us into a reconfiguring encounter with the supreme otherness of Yahweh. Or to put it more succinctly: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

*Phil Durrant*  
*Clevedon Baptist Church*

**Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in The Modern World by Abby Day (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 256pp**

This fascinating monograph explores the nature of believing in modern Euro-American societies. It is based on the author's post-doctoral research at Lancaster University and builds on her PhD thesis, a case study centred on the Yorkshire town of Skipton. Day set herself the challenge of exploring belief by asking open questions that did not presuppose that answers would be offered in relation to religious categories. So, for example, *What do you believe in?* and, *What or who is most important to you in your life?* She then compared her findings with related studies from around the world. The research is well designed and the results significant.

The main finding is summed up in the title: people believe in belonging. To say they believe is to engage in identity building by claiming belonging – to Christianity (even if they don't believe in God) to family (on condition that they get to decide who qualifies as family) and to friends (with whom they work out their problems and their opinions).

Unsurprisingly then Day suggests that Grace Davie's influential argument that people in Britain today believe but don't like to belong misses the mark. People may not choose to participate in the activities of organised,



institutional religion but this does not mean that belonging is unimportant. On the contrary, for most people believing is profoundly relational. People believe *because* they belong and *in order to reinforce* belonging.

This believing in belonging is found to apply to those (the great majority) for whom believing is anthropocentric, that is those who articulate their beliefs primarily in reference to their human relationships. It also applies to those for whom believing is theocentric in that they cite God and their relationship with God as central to their lives. This observation leads to an interesting and nuanced exploration of the phenomenon of Christian nominalism.

Day offers us a rich picture of what it is to believe and in the light of her research suggests that we consider seven dimensions of the phenomenon: *content*, what people believe; *sources*, where beliefs originate; *practice*, whether and how belief informs behaviour; *salience*, the importance people attribute to their beliefs; *function*, the role of beliefs in people's lives; *place* the relationship between belief and location whether public or private, geographic or social and *time*, the fluidity or fixity of beliefs in relation to passing time and specific times. As an interpretive framework this scheme would seem to have real potential.

Much more could be said about what this book has to offer; there is a Foucault inspired archaeology of the concept of belief in the fields of sociology and anthropology; there are interesting observations on the way people limit moral obligations to those to whom they belong and the significance for many of ongoing relationships with the dead; there's an investigation of young people and belief, of believing in fate and of the

“othering” of women, non-Christian religions and “Asians” as those responsible for moral decline. All this in two hundred pages.

I have long thought that missiologists don’t pay nearly enough careful attention to the work of sociologists of religion – Duncan McLaren’s *Mission Implausible* was a notable exception, now sadly out of print. Abby Day writes as an academic sociologist and an active researcher. Her findings are a helpful contribution to the sociology of secularisation; they open an intriguing window into believing in Britain today. *Believing in Belonging* makes instructive reading, to say the least for those of us concerned that our compatriots might come to belong to the company of those who believe in Jesus.

*Glen Marshall*

*Northern Baptist Learning Community, Manchester*

**Sharing Possessions by Luke Timothy Johnson  
(Eerdmans: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 170pp**

What's yours is mine and what's mine's my own!

Ours is very much a consumer age and for most of the world a person's worth is measured by the things she possesses. Even the company of Jesus, who declared that it should be otherwise, is largely enthralled to property of one kind or another.

In this excellent and well-argued book, Luke Timothy Johnson helps readers to explore their relationship with their possessions, in particular how that relationship might look if it is shaped by faith in the living God. The premise of Johnson's book is that a response of ‘obediential’ faith, one which sees God as the ultimate

source of life, leads to a freedom to share possessions, wherever needs and opportunity are discerned.

What Johnson doesn't do is provide a biblical mandate for our response to possessions. In fact, in his first chapter he uses a quick survey of the material in Luke-Acts to identify a number of conflicting mandates, all drawn from the text, and which can only be used to determine our behaviour if we prefer one over the others. That we are tempted to do this, that we are even looking for a mandate, betrays our habit of approaching the biblical text as if it were merely a rulebook to guide our lives, rather than 'a body of witnesses' (p.73) to how we might live before God.

In chapter two Johnson discards the search for a mandate and turns our attention to faith and idolatry as contrasting responses to God. The chapter opens with an exploration of the complex relationship between being and having. His argument here is not always easy to follow, and readers may be left asking what he is trying to say, but the conclusion he draws, namely that there is no clear line between the two, so that my body is also something that I have (possess), helpfully extends the discussion beyond what we do with material objects to how we live and how we share, or don't share, our lives.

Idolatry involves the misplacement of hope and trust. All possessiveness, Johnson argues, is then a form of idolatry. It is identifying our lives with our possessions. Faith on the other hand is about identifying our lives with God. 'If the logic of idolatry leads to the attempt to grasp life by what can be possessed, the logic of belief in the true God leads to the refusal to identify what can be possessed with life' (p.53). Jesus' life, his response to God, in his response to others, is the pattern for such obediential faith.

The third chapter then explores how sharing our possessions is a symbol of our faith, or to put it crudely, how our response to others and their needs is our response to God. The way we use our possessions, whether we try and hold on to them or whether we are willing to share them, reveals what we believe (or not) about God as the true source of life and giver of all things. Much of the chapter is given over to a review of biblical texts - under the headings of the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, the letter of James and the Gospel, to support his claim that 'this same connection dominates the entire scriptural witness regarding possessions' (p.81).

One of the most helpful things about this book is that Johnson often rehearses his main arguments before he goes on to make a new point. The reader who worries about getting bogged down in the detail of some of his arguments need not fear losing their way altogether.

If the first 3 chapters deal with the book's primary argument then the last chapter returns to one of the mandates that is commonly drawn from Luke-Acts as the basis for monastic movements, that of the community of possessions. Johnson it should be noted had previously been a Benedictine monk living in such a community. He does not completely dismiss the practice but does argue strongly that it is beset with dangers not least in the areas of manipulative leadership and community isolation. He also argues that it has little basis in Scripture (something he backs up with references to Greek philosophy that will probably leave some readers scratching their heads) unlike alms-giving which he then commends as a far better practise to cultivate, for both individuals and communities.

It is important to note that this is the second edition of a book that was originally published in 1981. The main text

is unaltered but Johnson has added a page or two of comments at the end of each chapter to update the reader on his thinking. On the whole these comments just serve to underline what he still believes are the most important points of the chapter. At the end of the book, however, there is a substantial epilogue - as big as a fifth chapter - which introduces the reader to other writers on the topic, is a response to some of his earlier critics (most of whom were unhappy with his dismissal of community possessions in chapter 4 and who found his commendation of alms giving to be a weak conclusion to a good argument), and then introduces four areas he has since come to see as well worth greater consideration: hospitality, stewardship, Sabbath and discernment.

This is probably not a book I would have chosen to buy had I been browsing in a bookshop or online. As such I am immensely grateful to have been asked to review it. It has stimulated my thinking in so many ways. I do not agree with every point that Johnson makes and do wonder whether he might be read (or misread) as advocating a response to possessions that does not challenge the inequalities of society and the need for change that goes further than just what the individual does, whether that's in showing hospitality or giving alms. Without doubt he bears closer reading. I intend to do that because this is such an important subject for our times and Johnson's work tackles it with a theological rigor that is often lacking in other books.

*Ashley Lovett*  
*Socketts Heath Baptist Church, Grays*

**Living Without Enemies: Being Present in the Midst of Violence by Samuel Wells and Marcia A. Owen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 143pp**

*Living Without Enemies* is part of a series of books called *Resources for Reconciliation* and emerging from Duke Divinity School's Centre for Reconciliation. This is the first book, I've read from the series (other topics include friendship, forgiveness, justice), but will not be my last.

The book is fairly short and in six chapters with a study guide seeks to reflect on how the church might engage with its community that has experience violence. Sam Wells is the Dean of Duke University Chapel (until the summer, when he moves back to the UK) and author of a number of books on theological ethics and Marcia Owen is the executive director of the Religious Coalition for a Nonviolent Durham. Together they tell stories of the work of the Religious Coalition and reflect theologically how the church is called to present in the face of violence.

In the first chapter Wells describes and explores four models of engagement: working for, working with, being with and being for. Working for might be understood as 'let me carry that load for you'; work with as 'let me help you carry the load together'; being with as 'I recognise the load you are carrying and I will walk with you, but I won't assume you're looking for someone to take your load away'; and 'being for' as 'I see that person carrying that load, I can't help right now, but I am not turning a blind eye'. All four models may be appropriate at different times. This is an excellent chapter and there is much to ponder on what it might mean for church engagement (I think Wells might be expanding these models into a longer book-length treatment).

The remaining chapters use these models to explore how Marcia and the Coalition have been present in the midst of the gun violence that scars Durham. The ministry is one shaped by silence, touch and words.

The book is a good read, not overly academic, full of good examples and would be appropriate for all churches, especially those perhaps in more urban areas. *Living Without Enemies* is a useful read as we reflect on how churches responded and might in future respond to the violence we saw on our streets last August, and which is ongoing in different ways elsewhere.

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