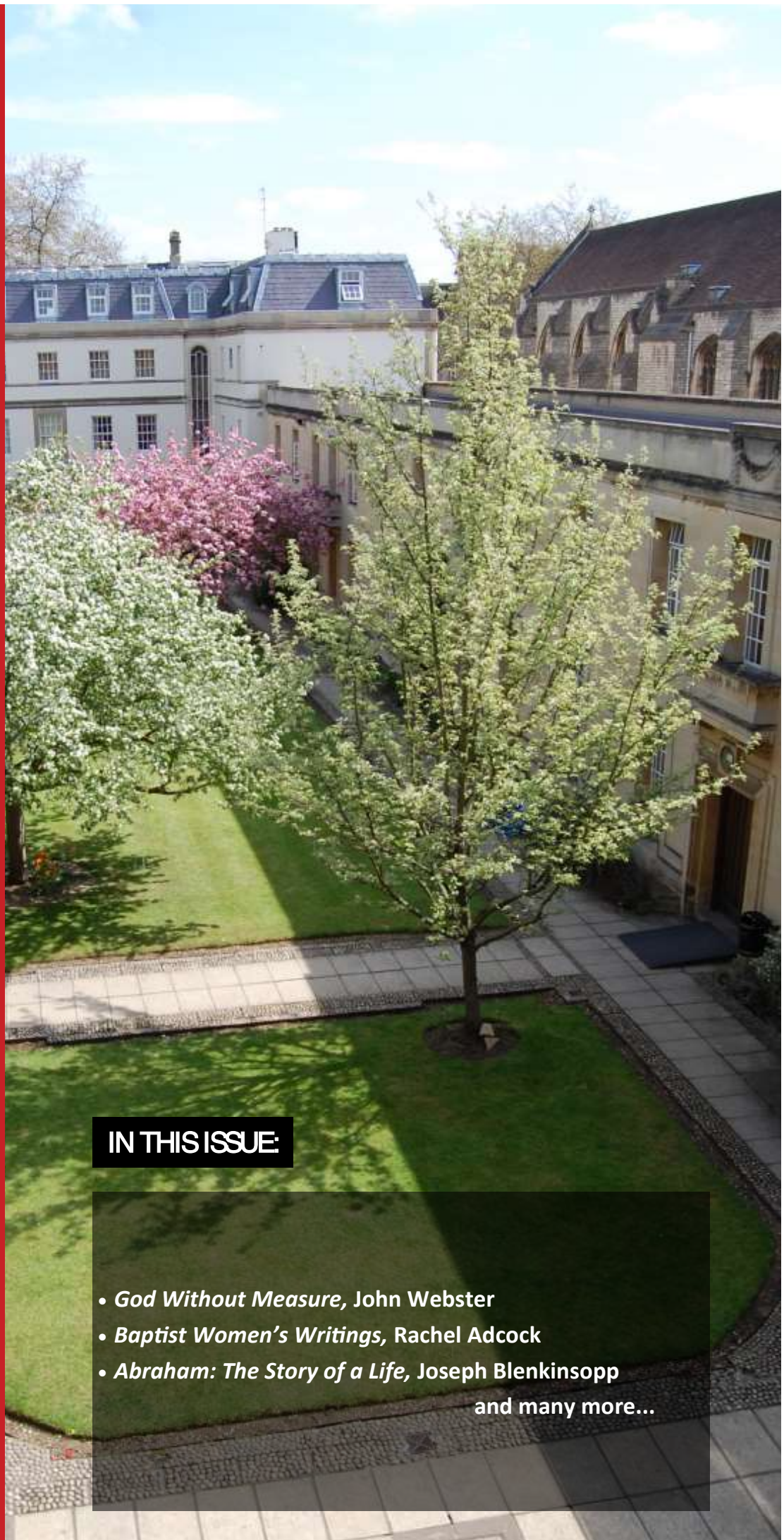


Regent's  
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# Reviews

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**Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Abraham: The Story of a Life* (Eerdmans, 2015), 256pp.**

I must confess a prejudice. While I admit the use of historical criticism as a valid approach to the biblical text, I have never personally found it to be particularly fruitful, and prefer to focus on what the final form of the text has to tell us. Therefore, I was somewhat disconcerted by the lengthy introduction to this book, which probes to understand the origins and sources of the Abrahamic narratives. This is not to say that Blenkinsopp denies the possibility of the events having a genuine historical foundation; he goes out of his way to point out the remarkable endurance of collective memory. Nonetheless I feared that the book would not prove to be useful to those seeking to gain a theological understanding of the text, rather than those studying out of pure scholarly interest.

However, once the main part of the book began, my concerns subsided. Throughout, Blenkinsopp well justifies his reputation as a biblical historian, with his extensive comment on the historical, cultural and geographical background to the traditions being narrated (although I would have welcomed the inclusion of maps). Some examples: Abraham and Sarah's actions in bringing Hagar to Abraham's bed are similar to actions permitted by the Babylonian law of Hammurabi; Sarah probably weaned Isaac no earlier than his third year; the semantic range for Ishmael's 'playing' with the young Isaac would permit the possibility of sexual abuse.

At the end of each chapter, Blenkinsopp adds a short discursus on the reception history of the text under consideration, with particular attention to the Hellenistic and rabbinic commentators. These early attempts to 'fill in the gaps' of the text (for example, the story that Abraham's brother Haran died in a fire set by the young Abraham in protest at his family's idolatry) are often speculative, but quite fascinating, even if they do not, in general, seem plausible to the modern reader.

It seems to me that the further through the book we get, the more 'exegetical payback' Blenkinsopp gives us. Although – or perhaps because – he works through Abraham's life more or less in sequence, it is largely as the story draws towards its conclusion that important theological insights begin to emerge. His discussion about the sacrifice of Isaac, for example, is both helpful and sensitive.

In the final chapter, the author makes some remarks about the importance of Abraham to us as Christians, in distinction to the Jewish and Islamic traditions of Abraham. While I would have welcomed a fuller treatment of the subject, this would have been outside the scope of his aims, and, brief as they are, his comments will prove a helpful stimulant to further consideration.

Joseph Blenkinsopp is a well-respected academic, and this book is an important contribution to the scholarly study of the Abraham story. Those seeking to use this as a resource for preaching will need to be prepared to draw some of the theological deductions for themselves. Ultimately, this book will prove useful for non-specialists who, as the author suggests in his preface, are prepared to make an effort.

*Helen Paynter*  
*Bristol Baptist College*

**Gordon Wenham, *Rethinking Genesis 1-11: Gateway to the Bible* (Didsbury Lecture Series; Cascade, 2015), 76pp.**

This slim book (76 pages) by renowned Old Testament scholar Gordon Wenham is an accessible summary of some of the major themes dealt with in his much weightier Word commentary on Genesis 1-15. In this new book his aim is to demonstrate some of the great theological messages of the proto-history (his preferred term for the opening chapters of the Bible) without causing his readers to lose sight of the wood because of the trees.

Many senior scholars are unable to convey their cutting-edge contributions in a comprehensible fashion to non-specialists. Many popular-level writers either jump to unwarranted conclusions or fail to show their workings. Wenham falls into none of these traps. Using enough technical language to educate, but not enough to bemuse, Wenham demonstrates much of the methodology from which his conclusions are deduced. Because of this, the book serves also as an elegant showcase for the application of his chosen techniques. He actually applies a combination of two methodologies: he reads the final form of the text with attention to its literary features; and he considers it in comparison with other, similar but vitally different, ancient Near-Eastern mythologies.

So, for example, he shows how the biblical flood narrative critically differs from its Sumerian counterpart, which in other respects shows remarkable marks of similarity. Thus the Sumerian version is a story of human progress from a miserable pre-existence, while the Genesis account starkly contrasts with this by emphasising the inexorable slide of humanity from paradise to degeneration. The Sumerian flood is sent by the gods because humankind was noisily troublesome; the biblical flood arises because of humanity's inclination towards sin and violence. To give a second example: by use of the literary-critical approach Wenham masterfully demonstrates the grand palistrophe that forms the Genesis flood narrative, which – incidentally – cuts through the source-critical divisions of the text. By elegant reference to wind and sea, the separation of water and the emergence of dry ground and various creatures, Genesis narrates the flood as an act of de-creation and subsequent re-creation. With the application of these two techniques, Wenham teases out the proto-historical roots of a number of major biblical themes such as Sabbath, the sovereignty of God and the disintegration of human society without divine intervention.

In the closing chapter of the book, Wenham comments on the way that the themes he has identified are developed in other parts of scripture, in particular in the New Testament. While his remarks are necessarily brief, they serve as a valuable reminder of the coherence of the biblical witness through both testaments. In his final paragraphs, Wenham becomes admirably doxological as he ponders the purposeful Creator, whose handiwork declares his glory.

This is, in my view, a frankly exciting book, which has already proved a valuable resource for undergraduates I have been teaching. More to the point, it is a laudable amalgam of the highest scholarly endeavour and accessible writing, which will be a very useful addition to the bookshelves of ministers who do not already possess Wenham's more comprehensive commentary, or who want a more succinct version.

*Helen Paynter*  
*Bristol Baptist College*

**Christopher R. Seitz, *Joel* (International Theological Commentary; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 239pp.**

This commentary on the book of Joel is the first Old Testament offering in the anticipated International Theological Commentary series from Bloomsbury T&T Clark. The new series approaches the Bible as Holy Scripture and draws on the 'confessional heritage of the Church' to produce a Christian theological reading of the biblical text. Seitz's commentary is a fine contribution to this project. It is not an easy read but it is well worth the effort required.

The book begins with introductory material in the form of nine essays on various matters relating to the book of Joel and its interpretation. This is followed by a bibliography, the NRSV translation of Joel, and the commentary proper. Two appendices and an index complete the work.

Sceptical of attempts to distinguish between a layer of authentic Joel material and later accretions or phases of redaction, Seitz offers an interpretation of the book of Joel as a unified whole. This exposition of the book as it actually stands will prove useful to preachers as well as to all serious students of the Minor Prophets.

Seitz pays equal attention to the discrete contribution of Joel as a book in its own right and to the important role of Joel within the Book of the Twelve. He sees Joel as a post-exilic work that weaves together intertextual references particularly from the prophets and the Sinai traditions to create its own distinct portrayal of the Day of the Lord in three parts. The first part (Joel 1.5-10) is an assault upon Israel in the form of a devastating locust plague. The second part (Joel 2.1-27) depicts a yet more fully unfolding Day of the Lord for the same generation. Part three (2.28 – 3.21) details a finale in which the nations that had formerly afflicted Israel now come under the judgment of God.

Three things bother me about the book. First, I detect in it a note of antagonism toward historical-critical or otherwise not-so-theological commentaries. I probably should have expected this from a series that 'seeks to offer a corrective to the widespread pathologies of academic study in the modern era' (p. ix). While I understand what the series is trying to do, I think it would be better without its combative stance.

Second, this commentary, like most others, seems to find no moral or theological problem with the prophetic portrayal of a God who brings disaster upon an entire nation. I think this is a problem with the prophets' message that commentators could acknowledge and address.

My third criticism has to do with presentational issues. This is an attractive hardback book that is a pleasure to handle and should be a pleasure to read. Yet numerous copy-editing failures disappointed and irritated me. Typographical errors and inconsistencies sometimes make the book difficult to read. (The longest sentence in

the book contains over 120 words.) Hebrew and Greek text is usually transliterated and translated into English (though where Hebrew script is used the words are often in reverse order). However, German quotations, of which there are a few, are not translated; this is mystifying to me. Worse, the bibliography and the list of abbreviations are incomplete. This makes for a frustrating experience when trying to engage with the wider discussion. Page 31, for example, quotes the '1992 dictionary summary of Theodore Hiebert'. The footnote cites, "Joel, Book of, III.873'. This refers to an article in the Anchor Bible Dictionary but 'ABD' is missing from the footnote (and therefore also from the abbreviations list) and there is no entry under Hiebert in the bibliography. Problems of this nature occur throughout. Perhaps Bloomsbury T&T Clark is saving money by the omission of copy-editing. It is a pity.

Allow me a lengthy quotation to demonstrate what I think is good and bad about this book. Commenting on Joel 2.10-11, Seitz writes:

The suffixed forms of verse 10 tell us what this has occasioned. Creation itself is being undone (*'eres; šāmayim; šemeš; yārēah; kôkâbîm*). With a crescendo, we arrive at the final climactic verse. The voice that brought creation into being now arises in un-creation judgement, spoken in the form of his host. 'Mighty is He who gives forth his word.' The word spoken here is like the word spoken on the Days of Creation. On this un-creation Eighth Day the word that is breaking forth in 'let there be' is a word that brings one face to face with the LORD God, on His Day. The cry that arises from the heart of this portrayal is but two words (*umi yĕkilenu*): And with that we are poised over the brink of Genesis 1's *tôhû wābôhû*. Who can endure it? From within that same temporal space comes in response the divine Word of creation, made known at Sinai. (160)

This is vintage Seitz. The passage bristles with insight and interest. Still, it creates unnecessary problems for the reader. Beside paragraph formatting problems (which I have not reproduced but are present on the printed page), the passage is difficult partly because of its untranslated Hebrew words. Catered for in other parts of the book, readers who rely on English are here left high and dry. Anyway, if you can read and appreciate the argument above, you will like the book; if not, you will not.

Seitz's commentary is a dense but excellent theological and canonical reading. However, when it comes to copy-editing, I think it would have benefitted from a further layer of redaction.

*Robert Parkinson*  
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**Robin Parry, *Lamentations. Two Horizons Commentary on the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 2010), 272pp.**

At the very start of this fine book Parry comments on Western culture's aversion to pain, tragedy and grief. He observes:

We have been robbed of a vocabulary of grief and we suffer for it. The book of Lamentations accosts us by the wayside as a stranger who offers us an unasked-for, unwanted, and yet priceless gift – the poetry of pain. We would be wise to pay attention.

Indeed. But it is a difficult book. Not only an alien and ancient text, and with its own exegetical conundrums and textual entanglements. But Lamentations is a howl of pain, exposing its readers to the raw brutality and anguished afterlife of disaster that ruins everything: city, worldview, economy, political structures, faith, society of family, neighbourhood and nations. The result is trauma, a disorientation of the soul, a numbing of the mind, and an emotional life blighted from fruitfulness into wilderness by events that were overwhelming. It is well named, Lamentations, a poetry of pain, recited in the desolating loneliness and emotional agony of lives evacuated of meaning.

It is a hard but necessary read. At least it is necessary if faith is to be adequate to the brutal violence and calculated cruelties of war, terror, and destruction unleashed by those called the enemy, whose hatred is implacable and in whom mercy never took root. In a world where drones deliver death by remote control, and suicide and barrel bombs inflict death and terror, the victims and the bereaved utter their own bewildered, despairing laments. Words, the grammar of the voice, enable reality to be named, even if that reality is tragic beyond reason and is experienced as unassuaged grief, fear and rage.

The book of Lamentations was written to be read, and is to be read so as to be heard. It is a warning of the consequences of enmity let loose with weapons, of hatred equipped with imperial power, of all those acts and activities, attitudes and mind-sets, in which the destruction of the means of life, and the taking of life itself, are each seen as not only acceptable, but by twisted logic or toxic faith, are celebrated as offerings to god, or nation, or race.

Reading Lamentations is an exercise in depth explorations, a willing listening to the human spirit articulating its own shattered hopes. Commentary on the text must involve exegetical care, historical discipline and an alert sense of how poetry, image, theology, and faith are straining at the limits of meaning. So there must also be a further step beyond exegesis, historical context and constructive commentary. It is this further step that makes this commentary a quite exceptional treatment of Lamentations.

The Two Horizons Commentary aims at both traditional exegesis, but supplemented and developed by a series of theological reflections which send out new trajectories for further exploration and application of the text in question. That approach is made to work quite brilliantly in the exposition of this book so laden with sadness, so bewildered in its anguish, so vulnerable in its anger and guilt and loss, and yet, and nevertheless, defiant of giving in to ultimate despair.

The Introduction constructs the context, explores the genre of poetic lamentation, and seeks to show the canonical connections. A fine 10 pages looks at modern attempts to identify and explore the theology of Lamentations, and considers in brief essays “Sin



and Punishment in Covenant Context” and “Hope in Covenant Context.” The theological oscillation set up between sin and punishment and hope, and these in the context of an unbreakable Covenant broken, takes us to the very heart of the book. Then for 125 pages Parry moves through the text, using his own translation, opening up the interpretive options, and demonstrating the rich tapestry of words woven together into poems and songs of lament, with occasional glimpses of hoped for recovery, restoration, and perhaps renewal of covenant faithfulness. This first horizon of the text is lucid, packed with interaction with secondary scholarship and making intertextual connections with the wider canon of Scripture. In particular, as brought out in two later sections, the relations of Lamentations to Isaiah 40-55 and to the New Testament.

The second section of the book is 76 pages of Theological Horizons which pick up a wide range of themes and connections which further illumine the text. Taken together, the two horizons fuse into a series of essays of varying length and development. One particular highlight for me was the connections made between Lamentations and Second Isaiah, and the significance of Second Isaiah picking up some of the key themes and in some cases the actual text of Lamentations, and showing how they are reversed. The “no one to comfort” of Lamentations, gives way to the call “Comfort, comfort my people”; the children as casualties of war give way to children being born and rejoicing in return. Lamentations as the cry of victims of anti-Semitic violence, Lamentations and political theology, particularly the critique of empire were further well-made implications for contemporary reflection and action.

Three more substantial pieces are on Lamentations and the Rule of Faith, The Place of Lament in Christian Spirituality and Theodicy and Divine Suffering. Together these reflections climb down into the theological crevasses that split across the human experiences that gave rise to Lamentations; and they provide us with profound reflections which compel us to hear those lamentations with 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears, and to pay attention to the peoples of this world for whom the devastation of their cities, the blowing up of their hopes and the tearing down of their cultural identity are real, and now, and just as unforgiveable.

We are in debt to Robin Parry for a commentary that takes such suffering seriously, and has thought about it deeply. His treatment of divine suffering is theologically nuanced, careful but not constrained by those who would foreclose too early on divine suffering as an aspect of God’s willing love. There are a number of good commentaries on Lamentations, including Paul House in the Word Biblical Commentary (twinned with Duane Garrett on Song of Songs), Dobbs-Allsop in the *Interpretation* series, Leslie Allen’s *Pastoral Commentary, A Liturgy of Grief*, and Kathleen O’Connor’s *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*. I’ve used each of these with considerable profit and learning. But this volume by Parry offers more, and due to the format of exegesis and theologically reflective essays, more that is different. This is a commentary, read alongside one or other of the above, that makes Lamentations not only preachable, but important to preach.

*Jim Gordon*  
*Aberdeen*

**Stanley E Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Eerdmans, 2015), xii + 297pp.**

This is a well-written, engaging and scholarly book, which is informative and thought-provoking while being reasonably demanding. Each chapter has its origin in a paper presented at an academic conference, which explains both the scholarly nature of the book and the sense that the chapters are all quite distinct. But given the different origins of the chapters, Porter offers two integrating aspects, which are reflected in the title. He is concerned with what might be seen as distinctly Johannine, not at the expense of the connection between John and the rest of the New Testament, which Porter will defend, but to seek to hear the Johannine voice. He also discusses what he considers to be important issues, 'viewing them as windows into John's understanding of Jesus' (p. 3). There is also a sense that this Christological interest has shaped the decisions around inclusion and exclusion. As such the book sits somewhere between a more tightly focussed monograph, for this book offers a broader sweep of the Gospel, the large number of new commentaries on John written in this century so far, and introductions that attempt to cover, if fleetingly, all the significant issues (for example, Ruth Edwards' new edition of *Discovering John*).

There are nine chapters after the introduction and the particular issues they cover are: the dating of the Gospel (and other early texts), the intended readership of the Gospel as more sectarian or universal, the relationship between John and the Synoptic Gospels, the prologue, the 'I am' sayings, the meaning of the term 'the Jews' and the charge of anti-semitism, the way the concept of truth shapes the Gospel, the Passover and finally the ending of the Gospel. After a final conclusion there is 29 page bibliography, based on an annotated bibliography on the Johannine writings he published three years ago. This is of significant value in its own right for anyone wanting to pursue further studies in John.

To give a flavour of the approach that Porter takes and the conclusions he comes to, he argues for an early date of composition (even as early as 70AD), for the historicity of the Gospel – rather than it being purely a theological reflection on Jesus or a window into a later community – in which significant material goes back to Jesus and so can be used as part of historical Jesus research, for the unity of Gospel (with ch 21 included from the beginning) and for the clear and original universal purpose of the Gospel (rather than being a more sectarian document). In a number of these areas Porter is taking a distinct and different line to much academic scholarship.

Some of the discussion is very detailed and will be appreciated more clearly in academic circles. Porter's discussion of dating the Gospel centres on a discussion of two early papyrus fragments, one it seems of John's Gospel and the other of a non-canonical Gospel. The conclusion is significant, for it is here he argues for an early date, but much of the chapter is a very detailed contribution to the scholarly debate on the issue. But even here, pages 15-17 offer a helpful summary of the different dating of John's Gospel over the last 100 years. Other chapters, while still carefully detailed, will appeal to a wider readership. Porter suggests, in chapter 5, that there are in fact 35 uses of 'I am' in the Gospel, many more than the traditional 'I am sayings' and argues carefully through the text for different kinds of usage all of which carefully shape the narrative. Similarly, in chapter 7 Porter offers a detailed analysis of a number of

passages to show that the concept of truth is a central organising idea that is developed in important ways through the Gospel. There is much here in the detail that a preacher can draw on, especially in the way that the Gospel as whole has been constructed.

One of the strengths of the book is the way that Porter engages with the tradition of Johannine scholarship, so those who would like to be brought up to date with some of the current debates then Porter here is a fine guide. A further strength of the book is the way that it engages throughout with the text itself, offering at times detailed exposition of particular passages as well as the way the Gospel develops as a whole. There is much in the book that is helpful, insightful and will bring new understanding of the Gospel. Clearly some issues are not discussed or barely mentioned; the material on the passion, for example, focuses entirely on the idea of Passover, which Porter traces back through the Gospel, rather than exploring other aspects – but that is the kind of book it is.

Porter has certainly been busy – a commentary on Romans, an introduction to Paul as well as a couple of books that explore the Greek of the New Testament and New Testament textual criticism all published in two years. It may, perhaps, be that research assistants have been very busy too. But this is a good, well written book, and if the others are of the same quality then these will be important contributions.

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

**Jeffrey A. D. Weima, 1-2 Thessalonians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Baker Academic, 2014), 736pp.**

On the Greek text, this volume by Jeffrey Weima has been years in preparation and is by an acknowledged expert whose previous research on the letters is deep and wide. The word authoritative is used by several blurb writers on the back cover, and my own use of this commentary leaves me in no doubt they are right. Interpretive options are carefully outlined, and Weima always engages with exemplary fairness and readiness to acknowledge the weight of other perspectives and interpretive choices.

The format of the Baker series I find is user friendly, each unit having an introductory summary showing its place in the overall flow, then a literary and structural analysis, followed by exegesis and exposition. Additional notes at the end of each text unit allow further detail on mainly textual issues. The footnotes in this commentary add to the discussion, offer further resources, show the biblical intertextuality of key words, phrases and concepts, and are not multiplied unnecessarily. I found that working through the relevant textual unit(s) early in the week, opened up various options and instilled confidence for handling the text in preaching. For example in that first sermon, focusing on the programmatic verse 3 of chapter 1, “we constantly remember your work of faith, and labour of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father,” there are 8 pages of careful lexical, grammatical, and intertextual study. The result is a virtual exegetical essay on the three cardinal

virtues, or theological dispositions, of Christian life, as these worked out in those new born Christian communities.

Or again in 4.1-12, with its questions of sexual conduct and public ethics, there is an extensive exploration of social and moral background that sifts through grammar, lexical comparisons, ethical schools of thought, the nature of holiness and how that relates to sexuality, and the roles and values of a community newly converted to Christ. Weima uses attitudes and norms of Hellenistic culture contemporary with Paul by way of contrast with the holiness that is to characterise Christian sexual ethics and behaviour. This is a challenging passage to preach in the context of our own changed and changing norms about sexuality, marriage, human relationships and relatedness. How to combine sensitivity to people's life circumstances and choices with pastoral integrity, balancing a rigorous questioning of an ethic of laissez faire, but without being judgmental while affirming Christian values and standards of love, faithfulness and, yes indeed, holiness. The overall impression was that Weima's treatment is sensitive, sensible, wide ranging in examining and listening to exegetical options, and offering considered and thought through conclusions that did not dilute the clearly stated parameters of Paul's guidance.

The pastoral and theological consideration of death, bereavement and hope in 4.13-18 is equally rich, satisfying, and provided all I needed to be able to preach on verses I have read at funerals many a time, and always with a combination of solemnity, hope and recognition that here Paul deals with mystery, yet in a tone of certainty. It becomes clear that certainty bordering on strident triumphalism sets the tone of Paul's early eschatology, and shows that the earliest Christians struggled to find concepts and words that would articulate Christian hope in the face of death, and Christian hope looking forward to the return of Jesus. As I write I am about to launch on those exciting, contested passages about Christ's return and what that means for the deceased and the living, then and now, when we face our own bereavements, and our own death.

I highly recommend Weima, and even if Greek isn't a strong point, his writing is accessible in the best and least patronising sense of that word.

Jim Gordon  
Aberdeen

**Wesley Hill, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters* (Eerdmans, 2015), 240pp.**

Wesley Hill's *Paul and the Trinity* is, I think, a breath of fresh air to the discussions and to the scholarship surrounding questions concerning the Apostle Paul and his view of the divinity of God, Jesus, and the Spirit.

In this, his PhD thesis, Hill is particularly critical what he calls the 'vertical axis' of Trinitarian thinking. The 'vertical axis' thinking has given rise to a confusing array of 'high' and 'low' Christologies that increasingly threaten to overwhelm the field. Hill focuses his critique of the 'low' Christology on the writings of James Dunn, Maurice

Casey and James McGrath. Hill notes that for these scholars, while varying to some degree with each other, all affirm that however high a status Paul attributes to Jesus, at no point does it impinge on the status of one God. Hill then offers a critique of those in the 'high' corner, notably Larry Hurtado and Richard Bauckham. Hill then asks, 'has Jesus risen to a high point, or the highest point, on the vertical axis whose uppermost reaches entail divinity?'

But Hill's critique of both of these 'low' and 'high' positions and of the concept of the 'vertical axis', is that they threaten to obscure the way in which, for Paul, the identities of God, Jesus, and the Spirit are constituted by their relations with one another. Hill's preference, a concept that stands at the heart of this book, is that a more fruitful study of Paul's Christology is better represented with the image of a horizontal axis, or a two-way street, or better still, with the metaphor of a web of multiple intersecting vectors. And I think he pulls it off.

More fully, Hill explains, 'the patterns of New Testament speech about God, Christ, and the Spirit lead us to understand that triune, reciprocal web of relations as constitutive of the identities of each of the three. God the Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit are constituted by and in their relations to and with one another.'

Paul identifies God – 'picks God out from the crowd' by referring to Jesus. That is, God is who he is only in relation to Jesus. Moreover, Jesus is who he is only in relation to God. Hill's discussion focuses on two key concepts here. Precisely that God's and Jesus' identities are constituted in their differing ways of relating to one another. God is the Father (of the Son) who sends, raises the Son from the dead, and exalts the Son. But Jesus is the Son (of the Father) who is sent, is raised from the dead, and is exalted by the Father. But second, God and Jesus share the divine name; they are both together "the Lord." At the heart of this assertion Hill gets to grips with Paul's use of the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8:6 and argues brilliantly that Paul is affirming God the Father and Jesus together as the "one God" of Deuteronomy 6:4 in a way that is non-competitive and mutually complementary.

Hill then makes the case that the Spirit is an agent in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and thereby playing a role in the identification of God and Jesus. God raises Jesus by means of the Spirit.

It is this mode of relations that Hill presents that is so helpful in making a clear case for Paul's Trinitarian thinking. There is a matrix of relationality: The Father is not the Father without the Son. The Son is only the Son of the Father. And the Spirit is the Father's agent in resurrecting the Son.

*Edward Pillar*  
*Evesham Baptist Church*

**John Christopher Thomas, and Frank D. Macchia. *Revelation. Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2016), 670pp.**

It's not every year that a major commentary on the Book of Revelation hits the shelves, but this is one of them. Weighing in at 670 pages, this is a substantial piece of scholarship, whichever way one looks at it. In keeping with the THNTC series, this

commentary is written firmly for those who inhabit the space of faithful discipleship. It is academic inasmuch as it engages thoroughly with academia, but it is also faith-full. In the introduction, the authors speak of their rootedness in their church communities, their commitment to the activity of the Spirit at work in the world, and of their prayer that their book 'will assist the church to rediscover and reappropriate' the book of Revelation. Their Pentecostal commitment informs their scholarship, and what emerges is a reading of Revelation which speaks to churches and Christians with force and challenge.

The two authors who have collaborated to produce this work have each contributed different parts to the whole. J.C. Thomas offers a literary and exegetical analysis of the text of Revelation, and Frank Macchia offers a series of theological essays on the themes of: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, Salvation, and Eschatology.

Of particular note here is Macchia's essay on the place of the Holy Spirit in the book of Revelation, which is an often neglected area of scholarship, something which this reviewer has noted elsewhere (see Woodman, "The "Seal" of the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation." In *Holy Spirit, Unfinished Agenda*, edited by Johnson Lim. Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2015). In his essay, Macchia explores the multilayered nature of Revelation's portrayal of the Spirit, first as the Spirit 'of God', then as the Spirit 'of Jesus', then as the Spirit 'of prophecy', then as the Spirit 'of worship', and finally as the Spirit 'of life'.

The textual exegesis is careful and clear, showing how the imagery of Revelation finds its origins within the Hebrew Scriptures, and how it relates to the world of the first century hearers of the original text. It is carefully footnoted and demonstrates a good level of engagement with contemporary scholarship, without itself becoming mired in technicalities.

Also of interest is the introductory section, where the usual discussions of audience/date/authorship give way to a fascinating section on 'Revelation and its streams of influence', which looks at the way the text has functioned within its interpretative history. From the 'disastrous interpretations' of Thomas Müntzer, the Anabaptists of Münster, Charles Manson, and David Koresh, to the influence of Revelation on art, music, hymnody, poetry, and film.

This commentary will make a useful addition to any preacher's shelf, and whilst not offering 'application' on a plate, nonetheless offers the ingredients from which many sermons may be brought into being.

*Simon Woodman,  
Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church*

**Pieter J. Lalleman, *The Lion and the Lamb: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Faithbuilders, 2016)**

This short book offers an introduction to the more 'readily accessible' parts of Revelation, focussing on the way they draw from the Old Testament. The style is

straightforward and avoids technical language, making it useful for those not used to reading theological material. Each section is accompanied by a paragraph of 'application' which suggests ways in which Revelation may be relevant to contemporary discipleship, followed by questions 'for thought and discussion'.

It can sometimes seem as though whenever a 'young adults' or a home-group are asked what they would like to study, the Book of Revelation is somewhere near the top of their list. This book by Pieter Lalleman will be of use to those who need a resource to help meet such a request.

*Simon Woodman.*  
*Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church*

**Shaun Bawulski and Stephen R Holmes, *Christian Theology: The Classics* (Routledge, 2014), 292pp.**

This book follows the shaping of Christian theology over the last two centuries. Bawulski and Holmes examine 31 important texts from Christian theologians/writers in chronological order to help the reader see how the story of Christian theology has developed through the history of the church. The authors focus on key texts which in their view are significant to the development of the Christian theology. They deem these texts classics. Each chapter is about eight pages long and contains a short biography of the subject, a synopsis of the text and then finish up with helpful criticisms of the text.

This is an excellent book and a refresher to many of the classic texts which appeared in theology lectures, but who have been unnecessarily relegated to the archives of the mind in the face of pastoral ministry. Many of the chapters still highlighted elements of theology that are still relevant to pastoral ministry. I was expecting to struggle to read some of the chapters, but none of them dragged, and I landed up using the book as a devotional text.

I found it fascinating to see how in the development of theology there was very much a major pendulum swing away from something considered unhelpful or wrong. This swing was at times very aggressive. This reminded me we owe much to those who got it wrong as we do to those writers who helped clarify what could be now be considered orthodox parts of our historical, theological understanding. I did wonder as I read the book if we have learnt not to throw the baby out with the bathwater when debating current issues and challenges of theology as it seems me some of our theological forbears did. They, though, were often arguing over issues for which the outcome would have mortal consequences for themselves or others.

Bawulski and Homles have offered some gentle criticisms of each text, which I like and help the reader hold a less polarised view of these theological positions.

The book is not just a recap on the classics such as Anselm, Luther, Calvin. It also introduced me to some theologians I'd not come across in detail, though I confess, I probably should have.

If I were to have one criticism of the book it would be that it does not have a bibliography/ further reading list. This would have been helpful, especially as many of these chapters whetted one's appetite to explore some of these writings deeper.

This is a great introduction, recap and devotional book to the classics which have shaped our Christian tradition and thinking. I wholeheartedly commend it to you.

*Rich Shorter*  
*Harold Hill, Romford*

**Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (IVP, 2016), 1016pp.**

The first edition of this dictionary came out in 1988, this second edition comes almost thirty years later. What does this second edition offer? First, it offers 400 new articles, and second, many of the existing articles are expanded and amended. To make room for what is new many of the articles on biblical theology from the first edition have been removed. There is now a separate *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. As I went through the *Dictionary* one thing I noticed was how many times John Webster's name appeared as author of an entry, as does Richard Bauckham. I'm guessing that many of these are from the first edition. A third edition will surely see them become entries in their own right. There are new entries on Stanley Grenz, Colin Gunton, Stanley Hauerwas, John Zizioulas, Rowan Williams, and NT Wright, amongst of others. Baptists are represented by articles on John Bunyan, Andrew Fuller, John Gill and C. H. Spurgeon. Steve Holmes provides big articles on 'God' and 'Revelation.' This is a substantial resource that includes a topic on probably almost any theological question a church minister might get asked. For that reason it is helpful addition to one's collection.

*Andy Goodliff*  
*Belle Vue Baptist Church, Southend-on-Sea*

**David R. Nelson, Darren Sarisky, and Justin Stratis, (eds.), *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John B. Webster* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 363 pp.**

I asked to review this book not only because of the quality of contributors – we are treated to a genuinely stellar line-up – but also because the work was written in honour of Prof John Webster. His theological work has made a tremendous impact on me personally, in a way that few others have done. He has indeed helped shape the landscape of my theological and exegetical concerns. But a few weeks after the book arrived in the post, on 25 May 2016, we heard the tragic news that John had died. Since then, tributes have poured in, written by numerous important theological figures. They attest to the fact that John has left a unique legacy. Never a man to sit within only one camp, theologically speaking, he has engaged with a wide variety of theological voices across his distinguished career, placing all under the scrutiny of his



penetrating intellect, voracious research and unique eloquence. In all of this he possessed that most important feature, which makes for the most interesting and helpful theology. I am speaking, of course, about that humble yet robust confidence in the *veracity of the gospel*.

In a revealing story, Dr Steve Holmes, of the University of St Andrews, reminisced about an SST conference, at which the presenter spoke of the “pastoral need” to “forgive God”. Sitting next to John, Steve exclaimed “forgiving God is rather a difficult concept theologically, is it not?” John responded: “It’s not difficult at all; it’s blasphemy. Come on, we’re going for a pint”!

In other words, John knew where he stood, theologically speaking: on the generosity of God’s gracious movement towards us in Jesus Christ. On this basis, he could make penetrating and decisive theological judgements, not merely on the basis of bland theological axioms, the kind that barks “heresy” at passers-by on the street. But because his thinking always sought to be animated by the truth of the gospel, which reveals a God so majestic that the idea of forgiving him is not merely absurd, but blasphemous.

Just as John was a colourful, sharp, multifaceted theologian, the essays in this book reflect something of that diversity and variety. And so it should, as in many ways this collection is now a tribute to one of the finest theological voices the United Kingdom has ever produced.

This is what I mean: there are some rather technical and focused essays, such as that penned by Robert Jenson on being and essence, in conversation with Thomas and Barth. (Incidentally, this essay contains one of the more humorous moments. Jenson, often criticised for his Hegelian tendencies, ends up using the kind of vocabulary that said German philosopher would recognise. His response: “so what if that’s Hegelian”! 130 n.21). Other essays are written very much with Barth, or theology influenced by Barth, in mind (Bruce McCormack, “Barth’s Critique of Schleiermacher Reconsidered”, Eberhard Jüngel, “New – Old – New: Theological Aphorisms” etc.), still others seem, in various degrees, more indebted to Thomist thinking (Katherine Sonderegger, “The Sinlessness of Christ”, Matthew Levering, “What is the Gospel?”).

Additionally, a wide variety of subjects are covered, ranging from theology and exegesis, which many of the essays discuss (e.g., Darren Sarisky, “A Prolegomenon to an Account of Theological Interpretation of Scripture”, Francis Watson, “Does Historical Criticism Exist? A Contribution to Debate on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture”, Lewis Ayres, “The Word Answering the Word: Opening the Space of Catholic Biblical Interpretation”), to creation (Justin Stratis, “Unconditional Love: *Creatio ex Nihilo* and the Covenant of Grace”), universalism and the last judgement (David Fergusson, “The Last Judgement”), ecclesiology (Tom Greggs, “Proportion and Topography in Ecclesiology: a Working Paper on the Dogmatic Location of the Doctrine of the Church”), pneumatology (Stanley Hauerwas, “How to be Caught by the Holy Spirit”), and so on. Ivor Davidson presents a nice essay on John himself, and the end of the book is capped off with a chronology of John’s publications.

What is particularly splendid in this collection is the mixture of analytic excellence with an almost palpable joy in meditating on these various subjects as the work of a Christian theology that displays “sufficient confidence to deploy its own resources” (see Darren Sarisky’s opening essay, “Theological theology”, 1). So Stratis, for example, writes beautifully of the way in which *creatio ex nihilo* is subordinate to *electio ex nihilo*, such that the unconditioned love of God is brought beautifully to the forefront (“Unconditional Love” 277-287). Sonderegger speaks of joyful affirmations, and so on.

One of Webster’s most important legacies, for me at least, has been to remind us that theology, rightly undertaken, draws us to a place in which we celebrate the plenitude and majesty of God’s graciousness and kindness. This superb collection of essays practices theological theology in the same spirit, and as such belongs in every theologian’s library.

*Chris Tilling*  
*St Mellitus College, London*

**John Webster *God without Measure: Working papers in Christian Theology Vol 1: God and the Works of God; Vol 2: Virtue and Intellect* (Bloomsbury T & T Clark , 2016)**

It is a desperately sad task to be reviewing these twin volumes of small essays by John Webster who died aged 60 this summer. He had held very senior theological chairs at Oxford, Aberdeen and St Andrews, and was one of the very few globally ranked theologians of the UK, in particular among the top Barth scholars of world theology. His move from Oxford was a major loss to the University’s strength in theology from which it has not really recovered, particularly taken along with the loss of Oliver O’Donovan again to a Scottish University. The Anglican cause has also lost one of its very few international theological stars and essays on ecclesiology in these two volumes testify what a deep loss that is.

John will inevitably be known as a very great Barth scholar, and also the leading British authority on Jüngel. These two slim volumes engage with core dogmatic themes, the first circling around the economic Trinity and the root of divine activity *ad extra*, the second moving out to the dimensions of the mind of faith and morality in relation to Christology. He explores the human predicament in the light of Christ, sorrow, dignity, courage and mercy. The effect of sin on human thinking is probed and the place of the university as a locus for theology. The essays are indeed brief articles, some already published in journals. An unusual format, in many ways ideal for a pastor who will find rich and ‘relevant’ resources for sermons, teaching and pastoral practice.

The essays in volume one cohere together as Webster’s theologising unfolds in a very Trinitarian fashion. The themes are structured in two parts entitled God in Himself, God’s outer works, including God, Trinity, Creation, Christology, Salvation and Church. We find a wide range of conversation partners engaged with, notably the Roman Catholic Thomist tradition and the emphasis on the perfection and completeness of God. Were I to offer one thesis running through the essays it would be this divine perfection over against the historicisation of God now so prevalent in contemporary

theology. Webster stresses the root of divine action in the Trinity, already perfect, the safest possible grounding for salvation.

His essay in volume one 'Eternal Generation' closes with three pages in which Pannenberg, Jenson and La Cugna are debated with and found to over indulge the economic Trinity at the expense of the immanent Trinity. Webster wants the Son's deity to be secured in his eternal origin rather than in the historical reality of the self differentiation of Jesus from the Father time – although he recognises the need to observe the distinction of the order of knowing from that of being, utterly crucial for us all to bear in mind! La Cugna's book *God for Us* is found vulnerable to a kind of centripetalist tendency, the begetting of the Son and breathing forth of the Spirit are in the economic life of God, thus in danger of collapsing God into the economy.

To take an essay from the second volume we can take his essay 'God, Theology and Universities'. He says that there are many different kinds of university, but that theology has a public vocation, citing Aquinas saying that the divine gift of wisdom is the ability to judge and set in order all things by God's rules'. English university faculties of theology are now almost completely shifting into faculties of 'religion', perhaps with 'theology' as a temporary link term destined to drop away as the governmental push for multi-culturalism to be underpinned by the universities, and Christianity to be pushed back and regarded as a phenomenon from outside church faith. Webster wants theology to be a good witness to virtue, to prefer contemplation to utility in its thinking and teaching. He points to the obvious fact that 'science' is now wholly 'naturalised' and that this is an inhibition for theological thought. Another such inhibition is phenomenalism, religion being analysed and reduced to outward phenomena such as texts, history, practices and liturgies. Webster trenchantly deems this phenomenalism as 'a defection of created intelligence from its calling, and opposition to the rule of Christ and the Spirit in the intellectual order. It has proved remarkably alluring, especially to the sub-disciplines of theology which can more easily be conformed to critical historical investigation of the natural objects of religion' (pp.166-7). This can give theology a warm glow of acceptance in the secular university, but this glow is skin deep. And I wonder if the author is correct in seeing all religions are equally under such critical analysis – the pre-Enlightenment inhibition of 'risking offence' is now deeply embedded in universities on behalf of one religion and that is certainly not Christianity. But the essay is correct in identifying this naturalism and phenomenalism as powerful eradicators of Christian theological theology. Theology can benefit from association with universities, but at a cost, and of course at the risk of bowing the knee to the state as the ultimate authority adjudicating what is proper as content for contemplation and formation.

These articles are indeed those of a genuine Christian theologian 'at his prime', to quote Kevin Vanhoozer's commendation on the back cover. They would be a wonderful gift for any pastor this Christmas. And any Christian reviewer and friend can only end with the note of thanking God for the author, his peaceable thoroughness, and ecumenical lack of guile, his insistent pointing to Jesus and the depth of God's love.

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

**Robert W. Jenson, *A Theology in Outline: Can These Bones Live?* Edited by Adam Eitel (Oxford University Press, 2016), 140pp.**

Robert Jenson is one of most important living theologians today. At the end of the 1990s he authored a notable two volume Systematic Theology, but has also written on Barth, Jonathan Edwards, metaphysics, the sacraments, culture, the doctrine of the Trinity, ecumenism, as well as two commentaries on Song of Songs and Ezekiel. This new short book is a set of lectures he gave to undergraduates at Princeton University in 2008. This is not his systematic theology in miniature, although it does cover the basic areas of Christian doctrine.

The book it might be closest too is another small book Jenson published ten years ago, which was the written record of a series of conversations he had with his then eight year-old grand-daughter called *Conversations with Poppi About God* (Brazos, 2006). In that book Jenson and grand-daughter explored questions of doctrine and church, with Jenson communicating at the level of an eight year old. In a *Theology in Outline*, Jenson again is writing for an audience wider than just other academic theologians. Where reading Jenson can sometimes take some hard work (nothing wrong with that), here in this new book, perhaps because they are lectures and introductory ones at that, I found myself swept along in the story he tells of Israel, Jesus, God, creation, salvation, and the church. I read most of the book in my car waiting for the Baptist Assembly. (In all honesty, I was so engrossed in the book, that it took me longer to realise that I was in the wrong car park to get the bus for the Baptist Assembly – which surely is a testament in itself to this book!) Jenson here is in apologetic mode, but with humility. In fact when Stanley Hauerwas recently said that the challenge is to ‘recover a strong theological voice without that voice betraying the appropriate fragility of all speech but particularly speech about God’, this little book from Jenson is a great example of how to meet that challenge.

When a paperback version appears, this is worth sharing with folk in your church. Theology will come alive, make more sense and they will come to know who Robert Jenson is, which will be no bad thing, when too many perhaps only know Wayne Grudem!

*Andy Goodliff*  
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**Keith L. Johnson and David Lauber (eds.), *T & T Clark Companion to the Doctrine of Sin* (Bloomsbury, 2016), xiv + 472pp.**

Despite having contributed to a few I’m not that fond of edited essay collections with multiple contributors. It’s appropriate to honour a noted scholar with a Festschrift from associates and peers, it’s similarly appropriate for the contributions to a symposium to be collected and edited, but collections of this nature with contributions on a single theme from invited authors (with little evidence of any conversation between them) generally disappoint in a similar manner to Dictionaries of theology. I appreciate that probably (albeit regrettably) Dictionaries or collections of this kind may be the sort of book that the average working minister consults for an accessible

summary of a theme or response to the contribution of a key thinker (and maybe such a reader would have proved a more appropriate reviewer) but for any reader with a more sustained interest in a theme or a writer these inevitably brief and restricted summaries are less than satisfying. I accept of course that essays like these, for many readers, might be a useful starting-point with references in footnotes offering possibilities for further reading and research, but there are already excellent introductions to the thought of Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, or Karl Barth (for instance) and, for the serious enquirer, there can be no substitute for engaging with such thinkers first-hand.

Having said this, the present volume is an impressive work, beautifully presented by the publisher (albeit with a far too cursory index), and comprising twenty-seven chapters partitioned under the headings of Biblical Background (seven chapters), Historical Figures (ten chapters), and Dogmatic Issues (ten chapters). Inevitably as in any collection of essays some contributions are more helpful and thought provoking than others – and it probably says as much about the reviewer as the reviewed that this reader generally found the historical and dogmatic sections more satisfying – but at least one of the biblical chapters felt more pre-critical than post-critical and I was left more aware of questions that, though perhaps mentioned, were not being addressed with sufficient rigour and critical awareness. There are some better known authors who contribute here, some of whom (for instance Ian McFarland and Alistair McFadyen) have authored helpful and provocative books on the theme of sin. The better essays manage, even within the restrictions of space, to press boundaries and prompt critical response, but I was continually left with the frustration of wanting far more.

And this is particularly the case given the subject in question. A persuasive and sustainable theological account of sin is precisely what is lacking in so much contemporary debate concerning medical ethics, economic responsibility, sex and sexuality. George Hunsinger's fine chapter on 'The Sinner and the Victim' poses a timely challenge to contemporary preoccupations and the discussion of race in Stephen Ray's chapter on 'Structural Sin' poses disturbing challenges, but such immediate application to the contemporary is rare here. But far more fundamentally the chasm of understanding between the Eastern and Western traditions, the connectedness (or otherwise) of mortality and sin, the lack of any doctrine of original sin within Judaism, the lack of reference to the Paradise story throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, the tension between the apodictic tradition of Torah and the experiential musings of Wisdom Literature, the staggering weight the Western Church has placed on Romans 5.12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15.22 and their relative isolation within the New Testament, the dominance (in the West) of Augustine's interpretation of these texts and the immense difficulties of his notion of inherited corruption together with the corresponding difficulties of John Calvin's notion of imputed corruption – all such issues are mentioned but left tantalisingly undeveloped.

But most basically of all, if it is the case that a recurring problem for Christian theology is that too often it is insufficiently Christian, insufficiently focused on Christ, then surely this is particularly and especially true of the Western tradition's account of sin with its preoccupation with Adam and Augustine. Might it not be the case as Barth suggests (and as is so ably summarised in Paul Nimmo's essay here) that sin is only properly defined as Christ assumes it on our behalf? Notwithstanding the number of

books on the theme of sin or original sin that have been published in recent years, including this present collection of essays, the lead of Barth is yet to be followed and the subject awaits a thoroughly Christological and contemporarily persuasive treatment.

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

**Marcellino D'Ambrosio, *Who Were the Church Fathers? From Clement of Rome to Gregory the Great* (SPCK, 2014), xiv + 304pp.**

This book offers an overview of that part of church history from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The book sets out its scope and rationale quite clearly. It will begin with the first post-apostolic churches and continues beyond the Council of Chalcedon in 451, where early church history often ends, to include significant individuals in three centuries such as John Chrysostom and Gregory the Great. It is based around key individuals in the story of the early church and most chapters are organised around one key figure, but these are the individuals whom, principally the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have considered as the key early writers, theologians and leaders. As many histories of the Early Church do, it is focussed on the areas around Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople – there is no place in the narrative, for example, for the leaders of the Celtic church.

It is set out not as a text book for students but 'to acquaint the reader with the colorful personalities and the seething passion of those who are our common ancestors and to share a few gems from the treasure of their precious teaching' (p. ix). What is offered here is then a narrative account. There is no explicit engagement with other scholarly accounts and the only references are to the writings of the early church authors. This approach has some clear strengths, especially for those not that familiar with the individuals concerned. The book reads well as a narrative, its concentration on the writings of the time gives a very clear focus on the primary texts and the reader is not bogged down in numerous footnotes. Those not familiar with the early church, and these seem to be the target audience, will gain an overall sense of the development of these centuries and an initial engagement with some of their writings.

But the book offers what is clearly one narrative of the church fathers, and my hesitancy about recommending it to others is that there is no recognition in the book that there are other ways of telling the story or that there is significant scholarly debate about issues the book suggests are simply facts. It would be possible to avoid detailed footnotes and discussion but still alert the reader to areas of contention, but this is not done. The author is an Italian Catholic, well known there for work in the media, and the narrative told is very clearly through the lens of the Catholic Church's understanding of history and ecclesiology.

So it is a narrative of monarchical bishops from near the very beginning of the church with a clear apostolic succession from Peter and Paul through the Bishops of Rome into what we now know as the papacy. But there is no discussion of whether Ignatius, for example, in his discussion of the role of Bishop is trying to present an argument or

describe the reality or of the difference in ecclesial polity that seem to emerge from Clement and Ignatius.

Behind the narrative there is also the question of the author's use of sources. D'Ambrosio has a very high respect for these early church writers, as well as for the wider tradition of the Catholic Church, and together this leads to a very positive review of early church documents with little room for a critical approach. In one chapter D'Ambrosio discusses Irenaeus and his writings against the Gnostics and his list of the Bishops of Rome back to the church's founding by Peter and Paul. D'Ambrosio gives no hint at the discussions around the founding of the church at Rome, whether either Peter or Paul were involved or no suggestion that the accuracy of Irenaeus' account, which is strongly polemic, might be questioned.

In a later chapter D'Ambrosio briefly tells the story of the discovery in the early twentieth century of a document called the *Egyptian Church Order*, and how this was clearly shown to be the lost *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. Arguing further that Hippolytus was a traditionalist who sought preserve and older liturgy, D'Ambrosio states that this state preserves the liturgy in Rome in the second half of the second century – a very early witness. While it is true that some scholars have argued for the *Egyptian Church Order* to be a translation of Hippolytus' work, many have argues instead that it is a later composite document whose provenance is uncertain. This illustrates the general approach that D'Ambrosio takes to the ancient texts and their content – accepting rather than questioning.

So all in all this is a very readable book that presents the history if this part of the early church in an engaging way, but it is written with a very distinct slant shaped by Roman Catholic tradition. While D'Ambrosio may be familiar with and consulted some of the work of other scholars, but there is little suggestion in the book of other ways that narrative is and could be told. The book could be helpful for some, but to be used with care.

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**Scott MacDougall, *More than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2015) 290pp.**

When you have been associated with churches for any length of time you forget how strange they are. MacDougall explains that ecclesiological imagination—what on earth you image you have joined—is the type of imagination that Charles Taylor calls the “social imaginary” (see his *A Secular Age*, 2007). It is the pre-conscious, pre-theoretical ‘background’ that unites a community, and ‘is encoded in shared perspectives, repeated narratives, and common practices’ (p.1) which provides the members of that community with a foundational imagination of who they are. It becomes the way of being in the world, and provides a horizon of normativity, commitment to a set of metaphysical or moral truths that underlie the social order. MacDougall argues that theology, in its broadest sense, is a kind of ‘theological imaginary’ analogous to Taylor’s social imaginary.

This is much deeper than the often observed 'Christian worldview,' which MacDougall argues, is much too intellectual. The social imaginary and its theological counterpart are much more 'lived out' than merely 'thought through.' Following James K. A. Smith, he wants an imagination that 'is a theological vision of human flourishing, profoundly informed by the scripture, tradition, and personal experience of Christian faith that shapes and is shaped by . . . our manner of life and that provides and reflects . . . a template for the world we desire and the people we seek to become' (p.2).

What gives rise to that which has ultimate value is handled under the heading of eschatology. That eschatological imagination, "the lived vision of what suffuses with divine meaning the entire drama of the cosmos from creation to ultimate fulfilment," provides the background to how we embody Christian community, and so eschatology and ecclesiology become closely linked (and not in the sense that some churches become obsessed with speculation about 'the end times.)

Thus setting the broad theological perspectives of his thesis, MacDougall continues by focusing upon Communion ecclesiology, and its dominance amongst episcopal churches. It is broader, though, than those churches that adopt an episcopacy for dogmatic reasons (Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Orthodox). Roger Haight argues that the WCC, without being a church itself, "represents a form of actual communion". Within its participants are plural ecclesiologies of communion rather than a monolithic communion ecclesiology. What results is a rich and multi-layered understanding of communion (*koinonia*): within the Godhead; the church as a communion of individuals within a community; and of those communities in communion with one another. The practice of the eucharist provides the entry-point for that communion life. MacDougall finds difficulties with emphasis, however, since such ecclesiologies tend to understand communion as realizable now, as a gift the Holy Spirit offers to, in, and through the churches. This realized eschatological imagination leaves little room for 'the more.' It tends to be limited to a focus upon the church alone, whereas the eschatological promise that MacDougall identifies broadens to embrace the whole of creation that will be the beneficiary of God's grace.

So, rather than seeking to 'dethrone communion as the ascendant approach to ecclesiology' (p.6) MacDougall wants to push it further. 'In short, for a communion ecclesiology to effect communion, it needs to imagine communion more expansively and, in doing so, to imagine church more eschatologically' (p.6).

The argument (and thesis, for this is a largely unreconstructed doctoral thesis) unfolds with a chapter that analyses communion ecclesiologies — especially in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and WCC expositions. There follows two chapters that engage with significant exponents of differing relations between church and world: John Zizioulas (the church beyond the world) and John Millbank (the church over against the world.) Both these theologians, troubled by the impact of modernity upon the contemporary church and the wider culture, offer theologies that creatively retrieve a perceived Christian past. They offer communion as the essential category for ecclesiality precisely because it is what is missing from (post)modern life. They do so by unifying "*koinonia* as mystery of the Church with *koinonia* as mystery of God, *Pneuma* with *Ecclesia*, Christology with Pneumatology, liturgy — especially the



Eucharist — with theology.” (p.7., quoting Hankey, *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 387–415 (394).)

From this baseline that first embraces Zizioulas’ eschatological priority of returning God’s good creation to God in love, praise and worship, of which the instantiation is the church gathered around its bishop and celebrating the eucharist that ‘remembers the future’, and secondly, follows Millbank in seeing eschatological perfection in a return to prelapsarian peace, and a rejection of postlapsarian mimetic violence, and thus the church as that community which stands against the ontology of violence, MacDougall develops his “more.”. For Millbank, the church itself is a social theory and a practice that opposes the fallen “secular city.” It is this dimension of the “more” that MacDougall develops in chapters 5 and 6, seeking to revise the over-realized eschatology of Zizioulas and Millbank by situating the church *in* the world, not apart from it, or over-against it.

Thus the church is not only in the world, but exists for the world (ch. 6), and the church is the proleptic anticipation in history of the basileia, the Kingdom rule, of Christ. In the church, the eschatological reign of Christ is already present, but not fully so. Church is a community of disciples that anticipates the basileia, and provides a “foretaste of the quality of relationality that fulfilment of God’s promise anticipates.” (p. 179) This is a church in and for the world, with it in its suffering, yet witnessing to hope.

In chapter 7 the way that the church fulfils that being in and for the world is explored through the ecclesial practices that MacDougall explores through engagement with Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra’s “school” of practical theology—one rooted in an understanding of practices. This is a way of understanding the character of Christian discipleship with which I have a great deal of sympathy, and it roots this ecclesial argument in the messy business of Christian practices.

This book represents an important development of communion ecclesiologies from the more familiar expressions in ecumenism and the more influential of contemporary theological expositions. It roots the church in and for the world, and begins to explore how that being for the world might be expressed in ecclesial practices. It deserves a place in every theological library with a meaningful section on ecclesiology, and perhaps, also, its thesis deserves an outing in every course in ecclesiology. Furthermore, it provides a place for an ecclesial foundation for ‘practical theology’ that is often absent in the rush to say what must be done by the church. *En route*, it provides one of the best summaries and analyses of the work of John Millbank (famously, one of the more opaque of contemporary theologians, as anyone attempting to read *Theology and Social Theory* will have noticed) and a similar exploration of Zizioulas’ influential theology.

It is a shame that it is so expensive, but there are reductions available, I note, on Bloomsbury’s website for any brave enough to spend the price of a large family meal in a restaurant, or two tanks of fuel for their car, on just one book!

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**Thomas A. Noble and Jason Sexton (eds.), *The Holy Trinity Revisited: Essays in Response to Stephen R. Holmes* (Paternoster, 2015), 187pp.**

As the title suggests this book is a response to Steve Holmes, *The Holy Trinity* (2012). Holmes' book was an account of the doctrine of the Trinity in historical perspective. Its controversial thesis was that the revival of Trinitarian doctrine in the twentieth century was not a revival, but something different from what the church had taught for the previous two millennia. Holmes argues that Zizioulas, Moltmann, Volf, Gunton (his doctoral supervisor, friend and colleague) and others part company with patristic, medieval and reformation accounts of the Trinity.

The book produced a small amount of interest and one conference dedicated to responding to it. That conference was the Tyndale Fellowship conference in 2013. Some of the papers from the conference appeared in the *Evangelical Quarterly* journal in January 2014, and are reprinted here with a number of extra additions. Two of the responses to Holmes come from his fellow Baptists John Colwell and Graham Watts, other contributors are Fred Sanders, Robert Letham, Kevin Giles and Michael Bird. Sanders sets Holmes' book in the context of where Trinitarian theology is today. Letham and Giles offer personal responses. Jon Mackenize explores the place of Luther in Holmes' book, while Jason Radcliff asks where is Torrance in Holmes' narrative and then offers Torrance as an example of someone who goes against the grain of the twentieth century. R. T. Mullins approaches Holmes' book from an analytic perspective. John Colwell represents the work of Gunton and Jenson and so challenges Holmes' reading. The biblical scholar Michael Bird engages with biblical chapter in *The Holy Trinity*. Graham Watts asks the big question is Holmes chief argument right? Holmes himself provides a chapter length piece and responds to his critics, before the editors Noble and Sexton offer a short summary. The book is best read with Holmes' original book and what it offers is a good example of current discussion around the doctrine of the Trinity.

For those who were taught at King's College London like Holmes, and also Colwell, (and myself as an undergrad 2000-2003), you learned to understand the doctrine of the Trinity through Gunton and Zizioulas, in which the Cappadocians were the heroes and Augustine, while not a villain, was the problem. Holmes (now) argues that the Cappadocians and Augustine were in basic agreement. John Colwell offers the push back here, via Robert Jenson, and I especially enjoyed this chapter and Holmes response at the end of the book. Holmes argues that we have not read the Cappadocians or Augustine right.

It seems to me that the doctrine of the Trinity can either become something so complicated in nuance that it becomes almost impossible to talk about or it can be so simplified and asked to become so practical a doctrine that we think of God in too human-like terms. This makes the case for the importance of Holmes' historical work and for the on going reflection on the doctrine that these essays provide. It is too important a doctrine to get wrong. I also like the practice of taking a book and responding to it in critical and constructive ways, especially when its thesis seeks to challenge the conventional thinking of the day. This kind of work happens at conferences and in journals, but rarely reaches a wider audience that a book can provide.

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**Alister McGrath, *Emil Brunner: A Reappraisal* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 245pp.**

In 1976 I picked up a book by someone I had only vaguely heard of. The book was *Revelation and Reason* by Emil Brunner, and it cost me 90 pence. I ploughed through it and found myself entangled in distinctions between the natural knowledge of God and the saving knowledge of God, God's self-revelation in nature and God's self-revelation in history culminating in Christ as the final and definitive revelation of God. There were long argumentations about epistemology and the sin blinded reason of fallen humanity healed only by faith in Christ, so that the old hymn "Loved with everlasting love, led by grace that Love to know", was given massive theological underpinning:

Heaven above is softer blue,  
Earth around is sweeter green;  
Something lives in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen:  
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,  
Flow'rs with deeper beauties shine,  
Since I know, as now I know,  
I am His, and He is mine.

As a recent theology graduate it was a tough read. But I then began to read Emil Brunner, and found in him a theological vision that was attractive, provocative and confessionally freighted. He is a neglected figure these days, overshadowed by the massive presence of Karl Barth, Brunner's theology too often being treated as a weaker and fainter light-source rendered superfluous by the full sunlight streaming from Basle. The eclipse of Brunner by Barth is neither theologically just nor historically accurate, and Alister McGrath's book is a quite deliberate reappraisal and to some extent a retrieval of that which is of lasting value in the theology of Emil Brunner.

The book is not an intellectual biography though McGrath does a brilliant job of tracing the development of Brunner's ideas, against the background of theological developments in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nor is it a full review of all Brunner's major theological writings, the three volume *Dogmatics* receiving but three pages of evaluative comment near the end of the book. The book is however a major contribution to our understanding of the misunderstanding between Brunner and Barth on the contested and theologically explosive discussion of the need for, or possibility of, or dangers of, natural theology as a supplementary or even valid form of knowledge of God the Creator Redeemer.

Indeed a way of reading McGrath's carefully structured book is to follow McGrath from Brunner's birth up to the dogmatic collision between Brunner and Barth that provoked Barth's theological snort of rage which he entitled *Nein!* Then to see the rest of Brunner's career as his development of, and clarification of, his understanding of revelation, knowledge and an epistemology that does justice both to divine revelation, and the impact of sin on human *capax dei*, and of faith in Christ as the healing of

human receptivity to God's revelation in creation. Once Brunner had achieved such clarification, he pursued a programme of theological writing and teaching on the theological reconstruction required for a post-war world. Throughout that theological project he explored issues of justice and the social order, the nature and reality of the church, truth as practical faith lived out in community under the authority of the Word, and ethics as the application of the reality and finality of God's revelation in Christ, to the life of the world, the church and the believer.

The three chapters leading up to the Brunner – Barth confrontation trace the development of key ideas, articulated provisionally, refined and adjusted, but each becoming an essential component in Brunner's theology. In works like *The Mediator*, *The Word and the World* and *The Divine Imperative*, Brunner established his reputation as an articulate and increasingly influential exponent of the theology of crisis. By the time he wrote *Nature and Grace* in 1934 in which he publicly criticised Barth's total rejection of the possibility of a natural theology, his own theological programme was well underway. His views on both the possibility of, and biblical warrant for, a natural theology had become an argument for the theological validity of such a medium of revelation as the church went about its task of eristic and apologetic theology – that is, engaging with and providing critique of, competing ideologies and cultural norms. It is in the tracing of the misunderstanding between Brunner and Barth that this book held its value and fascination in my reading of it. McGrath suggests that Barth's highly sensitised aversion to natural theology was fuelled by the looming menace of a National Socialism looking for just such a justification of its distorted theologies as a natural theology might provide. Brunner's failure to read the signs of the times in the same way as Barth meant he clearly underestimated both the dangers of Nazi ideology and the need in European academic theology for uncompromising witness to Christ, rather than nuanced academic discussions of theological epistemology, in order to confront and contradict the core usurpations of Nazism.

McGrath argues persuasively that Barth in fact misunderstood what Brunner meant by natural theology, and the crucial distinction Brunner insisted on between natural knowledge and saving knowledge, a distinction clearly held by Calvin and other Reformers. But McGrath's discussion is nuanced, seeks to be fair to both contestants, offers a number of revealing observations, and is worth a careful reading in itself. It helps us see two protagonists, sincere in their motives, seeking intellectual integrity in their own theological commitments, attempting to bring theology as a primary critical force against secular ideologies, and speaking past each other because they did not mean the same thing by the detonating phrase "natural theology".

Following the fallout of this fall out, Brunner published what McGrath considers his finest monograph, *Man in Revolt*. Brunner's instinct was surely right, that a major contribution of theology would be an anthropology rooted in Christian theology rather than secular philosophical and ideological constructs. The antidote to the mythical construct of the super-human being is a realistic account of human being and of humanity dependent on God, made in God's image, and each human being finding their identity on the Creator Redeemer God. As a further step, Brunner published a further work that expounds his mature, and from then onwards, permanent understanding of truth and how it is discovered and understood: *Truth as Encounter*.

There is much to enjoy and learn in this book. It is right that Brunner should have a champion as steeped in German theological developments as McGrath, and one who in his analysis and exposition is fair in voicing criticism and affirming value. The final chapter gathers the legacy of Brunner and the ongoing significance of his theology. These include Brunner's articulation of a Reformed theology in critical conversation with culture and church; a theology of nature which brings revelation and science into mutually informing encounter; cultural engagement and a theological foundation for apologetics; a view of revelation and truth expressed as encounter and founded on a theology in which faith is personal and human identity is relational, and the prime relationship as *imago dei* is with the Creator Redeemer; and at a time when the value and centrality of Trinitarian theology is in danger of runaway inflation, Brunner demonstrates a theological modesty in which the Trinity is deemed to be an implied dogma, but not itself of the kerygma of the church.

This is now the starting point for secondary study of Brunner. McGrath's project is intended to rehabilitate the best thought and writing of a theologian who deserves to be better known and appreciated. Reading Brunner's best work would be an early step to making that happen.

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*Aberdeen*

**Rachel Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640-1680* (Ashgate, 2016), 194pp.**

James McClendon Jr coined the phrase "this is that" as a summary of what he calls "the baptist vision" – the uniting factor among Baptists and others who share baptistic features. He draws the phrase from Peter's sermon in Acts 2, in which Peter identifies what is happening in the present with the story from the past – this is that describes the events now in terms of the prophecies then.

This has become a useful, if sometimes limited, lens for understanding what it that unites Baptists in different cultures and contexts – and is a very evident part of the story reflected in this discussion by Adcock. She takes the fairly well known writings of Anna Trapnel, Agnes Beaumont, Anne Wentworth and Katherine Sutton, and adds into the discussion writings by others - Deborah Huish, Sara Jones, Susanna Parr, Anne Venn and Jane Turner – not so well known. The centre of her discussion is to examine the different ways in which these women found ways of expressing their convictions, their sense of calling to communicate and their impulse both to teach within the congregation and to evangelise and speak to power in the nation.

Although she makes no reference to McClendon's "vision", it is clearly present; the chapter headings identify the women, and their activity by drawing on (mostly) biblical models – Virgins in Sion, Deborah, Mothers in Israel. She shows how these "personalities!" were adopted and exploited by the women – and by those who used their writings – to justify their right to write and to give weight and presence to the content.

She also shows some of the opposition that they faced – both as Baptists and as women – and the ways in which the transgressive nature of their writings and prophecies were used to further discredit their movement they belonged to by those who opposed Baptists.

By using this approach, Adcock is able to engage us in conversation with women whose voices have not been easily heard, and to give us a way of understanding them in their context and dealing with the questions that they faced, and not just in isolation.

Together with Curtis Freeman's wonderful *A Company of Women Preachers* this book gives us a rich resource for understanding more deeply the depth and complexity of our Baptist story in revolutionary times.

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**Lidija Novakovic, *Resurrection: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016)**

At every funeral we oversee as ministers, we are compelled to articulate something, somehow, of our shared Christian hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the gospels the realisation that Jesus had been raised was followed by the commission to go and tell, and today we, standing in that sacred tradition, share this task of the post-resurrection community of The Way. It is the single most important event of the NT. But *what* do we say? As Lidija Novakovic says in the introductory pages of her book, '...there is hardly any topic that is less understood than the resurrection'. Yet we *must* speak of it.

To whet the appetite, here are some puzzling questions.

- What is the scope of the resurrection – who is raised (and, therefore, who is not)?
- What happens to our mortal bodies in the resurrection?
- What is a soul?
- Do chronological concepts have any meaning at all when we speak of resurrection?
- Will we be reunited with our loved ones in our resurrected state?
- Is the idea about resurrection in my head the same as the idea in the mourners' heads - and do either have any relationship to the ideas around in the first century?

Novakovic's book doesn't necessarily answer all these issues – which will not be a surprise, given her opening caveat. What she does do - beautifully - is to survey recent ideas primarily from a biblical, rather than a philosophical, perspective. Her hermeneutical process is governed by the conviction that we cannot adequately approach this subject today unless we at least make the attempt to understand what resurrection may have meant to the early followers of Jesus.

Novakovic first reviews the ideas about resurrection extant in Second Temple Judaism, which would have informed the disciples and the writers of the NT, and been known to Jesus. She finds that the idea of resurrection (whatever that means!), while hazy in

early Judaism, becomes stronger during the Maccabean period, probably as a kind of theodicy in response to the Jewish experience of persecution. A diversity of views of resurrection is revealed, arguably reflected in the diverse experiences of the NT witnesses. However, a significant area of agreement, of interest to us in modern times, is that the resurrection is envisaged to be corporate, not individual. Interestingly, the resurrection of the Messiah is not a feature of Second Temple Judaism, which tells us that Jesus' resurrection is indeed a new thing (once he is clearly identified with the messianic promise).

Noting that no-one actually records witnessing the resurrection itself, Novakovic explores the non-narrative (*ie* formulaic and propositional statements, comprising the earliest NT writings) and narrative (witnessed experiences of the risen Lord) traditions about Jesus' resurrection. This section is followed by a chapter on the empty tomb narratives, in which she notes that the empty tomb itself is not proof of resurrection, only that there is a missing body. It is as a prequel to the appearances of the risen Jesus that the empty tomb makes sense, and this idea forms the content of the next section.

The appearance narratives are extremely diverse: who, when, where and what are all variables between the gospels, and Novakovic attributes this variety to the theological rather than historical motives of each writer. Most gospel accounts suggest an initial difficulty with the post-resurrection recognition of the Lord, and the physicality of the risen body is often emphasised. Novakovic explores the issues of continuity versus discontinuity with respect to the pre- and post-Easter Jesus and wonders whether the two narrative streams – the empty tomb and the appearances – developed separately, but were joined for apologetic purposes. At our modern Easter, we leap naturally from empty tomb to appearances and presume resurrection as the explanation – but Novakovic points out that logically this is not enough to make the case for resurrection.

Can we then approach the resurrection as an historical enquiry? This fascinating question involves a consideration of Troeltsch's historical method, using the three principles of criticism, analogy and interconnectedness. The traditional arguments about the case for the empty tomb are reviewed (noting that the use of 'unreliable' female witnesses is indeed the most persuasive), and then the narrated appearances of Jesus are considered – were they subjective (the result of stress and bereavement) or objective (external experiences)? The conclusion is that it is not possible to show historically that the resurrection occurred, not least because there were no witnesses; but neither can it be proved that it did not.

Ultimately the transformation of the disciples – and thus also of ourselves - remains one of the most convincing arguments that Jesus lives.

This is a really good book for ministers and students, summarising in a balanced manner the contemporary resurrection debate. It is well written, impressive in its scope for a modest sized book, and contains references to a range of other writings to expand one's understanding. Read it before next Easter's sermons.

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**Andrew G. Walker, *Notes from a Wayward Son: A Miscellany*. Edited by Andrew D. Kinsey (Cascade Books, 2014), 322pp.**

This is a selection of articles, interviews, previously published chapters from over 40 years of sociological and theological enquiry by the Emeritus Professor of Theology, Religion and Culture at King's College and edited by Andrew Kinsey, senior pastor at Grace United Methodist Church.

It aims to bring together material which can compliment his numerous publications which embrace the three broad areas of research and comment which have occupied Andrew Walker since his conversion to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of liturgy, prayer and theology in the early 1970s.

He outlines these three in an all too brief Afterword as:

- the mutual embrace of theology and sociology, which he explores in one of the most powerful pieces in the collection: *The Concept of the Person in Social Science: Possibilities for Theological Anthropology*.

- the outcome of his big idea that we are living through times of the Third Schism where theological reflection has embraced 'the liberal impulse' and let the methods of science shape philosophical reasoning so that there is no room for faith statements and all belief is subject to cultural fashions. From this has arisen the 'Deep Church' movement which owes its name to C S Lewis and various attempts to make cultural studies an acceptable discipline in theological formation.

- his enduring debt to his Pentecostal upbringing in the Elim Foursquare Gospel Church and the Orthodox Way.

The book has four main sections. The first is a comprehensive overview of the development and significance of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity but more importantly the tense and unfulfilling relationship between the two.

Second, background material for the early beginnings of Deep Church from his own life and that of C S Lewis with a fascinating interview between Walker and Basil Mitchell.

In the third and most significant for this reviewer Walker speaks out as an apologist for the Orthodox Way. I have already mentioned his exploration of Theological Anthropology but of particular interest to this Baptist are the chapters of the prophetic role of Orthodoxy in Contemporary Culture and the relationship of Church to the Sermon in the Orthodox communities. It is this section which provided me with the most memorable quotations. I limit myself to one:

Self-important and self-serving prophecy is prophecy without cost, without pain, without repentance ... When we berate others for their short-comings and neglect our own, we cease to be prophetic altogether and become stiff-necked Pharisees unable to bend our heads in supplication and prayer, and hence unable to know the mind and will of God. It was not for nothing that the church fathers rightly saw that the repentant publican was the true model of Orthodox spirituality (p.173).



This quotation reveals the intention in his advocacy of Orthodoxy. We must recover respect for and understanding of the teachings of the Church Fathers who speak from the time of the One Church in its post New Testament naivety (my word). He especially believes that the post renewal evangelical has much to give to and receive from the Orthodox churches if both would but be more like the publican. For he is not uncritical of the Orthodox and would wish those in the West to move from considering themselves as little noticed exiles to missionaries to the lost West.

The final two sections contain reflections on the impact of culture on belief and behaviour of current Christian communities with a rightly remembered interview with Leslie Newbigin who was one of the founders of the Gospel and Culture Network.

There are three final comments that need to be said. The first is that in order, I presume to give each of the five sections some sort of development of thought, the individual chapters are not in chronological order. Thus they are separated from their original context which required some rooting around in the index to discover their historical root. The second is that Andrew Walker has two styles – journalistic and academic. Each can sound polemical and he delights in words that end with ‘ism’. Nothing wrong with that some might say it cuts down on lengthy explanations but it can read as pretentious. The third is one of gratitude. As a person who ministered through the five decades that this book and his work cover I have been helped to see how our denomination and churches have arrived at where we are.

I also am delighted that his chapter in the book *20/20 Vision* edited by Baptist Haddon Wilmer is included. In this he argues that the future of the churches is sectarian. This will be sociologically inevitable and theologically necessary as long as we keep in touch with the long history of the Church not just our chosen Protestant or Catholic origins in Medieval Europe. He concludes:

If Christianity cannot harness her impatient but powerful sectarian spirit for the good of the whole church, then the unbridled sectarian spirit will do what unbridled sectarianism always does: break away from the common herd and run wild, taking fierce pride in having refused to be broken by the forces of apostasy and establishment. (p.243)

Baptists we were warned!

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**Marion L.S Carlson, *Setting the Captives Free: The Bible and Human Trafficking* (Cascade Books: 2015), 122pp.**

*Setting the Captives Free* states it is ‘aimed at Christian anti-trafficking activists and church groups’. The book provides a biblical overview concerning slavery and prostitution. Carlson addresses the difficult hermeneutical questions of why the Bible ‘contains passages in which slavery seems not only to be condoned, but even commanded’. For Carlson, these difficult Biblical texts are outweighed by ‘the central message of the Bible is of a redeeming God who sets the captives free.’

Inspiration within the book is found from the Abolitionists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and readers are encouraged to follow their example of reading 'the biblical text through the lens of the law of love'. Indeed, Carlson's 'law of love' hermeneutic would be helpful when relating to Biblical interpretation relating to other contexts of oppression. The book offers a helpful introduction for churches and individuals starting to explore slavery, prostitution and human trafficking. Taking key Old and New Testament texts Carlson gives a helpful overview of these issues relating to their historical and cultural Biblical contexts. Questions at the end of each chapter provide helpful discussion for small groups.

The book however lacked a critical response to the Biblical texts. There is no major critique that the Bible does not condemn slavery, but is rather complicit in it. The hermeneutical approach is therefore accepting of the Biblical text rather than asking if it could be viewed as an oppressive text. The Biblical overview does not adequately condemn the evil that human slavery is and consequently left a somewhat sanguine feeling to the book. This is a shame considering the author no doubt has first hand experience and feels passionate about anti-trafficking, being the secretary of the European Baptist Federation Anti-Trafficking Network. Indeed, with only fourteen books in the Bibliography, the book could have increased in depth and breadth.

Trafficking is not an issue only impacting distant shores. It is evident and rife within the UK and Europe. Increasingly churches and charities are coming across people who have fallen victim to or impacted by trafficking. This has also been my experience working as a Baptist minister. Human trafficking is a justice issue that should make us angry and mobilise us as a humane communities to act. Consequently the practical application within the book could have been expanded with the argument going deeper than being told that prostitutes should be 'welcome in church and not rejected'.

In summary, if you are looking for a resource to initiate people to the issue of slavery and prostitution within the Bible, then this book is for you. While introducing the issue of human trafficking, it offers an overview of the themes of slavery and prostitution within the Bible, as well as exploring how the church responded to these issues in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If however you are looking for a text that motivates you to action concerning the present day human trafficking context, then you may need to find your resources elsewhere.

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**Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom & David D Bjorlin, *Incorporating Children in Worship: Mark of the Kingdom* (Cascade, 2014), 151pp.**

Clifton-Soderstrom and Bjorlin's main discussion falls around the word 'incorporation', a word they come back to as they argue staunchly for children's incorporation into the worship life of the church. Children, they argue, should be fully included in worship – to do so is in fact a mark of the kingdom.

They use the language of 'children', but early on note that the issues being discussed equally apply to 'youth'. This is a book that is written with a large audience in mind. It is not just for those who work with children and young people although it will be of obvious interest to them and of value to all studying in this field, but it should be reading for all who are in ministry and leading worship, as well as for parents whose role is significant in the incorporation of children in worship.

The strength of this book is the attention to theology in presenting the case for children's incorporation. If you are looking for creative or quick ideas for ways of engaging children in worship then don't expect to find them here. Instead what you will find is a rich discussion on the reason why churches should be giving full energy to ensuring children are present, engaged and listened to within worship. They are particularly focusing on liturgical Sunday worship, but as they develop their argument show how incorporation here leads naturally to fuller incorporation of children alongside adults in the wider mission of the church.

The book is focused in two parts; part one (chapters 1-3) provides theological, biblical and historical background and rationale to the theme. Part two (chapters 4-6) focuses on the formation of virtue in worship and the vocation of the child in worship before looking at the vision for worship where children are fully incorporated.

In part one on 'children', the authors draw our attention to how God works through the small to advance the bigness of the kingdom. They note how the child is often used as a motif, a trope in biblical narratives to 'reveal the contours of faithful relationship with God'. Children are blessed and a blessing, and participants in the story of God, playing vital roles in Israel's story, yet often overlooked or neglected in biblical interpretation. God himself became small, entering the world as a child.

Moving on the authors explore 'worship', and consider children as true worshippers. They highlight the problem or danger of haphazardly adding elements within worship 'for the children', but suggest that when worship is fully centred on God then children 'find their place alongside adults...for the ends and purposes are bigger than either group alone.' Worship, they argue, puts all people on an equal footing. Children need to be part of the story of faith alongside adults, with children's responses encouraged and allowed in worship in a mutual way.

They take a chapter to investigate the theme of 'incorporation', which they define as 'the economy of love that exists within the trinity', and explore doctrines of the Trinity and Christology to unpack the concept. In brief, they consider how incorporation is about oneness, communion and unity. It requires cooperation, humility, inclusivity and hospitality. What is particularly interesting is their focus on the importance of maintaining difference and differentiation. Incorporating children in worship does not mean that we expect children to become adult-like or mini adults, but they are included and involved *as children*, bringing their difference and diversity to the whole. For the authors, participation is about the whole being unified and for each person to be recognized as distinct and unique and their participation encouraged as such. This involves for many churches a shift of power, and before that, recognition of where the power lies and where dominant cultures dominate within worship.

In the second part of the book the chapter on 'virtue' looks at the three main virtues necessary for worship – faith, hope and charity (love). They note that a child is not deficit, but displaying virtues and developing virtues in worship alongside adults. Virtue in the sense the authors are writing about is not about steering children towards 'good' behaviour and developing moral codes, but is about working towards 'excellent' worship for adults and children alike and a building up of the community of faith in faith, hope and love.

Children's 'vocation' is explored in chapter 5, and again an emphasis as throughout the book, on the 'now' rather than any future role for children. Children have a contribution to make to worship as they are, and are a means of grace. The authors refer to the work of Marcia Bunge on this subject and the importance of children being allowed to practice faith in the worshipping community using their gifts, taking part in ritual, in a mutual relationship with and alongside adults. There is also a challenge to adults to become more child-like.

In 'vision' the authors look at the implications for putting all of this into practice and note that 'incorporation risks failure'. It takes courage, may involve the shifting of power and giving up of some control to incorporate children fully in worship. It can be messy! They end by highlighting how incorporating children can lead us further into a place of incorporating all people of difference and diversity more fully in worship, and in doing so we gain a richer picture and experience of the kingdom of God.

This is a fascinating and timely book as increasingly churches consider how to be intergenerational and inclusive in worship. The challenge is how to take the themes so usefully explored by Clifton-Soderstrom and Bjorlin and relate them to specific contexts within our Baptist worship. What for me was disappointing was the conclusion, which set to tell the story of what incorporation might look like. For me it didn't do justice to the work of the book, and a fear is that as we take the ideas from this book alongside others who are writing in this area that we equally won't do justice to this. If we take seriously that incorporating children in worship is a mark of the kingdom and 'matters to the advancement of God's kingdom on earth', we may well need to be serious in taking the risks and challenges involved in making it happen.

*Linda Hopkins,  
Northern Baptist College*

**Joanna Collicutt, *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation* (SCM, 2015), 275pp**

In this ambitious book Joanna Collicutt pursues a vision. This is to utilize psychology to best help Christian spiritual formation in the 21<sup>st</sup> c. In the so-called century of the self that has infected much of the contemporary church Collicutt sees a need to transcend the implicit egocentricity of being human. She offers a simple antidote – the goal of all human living is to be like Christ, but this requires a radical re-assessment of who we are and what we do. Collicutt aims to do this through the tools of positive and cognitive psychologies, a brief excursion into the attachment theory, and a return to

Biblical texts. She recognises a need for a self-awareness and spiritual revolution in order to re-orientate our Godward being. We do this through valuing what we do in our humanness that contributes to being Christ-like, and by challenging patterns or attitudes that detract from this goal.

Joanna Collicutt draws on her background as a clinical psychologist, a neuropsychologist, Anglican priest, author, and theological teacher at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford. Collicutt attempts the difficult task of offering a book that is academically informed using empirical research in order to satisfy a professional and academic audience, whilst also offering something that is accessible for those starting out in their ministerial training. Collicutt offers us an interdisciplinary guide to Christian character formation. She also offers a psychological manual for Christian spirituality, with the aim of equipping the Christian disciple with psychological insights and practical ideas to support spiritual growth. It is clear that she has Christian leaders in mind, reflecting no doubt the origins of many of these chapters to her students at Cuddesdon. This may explain the uneasy balance between the academic with the need to be seen to be rigorous, but also wanting to equip and be practical so that the reader can apply aspects to their personal growth, psychological and spiritual.

After an introduction Collicutt divides the book into three parts. Part one outlines 'The Nature of the Endeavour' (three chapters); part two, 'Insights from Psychology' (three chapters); and part three, 'Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit' (eight chapters). Collicutt begins with spiritual formation, where the term 'spiritual' is defined in its narrowest, traditional sense. Collicutt, while self-identifying as an Anglican, adopts a theological perspective that is similar to a Reformed or Puritan ethos. There is the central focus on Christ and our aim is to become like Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming us. Collicutt then uses the ideas of 'control theory' to show how cognitive processes drawn from positive psychology can support the pursuit of her view of spiritual formation. By establishing a goal, clarifying the rules we live by in pursuit of that goal and the emotions this generates on completion (or non-completion) of this goal we have one way of understanding how we work. Too many competing goals lead to personal incoherence, when we should be striving for self-concordance where the goals we seek best fit with our ideal self. For the Christian this is putting Christ first. Collicutt argues that if we commit ourselves to the goal of becoming like Christ, we will change the way we live, and enjoy life fulfilling our best potential. Collicutt applies this to Christian living, extolling the value of knowing more about Christ by: reading the Gospels; prayerful contemplation; and participating in communion and corporate worship. These become the practices or 'rules' that enable us to achieve our ultimate goal. In chapter three Collicutt takes the life of Christ as a model that shows how he achieved self-concordance by understanding his goal and identifying the rules he lived by. Collicutt discovers the following virtues in the life of Christ that serve as a pattern we can follow in becoming like him. These are:

- Jesus had a deep intimacy with the Holy Other
- Jesus exercised humble power
- Jesus paid attention to 'heaven in ordinary'
- Jesus achieved personal coherence by balancing competing demands in his life
- Jesus showed hospitality

Jesus felt compassion  
Jesus did not retaliate  
Jesus taught wisdom  
Jesus embodied transformation

These themes become central to the core of the book as in part three Collicutt dedicates a chapter to each of these.

So having set herself what I think is a near impossible task, Collicutt is to be applauded for her vision. It is ambitious in scope and comprehensive in character. Yet all such visions are personal and shaped by the uniqueness of who we are. I also think titles are always tricky, so a more accurate title for this book would be *Christian Character Formation assisted by Scripture and Selected (primarily Cognitive-based) Psychological Theories*.

I always get worried when the author warns you in the opening chapter that the book will get challenging. It does, not least because some aspects of psychology are fascinating and others, frankly are just dull. The word empirical is bandied about but I would have liked a stricter definition of what is being offered and the implicit philosophical assumptions that lie behind it. There is an implication therefore that on the basis of science we now understand more, yet that is what you would expect a psychologist to say. She offers that the psychology she draws from is evidence-based. This appears a somewhat defensive step as a great deal of spiritual formation has little or no research evidence as there is a distinct lack of Randomized Control Trails (RCT's) the gold-standard of evidence based practice for character formation. Yet no-one would question the value of such spiritual formation. This is an example of where the crossover from the politics of the psychology world grates a little. It raises the spectre that by inhabiting both the spiritual and psychological worlds Collicutt does not find herself at home in either. Yet she blends ideas together in ways that are reflective, and fulfil her aim of a selectively psychologically informed formation of Christian character.

Collicutt uses Scripture and its insight into human nature and the character of a Christian to set up a dialogue with the recent insight drawn from psychology. One area of fruitful dialogue concerning faith expressed in psychological terms is Fowler's faith development ideas. This was a surprising omission with no reference to the literature and research of faith development started by James Fowler and followed up by many others that have replicated his early findings, while also becoming more nuanced. There is also ground-breaking research offered by Nicola Slee on woman's faith development which is equally overlooked. The issue of gender was similarly skated over.

Collicutt's writing style was uneven as at times this flowed with a helpful transition from psychological theory to biblical reflection, yet at other times it jarred making too many assumptions. These two 'languages' come with such different accents it is not always clear what is being said. Clearly Collicutt is bi-lingual and moves easily from one form of expression to the other, however at times this was not as easy to follow as she thinks. Yet Collicutt did warn us at the start that there would be difficult aspects and encouraged the reader to persevere. This book is worth persevering with, the last

chapter on transformation shows how her ideas come together, and there are many others aspects that are of value.

*Alistair Ross,  
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**Peter Tyler, *The Pursuit of the Soul. Psychoanalysis, Soul-making and the Christian Tradition* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 200 pp.**

Christians sometimes bandy the concept of 'soul' as if it were an immediately obvious thing, especially in pastoral theology and spirituality. Yet, as Peter Tyler makes abundantly clear, precisely what we mean when we use the term 'soul' is far from clear. In this book Tyler seeks to engage the ancient world (Platonists and their offspring especially) with the modern, holding the conviction that the dialogue between the two might help illuminate answers to postmodern questions.

The idea of 'soul' has, in modernity, come to be subsumed within psychology, which in turn has increasingly found no utility for it. Psychology has become quantitative, material — obsessed by functionality, enamoured by neuroscience and reduced to the measurable. This is to be expected in a culture that places little value on what cannot be measured, evaluated, tabulated and quantitatively justified. Theology, too, became somewhat embarrassed about 'the soul', and into this void has grown the burgeoning forest of 'spirituality.' Tyler turns to the Jungian psychoanalyst, James Hillman, for a way out of the psychological cul-de-sac. Considered a maverick — heretic even — among his fellow psychoanalysts, Hillman used the language of soul to identify all that was missing from wider Western culture, and in particular, the 'helping professions.' He had become 'critical of the whole analytic discipline', becoming a kind of New Age substitute for life, and saw soul language as a way of guarding the 'essential poetic ambiguity that lies close to the source of human wonder and discovery.'(p.10).

Avoiding collapsing theology into psychology and thereby creating a kind of 'spiritual mush', Tyler explores the origins of soul language in both Christianity and psychoanalysis, and in so doing turns to the current 'return of the soul', and its potential for the revitalizing of both Christianity and psychoanalysis. Tyler does so by also utilizing the language of *The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church*, which uses the term in a variety of ways, and lends a particularly Catholic tenor to this exploration.

The first major section pursues the soul via Plato (our 'Father in faith', chapter 2) and those who exploited that world-view to understand the Christian experience — Plotinus and Augustine (chapter 3) and then two desert fathers who sought a third way — Origen and Evagrius (chapter 4). Evagrius in particular 'taking the metaphorical apparatus of Origen and combining it with the precise psychological observations of the desert fathers on the movements of the soul . . . is able to develop a Christian theory of the soul' that survived on the fringes of the monastic tradition, despite condemnation from successive Church Councils. From there is emerged into our own postmodern times. The heart of this vision of humanity is that we are made for contemplation, 'loving knowledge' of God.

Part 2 turns to the origins of soul language in psychoanalysis. Referring to Freud, and his successor, the analyst Otto Rank, together with the philosopher, Wittgenstein, Tyler distinguishes between psychology and psychoanalysis as *Weltanschauung* (world view) and *Weltbild* (a way of seeing the world aright). Rather than a search for facts and knowledge about the mind, Rank wanted to take psychology to the world of interpretation. The psychologist's task was not so much to understand what a person is, but to discover what a person thinks he or she is. Rank used soul language for this, and 'the soul had returned to the modern world' (p.106).

Turning next to Jung, Tyler explores the work of the late James Hillman (he died in 2011). The route back to the soul for Hillman is imagination and creativity, and he is critical of the way the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 869 reduced the hitherto tri-partite distinction between spirit, soul and body to a bi-partite dualism between mind and body. Hillman was both critical of the 'over-spiritualizing' of the self by that turn, and the 'over-scientism and reductionism within contemporary approaches to psyche' (p.133). Hillman is a critic of both religion and psychology, yet he does point to the place of the psyche in human existence, and its role in relationships, creativity, and the libido — all areas where the Christian tradition has an acute interest.

The third two sources of soul-making language are discussed in the third part: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rabindranath Tagore and Thomas Merton and the postmodern turn (chapter 7) and then Edith Stein (chapter 8). Placing Wittgenstein and Merton together is particularly interesting, and not a conjunction I would have imagined. Both came from similar backgrounds (affluent, artistic families), both considered the monastic vocation ((embraced by Merton, not by Wittgenstein) both wrote significant works as relatively young men (in Wittgenstein's case, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and in Merton's, *The Seven Storey Mountain*) and both 'stand on the cusp of modernity and postmodernity, and reveal in their works the transition from one to another,' (p.158)

In conclusion, Tyler believes he has forged a 'soul psychology' 'that avoids the pitfalls of, on the one hand, the Charybdis of overly mechanized scientific solutions, and on the other, the Scylla of a spiritualized 'anti-matter' that seeks a divorce of soul language from the wholeness of personhood expressed in terms of body, heart, mind and spirit.' (p.176) The proper discourse of the soul is mythic, a way of seeing, and the locus of the intersection between the transcendent and the immanent. Soul work follows the path of unknowing as much as knowing; like the paradox of the Trinity, the soul-maker lives in the realm of the ambiguous; deals with creativity and artistic endeavours; and is at heart a relational process and an art of love that embraces the libidinous. Soul language is the 'choreography of the transcendent and the immanent' (p.181) and the 'soul is a linguistic signifier that allows us to gaze simultaneously at the physical and spiritual realms . . . a call to hold theology and psychology together in their shared pursuit of the divine' (p.181).

Do not be fooled by the title of this book into thinking this is a book of spiritual exercises, or spirituality. Rather, from the Professor of Pastoral Theology and Spirituality at St Mary's University, London, we have a work of detailed and complex



theology that seeks to integrate psychology and spirituality. Not, however, in a coldly intellectual way, but one that portrays a life that is in pursuit itself of his subject matter. I have long held an integrationist perspective on the relationship between psychology and theology/spirituality, and so I want to affirm the overall strategy that Tyler employs, and share his conviction that ancient writers have profound things to say to our postmodern condition. I wonder if his vision of soul-making does have some profound things to say to the way we educate our children — our youngest, in particular — and that in our current obsession with numeracy and literacy in order to prepare children for the work-place (and economic productivity especially) we have not set them adrift in a life-time of a soul so ‘thin’ that it is barely acknowledged. The age of humanity as automaton, even as servant of the algorithm, needs some new Wittgensteins or Mertons, Augustines or Steins, who will in their awkwardness and rebellion against the status quo, point to a richer and deeper way of living — one that embraces the pursuit of the divine as the pursuit of our deepest humanity, and sets people free to live freely and wholly.

The book was stimulating and stretching. Precisely what I look for in this field, so I can whole-heartedly commend it.

*Paul Goodliff*  
*Abingdon Baptist Church*

**Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard: A Single Life* (Zondervan, 2016), 304pp.**

One of the commendations on the back of this biography of Kierkegaard says ‘I’ve waited all my whole life for this book. And so has the church’ is just silly. I’m sure both the writer of this sentence and the church would have survived without this life of Kierkegaard. This is not to suggest that I think this is not a wonderful book and a great read. If you’ve done any theological study, you may well have heard Kierkegaard mentioned at some point and you may well have read some, most probably *Fear and Trembling*. He was an influence on Barth, Bonhoeffer and others in the twentieth century, but who was Kierkegaard is an area in which most have much less knowledge outside that he was Danish. The origins of this biography lie in Backhouse’s colleague Lincoln Harvey asking for a study of Kierkegaard he could read on holiday. Here was a gap and one waiting to be fulfilled and so Backhouse set to work.

Backhouse, who undertook doctoral studies on Kierkegaard’s views of nationalism, offers us this account of his life. It starts with Kierkegaard’s funeral and then draws you back to the beginning of his life and onwards to explain why his funeral was a controversial affair. It is a beautifully written and structured biography – it had me hooked from the start! In reading you will be introduced to one of the most interesting and tragic characters of the nineteenth century, whose work after his death has impacted theology and philosophy around the world.

The biography doesn’t go too much into the detail of Kierkegaard’s major works, instead there is a helpful section at the end which provides an overview of each of his books.

This is a book to read on holiday or at anytime – highly recommended.

*Andy Goodliff*

*Belle Vue Baptist Church, Southend-on-Sea*

**Stephen Cherry, *The Dark Side of the Soul: An Insider's Guide to the Web of Sin* (Bloomsbury, 2016), 263pp.**

For Lent this year I prepared a series of sermons exploring the Seven Deadly Sins and their impact on Christian discipleship. Stephen Cherry's book had just been published so it was added to the small pile of others that I had bought to consult, including titles by Graham Tomlin and Will Willimon. What distinguishes Cherry's work is that he takes a more nuanced approach to the sins, breaking down the traditional seven inherited from Evagrius, Aquinas and others, and interpreting them through the lenses of sociology, psychology, economics and philosophy as well as Scripture and theology. Cherry's sins are clustered under headings, such as "Vicious Regards" and "Tragic Desires", and these allow him to explore the connections between different human behaviours while at the same time introducing the reader to the more subtle nature of different sins. Recognising that sin destroys not only the person but those around them, Cherry's aim for his study is to help those who seek 'honest self-awareness in the interest of taking responsibility for, and nourishing, [their] relational self' (p.4).

The book begins with two chapters which introduce the subject and the author's approach. Cherry contends that we do not use the language of 'sin' much these days and that the reason is not just creeping secularisation but also a weakness in the Christian understanding which is neither scientific nor moral. The suspicion of many, he argues, is that when Christians talk about sin their focus is on blame and condemnation. As such, popular preference is to talk about evil and then to distance ourselves from responsibility, because evil is what other people do. To counter this is why Cherry believes we need to recover sin-language. Sin offers us, he writes, 'a way of naming what is wrong without pretending that doing wrong is an extreme aspect of a few characters' (p.13). To aid this recovery, he proposes that instead of Paul's language of "the flesh" (which tends towards an unhelpful dualism in many readings) we see sin as 'the dark side of the soul.' This is his attempt to reflect both the intrinsic nature of sin, it comes from within us (out of the heart, as Jesus said), but also the influence of extrinsic forces (blinding our hearts, as Paul pointed out). That sin emanates from the dark side of the soul does create a problem for Cherry in that this makes it hard to really understand what it is going on. Even so it is possible to throw some light on the matter and that's what the rest of the book aims to do. 'The dark side of the soul is shadowy but not pitch black' (p. 36).

The middle chapters of the book deal with six different clusters of sin, starting with those under the heading "Naughty, But Nice", in which he tackles gluttony, intoxication and talkativeness. The inclusion of the latter is indicative of Cherry's more nuanced approach, as is his ability to bring contemporary issues, such as obesity and eating disorders (gluttony), the so-called 'war on drugs' (intoxication) and social media (talkativeness), into conversation with the writings of medieval hermits and theologians. In the following chapter, "Vicious Regards", in which he considers

snobbery, vanity, pride, abjectness and envy, he laments the loss of the word 'vainglory' from our vocabulary. With reference to the modern obsession with the selfie, he notes that the word has "disappeared... precisely at the time when there is more vainglory on display than ever before in history." This is not so surprising, he continues, because our 'passions and demons thrive and flourish best when they are not noticed' (pp.70-71). This is a shrewd observation and there might be a case for attempting to bring back words like this if they can help us identify and respond to the subtleties of sin in its modern guises. Cherry's decision to use more words, rather than simply stick with the seven, is validated at this point. This is not to say that other books don't attempt to look at the contemporary expressions of the seven sins but rather that by making these finer distinctions this book is more helpful.

The remaining chapters of this middle part of the book deal with "Impossible Ideals" (hypocrisy, defensiveness, certainty and perfectionism, which Cherry describes as sins against the truth of who we are), "Temporal Disjunctions" (sloth, boredom, busyness and nostalgia, sins which all reflect a problem in our relationship with time), "Tragic Desires" (lust, greed, insatiability and control, sins that want more of something which when acquired is never enough), and "Malicious Tendencies" (cruelty, rage and revenge, sins that emanate from "a completely lightless and airless corner" of the dark side of our souls). Throughout these chapters it becomes increasingly clear that Cherry thinks the line between virtue and vice is a fine one. Thus envy can be positive if it acts as a 'modest spur to do better' (p. 89), although it is better to admire, but vicious when its only desire is to see the other fall or fail. Similarly righteous anger is a good and proper response to injustice but vicious anger or rage gives itself to actions wholly disproportionate to their cause. Such a fine line does not exist in all cases but is worth pondering if we are to avoid simply labelling human behaviours as either good or bad. The careful analysis in this book repeatedly reminds us that we are more complex than that.

In the final two chapters, the book moves through diagnosis to prognosis, rehearsing what we have learnt and then considering how we might respond. Chapter 9 is then a recapitulation of both the book's main argument, that the dark side of the soul is a complex web of sin, of attitudes, behaviours and responses, and of its stated purpose, to help raise self-awareness and personal responsibility-taking. It also offers a summary of the six clusters of sin, discussed in the middle chapters, reiterating in short what connects the vices contained within each. Chapter 10 is Cherry's attempt to suggest what such responsibility-taking might involve, now that we know a little more about what lurks in the dark side of the soul. It begins with naming sin, something made easier (but not easy) by the book's discussion of more than twenty identified vices, although Cherry notes that his list is far from complete. He then offers seven tactics for wrestling with these 'demons', starting with the significant "recognize that sin is a spiritual issue" and including "seek humility" (a theme he treats at length in his earlier book *Barefoot Disciple*) and "learn to love", each of which he elaborates on only briefly. These tactics are not progressive steps nor do they amount to a program as such, but there is a wisdom in his approach that belies the brevity of the treatment he gives them. The way forward is not simple but that doesn't mean it's difficult to understand.

While the outline of this book does make it useful for dipping into, there is a sustained argument that makes the whole worth more than the sum of its parts. When I read the book for my lent series it felt patchy because I only read sections to find insights useful for a particular sermon. When I read it again for this review it was much more satisfying because doing this gave a sense of how the smaller discussions belonged within the wider argument that Cherry is making about the dark side of the soul. Pastors may want to use it as a reference for preaching but my advice would be that they read the whole book first as that will ensure they get the best out of it. If they do then what they will find is an excellent resource that's actually more suited to the pastoral task of helping people (starting with themselves) to follow Jesus more faithfully while all the time struggling to throw off the sin that so easily entangles. Those not involved in pastoral ministry may find the book useful although its multi-disciplinary approach could be off-putting and the simpler approach offered by Tomlin, for example, may for them be a better place to start.

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

**Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in the Contemporary World: Exploring texts and contexts - then and now* (SPCK, 2016), 192pp.**

In any straw poll of the issues that matter most to today's public at large, one might reasonably expect to find such concerns as the balance between personal freedoms and responsibility; globalisation and trade; a widening poverty gap between rich and poor; the environment and global warming; human rights and suffering. One of the charges levelled at the western church by those outside it is that Christianity often seems to have little to contribute to the public discourse on these issues and that we major on answers to questions that the non-Christian majority are not asking. *The Bible in the contemporary world* is a collection of fourteen essays written over a period of some 15 years, addressing how the bible may speak into some of these critical political, social and environmental issues we face.

Bauckham proposes that if we are to grasp the relevance of scriptural teaching for today we must do so alongside an understanding of the contemporary context. Present-day interpreters need to bring the bible and the modern world into a process of dialogue. The themed essays in *The Bible in the Contemporary World* offer a model for this approach. The author suggests that, if we go on studying scripture at the same time as we attend to what is happening in our world, there is always the hope of discovering fresh insights. These insights will draw upon, and point towards, the bible's metanarrative of God and creation in which God continues to work out his salvific purpose for the world.

One of the key contemporary issues addressed is that of personal freedom. Given that individual freedom is arguably the most powerful concept in contemporary western culture, it is plainly worthy of serious theological exploration. Do Christians in the West generally have a definition and a practical theology of freedom that is both consistent with biblical teaching and which can be defended in, or contribute towards, a broader public debate? Bauckham contends that Christians generally are too ready

to adopt views that are current in our culture without serious critical assessment informed by scripture. If we are to appreciate the biblical metanarrative, we must first take pains to distinguish it from the modern metanarrative of the post-Enlightenment society in which we are immersed.

Any new work by Richard Bauckham is something to look forward to with enthusiasm. His academic credentials are strong. Until 2007, he was Professor of New Testament Studies and Bishop Wardlaw Professor in the University of St Andrews and is now Professor Emeritus. From 1996 to 2002 he was General Editor of the Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. A lay Anglican, he was a member of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England for some years. In 2009 he was awarded the Michael Ramsey prize for his book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, and in 2010 the Franz-Delitzsch-Award for a volume of collected essays, *The Jewish World around the New Testament*. He retired in 2007 but continues his writing and research as a Cambridge scholar.

*The Bible in the contemporary world* does not seek to offer a systematic theology – the range of topics is too broad for this – but it does encourage us to relate the big questions of our times to the scriptures by offering stimulating essays. As well as being of academic interest, I suggest this work is suited to those in pastoral ministry, theological students and Christians seeking to be informed on, and think scripturally about, the big issues of our times.

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

**Fran Porter, *Men and Women after Christendom* (Paternoster, 2015), 150pp.**

This is a readily accessible book which explores the way that gender relationships changed under Christendom. Sadly gender imbalance remains in Church structures: even within the Baptist Union which agreed to the ordination of women over 100 years ago.

I found it an interesting, highly informative book that challenges us to rethink gender relations in both church and society. Porter has given us an excellent introduction to the history of gender relationships in the church from the first century. Even as someone who has studied the area of feminist theology I still found interesting and informative. It should be on the reading list of every college.

The book looks at different aspects of this relationship: personal structural, philosophical and theological, arguing that the hierarchical paradigm that has prevailed was not there at the start of Christianity and now needs to be renewed and reformed. She argues this through detailed biblical and theological reflection tracing how unequal gender power relations have dominated all aspects of Christian life and wants to remove hierarchy out of gender relationships for the sake of women and men. It has none of the vitriol that sometimes can be found in early feminist theologians instead seeking a way forward for both men and women that benefits both.

The book maintains that there had been 'a process of expunging the memory of ordained women from Christianity.' Women had increasingly been characterised as 'unnatural in birth, incompetent in mind, disgusting in their bodily functions, they were clearly inferior'. In 1543 an Act of Parliament banned women from reading the Bible out loud to others. This was a difficult place from which to move forward but she argues the church has begun this process but she should and must do more for the sake of the gospel: agreeing spiritual equality needs now to express itself in transformed relationships and structures.

Her concluding chapter offers a hermeneutic of friendship between men and women: 'a state of mutual regard and indeed affection'. I have many such friendships which are precious to me and my male friends. As she argues Jesus called all the disciples friends and that we must cultivate friendship between the genders. Loving one another as Jesus loves us. As she points out friendship is the major metaphor in John's Gospel for expressing the relationship of redeemed humanity with God. In friendship matters of subordination of another do not come into play and our equality before God is made manifest in redeemed relationships that speak powerfully to the world around us.

This conclusion offers a new paradigm for gender relationships which is radically different to the dominant oppositional models that sadly still prevail - a vision of how the new community of Christ should look and thus provide a model to the world of how transformative the gospel can be for men **and** women and so the world.

*Julie Aylward*

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**Paul Beasley-Murray, *Living out the Call* (Amazon e-book, 2015)**

In four volumes: *Living for God's Glory; Leading God's Church; Reaching out to God's World; Serving God's People*

*Living out the Call* is the latest book on ministry from Paul Beasley-Murray, and certainly the most substantial. It has been self-published in four volumes which are available as e-books from Amazon for £2.25 each. As Beasley-Murray sets out in the preface, which is repeated in each book, his desire here is to draw on his 43 years of stipendiary ministry to offer a resource for others in ministry whether at the beginning of such a ministry or with substantial experience themselves.

In many ways these four volumes together are a major reworking and expanding of Beasley-Murray's, *A Call to Excellence: An Essential Guide to Christian Leadership*, which was published in 1995. Many of the titles of the major sections in *Living out the Call* are taken from the chapters of *A Call to Excellence* (the exemplary pilgrim; the charismatic preacher; the creative liturgist) and some of the more detailed writing is the same. The sense it gives is of starting with the text of *A Call to Excellence* and changing, adding and expanding as appropriate.

The original seven chapters and topics from *A Call to Excellence* have been arranged here in a different way, and since each ebook can be bought and read separately there is a greater need for the individual volumes to hold together on their own. The first book, after an introduction on ministry today, brings together the issues of

professionalism and spirituality: the passionate professional (rather than the professional pastor) and the exemplary pilgrim. The second book is devoted to leadership, and the effective leader from *A Call to Excellence* now becomes the inspirational leader, the empowering team player and the effective manager. The third book brings together preaching and mission, with an emphasis on looking out to God's world and the fourth book worship and pastoral care under the theme of serving God's people.

Approaching *Living out the Call* with a redactional-critical eye suggests that the most obvious and significant difference is that the one chapter on leadership in *A Call to Excellence* now becomes a book on its own. This, though, should not be surprising since Beasley-Murray has already defined leadership as the key pastoral task and it is views on leadership and ministry which a theme that Beasley-Murray is best known for, as in the correspondence with fellow Baptist minister Ted Hale in the Baptist Times in 2011.

Those familiar with Beasley-Murray's work of the past will find here generally the same themes approached in the same kind of way and with the same clear style of writing. In many ways the books read as an articulation of Beasley-Murray's self-understanding of ministry. Here you find the books he has read, the people who have influenced him, the issues he thinks are important. The books draw on a wide literature base, both scholarly and more popular, and have a significant number of footnotes. This variety means you find both comments on the anarthous and exegetical nature of Philippians 1:1 together with quotes from Bill Hybels and Rick Warren.

There is also a variety of material included. As well as discussions of biblical texts and the presentations of ideas Beasley-Murray has found helpful, there are sermons included in each of the sections that relate to the theme. And while Beasley-Murray says that this is not a book that tells the story of a pastor and his two churches, the four books are punctuated with examples from his own ministry and experience, so that nothing is left purely at a theoretical level but is always grounded in practice and experience, from a covenant that is read annually at Central Baptist Church Cheltenham to helpful advice on handling emails.

One of the disappointments of the book, though, is that there is comparatively little engagement with other views – it is much more a presentation of Beasley-Murray's approach. So in the book on leadership, a subject which Beasley-Murray recognises to be contested, there are some brief references to those, for example Stephen Croft and Rob Ellis, who have taken a different view, but there is no sustained engagement with these ideas. Instead the space is taken up with a presentation or summary of the writings of others who Beasley-Murray wants to draw from positively. Generally, the fundamental idea proposed, that Baptists believe in the ministry of all and leadership of some, is assumed rather than explored. Given the range of views in some of these subjects this seemed an ideal opportunity for a longer and more careful discussion of difference approaches and so a more thorough argument for, rather than presentation of, Beasley-Murray's own views.

There are also times when Beasley-Murray offers positive appreciation of different authors without exploring areas of critique as well. For example, he offers an account

of the work of Brian Winslade, who has led churches in New Zealand, Australia and America in order to bring his thinking to a wider audience. Beasley-Murray does suggest he is a little uncomfortable with Winslade's language of calling the senior pastor the CEO, but is otherwise very positive. Yet Winslade is essentially arguing for a kind of presbyterian form of governance for large Baptist churches for the sake of being more missionally engaged, and insists very strongly that the congregation do not lead at all – that is the role of others. Yet it is unclear how such a strong insistence by Winslade that there is no leadership offered by the gathered church can fit with a Baptist ecclesiology, or how this sets alongside the disquiet Beasley-Murray expresses about the language and model of being a senior minister, since being a senior servant does not seem to fit well with Jesus' model.

Again he writes that ministers need to be leaders with deep excitement, so they are charismatic because this is what makes people want to follow the leader (*Leading God's Church*, p.26) while at the same time criticising the idea of the heroic leader from the corporate CEO model and exploring the notion of the post-heroic leader (*Leading God's Church*, p. 30) who is 'led' by others. These tensions are neither discussed nor resolved. Beasley-Murray thinks of himself as the leader of the church, talks about 'most of my teams' and 'going up the leadership ladder'.

And finally, while the book is full of interesting material that will take the reader in various directions, ultimately it feels too long. Beasley-Murray suggests that his enthusiasm for ministry ran away with him and what was intended as one book grew in to four. It may also be the influence of writing a self-published ebook. The diversity of material included means that the project does not quite have the focus that a shorter word limit would have given it.

There are other views of and approaches to Baptist ministry that are and have been articulated, and some of these would be quite different to Beasley-Murray's overall approach. Here is probably the most significant presentation of one approach, one that is more functional than sacramental and one which places particular stress on the minister as the leader of leaders.

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**Vernon White, *Purpose and Providence: Taking Soundings in Western Thought, Literature and Theology* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 176pp.**

Any rumours of the death of the concept of providence have been greatly exaggerated, and Vernon White explains why in *Purpose and Providence*, a charmingly lucid and stimulating account of an often enigmatic doctrine.

White's aim is to explore the ways in which a 'sense of universal and objective purpose' (p. 3) in both global and personal events persists and how this sense might be articulated with credibility for the present age. He tracks the development of the related concepts of meaning and purpose through Western intellectual history. The pre-modern era was able to accommodate these within a framework that presumed a



strong relation between human endeavours and the reality of God's eternity, timelessness, and changelessness. However, this framework is today largely lost; meaning is now made by the human self rather than discerned in the world, God is no longer a necessary hypothesis, and purpose throws off the shackles of divine providence to embrace either its secular counterpart, Progress, or to abandon any notion of meaning altogether.

This bleak outlook is mitigated somewhat by an ongoing sense of genuine transcendence often found in the least likely places. Even language points to this: postmodernity, despite its playfulness, appears to infuse its 'post-' with a degree of amelioration to suggest that it is heading in a particular, purposeful direction. White wonders where this sense of direction and its ultimate grounds comes from and concludes that humans can only function properly by accepting their necessary limitations, by adopting a narrative in which they can interpret their lives, and by recognising that morality motivates and shapes behaviour. Thus, for White, the transcendent has been displaced but not obliterated; and because it has not been obliterated, it should not be ignored.

Although White's intention in *Purpose and Providence* is not to construct an actual doctrine of providence, his stance does allow him to make a number of helpful observations and constructive proposals. Drawing from the thought of Karl Barth and Hans Frei, White employs figural interpretation ('the possibilities of seeing a patterned family resemblance between events, even though there is little or no visible causal relationship between them', p. 7) to show that meaning and purpose do not necessarily connote ideas of linear progress; such things may be found instead in the similarities between ostensibly disparate events or actions without actually being said to cause subsequent events or actions. Of great importance for White is the Christ event, for this is the (literally?) crucial event to which all creaturely actions must be related, by which all happenings in the world must be interpreted, and through which all actions and occurrences (including evil ones) are redeemed. This depends on a strongly radical concept of transcendence by which God is affirmed as *sui generis*, for only a God whose being is radically other to the world can act in such ways. Moreover, it is the existence of this radically other God who accounts for the ongoing sense of transcendence in the world; because God exists, humanity cannot lose its longing for a completion seemingly unattainable by naturalistic means. And all this entails an emphasis on the particularities of life as read through the particular life of Christ. What matters is not that humanity can determine some totalising thrust of human history towards some inevitable end (though White is sure that the Christian faith points to the eschatological consummation of the world), but that communities can discern God's providential actions in local situations that might somehow approximate to the Christ event but without pointing clearly to a wider metanarrative. Thus 'meaning only emerges if we see a figural and Christ-centred interpretation of events—and that is often opaque' (p. 164).

*Purpose and Providence* is an engaging read and White's prose is elegant. He is not content simply to engage with theological ideas as such but dedicates a chapter to excavating layers of the transcendent from the writings of Thomas Hardy and Julian Barnes; a chapter to tracing the development of the doctrine of providence in Christian thought, from Augustine through to Barth, via Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and even

Friedrich Schleiermacher and G.W.F. Hegel; and still another chapter to more recent accounts of divine action, including those of the science and religion dialogue and Kevin Vanhoozer's model of divine communicative action (of which White appears highly appreciative). White is fair to his interlocutors and modest in what his own proposals might achieve or contribute to wider discussions. As with any monograph, there are points in the details that could be perceived as weaknesses. For example, the idea of figural interpretation is such an important element of *Purpose and Providence* that I cannot help but wonder if White should explain it in more detail than he does. His ideas are shown to resonate with Scripture, but arguably some actual exegesis of specific biblical passages might have been useful as well (though I accept such exegetical reflections would probably have interrupted White's overall thesis). And some, including me, might find that White's account of God's radical otherness bears too much conceptual weight; if pushed too hard, surely such radical otherness essentially transmutes into an unconstrained omnipotence—a recurring vulnerability in discussions of divine providence. But against these things, I can only emphasise that *Purpose and Providence* is pregnant with possibilities and so essential reading for anyone with an academic interest in the doctrine of providence.

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**Benjamin G. McNair Scott, *Apostles Today: Making Sense of Contemporary Charismatic Apostolates: A Historical and Theological Appraisal* (Lutterworth, 2014), 254pp.**

This book originated as a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Andrew Walker. As the title suggests it is a study, both historical and theological of the language and role of apostles in terms of how it is used and practiced within the charismatic movement. The book opens by painting the scene both in the USA and in Britain today, before providing the history, followed by a biblical and theological critique. Since the 1980s onwards we have heard repeated calls for the recovery of apostolic ministries and in some church streams apostles have been recognized. *Apostles Today* sits alongside a small body of work, which began with Andrew Walker's *Restoring the Kingdom* (1985, 1998) and more recently William Kay's *Apostolic Networks in Britain* (Paternoster, 2008), which seeks to give an account of charismatic Christianity beyond the historic denominations.

I was interested to read this book in terms of how this impacted Baptists. I found Baptists get a brief look in and the comments made are from an interview with Nigel Wright. The book contends that 'Douglas McBain was "ordained" as an apostle within the Baptist Church' (p.44), which reads wrong on several accounts. First there is no Baptist Church with a capital 'C', only Baptist churches. Second, I'm not sure 'ordained' is accurate language. In McBain's own account in *Fire Over the Waters* he does not speak of being ordained as an apostle. Third, even if this was the case, his being an apostle would have only been recognized and exercised by a small number of Baptist churches, rather than all Baptists. For a doctoral thesis I was surprised that he makes no reference to any other sources.

That aside, the book brings together the different personalities and arguments to provide a good account of what has been going on with charismatic Christianity with regards apostles. For those trying to get handle on how this language is being used, McNair Scott's book will provide a well-placed introduction.

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