

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Mark A. Noll**

***Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the  
History of Christianity***

Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic,  
2000 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Mark A. Noll, Professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton College, has written a captivating introduction to the history of the Christian Church. Unlike the usual church histories which chronicle the important persons, dates and events throughout the past 2,000 years, this book focuses on twelve "Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity."

This novel approach, updated in this second edition of the same title, arose out of the author's experience. When seeking to organise a Christian history course for adult education in church and a one-semester survey history of Christianity for students at Wheaton College, he decided to organise the lessons around decisive turning points in church history.

The crucial question then arises, "Which events are the decisive moments in the history of Christianity?" Noll acknowledges that others may debate his selection of events. But he contends that such a discussion is a healthy exercise to interpret the flow of events in the church for 2,000 years.

The book is not intended as a comprehensive account of Church History. In fact the author intends it to be a survey for the two millennia of Christian history. Each chapter begins with a Christian hymn and ends with a prayer, each composed within that time period of discussion. Very importantly, each turning point is related to other events that preceded and followed that event. Each chapter contains some long quotations pertinent to the discussion in hand and placed in a highlighted block. Illustrations and pictures

are scattered throughout, but only one small map is found in the entire book; this is a serious deficiency.

The turning points are as follows: 1) The Church Pushed Out on Its Own: The Fall of Jerusalem (AD 70); 2) Realities of Empire: The Council of Nicea (AD 325); 3) Doctrine, Politics and Life in the World: The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451); 4) The Monastic Rescue of the Church: Benedict's Rule (AD 530); 5) The Culmination of Christendom: The Coronation of Charlemagne (AD 800); 6) Division between East and West: The Great Schism (AD 1054); 7) The Beginnings of Protestantism: The Diet of Worms (AD 1521); 8) A New Europe: The English Act of Supremacy (AD 1534); 9) Catholic Reform and Worldwide Outreach: The Founding of the Jesuits (1540); 10) The New Piety: The Conversion of the Wesleys (AD 1738); 11) The French Revolution (AD 1789); 12) The Edinburgh Missionary Conference (AD 1910); 13) Further Turning Points of the Twentieth Century .

By focusing on these twelve major "turning points," the author is able to highlight certain milestones within this 315 page introductory survey of Church History. The book thereby avoids the monotony of endless dates, controversies, personalities and developments which span 2,000 years, which may lose the initiate in Church History in boredom. However, he does use the "turning points" as opportunities to relate these crucial events with significant developments preceding and following the events.

For example, one might have thought that the conversion of Constantine in AD 313, which eventually led to the official recognition of Christianity by the Roman Empire, would be a "decisive moment" in the history of Christianity. Instead, Noll chose The Council of Nicea (AD 325). But he connects this important Council to the conversion of Constantine who then called the bishops to attend the Council of Nicea in order to end the religious strife in the church (and by extension, in the empire). Moreover he introduces the dilemma of imperial politics of the Roman Empire interfering with the internal affairs of the Christian Church, a dilemma which plagued the Church for centuries.

When choosing Benedict's Rule (AD 530) as a "turning point," he does far more than discuss Benedict's *regula*. Noll uses this

topic to discuss the motives and circumstances that led to the rise of monasticism. Furthermore, he portrays the importance and development of monastic movements throughout the middle ages. Thus the selection of “decisive moments” is more than a limited discussion of a “moment” in church history. Those “turning points” are focal points affording the opportunity to summarise in outline form the various developments related to the “turning point.”

This book, however, focuses on Western Church History. The fact is, of course, that most of the development of Christianity for 1800 years was centred in Europe, Eastern and Western. Only in the twelfth “turning point” (The Edinburgh Missionary Conference in AD 1910) does the author sketch the spread of the Christian faith to other parts of the world. It is painful to find only 25 pages devoted to missionary outreach in Asia, South America and Africa.

“Further Turning Points of the Twentieth Century” are mentioned on 20 pages in chapter 13, namely, 1) The Rise and Spread of Pentecostalism; 2) The Second Vatican Council; 3) New Visibility for Women; 4) Bible Translation, and 5) Survival under Communism.

It is an excellent book to introduce Christians to a survey of Christian development. On pages 320-336 are study questions for discussion by students, including questions for today’s church. This book is thoughtful and illuminating.

Mark Noll has achieved the purpose for which he wrote the book: providing a framework for understanding the 2,000 years of Christian history in survey form. It is informative, inspiring and interesting to read.

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**G.N. Monsma**

***Economic Theory and Practice  
in Biblical Perspective***

Potchefstroomse University:  
Institute for Reformational Studies, 1998

**M. D. Williams**

***Homosexuality, Scripture  
and the Body of Christ***

Potchefstroomse University:  
Institute for Reformational Studies, 1997

**H. Bavinck**

***The Certainty of Faith***

Potchefstroomse University:  
Institute for Reformational Studies, 1998

These three study pamphlets come out of Potchefstroomse University in South Africa. The first consists of two papers delivered by the author, a professor from Calvin college in the United States, in 1980 and 1997. The second is a reprint of two articles originally published elsewhere in 1993 and 1997, and written by a teacher at Covenant Theological Seminary, also in the United States. The third is a reprint of a work written by the renowned Dutch reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), which was first published in an English translation in Canada in 1980.

The first of Monsma's two papers is entitled 'Biblical Principles for Economic Theory and Practice'. It is brief, just 14 pages, much of it consisting of the extensive quotation of biblical texts that bear on economic issues. The largest section discusses the biblical notion of stewardship, which the author summarises with three principal points: those who have been entrusted with resources have only a

limited right to the personal use of them or their product; they have a duty to use them productively for their family's needs and the needs of those who do not have enough; and society has a responsibility to provide just structures (including property structures), which the author then defines. Monsma also summarises biblical teaching on wealth, the effects of sin on the economic area of life and the impact of redemption. He stresses the fact that 'there can be no religiously neutral area of life. Thus all economic theories and actions are influenced by the faith of the person devising or engaging in them' (p.14). The article is a helpful review and introduction to some key biblical principles, but the analysis is very condensed and does not take the reader very far.

Monsma's second paper, 'Christian Faith and Economic Theorizing', attempts to apply biblical principles to actual economic theory. He starts by affirming, 'There is no area of a Christian's life that is not subject to the Lordship of Christ' (p.15); this must include intellectual activity, and specifically here economic theorizing. This is particularly the case because no area of knowledge is objective and value free: 'plausibility structures' (Newbigin) or 'control beliefs' (Wolterstorff) always shape the way in which we 'know'. For a Christian, the fundamental doctrines of creation, fall, redemption and the second coming should constitute the framework from which all knowledge, including economic theory, is evaluated and constructed. Monsma then applies this approach to the Neo-classical school of economic theory, as the dominant approach in the West and, increasingly, in the rest of the world too. He briefly explains certain key elements of the Neo-classical school and offers a critique from a Christian perspective. In conclusion he suggests that Christian economists should respond to Neo-classical theory in two ways. First, as it is so prevalent it must still be studied and taught, but critically: 'we must evaluate and modify it on the basis of our Christian worldview, and help our students and the Christian community in general to do so also' (p.25). Second, Christian economists should seek to develop a body of economic theory based on a Christian worldview. Monsma recognises that this is not an easy task and that little progress has actually been made, but declares that it is essential if Christians are

to be salt and light in their societies. 'Christian Faith and Economic Theorizing' reminds us that Christians are called to apply their faith in all fields of learning, and it offers an example of how that might happen in one area. It is a vital part of what discipleship means for the student and scholar; the alternative is simply to accept the humanistic and rationalistic consensus that invariably prevails in the academic world.

Williams' first paper is entitled 'Homosexuality, Scripture and the Body of Christ'. The author notes the existence of what he terms 'homosexual hermeneutics' which suggest 'that Scripture is silent on or irrelevant to the issue of homosexuality' (p.1). In response the author argues that the Bible does indeed regard homosexuality as sin, and deals with the various hermeneutical manoeuvres that have been deployed to try and prove the opposite. At the same time, in discussing Romans 1, he points out that part of Paul's purpose is to demonstrate that all are sinners, not just the homosexual, and that all therefore stand equally in need of the grace of God. Thus, while Scripture condemns homosexuality, it does so 'in exactly the same way that it condemns pride, parental disobedience, adultery and gossip' (p.14). The homosexual who belongs to Christ's body 'deserves to be understood, accepted, loved, forgiven, trusted and affirmed' as much as every other Christian.

The second article, 'Homosexuality and the Body of Christ: an Opportunity for Reflection', notes what the author terms 'the homosexual insurgency' in the West and proposes six theses as a Biblical framework within which the current discussion of homosexuality should be conducted. Again, while contending strongly against the homosexual agenda and its supporting arguments, he points out the hypocrisy that may often characterise the opposing side: 'the homosexual movement has raised a stinging moral challenge to the hypocrisy and decadence of our culture' (p.26). He concludes again by insisting on the necessity of demonstrating the grace of God to the homosexual: 'it means supportive and knowledgeable pastoral care for persons seeking to cope with the problem of homosexuality' (p.30).

Bavinck's work comes from an earlier generation which was facing the erosion of faith. However, the problem is of continuing relevance because of the importance of the issues involved: 'when our highest interests, our eternal weal or woe is at stake, we must be satisfied with nothing less than infallible, divine certainty' (p.5). The question, therefore, is where such certainty may be found. Bavinck considers various possibilities, particularly scientific demonstration and personal experience, and points out their inadequacies. Moreover, recognising that the devotees of all religions claim to have certainty, he notes that '... certainty is not the same as truth. Truth always brings certainty, but certainty is not proof of truth' (p.14). He concludes that what is essential for certainty of faith is a word from God himself, whose truth is confirmed to the believer through the work of the Spirit: 'true knowledge of God is possible only through faith, which He himself quickens in our hearts' (p.37). This is not to deny the value of apologetics in evangelism, and the believer must seek grounds to make his faith 'more acceptable to the outsider'. However, 'apologetics is the fruit, never the root, of faith' (p.8), and its arguments are 'often rather flimsy'.

Three implications that Bavinck draws from his analysis of faith are particularly worthy of attention. First, the role of theology must be 'to nurture the certainty of faith': it must be practical. Theology that concerns itself only with critical and historical studies 'is not worthy of the name theology. And a theologian who is acquainted with all the latest issues of his science but who stands speechless at a sickbed and knows no answer to the questions of the lost sinner's heart isn't worthy of his title and office' (p.6). Bavinck's challenge to theology and theologians is just as relevant now as it was when he wrote these words - maybe more so. Second, he criticises approaches to faith which produce a 'narrowness of Christian vision' (p.21), and leave the world untouched. Certain faith should recognize that 'God is the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth', and so should have an impact on the world he has created. The weakness of pietism, Methodism and Moravianism was that 'the earthly terrain of art and science, literature and politics, family and society were not recognised in their full meaning and significance

and were therefore also not reformed and renewed on the basis of Christian principles' (p.21). It is an accent found also in Monsma's insistence, noted above, that Christian economists should be pursuing a Christian economic philosophy. Third, certain faith brings with it its own assurance of salvation. Assurance is 'contained in faith from the outset and in time organically issues from out' (p.40). It does not come from logical reasoning or self-examination.

All three booklets can be warmly commended. It is to be hoped that the Institute for Reformational Studies at Potchefstroomse University will continue to produce such studies. Its publishing initiative constitutes a challenge to other African theological institutions, and to African theologians too.

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**Millard J. Erickson**  
**L. Arnold Hustad, ed.**  
***Introducing Christian Doctrine***  
Grand Rapids, Mich., USA: Baker Academic,  
2001 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

In 1983 Millard J. Erickson, then the Professor of Theology at Bethel Theological Seminary, published his landmark theological textbook under the title, *Christian Theology*, an unabridged, one volume edition of 1,300 pages. That book has been widely acclaimed and used as a seminary-level textbook for graduate level study of systematic theology.

*Introducing Christian Doctrine*, second edition, is an attempt to provide "a briefer version" of that magisterial textbook for use in Bible Colleges and Christian liberal arts colleges. The content of this introductory textbook on Christian doctrine is "entirely" the



work of Erickson, presently the Distinguished Professor of Theology at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary. But the deletion and condensation of *Christian Theology* is the work of L. Arnold Hustad, a former student of Erickson and present Professor of Theology at Crown College in Minnesota. Some portions of the book were re-written by Erickson.

The main outline of this introductory book on Christian doctrine is the same as the original seminary level textbook, Part One to Part Twelve. But the chapters have been reduced from 59 to 42 in order to reduce the size of the book from 1,300 to 415 pages. Advanced topics on philosophical questions or the history of the doctrine have been eliminated. Part One has been rewritten to reduce the content from 133 pages to 22 pages. What remains is a readable presentation of basic Christian theology.

Unlike the seminary-level textbook which only provided a brief outline at the beginning of each chapter, this college-level textbook includes at the beginning of each chapter: chapter objectives, chapter summary, study questions and chapter outline. This book also has a larger font for subheadings and various summary statements set out in larger print.

The theological perspective and much of the content remains the same as the unabridged version. While Erickson describes the various theological positions on a particular issue, he concludes with a presentation of his own theological view.

He holds to a high view of Scripture which is wholly dependable and fully inerrant. His teaching on God, Man, Sin, the Person and Work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, Salvation, the Church and the Last Things are evangelical; that is, faithful to the historic orthodoxy of the Christian Church.

His position on the miraculous gifts today is neither Pentecostal nor cessationist. While open to the possibility of miracles and speaking in tongues, he sees the New Testament church as transitional. What the Book of Acts narrates should not be taken as normative. The emphasis in Scripture is on the One who gives these gifts and not the spiritual gifts themselves.

He is Reformed in his teaching of predestination and perseverance of the saints. He is congregationalist in his teaching

of church government, though he acknowledges that nowhere in the New Testament is there any prescriptive teaching on the kind of church government laid down. His view of baptism is baptistic and his view of the Lord's Supper is Zwinglian, that is, commemorating Christ's death. He comes out in favour of pre-millennialism and the post-tribulation rapture.

Altogether, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* is a worthy book on Christian theology to be made a standard textbook for a Bible School or College course on theology. Its basic nature, however, means that the student who desires something deeper must turn to the original, Erickson's *Christian Theology*.

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**Walter A. Elwell ed.**

***Evangelical Dictionary of Theology***

Grand Rapids, Mich., USA: Baker Book House Co.

Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press

2001 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

In 1963 this book reviewer received as an award in seminary the *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, first published in 1960. For twenty years that 566 page dictionary served two generations of theological students.

Then Baker published an enlarged and updated edition, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell. That 1,200 page dictionary was composed of 1,200 entries with 288 contributors. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, first edition, was written without technical language so that lay people could easily understand. But contributing authors were mostly Ph.D.'s with expertise in their area of contribution. It was an *evangelical* dictionary of theology in that nothing cast doubt on fundamental truth of the Christian faith or the absolute trustworthiness of the Bible. Book reviews were effusive in praise for this "prodigious

and significant work,” “a first class piece of evangelical scholarship,” one that “should be without question on the shelf of every university student, seminarian, and Christian worker.”

Twenty years later it was felt that this pace setting dictionary should be revised and updated in order to address new issues and correct some shortcomings in the older edition. This was “a full blown revision” that took six years of work. The editors deleted 100 articles thought irrelevant and added 215 articles on new theological trends and on living theologians. Many articles were also rewritten or updated. But the editors have retained the one-volume format with 1,300 pages.

A comparison of the second edition with the first is illuminating. Various word studies found in the original dictionary are omitted in the revised edition. Articles on historical personalities are added, including African-Americans and Jewish philosophers. Certain articles are significantly revised such as the ones on Abortion, Ageing and Evolution. A 5 page article on African Theology has been added where none existed in the first edition. We can only lament the loss of the article on Church Growth authored by Donald McGavran, the Father of Church Growth. In its place is a valuable updated critique of the Church Growth Movement by Scott Moreau. But the fact that no article has been included by McGavran or about him is a tragic oversight. The original history of the contributors with names in bold print followed by identification of their place of service is far superior to the revised listing of contributors. In fact, both editions could have been improved by providing an index of the contributors with the articles in the dictionary authored by them.

Apart from the inevitable limitations determined by space constraints, this first class second edition of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* should be considered an essential part of a reference library for every serious student of the Word of God, in whatever part of the world the person may be. If you are fortunate to own the first edition, it also should be preserved for articles omitted in the second edition.

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**Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg**  
***A Global History of Christians***  
***How Everyday Believers***  
***Experienced Their World***

Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 1994

Many historical accounts of the church can be dry reading because they often focus on the endless councils, popes, emperors, doctrinal controversies and church divisions.

*A Global History of Christians* is a 450 page Church History but with a difference. As the subtitle indicates, it emphasises “how everyday believers experienced their world.” As a book on church history should do, it does treat major events, leaders, institutions and theological controversies throughout the 2,000 years of church history. But it emphasises the lives of ordinary Christians by placing them in their cultural setting. Hence, this book is readable and enjoyable for it is church history with a difference.

There are 17 chapters, beginning with “The World of the First Christians” and ending with “The World Since World War II.” Throughout the book there are highlighted boxes with brief treatments of key persons, events and quotations. Many pictures bring further interest. At the end of each chapter there is a selected bibliography for further reference.

The following excerpt from chapter one illustrates the flavour of the book which whetted my appetite.

It is difficult for well-scrubbed twentieth-century American Protestants to imagine visiting a first-century synagogue or church. The most startling difference would have been the odors. Although ritual bathing occurred at intervals, no deodorants or soaps reduced the general funkiness of Eastern Mediterraneans. The warm climate, a diet rich in onions and garlic, infrequent changes of clothes, and the smoke from oil lamps and cooking fires combined to produce an extraordinarily earthy atmosphere wherever people gathered. Add a little incense and breezes

wafting from the dung heap outside town and the aroma would drive modern hygienic Westerners to their knees (not necessarily in prayer).

Throughout the book there are attempts to picture the people in their social and cultural context. Portraying the picture of everyday Christians in the early church, the authors describe Hellenistic lifestyle and philosophies and then add the Roman context to help one understand the world of the apostolic church.

Throughout the book the authors vividly describe in concrete and down-to-earth ways how the Christians responded to their faith in their culture and how they were perceived by non-Christians. For example, the Romans hated the Christians because

Christians appeared to their pagan neighbours as spoilsports. They refused to participate in many of the normal duties and activities of civic life... Christians avoided the arena and condemned others for enjoying the blood-letting. To Romans the arena was the moral equivalent of televised football [American football]... Christians condemned the popular theatre as pornographic (so did some Romans). Most regarded the theatre as light entertainment. Christian attacks on the practice of putting unwanted babies on the refuse heaps challenged the traditional right of the Roman father over his children. For such activity they were regarded as anti-family.

It is indeed a church history book "without peer" which students will find enjoyable to read.

However, the student of history in the third world will be disappointed with the scant treatment of the younger churches. While there are 42 pages on "The Twentieth-Century America", there are only 7 pages on African Christianity after World War II. Furthermore, the vivid descriptions of the cultural and social environment of everyday Christians quoted above from chapter one, does not continue to the same degree throughout the book. But then one could not expect the authors to do so when seeking to compress a history of world Christianity within 450 pages.

We highly recommend this book. It not only represents the best in evangelical Christian scholarship in church history but brings to life the living reality of everyday Christians in a readable and enticing manner. Even though African church history is not

prominent, one can gain keen insights into the ways the social and cultural environment in the past has affected Christianity in different parts of the world, even as culture affects the Christian church in Africa today.

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**Michael Green**

***THE MESSAGE OF MATTHEW***

Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000

The publication of *The Message of Matthew* by Michael Green brings to completion the New Testament series of *The Bible Speaks for Today*. It is not itself an entirely new volume, but a revised reissue of Green's *Matthew for Today*, originally published in 1988. It contains 4 pages of bibliography; an introduction discussing the usual questions of author, date, readership and so on; the exposition proper of almost 270 pages; and finally a study guide with questions for individual reflection or group discussion on each section of the text.

The purpose of *The Bible Speaks for Today* series is 'to expound the biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to be readable'. *The Message of Matthew* largely conforms to this pattern. Technical discussions are kept to a minimum, the style is lively and attractive, and the emphasis is on communicating what the text means and how it applies today. It would be accessible not only to people who have some formal theological background, but also to those with a modicum of education who want to understand the Scriptures better.

The structure of the gospel has been much debated, and Green follows the pattern identified in *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel* by E. and I. Billingham (Brechinset Publications, 1982), dividing Matthew into 2 major sections (chapters 1-13 and 14-28), and each of these into 3 subdivisions. However, it is not always obvious that

the structure Green identifies arises naturally from the text itself. The reference on page 34 to 'a particularly subtle link' between sections itself implies that some of the connections and divisions are less than self-evident. Green suggests, as others have before him, that the five main blocks of teaching in the gospel intentionally parallel the five books of Moses, thereby identifying Christ as a second and greater Moses, the mediator of a new and greater covenant. He doubts that Matthew the disciple wrote the gospel, but accepts that he may be the author of one of its sources, perhaps of the supposed sayings collection, 'Q', or of a list of Old Testament messianic prophecies fulfilled in Christ, or of an oral tradition that was subsequently incorporated into the gospel that came to bear his name. He dates the gospel at about 80 a.d., and is frequently concerned in his exposition to relate its message to the supposed concerns of the original readers. He concludes the introduction with a useful brief survey of recent study of the gospel.

The author is well-known as an evangelist and apologist, and this is apparent in this work, as when he defends the historicity of the virgin birth or that of the resurrection. His interpretation shows an occasional charismatic leaning. Thus, he argues that some of the healing stories are intended to encourage disciples to do the same: 'Jesus laid his hand on the woman, and she was healed. And the disciples should do likewise' (p.116). However, he goes on to admit, 'many people are not healed', which leaves a degree of ambiguity: clearly, even in Green's view, the disciple cannot simply 'do likewise'. His defence of infant baptism, which he argues is 'reasonable and in line with the Old Testament recognition of the place of children within the covenant' (p.206), betrays his Anglicanism.

Green does not always provide the detailed help with the text that readers might be looking for. He frequently offers a 'broad brush' approach rather than careful exposition, and long, important passages do not always get the attention they deserve. For example, in pages 82-84 there is a good discussion of the theological significance of the temptations of Jesus, but little detailed exposition of the individual temptations themselves. At times his approach is centred round key themes that he wishes to develop, but

not obviously derived from the priorities of the text itself. So, the discussion of the mission of the disciples highlights certain themes but actually omits discussion of some of the text. Again, in his discussion of Matthew 12 he quite simply skips over some pericopes, presumably to maintain his own predetermined pattern.

Green's exegesis can sometimes be weak. In the course of his discussion of the Sermon on the Mount he discusses the different Greek words that are translated by the one word 'love' (pp.97-98) - *philia*, *eros*, *storge*, *agape*. He claims that *agape* 'was something very different .. [it] means a love that gives itself for the good of the recipient'. However, it has long been recognised that a lexical approach of this nature is flawed. There is indeed something unique about the love of God and that which should characterise his children, but it cannot be associated with just one particular Greek word group. Sometimes Green seems to read more into the text than is there. He claims that Jesus used parables in part because of 'the move from the synagogue to the seashore. As the leaders of the religious establishment turned increasingly against him, we find Jesus moving more and more out into the open air, where the common people heard him gladly. So the teaching in parables comes after widespread rejection of his message and his person by the rulers' (p.153). But is this true? Green does not demonstrate that it is so, and it is not clear that this gospel or any of the others supports it. His discussion on marriage and divorce is good until he claims, when discussing the exception clause in 19:9 ('except for marital unfaithfulness'), 'there is a straight contradiction between Matthew on the one hand and Mark and Luke on the other' (p.204). Such an assertion is, first of all, simply false; the fact that Matthew gives a slightly more nuanced version of the Saviour's teaching than do Mark or Luke, does not mean that there is a contradiction. Secondly, it raises questions about Green's view of the reliability of the gospel as a record of Christ's teaching. He goes on to explain the Matthean exception clause in the following terms: 'here in Matthew we probably see the earliest attempt of the first Christians to be loyal to the thrust of Jesus' teaching but making an exception for a manifestly difficult situation' (p.205). In other words, the phrase, 'except for marital unfaithfulness', came not from Jesus



himself but was added by the church to moderate his teaching. This at once raises the question of how much more of Jesus' teaching as recorded in the gospel might have been added later by the church; it is a dangerous path to go down. Later on he interprets Matthew 27:52-53, the brief reference to the resurrection of 'many holy people who had died', as a 'profound meditation on what the crucifixion of Jesus means for the destiny of humankind' (p.303) rather than an account of actual events.

Some of Green's observations are wrong or gratuitous. He associates the prophecy of the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14) with the reign of Hezekiah rather than Ahaz (p.64). He identifies Benjamin as the ancestor of the Messiah (p.73). He claims that when the mother of James and John asked for them to sit at Jesus' right and left in the kingdom, it was 'to their embarrassment' (p.215). He writes that Paul 'probably' found it 'trying' that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection, given that he does not mention them in his account of resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15 (p.313). Curiously he refers to the Holy Spirit as 'it' (p.78). More seriously, in his comments on Matthew 16:21, Green's explanation of the necessity of Christ's sufferings is weak, with no clear reference to their primary, propitiatory purpose. Rather he emphasises, first, the need for the Saviour to 'empathise' with suffering humanity, and then refers to 'the need to get to the root of evil in the world' and to 'overcome the deadly disease of human sin and cosmic disorder' (p.182), but with no suggestion as to how Christ's death may have accomplished these objectives. Elsewhere he claims that on the cross Christ was 'fully and *ontologically* [my italics] identified with the sins of humankind' (p.81); but what does that mean?

To conclude, there is much that is good in this book. The author frequently opens up new insights into the text, and equally offers much material to assist the teacher and preacher of the Scriptures with appropriate contemporary application. It can undoubtedly be read with profit. But as a careful exposition it is at times deficient, and some of the weaknesses are serious.

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