

Book Reviews

ABOVE ALL EARTHLY POWERS: Christ in a Postmodern World

David F. Wells

Leicester: IVP/Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans, 2005 339pp £14.99hb

ISBN: 1-84474-106-0

David Wells' important analysis of Christ and Western culture began with *No Place for Truth* (1993), continued with *God in the Wasteland* (1994) and *Losing our Virtue* (1998), and concludes with the present volume. Previous analyses of modern and postmodern culture have tended to focus on the role of ideas but Wells argues that Enlightenment ideas and the experience of the modern world actually reinforce each other. Indeed the social processes of modernisation gave coherence and plausibility to the intellectual goals of the Enlightenment and this brought about the disappearance of God, the abolition of human nature and an arrogant trust in the omniscience of man. The cosy relationship between ideas and social processes has now fallen on hard times, and the combination of fragmentation and migration have led to a postmodern experience that is life with no centre. It is not a melting pot so much as a cocktail party, 'a place of brief encounter...instant, but evaporating community' (p. 45). This is a world with no truth, no worldview and no purpose. The individual is a tourist not a pilgrim, and the journey is about experience not the destination. Evangelicals who take this route face great peril.

This shift is born of a new worldview and does not, as some imagine, stem from a changing culture alone. Spirituality centred on the self has surprisingly ancient roots in Gnosticism, and Wells draws further on Nygren's categories of Eros and Agape spiritualities to elucidate the contrast between belief centred on self and that centred on God. Today's church must hear the warning that such ideas need to be met with confrontation and not tactical accommodation. Postmodern evangelicals who buy into openness theology and into the commercialisation of church (where the gospel is a 'product') are not reaching the culture but replicating it. 'What is so "authentic" about Christians becoming cognitively indistinguishable from the postmodern believers they want to see join their churches?' (p. 308). No, salvation must come from without and by revelation from God in Christ. Only there can we recover the central truths of a fallen self, public truth and the personhood of God. Christ himself stands at the centre of a worldview with meaning, his cross and resurrection pivotal in salvation.

Any thinking Christian who desires to proclaim afresh to each new generation the unchanging message of Christ will need to absorb the penetrating, cogent and intelligent analysis offered in this and Well's previous books, especially the insight into the significance of social processes and the theological critiques of contemporary spiritualities. While the chapters are closely argued, they are also well disciplined each making a single main point. They sound a clarion call to the church in the West that we cannot ignore the changes which have taken place in culture; but nor can we absorb them either. This is a book not to miss.

ED MOLL
Basingstoke

SCRIPTURE

An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and its Interpretation

Michael J. Gorman, ed.

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2005 £11.99 pb ISBN: 1-5656-39278

This book is a series of essays by different authors, representing a broad spectrum of ecumenical biblical study, dealing with all the major aspects of the Bible which introductory students need to know. It is conveniently divided into two equal parts, the first of which is dedicated to the biblical text and the second to its interpretation.

In the first section, the contributors deal with such matters as manuscript formation and tradition, the canon of Scripture, the different types of literature found in it, the nature of translation and so on. Even such matters as the origins of chapters and verses are included, which is very useful information not always readily available elsewhere. Sometimes it is possible to question the author's judgement, as for example, when Paul Zilonka compares the Bible to a 'library' of very different books when it is more like a collection of writings which, however varied they may be in form, nevertheless focus on a similar range of subjects. The chapters on the canon also reflect a Roman Catholic perspective, with the deuterocanonical books distinguished, but not clearly separated, from the rest of the Old Testament.

The section dealing with interpretation starts with a historical approach, continues with studies of Protestant traditions (on the one hand) and Roman

Catholic and Orthodox ones (on the other), and concludes with a few chapters dealing with contemporary issues—African-American interpretation, social justice questions and ecumenism. Generally speaking the approach taken is fair and tries to represent every school of thought in the best possible light. The dominant approach would have to be called moderately liberal, and there is a strong Catholic bias in some of the chapters, though that tends to have a certain conservative effect. Where the book falls down is on the Evangelical wing of Protestantism, which is not adequately represented. The authors and editors are careful to distinguish Evangelicals from ‘fundamentalists’, which is good to see, but they tend to assume that the former are mostly closet liberals working in more conservative church environments. There are certainly plenty of such people about, but it is not very satisfactory to describe the evangelical world in this limited way.

The impression left with the reader is that the Ecumenical Institute of Theology, which has sponsored this volume (the editor is its dean) operates outside the evangelical constituency and has only minimal contact with it. For biblical studies, where Evangelicals are so prominent, this is particularly unfortunate, and will make it more difficult to use this otherwise excellent book in evangelical contexts. Perhaps the main lesson to be learned from this is that, although Evangelicals have now come onto the liberal radar screen (especially in America), they have still not come into focus, and there is still some way to go before they will be fully accepted on the ecumenical scene.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

JOURNEYING THROUGH ACTS

A Literary-Cultural Reading

F. Scott Spencer

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004 278pp £11.99pb ISBN: 1 56563 990 1

This volume is effectively a reprint of F. Scott Spencer’s 1997 commentary *Acts*, (Sheffield Academic Press). Its preface’s claim to be an updating of this early work hangs on the addition of a revised and expanded introduction and bibliography. The main text (and page layout) remain unaltered from the earlier volume.

The new introduction adds ten pages to the original book's length. These few pages provide a helpful overview of the most recent Acts scholarship and outline the most lively issues presently under debate. It is a shame that at least one recent and important scholarly work is simply mentioned in the expanded bibliography and not even mentioned in the introductory survey (Pao, 2002). This reflects the 'big-picture' nature of the introduction, which is both its strength and weakness. Spencer dates Acts within 70-100AD, and avoids identifying a specific audience or a single genre for the work.

The title and subtitle of this re-issue effectively position Spencer's work. Adopting what he calls 'trifocal cartography', the book concerns itself with 'mapping a variety of specific (1) temporal, (2) spatial and (3) social dimensions of each segment of the Acts journey' (p. 27). The result is an innovative 'reading' of the whole book (section by section, rather than verse by verse) which explores Acts as narrative and particularly seeks out the fruit of what can be broadly termed 'social-scientific' readings of the text.

Combined with an arresting writing style which at times romps through the text and always has enthusiasm, this volume will be a fascinating introduction to such readings of Acts for those raised on historical-critical commentaries (e.g. Barrett, Bruce) or even the innovative narrative-critical work of Tannehill. As such, this book deserves a wider readership, and will feed both the preacher and the scholar, often at the same time. Spencer makes fresh connections within the text of (Luke-)Acts and provokes insightful applications.

That said, Spencer's reading can also irritate, and sometimes verges on the allegorical (especially when attempting to read all three aspects of his 'trifocal cartography' as equally significant in a particular passage). His reading also requires some resistance—the apostle Peter, for example, comes off worse in Spencer's reading than my own reading of Acts would suggest (e.g. see p. 126 regarding 10: 44-48). Nevertheless, he is always provoking his readers not only to read with him, but also to read Acts for themselves, and he is to be commended for this achievement.

No doubt his kind of reading will, like others, come under development and critique, but here is a volume which helps us read and re-read Acts for what is in the text, and will also introduce readers to new ways of seeing the text.

While it would not be my 'desert island' commentary on Acts, this is the commentary on Acts I would choose for an enlivening read while on a long journey. Attractively priced and with Greek words transliterated, this book deserves to be bought and read by a wide audience.

MATTHEW SLEEMAN
London

CYPRIAN THE BISHOP

J. Patout Burns Jr.

London/NY: Routledge, 2002 240pp \$80/\$25.95 ISBN: 0-415-23850-1

Few people have had greater influence on the everyday life of the Christian church than the third-century bishop, Cyprian of Carthage, and yet he has been poorly served in recent scholarship. Sandwiched between Tertullian and Augustine in North Africa, and less appealing to most people today than his contemporary, Hippolytus of Rome, Cyprian has become one of the lesser-known fathers of the church. It is therefore of great interest to note that Professor Burns has reconstructed Cyprian's thought in an accessible form, showing just what its true strengths and weaknesses are. He makes no pretense to originality, but as few people will have read the sources he relies on, this is of minor importance. His work brings the current state of scholarship to general attention, and that makes it of considerable value in itself.

As Burns presents him, Cyprian came to high office in Carthage at a moment of make-or-break crisis for the church. It was a time of severe persecution, and many had lapsed, betraying their faith in order to save their lives and property. How should such people be treated once the persecution was over and some of them (at least) sought to be readmitted into fellowship? As it is not difficult to imagine, this desire divided those who had remained steadfast through the worst trials. Some were for forgiveness and reconciliation, but others felt that such a crime could not be so easily forgotten. For them, permanent exclusion from the church was the only suitable punishment, mitigated perhaps by deathbed reconciliation.

Cyprian's task was to find a middle way between these two extremes, one which would do justice to the faith of those who had persevered without forever

alienating the weaker brethren. In the process he was forced to work out the significance of baptism as an indelible sign of church membership, the proper authority to be accorded to the bishop and the efficacy of penance as the way to reconciliation. His solutions to these complex problems proved to be remarkably enduring, long after the circumstances in which they had been elaborated ceased to be relevant. The result was that when the Donatist controversy erupted in the fourth century, both sides could (and did) claim Cyprian's legacy as their own. Burns inclines to the view that the Donatists were actually closer to their mentor's theology than the mainstream church members were, a fact which he regards as an important indication that Cyprian's views were in serious need of a revision which they have never really had.

The book is well-written and refreshingly candid about Cyprian's views, without ever seeking to belittle them. It will probably be the standard introduction to his thought for some time to come, and will help to shape the next generation's perception of the important legacy of the North African church.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

THE CHURCH'S BIBLE

1 Corinthians Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators

Judith L. Kovacs

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005 414pp £19.99(\$35)hb ISBN: 0-9028-2577-X

Growing interest in the interpretation of the Bible as practised by the church fathers has led to the appearance of a number of commentaries in recent years, some of them simple translations of major works which have not yet seen the light of day in English, and others (as here) as selected extracts designed to give modern readers some idea of how the fathers approached the Scriptures.

This particular volume is the second one to appear in a series sponsored by Eerdmans (the first having been on the Song of Songs). It begins with a lengthy introduction to patristic methods of interpretation generally, and follows this by a similarly long study of their approach to the Apostle Paul and his writings. After that comes a section of quotes relating to the Apostle himself, quite apart from his writings, and only then do we come to 1 Corinthians itself.

This approach is valuable in the first volume of the New Testament series, but it will pale somewhat if it is to be repeated in every other volume as well. The problem, of course, is that when the whole work is completed, who will think to look in the volume on 1 Corinthians for general introductory material? It is hard not to feel that there should be a companion volume to the series as a whole, in which general remarks of this kind could be made.

The volume follows the chapter sequence found in modern Bibles, even when this does not correspond very well to the thought-pattern of the original text, but it is not really a verse-by-verse commentary. The approach is rather to select three or four fairly long paragraphs from different church fathers which illustrate groups of verses within the different chapters. This certainly corresponds to the way in which the fathers themselves would have read the epistle, and it avoids having to chop up selections into tiny morsels, but it also makes the book harder to use, particularly since the verse selections do not always overlap. Thus (for example), chapter 11 starts with Ambrosiaster and John Chrysostom on the first two verses, continues with Theodore of Mopsuestia on verse 3, John Chrysostom on verses 3-5, a Montanist-Orthodox dialogue on verse 5, Severian of Gabala and Augustine on verse 7 (v. 6 is omitted altogether), then Theodoret on verse 10 (omitting 8 and 9)... and so on!

For some strange reason, the editors have chosen to give the sources at the end of the volume, rather than at the end of each selection, which means that anyone photocopying a page will have to add the reference later. It is all rather unwieldy, and leaves the reviewer wondering just who the book has been compiled for. One suspects that there is no clearly defined audience in mind, and that the main impulse was academic rather than practical. In this, it stands in sharp contrast to the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* which was designed to appeal to pastors, students and interested lay people, and which is correspondingly much easier to use.

Having said that, the selections are good and the translations are well done. The difficulty is not at this level, but at that of overall conception and presentation. Those looking for specific patristic statements may well find what they want here, but probably such people will be able to consult the originals without much difficulty and will probably want to, if only to establish the overall context which the selections are generally too short to provide.

It remains to be seen what subsequent volumes in the series will be like, but the reviewer can only plead for a more user-friendly approach, aware that this in turn will mean defining who precisely the prospective users are.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

THE DOMINANCE OF EVANGELICALISM:

The Age of Spurgeon and Moody

David W. Bebbington

Leicester: IVP, 2005 284pp £16.99hb ISBN 1-84474-070-6

The new IVP History of Evangelicalism series, in five volumes, is living up to the high expectations with which its announcement was greeted. The first two books to emerge are by the series editors, first Mark Noll's *The Rise of Evangelicalism* (covering the 1730s to 1790s) and now David Bebbington's *The Dominance of Evangelicalism* (covering the 1850s to 1900s). They are a joy to read, filled with treasure, and raise the bar for historical writing about the evangelical movement.

The series draws together five leading scholars, deeply read in both the primary sources and the latest monographs, who are then able to survey the big picture and identify major themes and trends. The breadth and depth of Bebbington's knowledge is impressive. Here he presents the fruits of a lifetime's research and reflection. Obscure evangelical magazines, journals and newspapers are a particularly rich mine from which he offers colourful quotations to support his arguments.

The major theme of the volume, as the title suggests, is the dominant role of evangelicalism in late-Victorian culture. The end of the nineteenth century was a time of sustained expansion for this global movement, which showed numerous signs of vitality. This dynamism is mirrored by Bebbington's pacy prose, as he describes a multitude of evangelical initiatives, especially in response to the rationalism and romanticism of the day. Evangelicalism straddled the world and was to be found 'wherever Anglo-Saxon settlers had penetrated' (p. 249). Its adherents were so numerous and so active that they could often sway the direction of change in society, and did a great deal to shape their communities and their national life.

A global phenomenon reveals many vivid internal contrasts. Evangelicals across the world were extremely diverse, especially in different denominations or different social settings. They were both authoritarian and libertarian, traditional and innovative, respected and obscure, educated and ignorant, long-established and newly-settled. Yet despite this inevitable heterogeneity, Bebbington argues persuasively that in the late nineteenth century the movement displayed remarkable unity, that ‘the commonalities far outweighed the differences’ (p. 249). For example, he writes: ‘The evangelical denominational groups were but regiments in a single army. Anglicans might be more churchy, Presbyterians more intellectual, Methodists more exuberant, Baptists more rigid and Congregationalists more open, but they knew that they shared the same gospel’ (p. 244).

This unity was stimulated by the Victorian communications revolution, as railways, steamships, telegraphs and newspapers carried evangelical ideas around the world. Most church historians focus on a small part of the picture and so miss this global perspective. But Bebbington’s wide vision is able to identify these strong inter-denominational and international linkages, especially across the Atlantic. Collaboration, rather than rivalry, was a hallmark of the movement and the polarization along fundamentalist versus modernist lines lay in the future. For that part of the story we must read the next volume, which we avidly await.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE
Eynsham

**THE WORD OF HIS GRACE:
A Guide to Teaching and Preaching from Acts**
Chris Green

Leicester: IVP, 2005 189pp £8.99pb ISBN: 1-84474-075-7

This is a very useful book for anyone wanting to get a better grasp of the book of Acts. Chris Green, Vice-Principal at Oak Hill Theological College, starts by observing the many different reactions we often have to Acts, from a realisation that it is an important book for a healthy church to be grappling with, to confusion over how to handle it, particularly when unique (and disputably, unrepeatable) events occur in the narrative. The opening chapter

outlines diverse strategies for reading a big book like Acts and shows how different aspects of the book's teaching are brought out by various ways of structuring it or by asking different questions of the text. He looks at what Acts has to say on history, theology, mission, and training. Right from the start, he is keen not to forget application of the book to today; so for instance on p. 20 he says, pointedly, '[t]o those Christians in apparently successful churches [Luke's teaching on church growth] is a much-needed reminder that true growth comes not from programmes or staffing decisions but from people believing the word of God'. These first 38 pages are quite excellent, and almost worth the price of the whole book on their own.

The body of the book is taken up with seven chapters on the 'architecture' of Acts, which are extremely helpful in laying out the structure and purpose of each section of Acts. He shows how the book fits together, how each section develops, and what the major themes and distinctive emphases are in each successive 'panel' of the book. It's not a commentary on every last verse: it is much more useful than that, helping the reader get a sense of what Luke was up to when he wrote and arranged Acts in the way he did.

With this big picture in place, he then moves on to a section devoted to preaching Acts. This is what distinguishes the book from other scholarly tomes on Acts, as Chris Green shows us how to take the basic framework and approach he has just outlined and use it to drive and shape actual sermons on the book of Acts. This makes this volume much more useful and stimulating for a preacher, and is an excellent idea. It would be most instructive if other authors could do something similar; I for one would be fascinated to read examples of sermons by Graeme Goldsworthy, Haddon Robinson, Sidney Greidanus and others whose technical treatises on preaching I have found incredibly useful but who often leave one wondering what their approach would look and sound like in practice.

For anyone who has ever read a technical commentary and then found themselves shouting back at the commentator, 'yes, fine, but how do I preach that?' Chris Green provides just that kind of practical illustration in real life examples of sermons on various texts from Acts. I would have preferred to read unabridged versions of the sermons (including the illustrations!) and am not a fan of the annotation method used to comment on them (why not just

use footnotes as in the rest of the book?) but that does not distract from the very constructive contribution made by this section. There are some good tips on preaching which will be useful whatever the text or occasion. To echo Acts 17:32, it would be good to hear more from the author on this subject again.

Throughout the book Chris Green's often arresting style and pithy way of summarising things makes this an engaging book to read, and he always has an eye on how Acts should impact us today. The last chapter is specifically on 'living Acts' which contains many insightful comments on how Acts affects our understanding of the gospel, our practice of evangelism, our church planting, discipling, suffering, prayer, preaching, and leadership/training. There are also some valuable diagrams and tables throughout the book (although splitting a complicated chart like that showing Old Testament allusions in Acts 3–5 over two pages (pp. 57-8) is not particularly helpful and so it does not always work as nicely as it probably does in the classroom). All in all, this is an obvious recommendation for any serious Bible reader, and a top class guide for any preacher or teacher of the book of Acts.

LEE GATISS
London

THE FREE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Introduction to an Anglican Tradition

John Fenwick

London: T&T Clark, 2004 339pp £45.00hb ISBN: 0-567-08433-7

Back in 1843 the 'Great Disruption' saw a massive realignment of Christian life north of the border with the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland. This new network attracted evangelicals in large numbers and began to blossom. A year later evangelicals in the Church of England followed suit, beginning with James Shore in the Exeter diocese who led his congregation out of the diocesan structures and away from the authority of his bishop. The Free Church of England was born, established as a legal entity in 1863. Yet unlike in Scotland, the FCE never made a significant impact. Evangelicals in the established church were not attracted in large numbers and it failed to fulfil its potential. Nevertheless the movement survives to this day and has much to teach evangelicals who remain within the Church of England.

There has been no history of the FCE since that by Bishop Frank Vaughan in 1936 (3rd edition 1994) and John Fenwick's account is sure to remain definitive for years to come. He offers a brutally honest, warts-and-all survey of the denomination from its earliest years through to its recent crises. The book should be read alongside Allen Guelzo's *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians* (1994) and Grayson Carter's *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media* (2001), which examine other parts of the picture.

One of Fenwick's major emphases is the great antiquity of the FCE—hence the icon of St Augustine of Canterbury on the cover! He argues against the oversimplistic view that it was simply an anti-Tractarian reaction and points to its roots within the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in the eighteenth century. In this sense the FCE was not a new church, but a revival of an earlier form of Anglicanism and might be seen as 'a surviving expression of the heritage of Whitefield' (p. 53).

Sadly the high hopes of the mid-Victorian years were never met. Although there were 39 FCE churches in 1880, served by 35 clergy, they had shrunk to 22 churches by 1895. It looked as if the whole enterprise might soon collapse. As numbers fell, fragmentation increased. Alongside the Free Church of England sprang up a rash of other small groups—the Reformed Church of England, the Reformed Episcopal Church in England (a branch of the REC in North America), and a short-lived Evangelical Church of England. The relationship between these rivals is a bitter tale of theological wrangles, personality clashes, public disputes, financial failure, and increasingly bizarre practices. As Fenwick wryly observes, 'Doctrinal orthodoxy has not always been accompanied by a Christlike attractiveness' (p. 277).

Both the FCE and the REC survived against all the odds and were united in 1927, temporarily breathing new life and optimism into the movement. There was growth between the World Wars, and 50 congregations by 1939. Yet the story since then has been one of steady decline. Today only 24 congregations survive, many small and vulnerable—fewer than at any time since the 1860s. Half are expected to fold within the next decade. Young converts have not been attracted to a denomination with services wedded to the Book of Common Prayer and with an ancient leadership (compulsory retirement for

FCE ministers, at 75, was only introduced in 2002). Fenwick points to a ‘drawbridge mentality’ (p. 291) which has failed to address contemporary issues. The FCE sadly lost sight of its strong revival and evangelistic heritage, and became substantially negative, especially anti-Tractarian, in its outlook.

The handful of recruits within recent years are mostly those that the FCE could do without. In a remarkably frank chapter, Fenwick casts light on the acrimony and division of the late 1990s and early 2000s, largely caused by newcomers to the denomination. The FCE became ‘a sort of cave of Adullam’ (p. 287), a refuge for all manner of strong-minded people fleeing the Church of England who tried to make the FCE a platform for their own agendas. There has been recent disciplinary action against a rogue bishop, and many shady dealings which are not honouring to Jesus Christ. Fenwick’s revelation of these troubles acts as a sober warning to those for whom the idea of leaving the Church of England is attractive—the grass is not always greener elsewhere.

Although the FCE stands on the brink of extinction, its importance far outweighs its size. It acts as a mirror upon our current tensions within the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion. As Fenwick shows, by virtually every test that can be applied, the FCE is an Anglican church—in origin, episcopacy, constitution, doctrinal basis, liturgy, visual appearance and terminology. Indeed, it is arguably more ‘Anglican’ than some of the provinces of the Anglican Communion. Its orders are generally agreed to be ‘irregular’ but ‘valid’. One of the reasons for its original break with the Huntingdon Connexion is that the FCE did not want to be seen as a network of Calvinist chapels, but as a Protestant Episcopal Church, modelled on the establishment. Yet it has found itself locked into a curious love-hate relationship with the Church of England, as the author explains: ‘The Church of England is both the revered Mother to be emulated and the grossly distorted monster to be feared and attacked whenever possible. At different times the leadership has oscillated between the two poles’ (p. 279). As we continue to wrestle over the question of Anglican identity and continuity, there is much stimulating food for thought here. The FCE began as an evangelical grass-roots movement, concerned by the doctrinal drift of the Church of England and the unbiblical teaching of its bishops. It is hard to escape the contemporary relevance of its history.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

Eynsham

THE KING'S REFORMATION

Henry VIII and the remaking of the English church

G. W. Bernard

New Haven/London: Yale, 2005 414pp. £29.99hb ISBN 0-300-10908-3

Few figures in English history provoke such enduring fascination as Henry VIII. The story has everything—sex, violence, religion, power and multiple forms of tragedy. It was never meant to happen. Henry VII was to be succeeded by Prince Arthur, who would marry the King of Spain's younger daughter and life would go on as it always had. The second son would have faded into obscurity or perhaps suffered a more cruel fate, especially if he had presented any kind of threat to the ruling monarch. Instead, Arthur died young, the second son emerged from the shadows, and his inherited Spanish bride failed to produce the desired male heir. All this coincided with a religious ferment which both helped and hindered the search for a solution. It helped, to the extent that Henry VIII could risk a challenge to the pope's authority and gamble on being able to get away with it. But it also hindered it, because the pope could not afford to be as flexible as he might have been in less contentious times. To secure his dynasty, Henry needed to take control of the church, and that in turn required a revolution which would wrest the institution away from Rome without letting it fall into the hands of religious fanatics with inconvenient principles that would restrict the King's freedom of movement even more.

Dr. Bernard thus maintains that the English Reformation was the work of the king from beginning to end. Its agents were his servants, and they were used and discarded as he saw fit. The groundwork for reform was laid by Cardinal Wolsey, but when he proved unequal to the task of obtaining an annulment of the King's marriage, he was tossed aside and replaced by Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell did exactly as he was told, but in the end, he too was dispensed with, largely because Henry did not want France and Spain to think that he was captive to a reformation which he could not control. None of the wives had any real influence over him, and even Thomas Cranmer had to toe the line, which he did with remarkable ingenuity. Henry contained dissent in the church by demanding conformity to his somewhat eclectic views, and labels like 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' are curiously unhelpful in trying to describe the end result. The variety and the inner tensions of Anglicanism still reflect the

inconsistencies of a royal mind which upheld the traditional mass but dissolved monasteries and hedged its bets on purgatory.

To make his case, Bernard has to overturn much received scholarship, and this he does with great gusto. Readers unfamiliar with the work of modern scholars like the late Sir Geoffrey Elton, Jack Scarisbrick, Richard Rex and Rory McEntegart will be lost in the polemics, but it must be said that Dr. Bernard fears no foe and has few favourites. In his own way, he beheads academics with as much determination as Henry beheaded his courtiers and for the same fundamental reason—they stand in the way of what he is trying to do.

Evaluating Dr. Bernard's thesis is difficult, because at one level it is obviously true and is accepted by all sides in the debate. Henry VIII had the power of life and death over his subjects, and to that extent it must be admitted that the Reformation was indeed his doing and no-one else's. How far he got what he wanted though is much harder to determine. Anne Boleyn apparently resisted his approaches, at least for a time, and although the king could contain theological differences among his bishops, he could not unite them in a genuine Erasmian consensus based on his own views. To some extent, Henry's career reminds one of Marshal Tito in Yugoslavia, who kept rival factions at bay but was unable to provide a solid basis for maintaining the structure of his state once he had gone. His daughter Elizabeth tried to follow in his footsteps, and succeeded to some extent, but by then the international scene had changed fundamentally, and it was no longer possible to sit on the fence between the pope and Martin Luther.

There may be echoes of Henry VIII in the Church of England today, but it is not really a Henrician church, or even an Erasmian one. It is Protestant in a way (and to a degree) which Henry VIII never wanted, and which he would not recognise. His selective destruction of the old order made it easier for genuine reformers to take control after his death, but it was only then that the ground rules of the English reformation were firmly established. Elizabeth's church was to be as much the legacy of Edward VI as of Henry VIII, and even the unhappy reign of Mary I left its mark in different ways.

Dr. Bernard makes wide use of original sources, in many cases revealing the inadequacies of such collections as the Letters and papers of Henry VIII, but

he is not averse to straining the evidence when he wants to assert some controversial point, for example, that the king had had sexual relations with Anne Boleyn at the start of their relationship, which she then backed away from. Even when evidence is plentiful it can be unreliable, as for example, in the correspondence between the imperial ambassador Chapuys and his master Charles V. Dr. Bernard knows what the dangers are, but if he finds a convenient theory he tends to throw caution to the winds and build it up out of flimsy evidence. He claims (for example) that the so-called King's Book of 1543 is just a revision and expansion of the Bishops' Book of 1537, not a theological retreat from it, but seems to base this opinion as much on a line in the Revised Short Title Catalogue as on the books themselves.

Sometimes, his use of sources leads him into curious errors, as for instance on p. 194, where he mentions one 'John Willor' as a signatory to a protest against the declaration of the royal supremacy over the church. The text he quotes does indeed mention Willor, but it would have been a simple matter to compare this with the list of proctors in the 1529 convocation, where it would have been apparent that his real name was Wilbore, and that the scribe who copied the original was not sufficiently familiar with English names to get this one right.

There is no doubt that Dr. Bernard's book will stir up a hornet's nest of controversy in the scholarly world, which is quite an achievement in an area as well-trodden as this one is. How many of his conclusions will stand the test of time remains to be seen, but even if many of them are eventually rejected or substantially modified, they may well set the agenda for years to come. Henry VIII has not been laid to rest yet.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

FAITHFULNESS AND HOLINESS: The Witness of J. C. Ryle
J. I. Packer

Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2002 246pp £10hb ISBN: 1-58134-358-2

'The fact that today's evangelicals are so largely out of touch with their own history, and so cannot discern how small and dry and lightweight and

superficial and childish they are compared with those from whom they take their name, is one of the more glaring of our current shortcomings,' writes Dr. Packer, Professor of Theology at Vancouver, Canada, in this book (p. 82). Consequently, he has written a short biography of a spiritual giant who deserves to be better known: 'Ryle lined up with Calvin, and Augustine, and the apostle Paul, all of whom fulfilled their ministries in terms of the same set of pastoral priorities' (p. 43). Ryle was Bishop of Liverpool towards the end of the reign of Queen Victoria. On starting his work there he announced, 'I come among you as a Protestant and Evangelical' (p. 53). Biblical presbyters outside the established Church recognised his stature: 'Spurgeon once called Ryle the best man in the Church of England' (p. 62).

Of the twelve chapters (arranged in 85 pages), perhaps the most valuable chapter is the eleventh, "A Great Legacy". In it Dr. Packer expounds 'six stellar excellences that I see in this great Puritan bishop' (p. 67). They are Ryle's enduring of evangelical disfavour, Ryle's practice of evangelical family life, Ryle's declaration of evangelical belief, Ryle's demonstration of the evangelical way to meditate on the Bible, Ryle's vindication of evangelical churchmanship, and Ryle's vision of evangelical vitality.

To Packer's appreciation of Ryle's ministry is appended the Bishop's own work—*Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*. In his thesis statement, Ryle finds that unbalanced theories of holiness teach things which are not according 'to the proportion of God's Word' (pp. 95, 100, 102, 104). Previously, for the 1979 edition of Ryle's book (published by Evangelical Press), Packer wrote a preface of six sides. But we must be grateful that he has taken the time to expand this introduction into a biography a century after Ryle's death.

Notwithstanding the clarity and passion of Ryle's writing, the precision of Dr. Packer's own words are worth the price of the whole book on their own (as could also be said for his masterly "Introductory Essay" for John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967]). Both Packer and Ryle are doctrinal and pastoral throughout. With access to such writers, the shortcomings of today's evangelicals may yet be rectified.

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AUGUSTUS TO CONSTANTINE

The Rise and Triumph of Christianity in the Roman World

Robert M. Grant (with new material by Margaret M. Mitchell)

Louisville, KY/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 xlii, 350pp
US\$29.95pb ISBN: 0-664-22772-4

This is a reprint of Professor Grant's 1970 book with a new foreword and notes which attempt to place it within twenty-first century scholarship along with a new reading list of the secondary literature intended to update the original bibliographies. It is a history of Christianity from its Roman origins in Roman-dominated Judea, its spread throughout the Roman world despite opposition, until it won the support of the first openly Christian emperor. According to Grant's 'Preface', this book 'attempts to co-ordinate Christian and Roman history and seeks to explain the course of Christian events in relation to what was going on in the empire'. In so doing, *Augustus to Constantine* gives fresh interpretations of New Testament passages and reveals new relationships between them and the secular literature of the era, drawing on both knowledge of ancient social realities and intellectual history. The book also provides readers with 'tools by which they can pursue their own critical questions' about the material in the book rather than relying on a modern author's judgements.

Grant's sources alone make this book invaluable. He draws on a vast array of acts and information that are little used or not cited by other writers. These are not the sorts of material that can be found easily or in collections but manifest that Grant has read widely in even obscure religious and secular Roman documents. For instance, he makes much use of ancient secular inscriptions extant today only in so large a diversity of scholarly journals that he must have spent months or years locating this material. He also cites papyri, the Mishnah and ancient coins. Furthermore, he brings in thoughts and references from a large number of scholarly journals. All this is in addition to his being well-versed in both early Christian and secular Roman authors.

Professor Grant provides new and penetrating insights from both the obscure and better-known extant material. Bringing in little-known evidence, he uncovers new facts, produces fresh insights, and draws new conclusions. *Augustus to Constantine* is eminently balanced in its treatment of the evidence. It gives even-handed treatment of the arguments on various issues from early sources, alludes

to methods of evaluating competing or contradictory documents, and relates one view and document to another. Grant is forthright in admitting gaps in the extant evidence, points out local variations in early Christian practice, and deals even with evidence that is contrary to his own position.

My chief complaint is that this volume is not a revision with complete revamping of the pages themselves but a mere reprinting that is not completely brought up-to-date by the addition of the 2004 material. The original volume (and therefore, the re-issue) contains an uncommonly large number of typographical errors which should have been corrected. Furthermore, the 2004 supplementary material fails to mention two or three translations of works cited that have been published since 1970. In addition, coverage of Masada has become outdated or at least open to debate since 1970.

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JOHN WYCLIF. *Myth and reality*

G. R. Evans

Oxford: Lion, 2005

320pp £20 hb

ISBN: 0-7459-5154-6

The ‘morning star of the reformation’ as the sixteenth-century friar and bishop John Bale called him, remains a strangely elusive figure. Lauded on many (if not all) sides as the ultimate author of English literary prose, English political and religious freedom and generally most things we now think of as ‘English’, the historical Wyclif has not had a major biography for three quarters of a century and almost nobody can tell you anything specific about him. As Dr. Evans points out, he did not die a memorable death, he never said anything which sticks in the mind, and none of his books has attracted a popular audience. What he is chiefly remembered for—the first English translation of the Bible—was not his work and it is unlikely that he wrote anything in his mother tongue. If the gap between his reported achievements and the reality is less wide than in the case of King Arthur or Robin Hood, it is still disturbingly greater than in any other would-be father of the English reformation.

Who exactly was John Wyclif and what did he do? As with many similar figures from the Middle Ages, we know very little about his background or

personal details, beyond the fact that he came from a large family in Yorkshire. Wyclifs crop up here and there throughout the fourteenth century, but it is uncertain how they were related to John (if indeed they were) and of course, he had no love life that we know about, so the biographical tidbits which lend colour to a narrative are hard to come by. On the other hand, we know a lot about fourteenth-century Oxford, the milieu in which Wyclif worked, so it is possible to recreate the atmosphere he breathed even when he himself remains somewhat elusive.

The is basically what Dr. Evans does—and does brilliantly—in this book. ‘Wyclif in context’ might even have been a better title, since it describes more accurately what she has written. With the mastery of an expert in the field, she takes us through the leading intellectual currents of the age, as well as the more humdrum realities of daily life in an Oxford college.

Wyclif must have been brilliant, or at least charming, because although he was not particularly well-connected in social terms, he was Master of Balliol while still in his thirties—no mean achievement. He attracted the notice of John of Gaunt, the effective ruler of England at the time, who used him to support his own political campaign against a rapacious papacy. It was a time when the emerging states of Western Europe were starting to flex their muscles against an over-powerful church, and Wyclif was clearly an ally of the state in this particular contest. That earned him the hatred of many of his fellow clerics, of course, and it is at least possible that they denounced him to the Roman authorities less because of his beliefs than because of his political position in the late 1370s.

Having said that, it remains true that Wyclif was not an ‘orthodox’ thinker by contemporary Roman standards. He advocated an ecclesiology rooted in the principle of *sola Scriptura*, and had little time for the canon law. His attitude towards the papacy and the church hierarchy, which was initially rather favourable, turned sour as he found himself under attack. He rejected transubstantiation, which was neither in the Bible nor in ancient church tradition, but did not accept the doctrine of predestination in anything like its classical Augustinian or Calvinist forms. Elements of reformation thought are thus present in his works, but the complete package is missing. However, as Dr. Evans points out, Wyclif’s ideas were constantly evolving under the pressure of

events, and it is possible that his thought did, in fact, move further than the surviving evidence indicates. Many of his draft manuscripts perished in 1410, when the University of Oxford officially burnt them, and had it not been for the prescience of some quick-witted Czechs, who grabbed what they could find and took it back home, we would know even less about him than we do. Jan Hus was undoubtedly indebted to his labours, but of course it is hard to untangle what Hus owed to Wyclif specifically and what he got from elsewhere (or thought up himself).

As far as the English Bible is concerned, Wyclif almost certainly had nothing to do with it, at least not directly. He was in favour of using English when that was possible, but whether he ever did so himself is unknown. Even his preaching was not ‘popular’ in the modern sense, being full of academic allusions which ordinary people could not possibly have understood. Nevertheless, a movement of translation and preaching in the vernacular sprang up soon after Wyclif’s death, and Lollardy, as this movement is known, claimed him as its inspiration. Lesser figures may have done most (if not all) of the work, but Wyclif received, and has retained, the credit for it. This is why Dr. Evans writes about him and not, for example, about John Purvey or William Sawtry.

A man like Wyclif must have had something about him which attracted this kind of reputation, but that something remains distressingly hard to pin down. Contemporaries who mention him are mostly hostile, though that is also a testimony to his power of attraction. He will doubtless always remain a somewhat mysterious figure, neither Catholic nor Reformed, but something else altogether—a medieval mind probing the foundations of his own social order, which by definition was God-given and eternal. If he were to reappear today he would probably be just as disconcerting as he was in the fourteenth century, though as Dr. Evans shrewdly points out, Oxford has rather a lot of people like that. Perhaps he could return to Balliol and be scarcely noticed—he is hard to imagine anywhere else.

The reality is less potent than the myth, but even so, it seems that Wyclif’s reputation is destined to endure. Perhaps the real reason for this is that things were on the move in late fourteenth-century England, and the human mind needs a person around whom to focus its conception of these developments. In that sense, Wyclif was the right man in the right place at the right time, and

thus has come to incarnate an age which no-one at the time, including him, could really understand.

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ST. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS. Selected Sermons (Volume 3)

Fathers of the Church Series 110

William P. Palardy, ed.

Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2005 xviii+372pp \$39.95hb

ISBN: 0-8132-0110-1

This volume is the latest in the commendable “Fathers of the Church” series, and completes the sermons of Peter Chrysologus, a fifth century bishop of Ravenna. Though currently obscure, Peter Chrysologus was the chief prelate of what was then the capital of the Western Roman Empire, and so his influence was much greater than most people today realise. His sermons give us a good insight into the way in which Christian teaching and practice was taking hold of the Roman world, and the third volume concentrates on the gospels and the liturgical cycle, bringing us immediately to the heart of our faith. What is particularly striking about these sermons is their pastoral sensitivity and depth, which allow them to transcend the context of their time and speak to a universal audience. The translation is fluent and generally devoid of archaisms or unassimilated aspects of ancient rhetorical style which would make the sermons sound stilted in English. It is always difficult to transcribe the spoken word and transfer an essentially oral text to the printed page without losing something of its power, but Mr. Palardy has tackled this difficulty extremely well and must be congratulated for bringing this little-known father of the church back into public view.

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