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## Book Reviews

### FROM PENTECOST TO PATMOS

**Craig L. Blomberg**

Nottingham: Apollos (IVP), 2006 577pp £19.99hb ISBN:978-1-84474-052-9

### LETTERS AND HOMILIES FOR HELLENIZED CHRISTIANS VOLUME 1

**Ben Witherington III**

Nottingham: Apollos (IVP), 2006 623pp £21.99hb ISBN:978-1-844-74-143-4

These two books have been put out by the same publisher at virtually the same time, and both are surveys of parts of the New Testament. Each of them is a sequel to other works which have gone before. Craig Blomberg has already published a highly successful volume on *Jesus and the Gospels*, to which this is the second and final installment, whereas Ben Witherington is engaged on a massive project to cover the entire New Testament. His current volume is the first of three which will deal with the Pastoral Epistles and the non-Pauline books grouped together at the end of the canon, which he sees as a mixture of letters and homilies written to both Hellenized and Jewish Christians.

The authors are both Evangelicals and are firmly committed to the authenticity of the writings they are discussing. This is especially significant in the area of the Pastoral Epistles, where Witherington in particular mounts a lengthy and impressive case for refusing to accept the view that they are post-Pauline productions. They are not necessarily or uniformly conservative in their conclusions—Blomberg, for example, is happy to put Revelation in the 90s rather than in the late 60s—but it is clear that they are equally determined to give the texts the right to speak for themselves and to be taken at face value as long as there are not compelling reasons to do otherwise.

Both volumes are well produced, comprehensive in their treatment and easy to read. Inevitably, Witherington's is much more detailed but Blomberg's is also very impressive in the amount of material which it manages to squeeze into an average-size volume. Both men are to be commended for this achievement, which only another author can properly appreciate. Blomberg has written what is essentially a student textbook, based on course notes and full of helpful diagrams to illustrate his points. He goes through Acts to Revelation paragraph

by paragraph (not strictly verse by verse!) pointing out the significance of each section, the difficulties and disagreements which have affected their interpretation and the relevance of the issues for the church today. He writes from a clearly evangelical perspective and does not hesitate to distinguish liberal from conservative views, but he does this in a thoroughly responsible manner and does not hesitate to point out that not all Evangelicals are equally conservative, just as not all others are necessarily 'liberal'. In an atmosphere where these terms tend to be bandied about with little reference to the facts, his exposition is to be welcomed and will be very useful indeed to students trying to grapple with the hermeneutical issues involved.

Witherington concentrates much more closely on the Greek text and its composition. His aim is to show the importance of rhetoric for the meaning of the New Testament and his book is full of very helpful references to other literature which illustrate his various points. Particularly useful are 'boxes' in which he develops certain themes more deeply, like the meaning of 'godliness' or the significance of saviour language as applied to God and/or Jesus. For those who want to go beyond the introductory level, particularly in Greek, this is a good place to begin.

The main limitation of both books is that they are relatively weak on theology. Blomberg pays more attention to this dimension than Witherington does, but his forays into the subject are generally unsatisfactory. For example, he seems determined to create a middle way between Calvinism and Arminianism by suggesting that particular biblical verses fully support neither (or partly support both, depending on one's point of view) but this comes across more as a desire to remain neutral in what has recently become a bitter struggle in some American circles than as a concern to get to the true meaning of the text. Blomberg clearly does not like controversy and prefers to sit on as many fences as possible, which is an appealing character trait but one which is bound to be unconvincing when applied to issues of deep disagreement.

The crunch question for both authors, and the one which reveals their true characters, is the feminist issue raised by 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Witherington has few doubts here. To his mind, the church has misread these verses and done a great injustice to women over the centuries, and he tries to support this belief by an appeal to the details of the text. The result is a painful over-analysis

which has him going to the point of claiming that the Greek verb *epitrepo* (allow) when used in the present tense means ‘I am not currently allowing’ rather than ‘I do not allow’ in a more permanent sense. This is special pleading of an embarrassing kind, which is clearly motivated by the author’s own predilection and not by the meaning of the text.

Blomberg is more honest here and accepts that the text itself is not favourable to feminist claims, but he quickly points out how polarized the debate has become and so he sits once more on the fence. He concludes that both sides in the debate should be humble and listen to what the other has to say, which is certainly true but does not answer the question! Nevertheless, on this issue at least, his approach is clearly preferable to Witherington’s, especially since Witherington dresses it up in deceptively impressive exegesis.

Blomberg’s book is also to be commended for containing discussion questions at the end of each chapter and a helpful bibliography. He also tries to find applications for the message of each biblical book which is very good in principle, even if occasionally it comes across somewhat strangely. For example, at the end of 2 Timothy he tells us how easy it can be for a Christian witness to decline and disappear, and then cites the churches Paul founded in what is now Turkey as an outstanding example of this. On p. 382 he says: ‘After more than thirteen hundred years of aggressive Muslim activity there, Christianity exists only in tiny pockets and by no means in every city in which Paul originally preached.’ Leaving aside the fact that some of those cities are now ruins, this is a misrepresentation of church history which should not go unchallenged. The Muslim Turks invaded Asia Minor in 1071 (less than a thousand years ago) and there were substantial Christian communities there until 1923 when they were forcibly removed to Greece. The picture is therefore more complicated than Blomberg allows, but that may be the price of oversimplification, which is difficult to avoid in a book like this one.

One the whole therefore, each of these books has a great deal to commend it and students of the New Testament at all levels will profit by reading and consulting them as occasion demands.

GERALD BRAY  
Cambridge

## THE DAWKINS DELUSION

**Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine**

**Alister McGrath with Joanna Collicutt McGrath**

London: SPCK, 2007      78pp      £7.99pb      ISBN: 978-0-281-05927-0

Richard Dawkins has a reputation as a creative thinker, trying to assess and explain human experience from a scientific perspective for the popular market. *The God Delusion* is his most recent publication on this topic, but it displays a surprising agenda: ‘If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down,’ he writes.

The gauntlet has been thrown down, and Alister McGrath (with expert input from Joanna Collicutt McGrath) takes it up. *The Dawkins Delusion* has been written as a response—partly to dignify those of Dawkin’s arguments which merit consideration with respect, and partly to expose those which need rebuttal if they are not to mislead his readers. So it is for an audience of two kinds: for Christians who want to know what to say to their friends who have read *The God Delusion*, but also for atheists whose acceptance of Dawkin’s guru status McGrath wishes to challenge.

But it seems that there is also a personal motivation: ‘When I read *The God Delusion* I was both saddened and troubled. How, I wondered, could such a gifted populariser of the natural sciences, who once had such a passionate concern for the objective analysis of evidence, turn into such an aggressive anti-religious propagandist, with an apparent disregard for evidence that was not favourable to his case? Why were the natural sciences being so abused in an attempt to advance atheist fundamentalism?’ This being the case, McGrath himself wonders whether there is any point in reasoned response. ‘Except that once I too was an atheist, and was awoken from my dogmatic slumbers through reading books that challenged my rapidly petrifying world view,’ he says.

For those who are not familiar with Alister McGrath, they will find in this book the incisive but accessible argument the rest of us have come to expect from him. As both a molecular biologist and a theologian he is ideally qualified to speak on the major themes of Dawkin’s book, and where he may lack expertise (in the detail of experimental psychology and neuroscience) he has seamlessly woven in contributions from Joanna Collicutt McGrath. This

collaboration highlights what possibly comes through as Dawkin's major failing—namely, preaching dogmatic conclusions in areas in which he has inadequate knowledge or understanding.

What we hear in *The Dawkins Delusion* is one side of a public debate. Reading it, one gathers a little more of the other side of the conversation than an eavesdropper on a telephone conversation, but we are left nevertheless as we read with the question, 'If Dawkins were listening now to this catalogue of mistakes, I wonder what he would say to that?' McGrath and Dawkins seem to have established a pattern of responsive publications. We may not have to wait long to see the response! In the meanwhile, I am inclined to risk reading *The God Delusion* with a much better grasp of the issues than I had before.

MARGARET HOBBS

Oakwood, London

### **OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: VOLUME 1 ISRAEL'S GOSPEL**

**John Goldingay**

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003 900pp £24.99hb ISBN: 9781842274965

### **OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY: VOLUME 2 ISRAEL'S FAITH**

**John Goldingay**

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006 891pp £24.99hb ISBN: 9781842274972

Writing this review is, I suppose, a little like writing a review of *The Lord of the Rings* before the publication of the third part, *The Return of the King*: the whole scope of the work is not on view, neither does the reviewer have the benefit of seeing what fruit repetition of the grand themes of the book brings. The first two volumes of John Goldingay's *Old Testament Theology—Israel's Gospel* and *Israel's Hope*, both 800+ page works in their own right—await completion and consummation by the publication of the third volume, *Israel's Life*. However, the daunting size of the works is overcome by Goldingay's friendly, even charming, style. He writes as one who has spent a lifetime of study in the Hebrew scriptures, with great authority; but he also writes as if he is sitting on his verandah in California in the late afternoon holding an iced tea. Goldingay writes Old Testament (he prefers the label 'First Testament') theology generated by Christian and evangelical convictions about Scripture. It is delightful to see that he does not fail to cross into the New Testament to

make clear his convictions about the Old. After all: isn't the New Testament the first work of 'Old Testament theology'? He is also convinced of the centrality of narrative for the project of biblical theology. This may make him 'postmodern'; and certainly he does show at many points the influence of Walter Brueggeman's magisterially postmodern (the paradox is deliberate!) *Theology of the Old Testament*; but it is also the case that this method is true to the material at hand. Thus, *Israel's Gospel* is an account of the Old Testament organised around the sequence of God's acts: creating, promising, delivering, etc., with the final chapter being an account of the sending of Jesus.

A highlight of the first volume as far as I was concerned was the Postscript—'Old Testament Theology and History'. While he gives small comfort to those who would read Genesis in a woodenly rigid way, he is unafraid of questioning some of the nostrums of academic biblical studies. As he puts it: 'Modern historical study has presupposed that we are in a better position to determine where the facts lie than the authors of premodern narratives were, as well as having the motivation to do that. The trouble is that the results of a historical approach to the First Testament narratives are disappointing....First, in the 2000s we know much less than we knew in 1900 or 1950 about the origin of most of the narratives' (p. 866). Speculation, as Goldingay shows, has repeatedly become confident assertion in one generation only to be exposed and overthrown in the next. And the real business—of asking 'what are these texts actually saying?' becomes further obscured.

In the second volume, Goldingay approaches the Old Testament from a more thematic perspective, covering God, Israel, sin, humanity and the world. The third projected volume will be more or less an account of Old Testament ethics and worship. If at the moment the series seems empty of an account of Israel's ritual practices and its devotion to torah, one assumes that this will form a significant part of the third volume. Of course, this lacuna at present leaves Goldingay's account of Christology a little underdone.

To my mind, every Christian pastor or theologian of whatever stripe ought to at least have Old Testament theology as a hobby—bearing in mind that Old Testament theologies as such have only been written in the last century or so. In the hands of a scholar committed to the authority and integrity of the text and to the unity of the whole Bible, 'OT theology' is a far more fruitful and

interesting approach to the Old Testament than reading commentaries on individual books. For one thing, it shows just what a complex—and rich—entity the Hebrew scriptures are.

MICHAEL P. JENSEN  
Oxford

## JUDGMENT AND JUSTIFICATION IN EARLY JUDAISM AND THE APOSTLE PAUL

**Chris VanLandingham**

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006 384pp \$24.99hb ISBN:978-1-56563-398-8

Everyone now knows that the appearance of E. P. Sanders' book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977 set the agenda for Pauline studies which continues to dominate scholarly discussion today. Sanders maintained that first-century Judaism held to what he called 'covenantal nomism', the belief that Israel had been elected by the free grace of God, apart from works, but that once in the covenant, Jews had to stay there by living in a way which demonstrated their entitlement to salvation. At the time, this was widely regarded as a denial of traditional Protestant interpretations of Judaism, according to which the latter was a religion of salvation by works, from which the Christian gospel has set us free by its proclamation of justification by faith alone. That in turn demanded a radical reappraisal of the apostle Paul and his message, which was no longer one of grace as opposed to works but of grace mediated by the law as opposed to grace mediated through Christ.

Opposition to Sanders has mainly concentrated on trying to demonstrate that the Judaism of Paul's time did indeed believe in salvation by works and had forgotten its origins in the free grace of God as that had been shown to Abraham. Dr. VanLandingham also disagrees with Sanders, but in a different way. As far as he is concerned, not only was Judaism a religion of salvation by works, the Pauline gospel was also! He goes through a large number of Jewish texts, taken from many different sources, in an attempt to demonstrate that the only way a Jew could ever become righteous was by obedience to the commands of God—election by grace did not come into it at all. He then attempts to show that Paul remained rooted in that tradition, but had discovered that the death of Christ had changed the conditions in which a believer had to operate.

Instead of trying to keep the law on his own, and inevitably failing to do so, the Christian was given the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This presence cleansed him from his previous sins, freed him from the need to sin and equipped him with the ability to obey the commandments of God. However, it was still perfectly possible for the believer in Christ to reject this gift and to fall away. The Last Judgment would be the moment at which his works would be revealed and assessed and, at that time, those who had failed to keep the law of God in the Spirit would be rejected and would not obtain the salvation promised to those who persevered to the end.

Much of Dr. VanLandingham's argument depends on the correct interpretation of particular Hebrew and Greek words, notably the Hebrew *mishpat* and the Greek *dikaio syne* and its cognates. The Hebrew word normally means 'judgement' and it is relatively easy for Dr. VanLandingham to show that it should not be translated 'justification', as it has been in a number of late Jewish texts. The Greek *dikaio syne* is a different matter. Dr. VanLandingham's contention is that it should always be translated 'righteousness' and never 'justification' and he uses that belief to claim that 'justification by faith' is not a New Testament concept.

However, it soon becomes apparent when we look at the texts to which he appeals, that the distinction which he is trying to make is somewhat artificial. Certainly there are cases where *dikaio syne* and related words are used in ways which are not 'forensic', as the traditional language of the divine courtroom in which the heavenly judge acquits the guilty sinner is called, but if the legal imagery can be overdrawn, this does not mean that the underlying principle is not present in the text. To be 'declared righteous' is to be justified, and if this is not done on the basis of human works, it must depend on what God has done for us.

Here there is no difference between the law and the gospel, but only because the law presents in types and shadows what the gospel reveals in its fullness. Christ became sin for us and paid the price of our guilt before God, so that we might be accepted in his sight and receive the gift of eternal life. No-one would disagree that the Christian must reveal the fruits of that new life in his behaviour, and even Luther stressed the necessity of good works done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The difference between him and Dr. VanLandingham is that for Luther,

such works were evidence of grace at work in a person's life, not attempts to stay on the right side of God and pass the test at the Last Judgement. At that point, even the finest Christian will have to confess that all his good deeds have earned him nothing, but this will not matter because the grace of Christ is sufficient for us to stand in the presence of God and be declared righteous in his sight, whether the word you want to use for this is 'acquittal' or not.

Having started with a well-founded suspicion that Sanders had misunderstood the Judaism of Paul's time, Dr. VanLandingham has gone to the other extreme and constructed a religion of salvation by works which applies just as much to us today as it did to Paul's contemporaries. It is a dangerous doctrine, and one which is not true to the New Testament text, but this book is one which forces us to rethink the issues in a fresh light, and for that reason it is to be welcomed. We need to be challenged if we are to be kept on our toes, and reminded of just how important this issue of justification is. Dr. VanLandingham has succeeded in showing us this, and although in the end we must part company with his interpretation, working through it is a stimulating and worthwhile exercise.

GERALD BRAY  
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**TOTALLY SUFFICIENT: The Bible and Christian Counselling**  
Ed Hindson & Howard Eyrich (eds.)

Fearn: Christian Focus, 2004 272pp £7.99pb ISBN: 978-1-85792-960-7

These twelve essays explore how the sufficiency of Scripture affects the practice of counselling. The authors espouse the Biblical Counselling movement's contention that this is an effective position for Christian professionals working in this and related disciplines. Their target is the kind of church that says it believes the Bible to be sufficient but in practice relies on secular models for pastoral work. Such churches deny the Bible's teaching that humanity cannot be understood apart from God: 'If we want to understand the nature and causes of a person's human difficulties, we need to understand the ways in which a person is unlike Christ in his or her values, aspirations, desires, thoughts, feelings, choices, attitudes, actions, and responses' (p. 27). The aim of Biblical Counselling is to treat the whole person in conformity with Scripture and these essays outline the applications to several fields of work.

Two important questions are raised by the sufficiency of Scripture in counselling. The first is how biblical truth relates to scientific theory, and the authors tackle head on the prevalent view among psychologists: ‘The *a priori* assumption that they can explain people truly without reference to God commits psychologists to a systematic error. Integrationists wash away or pay lip service to this antithesis; biblical counsellors [*sic*] restore the antithesis’ (p. 78). It is impossible to weave together elements of each kind of knowledge if they are antithetical, and instead the authors suggest that secular knowledge is only illustrative of truths taught by the Bible. Madtes and Hyndman’s insistence that the Bible is sufficient to direct biomedical research is too ambitious to be argued in a single chapter, but otherwise the points made by the Biblical Counselling movement are a welcome corrective to the church’s surrender to secular models in pastoral practice. A strong view of the sufficiency of Scripture must address the relationship between these two types of knowledge and these chapters begin to sketch out where the debate lies.

The second question crops up in the practical business of trying to decide what kind of treatment to seek. The sufficiency of Scripture does nothing to undermine the validity of science-based medicine: the dispute is on models of the mind. But if practitioners give more than lip service to the biblical teaching that whole people are integrated, body and soul, then counselling can address concrete situations. A couple of long case studies show how biblical counselling was able to resolve a situation that treatment with drugs would otherwise have only been able to stabilise. Positively they show how wise, biblical and patient counselling can bring healing through restoring a person’s relationships—not least with their Creator and Redeemer.

These chapters give a taster and raise some questions, which one assumes are dealt with at length in the authors’ books (which curiously are neither listed nor referred to). It is also curious that a book so completely set in the North American Christian scene should be published in the UK by Christian Focus. It is not that this sort of thing cannot be published in the US (P&R publish extensively on it). Perhaps it is that this debate is breaking out into the UK and this is a good thing if it leads churches to let the Bible speak to those whose hurt is in mind and soul, as well as in body.

ED MOLL  
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**SHY BUT NOT RETIRING: MEMOIRS****Eric Kemp**

London: Continuum, 2006 285pp £30.00hb ISBN: 978-0826480736

This is one of those unusual books which ought to be read by anyone who wants to understand the Church of England. It is also a volume which ought to be read by real Evangelicals for the insight it provides into the mature thinking of Catholics in the Church. Eric Kemp was Bishop of Chichester, and before that, Dean of Worcester and Chaplain of Exeter College Oxford. However such a bare summary gives no hint of the way in which he was involved in almost everything which was a matter of moment in the established Church for fifty years.

Commonly, he is thought of as the great expert in Canon Law (which he is) but that is a subject which most people feel to be esoteric. However Bishop Kemp was also deeply involved in relations with the Old Catholics. He knew the last and the present Pope. He worked with Evangelicals and many kinds of European Protestants in a variety of committees and visits. He chaired most of the Anglo-Catholic Societies and was involved in almost all of them. He is the only Bishop in recent times who has appointed a conservative Evangelical as his Suffragan—and that in itself shows the wide sympathies of this remarkable and too self-effacing man.

JOHN PEARCE  
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**CHRIST TRIUMPHANT AND OTHER HYMNS****Michael Saward**

Jubilate Hymns Ltd. £0.00 ISBN: 0-95055-899-0

Hymns in today's church are often a source of contention. They can be valued for the comfort of their familiarity, for the strength of their theology, and their general lack of repetition (though it is interesting to see the educative use Michael Saward frequently makes of repeated or only slightly changed phrases in his verses). On the other hand, they are denigrated for theological incomprehensibility, antiquated forms of English, and lack of emotional involvement. This book is more than a one-author hymn book. It builds on the strengths of the tradition while providing an answer to such criticisms. It also

offers fascinating glimpses into the methods and motivation of the writer, and Michael Baughen's fulsome foreword points to some of the unique theological characteristics of Michael Saward's hymn writing.

The author defines a hymn as 'a series of connected verses, usually addressed in worship to one or all of the persons of the Holy Trinity, logically developing a Christian theme, usually in metrical and rhyming form, to a tune capable of being sung by a congregation'. For him, the purpose of a hymn has as its first goal 'to express truth as it is grounded in Holy Scripture and to do so in language which, while theological, carries contemporary force and lifts the heart and mind of the singing congregation to God, as it touches them at the deepest level of their personality'. He aims for objective content, though not ignoring the responsive element: 'A good hymn should teach truth, and not merely leave the singer feeling warmed up.'

And so to the hymns themselves. There are many Trinitarian; many also Psalm paraphrases; most are completely original, but some are useful re-writes of ancient hymns. With each hymn there are snippets of biographical insights to the inspirations, privileges and trials of a hymn-writer, and there are also suggestions of his preferred tunes. Michael Saward only ever wrote one tune himself, though some of his hymns subsequently had new tunes composed for them. The merit of using old tunes is that in either a traditional congregation or one unused to many hymns they may not find a new hymn too unfamiliar. The drawback is the distraction of well known words or associations with the tune, and of this I was particularly conscious in one instance. In his tune choices I feel he is sometimes optimistic about the musical agility of a congregation (Clonmel's octave leaps and top F would have our congregation complaining), and I was baffled by attempts to fit No. 20 (which is 77 88) to tune Rittersberk (which is 66 66). One wonders whether there is a publication error here to match the 'Lie-conceiving wind of heaven' on page 4?

Being hyper-critical one could complain of the odd hymn in which over-dense theology was followed by the reverse in what felt like an attempt to make up the rhyme or metre, and I think a thematic rather than an alphabetical arrangement would have made the book more useful as a resource. Nevertheless, I found myself singing along to tunes which came into my head as I read and looking forward to seeking out the suggested tunes where the words particularly

struck me. A number actually had the tune score alongside, though more would have to be looked up in one of the original publications (helpfully listed).

One should not look a gift horse in the mouth: thanks to the generosity of the Pratt Green Trust and the Jubilate Trust this book is available free (£1 p & p to UK; US\$3.60) from Michael Saward at 6 Discovery Walk, London E1W 2JG. For a person responsible for choosing music for congregational singing, there is a stimulating selection of hymns here, many of which deserve to be more widely used, and some also seeing publication in this volume for the first time. Michael Saward was 75 this year: I wish him and his hymns many happy returns!

MARGARET HOBBS  
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## **THROUGH THE BIBLE THROUGH THE YEAR**

### **Daily reflections from Genesis to Revelation**

**John Stott**

Oxford: Candle (Lion), 2006 432pp £12.99 ISBN: 978-1-85985-658-1

The Church of England's most esteemed evangelical teacher has put us in his debt once more. Using the church calendar as a framework, the author offers daily readings in weekly (undated) clusters from the Old Testament (for September to December), the Gospels (for Christmas to Pentecost) and from Acts to Revelation (for May to August). Respectively, these emphasise the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

Perhaps it was inevitable that we would be offered daily readings from his pen but those expecting mere excerpts from his previous works will be surprised. Crisp tailor-made meditations stretch the mind, rebuke the wayward and train the novice. These model expositions will surely renew love for God and encourage every hungry heart. Intriguing aspects of the work include verses from different Bible versions (e.g. NRSV, NASV, REB), a great breadth of quotations (from Fathers, Reformers and other commentators), wide use of Greek words (in the last third of the book), and a gloss finish for every page. There are rebukes for homosexual activity (p. 28), abortion (p. 65), emphasis on the triumph of the cross at the expense of its atonement (p. 268), the language of second blessing (p. 364), and a literal view of Revelation (p. 421). The author's view of feminism is so nuanced as to be unclear to this reviewer (pp. 26, 374).

The imperfections are largely in format. The language is American English (in spelling, abbreviation and punctuation), the verses quoted at the top of the pages overuse hyphens, and there are only two footnotes in the whole book (pp. 179, 290). Perhaps the end-of-page term ‘For further reading’ ought to be the more directive ‘Reading’ lest the Scripture be seen as optional to the words of the commentator above. This publication is not over-priced. Read it and refresh your vision and ministry.

JONATHAN FRAIS

Bexhill

## **IS THE REFORMATION OVER? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism**

**Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom**

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005 265pp £13.99pb ISBN: 1 84227 387 6

A prominent English evangelical leader recently urged a group of us to be clear about the gospel and courageous about gospel proclamation. Nothing exceptional here; but in a passing comment he stressed the need to convey the gospel in today’s pluralistic settings boldly so that our Muslim friends, atheist friends and Roman Catholic friends might repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The inclusion of Roman Catholics in this group struck at least one listener as somewhat archaic if not problematic. Haven’t Evangelicals moved beyond this understanding of Roman Catholicism? Evidently, not all have. At the same time, should Evangelicals change their understanding? Are there justifiable theological reasons for Evangelicals to regard Roman Catholics suspiciously? Are Reformation issues continuing points of difference? Arguably, one explanation for a perceived acceptance and graciousness towards Roman Catholics from some Evangelicals is, in part, the changes within Evangelicalism itself. But then how does one tally this with protestant Evangelical luminaries such as Jim Packer, to whom the book is dedicated and who features prominently in the book as one Evangelical who is committed to better Catholic–Evangelical understanding? Surely, Packer cannot be legitimately accused of going ‘soft’ (although, as Noll and Nystrom point out, some have tried).

Mark Noll, who teaches at Wheaton College (one of the flagship Evangelical educational institutions in the US) and Carolyn Nystrom have co-laboured to produce what is both a survey of Roman Catholic–Evangelical dialogues over

the past 50 years as well as a theological introduction to Roman Catholic theology for today's Evangelical. The book is worthwhile for these twin foci alone. Clearly, both are required: to answer the book's central question one needs to know what contemporary official Roman Catholic doctrine is and how it differs from what Evangelicals have assumed is Catholic teaching. This is where the history of Catholic–Evangelical dialogue helps.

The book approaches the thorny issue of the continued relevance of the Reformation by starting with an historical survey of the significant changes in mutual perception among Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. Change abounds. Here Noll and Nystrom highlight the significance of Vatican II, the Billy Graham crusades, the influence of certain Evangelical publishing houses whose publications have been accepted and appreciated by Roman Catholic laity and clergy, the use of Campus Crusade evangelistic literature by some Roman Catholic student groups, evangelistic courses like Alpha, the importance of the Catholic-Charismatic renewal movement, and, notably, the theological resonance noticed in the writings of the late Pope John Paul II by some Evangelicals. Of major importance are the three Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) meetings, led by notables like Packer, Richard John Neuhaus and Charles Colson. Each meeting produced important theological statements, delineating points of agreement, disagreement and a desire to continue discussion.

It is here where readers will see the good will of both Roman Catholic and Evangelical participants. At the same time, it is also evident, according to Noll and Nystrom's exposition of the ECT publications, just how far apart official Roman Catholic teaching and traditional Evangelical and Reformed theology are. Herein are both the frustration and the benefit of this book: for with all the good will and charity extended (which are surely commendable) by both sides, there remains a fixed divide. In short, theologically the Reformation is not over—and the issues which understanding Evangelical readers anticipate as problematic are precisely the outstanding problems. Does this mean Noll and Nystrom's book is unnecessary? On the contrary, this is an important book and for five reasons.

First, Noll and Nystrom expound the official Roman Catholic teaching contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (published in English in 1994). This exposition is salutary for two reasons. First, it helps Evangelical readers (and possibly Roman Catholic readers?) appreciate official Roman

Catholic teaching rather than hearsay, the occasional wild Protestant overstatement or the Church History survey course that one might have had years ago. The Catechism is remarkably full of Scripture and this helps break down stereotypes. At the end, however, the inescapable conclusion stands: over major and central theological issues official Roman Catholic teaching and historic, Protestant, Reformed and Evangelical theology differ. Yet, at least the differences are seen in official teaching rather than false caricatures.

Second, Noll and Nystrom provide considerable references and an invaluable annotated bibliographic section. Perhaps readers will pass over this material but we ought to appreciate the invaluable work the authors offer to those who wish to further knowledgeable debate, study and discussion. Third, ironically, Noll and Nystrom reveal some of the theological confusion and muddle-headedness in contemporary Evangelicalism. It is hard to determine if the authors intentionally aimed to do this; the end result, however, is sobering. One of the questions close to the centre of this book is what is Evangelicalism? Because this term no longer (if ever?) is clearly and uniformly defined the authors regularly have to qualify their comments and conclusions. They make the following prediction in passing but with astuteness, ‘The opening of Catholic-evangelical dialogue, in short, will almost certainly intensify Protestant debates among themselves’ (p. 227). One might hope for Evangelicals to correct their own theological confusion before correcting their brother’s possible errors.

Fourth, Noll and Nystrom put their finger on the pulse of the issue. Both during the Reformation and subsequently, the issue has never been one of abstract and arcane theological debate but on the nature of the church. Whatever else one reads in the Catholic-Evangelical debate—and certainly one is impressed with the increasing mutual understanding and dialogue—the critical differences remain. The authors state that the central issue is found in basic differences over the nature of the church.

‘In sum, the central difference that continues to separate evangelicals and Catholics is not Scripture, justification by faith, the pope, Mary, the sacraments, or clerical celibacy—though the central issue is reflected in differences on these matters—but the nature of the church. For Catholics, the visible, properly constituted, and hierarchically governed church is the principal God-ordained agent for the work of apostolic ministry. For

evangelicals, the church is the body of Christ made up of all those who have responded to the apostolic proclamation of the God-given offer of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ' (p. 237).

Fifth, Noll and Nystrom model irenic debate. This is no small contribution. In an age when there exists too much polarisation as well as too much romanticising, too much vitriol as well as too much naïveté, and too much derogation as well as too much superficiality, Noll and Nystrom's work is a welcome model. Not all will like their conclusions—be they Roman Catholic or Evangelical—but all of us could learn how to communicate better. Perhaps we might be more careful to qualify what we mean when we include Roman Catholics with Muslims, atheists and other opponents of the gospel. The Reformation is not over, the issues remain; but the challenge includes finding a godly way not simply to defend and explain our side's position but to commend the grace, power and majesty of the one Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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## THE AGE OF REASON

Meic Pearse

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker (Monarch), 2006 457pp £14.99pb

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This is volume five of what looks set to be an outstanding series published by Baker Books (USA) and by Monarch (Lion) in the UK. The series is written from a broadly Evangelical perspective, which in practice means that conservative Protestant groups (and their particular concerns) get more and better treatment than is usual in church histories. It certainly does not imply that the volumes are propaganda for one point of view. Meic Pearse covers what is usually known as the 'age of reason', the period which began in the late sixteenth century and came to a great crescendo in the French revolution. In many ways it is still with us and Dr. Pearse argues that its greatest effects were not felt until after the period covered in this volume, but there is no doubt that we have to understand it if we are to make sense of the modern world.

Dr. Pearse shows how medieval Christendom survived the Reformation remarkably well, only to succumb to new forces which were inimical to

Christianity even when they were not openly opposed to it. The emergence of secular states created a situation in which the church would either have to be subordinated to those states or leave the political realm altogether. In the period described by this book (1570-1789) both these things happened. In some places there was a dramatic swing from one extreme to the other (France is the classic example) but elsewhere things were more restrained. England ended up with a state church subordinate to political interests but it also had a dissenting tradition which was so detached from the body politic that some of its members left the country to found new religious commonwealths in North America.

Obviously a book of this kind cannot cover everything, but Dr. Pearse is remarkably broad in his range. Of particular interest is the way in which he delves into the far corners of the Christian world, giving considerable space to Latin America, the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Far East. He does not neglect theological issues, though he tends to believe that they were mostly rationalisations of decisions taken on other grounds. Presbyterians, for example, became what they were because they could not make the existing episcopal system work to their advantage; only later did they come up with the view that presbyteral government was more faithful to the New Testament than anything else, and so on. In dealing with the different branches of Protestantism, he is remarkably fair in that he criticises them all equally, often with biting sarcasm which can be irritating at times and will certainly put some readers off. The book's style is punchy and will keep the reader's attention, though it must be said that Dr. Pearse occasionally lapses into propaganda of his own. He strongly dislikes any form of state church and says so in the most uncompromising terms, even though this makes some of the story he has to tell hard to understand. The Church of England undoubtedly had its problems in the eighteenth century, but it was also the seedbed of revival, and even Dr. Pearse has to admit that the Puritan dissenters came to a bad end. Had it not been for faithful members of the established church there would have been no Evangelical revival, not even in Wales! The Church of England must have had something going for it and he manages to admit this, but lack of sympathy makes it impossible for him to analyse this convincingly. Another blind spot is Ireland, where Dr. Pearse repeats a left-wing view which could easily have been penned by Sinn Fein/IRA. There has been a great deal of excellent work done on Irish religious history in recent years that has painted a very different picture, but Dr. Pearse does not seem to be aware of it—or has chosen to ignore

it if he is. This is a pity because too many people, especially in America, have both a deep interest in and a dangerously distorted view of the Irish situation which this book does nothing to challenge.

On the other hand, it would be almost impossible to find another volume which gives such a detailed picture of what was going on in places like Russia and Brazil, not to mention the Ottoman Empire where Christians were severely discriminated against and occasionally persecuted by a hostile government but where they managed to survive and even flourish in spite of it all. The Anabaptists are put firmly in their place—commended for their belief in a gathered church but strongly criticised for almost everything else. Dr. Pearse shows that they were only distantly linked to the first English Baptists and in this respect flies in the face of much popular opinion in the USA. As the book was written with an American audience in mind, this is no bad thing. Fortunately it is also written by a Welshman, so the European side of things is not distorted or misrepresented as it so often is in American books.

This book fills a great gap in most people's knowledge of church history and it deserves to become a standard work in university and college courses on the subject. Once the author's bias is recognised and taken into count, it is a remarkably informed and informative portrait of a little-known and much-misunderstood period. Dr. Pearse is to be congratulated for this and it must be hoped that his work will set a new standard for subsequent treatments of the subject.

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## THE LETTERS OF 2 PETER AND JUDE

**Peter H. Davids**

Nottingham: Apollos, 2006 348pp £21.99hb ISBN: 978-1-84474-151-9

The author grants that one could write a commentary on these two short letters 'simply because they are there'—he would prefer to convince readers that 2 Peter and Jude are 'fascinating and make a significant contribution to the New Testament' (p. 1). This commentary succeeds admirably in that stated aim.

Davids' writing is commended by both its pastoral insight and historical sensitivity. The former is seen in comments such as on the love of God in Jude

v. 1, ‘One aspect of pastoral care is to make this objective reality an experiential reality’ (p. 38). The latter is displayed in a precise description of the various ‘lords’ that demanded fealty in New Testament times (p. 45), pertinent use of sources such as Josephus (p. 66), a stimulating discussion of Balaam in rabbinic literature (pp. 253-6) and a careful exploration of authorship issues. Davids grants that formidable arguments against traditional authorship have been arrayed by scholars. He does an excellent job of warning those who accept such arguments that they may be going beyond the bounds of what historical investigation can actually demonstrate (p. 149). Distinctive emphases in the epistles’ concluding comments are admirably summarised by laying out various letters side by side (p. 313). Throughout the commentary, one senses that the fruits of detailed scholarship are being crystalised in such a way that the meaning of the text is illumined. Short cuts are avoided and riches are mined.

This commentary should be referred to when preaching on 2 Peter or Jude. Perhaps it should be more widely used—pastors and preachers would do well to read this commentary through cover to cover for their own personal edification. Doing so would give much spiritual benefit and surely encourage the delivery of some substantive, mature expositions.

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