

## Book Reviews

### WHEN THE DARKNESS WILL NOT LIFT

John Piper

Nottingham: IVP, 2007 79pp £4.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-184-7

A small readable book, which began life as Piper's larger volume *When I don't Desire God: How to fight for Joy*, this book is full of practical help for those struggling with, or counselling, those with depression. Whilst Piper is careful to explain at the outset that a rigorous grasp of the differences between justification and sanctification are essential to living a life of joy, illustrating this point with John Bunyan's joyful triumph over despair, he is careful to stress that despite this, for some sincere believers, joy in the Lord remains out of reach. At one time or another, depression is the experience of most believers.

Piper is pragmatic in his diagnosis of the causes of melancholic and depressive tendencies among believers, and his five middle chapters focus on either a cause of spiritual darkness and/or the fuel of its condition. These are (1) physical factors (tiredness, overstrain, illnesses), (2) a feeling that we are alone in our darkness and/or impatience in our darkness, (3) idleness, (4) unconfessed sin and (5) self absorption. In each chapter, Piper peppers his practical challenges on how we might help someone suffering with spiritual darkness with scriptural references, wisdom from other theologians and examples from the lives of ordinary (and not-so-ordinary) Christians. His advice to those who are helping those impatient in the darkness, who feel alone and that they are not really a child of God is particularly refreshing and challenging. He first advises that one must tell (and presumably show) that that you love that person and will not let them go, so that they can 'feel God's keeping presence, which they may not feel in another way'. Only then can one remind them of theological truths or their own earlier affirmations of the Lordship of Christ. In his practical advice to encourage out of idleness or self-absorption, Piper is careful not to over-burden the already beleaguered believer, but provides simple, small steps as to how one might journey to that place of joy once again.

Piper retains the realism that we would expect from him. He concludes, drawing on an example of the life of hymn writer William Cowper, who was faithfully and devotedly pastored by John Newton through more than twenty

years of depression. Despite Newton's years of ministry and faithful correspondence, Cowper never saw the darkness lift in his life, and died in the midst of his depression. However Newton's ministry to him was not wasted, as Cowper left in his wake a wealth of hymns which have encouraged generations of Christians to trust in the Lord who 'plants his footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm'. The challenge of ministering to Christians in darkness is that of love: Will we love as Newton loved, as Jesus loves, with faithfulness and devotion? Will we continue to love even where we struggle to understand and see little fruit? Will we trust in the Lord who moves in mysterious ways through our own, and others, darkness?

SUSANNA SANLON  
Cambridge

## **A LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE: JESMOND PARISH CHURCH, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE**

**Alan Munden**

Newcastle upon Tyne: Clayton Publications, 2006 286 pp £13.99hb  
ISBN 0 9507592 1 X

Jesmond Parish Church in Newcastle upon Tyne (affectionately known as JPC) is one of the largest Anglican churches in Britain today. Its vibrant and Bible-rooted congregation has grown dramatically over the last thirty years under the prophetic leadership of David Holloway. Through its major contribution to the Christian Institute (founded in 1990) and Reform (founded in 1993), JPC has been of national importance in upholding biblical morality and reinvigorating evangelicalism. Yet things have not always been this way. For much of the twentieth century, JPC was better known for its musical tradition and its freemasonry than its biblical teaching. The story is attractively told by Alan Munden, who has had connections with the church since he arrived as minister for students in 1976. The content of the book is good, but so is the production quality—hard back, illustrated, glossy, all for a snip at £13.99—outstanding value.

Munden has published widely on the history of Anglican evangelicalism and already has other local studies to his credit, on Christ Church, Coventry, and St. Luke's Church, Cheltenham. The present book is by far the most substantial

and builds upon a brief history of JPC from his own pen back in 1981. The tale begins with the pioneering evangelical ministry in Newcastle of Robert Wasney (mentored at Cambridge by the great Charles Simeon) and Richard Clayton, in whose memory the church was founded in 1861. The original aim of JPC was to perpetuate ‘the pure principles of the Gospel of Christ’, and to reflect traditional Anglicanism by being ‘scriptural, Evangelical, Protestant, national and episcopal’ (p. 47). Yet within a generation or two those high hopes had been obscured.

The sixth incumbent, James Inskip (Bishop of Barking from 1919) threw his weight behind Liberal Evangelicalism and became a figurehead of the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement (AEGM). His successors brought JPC firmly under the Liberal Evangelical banner, and there was a steady erosion of the founders’ vision. The pulpit was lowered just after the First World War, a symbolic architectural change which Munden interprets as representing a shift from the supreme authority of Scripture to the liberal ‘quest for the elusive mind of Christ’ (p. 166). The church also hosted the prestigious Jesmond Conference, which ran from 1924 to 1951, the annual focus of AEGM in the north of England. Munden’s astute discussion of this ‘bland’ movement (p. 11) is one of the highlights of the book, and he is not afraid to draw parallels with the present day, seeing ‘open evangelicalism’ as a revival of Liberal Evangelicalism in new garb (p. 164).

By the end of the 1950s, JPC still had something of a ‘name’ in the city and the diocese but ‘lacked spiritual vitality and a vibrant teaching ministry’. It was ‘hardly evangelical’—‘low church’ only in the sense of hostile to ritualism, but not particularly concerned with the Bible (p. 193). Munden rightly warns that the freemasonry which had taken root, even amongst the clergy, ‘is not some harmless diversion but is completely at variance with biblical Christianity’ (p182). Such men are ‘always resistant’ to the gospel message (p204). Dramatic change took place when Roger Frith arrived as incumbent in 1960. Under his ministry there was what Holloway calls a ‘back-door revival’ – many people left! However as biblical preaching returned, conversions took place, large numbers of students flocked in, and the ground was prepared on which Holloway has built.

Munden’s study is recommended for anyone concerned with the present progress of Anglican evangelicalism. Through his local focus, he sheds vital

light on developments within the wider movement over the last two centuries, its successes and failures. There are crucial lessons here for today, and warnings about the hazards of maintaining a consistent gospel ministry in the local church from generation to generation.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

Oxford

## **THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN: NEW TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGY FOR AN EMERGING CHURCH**

**Andrew Perriman**

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005 272 pp £14.99pb ISBN:978-1-84227-299-2

The Emerging Church movement is trying to forge a new paradigm in order to help the Gospel make sense to a post-modern culture. The project includes a conscious attempt to change from one organising principle to another: “We are dismantling a piece of equipment that we suspect has not been properly assembled” (p. 8), and the new criterion of truth is ‘narrative coherence’.

What is attractive is the genuine desire to read the New Testament through authentic contemporary eyes and to tell a coherent story. In studying eschatology this means letting the writers tell their story, acknowledging that the way they speak shows us something about the way they experienced the world. Experience matters because it ‘is at all times more important than abstract theology’ (p. 14). When Jesus and his followers described their hope in terms borrowed from Old Testament writings, they seemed to be interpreting these passages in the light of their experience. For instance when Jesus picks up the abomination saying in Matthew 24:15 (and parallel passages), he ‘borrows it, exploiting its affective power, the story around it, and perhaps a certain intrinsic openness to another future, in order to characterise the coming judgement as a comparable event and, most importantly, to assimilate the new narrative into the old’ (p. 8). The Emerging Church prefers to think of itself as part of a grand narrative not a static metaphor: ‘within this narrative I think that we will then find a grounding for the sort of earthy, holistic, creational notions of community, spirituality, and mission that characterise the thinking of the emerging church.’ (p. 15).

In crude terms, if New Testament eschatology is the stories the early church told themselves to make sense of their world, then we can tell ourselves (different) stories to make sense of our (different) world—as long as they have ‘narrative coherence’. What emerges (excuse the pun) is that New Testament eschatology is not about the end of our world but about their hope in the light of their world experience. Understood like this the coming of the Son of Man is seen to have meant the vindication of Jesus first in the destruction of Jerusalem, and second in the establishment of the church.

What the New Testament writers saw ‘was not an end to history but a transition, a redefinition, a restructuring ... the emergence of a movement of renewal within Israel’ (p. 225). And salvation is ‘the response of God to a particular set of concrete circumstances’ (p. 227) rather than his universal action once for all time. In conclusion ‘the “Day of the Lord” is never the end of the world—it is always a day of reckoning, a day of rescue, and a day of renewal, in the midst of history’ (pp. 237-8 emphasis original).

In many ways this book illustrates the best and the worst of the Emerging Church: this is a sincere attempt to engage with culture and scholarship in that it leans heavily on the scholarly work of N. T. Wright. Because it explicitly avoids any detailed exegesis (too lumbering for postmoderns, p. 14), it becomes if anything even more self-centred than the modernism it wants to replace. Those who want to learn about the first-century church will do well to read N. T. Wright (whose prose is significantly more limpid). Readers who fancy a peek at how some of the Emergent Church does its thinking may like to look at this volume.

ED MOLL

Wembdon, Bridgwater

## **SIGNS AND WONDERS THEN AND NOW: MIRACLE-WORKING, COMMISSIONING AND DISCIPLESHIP**

**Keith J. Hacking**

Leicester: Apollos, 2006 301pp £14.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-149-6

The Third Wave of Pentecostal Charismatic Renewal (PCR) comprises an estimated 8 million believers in Europe alone. The movement is significant across

all denominations in the UK. While the Second Wave of PCR gave rise to the house church movement and laid emphasis on baptism in the Spirit and the use of charismatic gifts in the church, the Third Wave looks for signs and wonders in evangelism. John Wimber and others first brought the movement to prominence in the 1980s, and the Third Wave claims to reproduce the experience of the early church and to stand as heirs of Jesus' paradigmatic ministry: 'In terms of the contemporary application of their theology of signs and wonders, the Third Wave believe that Christians are inheritors of the ministry of Jesus and that this is clearly reflected in the experience and praxis of the early church' (p. 46).

The way the Third Wave gather and use the New Testament evidence to support such a claim raises the kinds of hermeneutical questions that Hacking has sought to address in this work. The root of the Third Wave's 'hermeneutical ambivalence' (p. 24) is an approach to the New Testament and especially to the gospels which homogenizes (*sic*) the evidence. Because the link between Jesus' earthly ministry and contemporary practice is so central to Third Wave claims, Hacking examines the presentation of miracle-working, commissioning (especially sending the twelve and seventy(-two) disciples) and discipleship in the writings of the three synoptic evangelists.

In each case a patient and critical examination of the evidence in its literary and theological context demonstrates that the gospels do not support the Third Wave contention, and that each synoptic author highlights key themes of discipleship by their treatment of the tradition. Jesus' command to 'make disciples' (Matt. 28:19) has to be understood in the light of everything that Matthew's gospel teaches about discipleship and while the theme of sharing Jesus' authority is present it is subordinated to the larger theme of doing God's will. Mark's gospel portrays discipleship in both positive and negative light. Signs and wonders are not integral to his paradigm for following Jesus but are given to authenticate the initial evangelistic mission of the church.

Hacking states, 'In the end, the model for discipleship that Mark's readers are left with—then and now—is one where, despite weakness, misunderstanding and failure, the disciples are called again by the risen Jesus to continue to follow him in the way' (p. 153). Luke's account is significant for his inclusion of Jesus' sending the seventy(-two), which Third Wave commentators rely on to argue that authority to heal and exorcise is normative for Christians today.

A more critical reading shows that Luke is foreshadowing the model of Acts in which individuals—rather than the whole church—are commissioned by Jesus for particular tasks. Luke’s portrayal of miracle-working in Acts confirms that the miracles’ function is salvation-historical rather than paradigmatic.

Hacking has shown that the Third Wave’s ‘hermeneutical ambivalence’ results in a poor appreciation of miracle-working, commissioning and discipleship in the Synoptics and Acts, that the New Testament evidence does not support the Third Wave’s claim, and that the consequent expectation in their churches of contemporary signs and wonders lacks biblical warrant. Although this is a revised doctoral thesis, Hacking’s scholarship serves the church by exposing such shallow foundations. He also shows how a critical reading of these texts throws light on what each evangelist does emphasise about following Jesus.

ED MOLL

Wembdon, Bridgewater

**FANNING THE FLAME: The Story of Ridley Hall, Cambridge:  
Volume 3, 1951-2001**

**Michael H. Botting**

Cambridge: Ridley Hall Council, 2006 291pp £12.00pb ISBN:1-85174-627-7

**RESEARCH FOR THE ACADEMY AND THE CHURCH: Tyndale  
House and Fellowship: The First Sixty Years**

**T. A. Noble**

Leicester: IVP, 2006 336pp £19.99hb ISBN: 978-1-84474-095-6

Two evangelical institutions in Cambridge, only a short walk from each other down Sidgwick Avenue, have both recently produced histories covering the last five or six decades. Those years, from the Second World War to the present day, have witnessed remarkable changes within the evangelical movement in England, in which both Ridley Hall and Tyndale House have played a significant part. Yet readers will look here in vain for any serious wrestling with the theological issues at stake.

Ridley Hall now has the unique privilege amongst the theological colleges of the Church of England of having not just one or two, but three volumes

chronicling its history. Frederick W. B. Bullock published the first two volumes in 1941 and 1953, totalling a massive eight hundred pages of minute detail. Michael Botting brings the story up to date, but unfortunately has not entirely thrown off the style of his predecessor. The book is not a synthesised history, more a chronological compilation of events, drawn from council minutes, common room proceedings and annual newsletters. Trivia dominates—sports matches, birthday parties, fire drill, telegrams, weddings, details of visiting speakers, and even of Ridley’s car parking facilities! Of course for the happy couples involved, weddings are of top significance, but must we be told about them here? A few of the reminiscences are certainly amusing, and stories of student pranks and school-boy humour abound. But this volume is unlikely to draw a readership beyond Old Ridleians, because it neglects the wider context of evangelical theological education.

Botting’s chronicle is an ‘authorised’ history, published in the name of the Hall Council. He is on first name terms with the principals—Cyril Bowles, for example, is ‘Cyril’ throughout. The disadvantage of this approach is, of course, that we hear little from those who were out of step with the hierarchy. Occasionally there are small signs—like the bizarre case in 1977 of a group of students calling themselves the ‘Campaign for Real Evangelicals’ who ran away with the new stoles of the Ridley staff, perturbed by a loss of the Hall’s Protestant credentials.

There are also hints of the conflict in the early 1990s between Principal Hugo de Waal and a minority of conservative students, but Botting brushes the issues discreetly under the carpet. He seems an innocent at times of the tensions within the modern evangelical movement. He describes the Ridley regime as ‘essentially evangelical’ (p. 47), labelling the first five principals since the 1950s ‘liberal evangelical’ and the sixth ‘conservative and open’. But there is no sustained assessment of what these terms mean or their theological implications.

The best chapter, because the most focused and most theological, is that concerning Francis Palmer who began as principal in September 1971 but whose resignation was requested by the student common room in November by 28 votes to two. In January 1972 the council refused to back him, and the man they had just appointed was gone by Easter! It was a deeply unhappy



period in Ridley's history, with staff not on speaking terms and implicitly preaching against each other in chapel, and here Botting is refreshingly frank. Shortly afterwards the ecumenical Cambridge Theological Federation was inaugurated, to which it was said that Westcott House brought a concern for liturgy and worship, Wesley House a concern for social justice and Ridley Hall a concern for evangelism. Botting praises the Federation for adding 'richness and depth' to theological training in Cambridge (p. 235), but fails to ask any questions about its long-term implications for evangelicalism.

Noble's history of Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship, in contrast, is excellent history, painstakingly investigated and professionally written. It traces the influence of the residential library and research institute from the earliest days of its predecessor, the Biblical Research Committee of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, founded in 1938. John Stott has said that the resurgence of British evangelicalism is 'due more than anything else to the recovery of evangelical, biblical scholarship', and we owe Noble thanks for placing this history on record. Here we meet a glittering array of evangelical dignitaries who influenced a generation—Douglas Johnson, John Wenham, G.T. Manley, Donald Wiseman, Alan Stibbs, Leon Morris, Norman Anderson, Derek Kidner, Fred Bruce, Howard Marshall, Alan Millard and others. Noble rightly proclaims that 'Only through the biblical and theological teaching which is the fruit of scholarship is the church built solidly with gold and silver and precious stones and not with wood and hay and stubble'. He insists: 'No other institution anywhere in the world has provided such a service to the growth of evangelical Christian faith' (pp. 14-15).

Unfortunately, like the Ridley Hall chronicle, Noble's account is encumbered by needless detail. Much of the narrative charts 'the patient, dogged pursuit of committee work' (p. 13) and is a sober reminder that evangelical scholarship is often inglorious, involving more monotonous meetings than groundbreaking monographs. Acknowledging that some parts of his book are dull, Noble invites us to 'skip the mundane details' (p. 14), a strange health warning for an author to attach to his own work! There are brief glimmers of the theological undercurrents within the Tyndale fraternity, though once again we wish they were more clearly displayed and analysed. An early source of tension was Tyndale House's decision to focus exclusively upon 'first-class, front-line, objective, technical and linguistic biblical research'. Jim Packer argued that

theological studies must be an organic whole and that it was wrong to neglect historical theology and church history. Similarly Martyn Lloyd-Jones argued that Tyndale House should not breed specialist scholars but train men to expound the Scriptures, giving them a broad grasp of biblical and systematic theology. Yet Packer and Lloyd-Jones fought losing battles. Tyndale House was afraid of becoming ‘merely a theological debating society’, perhaps believing that ‘the Bible unites, theology divides’, and scarred by early feuds over five-point Calvinism.

The major issue at stake in the work of Tyndale House and the Tyndale Fellowship is whether it is possible to affirm both the infallibility of Scripture (unlike ‘liberal evangelicals’) and the validity of biblical criticism (unlike ‘fundamentalists’). Decades of wrestling with this question have led, Noble suggests, to ‘a truly creative tension’, still unresolved in the present (p. 13). From the late 1970s deep distress was expressed about doctrinal drift within the Tyndale Fellowship. Some senior members began to publish theories about the Bible apparently inconsistent with their commitment to the IVF doctrinal basis. Soon observers were asking, Is there any longer a distinctively evangelical approach to the Bible? Has ‘unfettered scholarship’ and ‘academic freedom’ triumphed over evangelical faith, or can they be held together? Noble hints at these controversies and some cautious lessons to be learned from them. His instructive history is well worth reading by all concerned for the multiplication of faithful and fruitful evangelical teaching.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE  
Eynsham

## SIX HUNDRED NEW CHURCHES

### The Church Building Commission 1818-1856

M. H. Port

Reading: Spire Books, 2006 386pp £49.95hb ISBN: 9781904965084

This handsome and lavishly illustrated book, in large quarto, is the full and authoritative account of one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of the established Church of England. Following the Industrial Revolution, and the migration of the rural poor to the towns, disrupting the whole pattern of society, the church was faced with vastly increased urban populations, for

whom no ecclesiastical provision existed. In this crisis, Parliament voted a million pounds, and later a further half-million, to build additional churches and to provide them with ministers. It was a truly remarkable response.

The way the work was carried out has frequently been criticised. The budget for a new church was tight, and church architecture was going through a period of transition. The most suitable site for a new church was not always available. Moreover, those who had lost the habit of church-going since they left their old home were not easily persuaded to resume it in a new one. But the author is an enthusiast, keen to answer the fashionable chorus of detraction, and if learning was a complete answer, he would have it in abundance. It has to be admitted that some of the new churches were unattractive, but this is not true of them all. Also, the author's literary style is somewhat lacking in elegance. But what he has produced is a very worthwhile monument to a great Christian enterprise, and he deserves our respect and gratitude.

ROGER BECKWITH  
Oxford

## **THE BIBLICAL CANON: ITS ORIGIN, TRANSMISSION, AND AUTHORITY**

**Lee Martin McDonald**

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007    546pp    £16.99    \$29.95pb  
ISBN: 978-1-56563-925-6

The author, president of a Baptist seminary in Canada, states the purpose of his book is 'to provide a more readable and not too technical guide to the origins of the biblical canon as well as offer some understanding of the major issues involved in canonical research today'. He answers the questions 'Why did some ancient books make it into our Bibles, and others did not?' 'Why did it take the church so long (centuries in fact) to recognize its canon of normative Scriptures?' Repeatedly throughout this monograph McDonald is concerned with disproving the misconception of many modern-day Christians that Jesus and his apostles possessed and handed on to the church a definitive and closed canon of Scriptures. According to McDonald, this book is not directed to academics or the 'critical scholarly community' but to students (especially those in seminaries), inquisitive laypersons, and practising parish clergy.

McDonald believes that canonization was a gradual process rooted in the mundane practice of individual congregations' using some books, and not others which purported to be Scripture, on the criterion that they found them useful in public worship and for ascertaining God's will in their particular situations. He asserts that grassroots Christians in some areas in certain time periods found some books suitable or valuable for these purposes but other believers did not so consider them at other times and places. This explains, says McDonald, why there were considerable variations during the first six Christian centuries, and accounts for why some books were admitted to the canon comparatively later, and some books in earlier canons later lost their authoritative (canonical) status. He addresses common modern assumptions about canon formation, and reveals that the biblical canon is very much debated in twenty-first century academia.

McDonald displays an exhaustive grasp of the Talmuds and Jewish literature at the turn of the era, early Christian events and trends, and in the classics, as well as modern monographs and journal articles on his subject. His use of Greek and Roman sources is not just in occasional quotations but exhibits an intensive and extensive mastery of the ancient secular literature. McDonald provides more and fuller descriptions of important concepts than do other authors of his genre, e.g. 'defile the hands', 'codex', 'textual criticism'. Even his footnotes contain a wealth of material valuable for self-directed students.

McDonald incorporates tables of parallels, quotations and allusions between Bible verses and non-canonical literature; lists of ancient canons of the Bible; and explanations, elucidations and references valuable for self-directed research. Granted, he borrows many of these from other monographs, but he reproduces them entire rather than merely indicating where they can be found. This feature is especially helpful to some laypersons without easy access to a theological library. *The Biblical Canon* thus provides the services of many books in one. For this reason it is well worth buying. I say 'buy' rather than 'borrow from a library' because an interested inquirer will refer to these valuable features so often as to find it necessary always to have a copy near at hand.

DAVID W. T. BRATTSTON  
Nova Scotia, Canada

## A NEW SONG FOR AN OLD WORLD: MUSICAL THOUGHT IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Calvin R. Stapert

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 232pp £9.99pb ISBN: 978-0-8028-3219-1

Patristic studies and musicology are odd bedfellows. Few would immediately associate the early church fathers with song and dance. Indeed the fathers themselves might be surprised by the publication of this book, because they had little to say on the subject. Amongst their massive extant corpus, no theological treatise is dedicated to music save Augustine's *De Musica*, a unique exception. Nevertheless, there are brief references scattered through their writings, and now a recently-retired professor of music from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan has collected the fragments together. The particular focus is upon Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Augustine and, of course, Ambrose, the 'father of Western hymnody'.

Unfortunately the book is thin on content and its conclusions are entirely predictable. They leave us often wanting to cry out in irony, 'Quelle surprise!' The fathers, we learn, were 'uniformly vehement' in their polemic against the music of pagan culture (p. 131), even Ambrose. They stood against the ecstatic, orgiastic rites of the mystery religions, and were not too pleased either by drunken revelry, frenzied dancing, flagellation, mutilation and adultery. In fact these theologians much preferred psalms, canticles and explicitly Christian hymns which built up the church. Rather than reject all music outright, they valued it as a great gift of God, and knew the evangelistic and didactic power of song. These are facts we could have guessed before we opened the book and the analysis is superficial.

Stapert observes that those of us in the West live in a society similar in decadence to the later Roman Empire, and therefore can learn from the fathers' attitudes to music and culture. He emphasizes the power of songs to corrupt or edify and quotes approvingly Plato's dictum, 'Let me make the songs of a nation and I won't care who makes its laws.' But then Stapert takes an unwarranted jump to his major conclusion, a protest at the so-called 'inculturation' of worship. This, he argues, is a dangerous idea because the church will not grow if it adopts the music of pagan culture. The key hinge of the argument, however, is missing.

What if the relationship between words and tunes can be broken? Can godly words be put to pagan tunes with good effect? Were the Primitive Methodists and the Salvation Army wrong to think that pop songs can be redeemed from their pagan context, and re-written, for the glory of God? This is a question of key relevance for the modern church, but the fathers do not touch upon it, so cannot help us here much. Stapert is on shaky ground when he claims them as allies in his campaign against ‘inculturation’. The book’s conclusion says more, perhaps, about its author’s taste in music than about patristic theology.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE  
Oxford

## TAKING THE LONG VIEW: THREE AND A HALF DECADES OF GENERAL SYNOD

Colin Buchanan

London: Church House Publishing, 2006    336pp    £22.50hb  
ISBN: 978-0-7151-4098-7

Colin Buchanan has been one of the great figures on the General Synod of the Church of England. Ceaseless in his campaigning energy, incisive in his critique of foolish policies and proposals, quick-witted and entertaining on his feet, he brought a sense of decisive purpose to Synod’s cogitations. Because of his high-speed activities and multi-competence he was once described in his youth as ‘a hurricane’ and ‘an amazing cross between Thomas Cranmer and the Bionic Man’ (Church of England Newspaper, 19 January 1979). By the time he retired from Synod in July 2004 he had served for 29 of its 34 years of existence, and attended about eighty groups of sessions. He is a self-confessed ‘synodical enthusiast’ and proclaims: ‘The truth is, I loved it—and revelled in Christian vision-forming, and argument on the way’ (pp. 6-7). Yet sometimes it was a love-hate relationship and Buchanan is frank about his frustrations, chastising Synod’s ‘institutional irrationality and purblindness’ (p. 225).

This is a personal insider account of the ‘cut and thrust’ of General Synod’s life. Buchanan aims at ‘accurate journalism’ (p1), with a well-chosen motto: *veni, dixi, scripsi* (p. vii). But he makes not pretence at an objective record. The mood is impassioned and adversarial, and Buchanan reveals his hunger still to be engaged in the forefront of the battle. The themes selected match his own

particular interests—liturgical reform, ecumenism (especially with Methodists and Roman Catholics), theological colleges and courses (he was once principal of St John's, Nottingham), the ordination of women, racism (he was once bishop of Aston and then Woolwich, both multi-ethnic areas), the Anglican Communion, political structures, even the Single Transferable Vote (he is president of the Electoral Reform Society).

The relationship between church and state has been one of his major concerns, as shown by *Cut the Connection* (1994), and he concludes that the establishment of the Church of England is 'not only archaic but incredible and, as Erastian, arguably heretical' (p. 228).

This book is a vital reference tool for the recent history of the Church of England. Although filled with synodical technicalities, speeches, resolutions and committees, it is a handy introduction to official debates since the 1960s and the current state of play. Many will benefit from reading it cover to cover (which should be obligatory for every member of General Synod), others will find their bearings on particular themes by dipping into the relevant chapters. Buchanan explicitly affirms that his proactive role within Synod has been to seek a more biblical Church of England. His stand against the errors of Anglo-Catholicism and Roman Catholicism has been especially important. Despite many defeats along the way, overall he is positive about the synodical enterprise, arguing that the wheels of General Synod turn, however slowly, in the right direction.

We are left, by the end of the book, wanting to interrogate the bishop further. For example, what about the undeniable progress of liberalism in Synod since 1970? And what about evangelical divisions in Synod? Developments which to one evangelical seem a gain, to another seem a loss. There is little hint of such liberal ascendancy or intra-evangelical tensions in this chronicle. Likewise, we hoped for a more detailed theological defence of why evangelicals should get involved in synodical structures in the first place—forty years after the 1967 Keele Congress, the wisdom of this policy is not self-evident and needs explication. Buchanan is well placed to offer an apologia for ecclesiastical politics, where 'give and take', even compromise, is a reality which alarms evangelical idealists. Has General Synod in the long run been a bane or a blessing to the Church of England?

Readers will have to judge for themselves, but this ‘long view’ gives us a valuable breadth of perspective. What is certain is that without Colin Buchanan’s contribution to Anglican politics over the last generation, evangelicals would be in a weaker position than they are today.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE  
Oxford

## **EARLY CHRISTIAN GREEK AND LATIN LITERATURE:**

### **A Literary History**

**Volume 1: From Paul to the Age of Constantine**

**Volume 2: From the Council of Nicaea to the Beginning of  
the Medieval Period**

**Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli; Matthew J. O’Connell (trans.)**  
Peabody, Massachusetts, USA: Hendrickson, 2005 1189pp \$99.95hb set  
ISBN: 1-56563-606-6

This study of Christian Greek and Latin literature from its beginnings to the early seventh century AD is based in the conviction that ‘the birth and development of Christianity gave rise to new forms of literary communication that were adapted to new institutions in relation to which they were to function’. This study is not a history of theology or of the Christian religion but of the two literatures as entities in themselves and considers the history of such literature a specialised discipline in itself. Confined to those two languages, it does not treat of Christian literature in Syriac, Coptic, etc.

This is a survey-with-commentaries like standard Bible commentaries but sometimes discusses relevant biblical and extra-biblical background literature. At important points it gives information on the secular cultures, thought and psychologies of the periods, summarises the contents of many of the Christian writings, deals with modern scholarly differences of opinion, and outlines various erudite theories about some of them.

This contribution to the recent emergence of Italian scholarship in translating and studying early Christian documents displays a wide grasp of the literature, both as a whole and in the details of several works. At points it exhibits an intimate knowledge of both individual works and the others within an author’s



corpus, along with the ability to see a pattern among them. Attention to detail picks up elements not mentioned in some patrologies even though these details were known in their day. Moreschini and Norelli often arrange material in an order different from other scholars, which provides new and sometimes better insights into the ancient literature.

The work's main weakness is the utter lack of an index of subjects or proper names, which is particularly disadvantageous because (1) not all works discussed in the text are listed in the 'Table of Contents', and (2) they are grouped by various methods, which necessitates searching throughout the entire 'Table' and even then never being sure whether one has located all the material on a document. The authors' discussions are very uneven: some works are discussed at great length while others are given only two or three sentences, and some only a mere title.

Substantiation of the authors' statements leaves much to be desired. There are irritating references to recent discoveries of documents without giving enough bibliographic information to help find them in published sources. Also irritating and baffling are references to the hypotheses, views and comments of modern scholars without references to where they can be found. These are compounded by a lack of indexes.

Despite the authors' statement that this work was written for 'nonspecialists desirous of gaining a familiarity with this Christian literature', a previous acquaintance with the writings and their environments is necessary. A person already conversant with the field—but not a novice—can spot and adjust for the work's many errors or contradictions of generally-accepted facts and dates, and what I hope are typographical errors. These flaws may be no more than a failure to qualify their relevant statements as hypothetical or controversial.

In all, this work is helpful for information about modern scholarly debates, less so about the original texts themselves. It will enable experienced scholars to exercise their minds and be aware of alternate approaches in the discipline, and will serve as a refresher for them.

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**THROUGH WESTERN EYES****Robert Letham**

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The ecumenical movement of the twentieth century has produced some interesting results, but few are as intriguing as the rapprochement between the Western Reformed tradition and the Eastern Orthodox churches. Few people now realise it, but in some ways this is actually the rediscovery of a relationship which was alive and well in the early seventeenth century. As Dr. Letham points out, there was a Calvinist patriarch of Constantinople (Cyril Lucaris), who is widely recognised as the most brilliant theologian to have occupied that see since the Turkish conquest in 1453. Before going to Constantinople, Lucaris was patriarch of Alexandria, and it was in that capacity that he gave the Codex Alexandrinus to the English ambassador as a token of his esteem.

For a variety of reasons, the warm relations which existed at that time cooled off and disappeared as time went on, so that by 1900 neither side knew much about the other. The Russian revolution and modern travel have changed all that however, as has the co-existence of every form of Christianity in the United States. There have now been a series of official conversations between the Orthodox and some Reformed, though the latter have not been typical of the tradition they are supposed to represent. Reformed theologians attracted to Eastern Orthodoxy have initiated discussions, with the result that a degree of agreement has been reached which does not reflect the true position of the Reformed churches.

In the light of this unsatisfactory situation, Dr. Letham has taken it upon himself to engage with the Orthodox in serious and sustained dialogue. His book is neatly divided into two sections, the first of which is mainly historical and the second of which is thematic. In some ways the two traditions are not strictly comparable. The Orthodox go back to the earliest days of Christianity and see themselves as the direct heirs of the New Testament church. The Reformed, on the other hand, are clearly a product of the sixteenth-century break-up of the Western church and their theology makes sense primarily in that context.

Because of this, it is extremely easy for one side to misrepresent the other, and Dr. Letham bends over backwards to avoid this. Indeed, his exposition of the Eastern church and its beliefs is so fair and irenic that some readers will probably think he has converted to it. His willingness to see the best in icons and in Orthodox devotion to Mary makes him say things which would sound extremely odd if the dialogue partner was Rome! But since Reformed–Orthodox relations have none of the history attached to the Protestant–Catholic divide, opinions which would be unmentionable in the latter context can be expressed dispassionately. This is most refreshing, but Protestant readers who are sensitive to such matters must be advised to persevere with Dr. Letham and not give up on him too quickly!

For all his openness towards the East, Dr. Letham is by no means uncritical in his observations, and it is precisely because his basic sympathy for Orthodoxy is so strong that his objections to it carry more weight. In particular, he regrets the Orthodox tendency to exalt the visual over the aural, putting the veneration of icons ahead of preaching the Word. He also believes that the Orthodox have misunderstood certain Reformed doctrines, particularly those linked to election and predestination, which has led them to denounce a caricature of what the latter really teach. An additional complication has been the strong influence of Gregory Palamas, the fourteenth-century archbishop of Thessalonica, whose mystical theology has been revived in modern Orthodoxy. Whether this revival is true to Palamas himself is a question that Dr. Letham does not address, but he recognises that it has turned the Orthodox in an anti-Augustinian direction which is not faithful to the Eastern theological tradition of earlier times. He is also unsure of where Orthodoxy will go once it faces the full impact of Western liberal theology, something from which it has been relatively well protected until recently.

The truth seems to be that Russian thinkers of the revolutionary era recovered Palamas and recycled his teaching to suit the existentialist currents of that time. Orthodoxy has been more subtly Westernised than most people realise and for that reason it has been able to appeal to people in the West who have been influenced by similar patterns of thought. Nor is this a new phenomenon. Dr. Letham does not mention it, but seventeenth-century Orthodoxy was heavily influenced by Jesuit scholasticism and had become quite Western in some respects. The Russians of a century ago were reacting against that as much as

anything else, and in the process they have reinvented a Byzantine past which is only partly faithful to historical fact.

One of the difficulties facing Protestants in a dialogue with the Orthodox is that they approach the subject very differently. We are used to being self-critical, and Dr. Letham never spares his own tradition when he thinks it deserved to be censured. He is quite prepared to tell his Reformed readers how far they have departed from their own heritage and to call them back to a faithfulness which is often exemplified in Orthodoxy. In particular, the liturgy of the Eastern church is much more biblical and reverent than anything readily available in the West and there is a great deal that we can learn from it. Sometimes though, it must be said that Dr. Letham takes his enthusiasm a little too far. For example, he points out that the Eastern churches worship in the language of the people, unlike Rome (until very recently). Unfortunately, this is really only a half truth. In Greece, the Orthodox churches use the ancient language, not the modern one, and in the Slavic countries it is Old Church Slavonic that dominates, which not many people understand. The result is that the Eastern churches often do not use the true language of the people in prayer, whilst claiming that they do!

It is hard to get this kind of message across to the Orthodox because they are much less self-critical than we are. If they were as ready to learn from others as Dr. Letham is, reunion might be more advanced than it is. But however great the goodwill may be, the barriers to a genuine reconciliation are formidable, as Dr. Letham points out. The heart of the matter is that West and East have different mentalities which overlap and can interact in creative ways, but which cannot easily merge into one. This becomes painfully clear in discussions about the Trinity, where the weaknesses of each tradition can be exposed without producing the key to creating a common doctrine.

Nevertheless, conversations will continue and Dr. Letham's book is probably the best one there is from a Reformed perspective. It should be in the library of every pastor and theologian and consulted whenever questions relating to the eastern church and our links with its tradition arise.

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