

## Book Reviews

### THE CHURCH'S BIBLE: ISAIAH

Robert Louis Wilken (ed.)

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 590pp £24.99hb ISBN: 978-0-8028-2581-0

This is third volume to have appeared in the series *The Church's Bible*, which is the Eerdmans equivalent of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture published by IVP (USA). As a series, it differs from the ACCS in that it has fewer (but usually longer) selections and includes medieval writers as well. Moreover, unlike the ACCS, it makes no attempt to cover every verse of the biblical text and sometimes whole chapters are omitted, presumably because the editor has concluded that the ancients had nothing significant to say about them.

It is probably also fair to say that the ACCS is geared to the needs of students, pastors and preachers whereas it would seem that *The Church's Bible* has a less well-defined audience in mind. Many of the selections will be of great interest to scholars who might not otherwise be aware of them, but the most likely market will probably be among those who look to the fathers of the church for devotional guidance. Certainly many of the texts translated in this volume lend themselves to spiritual reflection and readers will be challenged and rewarded by reflecting on them.

The translation is very well done and the material is clearly presented. Within each chapter the texts are presented in chronological order, though there is little attempt to follow the thought of any one church father in a systematic way. There are numerous passages taken from Origen and Augustine, for example, but readers will get little idea of what either of those great writers thought about Isaiah as a whole. Nor will they find it easy to place later commentators in a tradition of interpretation reaching back into the second century. Given that novelty was considered a vice in antiquity, this is a serious gap and compromises the book's value for scholars.

One interesting feature is that the text of Isaiah is from a new translation of the Septuagint which many readers will not have seen before. The Septuagint was the most widely used Old Testament text in the ancient world, but it was discarded by Jerome, who preferred the Hebrew text as a more reliable guide

for his Latin translation. This edition takes account of that fact, as the selection from Jerome's commentary on Isaiah 8 (for example) makes clear. Particularly important are the introductory chapters, which explain that the fathers of the church and their medieval successors understood the Old Testament in prophetic terms, and give us a clear grasp of their hermeneutical principles. We are also given a good overview of the different types of literature from which this anthology has been drawn. The texts used range from theological treatises to sermons, from letters to liturgies. Many of them are discursive in style and only a few can be said to have been commentary material in the modern sense of the term.

The volume comes with a good set of indexes and each chapter starts with an explanatory preface that explains its content and significance for the early church. These prefaces should certainly be read before looking at particular selections, since they put everything in context and make it easier for non-specialists to enter into the thought world of the ancients.

But although these additions are very helpful, it must be said that *The Church's Bible* is less user-friendly than ACCS and therefore less likely to be used by pastors and preachers in sermon preparation and the like. Having said that, it is eye-opening to read extensive passages by men like Bernard of Clairvaux and realise how contemporary they often seem. We are constantly being reminded that the church is a fellowship of the saints of every age when we hear the echoes of our own faith in the thoughts of those who lived so long ago. For that alone, this book is worth its very modest price, and reading it will refresh and delight everyone who feels a particular attraction to the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

GERALD BRAY  
Cambridge

**ENGLISH HYPOTHETICAL UNIVERSALISM:  
John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology  
Jonathan D. Moore**

Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007 324pp £19.99pb ISBN: 978-0-8028-2057-0

In this thoroughly researched and clearly written work, Jonathan Moore sets out to rectify the lack of attention paid to the theology of John Preston.

Preston (1587-1628) developed theologically within the Elizabethan Calvinistic Puritanism so strongly influenced by William Perkins. An experimental predestinarian, he rose to prominence as an able preacher and sharp thinker ministering from influential pulpits in London, Cambridge and at court. Many of the rigorous Calvinists of the time saw him as the natural successor to Perkins. Moore styles him a 'conforming reformer'. Seemingly he worked himself into an early grave.

It has usually been assumed that Preston was a Perkinite through and through. Moore proves (conclusively in this reviewer's mind) that, while he may once have been, by the mid 1620s he was not. After a brief biographical chapter and forty pages outlining his heritage in Elizabethan Puritanism, Preston's theology is expounded by looking in turn at his understanding of the divine decree, the extent of the atonement and the nature of the gospel call. This is followed by an account of the York House Conference of 1626. In the final chapter Moore shows that Archbishop Ussher was the influence behind Preston's (and John Davenant's) theological development beyond Elizabethan Puritanism.

There is little in Preston's theology of the divine decree and predestination which would have disturbed William Perkins. Preston espoused a high-octane predestinarianism, and throughout his ministry he was a formidable opponent of Arminianism. However, at some point in the last decade of his life he settled on a view of universal redemption. The sacrificial and intercessory work of Christ as priest are separated. The decree of election is removed from the (universal) propitiatory sacrifice and is solely lodged in his (limited) intercession. Thus the efficacy of Christ's death is found in Christ's intercession alone, and not in redemption itself. Preston believed, therefore, that the death of Christ is truly and really ineffectual in the face of unbelief.

Naturally, universal redemption had repercussions for understanding the nature of the gospel call. Preston was particularly sensitive to the charge that the Reformed system bred passivity. So although still opposed to Arminianism and in his writings clear about election, he genuinely appealed to the reprobate. He never explicitly states that Christ died in a special way for the elect.

The chapter describing the events of the York House Conference can only be described as gripping as we see Preston tested under pressure. Preston had been

enlisted by the rigorous Calvinists to argue their case, and after hesitating he agreed. But his sponsors were deeply disappointed by his performance. Of course, Preston's view of the atonement had moved on by this time.

These debates, in whatever generation, are often hindered by overlooking two things. First, that even the strictest particularist holds that there are significant benefits of Christ's death beyond the elect alone, and, second, that in Leviticus sacrificial activity is not limited to the substitutionary death alone, but include the sprinkling of the blood and entering the Most Holy Place.

What Moore has uncovered is a rich vein of Reformed theology in Jacobean England, which on the one hand vehemently rejected Arminianism, but on the other moved away from the strict Calvinism of Perkins. Moreover, even within this vein there were significant differences (e.g. Davenant keeps Christ's priestly work united, but introduces different intentions for different people). Any Calvinistic consensus against Arminianism was far from monochrome.

The whole book tellingly exposes the weaknesses and mistakes of other scholars, with R. T. Kendall suffering devastating criticism of his doctoral dissertation. Importantly for understanding the general climate of Jacobean England and some of the underlying reasons for the civil war, Nicholas Tyacke is also found wanting in his analysis of a Calvinistic consensus. However, Moore's claim that Carl Trueman shows Ussher to be a rigorous particularist is unfounded given the reference cited, but it is certainly interesting to be told at the same time that Ussher was not the author of *A Body of Divinity* (pp. 178-9)! On a few occasions the reader needs some basic theological Latin, and some prior knowledge of the era and its disputes.

The historical debates covered offer insight for other debates within evangelicalism. Three examples are: the necessary connection between the doctrine of penal substitution and limited atonement; the objectivity of the covenant and the role of the sacraments; and the nature of the prelapsarian covenant of works.

This is an extremely fair book. (There is not a hint of the author's own view until p. 206.) It offers much grist to the mill for those seeking to find a consistent theological system which includes universal redemption but is not

Arminian or, for that matter, Amyraldian, but strict Calvinists will (needfully perhaps) learn to be more careful and precise in their critique of any Reformed version of universal redemption. Whatever one concludes on these questions today, religion in Jacobean England must now be understood in the light of this work.

PAUL DARLINGTON  
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**JUSTIFIED IN CHRIST**     **God's plan for us in justification**  
**K. Scott Oliphint, ed**

Fearn: Mentor, 2007     309pp     £11.99pb     ISBN: 978-1-84550-246-1

**BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT**     **Paul and the order of salvation**  
**Richard B. Gaffin, Jr**

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006     114pp     £8.99pb     ISBN: 1-84227-418-X

Both of these books are products of Westminster Theological Seminary and both treat the same overall theme—justification by faith and its place in Paul's theology. No-one familiar with recent trends in New Testament scholarship will be unaware of what is called the 'new perspective on Paul', an approach to the Apostle's writings which wants to situate them in their Jewish context and get away from the traditional Reformation emphasis on salvation by faith as opposed to works. The general contention of scholars who adopt that approach is that the classical Protestant understanding of justification is foreign to the New Testament, and especially to the apostle Paul, who regarded Judaism as a religion of grace just as much as Christianity is.

The aim of these books is to point out that what the proponents of the new perspective regard as classical Protestant teaching on this subject is wrong and that they have not understood what they are rejecting. They also contend that the solutions proposed by proponents of the new perspective are inadequate to do justice to the true teaching of Scripture on this subject.

The main line of argument is that it is a mistake to believe that the Reformers ever thought of justification by faith as the centre of Paul's theology. If Paul's thought can be said to have a centre, it is not to be found there, but in the deeper concept of union with Christ. Only those who have been spiritually

joined to the Son of God have been justified, because only they have died and risen again with the Saviour. Moreover, it is also true to say that this justification is not fully accomplished, because it is only at the last judgement that we shall finally be pronounced guiltless, because our sins will all have been pardoned by the blood of the Lamb.

In this way, the authors of these books show that the proponents of the new perspective are not as far from traditional Reformed thinking as they may have imagined. At the same time however, the men of Westminster Theological Seminary also want to insist that salvation is a personal thing which every individual must receive. It is not enough to belong to a community of faith; belief is something that each individual must share and be accountable for. The Protestant doctrine of justification is therefore both broader than its critics have imagined and more focussed than they would like it to be.

Dr. Gaffin's book is a development of lectures originally given at Oak Hill College in London, and much of what it says is echoed in the longer volume subsequently put out by him and his colleagues. Coming as they do from WTS, they are all concerned to uphold the Westminster Confession of Faith and demonstrate its coherence with the teaching of Scripture. They distance themselves from Lutheranism, which they regard as being closer to the caricature attacked by the adherents of the new perspective, as well as from Roman Catholicism and every form of liberalism. At times, some of the contributors lapse into a philosophical jargon which will grate on the ears of non-specialists and make them wonder whether what the authors are contending for is truly biblical, but there is no doubt that they have made a good case for their position. In particular, it is refreshing to see how Dr. Gaffin uses the Pastoral Epistles and books like Ephesians and Colossians to defend his view of Paul.

He reminds us that these epistles have taken a back seat in much modern discussion because of doubts about their Pauline authorship, and that their clear statements about justification have sometimes been seen as a deviation from the purer, more primitive teaching of the Apostle himself. He then goes on to demonstrate that there is no logical reason to adopt such a position which leaves unexplained how the church's teaching could have evolved so far from the Apostle's intentions in less than a generation. By restoring them to

their rightful place alongside the other Pauline writings, Dr. Gaffin shows the unity and breadth of the Apostle's teaching in all its many-sided splendour.

The Westminster symposium ranges more broadly than the New Testament, encompassing the thought of the great Reformers and reaching out to deal with contemporary concerns. There is a welcome call from Dr. J. S. Carson for more doctrinal preaching, so that today's churchgoers can get a deeper understanding of the implications of their faith. Dr. W. Edgar tackles the feminist question and points out just how far feminist thought can be from the gospel. The symposium concludes with a long appendix, which is a reprint of the late John Murray's important work, *The imputation of Adam's sin*. Dr. Murray had a formative influence on most of the men who have contributed to this volume, and there can be no doubt of the relevance of his monograph on the subject of sin, both for the debate about justification and for the Christian life in general.

The major defect of both these books, but especially of Dr. Gaffin's, is the very poor style in which they are written. Commas are overworked and used in the wrong places, making it difficult for the reader to grasp what the flow of thought really is. In some cases, whole sentences are defective and do not make sense as they stand. Most probably the books are transcripts of lectures which have not taken sufficient account of the differences between the oral and the written medium. This is a pity because it will obstruct the reader's enjoyment and possibly lead to misunderstanding at various points. The authors would be well advised to ensure that their work is thoroughly proof-read and corrected before being published again, so that the content of what they have to say may be more effectively communicated to the intended audience.

GERALD BRAY  
Cambridge

## THE ANGLICAN FORMULARIES AND HOLY SCRIPTURE: REFORMED CATHOLICISM AND BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

Peter Toon

Bishopstone, Herefordshire: Brynmill Press, 2006    64pp    £2.40pb  
ISBN: 0-907839-92-7

The basic thesis of this short book is that Anglican doctrine is and ought to be grounded in the classic Anglican Formularies: the *Book of Common Prayer*,

the Ordinal, and the Thirty-nine Articles, together with the Homilies which can be seen as a commentary on those other Formularies. Separate chapters discuss the Articles, the Prayer Book and the Ordinal, before a concluding chapter “One Canon with Two Testaments” about how the Formularies and Homilies depend ultimately on the authority of the Bible. Toon sums this up by saying that ‘To maintain and use the three Formularies, as the distinctive Anglican means and ways of being subject both to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and to the Holy Scriptures, the Word written, and thereby retaining the Reformed Catholic nature and characteristics of the Anglican Way, is a high privilege and solemn duty’ (p. 63).

The author has been a theological tutor in several English colleges and also a professor of systematic theology in the USA, as well as the vicar of an English parish. For some years he has also been a very active President of the Prayer Book Society of the USA and this short book has been issued in America by ‘the Preservation Press of the Prayer Book Society of the USA’. This gives something of a feel for its perspective which is grounded in a version of Reformed Catholicism which feels (to this reviewer at least) ever so slightly old fashioned in some respects, but still has much to teach a doctrinally latitudinarian age. In a time when the Church of England seems overly eager to cut loose from its historic moorings, this brief reminder of the evangelical riches to be found there is salutary and most welcome.

The book is released at the same time as a new edition of the Homilies themselves by the same press, available through [www.edgewaysbooks.com](http://www.edgewaysbooks.com). It is, no doubt, meant to explain the importance of that volume, which is still incredibly useful for establishing what Anglican doctrine truly is (as a friend discovered recently when locked in a debate with members of the PCC about images in worship—a subject which the Homily entitled, “Peril of Idolatry, and Superfluous Decking of Churches” is very clear about!).

One may not want to agree with every conclusion here, and some things could perhaps have been phrased a little clearer. A more in-depth defence of certain aspects of Anglican ecclesiology (such as the episcopate) would have been useful, and many questions are left unanswered (such as, what precisely is the definition of a ‘truly credible form of the Anglican Way’ which deserves to be tolerated in a genuine comprehensiveness?). This being said, the broad



contours of the book are helpful, and might be especially useful for an ordinand to use during the process of selection, giving them a handle on Anglican ways to say evangelical things (as it were).

LEE GATISS

London

## **THE LIVING CHURCH: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor**

**John Stott**

Nottingham: IVP, 2007 192pp £8.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-183-0

‘Uncle John’, as he is affectionately known to many in the evangelical world, has produced another clear, faithful, and challenging book with much for the living church of the twenty-first century to chew on and learn from. It is essentially a work of practical ecclesiology, with chapters on God’s vision for the church, worship, evangelism, ministry, fellowship, preaching, giving, and social change. Three stimulating historical appendices (including “Why I am still a member of the Church of England” and “Reflections of an octogenarian”) and an autobiographical sketch complete the book. The latter contains the amusing anecdote of how, as a child, the young Stott made paper pellets out of bus tickets and dropped them from the balcony of All Souls, Langham Place onto the fashionable hats of the ladies below. This should help us not to despair too much of the children in our churches!

Some of the material in the book will be familiar to avid Stott fans. Much of chapter 4 is very close to his Acts BST commentary, and chapter 7 has been printed in at least two other places. But on the whole it is all good material which deserves to be collected in one place for our convenience. In the course of the book he helpfully touches on the merging church, the homogenous unit principle, and other hot topics in ecclesiological discussions, in a way that is fair and reveals a wealth of careful study and reading.

There are many provocative lines, e.g. ‘We take little trouble to prepare our worship services. In consequence, they are sometimes slovenly, mechanical, perfunctory and dull. At other times they are frivolous, to the point of irreverence’ (p. 45) or ‘Any political party would be wildly jealous of the buildings and personnel which are at [the local church’s] disposal’ (p. 52) or ‘God expects those called to the ministry of the word to concentrate on their

calling and on no account to allow themselves to be distracted by social administration' (p. 76). He often has an amusing way of getting his point across such as when he writes 'there is a strange reluctance among us to engage in personal evangelism. We sometimes sing 'Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my dear redeemer's praise'. But it is a useless wish. For one thing we will never have a thousand tongues. For another, if we had them, we would not know what to do with them when the one tongue we have is often silent (p. 98)! I was cut by the observation that we often complain about our society but 'If therefore darkness and rottenness abound, it is to a large measure our fault, and we must accept much of the blame' (p. 143).

The chapter on preaching is a great reminder of what we should be about, but it also illustrates what is a characteristic and sometimes unhelpful habit of mind. Stott is a fan of paradoxes and dichotomising; that is, he will often look at things from two angles, dismiss both extremes as unstable and unbiblical, and then put forward a neatly balanced, integrating view. This can sometimes be a useful heuristic device, but it can also lead us astray, as I personally think it does in Stott's view of women's ministry (pp. 81-82) where two truths from the Bible are felt to be in need of being 'reconciled' as if they were in conflict thus leading to some weak arguments in an attempt to find the mediating position.

This, of course, is a very 'Anglican' tactic! And Stott's Anglicanism is prominent in this book in a surprising and unexpected way. He quotes very liberally from Bishops and Archbishops. Calvin and Spurgeon get a few mentions too, but I think the Episcopal bench is vastly over-represented in the collection of quotations used throughout the book's newer sections. It is good to be able to notice and use some of the positive and valuable things bishops have said; it is easy to be too dismissive of bishops and give the impression that it is the height of discernment to be constantly negative and critical of them. Perhaps Uncle John is trying subliminally to teach us something here? But I still found it quite odd to hear from so many bishops.

There are quotes from official Church of England Reports and even Lambeth Conferences (and not just resolution 1.10 from 1998 with which we are all familiar). If some criticise Stott for spending too much time thinking about evangelicalism internationally and not enough time helping to reform his own denomination, he at least demonstrates that he is not unaware or uninformed

about what was going on, even if we might wish him to have been more critical. There is some unnecessary cluttering of the text with otiose transliteration of Greek words, and here and there readers will find things they disagree with, or would not quite have put that way. But how useful to read Stott as he reflects on movements in the church he has seen come and go in the last forty years. So this is an extremely beneficial book which I recommend as a helpful survey and heartfelt challenge on all the areas it covers. I hope it will come down in price so I can afford to give some copies away!

LEE GATISS  
London

### **DECODING EARLY CHRISTIANITY**

#### **Truth and Legend in the Early Church**

**Leslie Houlden and others (eds.)**

Oxford: Greenwood, 2007 140pp £19.95hb ISBN: 978-1-84645-018-1

### **THE LOST GOSPEL OF JUDAS: Separating fact from fiction**

**Stanley E. Porter and Gordon L. Heath**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 127pp £8.99/\$16 ISBN:978-0-8028-2456-1

One of the more curious phenomena of modern life is the extraordinary impact which popular misrepresentations of Jesus and early Christianity have had on the general public. Never before has there been such a large, semi-educated market for charlatans posing as scholars and ‘experts’, and we must be grateful to the authors of both these books for taking up the challenge of putting the record straight.

The first book is a collection of essays by five writers all of whom are, or have been, associated with theology departments in leading British universities. The best-known of them is Leslie Houlden, who contributes a chapter on what can be known of the historical Jesus. He is careful to guard himself against accusations of undue bias against more conservative scholarship, and he admits that the New Testament evidence is susceptible of many interpretations other than his own, but it is clear that his is a minimalist approach to questions of objective historical fact. He is more at home with the notion that the gospel writers exercised their creative imaginations in composing tales of Jesus that sound authentic enough without being necessarily ‘truthful’ in the strict sense.

Professor Stuart Hall of St. Andrews writes very entertainingly about the New Testament apocrypha and Gnosticism, and tells us that the creative imagination of the so-called Gnostics is even more developed than that of the New Testament writers. Most of what they said cannot have been historically accurate, but that is a secondary consideration. As he puts it (p. 60): ‘*The Da Vinci Code* is pure fiction, but good fun. It would be very unwise for those who love God in Jesus Christ to object to this.’ In other words, say whatever you like, as long as it is amusing!

The best chapters are those by Graham Gould on the origins of the papacy and by Stephen Need on the relationship between the Qumran sect and Jesus. Dr. Gould shows that there was no centralised Roman church organisation before the third century and that modern papal claims cannot be based on historical evidence. Dr. Need examines the striking similarities between the Qumran sectarians and Jesus, but concludes that they can all be explained by the common background which the two shared, and that there was little or no genuine interaction between them. Neither of these assertions is new, but they are backed up by a wealth of evidence culled from primary sources, and many readers will find what they have to say very helpful.

The book by Stanley Porter and Gordon Heath has a narrower focus, but at the same time it is more satisfactory in its treatment of the early Church. Unlike the authors of the former volume, Dr. Porter and Dr. Heath write as committed Christians who are determined to maintain the truth-claims of the New Testament and the good faith of those who canonised it. They point out that the Gospel of Judas is a very interesting and important source for fourth-century Gnosticism, but that it has little or nothing to do with the life and work of the historical Jesus.

Whether the text we now have is the same as the one mentioned by Irenaeus in the late second century must remain uncertain, but there is a general consensus that the Gospel of Judas comes from a milieu which was deeply and consciously opposed to the God of the Bible. For that reason, anyone who opposed God’s will was to be honoured, starting with Cain, who gave his name to these so-called Cainites. That they were behind the Gospel of Judas seems very probable, although we must be careful about making precise claims in an area fraught with so much uncertainty. Particularly refreshing is the sturdy

defence which the two men put up of the reliability of the canonical Gospels. They do not hesitate to point out how liberal scholars have distorted the evidence and used tendentious language to discredit orthodox Christianity, and show that one of its leading critics, Professor Bart Ehrman, is almost certainly in rebellion against his own conservative background. So much for scholarly objectivity! What is distressing is the extent to which a body like the National Geographic Society has been complicit in these attempts to discredit the Christian faith by pseudo-scholarship and even by shady dealing in the acquisition of ancient manuscripts.

That such a professional body could have stooped to the level of crude anti-Christian propaganda in an effort to sell its magazines is reprehensible, but sadly typical of the market-driven forces that determine so much of the current publishing agenda. By exposing this, protesting against it and offering a plausible (and pious) alternative, Drs. Porter and Heath have done us all a great service. The fact that they have written in language accessible to non-specialists and included a good deal of background material which will be well-known to other specialists but probably not to the wider public, makes their book a particularly useful one for popular education and apologetic purposes. The first volume is a mixed bag, but this one is solid from beginning to end and will make a welcome addition to any pastor's library.

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## THE DIVINE SPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

### Challenging Evangelical Perspectives

A. T. B. McGowan

Nottingham: Apollos, 2007 240pp £14.99 ISBN: 978-1-84474-220-2

Those outside the Evangelical fold frequently characterize Evangelicals as 'Bible-believing', if not 'Bible-thumping' Christians who hold a highly questionable belief in the divine inspiration of the text which puts it above and beyond all criticism. That this view is a caricature becomes apparent as one studies the Evangelical world more closely, but there are still enough people inside the movement whose unthinking Biblicism lends plausibility to this portrayal. In recent years this has produced a deep cleavage in American Evangelicalism between those who believe that the Scriptures are fully inerrant in every respect

and those who do not. The latter are frequently accused by the former of having set out on the slippery road which will eventually lead to scepticism and unbelief, a fear which leads the former to be even more vigilant in defence of their position.

Outside the USA, this debate is much less prominent, and among native Europeans in the Reformed tradition, it is fair to say that it is almost non-existent. This is not because the Europeans are more liberal than their American colleagues but because their intellectual history has been different. Dr. McGowan sets out to explain why this has been so and to propose that American Evangelicals should abandon their false dichotomy between ‘inerrantists’ and ‘errantists’ in favour of something more like the conservative European model typified by men like James Orr and Herman Bavinck.

Along the way, Dr. McGowan treats his readers to a broad history of Reformed thinking about Scripture, going right back to the early sixteenth century. He shows that the first Reformers started their theological reflection with the doctrine of God and then moved on to consider the nature and status of the Bible, but that from the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 onwards, there was a growing tendency to make the doctrine of Scripture the foundation of systematic theology. This gradually led to a rationalistic approach which was far removed from a theology rooted in God’s self-disclosure and Reformed dogmatics has suffered ever since. Dr. McGowan is a minister of the Church of Scotland who is committed to a conservative understanding of that Church’s traditional theology, so it will come as a surprise to many to see how ready he is to point to shortcomings in the Westminster Confession of Faith in this regard.

Dr. McGowan argues that our doctrine of Scripture should be seen as deriving from our doctrine of God, and in particular from our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. This is how the Bible presents itself after all, and if we approach it in this way we shall locate it in its proper doctrinal and ecclesial context. According to Dr. McGowan, the sacred text of the church has been given to us as it stands, regardless of whether it corresponds to ‘objective’ historical or scientific truth. It must be read and expounded on its own terms, and not in relation to a standard of reliability imposed from outside—in this case, by minds formed in the rationalistic traditions of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment worlds.

What passes for standard evangelical thinking today was elaborated in response to nineteenth-century liberalism, and in that context it is understandable that it took the form it did, but now that classical liberalism has all but disappeared, the reaction to it looks decidedly dated and inadequate. Instead of using the concept 'inerrancy', Dr. McGowan proposes we should focus more on the text's 'infallibility'. By this he means that the Bible will not lead us into error if we submit ourselves to its authority and hear it speaking through the teaching and preaching ministry of the church. This is a fact which has been demonstrated over and over again in the history of the Reformed tradition, but it does not force us to insist that every word it contains is 'true' in some abstract sense that is totally divorced from the context.

Dr. McGowan has tackled a difficult subject at a sensitive time in the history of Evangelical and Reformed theology. There is no doubt that he is right to insist on the primacy of God and his location of the doctrine of Holy Scripture within the sphere of the work of the Holy Spirit is perfectly justified. He is probably also right to suggest that Reformed theologians like Warfield, who are seen today as the ancestors of modern 'inerrancy' were in many ways closer to what he labels 'infallibility' than to what modern inerrantists like to claim. Having said that, there is also no doubt that he has taken on an enormously sensitive topic which is bound to have huge repercussions, especially on the American scene. What he is proposing will doubtless not be the final word on the subject, but Dr. McGowan is not suggesting that it should be. What he wants to see is a frank admission that recent definitions of 'inerrancy' have failed to do justice to the doctrine they are trying to uphold and that the Reformed tradition has resources at its disposal for resolving the impasse that the inerrantist debate has led to.

Dr. McGowan's plea is that he should be taken seriously by those who want to maintain a high doctrine of Scripture in the church and not simply dismissed as another covert liberal. We can only hope that this plea will be heard and that the issues he raises will provoke a serious and constructive discussion among Evangelicals who most certainly need to revisit their doctrine of Scripture and find new ways of expressing it in a changed theological climate.

GERALD BRAY  
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## THE HERMENEUTICS OF DOCTRINE

**Anthony C. Thiselton**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 649pp £24.99hb ISBN: 978-0-8028-2681-7

Any major book by Professor Thiselton is a publishing event, but this one is even more so because it will probably be his final academic testament. As a postscript to the preface explains, he suffered a debilitating heart attack just as it was going to press and barring a miracle, it seems unlikely that he will return to his scholarly pursuits in a similarly serious way. Professor Thiselton could not have seen it coming, but there are many indications throughout the book that he intended it to be his parting statement. On almost every page he takes us back to some event in his life—an article he wrote, a student he supervised or a committee he sat on—and reflects on some aspect of his long career.

Hermenutics has been his special study for much of his life, and in this volume we get some idea of just how wide his reading has been. From Aristotle to Wittgenstein, from Aquinas to Bultmann, he has absorbed it all. Virtually every point he makes is supported by a string of sources, some of them well-known to the general public, some familiar only to specialists in the discipline and some still obscure. In a country and in a church which tends not to engage with the European mainstream or know much about it, Professor Thiselton stands out as a man who knows his way around Italian and Hungarian philosophers, as well as the more usual French and German ones.

Intellectually speaking, it soon becomes apparent that Professor Thiselton is most at home with German theologians like Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann. He also resonates with Wittgenstein, Gadamer and Ricoeur in the philosophical world and quotes them frequently to illustrate the points he is making. At the same time, he is very concerned to make us realise that he is not to be classified as a follower of any one of these men and he abhors the idea of belonging to a ‘school’ of thought. In the end, although he has read widely and borrowed heavily from many sources, the synthesis is his own and he wishes it to be seen and evaluated in that way.

The book is divided into three unequal parts. The first one argues the case for developing a hermeneutics of Christian doctrine. Professor Thiselton is not trying to improve on traditional orthodoxy nor does he reject it in any way.



His concern rather is to relate it to the main currents of intellectual thought in our generation and seek to build bridges to minds that, on the surface at least, may seem to have little to do with God or with the Christian church. The second part of the book deals with the different objections which might be raised against his project, whilst the third (and much the longest) part is a kind of systematic theology, in which hermeneutical principles are applied to every aspect of classical Christian teaching.

There is no point pretending that Professor Thiselton's work is an easy read. Few people have the breadth of learning that he has and many will find it hard to follow his arguments. His pages abound in technical terms culled from German, Greek and Hebrew (the latter two presented in their original scripts as well as in transliteration, though not always in translation!) and this is certain to be a barrier for many. Probably the majority of the writers he quotes will be unknown to most readers also, which is difficult if we are expected to have some idea of what they think (or thought).

The book is so vast that there are occasional repetitions, as for example, when the Patristic interpretation of the biblical phrase 'the image and likeness of God' is mentioned twice (p. 179 and again on p. 288). We are also repeatedly told that Janet Martin Soskice, one of Professor Thiselton's former research students, 'has demonstrated that metaphors may make valid cognitive truth-claims' (pp. 79, 319 and 331), but this is probably inevitable when the subject-matter covered is so extensive.

Particularly interesting (and encouraging) is the fact that Professor Thiselton does his best to defend classical Christian orthodoxy, even including such controversial themes as penal substitutionary atonement. This is all the more remarkable in that it is evident that he is not a fan of the kind of conservative Reformed theology represented by Charles Hodge. Professor Thiselton can hardly be called a neo-Thomist, but in some ways his approach is remarkably like theirs and the homage he pays to Bernard Lonergan is indicative of this leaning. In the end, he believes that Christian doctrine is an intellectual pursuit which reflects and responds to the main currents of contemporary thought.

Inevitably someone like Hodge, who saw it rather as the exposition of divine revelation, will seem alien and unsatisfactory to him. In the Church of England

he has been in the Evangelical wing without really being of it and his impact has been far less than one might have expected, perhaps because of his lack of sympathy with this kind of Reformed theology.

Having said that, there is a sense in which it is hard not to conclude that Professor Thiselton's reputation as a genius rests on his ability to make simple things obscure rather than anything else. For example, where most people would say: 'If you want to relate to God you have to talk to him', he writes: 'The hermeneutical horizons within which creation and humankind are evaluated are formed first and foremost as praise and address to God. When theologians use the fashionable but abstract term 'relationality', the hermeneutical dynamic begins with the 'I-Thou' relationship of address to God. Nothing goes to the heart of 'relationality' more directly than this (p. 199).

Another thing that soon becomes apparent as we work our way through the book is that it is replete with quotations and references which are not subjected to much analysis. Often the avalanche of names is so overwhelming that the thread of the argument is lost, if indeed it was ever there to begin with. Much of the book reads uncomfortably like an undergraduate essay written by a student who has been told to quote sources but who has neither the space nor the inclination to critique them seriously.

This is not to deny that Professor Thiselton has a mind of his own, but to point out that often it seems to be swamped by a mass of information which it is almost impossible to digest or evaluate properly. Odd sentences taken from Emilio Betti, John Robinson, Karl Barth and so on demonstrate a certain cleverness, but whether they reveal much genuine appreciation of what those writers were trying to say is much harder to discern. Most of us simply have to take Professor Thiselton's word for it and move on to the next round of quotations.

Most likely this book, like Professor Thiselton's other works, will be bought by many and read by few. There will undoubtedly be a small number of people who will rate it very highly and even a few who will take it as a model for their own work, but the masses will probably be left indifferent. Perhaps that is only to be expected of a book like this one, and it will be up to future generations to popularise its insights and apply them in layman's language to the concerns

of the day. Or perhaps it will sit and gather dust on the shelves as the names mentioned in it fade from popular consciousness. Only time will tell. Meanwhile Professor Thiselton has offered us an intellectual feast and must be congratulated on having done so much in a field which most of his potential readers find as alien as the far side of the moon.

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**CHINA'S MILLIONS: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905**

**Alvyn Austin**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 506pp £25.99 ISBN: 978-0-8028-2975-7

This is not another history of the China Inland Mission. The author's focus is certainly on the earlier years of the CIM, however he aims to set the mission's work in China within a broader context. In order to do this he has studied both CIM and other archival material. It makes for fascinating and rewarding reading. The only problem is that the wider questions opened up by such a study are simply too many. At all sorts of points within the narrative, one wishes that there was more information and discussion about the issues raised. To some extent the focus on Shanxi province helps make things less unwieldy. These pages reveal the more difficult reality behind the rather idealised histories of this period that came out of the CIM. The personal friction between those in China and those back in England is laid bare, as is the naivety within the celebrated Cambridge Seven. Some of them refused to study Chinese and prayed to receive the language supernaturally. The reader is also given a good idea of the complexity that different denominational and national backgrounds gave to relationships both within and outside the Mission.

Austin states in the Preface that he wishes to focus on two broad questions in this work. One question is how the CIM illuminates the relationship between nineteenth century British evangelicals and twentieth century American fundamentalists. The other is how evangelical Christianity became truly Chinese. They are good and important questions but this reviewer is not entirely convinced by everything that is said here.

It is right to see Pastor Hsi and the ministry to opium addicts as significant in

this matter, but I am not so sure that the Chinese religious background is quite as influential as Austin suggests. One feels that the way in which evangelical Christianity became truly indigenous in China needs a much bigger canvas to paint a compelling picture.

In the matter of the way in which the CIM related to wider theological trends the reader is likely to be on more familiar ground, though the reality is nevertheless complex. It is very instructive to be informed about the supporters of Hudson Taylor in the early years. There was considerable Brethren influence.

Although the CIM later drew back from the pentecostal movement, it is clear that in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century there were some strange theological currents which affected the Mission. The particular revelation to this reviewer was the massive influence that the American director H. W. Frost had in guarding the Mission from liberal tendencies, to the extent that he forced Stanley Smith, one of the Cambridge Seven, to resign in 1904. It is not surprising that Frost was a significant contributor to the original 'Fundamentals'.

For all the difficulties and heartache that this book unveils, the fact remains that the Mission's enormous achievement continues to shine out. There is a passion and commitment and faith that still challenges and inspires. Perhaps the fact that this is there despite the problems can encourage us when we today are conscious of the earthly nature of the vessels that the gospel is carried in. All in all, a worthwhile book which leaves the reader seeking to find out more.

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**THE EXPANSION OF EVANGELICALISM:  
The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney**  
John Wolffe

Nottingham: IVP, 2006    272pp    £17.99hb    ISBN: 9781844741472

John Wolffe's contribution to the IVP History of Evangelicalism series captures the rich diversity of the evangelical movement in the English-speaking world during a period when, as Wolffe puts it, 'evangelical social engagement was particularly profound and far reaching' (p. 21). The book is thematic rather

than chronological, exploring evangelical views on the family and gender, campaigns for social reform, political activity, shifting temperaments in worship and spirituality and the changing face of mission.

Wolffe begins with helpful contextual information about late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century society that will orientate general readers to the significance of the evangelical movement in this era. As with all the books in this landmark series, Wolffe attempts to provide a unified account of the history of evangelicalism across the English-speaking world. This ambitious aim produces consistently invigorating results. Wolfe's juxtapositions and comparisons of evangelical developments across national boundaries are stimulating and thought provoking.

A central theme Wolffe's argument is that, despite a greater awareness of the fellowship of 'true believers' across the world during this period (pp. 70, 218), evangelicals in the mid-nineteenth century nevertheless tended to resist a monolithic or unified approach to mission and social involvement (pp. 181-82). Historians too, suggests Wolffe, must therefore resist easy generalisations about what was a 'very fluid movement' that tended to reshape itself according to its context (p. 20).

If there is one failure of the work, it is that which is admitted by Wolffe himself, namely that the book 'gives more attention to society and politics and less to theology and culture than the preceding and succeeding volumes in the series' (p. 21). This is perhaps an inevitable result of space constraints, but there is still much about nineteenth-century evangelical theology that needs to be delineated. The idea that in this era evangelicals were strong on action, weak on theology is a misleading judgement which awaits a more comprehensive rebuttal than this introductory volume can deliver.

Nevertheless, historians who address themselves to this task will find an invaluable foundation in Wolffe's work. Meanwhile, new students of nineteenth-century evangelicalism will find in this book a highly readable, fresh, and informative explanation of the growth of evangelicalism into a prominent and deeply influential part of nineteenth-century society.

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**THE GODS OF WAR:****Is Religion the Primary Cause of Violent Conflict?****Meic Pearse**

Nottingham: IVP, 2007 234pp £9.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-226-4

It is often claimed that religion is responsible for more wars, more global conflicts and more deaths than any other factor. Alas, the picture is not quite so simple. Indeed, writes Meic Pearse, ‘there is only one thing that bears a heavier responsibility than religion as a principal cause of war. And that is, of course, irreligion’.

Nevertheless, this book does not exonerate religion in general, nor Christianity or Islam in particular, from complicity in war. Nor does it write off Marxism as an unmitigated disaster. It takes the reader on a fascinating sociological, historical and theological journey through many of the world’s conflicts, analyzing the role of religion within them.

In a thought-provoking pair of chapters the ‘religious’ nature of nationalism is explored—describing this as ‘tribal gods’, whether in Serbia, Russia, or England’s green and pleasant lands. Christians will be challenged by the chapters reviewing warfare perpetrated in Christianity’s name, and delving into whether a Christian can legitimately take up arms.

This is a very even-handed book, giving credit—and blame—where due. It exposes the weaknesses in arguments and philosophies, while explaining the motivations behind them or the actions taken in their name. The title asks a question to which most people will have a preferred and simplistic answer.

This book should both persuade its readers of its conclusion, but also stimulate further thought about their own attitudes and the wider and deeper issues underlying conflicts today: it is a good read, and well worth making the shelf-space to keep it for future reference.

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