

Book Reviews

ENCOUNTERING ECCLESIASTES

James Limburg

Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006 141pp £7.99pb ISBN: 10:0-8028-3047-1/
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This reviewer was recently in a house group studying Ecclesiastes and some members made quite heavy weather of it. If only we had had access to this commentary, we might have reached a better understanding: it provides a simpler summary than the fuller commentaries by Kidner and Tidball which are known in this country but are strangely omitted from this volume's bibliography.

The author is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota and subtitles his commentary *A Book for our Time*. His most helpful book quotes with approval a North American who writes of Ecclesiastes words which apply equally well this side of the Atlantic, 'No adolescent could be more scathing of the delusions under which her successful and success-driven parents labour. For this reason the book has a special appeal for youth of high-school and college age as well as for young adults struggling with the disappointment of the "real world"' (p. 5).

Deploring the lack of attention paid to the book in the formal liturgies of the Christian church, the writer draws attention to the place it has in the Jewish celebrations of the festival of Sukkoth (ch. 7). He is obviously familiar with Jewish tradition, and quotes the Talmud and other Jewish writings as well as a variety of other commentators. Picking up a comment by von Rad that 'Qoheleth [Hebrew for the Teacher]...lumps all of life's experiences together and then labels the sum "nothingness" (Heb. Hevel), Limburg prints the plainsong melody of 'Of the Father's love begotten...' to illustrate the point that the constant refrain of 'meaningless...meaningless...' runs through the book like the pedal-point, the sustained bass organ note running through the whole musical composition. 'Enjoy' says today's waiter or waitress bringing a meal, and that is one of the key themes traced through this book (pp. 106-11). Along with this comes the warning that we should live our life in the light of our death (ch. 7). Yet there is plenty to dispel the apparent gloom of the book, and the reader is encouraged to find joy in 'good times with friends, days filled

with meaningful and enjoyable work—these are the best things in life, and they are God’s gifts’ (p. 33).

The book is made more readable by the fact that the biblical text is interspersed with the commentary: however it is disappointing to find that the author appears to lose interest towards the end of the book. After a most helpful introduction and summary (ch. 1, Getting in to Ecclesiastes) we have what is virtually a verse-by-verse exposition of chapters 1:1–6:6, and then no treatment of 6:7–9; 8:1–17 or 9:13–11:6. There is, however, a summary of 8:1–7 and 16–17; 10:14 and 11:1–6 in the context of chapter three; this is one of several places where topics are brought together and helpfully discussed. In summarising Ecclesiastes’ teaching on death, Limburg draws attention to the New Testament hope of the resurrection, contrasting Qoheleth’s ‘Who knows?’ with the apostle’s ‘I am convinced...’ (Rom. 8:38, p. 101).

In conclusion the author quotes with approval the summary in Luther’s *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, ‘...the point and purpose of this book is to instruct us, so that with thanksgiving we may use the things that are present and the creatures of God that are generously given to us and conferred upon us by the blessing of God. This we are to do without anxiety about the things that are still in the future...’ (pp. 137–8). The point is brought out admirably in this commentary.

DAVID WHEATON
Chesham

A POCKET GUIDE TO SECTS & NEW RELIGIONS

Nigel Scotland

Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2005 pb 256pp £6.99 ISBN: 0 7459 5159 7

From time to time fringe sects and new religions break into the news headlines, often for tragic reasons. These however are but a fraction of the religious groups which form today’s spiritual scene. Having written on *Sectarian Religion in Contemporary Britain* (Paternoster, 2000), Professor Scotland has broadened his scope and this Pocket Guide gives a snapshot of over 40 of the most popular sects and religions from all over the world. Some could be termed ‘mainstream sects’ (although that is surely a contradiction in terms), such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, closed Plymouth Brethren, Spiritualists and the like.

Others are ancient streams recently revived such as the various paganisms; and others still are newer inventions, such as the UFO religions.

Each sect is described briefly in terms of their Origins and Core Beliefs. Recent Developments bring the reader up to date and there is a guide to Present Practice. In more than one case, the Core Beliefs are hard to define as the movement is so diverse; in others the key beliefs have changed with new leadership. It fascinated me to see how many of the sects have beliefs that are so similar to those of major world religions (Christianity, Islam) as to seem at first glance to be compatible. I was hoping to ask door-to-door visitors (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses) for their reaction to the description of their beliefs and practice; unfortunately none called while I was reviewing this book.

This guide is helpful for its range and brevity. An index of names might have helped further for enquiries of the type, "I've got this book by Madame Blavatsky, vicar: is it likely to be helpful?" (The answer is No). Nevertheless the layout is sufficiently clear for a few minutes' browsing to yield results. This is a work that is both helpful and clear.

ED MOLL
Basingstoke

**SUCH A GREAT SALVATION: The collected essays of Alan Stibbs
A. Atherstone (ed.)**

Fearn: Mentor, 2008 316pp £11.99 ISBN: 978-1-84550-423-6

What a treasure trove we have here. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing Alan Stibbs and of sitting at his feet when he unfolded the Scriptures, and whose copies of Falcon Booklets and Tyndale Monographs have become rather dog-eared must be truly excited by the publication of these essays. We must also be grateful that we can put them into the hands of younger Christians who have yet to discover these treasures.

Alan Stibbs was indeed a wonderful man and a very humble and superb expositor of the Word of God. Andrew Atherstone's introductory biography captures the man. He had that gift, shared with his one time colleague at Oak Hill, the late Derek Kidner, of expressing things pithily and incisively, whereas

many moderns have been lengthy, convoluted and obscure. It is possible to be deceived by the brevity of some of these essays into thinking that they are shallow and superficial. On the contrary, his essay “Sacrament, Sacrifice and Eucharist: The Meaning, Function and Use of the Lord’s Supper” is arguably one of the most insightful and helpful articles on the subject. Here too we have those two very important Tyndale Monographs *The Meaning of the Word ‘Blood’ in Scripture* and *The Finished Work of Christ*—surely compulsory reading for all those doing theology or training for the ministry. Several articles that first appeared in this journal are now republished. The full Bibliography tells us where we can find other essays. The issues that Alan Stibbs wrote about are still with us today. We still need to hear a defence of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. The meaning of the death of Christ remains under attack. Many of the scholarly current defences of penal substitution, in fact, appeal to Stibbs’ writings, and here we can also have them.

One of the most hotly debated issues today concerns ecclesiology. The essays “Taking the Church seriously” and the “New Testament teaching concerning the Church” as well as several articles on the sacraments remain vitally relevant, but I would love to have seen “God’s Church—a study in the biblical doctrine of the people of God” included. Andrew Atherstone is to be thanked for editing this gold mine, and Christian Focus should be congratulated for publishing it. We now await the republication of Alan Stibbs’ superb trilogy *Understanding God’s Word*, *Obeying God’s Word* and *Expounding God’s Word*—but perhaps in slightly larger print.

JONATHAN FLETCHER
Wimbledon

PUBLIC LIFE AND THE PLACE OF THE CHURCH

Reflections to honour the bishop of Oxford

Michael Brierley (ed.)

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006 236pp £ 50hb/15.99pb ISBN: 0-7546-5301-3

Richard Harries was Bishop of Oxford from 1987 to 2006 and during that time became something of a public spokesman for the liberal wing of the Church of England. This book was put together by a number of his friends and colleagues, both in the church and outside it. It is clear from their contributions

that Lord Harries (as he now is) has had a good deal of influence in high circles over the past two decades and has done a lot to help the Church of England accommodate to the secular climate of our time. He has been especially active in the areas of inter-faith dialogue and medical ethics, and colleagues from both those fields pay him appropriate tribute.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about this book is the discovery that Lord Harries is in some ways more conservative than many of his friends. This is particularly true in the theological arena, where it turns out that he is more 'orthodox' on matters of Christology, for example, than someone like Keith Ward, formerly the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford. Of course, from an Evangelical point of view, the differences between the two men are insignificant (both are equally unacceptable) but it is interesting to read criticisms of a man who appears to us as an arch-liberal from others who would vie with him for that label. Christopher Rowland also has a go at him for not being a pacifist!

Unfortunately it has to be said that most of the contributions are scarcely worth the effort to read them. Typical of the tone is the following observation by John Drury in his chapter entitled 'Poetry and truth' (p. 137): '...fundamentalists insist that God's Word is in the Bible alone and the Bible as expounded, often very crudely indeed, by themselves and according to their own unexamined prejudices. A spirituality of open attention to the truth is opposed by a spirituality of closure and possession of the truth'. After that, why read any more?

Perhaps the most interesting chapter in the current climate of church affairs is called 'Sex and the Church of England' by Jane Shaw. Lord Harries was obliged, somewhat unfairly, to take the blame for the attempted appointment of Jeffrey John as bishop of Reading, and many contributors to this volume evidently fear that he is liable to be remembered for that more than for anything else. Miss Shaw tries to put the whole affair in context and in the process reveals her own deep commitment to the full inclusion of practising homosexuals in the life of the church. In the face of strong conservative opposition, she proposes 'dialogue' instead of debate, but it soon becomes clear that for her, dialogue has only one purpose, which is to win over those opposed to her views. It is simply not possible for anyone to have a genuine dialogue in those conditions, but it is both revealing and instructive to see that Miss Shaw does not understand this. Like Drury's imaginary fundamentalists, she operates according to unexamined prejudices and is guided by a spirituality of

closure, an attitude of mind far more prevalent among liberals, one feels, than among the Evangelicals who are consistently denounced as ‘fundamentalists’.

In other essays Lord Harries is praised because he objects to Christian attempts to convert Jews, evidently oblivious of the fact that if no Jews had become Christians, Christianity would not now exist. Mention is made of his tactical alliance with Richard Dawkins, of all people, in an attempt to suppress so-called ‘creationist’ schools in London. And so it goes. Whenever a leading churchman is needed to attack other Christians, it seems that Lord Harries is at the ready, and here he is commended for it. Jews, Muslims and atheists may enjoy this book but Christians would be better advised to pray for him in the darkness of his soul and to spend their money elsewhere.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

GOD SEEKERS: Twenty centuries of Christian spiritualities

Richard H. Schmidt

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008 366pp \$22pb ISBN:978-0-8028-2840-8

Anthologies of spirituality are increasingly popular these days, and Richard Schmidt has added another interesting volume to a growing library on the subject. His range is truly catholic, including such diverse figures as Origen, Julian of Norwich and John Bunyan. He has clearly made an effort to represent all the major Christian traditions and to give an adequate place to women writers. This is entirely justified given his subject area, because women have excelled here more than anywhere else in Christian theological thought. He is to be congratulated for reaching out to embrace people like Symeon the New Theologian and Jean-Pierre de Caussade, neither of whom is likely to be at all familiar to most of his readers. Mr. Schmidt is also to be congratulated for having resisted the usual tendency to weight selections heavily in favour of recent writers, at the expense of the great luminaries of past ages. The twentieth-century subjects he includes take up less than a quarter of the book as a whole, though it is noticeable that four of the seven are women and three of them are American. This certainly suggests a bias which can hardly reflect the work of the Holy Spirit in the modern world, but the difficulty of choosing modern writers for inclusion in a series like this one should not be under-

estimated. Augustine and Francis of Assisi have stood the test of time in a way that Dorothy Day and Rosemary Radford Ruether have not, but that will be true of any recent figure and cannot be used as grounds for excluding them.

Selections are always very difficult, and while nobody will question the inclusion of most of the classical figures, some will wonder why a man like Dietrich Bonhoeffer is not mentioned. Here the author is honest enough to admit that when limitations of space forced him to choose between a man or a woman, he invariably chose the woman. One could perhaps justify this fifty percent of the time, but on every occasion? The result is bound to be a distortion which could and should have been avoided. He could also have done more to reach out to the developing world, which is inadequately represented by the lone figure of John Mbiti. Is there no-one from Asia or Latin America who would qualify for inclusion here? Questions like these are bound to arise the minds of some readers, but they apply equally to almost all anthologies of this kind, which is why students of the subject need to acquire more than one textbook. Having said that, the selections themselves are carefully chosen and well-translated. The book will serve a useful purpose in many quarters and should prove a useful resource for those who teach this fascinating subject.

GERALD BRAY
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WRESTLING WITH ANGELS — Conversations in Modern Theology
Rowan Williams (ed. Mike Higton)

London: SCM, 2007 384pp £22.99pb ISBN: 9780334040958

What are evangelicals to make of Rowan Williams? It is certainly time for a more serious, critical and less simply dismissive engagement from the evangelical side than has hitherto appeared. The collection of essays published in *Wrestling with Angels* is in many ways a better introduction to the theological outlook of Rowan Williams than his *On Christian Doctrine* and may allow this outlook to emerge. As this book shows, Williams is at his best when writing about others—he is a model of critical engagement, allowing the voice of his interlocutors to be heard before posing his own difficult questions back to them. His question is whether or not this theology or philosophy stands on its own terms, rather than whether it accords with his own pre-determined system.

This means that Williams comes across as a curiously (but deliberately) unsystematic thinker. He often seems closer to his conversation partners than he actually is. For example, in his piece on Don Cupitt's work—"Religious realism": on not quite agreeing with Don Cupitt—he seems to find Cupitt's proposal genuinely enticing. But it would not be characteristic of his work as a whole to find him in the Cupittian camp. There is, too, a certain amount of English academic courtesy which conceals at times the real savagery of the criticisms: his piece on Maurice Wiles, his predecessor at Oxford, can only be described as a well-mannered dismemberment (it was originally published in Wiles' *Festschrift!*).

The piece on Wiles, which appeared in the same period of Williams' career as several key pieces in *On Christian Doctrine*, shows how Williams makes a definite break from the old school of theological liberalism which reached its climax in *The Myth of God Incarnate*. This is because Williams is determined to let the gospel of Christ exercise its function of judgment over us, and does not feel that Wiles' scholarly distance can really allow this to happen. Having said that, it is clear that he accepts, without question for the most part, the findings of historical criticism—it is just that he feels he is doing something different with those findings.

The editor Mike Higton has placed in the first position in the collection Williams' 1979 piece on the Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky on whom Williams wrote his doctorate. This is not accidental: Williams found in Lossky an appraisal of apophatic theology that he has found indispensable for his own thought (and which evangelicals have found quite troubling). As Williams writes of the Russian: 'Apophasis is never, for Lossky, a move in a conceptual game: it is the metanoia of the intellect, and indeed, not only of the intellect, bound up as it is with the metanoia of the whole human person' (p. 2). As for Lossky, so for Williams. He sees in Lossky a great help in the struggle to 'achieve some kind of rapprochement between systematic theology and what is so inadequately called 'spirituality' (p. 19). Perhaps that sums up best what Williams himself is trying to achieve in his work.

One of the problems for engagement with Williams from a Reformed evangelical perspective is that he does not himself engage with Reformed theology in any meaningful way. The closest that he comes in this volume is his

very long essay on Barth, 'Barth and the triune god'. We find Williams ill-at-ease with Barth's insistence on an irresistible divine revelation, because it is too dependent on a view of religious language and knowledge that Williams himself rejects. Ultimately this is what is so exasperating about Williams' writing. He is so endlessly sceptical about what one might say about God, or about what God has said of himself, that it is hard to see how he is able to affirm what he does.

MICHAEL P. JENSEN
Sydney

STRICKEN BY GOD?

Nonviolent identification and the victory of Christ

Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (eds.)

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 536pp £17.99pb ISBN: 978-0-8928-6287-7

One of the most helpful features of this book is that its aims are clearly set out at the very beginning. Brad Jersak, one of the editors, says (p. 19) that the contributors recognise that 'a shift in our understanding of the atonement is both necessary and well under way'. According to him, each contributor presents an alternative to the traditional Evangelical view of penal substitution, and despite their many differences, all of them are supposed to stress nonviolence, God's total identification with humanity and the victory of Christ over Satan, sin and death.

Not all the essays deal with these themes in equal measure, and Jersak is careful to qualify his remarks by suggesting that while 'most' of the contributors deny penal substitution, not all do—though he does not say who is included in this minority. There can be no doubt that the overall tone of the book is strongly critical of the traditional Evangelical and Reformed doctrine of the atonement, though some of the authors do not appear to have a very clear idea of what that doctrine is. One senses that some have painted a caricature which they then proceed to demolish, and it is remarkable how seldom they engage with the classical expositors of penal substitution. Most of their animus appears to be directed against Hans Boersma, whose 2004 publication, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*, is taken to be the leading defence of the classical doctrine today. The curious thing is that they accept that Dr. Boersma has taken a critical approach to that doctrine, but fault him for not going far enough. In other words, they seem to be saying that if he were true to his own inner

convictions, Dr. Boersma would be on their side, which if true, makes the claim that he is the leading defender of penal substitution today seem rather hollow.

In seeking to find alternatives to penal substitution, many of the contributors fall back on the Christus Victor motif, which they claim was the generally accepted view in the early church. They also dabble in deification theories borrowed from the Eastern Orthodox church as well as various rather nebulous concepts such as ‘restorative peacemaking’. One theme that runs through most of the essays is that of nonviolence. Virtually all the authors represented in this volume take it for granted that Jesus taught this and that any theory of the atonement which compromises it must therefore be rejected. Sacrifice is regarded as violent by definition, and therefore it cannot play any part in our understanding of Christ’s death.

With presuppositions like these it is hardly surprising that traditional Evangelical teaching has a hard time of it. Yet quite why anyone should suppose that nonviolence forms an essential part of Jesus’ teaching is hard to fathom, since there is no evidence for this in the New Testament. It is true that Jesus told his followers to turn the other cheek, but he also said that he had come to bring not peace but a sword, so violence must play some part in his mission. At bottom what we are seeing here is the classic struggle between Anabaptist and Reformed ideas, which first surfaced in the sixteenth century and has received a powerful new boost in the past generation. It is easy to understand why people would become emotionally committed to nonviolence in their own lives, but to project that onto the New Testament and claim that it is the only way to follow Christ is going too far. It leads to a distortion of the gospel in the form of a rejection of penal substitution, which lies at its heart.

Another thing that readers of this book must bear in mind is that some of the more prominent contributors were not part of the two-day conference held in Akron, Pennsylvania in January 2007, whose papers form the bulk of this volume. The most obvious non-participant in that event is the late Professor C. F. D. Moule, whose essay on punishment and retribution was first published in 1965! Another important non-participant is N. T. Wright, whose long essay on the reasons for Jesus’ crucifixion give a classic resume of his ‘Israel’s final return from exile’ theory but says virtually nothing at all about the atonement. Bishop Wright is probably one of those who does not reject penal substitution,

at least not completely, but that is nowhere made clear and the unwary reader is liable to think that he goes along with the main gist of the book.

The scholarly quality of the volume is extremely variable, as one would expect from a symposium, but some of the essays should never have been published. Kharalambos Anstall's attack on what he calls 'juridical atonement theology' in the light of his understanding of Eastern Orthodoxy is little more than a rant against the Western Church for its supposed desertion of patristic purity, while Ronald Dart's piece on divinization defies analysis completely.

What can we say to someone who writes (p. 505): 'The task before us is to find our way out of the forest of atonement tribalism to the high peaks and lofty summits of a fuller understanding of why Christ came to this fragile earth, our island home.' What on earth is 'atonement tribalism'? Mr. Dart has been carried away by his rhetoric and landed himself in a forest of mixed metaphors and high-sounding but fundamentally meaningless phrases. After several pages of this kind of thing, he finishes both his article and the book with (p. 518): 'Let us live with the mystery, and be gracious with those who miss the comprehensive epic vision that cannot be easily netted nor reduced to a simple formula and explanation.' Perhaps the best response to like this is that we too must be gracious towards those who are incapable of expressing themselves clearly and who have failed to understand what the gospel is all about.

GERALD BRAY
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OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY — A thematic approach

Robin Routledge

Nottingham: Apollos, 2008 384pp £16.99hb ISBN: 978-1-84474-286-8

The Old Testament covers about three-quarters of our Bible, yet it remains curiously misunderstood in the Christian church. For many it is essentially a long introduction to the coming of Christ, consisting of both promises of the blessings he would bring and reminders of the dreadful state of affairs that existed before his appearing. With few exceptions, the names and people of Old Testament times strike us as outlandish and their way of life seems impossibly remote. This is not true everywhere, but it is noticeable that those

who feel closest to the Old Testament today tend to come from African or other tribal societies whose rituals and forms of story-telling seem similar to those of the ancient Hebrews.

That this is a simplistic view has long been understood by scholars, but for a variety of reasons their approaches have seldom trickled down to the ordinary Christian in the pew. Long-running arguments about the value of history and archaeology for understanding the Old Testament text, complex theories of literary origin or the development of religious traditions and the lingering suspicion that the Old Testament is really more about Judaism than about Christianity have all conspired to make this huge portion of Scripture seem alien and forbidding to many people today. Given this situation, it is a great joy to come across this book that sets out what the Old Testament is and how it has been understood over the centuries, but which also gives us a systematic analysis of its message that is specifically designed to be of practical use to the Christian church. The nine chapters following the introduction are arranged in a logical sequence, beginning with God and the spiritual realm, continuing with a discussion of creation and the origin of sin and then concentrating for five chapters on the relationship between God and his people. This deals with the subjects of election, worship, teaching, kingship and ethics. The last two chapters touch on Old Testament eschatology and its approach to non-Israelites, two themes which have an obvious bearing on the gospel as proclaimed in the New Testament.

The emphases and general weight given to these different topics corresponds well with the flavour of the Old Testament in general. There can be no doubt that it is a divine revelation to a specific people, couched in particular terms that presuppose an intrinsic monotheism—and therefore a coherence to reality that leads naturally from the particular circumstances of Israel to the fate of the world as a whole. Other scholars might arrange some of the material differently, but that is a small matter and should not detract from the overall usefulness of this book. What Dr. Routledge has done, and done magnificently, is made the Old Testament once more accessible to Christians in a way which they can relate to. For someone beginning theological studies, or for a lay person interested in the subject who does not know where to start, this is the perfect introduction. It is clearly written, adequately referenced and full of useful footnotes that develop specific topics that may interest some readers but

which are secondary to the overall purpose of the book. Its price makes it doubly attractive and it should be widely used as a textbook.

The author and the publishers are to be congratulated for having produced such a useful volume and one can only hope that it will prove its worth by helping to revitalise Old Testament study in the church.

GERALD BRAY
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A BODY OF DIVINITY

James Ussher

Watford: Church Society, 2007 614pp £24hb ISBN: 0-85190-083-6

Speaking once of the Irish clergy, so Boswell relates, Dr. Johnson praised Swift and Berkeley, then added, 'But Ussher was the great luminary of the Irish church, and a greater no church could boast of, at least in modern times.' Ussher was born in Ireland, at a critical time for the Church of Ireland, then newly reformed, and when Queen Elizabeth founded a Protestant university in Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, Ussher was its first student. In his twenties he was appointed professor of divinity there, and left at last only to become bishop of Meath and then archbishop of Armagh. He was probably the main author of the 1615 Irish Articles of Religion and was always their warm defender. He was a diligent preacher, and to his phenomenal learning he added piety and moderation. His latter years were spent in England, and, though an episcopalian and a royalist, he retained the respect of the Puritans, and when he died Cromwell commanded that he be buried in Westminster Abbey, and allowed the use of the Prayer Book service for the occasion.

Ussher is chiefly known today for his writings on chronology, in which he made the assumption, common at the time, that the genealogies of the Book of Genesis are complete and enable one to date the creation of the world. However, he was equally well known in his lifetime for his writing on ancient Christian history, on patristics and on the Roman controversy. He made pioneering studies of the development of the creed and of the original text of the epistles of Ignatius, and his Answer to a Jesuit is one of the chief Anglican replies to the claims of the church of Rome. He wrote in Latin as well as in

English, and three of his chief works in English are reprinted by Church Society in this volume, with an informative (not to say, controversial!) introduction by Duncan Boyd. Apart from the *Body of Divinity*, the volume contains the Irish Articles and Immanuel, a short but illuminating treatise on the incarnation.

The Irish Articles are a masterly piece of work. It is not always noticed that they contain the substance, and often the wording, of each of the Thirty-nine Articles except two, Articles 35 and 36. The reason for omitting these two may be that Ussher considered that by 1615 the Homilies and the Ordinal could stand on their own feet and did not need the commendation of the Articles. However, in the Irish Articles the arrangement of the Thirty-nine-Articles is completely altered. Their original arrangement seems to have been dictated by the needs of contemporary controversy. They start with the common doctrinal heritage of the church, then the authority of Scripture, then the doctrine of salvation, then the doctrine of church, ministry and sacraments, and finally church order. In the Irish Articles they are rearranged more in the manner of a systematic theology, amplifying and supplementing them as necessary for this purpose, and beginning with the authority of Scripture in Articles 1–7. Predestination is more fully treated in Articles 11–17 (drawing on some of the proposed Lambeth Articles of 1595), and so is Justification in Articles 34–38, and the Church in Article 68. Topics added are Creation in Articles 18–21, the Man of Sin in Article 80 and Eschatology in Articles 101–104.

The Reformers, both on the continent and in Britain, used two forms of literature for the concise expression of doctrine. One was the confession of faith, which was designed for use by mature Christians, and of which the Thirty-nine Articles and the Irish Articles are examples, and the other was the catechism, consisting of questions and answers, which was designed for the instruction of beginners in the faith, and of which the Prayer Book Catechism and the *Body of Divinity* are examples. Of course, these two catechisms differ enormously in length, but in England also there was a ‘larger catechism’, called by this name in the 1603 Canons. The reference is to Dean Alexander Nowell’s catechism (included in the Parker Society volumes), though even this does not compare in length with the *Body of Divinity*.

Such was Ussher’s reputation, that he had the unusual problem of finding that people sometimes published his writings with his name but without his

permission. This happened with his *Reduction of Episcopacy unto a form of Synodical Government received in the ancient Church* (1641), and it happened also with his *Body of Divinity* (1645), though in the latter case the problem is rather more complicated. It was issued by a man whose preface shows that he greatly respected Ussher, John Downame, perhaps out of fear that it might never otherwise appear. When it appeared, Ussher wrote a friendly letter of protest to the editor, objecting not only to the lack of consultation but also to the fact that it was just part of a much larger work in which he had not simply expressed his own views but had transcribed the words of various other writers, with some of which he did not agree. How Downame had handled this larger work we do not know. Ussher apparently thinks that he did not have access to all of it. From what he did have access to, he perhaps selected the parts that he thought Ussher would have agreed with, and omitted the rest. But if so, it appears from Ussher's letter that he had mistakenly thought Ussher would have agreed with certain passages which did not have his agreement.

In his letter Ussher is far from disowning the work, though he did not like the words of others being attributed to him and not them, especially when they were words he disagreed with. He suggests that Downame or some other person should revise and improve the book, and publish it in his own name, not Ussher's, making appropriate attributions to the sources, notably the catechisms of Thomas Cartwright and Samuel Crook. Downame was older than Ussher and never did this, nor did anyone else, so the only form in which we have the *Body of Divinity* is the form Downame published in 1645, and we must be thankful to have at least this. At the same time, we must bear in mind that not every statement in it met with Ussher's approval, so individual statements, not endorsed elsewhere in Ussher's writings, should be treated with caution.

ROGER BECKWITH
Oxford

SIMPLY CHRISTIAN

N. T. Wright

London: SPCK, 2006 204pp £8.99pb ISBN: 0-281-05481-9

'Not since C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* has there been such a thrilling attempt to re-express the heart of the Christian faith', says the cover. That may

be a little overstated although *Simply Christian* is a powerful exposition of the Christian faith which will enthral any educated reader with its careful argument and illustrations from music concerts and art galleries. It presents Jesus Christ in the context of the biblical story of salvation and as the one who satisfies ‘the passion for justice, the longing for spirituality, the hunger for relationships, the yearning for beauty’ (p. 117). By way of response, the author sets out three options—pantheism (God too near), deism (God too far), and gospel (God close at hand)—and, as a fresh way of speaking of repentance and faith, calls for renunciation and rediscovery (p. 190).

The author offers several corrections to contemporary understandings and readers will have to make up their own mind whether the rebukes are fair. For instance, the author wants us to move beyond ‘sterile discussions’ between Protestants and Roman Catholics on the Lord’s Supper (p. 134), he is cautious about inerrancy because we should emphasise what the Bible is for (p. 156), and sin is not about our struggle to obey an arbitrary law-code (p. 188). In addition, the author’s treatment of the cross is passionate but limited: ‘The sorrow of heaven joined with the anguish of earth; the forgiving love stored up in God’s future was poured out into the present’ as ‘the fulfilment of God’s promises to his people of old’ became ‘the fulcrum around which world history turns’ (p. 95). But should not there also be a mention here of our sin or satisfying God’s wrath? Concerns about the atonement were also raised with C. S. Lewis. Maybe this is where the parallel lies.

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GOD, EVIL AND DESIGN. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

David O’Connor

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Recent arguments in the media have stirred up a new interest in the existence of God, and this book is another contribution to what seems to be a burgeoning genre. Unlike most of the others though, it does not take a polemical position for or against a divine being, but endeavours to present the issues involved in as dispassionate a way as possible.

Dr. O'Connor is a philosopher, not a theologian, and he argues from philosophical principles. He is well versed in the classical arguments for the existence of God, and has a good grasp of modern writing on the subject. There are frequent references to Christian apologists like Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne as well as to more sceptical writers, which gives the book a balance not often attained in its field. Dr. O'Connor also writes in a very accessible style, and does his best to illustrate complex philosophical arguments with examples taken from everyday life. It is therefore possible for the non-specialist to follow his line of thought without difficulty, and the book seems almost designed for discussion groups which would find weightier tomes on the subject indigestible. It is ideal for beginning students, who need to grasp what the issues are before embarking on a detailed examination of them.

Dr. O'Connor is careful not to foreclose the arguments for or against the existence of God, and he accepts that many readers will disagree with him at any number of points. Indeed, he welcomes this, and sees his book more as a stimulus to further thought than as an answer to questions which have been asked in different ways since the dawn of time. His humility is impressive and contributes to the general tone of fairness that characterises the book as a whole. Having said that, Dr. O'Connor reveals in the closing pages that he is more of a 'friendly atheist' than a religious believer, and anyone thinking of using the book for teaching purposes must bear that in mind.

The heart of Dr. O'Connor's concern is what theologians have traditionally called 'theodicy', or how suffering and evil can exist in a world created and governed by a good and omnipotent God. He is very careful to distinguish between different types of evil, some of which have human causes and some of which do not. He devotes a great deal of space to the problem of human freedom and the foreknowledge of God, issues with which theologians continue to wrestle. In the end he concludes that arguments for the existence of God do not address these problems adequately enough to be preferred over a non-theistic approach, though he does not dismiss religious believers in the way that someone like Richard Dawkins does.

From a theistic standpoint, it might be objected that Dr. O'Connor does not address the fundamental question of why it is that we have a notion of 'evil' at all. It cannot be ascribed merely to human self-interest, because there are many

instances in which things generally perceived as evil (like murder) may well be in the interest of most people. An example which Dr. O'Connor mentions is the case of Adolf Hitler—would it have been wrong to assassinate him and spare the world the many evils which he brought into it? Dr. O'Connor suggests that a good and loving God might have eliminated him by 'natural causes', but would that have made God's existence more credible? In the end, we are all eliminated in that way, without it making any noticeable difference to the level of belief or unbelief. Like most atheists in the Western world, Dr. O'Connor assumes a basically Judaeo-Christian moral sense and uses it to deny the existence of the God who gave it to us. In the final analysis we are back to the position of Job, who did not understand why suffering and evil came his way but who knew that whatever the reason was, his redeemer lived and would justify him in the end. That is the way of faith, and for Christians it remains a more compelling message than the logical but fundamentally flawed arguments of the philosophers to the contrary.

Dr. O'Connor's book is interesting and stimulating, though a believing Christian will inevitably have to dissent from his conclusions. That would not worry him though, as he respects the position of religious believers and expects his readers to have thoughts of their own, which is a refreshing change from so many of the books that have recently appeared on this subject.

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