

Book Reviews

A THEOLOGY OF INCLUSIVISM

Neal Punt

Allendale, MI: Northland Books, 2008 263pp \$14.95pb

ISBN: 978-0-945315-46-9

For those unfamiliar with the author and his subject, Neal Punt is a retired minister of the Christian Reformed Church in the USA and Evangelical ‘inclusivism’ is a term used to mean that the biblical texts which suggest that salvation in Christ is intended for everyone must be taken as read. However, Mr. Punt is not a universalist, because he also says that salvation is not granted to those whom the Bible specifically excludes, though who exactly they are is somewhat less clear.

The book must be set in the context of an argument over Calvinism and limited atonement which has been raging in Reformed circles (especially, though not exclusively, in America) over the past generation. Mr Punt begins his survey by asking himself whether God is ‘stingy’ or ‘generous’ with his grace, and his answer sets the tone for what follows. The fact that this starting point is not a Biblical one is conveniently overlooked as Mr Punt goes on to ‘prove’ the generosity of God in offering salvation to everyone, with the possible exceptions of Adolf Hitler and theologians who are more conservative than he is. The result is that the book has an air of breathless polemic about it which is clearly rooted in the internal quarrels of the Christian Reformed Church.

Suffice it to say that even if God had decided to save only one person, he would still have been ‘generous’ with his grace, so the basic premise that governs the work does not stand up to serious investigation. Whether Christ died for all or only for some depends on how the question is put. In one sense, Christ died for all because his sacrifice is sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world. Nobody has sinned so much that he cannot be saved by God, and therefore the church is summoned to preach the Gospel to every creature. To people who had been brought up on Jewish exclusivism that was an important and radical message; Christians were to go to Samaria and to the ends of the earth with the Good News of salvation because no-one was excluded from it.

At the same time, it does not follow from this that every person is saved, apart from those who are specifically condemned in the Scriptures. The case of children who die in infancy is an obvious one, that Mr Punt resolves by saying that they all go to heaven because they have not committed any actual sin and are therefore not condemned. This sounds good, but it leads to the view that it is somehow better to die as an infant than to live to maturity, because the risk of sinning (and therefore of losing one's salvation) is greatly multiplied in adults. Yet the New Testament constantly tells us to be mature in our faith and not to remain babes in Christ, so it can hardly be claimed that immaturity is a preferred option in Scripture. Nor is there any reason to suppose that infants are sinless or somehow protected from the consequences of the fall. God's choice of some people for salvation and not others is a mystery which cannot be resolved by logical argument, but it can be understood from practical experience. To know Christ is to know the love of God, and there are people who do not know that love or believe in it. It is not for us to judge them or to exclude them from the church, but we must recognise the phenomenon and learn to deal with it. The practical consequence of this is that we shall preach the Gospel to them as much as to any other creature, and not assume that they are saved.

Ultimately the duty of the Christian is to be faithful to the light he has been given from God and not to pass judgment on things that are unknown or unknowable to him. As a preacher of the Gospel, I can never write anyone off as a lost cause, but unless I accept that there are lost people about, even in the church, I shall never preach the Gospel to them. Furthermore, I must also accept that God works in the hearts of some people in ways that are not true of others—two men were working in the field, one was taken and the other left. Why this is so, and why the choice falls as it does I cannot explain, but I have to accept the reality. The doctrine of predestination and limited atonement comes into disrepute when it is misunderstood and misused to produce false security, spiritual snobbery and a church defined in human categories like race or income level. Such abuses are a terrible sin and we must do our utmost to avoid them, but we cannot go to the point of dismissing limited atonement altogether. It remains a fundamental truth of our faith which must be held in tension with the command to preach the gospel to every creature because God does not want any of his creatures to perish.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

CONFIRMATION BOOK FOR ADULTS

Sharon Swain

London: SPCK, 2008 128pp £8.99pb ISBN: 978 0281 05955 3

Amongst the many books and courses that, like this one, intend to “cover most subjects that new Christians need to learn or discover for themselves”, there are few aimed specifically at “adults who are either considering confirmation or who are members of a confirmation group”. In fact, I know of none from a solidly evangelical background, focused on those being confirmed, since John Stott wrote *Your Confirmation* over fifty years ago.

This is a book that is wonderfully clearly written, so that the average teenager could easily follow it (which is exactly the level of readability needed). However, its content is not so easy to commend. It is not that Swain teaches definite error (although see below for some painful exceptions), it is rather that where it is true, it is too weak to be useful for its intended audience of “new Christians”.

Perhaps one example will suffice: In chapter 2, “What is Christianity? Jesus Christ”, we find this sentence: “For this [i.e. because we have rejected God] we deserve punishment, but Jesus chose to take our place and suffer instead of us; he offered himself as a ransom to pay our freedom”. That sentence is an excellent summary of the heart of the gospel, the doctrine of penal substitution.

However, that sentence (and that is the only sentence of its type that I could find, other than a quotation of John 3:16, which follows it) is buried in a section focusing on the point that ‘For Christians, Jesus is the God who has suffered, but who understands our pain’. In a book for ‘new Christians’, I should have liked to see much greater clarity and emphasis on what is of ‘first importance...that Christ died for our sins...’. It would be far too easy to miss this reference to Christ suffering in our place.

As noted above, there are, regrettably, worse points of genuine error. Probably the most glaring is when we are told, ‘For Christians, the whole Bible is ‘God-breathed’, and we can say that it has been inspired by God [what this means is never discussed]...However, these books were not written by God: they were written by ordinary men and women, and they reflect the understanding and culture of their day. They have also been translated and copied over the

centuries. As such, they can, and do, contain mistakes'. A book that has as one of its basic statements about the Holy Scriptures that 'they can, and do, contain mistakes' is clearly unsuitable.

I also found it odd—given the book's target audience—that in the same chapter, Swain encourages her readers to dabble in amateur source and redaction criticism. Surely, it is much more important to help new Christians become acquainted with the contents of the Scriptures than with modern theories of their pre-history.

Prayer is—unbiblically—'likened to a two-way conversation on a telephone'; the Church of England is distinguished from 'the "Non-Conformist or Protestant Churches"'; and we are told, contrary to Article XXV, that 'The Communion service is one of seven "sacraments"'.

The first paragraph of the introduction states: '[This book] is written from an Anglican perspective'. Unfortunately, what Swain means by 'Anglican' is what a great many other people also mean. This is a book that I cannot recommend for use with its intended audience. One would have to make so many caveats and adjustments that it would be easier and more profitable to use one of the many other offerings for new Christians, or even to create one's own material.

TIMOTHY EDWARDS

London

PAUL, THE PASTORAL EPISTLES AND THE EARLY CHURCH

James W. Aageson

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008 235pp £12.99 ISBN:978-1-5985-6041-1

The Pastoral Epistles have long been at the heart of the controversy about the origins and development of the early church. Does their relatively highly developed ecclesiology represent an authentically apostolic origin or is it the product of a second or third generation transformation, in which communities of the free spirit changed into hierarchically-ordered churches dominated by a single 'orthodoxy' imposed and controlled by an élite? Arguments over this have raged for the better part of two centuries and have resurfaced recently in debates over the role of women in ministry. The Pastoral Epistles are clearly

against what we would now call women's ordination, which has encouraged those in favour of it to relegate them to a second tier of Biblical writing which lacks apostolic authority. Thus the scepticism first expressed in opposition to the apostolic origin of 'early Catholicism' continues to thrive in the latest incursion of liberalism into the life of the church.

Dr. Aageson is aware of this and does his best to negotiate the many difficulties which the critical tradition has thrown up. Recognising that not everyone denies the Pauline authorship of the Epistles, he tries to sideline the question by saying that it does not affect their message or their place in the developing Pauline tradition in any significant way. Whether Paul wrote them or not, they represent the culmination of his missionary career and the transition to a more settled and permanent church order which he may or may not have witnessed towards the end of his life. In any case, the Pastoral Epistles cannot be relegated to a late second-century date because their style and content are as different from the pseudepigraphal texts of that period as they are from the undisputed letters of Paul. The conclusion must therefore be that they represent an intermediate stage which must be located at or shortly after the end of the apostle's life.

Despite his best efforts to push the question of authorship into the background, Dr. Aageson cannot overcome the basic problem which it poses. If Paul did not write the Pastoral Epistles, it becomes necessary to explain why they appeared in their present form. It is not merely that Paul is named as their author, but that their content is so personal to him that it makes little sense if the writer was one of his posthumous disciples. Why would such a person have gone to the trouble of developing such an elaborate fiction, which must have been apparent to his first readers, and how is it that he was not discovered? The Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles was never questioned by anyone in the early church, which is surprising if the arguments used to justify their pseudonymity carry any weight. The ancients were well-attuned to forgery and it is inconceivable that the entire church would have accepted these letters as genuine if there was any real doubt about them.

Dr. Aageson justifies his position by a highly-detailed analysis of the style and vocabulary of the Epistles, pointing out just how they differ from each other and from the undisputed Pauline letters, but there are so many unknowable

factors involved which brings the validity of his conclusions into question. It may be true that the Pastorals call Christ the Saviour much more readily than the other Pauline Epistles do, but how can we evaluate the significance of this? Can we surmise that just because they do not concentrate on Jewish-Gentile conflicts they must be of a much later date than Galatians or Romans? There is so much about the early church that we simply do not know, and the letters are so short that it is impossible to generalise from them about the Christian church as a whole. In particular, the common assumption that there was a Pauline community that gradually canonised his writings lacks any evidence to support it. It is a compensating theory invented to explain why we have the Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament today, but the assumptions underlying it are much harder to prove than Pauline authorship is.

There are many valuable things in Dr. Aageson's book and scholars in the field will have to take his research into account, but his thesis is vitiated from the start by his unwillingness to accept Pauline authorship as the most likely explanation for their origin and canonisation and this inevitably affects the rest of his argument. The Pastorals will undoubtedly continue to attract debate among New Testament scholars but it must be hoped that they will recognise the fundamental importance of the authorship question for our understanding of them. By attempting to minimise that issue, Dr. Aageson has compromised the value of his work in other areas which is unfortunate, though those who are able to assess the relative merits of the other positions which he advocates will be informed and stimulated by what he has to say about them.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

THOMAS MOORE OF LIVERPOOL—ONE OF OUR OLDEST COLONISTS:

Essays and Addresses to Celebrate 150 Years of Moore College

Peter G. Bolt

Camperdown, NSW: Bolt Publishing, 2007 328pp £20.00pb ISBN: 978-0-980357-905

Peter Bolt lectures in New Testament and Greek at Moore College in Sydney, with numerous publications to his credit on biblical and doctrinal themes. Yet

he has another string to his bow, that of local historian. Here he brings together ten articles and addresses composed for Moore College's recent sesquicentenary celebrations in 2006, all concerning its original benefactor, Thomas Moore (1762-1840).

Moore first arrived in Australia in 1792 as a ship's carpenter, but went on to establish himself as one of the largest landholders and wealthiest businessmen in colonial New South Wales. When he died, he left his fortune not to his surviving relatives, but to the Church of England—a massive bequest of 6,000 acres and £20,000. His testimony was 'God gave it all to me, and I shall give it all back to Him'. The bishop wanted to train more clergy for Australia, so spent the bulk of the estate on founding Moore College, the oldest evangelical theological college in the Anglican Communion. (St. John's College, Highbury, now transferred to Nottingham, did not open its doors until seven years later, in 1863.) Moore's old home in Liverpool (now a Sydney suburb) was the original location for the college, until it moved to its present Newtown site in 1891.

Bolt's book offers a number of colourful snapshots of Thomas Moore, though the collection is rather random – his purchase of Spanish Merino sheep; his role as a colonial magistrate; his purveying of timber for the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic War; his connection with St Luke's Church, Liverpool; his painted portrait; and Bolt's genealogical hunt for Moore's mysterious English family. By far the longest chapter (95 pages) concerns Moore's personal library. Because these addresses were delivered to different audiences, there is considerable repetition. Another oddity is that much of the book was written before Bolt's research was complete, so early chapters profess ignorance on details revealed in later chapters! The major strength of the book is Bolt's exploration of archival sources in Sydney, many not previously examined by historians.

Several intriguing questions are raised by the study, not least the puzzle over Moore's personal theological convictions. When was he converted? Was the benefactor of one of the world's leading evangelical colleges himself an evangelical? His beloved wife, Rachel, arrived in Sydney in 1790 as a 'Second Fleet' convict, serving seven years for theft in London. She promptly became mistress to a local surgeon and bore him a son, before marrying Moore in 1797. Yet by the end of their lives Thomas and Rachel were lauded as exemplars of godliness. When did the change occur? Bolt suggests that Moore

was an evangelical by 1817, when he joined the Bible Society committee, but the evidence is far from conclusive. His book collection suggests he may have previously dabbled in Unitarianism, though he died a staunch Anglican. We are left wondering what Moore College would make of their benefactor today if the historical record had not cast a discreet veil over his theological opinions.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

Oxford

WE BECOME WHAT WE WORSHIP: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF IDOLATRY

G. K. Beale

Downers Grove/Nottingham: IVP Academic/Apollos, 2008 341pp £17.88pb
ISBN: 978-1-84474-314-8

Greg Beale has written an important and brilliant book on a key biblical theme—that of idolatry. Idolatry is the central sin in Scripture and yet it is frequently ignored or underplayed in evangelical preaching, teaching, and life in the church in the West. Professor Beale’s book is a vital corrective to our weakness. Beale’s thesis can be simply stated: what you revere you resemble, either for ruin or restoration. For Beale, the worshipper reflects some of the important qualities or attributes of the object of worship (either idols or the true God).

Beale begins in the introductory chapter with some important hermeneutical and methodological reflections on a new approach to biblical theology. He argues for grammatical-historical with canonical-contextual exegesis. In particular, Beale builds a case for an intertextual approach to biblical theology where biblical texts mutually interpret each other. For Beale, exegesis involves a ‘thick description’ of a text where a quotation or allusion may illuminate the true and complex levels of meaning in the source text. His methodological reflections will not be accepted by all in the academy, especially his advocacy that the New Testament’s quotations and allusions can be used to interpret the Old Testament source text.

Beale’s hermeneutic is innovative and very refreshing and means that the Bible is a coherent unity which allows for theological reflection; yet he may be open to the charge that he over exegetes some passages (though Beale argues that his

exegesis of some passages receive their validity from the ‘cumulative evidence of the whole book.’)

The heart of the book lies in chapters 2 and 3 where Beale explores key Old Testament texts which are foundational for his thesis. For Beale, Isaiah 6 is the lens through which we get a snapshot of Israel’s sin of idolatry. He argues for a novel interpretation of Isaiah 6, that in this chapter we have sensory-organ-malfunction language (unseeing eyes, unhearing ears, and an insensitive heart) and burning trees (idols) which portray the sin of idolatry on the part of Israel. God through Isaiah pronounces a judgement on idolaters who begin to resemble their idols: they have become as spiritually blind, deaf, and lifeless as the idols. Beale also focuses on the golden calf incident in the Old Testament and presents intriguing evidence that the stiff-necks and behaviour of the worshippers of the golden calf resemble rebellious cows running wild and needing to be re-gathered, and thus Israel had become like its calf idol. Occasionally in these chapters Beale relies too heavily on the allusion to exegete the source passage rather than concluding that the allusion develops and expands something latent and implicit in the source passage.

Beale has a chapter on the origin of Old Testament idolatry dealing with the fall in Genesis 3 and Ezekiel 28, convincingly arguing that the sin of Adam and Eve was idolatry since Adam and Eve attempt to supplant God with themselves. A chapter on idolatry in early Judaism follows, though Beale fails to interact with Margalit and Halbertal’s seminal book, *Idolatry*, on early Jewish views of idolatry. Scholars will find the chapter interesting but many others may find it difficult.

The next couple of chapters on idolatry in the Gospels and Acts fail to add much to Beale’s thesis. In particular, Beale unconvincingly sees the citations of Isaiah 6 in the Gospels as indicating that Israel’s attachment to tradition constitutes idolatry, despite the terminology of idolatry and worship being absent from these texts. It is difficult to see how any early reader of the Gospels would be able to notice that the citations to Isaiah 6 in the Gospels refer to idolatry without any explicit identification.

The following chapters on Paul and Revelation are much stronger. Central to Beale’s thesis is 1 Corinthians 10. Beale argues that here Paul, alluding to the

golden calf incident, asserts that the idolater will reflect the same evil or dead spiritual attributes as the idols and the destructive and deceptive character as the demons that stand behind idols. My own independent thesis on powers of evil and idols in 1 Corinthians runs on parallel lines and supports Beale's thesis (though Beale's argument could be strengthened by preferring the textual variant in 1 Cor 10:20a). Further, in Revelation 13 Beale correctly argues that worshippers, by identifying with the beast, resemble his likeness. There follows a fine chapter on the positive side of resembling what you worship, with an overview of the entire Bible, focusing on the reversal from reflecting the image of idols to reflecting God's image.

Beale closes with some pungent reflections on the idolatry of the self in the modern evangelical church. Beale's stimulating book is invaluable for any preacher thinking of preaching on idolatry or any of the passages that Beale discusses, and repays careful study. Further, Beale's thesis raises very important implications: as to whether Muslims resemble Allah, Hindus resemble their various gods, secularists resemble their ultimate values, and, for evangelicals, whether we reflect the image of our Lord.

ROHINTAN MODY
Virginia Water

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM:
Sources, History and Theology, with a Translation of the Smaller and
Larger Catechisms of Zacharias Ursinus—Texts and Studies in
Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought**

**Lyle D. Bierma, with Charles D. Gunnoe Jr, Karin Y. Maag, and Paul
W. Fields**

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005 223pp £19.99pb
ISBN: 978-0801031175

The Heidelberg Catechism (HC) is one of the most important confessional documents of the sixteenth century. Prepared in 1562 and published in 1563, the Catechism was enormously influential throughout Europe in the period after it was written, and it still serves as one of the confessional documents for many Reformed Churches.

This Introduction has two parts. Part 2 contains translations of Zacharias Ursinus's Smaller and Larger Catechisms, the former of which was a source document for the HC. In their wording and theology, these make a fascinating comparison with the HC. Part 1 is an historical introduction, consisting of five essays on the history, theology, translations, and scholarly bibliography surrounding the Catechism. Heidelberg was the capital of the Rhenish 'Lower Palatinate', part of one of the leading principalities of the Holy Roman Empire in the sixteenth century. In chapter one, Charles Gunnoe Jr outlines the history of the Palatinate, narrating its reception of first the Lutheran reformation and later—via controversies between Gnesio-Lutherans (who remained loyal to Luther's sacramental teachings) and Philippist, or Melanchthonian Lutherans (who were much closer to the sacramental theologies of the Reformed wing of the Reformation)—its embrace of a Reformed Protestantism. Lyle Bierma builds on this in the next two chapters on the purpose and authorship, and the sources and theological orientation, of the HC. He argues that although the Catechism was produced by a committee of theologians and pastors, Ursinus was the primary author, and the man responsible for its final shape. Caspar Olevianus has often been cited as the Catechism's final redactor, but in line with recent scholarship, Bierma considers this unlikely, although Olevianus was part of the committee. Bierma shows that, in keeping with the various Lutheran and Reformed influences on the Palatinate, the purpose of the Catechism was threefold: to instruct children in sound doctrine, to serve as a preaching guide for pastors, and to provide confessional unity among the Protestant factions in the Palatinate. He convincingly demonstrates that, whilst previous generations of scholars have sought to identify a Calvinist, Bucerian, Bullingerian, or Melanchthonian theology in the HC, the catechism is a consensus document that avoids formulations that would prove divisive among the various Reformed and Philippist Lutheran parties. Moving from origins to reception, Karin Maag provides a brief introduction and finding list of the many editions and translations of the Catechism in its first hundred years. Paul Field provides a comprehensive bibliography of all HC research from 1900-2005.

The authors are acknowledged authorities on the HC and its bibliography, and although written by different authors, the book forms a coherent whole, with later essays building on earlier ones. For students interested in studying the HC in its historical context, this volume is therefore an essential orientation, and a wonderful bibliographical resource. However, as with any historical or

theological document, the first and best introduction is to steep oneself in the primary texts. Therefore, Churchman readers will probably want to invest in and study a modern translation of the HC, and Ursinus's own *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (published by P & R), before they turn to this worthy addition to the secondary literature.

MATTHEW MASON
Tunbridge Wells

**GEMS FROM MARTYN LLOYD-JONES:
An Anthology of Quotations from “The Doctor”**

Tony Sargent

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007 320pp £12.99pb ISBN:978-1-84227-494-1

This book is beautifully produced and of a quality to match the contents, but the title is rather off-putting. One whose, ‘stock-in-trade was lawyer-like cumulative argument,’ as Packer so eloquently says in his foreword, could never be contained in ‘gems’. Perhaps the subtitle, although formal, is better: ‘An Anthology of Quotations from the Doctor’ (or even ‘from Dr. Lloyd-Jones’.)

The question occurs: has the face on the cover been ‘touched-up’? No. That was how he always looked: highly serious, absorbed in thought and erudite in the extreme. Listen to him: ‘The Christian is sorrowful but not morose.... sober minded but not sullen, grave but never prohibitive.... his happiness is a serious happiness.’ A second question (which Tony Sargent asks in his Introduction) is whether the Doctor have approved of such a collection? I can hear him now dismiss this age as one of ‘digests’. Nevertheless I cannot but feel it to be very useful reading for any Christian (especially preachers).

Do we learn what motivated and encouraged this man? What enabled him still to live contentedly in 1953 on a quarter of the salary he earned in medicine in 1927? His whole *raison d’être*, was that, ‘God is searching for man and that he has revealed himself to man, because man by searching cannot find God.’ He believed that, ‘The Cross is the supreme and, the sublimest declaration of the holiness of God,’ and, ‘absolutely essential’ as nothing else could save us. We learn that what constrained Paul constrained Martyn Lloyd-Jones, ‘woe is me if I preach not the gospel.’

One surprise is his numerous warnings to preachers. He warns them for instance not to live on their own activities. 'You can be so busy preaching and working that you are not nurturing your own soul'. This makes the section on preparation and responsibility powerful reading for any preacher.

What encouraged him? Hearing that a woman said, disapprovingly, 'this man preaches to us as if we were sinners'. We find that he was always anxious that everyone should think and work things out. What a glorious ornament to Protestantism that was. You not only trusted the 'peasants' with the scriptures but you dared to say, 'work it out for yourselves.' Hear his advice on handling difficult passages—"do not listen to the devil who tells you to "leave it to the theologians." Say, "I belong to the Christian family and I intend to listen and to read until I do understand". The order was all important; he taught the mind which moved the heart which motivated the will. He teaches that apart from the Holy Spirit's work 'the greatest genius was in the same case as the greatest fool'!

He acknowledges that possibly 'the most difficult thing of all is to pray.' You might find that you cannot pray, perhaps, for one hour. ('Why cannot you?' he baldly asks.) Many will benefit then from reading the whole section on 'Prayer and Praise.' This deep veneration for God was typical of him—you knew he had been in God's presence before he came into yours. Again, he warns the preacher, 'God have mercy on all of us who are called to preach if we fail in the exercise of this ministry.'

We also hear from Anatole France, Charles Lamb, Gandhi, and Hegel among many others. He quotes from Francis Thomson and disparagingly from Tennyson; and he dares to criticise C. S. Lewis, Jonathan Edwards, and even the Puritans. The reader can sample his humour too: Westminster Chapel building is but a nonconformist 'inferiority complex' or, men who are popular today are, 'an aggregate of negatives'. Yes, he is awfully hard on saxophones and on women. But on the essentials he is gloriously right. I commend Tony Sargent's excellent volume. This is an invaluable introduction to the Doctor's sermons.

ERMINE DESMOND

London

GATHERING TO HIS NAME: THE STORY OF OPEN BRETHREN IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Tim Grass

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006 589pp £29.99pb ISBN 1-84227-220-9

THE GROWTH OF THE BRETHREN MOVEMENT: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Neil T.R. Dickson and Tim Grass (eds.)

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006 271pp £19.99pb ISBN 1-84227-427-9

‘Growth’ and ‘Brethren Movement’ are not words we expect to find in the same sentence. Indeed, a more likely title for Neil Dickson and Tim Grass’ new book would be ‘The Catastrophic and Irreversible Decline of the Brethren Movement’. Everyone knows former members of the Brethren, but how many current members can you name? The list of seceders is long and glittering—Sir Fred Catherwood, Gerald Coates (founder of the Pioneer Network), John Drane, Roger Forster (of Ichthus), James Houston (founder of Regent College, Vancouver), Jonathan Lamb (of Langham Preaching), the late Nigel Lee (of UCCF), Patrick Sookhdeo (of the Barnabas Fund), Dave Tomlinson (of post-evangelical notoriety), Hugh Williamson (regius professor of Hebrew at Oxford), to name but a few. Who is left? Over the last forty years membership has declined by a staggering sixty per cent. The number of assemblies has dropped by a third—now less than 680 in England—and they are closing at the rate of about one a week. Those assemblies which still survive tend to be tiny and ancient, and many are expected to fold soon.

Nevertheless, as David Bebbington observes, here is a movement ‘whose significance always exceeded its numbers’ (*Gathering*, p. xvi). During the 1920s and 30s the Brethren were a vital ‘bulwark of evangelicalism’ (*Growth*, p. 113), preserving the faith against the aggressive assaults of rationalism and sacerdotalism. While other evangelicals were liberalised and became ineffective, the Brethren stood firm on scriptural authority and the priority of mission, sowing the seeds for the post-War evangelical resurgence. Their contribution to biblical scholarship was especially significant, through teachers like Fred Bruce, Donald Wiseman and Alan Millard. Meanwhile at the early Billy Graham Crusades in the 1950s about a quarter of the counsellors were Brethren.

These two volumes are a valuable contribution to our understanding of the movement, building on seminal works like Harold Rowdon's *Origins of the Brethren* (1967) and Roy Coad's *History of the Brethren Movement* (1968), as well as recent studies like Dickson's *Brethren in Scotland* (2002) and Roger Shuff's *Searching for the True Church* (2005). The Dickson and Grass symposium is a festschrift in Rowdon's honour with an international flavour, including fresh studies of the Brethren in Germany, Singapore, New Zealand, Australia, Jamaica, Zambia and Angola. The Grass monograph is more substantial and deserves to become the standard introduction to the Brethren in Britain and Ireland. He traces the movement from its early roots in Devon and Dublin in the 1820s, up to the present day, introducing us to the key personalities, theologies and controversies. Grass's depth of research is impressive, with detailed knowledge of local assemblies sometimes far from the beaten track. His book is filled with a wealth of fascinating material, clearly and sympathetically analysed.

Both volumes keep returning to that hotly-debated yet most vital question which dominates Brethren studies, 'Why, then, did such a vibrant evangelical movement decline so rapidly?' Rowdon, now in his 80s, believes the answer is that the Brethren became 'captive to a tradition...a man-made interpretation of biblical data, heavily influenced by cultural factors, impervious to the breaking forth of yet more truth from God's holy word, and unserviceable for the needs of a rapidly changing world' (*Growth*, p. 115). He is resigned to their bleak prospects: 'Perhaps the time has come for us to recognize that the baton has been handed on to others who will carry it further and more effectively than we did' (*Growth*, p. 130). In contrast, Grass urges that 'we should not rush to write off the Brethren or to speak of them in the past tense', because they may be revived by God, just as others have been in the past (*Gathering*, p. 433). He concludes: 'their story is not yet complete and their usefulness not yet ended' (*Gathering*, p. 498). Although the Brethren's future is uncertain, British evangelicalism remains forever in their debt for their faithfulness in the past.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE
Oxford

SAVING POWER: THEORIES OF ATONEMENT AND FORMS OF THE CHURCH

Peter Schmiechen

Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005 xi+371pp £21.99pb

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The basic thesis of *Saving Power* is that ‘the gospel of Jesus is far greater and richer than what can be contained in only one theory of the atonement’ (p. 365). Peter Schmiechen therefore seeks to present a multi-faceted account of the atonement by considering ten ‘theories’ of the atonement. Each theory is given its own chapter, and Schmiechen groups the ten theories into four categories: ‘Christ Died for Us’ (containing chapters on ‘Sacrifice’, ‘Justification by Grace’, and ‘Penal Substitution’); ‘Liberation from Sin, Death and Demonic Power’ (one chapter, on ‘Liberation’), ‘The Purposes of God’ (‘The Renewal of Creation’, ‘The Restoration of Creation’, ‘Christ the Goal of Creation’), and ‘Reconciliation’ (‘Christ the Way to the Knowledge of God’, ‘Christ the Reconciler’, ‘The Wondrous Love of God’). In each chapter, Schmiechen outlines the theory, drawing on Scripture and key historical representatives (e.g., Luther on justification, Charles Hodge on penal substitution), before offering his evaluation. Each theologian was chosen simply as a good representative of a particular viewpoint, and it was not intended to imply that this was the only theory that they taught, or that they were necessarily the only exponent of a theory.

As a basic approach all of this is helpful enough. The atonement is indeed rich and multi-faceted, and different aspects of it will be pastorally important in addressing different issues or people. Expounding each view in conversation with one particular exponent also adds clarity and weight to the treatment, and the representatives are, by and large, well chosen. However, in execution, the book leaves rather a lot to be desired.

First, although it is right to distinguish different ‘theories’ of, or perhaps better, perspectives on, the atonement, there are also important systematic connections between the different ‘theories’ that merit further exploration than they are sometimes given. For example, within Athanasius’s own account of the renewal of creation, penal substitution finds an important place: creation cannot be restored if the curse is still in place; but although Schmiechen notes

the presence of Christ bearing the curse in Athanasius, he does not explore its connection to the theme of the renewal of creation. Similarly, given, for example, the place of Isaiah 53 within the overall context of Yahweh's victory over the idols in Isaiah 40-55, in speaking of liberation from sin, death, and demonic powers, it would be helpful to explore its relation to a penal substitutionary account of the cross. This is not to say that exactly the same imagery is involved in both aspects, or that one is reducible to the other, or that one must say everything every time one speaks of the atonement, but rather that, in a book on the multifaceted nature of the atonement, one might expect a systematic exploration of the connections between different 'theories', which Schmiechen does not always provide.

Secondly, there are at times serious expository and theological flaws in Schmiechen's account. To limit ourselves to the scope of a short review, we will consider just his first chapter, on sacrifice. Here, examining the biblical material, he fails to provide a detailed exposition of the Old Testament sacrificial system, wrongly denies that the sacrificial animals were substitutes (p. 22), rightly notes that the Passover lamb was not a sin offering, but wrongly implies that it had no reference to sin (p. 23), wrongly denies that hilasterion in Roman 3:25 and 1 John 2:2 speaks of propitiation, without interacting with any of the scholarly literature that defends this view (p. 25), and when discussing 'ransom' fails to note that Isaiah 53 provides an important backdrop to Mark 10:45, thus colouring the theological significance of the term (pp. 26f).

Schmiechen also denies that, in the Bible, sacrifice is something offered to God; rather, he claims, God takes the initiative in the sacrifices. Whilst the latter claim is true in the sense that he instituted the sacrificial system and that at the cross it is the Son of God who, in obedience to his Father's will, offers himself, the former is not. In discussing Calvin's account of Jesus' priestly office in the Institutes, Schmiechen makes a false dichotomy between a loving God sending Jesus for the salvation of the world, and Jesus' death as a sacrifice offered to propitiate God and gain salvation. He appears to think (contra Calvin) that these ideas are mutually incompatible. Schmiechen fears that the latter makes God somehow passive, and that, in any case, a retributive account of divine justice is unjust because, 'There is no way that the punishment can equal...the offense' (p. 39). Of course, a ready answer can be found: sin deserves an

infinite punishment because it is committed against an infinite God; but Christ endured an infinite punishment, precisely because he is of infinite worth, being the eternal Son of God. However, Schmiechen gives no hint that this response is available and needs to be engaged.

In his exposition of Calvin, Schmiechen displays little evidence of having wrestled to understand Calvin adequately before offering his criticisms. Apparently, for example, Calvin ‘is vulnerable to attack’ because his criticism of the medieval mass ‘has no place for sacrifice offered to God as a work that merits salvation. Yet his initial presentation of the priestly office [of Christ] brims over with the language of a sacrifice offered to God’ (p. 45). A basic introductory Church History course would inform him that, for Calvin, the former is true, precisely because the latter is also true.

On a number of occasions, discussion is marred by the use of slanted language: ‘retributive atonement...makes God passive as well as vengeful’ (p. 40); Calvin’s ‘harsh language about wrath, anger and God the enemy’ (p. 43); ‘troublesome notions that God is passive, that God is immobilized by anger’ (p. 52). This serves no purpose in advancing Schmiechen’s argument, other than to convey his distaste for a penal account of the atonement.

Any book that helps evangelical preachers and writers to extol and emphasize the multi-faceted, many-splendoured nature of the cross of Christ is to be welcomed. Sadly, however, in its caricature, hostility to penal substitution, and failure to integrate and systematise as well as to distinguish different aspects of Christ’s saving work, *Saving Power* is not such a work.

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THE FUTURE OF JUSTIFICATION. A Response to N.T Wright

John Piper

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This is an important book about an issue that could not be more important: the nature of the gospel. John Piper and N. T. Wright are two of the most

powerful figures in evangelicalism today: both have received unfair criticism and uncritical adulation alike. Readers should however note one important difference at: whilst Piper has been a New Testament lecturer, (and has a PhD from Munich), he also has over twenty years of pastoral experience. Wright on the other hand (according to Crockfords) has been neither incumbent nor curate; until becoming a Bishop his career was in academic or cathedral posts. This is not necessarily a criticism of Wright: his commitment to pastoral theology is clear. However the difference in perspective may be a crucial factor in their differing approaches to the doctrine of justification.

Whether one agrees with Piper's critique of Wright or not, one has to acknowledge that this book is a model of how one Christian should publicly disagree with another. Piper sent a first draft to Wright, and took Wright's response into account in the final version. Piper is consistently courteous and charitable towards Wright, and always assumes the best about Wright's motives, (a marked contrast to Wright's own polemics). Indeed, at some points Piper defends Wright from unfair criticism. He does not question Wright's salvation, (contrary to a misleading review by the Bishop of Lincoln in the Church Times), but is concerned as a pastor about the effects of Wright's views, not least the sort of preaching that they will result in. His approach is to ask Wright for clarification of what he has said, and to note Wright's numerous ambiguities. The latter is very important: this reviewer's impression of Wright is that he is an author who has the illusion of clarity whilst lacking the substance.

Piper combines pastoral concern with both courtesy and humility towards an opponent, and rigorous attention to the text of scripture. Wright and his fans cannot with justice dismiss Piper as a Reformed traditionalist. Wright will have to show that his exegesis is more convincing than Piper's, especially regarding Acts 13; Romans 2:6-16, 3:1-8, 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21. In addition, Wright will have to answer some very searching questions. First there is the meaning of the phrase *dikaiosune theou*: is it, as Wright says, God's 'covenant faithfulness', or, as Piper says, 'God's unswerving commitment to his honour'? I found Piper more exegetically convincing here, and readers will find a useful exposition of his own view, which is one of the foundations of his 'Christian Hedonism'. Second, Wright will have to answer the criticism by Piper (and many others) of Sanders thesis that 1st century AD Judaism was not a 'legalistic' religion that made salvation dependent on good works. Piper shows,

again I think convincingly, that the very texts quoted by Sanders and Wright point towards a ‘soft legalism’ in first century AD Judaism. Third, Wright will need to clarify his views on the atonement, and how it fits into his overall theology. Piper notes the ambiguity of Wright’s statements on this matter (and quotes in full Wright’s bizarre defence of Steve Chalke), but believes that Wright’s belief in penal substitution is clear. Unfortunately he overlooks Wright’s more recent *Evil and the Justice of God*, which points to Christus Victor as the heart of the atonement, and downgrades penal substitution.

Fourth, Wright will have to say clearly what he thinks the final basis of an individual’s salvation is. Piper is very cautious here in his exposition of Wright: it is one of the areas in which the latter is most unclear. But Piper does bring forward cogent evidence to show that Wright is much farther from the Reformed tradition than Wright has claimed, and that he does think that final justification is based upon a transformed life. Piper notes a crucial distinction between justification ‘according to’ and justification ‘on the basis of’ works, and shows that Wright has not done justice to the Reformed tradition which Wright criticizes. Fifth, Wright will have to show why, given his view that the gospel is simply the announcement that Christ is Lord, and not a message about personal salvation the gospel is ‘good news’? For this reviewer, as a pastor, this is the most important question.

Piper points out that Wright's views are hard to reconcile with Acts 13:17,38-39 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, (he might also have quoted Revelation 6:15-17, where it is anything but good news that Jesus is Lord). Wright’s reply has been published under the title *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision*; readers of Piper, will doubtless, in the interests of fairness, want to read it.

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CHRIST AND CULTURE REVISITED

D. A. Carson

Nottingham: Apollos, 2008 243pp £12.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-279-0

Professor Carson is up front about the huge task he has set for himself in this book: to undo the prevailing paradigm for understanding the relationship

between Christ and culture. H. Richard Niebuhr's fivefold typology has dominated discussion for fifty years but, Carson claims, it is reductionistic because it fails to follow a biblical theology.

Niebuhr provided five competing approaches to Christ and culture: Christ against culture, the Christ of culture, Christ over culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. It is not necessary to be familiar with Niebuhr since Carson gives an accurate and nuanced description of what Niebuhr was and was not saying. Carson finds biblical support for all of Niebuhr's approaches except the second. This allows him to ask, rather than treating them as competing options, whether they are 'embedded in a still larger and more cohesive understanding of the relationship of Christ and culture...a more comprehensive integrated whole'.

Carson proceeds to answer this question by outlining the 'great turning points in biblical theology' (including creation, fall, call of Israel, Jesus Christ, church, new heaven and earth). Each of Niebuhr's five types over-emphasises some of the great turning points at the expense of others. Rather, Carson argues, 'all [the great turning points] must be held together all of the time as we try to think constructively and holistically about the relationship between Christ and culture'.

Not unexpectedly from one who has thought long and hard about post-modernism, one chapter is given over to the dual concerns of what we mean by the term 'culture' and to epistemology and whether it is really possible to evaluate (or even meaningfully talk about) culture when we are all within one. (Carson helpfully indicates those pages which can be skipped without loss.)

In a deeply penetrating chapter, four of the particular pressures which cause "Christians to wrestle with how to relate to the broader culture" are discussed: secularism, freedom, democracy, and power. It is here that Carson brings his biblical theology to bear, exposing what is good and bad about these realities. Then a full quarter of the book is given to a discussion of church and state, before a concluding chapter.

The breadth of reference throughout is astonishing. Professor Carson shows a familiarity with past and present, Christian and non-Christian scholarship, but

in the absence of any bibliography these details are only to be found in the footnotes. Because of the range of material dealt with an annotated bibliography would have been a useful addition to this book. Given current debates, it would have been helpful to engage with postmillennialism when considering the transformation of culture and the new creation, but this is a minor quibble given the task in hand.

This book is ultimately about living under the Lordship of Christ in a multicultural world, and “which aspect should be emphasised of the many things that the Bible says...depends, at least in part, on the concrete historical circumstances in which Christians find themselves.” So none of us have lived under the Roman Empire, in which the New Testament was written; some have never thought what Christian responsibilities might necessarily flow from living in a democracy; others have to deal with oppressive totalitarian regimes which persecute Christians. There are legitimate questions such as ‘Is democracy always good?’ and ‘What kind of virtue is freedom?’

If the reader is looking to read answers straight off the page, this book will disappoint: biblical theology itself tells us that tensions will remain until the last day. What this book does, most ably, is lay a sound foundation which, if built on, should save us from some of the serious shortcomings that have, from time to time, dogged the Christian church in its life and witness. Whether this book will provide a new prevailing paradigm is hard to say, but for those who know that Jesus is Lord of everything and every culture, and that his sovereignty is continually challenged but in culturally different ways, it is a very significant help in forming a biblically coherent response to the culture in which we live.

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