

Reviews of Books

Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life, Barry Danylak. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010. 192 pages, £9.99, ISBN 978-1433505886

Barry Danylak's treatment of singleness, growing out of his Cambridge doctoral work on the topic of 1 Corinthians 7 and singleness in the first century world, is the most thorough, substantial, and rewarding biblical-theological exploration of the subject that I have encountered. Accessible to the intelligent layperson, *Redeeming Singleness* seeks to provide an account for the fact that, in contrast to other major monotheist faiths such as Judaism, Islam, and Mormonism, Christianity accords theological significance to the unmarried state. Rigorously establishing the core exegetical foundation for a theology of singleness, it traces the developing role that singleness occupies within biblical narratives, teaching, and the life of the people of God.

The book proceeds in terms of progressive stages of biblical revelation, studying each successive major phase of this revelation in turn. While the diachronic approach that Danylak adopts to his subject eventually proves to be quite illuminating, it makes heavy demands upon the patience of his readers, who must persevere through about half of the book before the first promising shoots of a theology of singleness start to break the surface. For those prepared to accept this lengthy deferral of gratification, however, Danylak's extensive groundwork serves to identify and follow the principal thematic threads that help us to understand the developing theology of singleness in the scriptures.

In their early expressions, these thematic threads appear to be configured in a manner that excludes any positive account of the single life. Physical offspring are so integral to the Old Testament's

articulation of the Sinai covenant, serving as evidence of divine blessing and, by implication, faithfulness to its terms, that both the unmarried and childless states are viewed in highly negative terms (81). It is within the prophetic literature that we encounter the incipient stirrings of a new understanding of offspring and consequently of singleness. Danylak focuses upon the book of Isaiah. Into the context of the prophesied complete judgment of the existing nation as the 'offspring of evildoers' comes the promise of a messianic figure, who will be 'the root of a new kind of holy offspring' (98). This new form of 'spiritual' offspring changes the status of previously reproached figures such as the barren woman and the eunuch, as the promised blessing of the covenant people is fulfilled through means other than physical procreation.

Moving into the New Testament, Danylak argues from exegesis of Galatians 3-4 that the offspring promised to Abraham come from Jesus alone. Jesus' teaching regarding eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven and his definition of a new family entered by means of a new birth represent an affirmation of singleness as an anticipation of the obsolescence of marriage in the age to come. The final chapter provides a detailed study of Paul's teaching on the subject of marriage and singleness in the context of 1 Corinthians.

Danylak writes in a clear and readable manner and each chapter is structured, divided, and summarized in a manner that renders his argument easy to follow. The book contains both helpful subject and scripture indices (although I have identified a number of erroneous references in the latter). Apart from the consistent misspelling of Richard Hays's surname, the text itself is generally free of errors (although grammatical purists of a certain school may be niggled by Danylak's occasional infinitive-splitting tendency).

The meticulous yet not overly technical exegesis of the relevant passages is the greatest strength and contribution of this book. For a topic-oriented work, such attentiveness and sensitivity to the text and its deeper thematic movements is refreshing. Such attentiveness produces a work replete with satisfying and insightful treatments of particular passages and concepts. The deftness of Danylak's exegetical hand, combined with the clarity of his presentation is particularly in evidence in his handling of the Isaianic concept of offspring, and in his treatment Jesus' teaching regarding eunuchs for

the kingdom of heaven.

Despite the satisfying and illuminating character of Danylak's detailed and careful exegesis of particular passages, his treatment of the broader biblical themes is less consistently so, perhaps suggesting a degree of biblical theological nearsightedness. This is especially noticeable in the character of the physical/spiritual opposition that underlies many of the contrasts that he draws between the operations of the old covenant and those of the new. Danylak too frequently employs the term 'spiritual' with the sense 'non-physical', rather than referring more precisely to the dynamic of the new age of the Spirit's work ushered in by the death and resurrection of Christ and Pentecost. In consequence, the complexity of the relationship between the natural orders of the original creation and those of the new creation is insufficiently explored. I was left with a number of questions relating to such matters as Danylak's understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church, the character of the work of the Holy Spirit within the old covenant, and the place that the children of Christians have within the life of the new covenant. As the precise character of the continuity and discontinuity between the operations of the old and new covenant and creation has considerable bearing on Danylak's larger thesis, this is not an insignificant weakness.

The greatest disappointment of *Redeeming Singleness*, however, arises from its failure to progress very far beyond its exegesis to biblically informed theological reflection upon the experience and role of single Christians and their place within the church. In the introduction, Danylak makes clear that it is designed to serve a particular goal – the construction of a biblical theology of singleness – and that those looking for a work addressing singleness as a contemporary cultural reality and lived experience would be better served by other books. On account of the restrictive parameters that he imposes on his work, the immense promise of Danylak's exegesis for such theological reflection is left largely unrealized, and perhaps the majority of the questions that single people will bring to such a book remain unaddressed.

The argument of *Redeeming Singleness* is a radical one, nowhere more clearly than in its treatment of singleness as a spiritual calling and gift: '[M]arriage does not entail a special manifestation of the

Spirit for edifying God's people and serving the kingdom of God. The charisma of singleness is something more – it is a divine enablement with a specific purpose' (201)

Such claims raise pressing questions that Danylak fails adequately to answer: How ought the church to recognize and encourage this gift? Where does this leave the majority of single people who are aware of no such calling? How does one become aware of such a calling? Regrettably, the failure properly to address these questions will probably leave many single Christians, who would seemingly constitute this work's primary audience, feeling dissatisfied.

At a time when the church is preoccupied with questions of sex and sexuality, committed singleness has a profoundly important yet neglected witness to bear. Danylak has done the church a service in identifying some of the deep gospel themes concerning which Christian singleness can testify. My hope is that *Redeeming Singleness* will be widely read and that able pastors and thinking Christians will use Danylak's invaluable exegetical insight as a springboard for the sort of applied theology and contextual theological reflection that, while it does not offer, it clearly invites.

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Pilgrims, Warriors, and Servants: Puritan Wisdom for Today's Church, edited by Lee Gatiss. St Antholin Lectures, Volume 1: 1991-2000. London: The Latimer Trust, 2009. 272 pages, £8.99, ISBN: 978-0-946307-77-7

This is an interesting and varied collection of lectures on Puritans and Puritan themes given by knowledgeable and well-known speakers such as J. I. Packer, Alister McGrath and Peter Jensen. Each of the lectures was originally given as the annual St Antholin Lecture, a lecture series which revives in a modern form an old Puritan lectureship. Each one seeks not only to describe and discuss the Puritans in their own context, but also to reflect on what may be learned from their example for today's church.

Each lecture is self-contained and assumes very little background knowledge of the subject matter while still seeking to consider issues in some depth. This makes the book ideal for pastors, and other serious Christian readers, who wish to get a taste of Puritan life and theology, and also see a model of how considering Christians from another period may help modern Christians to address issues in the church today.

The lectures are introduced with a chapter by the editor, Lee Gatiss, giving the historical background both to Puritan lectures in general and to the St Antholin lectures in particular. This is followed by ten lectures of varying length. Some address themes such as spirituality or the Puritan vision, while other focus on particular figures like Richard Baxter or John Owen.

Three of the lectures are by J. I. Packer, and each of these possesses the lucid and thoughtful style you would expect from him, as he reflects on the lives of Baxter, Perkins and Bunyan. For each he provides a brief portrait of their life, and reflects on aspects of their life and writings. I particularly enjoyed his consideration of themes in the Christian life from *Pilgrim's Progress*, and his challenge that we have lost the Puritan emphasis of seeking to die well. I suspect most readers would come away from this chapter wanting to read (or re-read) *Pilgrim's Progress*.

It is worth noting that each of the lectures was given by an Anglican minister, and understandably this affects both the concerns addressed and the views expressed in the lectures. For example, one issue of great significance in the Puritan period is whether those of Puritan theology should seek to stay with the Church of England, or whether they should leave it. In these lectures, when this issue is addressed, generally support is given to those choosing to remain within the established church, with the obvious implications for today. Furthermore, an Anglican perspective is certainly reflected in comments such as those of Geoffrey Cox that, 'the so called Regulative Principle is both a contradiction in terms which cannot hold both ideas logically within the same phrase, and also is not accurate biblically' (60). I believe that someone from another denomination, or a free church, would still benefit significantly from these lectures, but they should be aware of the particularly Anglican flavour to some of them.

An interesting challenge is given by Alister McGrath in his lecture, as he argues that evangelical churches generally fail to teach and to model a genuinely evangelical spirituality. He suggests that this lack of an evangelical spirituality is responsible (again writing in an Anglican context) for the phenomenon he has observed where some of those who begin as clear evangelicals steadily adopt a more catholic spirituality, and sometimes then also a catholic theology. He contrasts this present lack of a strong evangelical spirituality with the clear and deep spirituality of the Puritans, and argues that the evangelical church today must address this issue. Whether or not the reader comes away agreeing with McGrath's specific proposals for change, it is hard to disagree with the assessment that modern evangelical spirituality is impoverished in comparison with that of the Puritans, and that this provides a great challenge in our day.

Another very interesting lecture is that of Peter Adam, where he addresses the problem of the partial nature of the reformation of the Church of England in the Puritan period, and the manner in which the Puritans sought further reform. He makes a strong argument that the most effective reformation was that which sought to change the church 'from below' (193) by the Word of God, rather than by edict or structural change from above. Indeed, he argues that change from above can only be successful where there has already been change from below. Like much in these lectures this analysis has clear implications for those in mixed denominations today.

This collection of lectures has the great strength that it contains a number of different people speaking on subjects about which they are very knowledgeable and (it seems from the way they speak) are very close to their hearts. It is well worth reading, both for the encouraging portraits of great Puritans, and also the challenges contained in the lectures for the contemporary evangelical church. Furthermore, this book constantly encourages the reader to read the Puritans themselves, as indeed it gave me a great desire to do

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The True Profession of the Gospel: Augustus Toplady and Reclaiming our Reformed Foundations, Lee Gatiss. London: Latimer Trust, 2010. 131 pages, £7.50, ISBN: 978-0-946307-74-6

Anglicanism and evangelicalism are Reformed at their roots. Lee Gatiss argues that it is vital to recover this perspective if Anglicanism and evangelicalism are to be revived today. He begins by surveying doctrinal development in the Church of England from the middle of the sixteenth century through the rise of Laudianism and the Restoration to the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. He then documents the tension between George Whitefield and John Wesley before introducing Augustus Toplady and his writings in defence of Reformed theology against Arminianism. Gatiss concludes with some implications for the present time. Emerging from talks given at conferences and churches, this short book is very accessible and will benefit both Anglican and dissenting evangelicals.

Gatiss argues that the Church of England from the reign of Edward VI was distinctly Reformed in its theology, dispelling the widely-held belief that our Reformers were attempting to occupy the central ground between the Church of Rome and what we might call 'Calvinism'. Neither could Church of England doctrine be described as 'Lutheran'. Following Stephen Hampton, Gatiss shows that there was a distinctive strand of 'Reformed divinity with Restoration curlicues' (26)

This continued in the second half of the seventeenth century, contrary to some narratives of the period, which present Reformed theology as an oddity maintained by the non-conformists, with only cold moralism filling the pulpits of the established church. This, of course, offers little comfort to those who like to look back the late-seventeenth century for reassurance that the situation in the Church of England has been far worse than it is now. Against this background, it becomes apparent that the Reformed theology of Whitefield and Toplady is the mainstream of evangelicalism, with Wesley and other Arminians representing a deviation. Gatiss documents thoroughly Toplady's endeavours to prove that the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Book of Common Prayer and the Homilies,

along with the church's leading theologians, were Reformed. This makes it all the more odd that another evangelical clergyman who professes admiration for Toplady should refer to belief in limited atonement and double predestination as 'hyper-Calvinism', alleging that the Articles stand against this and suggesting that this might be a reason for men who hold these beliefs not to consider ordination in the Church of England. Gatiss notes this in a footnote, in which he identifies the websites where the offending material may be found (104). One address is out of date following a reorganization of the website in question, although some judicious searching will disclose the relevant article. In this footnote, Gatiss adds his own contribution showing how limited atonement is compatible with the Ordinal, John 10 and Acts 13.

Gatiss does not shy away from reminding us that men who are greatly used by God in spreading the gospel of his grace can nevertheless behave appallingly. The picture that emerges of Wesley is particularly unflattering. Gatiss describes how Wesley took advantage of George Whitefield's absence in America preaching the gospel to gain control of the evangelical movement. On one occasion, Wesley published a book under Toplady's name presenting Toplady and Reformed doctrine in the worst possible light. After Toplady's death, Wesley not only spread malicious rumours that Toplady had died in despair and blasphemy, but also failed to apologise or repent when confronted but instead silenced his critics with an appeal to evangelical unity. Gatiss is not afraid to lay the blame for the frequent evasion of the differences between Calvinistic and Arminian evangelicals for the sake of unity and witness at the feet of Charles Simeon. Men such as Toplady insisted on preaching Reformed doctrines precisely because of their commitment to proclaiming the grace of God in the gospel, and they knew that when those doctrines sound forth from our pulpits, reformation proceeds apace.

Gatiss' study exposes some of the shortcomings in contemporary conservative evangelical Anglicanism. Early in the book, he refers to the Jerusalem Declaration at the heart of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, which he does not regard as distinctively evangelical or Reformed, as evidence of a waning confidence in Anglicanism's Reformed character. Neither Anglicanism nor evangelicalism, he notes later, are merely anti-liberal coalitions. Toplady's criticism of

those who disagree with the Reformed Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England whilst continuing to receive the financial benefits of holding office in the Church might well be directed to liberal churchmen today. At the same time, Gatiss reminds us that Toplady directed this criticism at Wesley, a fellow-evangelical, which simultaneously warns evangelical Anglicans who claim that the Church of England belongs to them to be careful lest they be found to be hypocrites themselves in what they fail to uphold. Ambivalence about infant baptism would be a prime example of this. Gatiss relates how Toplady drew attention to Wesley's use of a foreign bishop to preside at irregular (but, Wesley claimed, valid) ordinations of his ministers who then officiated as if they were clergy of the Church of England. It is not too difficult to think of contemporary parallels for which this might be relevant. Gatiss writes that 'Toplady found it exceedingly difficult to understand why someone of [Wesley's] views did not simply avail themselves of the generous provisions of the Act of Toleration and leave the Church of England' (128). Toplady is not the only one. Toplady's commitment to the Church of England would put many to shame. Gatiss relates how, when asked what one should do if the Reformed doctrines of the Church of England aren't preached in the parish church but are preached in a nearby dissenting congregation, Toplady revealingly replied that one is bound 'to hear those truths where they can be heard: was it in a barn, in a private house, in a field, or on a dunghill' but that one still ought to attend Holy Communion in the parish church given the 'admirable and animating form of sound words' of the liturgy (67).

Gatiss concludes with a word of encouragement for those who are involved in the ministry of the local church, whether as ordained ministers or as members of the congregation. Toplady, whilst grateful for the irregular ministry of evangelical celebrities such as Whitefield, was content to minister almost exclusively in village parishes (except in the last three years of his life, when ill health necessitated his relocation to London). It is not just the large city-centre churches which are strategic, but even the smallest and remotest parishes when their pulpits and streets are filled with the sound of the gospel of God's grace.

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