

## REVIEWS

### **The Evangelical Conversion Narrative. Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England**

D. Bruce Hindmarsh

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005; 384 pp., hardback, £60; ISBN 0199245754

Spiritual autobiography is a fascinating literary genre. It emerged properly in the seventeenth century when a more introspective emphasis in their theology led Puritans like Bunyan and Baxter to write very full accounts of their personal experiences, thus breaking the Reformers' customary silence on such matters. It was amidst the mass conversions of the Evangelical Revival a century later, however, that the genre really reached its zenith. Whether male or female, young or old, educated or uneducated, these eighteenth-century converts wrote narratives, and the result is a rich collection of spiritual autobiographies dating from that period. It is this collection in particular that Bruce Hindmarsh has set out to analyse.

The major discovery to emerge from his analysis is that each ecclesiastical community embraced by the revival had its own form of conversion narrative. The Methodist narratives marshalled by John Wesley centred on a tortured struggle. The Moravian narratives encouraged by Count Zinzendorf involved a calm surrender. The Scottish Presbyterian narratives supervised by William McCulloch in Cambuslang were driven by the principle of *solī Deo gloria*. Apparently none of Wesley's narrators had undergone a Moravian form of conversion, and none of Zinzendorf's narrators had experienced a Scottish Presbyterian form of conversion. Hindmarsh infers from these findings that converts were interpreting, and not merely recording their experiences. They were imposing upon their own lives the model of conversion espoused by their communities so that every detail conformed exactly to the norm. Hindmarsh's tone is not cynical: he never questions whether these writers were truly converted. The issue is whether they had been converted in precisely the way they felt they had been; the way their communities wanted them to have been.

Hindmarsh's other significant discovery is that, due to its historical situation, this collection of spiritual autobiographies is unique. It 'appeared on the trailing edge of Christendom and the leading edge of modernity' (p.

340). The narratives display a degree of self-reflection that sets them apart from impersonal pre-modern biography; but it is always self-reflection within a community, which sets them apart from post-Christian autobiography with its aggressive autonomy. These writers had a strong sense of individual identity, but they found that identity in the context of 'intimate group meetings where the fellowship was close and people spoke more freely to each other than ever they had before' (p. 344). Hindmarsh pertinently observes the relevance of this to our own, post-modern age with its crisis of identity.

This book is hugely readable throughout. Quotations from conversion narratives are plentiful enough to give the reader a feel for the genre but never become tedious or overwhelming. Hindmarsh's treatment of the most cherished people and events in evangelical history is refreshingly balanced, neither hagiographical nor iconoclastic. It might be questioned whether 'Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England' is the most appropriate subtitle for a book that devotes a whole chapter to a revival that took place in Scotland. And a comment on the impact of mass spiritual autobiographies on Cambuslang's Presbyterianism would have been welcome. Was the parental expectation of faith developing gradually from infancy de-emphasised with this heightened emphasis upon conversion? But these are small points and I certainly recommend this new work on the Evangelical Revival. Its immediate concern with spiritual autobiography makes the book interesting but not obscure. It is not just for literary specialists. These eighteenth-century conversion narratives are of general historical and theological significance, and Bruce Hindmarsh's study of them is most welcome.

*Dan Peters, Cambridge Presbyterian Church*

## **The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology**

Roger E. Olson

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2004; 328 pp., £25; ISBN 0664224644

What is an evangelical? As a start to answering that question, Roger Olson begins his book with some handy definitions for readers to pick their way through. And he also does a useful job of disentangling 'evangelical' from 'fundamentalist' and 'charismatic'. A pamphlet resembling this section should be given away to every library of broadcasters in Britain, since the distinctions Olson makes completely escape the current crop of TV programme-makers.

However a word of warning. Although the author is easy in style, well informed and well organised (or should that be 'organized'?) the title of this book is unintentionally misleading for UK readers. The book is really a primer of evangelicalism and its theology *in the United States*. True, the very clearly written history section with which Olson begins, traces evangelicalism to the 16th century European Reformation, European 'pietism' and the revival movements of the 18th century in the British Isles. But from that point on, evangelicalism appears mainly to be a North American phenomenon. In fact, the history section focuses primarily on Princeton, J. G. Machen, the early and later Fundamentalists, the 'battle for the Bible' and the work of the Billy Graham organisation.

Beyond the entry on the World Evangelical Fellowship there is not much awareness of *global* evangelical thinking. Since the future of the movement probably rests with church in the non-western world, this field merited a lot more attention, in fact a section to itself even if it had to be written by another specialist. There is, for instance, significant theological writing from evangelical authors in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Shocking as this may be, some of these authors are being read in theological training centres more than Warfield!

'Gold standard' theologians then become obvious: Warfield, Ramm and Carnell (even though the latter two were really apologists) but not J. I. Packer or the prolific Alister McGrath who are both so popular in North America, nor Samuel Escobar and René Padilla who changed the face of evangelical theology of mission at and after Lausanne. The rise in the 20th century of evangelical theology and training bodies on the mainland continent of Europe enjoy no entries. You will look in vain for entries on the remarkable modern recovery of theological evangelicalism in the Church of England and its sister bodies, or of a similar movement in the Church of Scotland, or the resurgence of Protestant Reformation theology, or the arrival of mature Pentecostal theology in Europe. In the large section on well-known personalities, 14 of the 16 entries are American. And further definitions are needed to show differences between American evangelical theology and that of other western forms.

From the history section, one is left with the impression that evangelicalism is always a movement of theology whose whole meaning for existence is entirely introverted: internecine wars of attrition about the Bible and detailed internalised doctrine for the elite. The account of *Christianity Today* is one refreshing exception to this parody.

So is this a bad book? No, not at all. It is very well written and informative. It also contains a number of alerts for British evangelicalism to note with serious attention. Some of the energy-sapping introversions

which still seem to plague parts of the American scene also threaten the UK scene. Given the defensiveness, traditionalism, introspection and navel-gazing which can keep evangelicals fruitlessly busy here, Olson is well worth reading and should be taken as a prophetic warning to the UK.

*Roy Kearsley, South Wales Baptist College/Cardiff University*

## **The Rise of Evangelicalism**

Mark Noll

Apollós, Leicester, 2004; 316 pp., £16.99; ISBN 1844740013

*The Rise of Evangelicalism* by Mark Noll is the first volume in a five-volume set that will consider the development of evangelicalism in the English-speaking world since the seventeenth century. The author, a well-known writer on American evangelicalism, is co-editor of the series with David Bebbington. This volume covers most of the eighteenth century, focusing in the main on the revivals associated with Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and John Wesley, and discussing some of their effects on British and early American society.

While the term evangelical had been used almost as a synonym for Protestant in the century following the Reformation, Noll has chosen to use it as describing a movement that has minimised denominational distinctives and instead stressed the necessity of the new birth and holy living. This movement rose out of English Puritanism, European Pietism and Anglican spirituality, and it is not difficult to sense it was a reaction against a sterile form of Protestantism. George Whitefield stands out as the spokesperson for this movement, and no doubt denominational distinctives were not a priority for him (others were not so ready to abandon their convictions on church polity, as was seen in the refusal of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine to endorse Whitefield when he preached, with much success, in Church of Scotland congregations).

The second half of the seventeenth century was a time of significant change. Developments in international trade between Europe and America were utilised by the evangelicals to begin and maintain trans-Atlantic links that furthered their cause. They also became increasingly involved in attempting to improve social conditions, with the best-known response being their opposition to the slave trade.

Noll has written an engaging and comprehensive account of a movement that can be observed from two different viewpoints. At one level, the large number of converts from the revivals that gave the movement much of its impetus was the work of the Holy Spirit, as were the spiritual practices that these converts engaged in. At the same time, the

movement was a social force that contributed to the changing culture that was adjusting to the opinions of the Enlightenment. Noll manages to maintain both viewpoints in balance as he steers the reader through a complex story.

This volume is an excellent beginning to what should be a valuable collection.

*Malcolm Maclean, Free Church of Scotland, Scalpay, Isle of Harris*

## **To Know and Love God. Method for Theology**

David C. Clark

Crossway Books, Wheaton, Ill. 2003; 494 pp., £35; ISBN 1581344848

This outstanding book is one of those books that delivers far more than it promises. It promises to be an introduction to theology that deals with all the normal subjects such as epistemology and hermeneutics. What it delivers is a scintillating and often profound engagement with the post-modern intellectual and cultural world in which evangelical theology is to be done. The book reminded me in some ways of D. A. Carson's *The Gagging of God* in its scope and winsomeness. Clark touches on an immense number of intellectual issues with a confident lightness of touch that rarely fails him. As a philosopher of religion he is naturally interested in philosophical issues, the demanding discussion of which sometimes defeated me, but otherwise the book is a pleasure to read. Like climbing a mountain the book requires effort and has its tough patches, but the view is spectacular and that makes the effort worthwhile.

There are a number of clear features of the book. It is an *evangelical* introduction to theology. Clark writes from a commitment to classical Protestantism that is both confessional and experiential. Clark's approach is *eclectic* and *eirenic* in that he refuses to be pigeon-holed on some issues such as the rival claims of perspectivalism and objectivism in epistemology. Good academic that he is, he can see the arguments on both sides of a question, but in the end he always judiciously states his view. His eirenicism will no doubt help to commend his theology to those who disagree with him, both inside and outside the evangelical fold. Whatever issue Clark deals with he is always culturally, intellectually and theologically *engaged*. While written primarily for evangelicals this work is not in-house. Clark engages with liberal theology in its various forms as well as with current philosophy. In some ways this is the most valuable aspect of the book. It highlights the points where evangelicalism in the 21st century must engage the world intellectually. If you like, this is a map for the battle of the mind in which we must be engaged.

But the most distinctive feature of the book is the purpose of evangelical theology that Clark consistently adheres to and threads through his chapters. For him the purpose of theology is *sapientia* or wisdom. Theology is not an end in itself, but rather must serve to enable God's people to become wise in the business of godly living. Sadly this purpose has all too often been lost sight of in theology, and even evangelicals have fought the battle on the arid territory of modernism. Clark calls us back to the vision of theology that inspired the Reformers and the Puritans, not to mention the church fathers.

After surveying the theological field (chapter 1), Clark moves on to deal with biblical authority and interpretation (chapter 2), contextualisation in a globalized and multicultural world (chapter 3), epistemology (chapter 4), the unity of theological disciplines (chapter 5), academic theology (chapter 6), theology and spiritual life and the church (chapter 7), science (chapter 8), philosophy (chapter 9), world religions and pluralism (chapter 10), language (chapter 11) and theological language and spiritual life (chapter 12).

I suspect that this book will establish itself as a mainstay in the field for a long time to come. Its value is in vindicating the integrity of evangelical theology in the face of the challenges of post-modernism. Considering the anti-intellectualism of so much evangelicalism today Clark's book is a welcome intellectual and spiritual antidote that should help the people of God rediscover the riches of God's wisdom in Christ for the whole of life.

*Kenneth Brownell, East London Tabernacle, London*

## **Western Humanism: A Christian Perspective**

J. D. Carter

Photon Publishing, North Canton, Ohio 2005; 267 pp., \$17.99; ISBN 0974005398

Dr Carter is a scientist who has used his retirement to study Christian philosophy. He himself became a Christian after reading *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis.

To believe that humans 'can be moral – outside of a genuine relationship to the God of Scripture – is a gross error in thinking'. With this fundamental premise, the book is for Christians and others who may want to know how a biblical philosophy differs from secular humanist thought. The author sees history from Genesis onwards as cycles of faithfulness to God's revelation, followed by reversion to humanism, well

defined by the ancient Greek Protagoras as 'Man is the measure of all things.'

Part one is a critical historical survey, from ancient Greece through to the four figures of Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud and Marx. Until the 19th century, western humanism was largely shaped by Plato's threefold division of human nature into intellect, will and emotion, with the first as the controlling feature. Since then it has grown more secular and in some ways reverted to pre-socratic thinking which believed that truth was whatever seemed true to the individual. Likewise the view of Socrates, that you can acquire virtue through self-knowledge, has led to the modern obsession with education and its importance in the humanist programme.

The Hebrew Scriptures, in contrast, teach that humans by themselves are unable to either understand or accomplish the good, and that one comes to a knowledge of what is ultimately real only through faith in God's revealed truth, and for that in turn one must be 'supernaturally enabled'. Israel's refusal to believe her God is the reason why humanism is today the dominant philosophy of the Jewish people.

The book takes us through a summary of intellectual and church history, with a number of interesting cameos such as the conflict between Erasmus and Luther over free will. Carter defends Newton against the charge of deism. He uses Darwin's autobiography to discuss the problem of evil. He draws out the lasting significance of Nietzsche's stress on will over intellect, and his mistrust of conscience. He shows how Freud encouraged people to throw over the sexual standards derived from Scripture which in his view crippled society with guilt; and how Marx and Engels attacked marriage.

Part two looks at modern humanism and the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, modern humanism and the family, modern humanism and religion. Dr Carter points out that alongside secular humanism, there is the non-secular humanism which has invaded a large area of modern Christianity. The result is that people today either have no purpose in life, or a purpose which is self-centred; self-help books assume that behaviour change is entirely within the control of the human will. Without Scripture, there are no moral criteria which do not ultimately end up as simply the views of those seeking legitimacy for them; this in effect follows Nietzsche back to the ancient Greek sophists, who wrongly believed that image determined reality.

This is a good book of its kind, although in the final chapters Carter is a bit selective about the moral issues discussed – he considers greed but not the problems of capitalism, for example, and deals rather briefly with abortion – although he does hint that such issues are not always

straightforward. He also takes a quick look at selected theological controversies like open theism, and shows that C. S. Lewis moved during his life from a position of stressing free will to a greater stress on the sovereignty of God.

The author seems to be a fairly strict creationist, and argues that if Jesus made a reference to a person in the Old Testament (e.g. Noah or Jonah) that is proof in itself that the event was historical. There are a few irritating features in the book, such as citing Scripture sometimes in a 'thee' and 'thou' version, use of sexist language, and spelling Marx's colleague Engels 'Engles'.

Readers should also be aware that Carter at no point seeks to engage in dialogue with his humanist opponents, and this is clearly explained when he outlines his approach in the introduction. That said, the book is an impressive tour of Western intellectual history and useful in its summaries of the views of influential thinkers, which are always long enough to do them justice.

*Jock Stein, Tulliallan and Kincardine Parish Church*

### **Answering God: Towards a Theology of Intercession**

Robert Ellis

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2005; 220 pp., £14.99; ISBN 184227340X

### **Intercessory Prayer: Modern Theology, Biblical Teaching and Philosophical Thought**

Philip Clements-Jewery

Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2005; 158 pp., £40; ISBN 0754638286

As with buses, so with theological books: you wait for ages, and then two come along at once – two studies by Baptist pastor-theologians at the end of an apparently long fallow period, in addition revealing the unsung contributions of many others before.

There are interesting overlaps: both engage closely with Vincent Brümmer (always misspelled as Brummer in Ellis), Barth and Moltmann; both specify Paul Fiddes' help, and even the blurbs converge: God is the one 'whose answers and purposes combine' (Fiddes on Ellis); God 'both influences and is influenced by the creation' (Clements-Jewery; also pp. 6, 147). 'Reciprocity' (Ellis, p. 112) and 'two-way contingency' (Clements-Jewery, p. 8; Ellis, p. 175), then, are at the heart of these studies, neither of which constitute light bed-time reading!



And yet there are differences of style and content, as the impressive bibliographies of both books demonstrate. Ellis amasses direct questions; Clements-Jewery constructs the convoluted sentences of a doctoral dissertation. Ellis is more Barthian and Trinitarian, Clements-Jewery closer to Process Theology. Ellis borrows from Samuel Balentine's *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* the *leitmotif* that God is 'one who is personal, accessible, loving, powerful, and compassionate' (p. 2); whereas Clements-Jewery sets out to find 'an intellectually respectable, logically coherent and theologically satisfying account of petitionary and intercessory prayer' (p. 6). Ellis expounds Augustine, Calvin, Cullmann and Open Theism; Clements-Jewery introduces David Crump (*Jesus the Intercessor*) G. P. Wiles (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers*) (neither mentioned in Ellis), John MacMurray and the Process theologians.

Unfolding the ambiguous pun of the title, Ellis has four chapters on the theme of 'answering'. His first chapter, 'Starting with Scripture: The God who Commands us to Pray', looks (over-briefly) at Jacob and Moses, Jesus, John, Paul, Hebrews and James, presenting the useful language of 'negotiation' (p. 20) and proposing that 'our prayers are God answering God' (p. 31). (Incidentally, in a lovely misprint, R. E. Brown's 'the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus is in union with the Father' becomes 'the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus is in union with the Father' [p. 29]!) Clements-Jewery's parallel chapter on the biblical material limits itself to the New Testament, with the loss of those critical Old Testament perspectives which produce the 'dread of anthropomorphism' (p. 75) on which many studies founder (but ignore at cost), but with the gain of more detailed and well-documented studies of Luke's material on prayer in his Gospel and Acts, of prayer and the Holy Spirit in Paul, and of the relationship between Jesus' heavenly and earthly intercession.

Ellis' Chapter 2 – 'Beginning a History of Intercession' – suggestively places Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin in the same boat as Kant and Schleiermacher in terms of their view of prayer primarily as a matter of effecting internal shifts. But the sub-title of the chapter – 'The God who is Free to Answer' – is the direction Ellis would like to go in, and where he finds Barth so nourishing, 'Here be wonderful quotations': God 'is affected and moved' by creation (p. 79); God allows humanity 'to participate in His omnipotence' (p. 80). Clements-Jewery does not cover this ground.

Ellis' longest and most difficult chapter, Chapter 3 ('The Answering God: Prayer and the Doctrine of God'), stresses the importance of a Trinitarian vision of God in order to locate a sense of reciprocity when we speak of God 'answering' our prayers (p. 112). Acknowledging a debt to

Terrance Tiessen's *Providence and Prayer*, his exploration of time, eternity and 'multi-temporality', omniscience, omnipotence and God's self-limitation suggests that, instead of demonstrating control and coercion, Jesus reveals God's polyphonic nature, God's persuasive and patient love (p. 147).

The themes of this chapter of Ellis are more clearly distinguished in two separate and weighty chapters in Clements-Jewery. His Chapter 3 raises the question of (human → God) participation in prayer, asking 'Why is it Necessary to Pray?', while Chapter 4 raises the opposite (God → human) question 'Is God Capable of Answering Prayer?', which he concludes with 'a resounding "yes!"' (p. 89). Chapter 3 investigates 'persons in relationship', glancing briefly at John Oman and H. H. Farmer, H. E. Fosdick and E. S. Brightman, and then, in a more detailed, impressive overview, at John MacMurray's 'form of the personal' (pp. 57-63), concluding (to illustrate his style) that 'Petitionary and intercessory prayer may thus contribute to the making of history through the mutual personal interaction of human beings through the transcendent-immanent God who is present throughout the creation' (p. 64). Leading the reader judiciously through the forest of early debates on God's immutability and impassibility in Chapter 4 (as Ellis does *passim*), Clements-Jewery neatly distinguishes God's immutability, understood as God's ability to feel (Sarot, p. 83), as God's faithfulness to his own character (p. 86), from God's impassibility (I expand his language here), understood as the absence of defect, compulsion or fickleness in God (neither author refers either to Weinandy's *Does God Suffer?* or Jüngel's *The Doctrine of the Trinity*). This is good.

Clements-Jewery then has two further balancing chapters on 'How does God Work in the World?' and 'How does Prayer "Work"?' The former takes up Austin Farrer's language of 'double agency' in providence to expose Maurice Wiles' virtual deism and reject Paul Helm's position of 'middle knowledge'. The next chapter on how prayer works (pp. 115-35) is a surprise loose cannon: the only chapter in both books where a whole series of unargued assumptions and logical jumps keeps erupting. Traditional theism is suddenly identified with externality and coercion; concepts of God's otherness, absence and distance are all smuggled in without differentiation or analysis; the presence and action of God produces 'passivity and a desire to escape responsibility'; 'modern science' is to be the measure of theology (pp. 115-16, 122, 127, 145). In turn, there emerges a Process Theology with the impersonal feel of an evolutionary gnosticism where only 'God' appears (no Jesus or the Spirit), and where

elements are claimed for Process Theology that are not unique to it at all (pp. 134-5).

Ellis' final 40-page chapter ('Towards a Theology of Intercession: Praying In, With and To the God who Answers') rejects any view of prayer as 'therapeutic meditation' (Clements-Jewery's 'eudaemonism', p. 49), and concludes the 'answering' theme of his book. 'By praying', he states, 'we begin, strangely, to answer God' (p. 161). So argument is of the essence of prayer (pp. 166, 171), even to the point of the 'possibility of resistance to the divine purpose' (pp. 175-79). Though he accepts some of the insights of Open Theism and Process Theology, he is nonetheless finally convinced that prayer is not simply offered *to God*, but takes place *within God* (p. 180). 'There is room in the almighty liberty of God for the created liberty of man' (Moltmann). Clements-Jewery, in his own final eleven pages entitled 'Towards a Theology of Intercessory Prayer', offers a more seemingly traditional summation, somewhat at odds with the conclusions of his previous chapter.

Both these quite different books deserve careful study, for the authors struggle with virtually intractable theological quandaries. Ellis is more accessible and orthodox, Clements-Jewery more trenchant, but, in the end, less satisfactory. These are undoubtedly the two most important recent theological studies of intercession. But it is the hints and the absences that suggest a whole set of different questions.

What would happen if we developed a theology of intercession on the basis of Jesus' phrase 'the Father'? Why has the resignatory 'Thy will be done' swallowed up the more future-directed 'Thy kingdom come'? Is there such a thing as 'necessity' in God? Why is the Western Mystical – let alone the Eastern Orthodox – tradition so totally absent here? Why not combine the element of desire (Clements-Jewery [Pittenger], p. 129) with the Orthodox reading of *eros* to feed the fires of intercession? Where is the groaning, the longing, the tears, the desperation, the wrestling, bleeding heart? Instead of being distracted by omnipotence, why not set Bonhoeffer's theme of the 'powerlessness' of God (p. 76) in the crucible of the reciprocal, sacrificial *kenosis* of God and ourselves? Does not the over-assertion of the inalienability of human freedom automatically write out divine 'intervention'? But is a totally unsought vocation from God 'coercion' or 'manipulation'? Is a miraculous healing a 'violation' of human freedom? Have these words not become Aunt Sallies? Are there not major consequences to be drawn from the occasional reference to creativity in God and ourselves? What are the cultural connections between Process Theology and the Brave New World of post-World War II North American

utopianism? And what would Chinese Christians think? But, as they say, that might be another book....

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## **Ecclesiastes: A Peculiarly Postmodern Piece**

Doug Ingram

Grove Biblical Series, Cambridge, 2004; 28 pp, £2.75; ISBN 1851745793

Ecclesiastes is an extremely frustrating book. Its reader is immediately struck by its resonance with contemporary questions and struggles. It seems to express postmodern uncertainty, not to say cynicism. Yet, one does not have to read far before one is left wondering whether that was what the author intended or whether in fact, in spite of a full-frontal encounter with the blunt realities of life, the author has written a spiritual book – perhaps even a book of traditional and conservative spirituality – designed to inspire a robust piety. While biblical scholars may have the luxury of not having to decide between the two, preachers will have to choose the perspective from which they are going to expound the text.

Doug Ingram has provided us with a superb introduction to the problem in a little booklet whose length belies its value. A great deal of insight is packed within the slender covers of this Grove booklet. He deftly introduces us to the debate, using quotes from a number of key scholars while managing to maintain a light touch.

Central to his argument is an examination of a key word: ‘vanity’; a key phrase: ‘under the sun’; and a key passage: 1:1-11. *Hebel* can be variously translated negatively as ‘absurd’, ‘empty’, or ‘meaningless’ or more positively as ‘enigmatic’, ‘transient’, or ‘mysterious’. ‘Under the sun’ may either imply that this world is all there is or that there is a limit to what the Teacher has observed on earth but he believes there are other spheres of reality that might cast experience here in a different light. Similarly, the key passage Ingram examines may either be read as bemoaning the dreary futility of the endless round of nature or as a celebration of nature’s dependable regularity. Ingram helpfully sets out side by side two contrasting ways of reading this passage, each of which are legitimate interpretations of the Hebrew.

Ingram resists the idea that it is left to the interpreter to determine whether Ecclesiastes is to be read pessimistically or optimistically. That would be to slightly miss the point. He argues that Ecclesiastes is not ambiguous by accident but by design. As a realist the Teacher has chosen an ambiguous way of writing to mirror the ambiguity of human life.

‘Different people’, he writes, ‘with different presuppositions “read” the world, life and death differently’. Equally different people with different presuppositions come to different conclusions about the meaning and intention of this book. Such is life!

In a final crucial couple of pages Ingram raises the implications of this for the way we view Scripture, preach Ecclesiastes and relate to a postmodern culture. Some very helpful things are said here that suggest some positive ways forward, even though the grip of ambiguity is not loosened.

Almost twenty years ago I preached though this book in a series of sermons that were subsequently published (*That's the way it is*, Christian Focus Books). After all these years I could preach a different series from an entirely different perspective and both would, I believe, be legitimate readings of Ecclesiastes. For some time I have thought I would like to preach it as if it were a manual of piety (bringing to the fore the role of God in our lives and his world) rather than as a work of proto-evangelism (life ‘under the sun’ doesn’t make sense if you leave God out). Now Ingram suggest a third way; namely, from the perspective that life really is ambiguous. I wish I had had this little booklet to hand when I was preaching on Ecclesiastes. It would have been of great help. Preachers who will never have access to the scholarly works that lie behind it will benefit from that thinking and consequently their preaching will be deeper, more real and less boringly predictable as a result.

*Derek Tidball, London School of Theology*

## **SCM Study Guide to Science and Religion**

Jean Dorricott

SCM Press, London, 2005; xii+251 pp., £14.99; 033402975 9

The author of this book, Jean Dorricott, is a member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and an active member of ecological societies. She completed her first course in Theology at Selby Oak in the 1960s and has continued to study the whole area of Science and Religion since then. She is also a member of the Science and Religion Forum founded by Dr Arthur Peacocke, and has published in the areas of Feminist Theology and Christian Parapsychology.

This book is an introduction for undergraduate students to the issues surrounding the dialogue and relationship between science and religion. Both science and religion formulate views about the origin and meaning of the universe. It is reasonable to put both to test. Therefore, a balanced and judicious dialogue between science and religion is vital in pursuing the

truth. Is God only partly involved in his creation, as the author of this book seems to believe? Consequently does God not have a special plan for humanity and the universe? What is the meaning of the author's claim that 'we have the future in our hands and we create ourselves as we want'?

The book has two main parts. The first part undertakes an ambitious journey through scientific discoveries about our universe from a diversity of disciplines: astrophysics and physics, biology and anatomy, psychology and sociology. God (or Reality) is studied in the light of these discoveries starting with the theories of the Big Bang and the fine-tuning of the universe, continuing with the Darwinian theory of Evolution together with some theories about the source of morality. Through this brief and disjointed journey, the reader learns that life happened through a combination of chemistry and chance and has no meaning; the universe itself has no purpose and God, an unknown Reality, does not intervene actively in our world. The second part is a tendentiously selective account of the historical relationship between science and Christian theology. Christian theology is introduced not as a study of God's word addressed to us in Jesus Christ but as a collection of human beliefs. In the conclusion of the book, Samson's story is used to illustrate a God of the Jews who approves of suicide killers and does not offer viable solutions to the world problems. This leaves us, through the advance in science and technology, to find solutions to the world's problems and re-create ourselves and our world.

The book leaves the reader unsettled. From a scientific point of view we are permanently standing on moving ground. In the first part of the book we are presented with a mixture of objective scientific discoveries and subjective 'images'. The author misunderstands basic scientific phenomena, e.g., she understands entanglement in quantum theory as being transfer of information between two particles when in fact it is a counter-intuitive relation between two entities even when they are separated by huge distances. The account of Christian theology is not more than a series of bad experiences, myths and traditions and it is not given in accordance with God's word addressed to us in Jesus Christ. The author makes no attempt to clarify the role of the Scriptures in knowing God. The author rejects the fundamentalist movement that reads the Bible as a scientific book, arguing that although God initiated the Creation he was not actively involved in it. So, we were not special, created in God's image nor did God have from the beginning a good and well-defined purpose for humanity and the universe. The laws of morality are intrinsic to our universe and are based on evolutionary constraints. If there are specific genes for different kinds of behaviour, for example homosexual behaviour, then should the

church not rethink its attitude against sin? The author seem to say that the church should set at least some of its values according to social changes in ethics and to society's perceptions of what is sinful or good.

This book is confused science and confused religion; it therefore misunderstands the relation between the two. The author does not include in her discussion important contributions made in this subject by John Polkinghorne, Roger Penrose or Paul Davis, T. F. Torrance and Keith Ward, that would have helped the author to truly engage with the real issues. Therefore I cannot recommend this book.

*Amelia V. Taylor, Heriot-Watt University*

### **Luther and Calvin on Old Testament Narratives: Reformed Thought and Narrative Text**

Michael Parsons

Texts and Studies in Religion, Volume 106, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lampeter, 2004; 329 pp., hardback, £74.95; ISBN 07734 65251

Parsons writes with current interests in narrative theology's ability to address a postmodern audience in mind, seeking insights, confirmation, redress or otherwise from the exegetical works of the sixteenth-century Reformers, Luther and Calvin. In a series of chapters, Parsons examines the Reformers' interpretation of the stories of Abraham, David, Dinah, Bathsheba and Tamar, reflecting as he does so difficult issues with relation to both the doctrine of God and more practical issues in the lives of distressed souls. Readers interested in the writings of Luther and Calvin will find helpful and careful analysis of preaching (homiletical) material – a vein of research that has yielded particularly helpful insights into the theology of the Reformers.

Problems arise quickly: within a few pages, Parsons declares his view that Calvin is not an 'inerrantist', which he explains is equivalent to 'literalist' (p. 5). The meaning of a text is to be found

at a level that, at least, incorporates the importance of experience together with the importance of the centrality of the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the text in the believer's encounter with Scripture (p. 6).

Mid-twentieth century (and Barthian) as this sounds (others have made similar claims though one doubts if either Calvin or Luther would recognize himself in this sentence), it is a less than scrupulous analysis of either Reformer's doctrine of Scripture.

In sketching their treatment of narrative, Parsons makes an interesting and valuable point: that narrative enabled the Reformers to view themselves (their 'horizon') as being on the same 'overarching' meta-narrative (meta-narrative!) of biblical redemption from creation to final consummation. Hermeneutically, narrative provides a way of bridging the two horizons between 'then' and 'now' (pp. 15, 227-8). Given the nervousness over exemplary exegesis and the oft-repeated charge as to 'moralistic preaching', Parsons' work shows how these magisterial Reformers bridged the two horizons (see his employment of the idea of 'pattern' on p. 236).

Particularly helpful is the work Parsons has done in bringing together Luther and Calvin's portrayal of God (impassible, immutable, immense etc.) in a way that reveals God as both majestic and involved in the lives of his people. Narrative texts especially disclose aspects of God that otherwise would not be seen, a God who appears confrontational (e.g., with Jacob). Parsons shows how pastoral their theology was.

Ultimately Parsons' book, whilst immensely useful on several levels (preaching, hermeneutics, pastoral theology, to name but a few), it is guilty of putting too many eggs in this one basket. To say by way of conclusion, 'the Reformers were committed to narrative' is saying nothing and saying too much at the same time. Parsons has not proved that they were committed to narrative theology, merely that they were committed to the exposition of Scripture which contains as one of its genres, *narrative*! Although it is not that clear, one wonders what the ultimate goal of this work is. When others are clearly substituting 'narrative' for 'propositional', suggesting that we can have symbolism and substance without answering the more difficult issues of truth, albeit in the interests of communicating with postmodernism, it is not a time for ambivalence.

*Derek W. H. Thomas, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson,  
Tennessee*

## **Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age 1789-1901**

Nigel A. D. Scotland

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2004; 457 pp., £19.99; ISBN 1842272314

The days when students of the role of Evangelicalism within the Anglican Church had to rely heavily on G. R. Balleine's pioneering work are long past, and since the work of Michael Hennell and Kenneth Hylson-Smith, materials come more readily to hand. Building on his earlier studies of J. B. Sumner and the Palmerstonian bishops, Nigel Scotland of the



University of Gloucestershire, has helpfully added to this store with an extensive survey of Evangelicals in the Anglican Church during the nineteenth century. His contention is that Evangelicals, for all their acknowledged failings, made an overwhelmingly positive impact on society, and played a formative role in shaping their age. This he demonstrates through a series of fifteen thematic chapters and a conclusion covering the work of Evangelicals in areas such as politics and social concern, including the work of the Clapham Sect and Lord Shaftesbury: education; campaigns for Sunday Observance; attitudes to overseas mission; and responses to ritualism and revivalism. In times of theological flux and debate within evangelicalism, it is good to see chapters being devoted to theology and attitudes to the Bible: many issues of deep concern today were discussed with equal vigour in the nineteenth century. With the issue of 'spirituality' also a topic of much current interest, the chapter exploring how Evangelical Anglicans developed and worked out their relationship with God both in public and in private is a valuable resource.

Whilst being thorough, the study is not comprehensive. The focus of the book rests almost entirely upon Anglicanism within England. Readers of this bulletin will find little of the place of Evangelicalism within the Scottish Episcopal Church, or other churches within the Anglican communion. A chapter on Evangelical Anglicans and overseas mission is included, although the first black African bishop, Samuel Crowther, is dealt with in but two sentences. The author concentrates heavily on the work of the leading Evangelicals; the reader finds less about the values and the opinions of the vast majority of ordinary lay Anglicans, many of whom were working-class, who peopled the churches of the Evangelicals. The book is also a study of Evangelical Anglicans within Anglicanism itself. There is a chapter on the attitudes of Evangelical Anglicans to ritualism, but this reviewer would have liked to read of their role within the wider family of evangelicalism: what were Evangelical Anglican attitudes to the Evangelical Alliance; were they to be Evangelical Anglicans, or Anglican Evangelicals? Other areas not explored include the troubled and damaging relationships between Evangelical Anglicans and evangelical Nonconformists in the nineteenth century (both positively in terms of their pan-evangelical co-operation, and negatively in the hardening of attitudes as a result of the disestablishment movement), and the author does not choose to consider the dissatisfaction of Evangelicals who seceded from Anglicanism to join various Baptist groupings, or form the Brethren.

On the whole, the thematic approach used in the book is helpful, but it creates a rather repetitive style, particularly in the early chapters, where some material on the Clapham Sect is repeated almost verbatim. A few

factual slips include giving two different dates for Henry Thornton's birth (p. 13 and 28).

In sum, here is much that is valuable, but plenty of scope is left for filling in the areas of the canvas that remain as yet blank.

*Ian J. Shaw, International Christian College, Glasgow*

## **The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology**

Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.)

Cambridge University Press, 2003; xv+295 pp., paperback, £15.99, ISBN 0521793955; hardback, £42.50, ISBN 052179062X

This anthology begins with a penetrating theological analysis by the editor of the multi-faceted postmodern turn, which he sees more as a condition of history than a chronological period. For him the basic question is whether the postmodern condition sets requirements that must be met before theology can speak about God.

Vanhoozer highlights the emergence of post-secular thinking in Derrida's views of 'justice' and 'the gift' being 'beyond' deconstruction, and sees Tracy's 'return of the repressed' as opening a door for the return of theology as a metadiscourse. But his answer to the basic question is both negative and positive. On the one hand, he judges that some forms of postmodernity corrode the spiritual conditions which make faith commitment possible. On the other, he hopes that postmodernity's insistence that knowledge cannot be disembodied might make postmoderns responsive to gospel proclamations 'accompanied by performances that embody in new situations the wisdom and love of God embodied on the cross'.

The remaining chapters of part one present competently and informatively seven brands of postmodern theology, each written by *aficionados*: *communal praxis* (i.e. liberationist) by Nancey Murphy and Brad J. Kallenberg; *postliberal* by George Hunsinger; *postmetaphysical* by Thomas A. Carlson; *deconstructive* by Graham Ward; *reconstructive* by David Ray Griffin; *feminist* by Mary McClintock Fulkerson; and *radical orthodoxy* by D. Stephen Long.

Part two covers Christian doctrine in postmodern perspective and contains essays on Scripture and tradition (Vanhoozer); theological method (Dan R. Stiver); the Trinity (David S. Cunningham); God and world (Philip Clayton); the human person (John Webster); Christ and salvation (Walter Lowe); ecclesiology (Stanley J. Grenz); Holy Spirit and Christian spirituality (David F. Ford).

Vanhoozer contends that, while modernity demystified Scripture and tradition, postmodernity, by rehabilitating tradition and textualising the book, is questioning both the possibility of any biblical authority and the legitimacy of distinguishing 'text' and 'commentary'. He underlines the need to get beyond both modern and postmodern suspicion to view Scripture in terms of divine discourse and tradition in terms of divine deed.

Stiver argues that combining Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc and Gadamer's fusion of horizons provides a useful framework to recast creatively the theological truth of the Bible. Cunningham maintains that postmodernity and the doctrine of the Trinity are mutually enhancing. Postmoderns' emphasis on relationality, difference, and rhetoric enrich Christians' appreciation of the Trinity, while trinitarian insights of peace, personhood and practice provide a needed critique of postmodern thought.

Clayton contends that pantheism (the world is within God) offers 'theology in a postmodern key' the chance to regain the initiative from physics in determining the nature of reality. Webster proposes three characteristics of fruitful engagement between Christian theological anthropology and deconstructive postmodernity: First, deference to the intricacy of the past; second, guiding theology by the categories and practices of the Christian confession, avoiding passive accommodation to any postmodern condition; third, apologetics becoming subordinate to biblical and dogmatic description.

Lowe argues for an apocalyptic understanding of salvation which views the Christ event as divine invasion. Apocalyptic imagery, he claims, resonates with the popular alarm at unsustainable consumerism, and also puts into proportion views of individualistic salvation. Grenz affirms that the biblical story of God at work bringing his creation to its divinely intended goal is the church's constitutive narrative, empowering it to be a proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying and unifying community. In the final chapter (one of the most stimulating) Ford draws on insights from Bonhoeffer, Rowan Williams and Borowitz (an American postmodern Jewish theologian) to describe spirituality as living and being transformed before the face of Jesus Christ.

The writers of this book have valiantly attempted to sail between Scylla and Charybdis. Some turn out to be surer navigators than others. Nevertheless, this book contains useful bearings for all theological seafarers battling their way through the straits between modernity and postmodernity.

*Fergus Macdonald, New College, Edinburgh*

## The Gospel-Driven Church

Ian Stackhouse

Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2004; 291 pp., £12.99; ISBN 184227290X

*The Gospel-Driven Church* is the first in a series of books under the imprint of 'Deep Church'. The series is an attempt to 'retrieve and reconnect with the common Christian tradition once "everywhere and by everyone believed"... a renewal of the historic givens of the faith for today's Church'. The first book in the series attempts to do this with the charismatic renewal movement. Ian Stackhouse is the pastor of Guildford Baptist Church, having also been a leader of an independent new church, and now being one of the leaders of the Deep Church conversations.

The first part of this book is deeply critical of the charismatic renewal movement. In what the author sees as a drive for growth and success, his contention is that many of the leaders of charismatic churches are prepared to move from one fad to the next in order to make revival/success happen. (Revival and success are synonymous in his perception of the charismatic movement.) Stackhouse raises lots of concerns as a result of this perception: that the movement is theologically shallow; that 'technique absolves one from the rigours of Christian discipleship in the context of the local church'; that the movement is increasingly functional, prepared to do whatever it takes to make revival happen at the expense of theological reflection and understanding; that in worship there is a 'propensity to sacrifice theological and spiritual integrity on the altar of contemporaneity, expediency and revivalism'. This, he says, has led to a 'me-centred Christianity', and 'has the ability to foster a guilt neurosis' because 'God can only move close, in reviving power, once the community of faith has been purged and cleansed'.

The rest of the book counters this trend and tries to answer these concerns by what the author calls 'Mediated Grace: the practices of the Church'. He talks of revival by retrieval: 'the most pressing challenge – to have faith that the gospel is able to do its own work, create its own structures and fashion its own distinctive community'. To spell out what this means there are chapters on preaching, the sacraments, the work of the Spirit, prayer and the work of the pastor. He seeks to connect the charismatic-evangelical church with the classic past and traditions of the church.

For example, in the chapter on sacraments, he describes the sacraments in this way: 'In themselves, they are the power tools for Christian ministry.... Co-option into Christ through baptism and communion is the spiritual core that protects Christian faith from the angst of revival religion

and, conversely, the potential blandness of contemporary worship.’ Similar connections with the classic doctrines of the church and the Spirit, and with the classic prayer language of the church, are made in the rest of this fascinating book.

Some will disagree with Stackhouse’s basic premise, that all is not well in charismatic-evangelical churches. Yet, charismatic-evangelical Christians should read this book carefully and reflect on its criticisms. It might be painful; you might find yourself getting hot under the collar, but Ian Stackhouse might lead you to rediscover something precious that you have lost somewhere along the way!

This book is far more than that, however; there are deep challenges here to everyone who thinks about the future of church – how do we create a church for the future that is built on the historic givens of the faith? How do we keep church connected to the classic truths and prayer language of the past, without living in the past? In *The Gospel-Driven Church* there is a mountain of food for thought for every church leader; this book should be read by everyone who has the good of the church at heart!

*James S. Dewar, Juniper Green, Edinburgh*

## **Delighting in the Trinity: Just why are Father, Son and Spirit such good news?**

Tim Chester

Monarch Books, Oxford, 2005; 192 pp., £7.99; ISBN 1854246852

I suspect I am not alone among those who engage in Bible teaching, at whatever level, in dreading questions about the doctrine of the Trinity more than any others. After a brief stab at an answer, I usually find myself resorting to the unchallengeable ‘Well, it’s what the Bible teaches.’

Tim Chester recognizes my predicament, admitting that he too once found the doctrine ‘embarrassing’. But no longer, and this excellent book reveals why.

The book is appropriately divided into three parts with each chapter preceded by a useful synopsis. The first provides us with the biblical foundations, beginning by asserting the unity of God, then the plurality of God, and finally discussing the involvement of all three persons of the Trinity in salvation.

The second section is a historical survey of how the church’s understanding of the doctrine evolved over the centuries. Here we find reminders of our Systematics days, with concepts such as Monarchism, modalism, *persona*, *substantia* and *hypostatis* being explained. How I wish I had had Chester as my lecturer. A useful feature of this section is

little boxes-aside, where terminology can be dealt with apart from the main text, and vignettes of the main theologians (Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius) given.

Chester allows the Reformers a fair hearing and gives the Enlightenment philosophers, as well as modern theologians such as Barth and Moltmann, plenty of space.

What readers of this journal will find particularly helpful is the way Chester is constantly engaging with these heavyweights. This is why the book will be of great use to the theology student of evangelical convictions. Chester is not embarrassed to be critical in the light of Scripture.

I found the final section not only practical but inspiring. Here Chester spells out the practical implications of the doctrine of the Trinity.

He begins with 'The Trinity and revelation' where he refutes the postmodern tendency to deny the 'knowability' of God. That God is Trinity means that he is personal, which means he can be known. Quoting Tom Torrance, in Christ God 'has communicated not just something about himself but his very Self'.

In 'The Trinity and salvation' Chester traces some of the theories of the atonement, and in particular the rift between Anselm and Abelard (the 'satisfaction' theory and the 'exemplary' view). Chester shows that both approaches, while containing some merit, fall short of the primary biblical model, which is that of penal substitution. The atonement, he says, is an event 'within God. Salvation starts with God, is achieved by God and is applied by God.'

Steve Chalke's attack on penal substitution in *The Lost Message of Jesus* is given short shrift. Chalke assumes 'that the Father and Son are separate individuals. And it would indeed be unfair for one individual to punish another individual for crimes he has not committed. 'But the Son is not another individual. The divine Father and Son are one – sharing one will, sharing one love, sharing one being.'

The chapter with perhaps the most contemporary relevance is the chapter entitled 'The Trinity and humanity' where Chester demonstrates that the doctrine has implications for the human race. After all, we are made in the image of the triune God. Both totalitarianism and individualism are contrary to the common weal for they contradict our creation principle.

Chester ends his book with some thoughts on how the Trinity impacts on mission.

Ever the helpful teacher, Chester not only provides a comprehensive bibliography but makes some suggestions as to where to take one's reading further.

*Ian M. Watson, Kirkmuirhill*

## **Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology**

I. Howard Marshall

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2004; 136 pp., £9.99; ISBN 1842272780

Not only does this book give us Marshall's mind on some vital issues, but it has the added bonus of coming with its own reviews! Professor Marshall's three chapters are his Hayward Lectures, delivered at Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Then follow two responses, one by Kevin J. Vanhoozer of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and the other by Stanley E. Porter of McMaster Divinity College.

Chapter one, 'Evangelicals and Hermeneutics', notes the maturing confidence of evangelical biblical scholarship over recent decades (a success story which both respondents later avow owes much to Marshall himself). Marshall focuses on three levels of interpretation. The first is general hermeneutics, where he sees evangelicals as increasingly involved and significant. The second is exegesis, and it is here especially that evangelicals are active and productive. But at the third level, that of appropriating and applying the ancient text in the contemporary world, much remains to be done. Marshall insists we can no longer rest content with detaching principles from the historical and cultural frames in which they were first given and simply reapplying them today.

The next chapter, 'The Development of Doctrine', begins by outlining two ways of interpreting Scripture, the conservative and the progressive, and illustrates what this means in practice by looking at ethics, worship and doctrine. The boundary between the two approaches is admittedly fuzzy and I found myself flitting between these categories on different issues. Marshall's concern in what follows is to seek a principled way of moving from Scripture to theology, and especially to find in Scripture itself the guidelines which will ensure the project is biblical: scriptural principles for going beyond Scripture! He lays his foundation for this by noting how the New Testament itself witnesses to development, first in connection with the Old Testament, second in relation to the teaching of Jesus, and third in the progress of apostolic teaching.

The third chapter, 'The Search for Biblical Principles', explores these last three themes and asks whether they legitimate continuing development beyond Scripture and whether they provide criteria for its proper exercise.

First, a consideration of Leviticus in light of the New Testament seeks to show how the old/new covenant distinction is a significant interpretative tool. (What Marshall does here seems to me very careful, in comparison for example with the recent attempt of A. T. Lincoln to argue that if Hebrews can relativize and critique parts of the Old Testament in the light of what has happened in Christ then that provides justification for us to do the same with parts of the New Testament on issues like sexuality or Christian supersessionism in relation to Judaism, in his contribution to *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Craig Bartholomew *et al.* [Paternoster, 2004]). Second, Marshall looks at the shift from Jesus to the early church, and the way in which some elements of the liminal period were clearly transitional and provisional. He includes in this Jesus' teaching about the horrors of divine punishment, in imagery which was appropriate to the times but which the modern mind cannot accept. Surely here he is smuggling in a principle not derived from Scripture? (Interestingly, both respondents pick up on this.) Third, he discusses the development of doctrine in the apostolic church and concludes that the key, both then and now, is to be found in the combination of the apostolic deposit and the spiritual mind. The former provides the core and the criterion, while the latter responds to new situations with thinking nurtured on the gospel and guided by the Spirit.

Vanhoozer's response, 'Into the Great "Beyond": A Theologian's Response to the Marshall Plan', is brief and brilliant, and really does interact with Marshall. He is especially helpful in drawing out different possible ways of understanding 'going beyond' Scripture. It might simply be conceptual clarification, making explicit in new vocabulary what is already implicit in Scripture. Or it might be a 'redemptive trajectory' approach which applies the transcultural spirit of the text in the direction of an ultimate ethic. Or it might be Nicholas Wolterstorff's 'divine discourse', where there may be discourse beyond that of the human author's intent. Or there is Vanhoozer's own preferred approach, where we learn how to make the same kind of judgements as those embedded in Scripture because we have a 'mind nurtured by Christ-centred canonical practices'.

Porter's chapter, 'Hermeneutics, Biblical Interpretation, and Theology: Hunch, Holy Spirit, or Hard Work?', is twice as long as Vanhoozer's but much less to do with Marshall. Porter examines five approaches to New Testament interpretation that claim to lead from Scripture to theology. He first exposes the limitations of the historical-critical method as a basis for the theological enterprise. He then subjects Thiselton's use of Wittgenstein's classes of utterance to devastating critique, before trying to do the same to speech-act theory. The fourth and shortest section is on



Marshall. Finally Porter outlines his own thinking, based both on Pauline practice and on modern translation. He proposes dynamic equivalence translation theory as the model for New Testament theological hermeneutics.

*Beyond the Bible* is a short, rich and provocative read, and Professor Marshall deserves our thanks. At several points though, I felt that the distinction between the revelatory uniqueness of the New Testament and what we do in theology was in danger of being blurred. I am neither an apostle nor the son of an apostle, and analogies between a period and process of revelation on the one hand and the practice of contemporary theologising on the other must have clear limits. I am also concerned that more theological safeguards be explicitly spelled out in a project such as this. Otherwise some of those who build on it, and who are not as well grounded as the author, may take us *beyond the pale*.

*Alasdair I. Macleod, St Andrews Free Church, St Andrews*

## **Discerning the Spirits: A Guide To Thinking About Christian Worship Today**

Cornelius Plantinga Jr and Sue A. Rozeboom

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 2003; xv+170 pp., £12.99; ISBN 0802839991

Not another book about worship, I hear you ask. Yes, it is, but one with a difference and one that should be in the hands of all those responsible for helping congregations think about worship in today's cultures – note the plural. It doesn't provide resources to use within worship but, rather, it provides a context within which reflection on worship can take place shaped by Christian love and theology. Although written up by Plantinga and Rozeboom, the material for the book emerged from collaborative research and discussion organised by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (based in Calvin College/Theological Seminary) under the leadership of John D. Witvliet and sponsored by the Lilly Endowment. The mission of the Institute is 'to promote scholarly study of the theology, history, and practice of Christian worship and the renewal of worship in local congregations' (p. vii).

My order 'love and theology' above is important, because the book begins by noting the need for discernment in the present discussions about worship (the Holy Spirit is not the only spirit around). Having a good argument among Christians is one of the ways in which that discernment can take place. However, 'argument' is not to be 'quarrel' and the behavioural tone for debate must be set by Christian love. It is sad, if not

blasphemous, that we can talk of ‘worship wars’ where love is notable by its absence. In these discussions, the authors insist that love must give birth to humility, candour, hospitality and forbearance. The ‘main project in this book is to set a context and recommend a tone in which healthy decisions about worship may be conducted’ (pp. 10f.). This it does admirably.

The succeeding four chapters give us a potted history of the rise of Contemporary Worship (the capitals identify a style of worship rather than a chronological reference point), reflections on the interface between church and culture, and theological explorations of the church (at worship) and worship (within the church). While the last two chapters are brimfull of sound theology and practice, wisely and elegantly expressed, perhaps the greatest value of the book is to be found in the central chapter on church and culture – the longest chapter by far.

As humans, we cannot detach ourselves from culture and, therefore, all Christian worship is offered through particular cultural practices that embody the worship of those who are present. Contemporary Worship is one such cultural expression of worship. It is the attempt by some to translate Christian worship for today’s generations. As cultures evolve, this cultural translation of worship is inevitable, desirable and risky, and thus the gift of discernment is needed to know what practices are fitting to embody our worship of God.

The incarnation is explored as a model for cultural translation, as this is a major concept put forward by proponents of Contemporary Worship. The authors, while accepting the basic validity of the model, show the inadequate way in which it can be used to justify engaging with some forms of popular culture that may not be able to carry the translation of the gospel: the incarnation was not only an accommodation to human culture, it was also a judgement of human culture. So, ‘when it comes to deciding what in culture is to be accepted and what is to be rejected, there is no neat, authoritarian answer, but only a “messy” one. Finding it requires humility’ (p. 90).

Included in this chapter is a very helpful sidelight of several pages from Frank Burch Brown called ‘Testing Christian Taste: Twelve Assumptions’, but if you want to know what they are, you will have to consult the book.

This book should be read, reread, digested and its good things disseminated to congregations at large. Not only will we then create possibilities for reforming the worship of the church for the culture(s) of our time and place, we will do so in the Spirit of the One who said, ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’

*Jared Hay, Balerno Parish Church*

## **John Calvin: His Life and Influence**

Robert Reymond

Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2004; 160pp., £7.99; ISBN 1857929667

Here is a book that achieves its aims admirably. It is the substance of four lectures given in February 2002 to a church audience in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The author said he chose the life and influence of John Calvin as his subject 'because the average twenty-first-century Christian knows very little about him and all too often what they do know or have heard about him has been badly distorted' (p. 9). The lectures were given and the book written with the twofold purpose of helping to dispel the ignorance and correct the distortions.

To test how successful the first of these aims was likely to be, when I had completed an initial reading of the book, I asked someone to read it who had never read a biography of Calvin before. The reaction was positive and enthusiastic. This person found it not only very readable, but fascinating, and immediately expressed a desire to know more about such a formidable contender for the faith. This desire to know more is well served in the author's appendixes, which provide thoughtful lists of recommended Calvin biographies as well as opposing ones.

The work also effectively challenges the 'badly distorted' image that many have of the sixteenth-century Reformer. Reymond's point is very relevant. A few weeks before receiving the book I was listening to a radio programme, and around the same time read a totally unrelated newspaper article. They had one thing in common; the opinion that John Calvin's legacy – what we call Calvinism – has a very repressive influence on the development of human thought and society. No theologian has been more vilified and misrepresented than Calvin. The false impressions and misunderstandings of both the man and his work that have been created in the past are still being purveyed unthinkingly in the media, and sadly in many branches of the Christian church as well.

Reymond's book does much to redress this situation. The manner in which he brings out the spiritual stature of the man is impressive. It shows Calvin not only as a theologian of tremendous intellectual capacity (his literary output was amazing), but as a man humbly sensitive to the will of God for his life. The additional likely record of his conversion in the 'Reply to Sadoletto' (p. 39-40), his response to Farel's thunderous call to remain and minister in Geneva: 'I felt as if God from on high had stretched out his hand to arrest me' (p. 57-8), his renewed call to return to Geneva after the exile: 'I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my

heart, presented as a sacrifice to the Lord.... I submit my will and my affections, subdued and held fast, to the obedience of God' (p. 73), make the book well worth pondering. Reymond's efforts to show the warm, human side to Calvin's character are also well presented. Here we have a Calvin who is not the austere, stern, cold, calculating 'man who never smiled', as Harnack dubbed him, but rather a man who could laugh with those who laughed and weep with those who wept; a man who cared deeply for his fellowmen in their suffering, and passionately longed for the success of the gospel amongst them. His failings, however, are never glossed over, or excused. The 'head-on' treatment of the execution of Servetus in Geneva gives us a more realistic insight into the attitude of the Reformer on this issue than has formerly been the case.

The fact that much of the material for the book was originally taken from the author's lectures to his students on Calvin's *Institutes* at Knox Theological Seminary is reflected in the amount of space devoted to this masterpiece of theology. It perhaps tends to deflect from some of Calvin's other works, notably his commentaries, the importance of which merits more analysis. Calvin insisted that the *Institutes* should always be read alongside the commentaries, and Beza apparently regarded them as the primary work of the Reformer (*An Exhortation to the Reformation*, p. 35a-b). But having said that, Reymond's treatment of the *Institutes* is superb, dealing with its main topics, its development through the various editions without any change of substance, its general characteristics, and its major theological contributions. Of personal interest to me was his discussion of the question of Calvin's status as a 'covenant theologian'. Reymond rightly concludes that Calvin 'was seminally covenantal... in his theology' (p. 100). It was news, however, to read that Bullinger's *Decades* 'were structured entirely by the covenant idea' (p. 99).

This book will serve as an excellent introduction to the Genevan Reformer and his work. Ministers, divinity students, and 'lay' people alike will find it stimulating and full of interest. The unique place that Calvin holds in the unfolding of church history and Christian thought is something that arrests and holds you throughout. It is difficult to imagine anyone reading it thoughtfully without going on to explore further the life and influence of this remarkable man, whose crest motto was: 'I give you all, promptly and sincerely' (p. 73).

Andrew A. Woolsey, *Crumlin Evangelical Presbyterian Church*

## **Fixing the Idemnity. The Life and Work of George Adam Smith (1856-1942)**

Iain D. Campbell

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2004; xviii+255 pp., £19.99; ISBN 1842272284

When I was young, studying Semitics in graduate school and anticipating a life as professor in a seminary, I read George Adam Smith's two-volume commentary, *The Book of Isaiah* (1888 and 1892). I was absolutely bowled over by it: brilliant, theological, literate, compelling. This was scholarship transmuted into pastoral/prophetic care and preaching – the Hebrew verbs that I had been parsing so diligently, suddenly alive and moving, shaping holy lives, saving people. I followed it up by reading his *Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1894). Again, I was totally captivated. I followed every movement of pilgrimage and battle and worship on the wonderful maps, lived vicariously in the mountains and towns and valleys of Palestine for months. Every story, every sentence, in Scripture grounded – in place, local. No free-floating ideas; no doctrinal abstractions. When I learned that Smith had written both the books as a young working pastor of a new congregation in Aberdeen, the vocational tectonic plates shifted ever so slightly beneath me. The effect was seismic. When the aftershocks had receded everything was the same; nothing was the same. I had become a pastor.

Forty-five years later, as I read this clearly written and carefully assessed life of George Adam Smith by Dr Iain Campbell, I find that not everyone has been as uncritically admiring as I was. All the same, there is much to admire and his biographer gives us the details in full measure – a truly magnificent life, rich in accomplishment in the Presbyterian churches in Scotland and in biblical scholarship worldwide. But the title of the biography is *Fixing the Indemnity*. Yes, 'indemnity'. It turns out that not everyone experienced George Adam Smith as unqualified good; there were damages along the way. Apart from the thorough appreciation of George Adam Smith's life and work that Dr Campbell provides, we are not likely to be able to fix the amount of the indemnity. But with appreciation in place, a sober assessment is possible without diminishing the splendour. Out of the several areas discussed by Dr Campbell in which indemnity needs to be assessed, I select two, one from his work, the other from his life.

Work: his advocacy of biblical criticism in the service of understanding and obeying the Scriptures. Smith was bold and confident in his conviction that without the tools of biblical criticism, much of it developed in the German universities, our preaching and teaching of the Bible is unable to

penetrate contemporary life. His own preaching, teaching, and writing provided impressive credentials for his conviction. Conservative elements in the Presbyterian Church were not convinced; they perceived a dissonance with creedal orthodoxy. Acrimony developed. The phrase that gives title to the book is Smith's: 'Modern Criticism has won its war against the traditional theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity.' It is to be regretted that Smith conceived the differences as a war. He did win the 'war' but his combativeness did not serve the church well.

Life: over the years he was gradually absorbed vocationally and socially into the middle and upper classes of society. In Smith's early life he was passionate about the poor working class and urban social conditions. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the Moody-Sankey evangelistic campaigns in Scotland, especially as they brought the gospel message among vagrants and the friendless. As a student in Edinburgh he worked among, in his words, 'some of the poorest but bravest people I have known, and learned more from them than they have learned from me' (p. 34). But as he moved from being pastor of the affluent Queen's Cross church in Aberdeen (ten years) to the post of professor in Glasgow (eighteen years) and then as principal of the University of Aberdeen (twenty-five years) there was a steady erosion of that bold, conscience-stirring, social/political passion that spilled from the pages of his early Isaiah commentary. By midlife he had been captured by the aristocracy. 'He had moved away from the ideals of the social gospel to full participation in the higher echelons of civic and social life' (p. 217). He had become one of society's elite.

'Fixing the indemnity', to be sure. The perfectly accurate title for what Dr Campbell has done in gathering the data and evaluating the effects of the life and work of George Adam Smith.

*Eugene H. Peterson*

## **Land of the Living: Christian Reflections on the Countryside**

Ivor MacDonald

Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., College Station, Texas, USA, 2005; 249 pp. \$13.95; ISBN 1589397827

The aim of the book is to develop a biblical theology of the countryside and its implications for humanity in every aspect of our relationship to the land and to those who care for it. It tackles head on many of the issues that impact our daily lives. These include the constant drift from the land, the power of the supermarkets, globalisation, third world poverty, GM crops, the environment, organic farming and sustainability. The author shows

that God has provided a more foundational reason for caring for the countryside than much of the contemporary justification for environmentalism which is 'little more than earth worship dressed up'.

He deals with the biblical aspect of our relationship to the earth which is said to be 'imaged on God's' and is described as transcendent and immanent. Man is to rule over the animal kingdom and this distinguishes the Christian position from the animal rights view of transcendence as 'speciesism', and also from the New Age's pantheistic environmentalism. Both man and animals were created from the earth and thus share a connection with the land and with each other. Creation was the work of the Trinity and their interconnectedness is to be reflected in the relations between the animate and inanimate creation also. The visceral attachment that rural people have for the land derives from the manner of our creation. Any economic or social pressures that threaten this relationship must be questioned. Land ownership is to be as widely spread as possible and hypermobility is challenged by demonstrating that roots are important for the stability of individuals, families and societies.

Environmental issues can no longer be ignored as the ecosystems cannot cope with all the waste products; we have arrived at a 'full world'. Because of our stress on economic growth we have failed to adapt to this new situation. Increasing farm size and decreasing the cost of food is not the answer. Rather, family farms will best protect the local ecosystems so we should ensure they are adequately rewarded.

Globalisation, despite many benefits, is viewed as the enemy to best practice, as it can lead to lowered environmental regulations and safety standards and contribute to global warming. Profits go to the multinationals while small farmers are impoverished. A Christian ethic of restraint would counteract this. Technology, although a gift from God, has been idolised. Biblical principles for sustainable agriculture are adduced and an appraisal given of organic farming. Consumers are urged not to leave their consciences at the supermarket door and buy cheap food, which nevertheless has hidden costs and ignores our national food security, but to choose those foods that 'bless God's earth' and those involved in stewarding it.

The book is well written from a Reformed evangelical position, clearly argued and very readable. It is well referenced both biblically and technically with notes to each chapter easily accessible at the end of the book. The book presents a persuasive argument and is generally well balanced in its approach but, occasionally, there is a tendency to 'over-egg the pudding' which could be counter-productive. Reference was made to a

‘full earth’ in 2003 with a population of 6.5 billion but no solution was presented for feeding the predicted ‘overfull earth’ of 9 billion in 2050.

This book addresses a neglected but very relevant topical issue from a Christian perspective and can be strongly recommended to ministers, students, agriculturists, businessmen, politicians and the interested public. Why not present it as a gift to those who have influential positions in the food industry or government where it may act as ‘bread cast upon the waters’?

*Allan MacPherson, Ayr Free Church*

## **The Holy Trinity – In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship**

Robert Letham

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2004; xv+546 pp., £14.35; ISBN 087552006

J. I. Packer commends this work as ‘solid and judicious, comprehensive and thorough, abreast of past wisdom and present-day debate, and doxological in tone throughout; this is far and away the best big textbook on the Trinity that you can find, and it will surely remain so for many years to come’.

This commendation is no exaggeration. The work is sheer excellence from first to last and is in a league of its own. It is not a book for beginners but is a volume highly recommended to all pastors.

Part one (biblical foundations) compactly surveys the Old Testament background. The only missing part is the activity of theophany on Sinai and fellowship with Moses. Perhaps Letham followed Wainwright into a mistake when he suggests that there is little, if any, trace of dialogue within the Godhead in the OT? What about Psalm 110 which is quoted often in the NT? And what about Isaiah 49:1-9 and 50:4-11?

The survey of Trinity in the NT is thorough: Jesus and the Father (chapter 2), the Holy Spirit and Triadic Patterns (chapter 3). It is refreshing to reflect on Jesus’ affirmation of binitarianism (John 5) and then his teaching on the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 14–16. With regard to the Holy Spirit, the author, by way of overview, comments as follows: ‘Due to the invisibility and anonymity of the Spirit, his presence is not normally noted, even though he may be known by what he does. Even so, there is a vast increase in references to the Holy Spirit in the NT, compared with the OT. The NT, while never explicitly calling the Holy Spirit “God”, ascribes to him divine characteristics. Among other things, fellowship with one another, and with the Father and the Son, is by the



Holy Spirit. The Spirit sanctifies, gives joy in sufferings, opens people's minds to believe, enables us to worship, and brings about union with Christ' (p. 56). A twelve-page excursus is devoted to Ternary Patterns in Ephesians.

Part two (historical developments) and part three (modern discussion) is historical theology at its very best, totally fascinating to a Trinity lover and hugely informative throughout.

The Arian controversy was overruled for good in the providence of God to attain theological clarity. It was complex. Letham corrects the common myth that Arius challenged the orthodox doctrine, leaving Athanasius as the sole defender, *Athanasius contra mundum*. There was no definitively settled orthodoxy before AD 381, and Athanasius was not alone in defending the truth (pp. 119, 127). Chapters are devoted to the Cappadocians, the Council of Constantinople, Augustine, the *Filioque* Controversy and to John Calvin.

From Calvin we jump several centuries into the modern era. There is a chapter devoted to Karl Barth, one to the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984), Moltmann (1928- ) and Pannenberg (1928- ), followed by a fascinating and enlightening chapter describing Eastern Orthodox theologians Bulgakov (1871-1944), Lossky (1903-1958) and Staniloae (1903-1993). Finally a chapter is devoted to Thomas F. Torrance who on this subject is at the top of the climbing frame.

With regard to Barth, Letham observes: 'Then came Karl Barth (1886-1968), and it is from him that the recent revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity has its genesis. As R. W. Jenson puts it, '[It is] from Barth that twentieth-century theology has learned that the doctrine of the Trinity has explanatory and interpretive use for the whole of theology; it is by him that the current vigorous revival of Trinitarian reflection was enabled.' The translator of the first half-volume of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* suggests that his treatment of the Trinity in that volume is the most significant since Augustine. While this claim is exaggerated, there is little doubt that Barth's work has had a seminal effect' (p. 272).

A thorough and helpful analysis of the early and later Barth ensues. Did Barth succeed in his doctrine of the Trinity? According to Letham the answer is 'No': 'There is this persistent ambiguity at the heart of Barth's Trinitarianism that does not change. If he is not modalistic, he will escape from the charge of unipersonality only with the greatest difficulty.'

Having explored and analysed the theology of Rahner, Letham explains the theology of Moltmann and Pannenberg. Thomas Weinandy's refutation of Moltmann is assessed (see also Mostyn Roberts' article 'The Passion of the Impossible', RT 207). Letham then turns eastwards to 20th-century

orthodox theologians Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky and Dumitru Staniloae, the latter having worked in Romania where he was imprisoned by the Communist regime for five years.

Letham suggests that Moltmann's Trinitarianism 'encourages a reversal of patriarchal structures and attitudes. His view of God as suffering love, co-suffering with the world, is that of a weak bystander who can do nothing to change the situation. He simply suffers. God is a feminized God, indeed a transsexual deity, a motherly Father and a fatherly Mother. In turn, Moltmann's Christian society is a feminized society of persons in relationship, devoid of authority. One might call it a castrated theology. It is a mixture of Christian teaching and paganism. Whatever else one might say, it is certainly "politically correct"' (p. 312).

In summary of Eastern Trinitarian theology this conclusion is made, 'The Eastern doctrine of the Trinity requires different Trinitarian levels, undermines our knowledge of God, and, in so doing, implicitly questions the faithfulness and reliability of God. Largely due to its isolation from the West, the East has had no medieval period, no Renaissance or Reformation, and no Enlightenment, and so has never had to grapple with the vital epistemological breakthrough achieved by Calvin' (p. 354).

Thomas F. Torrance's work is helpfully described with pithy, helpful insights. For instance, 'Torrance understands perichoresis (the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity in the one being of God), in a dynamic way as the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three persons in an ontological relational, spiritual and intensely personal way.'

Part four opens up four critical practical issues: 1. The Trinity and the Incarnation; 2. The Trinity, Worship and Prayer; 3. The Trinity, Creation and Missions; 4. The Trinity and Persons.

There is a stimulating section opening up the view that for the Reformed the whole of creation is an icon, 'The relationality of the cosmos points unmistakably to its relational Creator' (p. 436).

Analysis is made of postmodern culture: diversity without unity. 'Postmodernism's world is one of instability, diversity and fragmentation. Since postmodernism allows no objective truth, there can be no fixed point of reference to determine what we should believe or how we are to act. This lack of fixity entails a total lack of stability in everyday life. No basis exists for a commonly accepted morality' (p. 451). While diversity without unity is the mark of postmodernism unity without diversity is the character of Islam:

Its doctrine of God is the major weak point of Islam. It is the root of all other problems. It is here that the Christian apologete and evangelist can

probe, with sensitivity and wisdom. While the Trinity is one of the major stumbling blocks to Muslims turning to Christ, it must be presented with intelligence and skill. Here the love paradigm of Richard of St. Victor, rediscovered in modern Russian Orthodox theology and developed in differing ways by Moltmann and Staniloae, offers help. Only a God who is triune can be personal. Only the Holy Trinity can be love. Human love cannot possibly reflect the nature of God unless God is a trinity of persons in union and communion. A solitary monad cannot love and, since it cannot love, neither can it be a person. And if God is not personal neither can we be – and if we are not persons we cannot love. This marks a vast, immeasurable divide between those cultures that follow a monotheistic unitary deity and those that are permeated by the Christian teaching on the Trinity. Trinitarian theology asserts that love is ultimate since God is love, because he is three persons in undivided loving communion. Islam asserts that Allah is powerful and his will is ultimate, before which submission (*Islam*) is required' (p. 446).

There are two appendixes addressing modern attempts by those with a feminist agenda (Bilezikian) to deny order within the Trinity.

A six-page glossary explaining the meaning of a wide range of terms used in Trinitarian theology is most useful.

Throughout the writing is robustly reformed. Robert Letham is the minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware, and adjunct professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. He is an Englishman who having settled in the USA still understands with enthusiasm the finer points of cricket.

*Errol Hulse, Leeds*

## **Review Editor's note on recent commentaries**

The *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, edited by James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003, xx+1629 pp., £37.15; ISBN 0802837115), is a massive and up-to-date introduction to biblical literature. It is a useful marker of current critical and liberal scholarship; the fact that the Apocrypha is included, and that few names from evangelical seminaries appear, is an indication that it is not pitched at the conservative end of biblical studies. The introductions to each book are useful; the commentary itself must be used with caution, however. A glance at the introduction to the Pentateuch, for example, shows that the documentary hypothesis is still alive and well. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the material on the New Testament writings is less liberalist in orientation, and Joel Green's essay on 'Hermeneutical Approaches to the

New Testament Tradition' certainly brought me up to speed on much that is taking place in the world of New Testament research and hermeneutics. This is a huge volume, which gathers together an international and ecumenical range of scholarly writings, and will be a useful tool, if used carefully, for anyone wishing an up-to-date introduction to biblical studies.

The latest edition in the Ancient Commentary on Scripture series is *Old Testament IX: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, edited by J. Robert Wright (IVP, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2005; xxix+434 pp., £19.81; ISBN 0830814795). This series brings together a selection of commentators spanning some seven centuries of biblical exegesis in the first millennium of the New Testament church. It was a period, of course, which saw a wide variety of abilities and styles among those who exegeted the biblical text, but for those who are interested in historical exegesis, this series will prove invaluable. The Song of Solomon, for example, was one of the most widely read and preached books of the Old Testament, yet the spiritual approach of the ancients is increasingly becoming too much for modern evangelicals. This refreshing volume grounds our exegesis in the full revelation of Scripture as well as in the wide sweep of the Bible.

Christian Focus publications have republished the short commentary on Lamentations by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Grief and Pain in the Plan of God: Christian Assurance and the Message of Lamentations* (CFP, Fearn, 2004; 141 pp., £6.99; ISBN 18579299341) is a gem from an outstanding Old Testament scholar. Kaiser brings the message of Lamentations – surely one of the more neglected Old Testament writings – to life, arguing for Jeremian authorship (contra the Eerdmans volume, above!) and bringing out the relevance of the dirges as a statement about the place of suffering in God's sovereign plan. The concluding essay on 'Suffering in the Old Testament' is a fitting summary of an important theme.

W. Harold Mare's *New Testament Background Commentary: A New Dictionary of Words, Phrases and Situations in Bible Order* (Mentor, Fearn, 2004; 511 pp., £19.99; ISBN 1857929551) is also a useful reference tool. At the age of 85 Professor Mare was engaged in archaeological work in Jordan when he died as the result of a road accident just before the publication of this volume. It is, therefore, a fitting memorial to one of the founding trustees and former Professors of Covenant Seminary, whose expertise in New Testament background is evident throughout this book. More a commentary than a dictionary, this volume works through each New Testament book, giving an introduction and a contextual analysis of key verses in each chapter. It

will certainly prove a useful reference tool for background studies for New Testament interpretation and exegesis.

Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, IVP New Testament Commentary series (IVP, Leicester/Downers Grove, 2004, 447 pp., £11.99; ISBN 0830818065), follows the style of the series and makes an important contribution to Romans studies. With Pauline studies now subject to the nuances of the so-called 'new perspectives' on Paul, any modern commentary on Paul's letters – particularly those which deal with justification and related matters – feeds into this particular discussion. Osborne is a reliable guide in this matter, nuancing justification in a declarative understanding of the term. One wonders whether it is time to call a moratorium on Romans commentaries; no doubt they will keep on coming. If one were to make a choice, Osborne's would not be a foolish one to make.

A latest addition to the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series is the volume on *1 Corinthians* by David Garland (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2003; xxi+870 pp., £27.50; ISBN 080102630X). Several volumes have now appeared in this series, and all have been valuable. With exacting attention to the Greek text Garland is a good guide through the epistle. He highlights at the outset that Corinth was 'a religious melting pot' with these outside influences affecting the thinking and behaviour of the congregation. He also rightly identifies how Paul brings his eschatology to bear on many of the problems at Corinth; to those who believed they had arrived, Paul highlights the importance of the 'not yet'. An important contribution to an important series.

Finally, two recent commentaries on Revelation are worth highlighting. Ben Witherington III has written a volume in the New Cambridge Bible Commentary series: *Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003; xviii+307 pp., £10.40; ISBN 0521000688), worth purchasing if only for the 'brief tour of Revelation' which appears in the introduction. Witherington is spot on when he says that 'though this is mostly a visionary work, it has its aural and oracular dimensions, and the visionary material is set within the context of the interpreting oracles' (p. 41). He is correct to place Revelation within the stream of prophetic, apocalyptic material, which is neither purely earth-bound nor transcendent, but which sees the world as the theatre of the supernatural. Operating on the principle of a 'double eschatology', Witherington shows the primary concern of the book for Christians of the first century, and its permanent relevance for the church in every age. This is a very accessible commentary on a difficult book.

*The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple. A new approach to the Book of Revelation* by John and Gloria Ben-Daniel (Beit Yochanan, Jerusalem, 2003; 266 pp., £14; ISBN 965551342), is an attempt to view Revelation in the light of the Temple background. It stresses the abundant Temple imagery of the last book of the canon, suggesting that the Temple is the unifying theme of the images, and the key to interpreting them. It is an interesting thesis, but hardly one that arises naturally out of the text. Used with care, however, this book does make sense of the many allusions to Temple liturgy in Revelation.

*Iain D. Campbell, Back Free Church, Isle of Lewis*

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