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## REVIEWS

### **The Moral Law: Its Place in Scripture and Its Relevance Today**

John L. Mackay

The Christian Institute, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2004; 64 pp., £3.50; ISBN 1 901086 27 5

A Professor of Old Testament Language, Exegesis and Theology at the Free Church of Scotland College in Edinburgh writing a little book on the moral law is an event hardly likely to set the heather on fire, you might think, and you would be wrong. These two lectures given at the Christian Institute's Autumn series in November 2003 in Newcastle maintain their learned, preachy tone in print, but more, they sing, at least they did for this Welshman. Reading this Scottish prose was a delight. I wanted John to go on and on, leading me further into the intricacies of law and gospel, the Decalogue, the Mosaic Law and the New Covenant. This summary was grand but not enough. Maybe it's the Welsh that creates the delight in me, or maybe it's the tension of the particularly divisive Baptist argument about the Christian and the law which found sweet sense and exegetical satisfaction in the theology of these pages. Allied to Iain D. Campbell's *On the First Day of the Week* (Day One), those of us who believe in the abiding use of the law of God for the Christian are strengthened by such publications.

Whereas Patrick Fairbairn's *Law in Scripture* (1868) will be acknowledged, this booklet will be read. Its ten or so chapters on the law are on the Old Testament evidence, the moral law, the Decalogue and the rest of the Mosaic Law, the application of the other laws, the law as a covenant of works, Jesus and the law, the law and love, Paul and the law, the law of liberty and the moral law in today's world.

At a recent Reformed Baptist Conference a paper was given on the subject 'Puritan and New Covenant Baptists: Co-Defenders of the Decalogue'. It was a fine paper. The speaker wants to be known as a 'New Covenant man' but he will not eliminate the Decalogue from its importance in sanctifying the believer. However, he regards the Sabbath as a ceremonial sign of the covenant. I am very close to that man; his

godliness is illuminating and one acknowledges that there are Mosaic, ceremonial and civil aspects of sabbatical regulations within the seven year and Jubilee structures of Israel. Yet the exegesis and explanation of John L. Mackay is more persuasive. I was delighted with this book. It will do good pastoral work for me amongst theological students and the more thoughtful leaders of the UCCF on the Aberystwyth campus. It will enlighten the officers of our own congregation.

*Geoff Thomas, Alfred Place Baptist Church (Independent), Aberystwyth*

## **Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament**

Peter Enns

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005; 197 pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 8010 2730 6

Normally I would steer clear of any book that refers to the Old Testament as a 'problem'. I have met many people who do find it to be a problem, though, and the advertising blurb gave me sufficient indication that this could well be a very helpful book for such people. Working with three issues that Evangelicals might have with the Old Testament, Enns provides not so much a solution as a clear delineation of the factors that would feed into a solution, and go a long way towards removing the so-called problem.

Chapter two addresses the importance of understanding the Old Testament as a document from the Ancient Near East. Besides providing an overview of literature from that context, Enns lays out the issues that arise when the Old Testament is read in this context. He sensibly dismisses some of the more outlandish claims that these texts undermine scriptural authority and demonstrates how our appreciation of the Old Testament is enhanced (rather than challenged) by this contextualised reading.

In chapter three, attention turns to the theological diversity apparent in the Old Testament. With a striking range of examples, Enns demonstrates that this diversity can neither be argued away by simplistic harmonisation, nor by pretending that the problem is only apparent (rather than actual). Here I felt the concluding section needed to be stronger. For those of us who are used to handling the Old Testament's diversity on a regular basis, the argument is moot; for Enns' main audience, his discussion needed to be stronger and more convincing. I agree with his affirmation that we do not need to be defensive about this characteristic of the Old Testament (p. 108), but feel he must be stronger in stating that the problem arises not so much

from the Old Testament itself but from our tendency to define *in advance* what Scripture should look like.

In chapter four, the concern is the use the New Testament writers make of the Old Testament. The phenomenon of texts being quoted out of context, or chopped and changed about to suit the author's need is well known. Enns starts by demonstrating that these techniques were common within the Second Temple period, and are not unique to the New Testament. In that sense, the New Testament writers were children of their time. This observation already undermines the argument that the apostolic writers had special permission from the Holy Spirit to use techniques denied to later generations. Instead, Enns suggests that rather than deny any validity to the apostolic method, we must find a way of incorporating this into contemporary exegesis. While recognising that Enns admits that this is a 'real dilemma, and there is no simple solution' (p. 156), I am not so convinced of his argument here. He provides a good start to a solution, though, and has given me much to ponder.

This book is not aimed at Old Testament specialists but at any Evangelical who feels uneasy with the Old Testament. I am impressed by the way Enns raises issues and deals with them with a refreshing honesty. He has a very high view of Scripture, and writes from a desire to help people – scholars and lay – to love the first four-fifths of the Bible as much as they do the final fifth. This book never undermines the Bible, but seeks ways to recognise that issues are sometimes more complex than we are always willing to work with. If our doctrine of Scripture is only big enough to encompass the New Testament, then we cannot really claim to have a biblical doctrine of Scripture.

A valuable book that deserves to be widely read.

*John Wilks, London School of Theology*

### **Consider the Lilies: A Plea for Creational Theology**

T. M. Moore

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2005; 231 pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 87552 716 7

There are not many books that have the potential to alter the way you look at both theology and the world around you. *Consider the Lilies* is one such book. Its author, T. M. Moore, a senior pastor at Cedar Springs Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, makes an impassioned plea to the church to take seriously the resources God has provided for her in what has traditionally been called general revelation. Moore prefers the term

'creational theology' claiming that it is freer of the baggage attached to such terms as general revelation, natural law and natural theology.

One of Moore's objectives in writing is to demonstrate that theology is not merely a task for specialists but it is the great privilege of every Christian. Ordinary Christians have not quarried general revelation as a resource partly because it has been a battleground for theologians. Moore characterises the divide as being between maximisers and minimisers. The maximisers include those who maintain that general revelation is so clear and compelling it can lead a person to a true knowledge of God, e.g. certain classical varieties of apologetics. Minimisers include Barthians, with their denial of revelation apart from Christ, and also the bulk of evangelicals who simply regard the task of reaping the fruit of general revelation as too daunting. With Moore we find a reliable guide who plots a course between these two extremes. He reminds us that there is true revelation in creation, accessible to us and for which we are accountable. Nevertheless we only arrive at true knowledge of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Creational theology will not save the unbeliever. Rather, it is the domain of the redeemed for whom it serves to increase the knowledge of God and hence our worship and our sanctification. In addition, Moore affirms that the task of creational theology can be accomplished only in the light of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and is to be done within the community of the church. Moore's theological surefootedness quickly disarms one of any fear that creational theology might be a capitulation to faddish earth spirituality. Indeed, he employs Scripture extensively to make clear that the 'happy task' of creational theology is one we are duty bound to undertake as Christians.

The raw material of creational theology consists first of all in creation, (not 'nature'), culture and conscience. Moore does not only mean 'high' culture but also family life, community traditions, economy, family life, etc. He instances the awe he experienced as a young man at the sight of a modern steel building in St Louis whose great height and strength pointed beyond itself to the transcendence and enduring nature of God. By conscience Moore is indicating the behaviour of people as their consciences act either in rebellion against or in obedience to the knowledge of God's law in their hearts. He instances an afternoon in a bookstore café observing two teenage girls drooling over the tawdry illusions marketed by a glossy magazine.

Engagement with creational theology promises a rich spiritual reward but requires resolution to make the time and to become 'mindful'. It should also result in some 'product' through which spiritual blessing can be passed on to others. It may result in the production of a poem, a painting,

music or even a simple exchange with a conversation partner who has agreed to discuss observations. Creational theology is thus able to bring reflection on God and his world into the whole of life rather than simply have an end point in the production of a book or a lecture. One begins to do theology rather than simply read it.

In keeping with this theological outlook, the book itself is geared to praxis. There are discussion questions at the close of each chapter and activities designed to get the reader started practising creational theology. Chapters are interlaced with the work of three great practitioners: William Cowper, Gerald Manley Hopkins and Jonathan Edwards. The result is a book that is full of beauty and inspiration. Read and enjoy!

*Ivor MacDonald, Kilmuir and Stenscholl Church of Scotland, Isle of Skye*

### **The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision**

The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision.

E. Calvin Beisner (ed.)

Knox Theological Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 2004; 331 pp., \$16.00; ISBN 0974947709

For some years now there has been a handful of voices within the American reformed community advocating for theological revision. This group of conversation partners has more recently embraced the designation 'Federal Vision' as a description of its collective aspirations. Among other things, they believe that classical Covenant Theology is in need of a biblical makeover and a fresh deployment in the reformed churches and in the lives of reformed Christians.

This book, first, provides the reader firsthand accounts of the views of key proponents and critics of the Federal Vision in their own words. Second, it is the record of a significant attempt to meet face-to-face in hopes of promoting the peace of the church by attempting to clear up misunderstandings, alleviate misplaced concerns and create consensus on disputed matters. Both of these points are significant because of the regular assertion of Federal Vision proponents that their critics are misreading them, falsely accusing them, uncharitably dealing with them and failing to meet with them and hear them out. This is clearly not the case with regard to the interactions in this book – which are the result of critics of the Federal Vision going out of their way to understand precisely what the proponents are saying, to deal fairly and Christianly with them, and yet also to express sincere concerns about the theological assertions and formulations of the Federal Vision.

Third, the Federal Vision proponents who are contributors to this volume are ministers in various reformed denominations. This is significant for at least two reasons. The first is that this indicates that the Federal Vision is having at least some influence amongst the ministry of various reformed and evangelical churches in North America. Yet it has been propounded without the affirmation of any major reformed denomination. That is, though its advocates assert it to be both consistent with and an improvement upon historic reformed confessional formulations, no reformed denomination of standing has recognized it as such, and yet ministers within those communions are openly and publicly promoting it among clergy and laity alike. This seems to be a very individualistic way to promote a view that claims to have a higher view of the church than that of the prevailing evangelical culture. Secondly, this is significant because one of the interesting features of the promotion of the Federal Vision, especially in the world of the internet, has been the factor of those who lack theological and ecclesiastical credentials advocating the doctrinal reformation of the churches.

The book is divided into four parts, and twenty-three chapters. Cal Beisner's introduction helpfully invites the reader into the debate with a healthy dose of context. It is an introduction not to be skipped. The first section of the book is an overview of some of the concerns of the proponents of the Federal Vision, as well as of concerns about the Federal Vision by its critics. It will give the reader a good feel for the issues in play in this debate.

Douglas Wilson speaks for the Federal Vision side. Wilson assures the reader of the Federal Vision's commitment to divine sovereignty and election and argues that this discussion should be treated as intramural – that is, he wants to stress that both Federal Vision proponents and opponents are legitimate members of the reformed, orthodox, Christian community, and thus that all discussion about the Federal Vision proposals should acknowledge that and reflect it in tone. Dr Joseph Pipa, President of Greenville Seminary (SC, USA) provides the rejoinder to Wilson and, after expressing appreciation for some of the Federal Vision's diagnosis of modern evangelicalism, proceeds to indicate a string of problems: (1) a faulty hermeneutic and exegesis, including a naive and sometimes irrational version of biblicism; (2) a faulty view of systematic theology; (3) confusion in theological definition; (4) an unbalanced, pastorally problematic covenant theology; (5) an incipient sacramentalism; and (6) deviant views of covenant and justification.

Section two of the book commences with Steve Schlissel's meandering essay 'A New Way of Seeing' in which he attempts to position the Federal

Vision proponents as those who see the big cultural and theological picture, while their detractors are small-minded nitpickers arguing about tassel-length on vestments while Lenin rides a boxcar into Russia.

Peter Leithart's essay in chapter five is the most impressive piece in the whole volume from the pro-Federal Vision side. Leithart's intellect and theological training come through in his outline for a trinitarian recasting of reformed theology. Those familiar with the work of T. F. Torrance will already be acquainted with a number of Leithart's themes. Leithart's signature tags regarding 'reification' and 'abstraction' appear here, and nicely complement Schlüssel's diatribe.

Rick Phillips' (PCA Pastor, and Chairman of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology) essay 'Covenant and Salvation or What is a "Christian"?' begins the third and longest section of the book, and is the first of two sturdy pieces he contributes. The fourth and final section of the book relates to the Federal Vision teaching on the sacraments, and Douglas Wilson's and Steve Wilkins' chapters are not to be missed. Indeed, reading these pieces will give the reader a feel for how much of the theological project of the Federal Vision is juxtaposed with baptist ecclesiology and sacramentology. Indeed, though the Federal Vision casts its conversation partner as the degenerated reformed tradition under the influence of two centuries of revivalism, the real dialogue is with their own personal story – in both baptist and reconstructionist aspects and phases. Cal Beisner's concluding comments in chapter 23 provide a superb summary of the problems of the Federal Vision, all the more valuable because they come from the pen and heart of a man who has tried valiantly to think the very best of his friends involved in this theological revision movement.

One question that ought to be asked is who should read this book, or anything else for that matter on the Federal Vision? Well, obviously ministers and professors need at least some passing acquaintance with the issue if they are to be of help to folks struggling with these topics. This volume provides, for that purpose, a good one-stop resource. When Guy Waters' *Covenant Theology Improved?* (P&R, forthcoming, early 2006) appears it will furnish a nice companion to this compilation. Ministerial students too will benefit from hearing both sides in their own words. However, material on the Federal Vision is not something that I would recommend to congregants (unless there is some special circumstance). Better that the laity feed upon healthy food and more edifying subjects.

*J. Ligon Duncan III, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi*

## **I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments**

Carl E. Braaten and Christopher R. Seitz (eds)

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, 2005; 275 pp., £13.99; ISBN 0 8028 2812 4

This collection of essays on the Ten Commandments originated as papers presented at three theological conferences that took place in the USA in 2003. Jointly sponsored by the Society for Ecumenical Anglican Doctrine (now known as the Anglican Communion Institute) and the Centre for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, the contributors come from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist church traditions. All write with the conviction that the importance of the Ten Commandments as divine revelation needs to be rediscovered by the modern Western church where the prevailing spirit leans heavily towards antinomianism.

The volume is divided into four sections. In the first part, The Decalogue in Church and Society, Philip Turner, 'The Ten Commandments in the Church in a Postmodern World', and Christopher R. Seitz, 'The Ten Commandments: Positive and Natural Law and the Covenants Old and New – Christian Use of the Decalogue and Moral Law', offer various reasons for the contemporary relevance of the Ten Commandments. The essays in part two, First Table of the Law, explore those Commandments which are primarily directed towards the divine-human relationship: Thomas C. Oden, 'No Other Gods'; David Bentley Hart, 'God or Nothingness'; Ephraim Radner, 'Taking the Lord's Name in Vain'; Markus Bockmuehl, '"Keeping It Holy": Old Testament Commandment and New Testament Faith'. The third section, Second Table of the Law, focuses on those Commandments which are chiefly about inter-human relationships: William T. Cavanaugh, 'Killing in the Name of God'; Bernd Wannewetsch, 'You Shall Not Kill – What Does It Take? Why We Need the Other Commandments If We Are to Abstain from Killing'; Robert W. Jenson, 'Male and Female He Created Them'; Reinhard Hütter, 'The Tongue – Fallen and Restored: Some Reflections on the Three Voices of the Eighth Commandment'; Carl E. Braaten, 'Sins of the Tongue'; R. R. Reno, 'God or Mammon'. The final part of the volume has two contributions under the heading, The Divine Command, which reflect upon two particular issues. Robert Louis Wilken, 'Keeping the Commandments' comments on current attitudes within the USA to the presence of the Ten Commandments in the public arena. Gilbert Meilaender, 'Hearts Set to Obey' discusses contemporary Lutheran attitudes towards the Decalogue.

As might be expected from a volume of this nature, one of its strengths is the variety of approaches found within it. No attempt has been made to produce a uniform treatment of each commandment. This enables individual contributors to draw on their own particular academic expertise, producing a volume that reveals something of the rich heritage of the different Christian traditions represented here. Not all readers, however, will necessarily agree with everything that is said, and the volume presupposes that those reading it will already have a considerable degree of theological understanding. (For example, at a relatively minor level, it is assumed that every reader will be familiar with the fact that the actual numbering of the Ten Commandments varies across the different Christian traditions.)

While each essay contains much that is likely to prove thought-provoking, two possible deficiencies should be noted. Firstly, the volume is largely orientated towards the Christian scene in the USA, where the peculiar nature of the relationship between church and state has a particular bearing on the status of the Ten Commandments, especially for US society at large. Secondly, although the volume seeks to be ecumenical in its range of contributors, significant sections of the Christian church are missing (e.g., Pentecostal, Presbyterian). Allowing for these shortcomings and read with discernment, this collection of essays provides a stimulating addition to the many studies that have already been produced on the Ten Commandments.

*Desi Alexander, Union Theological College, Belfast*

### **Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700**

Diarmaid MacCulloch

Penguin Books, London, 2004; 832 pp., £10.99; ISBN 0 14028 534 2

To adequately explain the Reformation and its effects in any one country, between the covers of a single volume, would require economy and brevity. The triumph of MacCulloch's contribution is that much of the continent is surveyed in over 700 highly readable pages. This book has rightly been described as magisterial. Its approach is one of a rigorous academic with little sympathy towards Calvinists, Puritans or indeed most Protestants of the period, while prepared to describe in some detail their outlook.

The author is Professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University. He grew up with Scottish family roots in an East Anglian rectory, and studied at Cambridge. Spells at Wesley College in Bristol and Ripon College preceded his ordination in the Church of England as Deacon, a path he did not follow, as a result of the controversies over human sexuality at the November 1987 General Synod. Resignation from

Wesley in 1990 was followed by freelance work on Reformation research, the 1995 offer by Oxford to lecture and the 1997 professorship. His previous writings include *Suffolk and the Tudors* as well as *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (1996), both of which won him prizes. The volume under review won MacCulloch the Wolfson Prize for History.

Readers of the *SBET* constituency will find much to disagree with in it, but cannot fail to be impressed with the author's ability to find the subtle nuances and grey areas in the field he covers. Theologians will find much to interest them. The fruitful relationship between humanism and the Reformation is explored at length. One highlight is the particularly lively in-depth analysis of Luther's changing theological emphases in his lifetime, his internal tensions and the importance of the Psalms and other parts of Scripture to the German Reformer's Christology. Professor MacCulloch is reasonably fair to Calvin and highlights challenges from Bolsec and Melancthon as driving the Genevan Reformer to fine-tune his views on predestination.

He sees the Reformation as illustrating the power of ideas and being rooted in concern about salvation. MacCulloch believes that the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic Church was performing adequately and in some cases very well. His detailed discussion of the Counter-Reformation is accompanied by the view that attempts at reconciliation between Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church should have succeeded. MacCulloch is largely even-handed in discussion of martyr statistics. His handling of Oliver Cromwell's brutality is shaded by acknowledgement of his increasing the level of toleration showed to Catholics in England and decision to allow Jewish people to live there once more. The account of the Scottish Reformation and seventeenth-century experience touches on the main points but there is lack of consistent detail: Andrew Melville does not feature, while John Carswell does. (Some may query the statement that Highland Scotland quickly became Protestant.) Clear discussions of the place of the sermon and catechising in Scotland parallel MacCulloch's stress on the importance of the Bible and Psalter in the vernacular across Europe. That said, while MacCulloch hurries through the *Covenanting period* in Scotland, he repeatedly returns to the *theme* of Covenant as it developed theologically and politically in the entire period. He roots William Perkins' view of assurance in his Covenant theology; one fascinating cameo paints the effect of Perkins and Ames on the Calvinists of Transylvania.

There is not a detailed bibliography despite a legion of references; the suggested reading list is divided by topic and geographical area, reflecting

the overall structure of the book. One useful feature is the cross-referencing in the body of the text.

*Norman 'TC' Campbell, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis*

## **Postliberal Theological Method: A Critical Study**

Adonis Vidu

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2005; xiv+269 pp., £19.99; ISBN 1 84227 395 7

This is a highly nuanced critique of postliberal theological epistemology by one who is generally sympathetic with postliberalism's accomplishments. Vidu aims in this work for a middle way between foundationalism and postliberalism's tendency to reify the social setting. His thesis is that the dominant postliberal perception of setting cannot account for the dynamic complex of mutually constitutive relations among texts, communities, and individuals within the total setting (world) created by the qualitatively infinite God who precedes all of our knowing, acting and being within particular settings.

Vidu begins by observing that there is a tension between postliberalism's philosophical commitment to the priority of the social setting and its theological conviction that God's reality is ontologically and epistemically ultimate (p. xiii). In his view, it is not the tension itself, but postliberalism's resolution of it that is philosophically and theologically problematic. Postliberal theologians too often see the 'horizon of understanding' as a territory or space with a stable and clearly defined inside and outside (pp. 1, 86). This perception immunizes 'inside' beliefs from 'outside' scrutiny, and reinforces the assumption that differences between communities are incommensurable before attempting dialogue. The spatializing of setting also lends itself to a hard perspectivalism and social constructivism that denies the individual's capacity to transcend his or her setting sufficiently to critically examine it (p. 33).

As an alternative, Vidu advocates conceiving of tradition/setting as a permeable, intersubjective, dynamic event or series of events in which a community and its individual knowers/actors take shape over time in relation to an 'end' that constitutes and sustains the tradition (p. 24). Vidu develops this proposal in Chapter One by bringing Gadamer and MacIntyre into critical dialogue with Fish and postliberal theologians who appropriate him. In Chapter Two, Vidu appropriates Frei's early view that the Gospels are 'realistic narratives', while rejecting his idea that their proper interpretive context is fictional, because a fictional reading virtually reduces

the material content of the Gospels to their textual form (p. 57). In contrast, Vidu argues that figuration or typology maintains the postliberal intuition that the biblical narratives interpret extra-Scriptural reality, while upholding the idea that text and extra-textual reality interpenetrate as aspects of God's larger purpose for the world (pp. 85-6).

If Frei's early work formalized the text, Lindbeck's influence on his later work is evidenced in its tendency to reify the interpretive community. Vidu argues in Chapter Three that this stems from a failure to discern the close relation between meaning and truth, scheme and content. Postliberals properly emphasize the traditioned shape of experience, but underestimate the role experience plays in shaping tradition. In this regard, Vidu argues that we ought to distinguish description from reference. Individuals from different settings are capable of fixing on a common object. And while their perceptions of the object will reflect their embeddedness within particular social settings, the settings themselves are porous, and will change as a result of the experiences of the individuals who comprise them (p. 101).

Given his conception of the relation between experience and setting, Vidu understandably questions the viability of a coherence model of justification that ignores external criteria and the witness of other traditions (p. 137). Such an approach wrongly assumes that paradigms are closed systems, that meaning is strictly determined by a social setting, and that the choice of one tradition over another is irrational. According to Vidu, this is a false alternative to the foundationalist assumption that belief is justified by appeal to objective neutral criteria (p. 122). He goes on to develop a 'good reasons approach' to justification which draws deeply on works by Donald Davidson and Bruce Marshall.

In Chapter Five, Vidu criticizes postliberalism for its 'Donatist-like' elevation of pure church practice to the status of *norma normans*, and its relegation of theology to second-order reflection on such practices. He then outlines a 'model of doctrine which may serve as both regulative and cognitive, with ontology as a necessary backdrop for any practice' (p. 177). The final chapter unpacks Vidu's concept of the ontological context of theological knowledge by explicating his view of the incarnation and its relation to the Gospel stories which, like metaphors and models, point beyond themselves to the self-revealing of God in the history of Jesus Christ.

Vidu's theological debut advances the discussion about the relation between divine activity and the social mediation of knowledge. At times, his critique of a tradition from which he has obviously learned much is sharp. But his detailed engagement with leading exponents of postliberal

thought suggests that his complaints are warranted. Moreover, his proposed revisions do but minimal violence, as they are developed from resources within this diverse and dynamic setting.

*James R. Wilson, Union Theological Seminary, Virginia*

## **The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years. After Jesus, Volume 1**

Paul Barnett

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005; 230 pp., £9.99; ISBN 0 8028 27810

Barnett explores the birth of Christianity during the twenty years between the death of Jesus and the first extant letters of Paul. His thesis is that 'the birth of Christianity and the birth of christology are inseparable, both as to time and essence. Christianity *is* christology' (p. 8, italics original). Barnett points out that the relatively brief space of time between Jesus' execution (c. AD 30 or 33) and Paul's arrival in Corinth (c. AD 50) leaves little room for an extended christological development in which Jesus became the Messiah and Lord, as some scholarship suggests. Rather, Barnett argues that the Christology of Paul and the Gospel writers existed in the years immediately following Jesus' death. This Christology was the same Christology that Peter preached at Pentecost and was the impetus behind the mission activity of the apostles.

In the early chapters of *The Birth of Christianity*, Barnett discusses concerns of historical study and the importance of chronology. These chapters serve as his foundation and the boundaries of his argument. In later chapters, he shows how Paul was aware of and continued to teach the same gospel that he had learned in the days and weeks immediately following his conversion. Barnett also focuses on the mission activity of Peter, John, and other apostles in Judea, and he highlights what is known of the Christians in Antioch in these first twenty years. He points out that Peter's teaching at Pentecost and to Cornelius' household was significant for the Christology of the early church. For example, traces of Peter's teaching can be found in Paul's letter to the Romans and in Mark's Gospel.

Barnett also discusses the Gospels of Mark and John and insists that no gap exists between the message of these Gospels and the early teaching of the apostles. Barnett argues that in the first twenty years of Christianity Jesus was called the Messiah, and that Jesus' resurrection was foundational to the teaching of the apostles.

*The Birth of Christianity* is a helpful survey of the first twenty years of Christianity. Those without much knowledge of the scholarly issues will

find Barnett's explanations helpful, while those with knowledge of the scholarly issues will find him engaging. Barnett interacts with very recent scholarship and specialists of early Christianity. He is concerned with historical method and about accurately piecing together the bits of information from the early years of Christianity. Barnett provides a significant amount of knowledge regarding the historical and political situation of the Roman world in the early first century and adeptly shows the relevant links between these events and those of the early church.

In his clear style, Barnett wrestles with the current scholarship that sees an unconnected gap between Jesus and Paul. His contentions accurately reflect Scripture and the boundaries of historical inquiry that he establishes. For those interested in further study, the bibliography and footnotes provide a helpful collection of sources.

Overall, Barnett provides a very persuasive argument for the position that the Christology of the early church emerged immediately following the death of Jesus and that this same Christology is what is found in the letters of Paul and the four Gospels. He clearly connects the evidence of the first twenty years after Jesus' death, from Paul's letters, the speeches and sermons in Acts, the narrative material in Acts, and the political and historical events of the Roman world.

*Benjamin E. Reynolds, University of Aberdeen*

### **Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament**

Bart D. Ehrman

Oxford University Press, New York, 2003; 342 pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 19 518250 2

### **Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew**

Bart D. Ehrman

Oxford University Press, New York, 2003; xv+294 pp., £8.99; ISBN 0 19 518249 9

Bart Ehrman seeks to persuade lay readers that modern discoveries of an ever-growing collection of vastly divergent Christian "scriptures" prove that the only intelligent response is to open the doors wide to *laissez-faire* pluralism (pp. 47, 92). Currently the chair of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ehrman began as an

evangelical studying at Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton and Princeton under Bruce Metzger, but now portrays himself as an enlightened agnostic.

The popularity of these books is due to their espousal of ideas supportive of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. Ehrman's *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* is a compilation of non-canonical books, devotionally imaginative writings, and books of Nag Hammadi Gnosticism. His translation of these documents, and those of other scholars, would be a good starting-point if it were not for his anti-orthodox bias in the introductions.

His companion volume *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* lays out his critical assessment of the formation of the New Testament as he presents a dizzying kaleidoscope of other possible Christian 'scriptures'. Ehrman raises hundreds of questions in this book but finds it intellectually untenable to propose many answers. His rambling style describes the canonization process while it chastises his former Christian background because of his concern for broadmindedness (p. 257). But does Ehrman show the same openness to those who hold to historic Christianity? No, not if they espouse an evangelical commitment to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ (p. 255). On a positive note, the book does provide insight into how people wish to think about Jesus and the New Testament, in the hope that the early diversity of scriptures will perpetuate tolerance.

Here are a few of the larger problems with *Lost Christianities*. It pays insufficient attention to the chronological superiority of the New Testament documents (pp. 239-49). He defends Gnosticism against proto-orthodoxy despite its cryptic messages. He paints pseudonymous writings as strict forgeries in modernist terms without explaining the ancient practice of disciples writing as faithful stewards of oral tradition. Ehrman focuses upon the battles of the second and third centuries, while ignoring earlier development, in order to make clear that hegemonic forces were at work eliminating books from the New Testament. He seems more interested in what the world might have looked like if orthodox Christian faith did not take shape than he does in dealing with the real world shaped by Christianity. Finally, he grossly underestimates the exclusivist Jewish roots of Jesus' teaching founded upon monotheism (pp. 24, 29, 47, 91).

The contemporary concerns regarding the canon and various views of Jesus raised by Ehrman are set forth to destroy the Christian worldview without any alternative offered. The infectious force of his questions will need to be answered intellectually, and with the gentleness of Jesus, through the combined witness of the church. Evangelicals will find reliable scholars like Larry Hurtado, Martin Hengel, Richard Bauckham, and N. T.

Wright helpful in forming a Christ-centered response. Larry Hurtado's *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003, 746 pp., £18.42) is a useful, generous, orthodox answer.

Ehrman, who deserted evangelical ranks, confronts us with the need for self-evaluation. God is not finished with Ehrman or others like him. We must consider how to continue to proclaim the exclusive Lordship of Christ in a world reeling from religious terrorism so that people like him can hear the voice of the Spirit speaking truth from the perspective of God's eternal kingdom. Scholarly assistance is available. Pastors should take the opportunity to digest this material in order to equip apologetic communities to speak the truth in love.

*James R. Howe, Community Presbyterian Church, Waldport, Oregon*

## **Grace Abounding. The Life, Books and Influence of John Bunyan**

David B. Calhoun

CFP Mentor, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2005; 224 pp., £8.99; ISBN 1 84550 031

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Since his death in August 1688, there has been a plethora of books relating to the life, times and works of the tinker from Bedfordshire, John Bunyan. Various authors have written from every doctrinal and literary standpoint imaginable. However, to find a volume that is so compact, accurate, comprehensive and informative as this present title is rare.

It has to be said at the outset that in writing this particular book, Dr Calhoun has endeavoured to put together something which is a refreshing change from the majority of studies, and it is, I believe, a unique volume. Dr Calhoun, Professor of Church History at Covenant Seminary, Missouri, displays a style of writing which is readable, informative and authoritative. It is a very commendable modern resource for the novice or the informed, as well as the student or the tutor.

The first chapter considers Bunyan's life. This biographical sketch, in just 30 pages, is packed with detail yet flows effortlessly through the changing years of Bunyan's turbulent life in a masterly fashion. Throughout the book there are 'grey boxes' containing additional facts, relevant to the main text at that specific point of the chapter – a helpful addition!

Following this introduction to Bunyan the man and his life, the reader's attention is turned to Bunyan the writer. As Dr Calhoun points out, 'The

variety in Bunyan's writing is remarkable: autobiography, allegory, fiction, polemics, poetry, and books for children... yet most are practical expositions of Scripture.'

Chapters two and three of *Grace Abounding* are a summary of Bunyan's masterpiece *The Pilgrim's Progress* (parts 1 and 2) and here Dr Calhoun has competently encapsulated the storyline of the allegory, which will be a useful reference for any wishing to 'pick out' a particular section of the work, as well as for those that have never read these works yet are interested in an overview.

A similar approach is made to *The Holy War*, *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* and Bunyan's other writings, in consecutive chapters. Parenthetical references throughout the book to the three volume *Works of John Bunyan*, edited by George Offor in 1854, giving the relevant volume and page numbers, will be of particular value to serious students.

Bunyan's theology, which is the foundation to his writings, is also comprehensively analysed by Professor Calhoun. Bunyan the Lutheran, Calvinist and Puritan are each explored as well as Bunyan's position on Baptists and the Sacraments. His beliefs on Assurance, Sanctification, Repentance, Perseverance and Predestination are among topics considered, in a manner seldom seen from Bunyan biographers.

Each chapter concludes with helpful footnotes which underline the writer's command of his subject, and give the reader additional information with page references of excerpts quoted from Bunyan's writings and works.

The book concludes with an appreciation of Bunyan, his contemporaries, and major biographers. Another unusual resource for those studying and researching the subject includes a section on writers and artists who were inspired by Bunyan's writings, such as C. S. Lewis and William Blake. A timeline of major seventeenth-century dates and an appendix of Bunyan sites in Bedfordshire and London are an added bonus.

A fundamental failing is the title of Dr Calhoun's book, which on a bookseller's shelf will appear at first glance to be Bunyan's own self-portrait, entitled *Grace Abounding!* This comprehensive volume, which is a thrill to read and a very valuable addition to the Bunyan section of any library, deserves a more ingenious title.

*John Prestell, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire*

## W. Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy

A. Donald MacLeod

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005; 401 pp.; ISBN 0 7735 2770 2 (hardback) £69; 0 7735 2818 0 (paperback) £17

W. Stanford Reid was, in many ways a man who was much larger than life. He was a respected academic, prolific author and churchman, and a man who made a significant contribution to the reformed church in Canada and around the world. Reid was born in a suburb of Montreal, Canada, on 13 September 1913 and died 28 December 1996. During the course of a long life he was actively involved in the life of the Presbyterian Church in Canada as a pastor and participant in the courts of the church. The author of this well-researched and readable book is A. Donald MacLeod who is himself a Canadian Presbyterian pastor and academic.

Reid was known outside of the Presbyterian Church in Canada as a Professor of History, first at McGill University in Montreal and then at the University of Guelph (where he would successfully lead the history department for many years). Reid's successful career in the university was testimony to the fact that it was possible to be both a respected academic and an evangelical Calvinist.

As well as Reid's official university posts, his contribution to the academy also included a lengthy term on the Board of Trustees of his *alma mater*, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. This was a post he took very seriously and which involved him in an intense theological controversy in the 1970s and 80s on the issue of justification by faith.

A. Donald MacLeod aptly describes W. Stanford Reid as a man who was 'a Calvinist... a confessional Presbyterian, committed to a creedal statement of the faith that enshrines Calvinism as defined in the seventeenth century by the Westminster Confession of Faith' (p. 300).

Given some of the robust stands that Reid took during his lifetime in defense of confessional orthodoxy, it may strike some readers as odd that during the 1980s Stanford Reid would come to accept the ordination of women in the Presbyterian Church in Canada and didn't want to make it a 'litmus test' of orthodoxy. He also came to regard *Living Faith* [the Presbyterian Church in Canada's modern statement of faith and subordinate standard] as an acceptable statement of Christian faith, 'as good, if not better than most' (p. 238).

The valuable and extensive bibliography at the end of this volume portrays the breadth of Reid's writings over the course of his long career.

He wrote extensively on the history of the Reformation, the impact of Calvin and Calvinism, and the impact of Scottish immigrants on Canadian society and culture. His articles, reviews and books sought to distill the fruits of his researches for a wider audience. Perhaps best-known of his writings is his biography of John Knox entitled *Trumpeter of God*. This work that was published in 1974 was received with generally good reviews although it did not sell as well as Reid would have wished.

A. Donald MacLeod has done a wonderful job of bringing the colourful figure of W. Stanford Reid fully to life. While there is no question that the author sympathizes with his subject much of the time, this volume is no exercise in hagiography. It is rather, a balanced account of a complex man. While one might not agree with all that Reid did and said during his long career, there is no doubt but that his was a life well lived in service of the academy and the church. This volume is well worthy of the attention of those who would seek to better understand the reformed church in Canada and around the world.

*Alexander (Sandy) Finlayson, Westminster Theological Seminary,  
Philadelphia, PA*

## **The Worship of God: Reformed Concepts of Biblical Worship**

Joseph A. Pipa (ed.)

CFP Mentor, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2005; 240 pp., £10.99; ISBN 1 8455 0055 5

This is a collection of essays, most of which were originally delivered as lectures and sermons at the annual conference sponsored by Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Carolina. This genesis of the book explains why some chapters are carefully academic and others exhortatory, but this should not be viewed as a disadvantage, since the intended readership is not scholars, but church officers and church members.

The standpoint of the writers is expressed in the preface through some apposite quotations from Calvin. He says, for example, that disciples of Christ should not 'frame any new worship of God for themselves at random, and after their own pleasure, but know that the only legitimate worship of God is that which He himself approved from the beginning'. Given such a basis, it is not surprising that the book expresses disquiet with contemporary worship models and contemporary Christian music.

The first chapter, by Terry Johnson, deals with the regulative principle, which he defines in the traditional way as meaning that in worship 'whatever is not enjoined by Scripture (whether by command, example, or by deduction from broader principles) is forbidden'. All the other contributors accept the regulative principle as the basis for what they say about worship, though they may differ in its application. This is particularly so in the chapters by Brian Schwertley and Benjamin Shaw, which argue respectively for exclusive psalmody and biblical hymnody.

Further chapters tackle 'Calvin and the Worship of God' (Robert Godfrey); 'The Purpose of Worship' (Joseph Pipa); 'The History of Worship in Presbyterian Churches' (Morton Smith); 'The Psalms and Contemporary Worship' (Robert Godfrey); 'Reformed Liturgy' (Joseph Pipa); and 'Worship from the Heart' (Terry Johnson).

The final chapter has the intriguing title 'The Few on behalf of the Many' by Cliff Blair. It deals with what has become a non-issue for most churches, including many in the Reformed tradition, namely the legitimacy of choirs in Christian worship. Blair, however, contends that the largely unquestioned acceptance of choirs since the nineteenth century has had a detrimental effect on worship, and advocates the view that 'the congregation is the choir in the worship of God's people'.

Well aware that his rejection of choirs is a minority position, Blair engages in a robust defence of his thesis. First, he examines the biblical data, concluding that the sacrificial implications of choir-singing in the temple era do not justify the modern practice. In the New Testament he shows the importance of corporateness in the worship of God's people, 'underscored by congregational singing and implicitly denied by the segregation of a portion of the congregation to sing separately'. As for the eschatological praise of the Book of Revelation, he says: 'What is chiefly notable in these passages is that all of God's people are envisioned as worshipping and singing. There is no distinct choir, the people are the choir.'

In a brief historical survey, Blair pinpoints John Jebb of the Anglo-Catholic movement as the initiator of choral services, following his belief that congregational singing was 'a mistaken and modern notion'. Later in the 19th century the revivalist movement in the United States adopted the use of choirs uncritically, believing they would impress the unsaved.

Blair then deals with various objections to his thesis, all the time insisting that the musically gifted in a congregation should be given scope to train and encourage the others, singing with them rather than singing to them. The abandonment of choirs should lead to the improvement of congregational singing, not the reverse.

There are those within the Reformed tradition who are happy with the much wider boundaries set by John Frame in his writings on worship. That is certainly not the case with the contributors to this symposium. Their arguments are biblical, their Reformed credentials impeccable, and their longing to see God truly glorified in the worship of his people is heart-warming.

*John M. MacPherson, Edinburgh*

## **Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption**

Michael D. Williams

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2005; xv+315 pp., £9.95; ISBN 0 87552 510 5

This biblical theology is solidly in the redemptive-historical tradition of Geerhardus Vos and displays a high regard for Scripture. It uses the resurrection as a lens through which to view the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose. The Messiah is the culmination of the Old Testament promises that God would come to his people, and the author stresses that the flesh Jesus takes on in the incarnation is one that he never again lays down. This perspective leads to a healthy emphasis throughout the book on the reality and goodness of creation, and on the consummation of redemption as re-creation, not the abandonment of the original divine purpose.

After an introductory chapter on the significance of the resurrection, the author moves back through the Exodus to discuss creation in covenantal terms, elucidating how covenant permeates the thought and presentation of the early chapters of Genesis. Subsequent chapters treat the Fall, the Flood, Abraham, and the Patriarchs so that the book is well advanced before one leaves Genesis. This, however, is a strength in that the foundations of the discussion are well laid by the provision of a scripturally sound theological structure. Furthermore, the author is careful throughout to assess the present relevance of each aspect of the redemptive story and to anticipate how it will reach its culmination.

In his discussion of Sinai the author again presents an elegant synthesis of the nature of covenant and of the treaty form. He then proceeds to discuss the Law, which functions not as a way of initiating a relationship with God but of nourishing it. This is contrasted with faulty modern conceptions of the nature and function of law in general, and a careful (Calvinistic) presentation is made of the role which the Law should have in the life of the believer. A chapter each is then devoted to Kingship and the

Prophets before the culmination of the covenant in Christ is dealt with. The newness of the new covenant and the time of its institution are clearly analysed in a discussion which does not hesitate to use Adam-Christ typology. The significance of the church as the Messianic community and of the eschaton as the renewal of all things form the subject matter of the closing two chapters. In discussing Matthew 24:37-41 Williams interestingly adopts the interpretation that the one who is taken experiences divine judgement and the one who is left experiences divine grace – a view which coheres with his emphasis on restoration in the eschaton.

It would be wrong to say that this book is presenting anything new, but it sets out old truths in a fresh, warm and compelling manner. The author displays a wide acquaintance with relevant literature which is judiciously evaluated. The book is therefore far more than a retelling of the biblical story but a profound and insightful commentary on it, which refuses to avoid difficulties but grapples with them in terms of scriptural parameters. There are many perceptive summaries of key theological and interpretative themes, and so the author provides an excellent introduction to biblical theology, which not only informs but also stimulates to renewed appreciation of God's covenantal, redemptive provision.

*John L. Mackay, Free Church College, Edinburgh*

## **Old Evangelicalism. Old Truths for a New Awakening**

Iain H. Murray

Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2005; xiv+226 pp., £14; ISBN: 0 85151 901 6

Iain H. Murray is well known, I suspect, to many of the readers of this publication. Mentored by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, he was for many years associated with the Banner of Truth publishing house, of which he is a founding trustee. Over the past forty years, he has written a variety of titles published by the Banner, including a monumental biography of his mentor and biographical studies of A. W. Pink, C. H. Spurgeon and John Murray. This recent volume, a collection of papers delivered on various occasions, also has a historical focus. The papers either explicitly deal with a historical figure – for example, ‘Spurgeon and True Conversion’ (pp. 39-70) and ‘What can we learn from John Wesley?’ (pp. 135-65) – or are heavily reliant on figures and material from the past. In fact, one of Murray’s aims in writing the book is to introduce readers to Evangelical, and particularly Puritan, figures from whom they can learn the lineaments and content of biblical Christianity.

The papers tackle major issues facing English-speaking Evangelicals today – things such as: how to go about preaching for conversion and what role conviction of sin plays in it; the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and how necessary is it to our understanding of the gospel; how to relate the atonement to the love of God; and what is true Christian unity. In each of the papers, much wisdom is drawn from the past, and one observes a real contrast between the Evangelicalism of past ages and that of the last hundred years or so. For instance, where much of modern Evangelicalism is questioning, even rejecting, the doctrine of Christ’s imputed righteousness, Murray rightly asserts that this truth is essential to the gospel (pp. 71-100). ‘In bringing forward Christ’s righteousness’, he writes, we ‘proclaim truth which goes to the very heart of things’ (p. 94).

The only major area where this reviewer had some difficulties was with Murray’s take on separation from error within a denominational body (‘Christian Unity and Church Unity’ – in particular, pp. 207-10). He rightly urges us to take a balanced perspective on this issue, but, to this reviewer, sounds far too hesitant a note when he states, ‘withdrawal from a local congregation, where the disorderly and the false teacher have power, is a biblical duty, but the duty of withdrawal from a denomination is not *necessarily* equally clear’ (p. 208). As Spurgeon asked at the height of the Downgrade controversy, how can one remain in a theological body which is seriously compromised where to do so involves one in a confederacy with known and vital error? I am not convinced that the two bodies – the local church and the denomination – are so different that what applies to the one in this case cannot apply to the other.

Be this as it may, this is a good book, and the truths it proclaims urgently needed for our day when Evangelicalism is in a state of theological free fall and utterly unsure of its identity. Here, we have framed for us what that identity looked like in the past so as to guide readers into biblical living in the present.

*Michael A. G. Haykin, Toronto Baptist Seminary, Canada*

## **Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance**

David A. deSilva

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004; 428 pp., £16.99; ISBN 0 8010 3103 6

Most Protestant Christians, many ministers and even some Christian scholars are woefully ignorant of the Apocrypha. We may be fully persuaded that the Reformers were right in excluding these books from the

canon, but this does not mean they are of little or no value. Calvin, for instance, while viewing them as non-canonical, nevertheless knew their contents well, and Jerome, Wyclif and Luther, as well as the authors of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the translators of the Authorised Version, all recognised their usefulness. David deSilva makes it clear that although he too would not argue for their canonicity he considers them of real value. The books show the way God's people sought to bear witness to him in the tumultuous world of their day.

There are extra reasons today for knowing more about the Apocrypha. As readers of this journal will know, there has been a major attempt to re-evaluate the Judaism of New Testament times, led by E. P. Sanders. The apocryphal books give us much information about the inter-testamental period and show us some of the theological developments during that period. Whatever we may think of the work of Sanders and others of similar outlook, their views have been very influential and have considerable bearing on the interpretation of New Testament books. Strangely, this volume is silent as to this proposed re-evaluation and the names of E. P. Sanders and major scholars sharing his outlook do not appear in the author index. Nevertheless the material presented here is relevant to this issue.

This is a paperback edition of a book first published in hardback in 2002. The range of the author's scholarship is considerable, for he is at home not only in the Bible and Apocrypha, but in the Early Fathers and Greek and Roman writings generally. His style is attractive, and this makes what would otherwise have been a daunting read accessible to the reader.

There are two introductory chapters. The first deals with the value of the Apocrypha, and indicates how they were viewed by the New Testament writers, the Early Fathers and the Reformers, and how they are seen today by the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. It also classifies them in a fourfold way as historiography (e.g. 1 Maccabees), Wisdom books (Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon), historical romances (e.g. Judith and Tobit) and apocalypse (2 Esdras). The second chapter gives us their historical background.

The main part of the book consists of sixteen chapters, fourteen of them focusing on one of these books while the other two deal with the Apocryphal additions to Daniel and to Esther. In each case the writer deals with such matters as structure and contents, textual transmission, author, date and setting, genre and purpose, formative influences and influence on later writings, plus the theology of each book and special issues connected with each.

There is plenty to maintain our interest as we see, for instance, how Deuteronomy's theology of history and of suffering influenced the books, and are stimulated to ponder such questions as why the Reformers had such a bad opinion of 2 Maccabees and why Esther (which does not mention God) is accepted as canonical while Judith (which constantly refers to him) is not. The so-called Prayer of Manasseh is a moving document. Undoubtedly the readers of this journal are likely to find the sections on the theology of the books the most interesting but it is important to set this in the context of the other information given.

*Geoffrey Grogan, Glasgow*

### **Paul: Pioneer for Israel's Messiah**

Jakob van Bruggen (trans. Ed M. van der Maas)

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2005; xix+411 pp., £11.95; ISBN 0 87552 648 9

The author lays out his objective to give a holistic account of the life and ministry of Paul by 'adopting a positive stance toward the *totality* of the historical sources' (p. xviii). He also seeks to address the relationship between Acts 15 and Galatians 2 and the dating of the deuter Pauline letters. Thus, the book is written to provide a 'clearer perspective' on Paul and his letters that will be useful as a textbook and resource for students, scholars and church leaders. Its clear structure and smooth readability make complex issues easily accessible.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part (chapters 1-14) reconstructs Paul's life whereas the second part (chapters 15-18) focuses on the historical development of the church in Paul's theological framework and how it relates to Israel's salvation history. Three useful essays of appendix follow the main discussion of the book. The layout does not include footnotes in the main discussion but furnishes the reader with endnotes after the appendix. The rest of the book contains endnotes, bibliography and indexes (pp. 327-411). Diagrams and maps are provided occasionally to illustrate, collaborate and vivify the line of discussion.

The reconstruction of Paul's life is based on a literal reading of the book of Acts as a historical document and a template upon which excerpts and references from the Pauline letters are incorporated to fill apparent gaps in the Luke-Acts narrative. The scope encompasses the birth to the end of Paul's life, probably in Rome. Van Bruggen argues that Saul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, though marking a turning point in his life, did not make him relinquish Jewish legalism (p. 23). Apparently, Paul rather perceived his ministry as part of the fulfilment of Messianic

promises to the Jews – where the nations are grafted to participate in God's blessings through Christ. Paul therefore began his preaching in Arabia to give Ishmael's descendants an opportunity to participate in the blessings of God (pp. 28-32, 120). The author indicates the occasion, time and context in which Paul writes each of his letters. He claims Pauline authorship for both disputed and undisputed Pauline letters, including Colossians, Ephesians and the pastoral epistles.

The second part deals with the historical development of the church in Paul as it relates to Israel and other apostles. The author argues that Paul neither abrogated the law nor deserted the Jews. Apparently, Paul did not dissociate himself from the other apostles but regarded them as fellow workers assigned to a different audience – Paul to Gentiles and others mainly to Jews. For van Bruggen, Paul did not condemn Jewish legalism, not even in Galatians, but 'incorrect understanding of the grace' that is revealed through Christ. Thus, 'in its own time and in its proper function the law was a good gift from God for the well-being of Israel' (p. 243). Gentiles did not have to observe the law in order to be saved but the law still had ethical relevance for Jewish believers. Van Bruggen contends that Paul never became anti-Semitic, an enemy of Jewish legalism, an apostate Jew or a defected Pharisee. On the contrary, Paul constantly expressed his affinity to Israel and painted her in a positive light (p. 263). The central thesis is well summarized as: Paul, the pioneer for Israel's Messiah, was

given the task of going to uncultivated areas and making them fruitful for the Creator... it seems as if he was a founder of a new religion, separate from the Jewish religion. But the history of his life, and his attitude towards the law and Israel make it clear that the apostle saw Christendom as a new phase in Israel's existence (pp. 274-5).

The style and content of the book appropriately meets the level of the target readership. The first part, which is reconstruction of Paul's life and ministry, will be particularly helpful to beginners in Pauline studies. The second part poses pertinent questions and challenges some of the tenets of the 'new perspective' on Paul and the law in a manner that deserves scholarly attention in the debate. His treatment of Paul and the law is thorough and quite persuasive. However, the way he dismisses germane issues in the debate of authorship of the deutero Pauline letters is simply insufficient since a substantial treatment would have made it possible for scholars to assess how his reconstruction contributes to the ongoing debate on dating and authorship of those letters. While one may disagree with some of van Bruggen's conclusions, he successfully raises critical

questions for us to rethink why we may want to retain, amend or reconsider our current understanding of Paul's ministry and some aspects of his theology.

*Daniel Darko, King's College, London*

**Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective**

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002; 195 pp., £9.90; ISBN 0 8010 2448 X

**The Doctrine of God. A Global Introduction. A Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Survey**

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004; 315 pp., £10.89; ISBN 0 8010 2752 7

Following his work on Christology, Professor Kärkkäinen of Fuller Theological Seminary has now produced two further volumes on theology, one on the person of the Holy Spirit and one on theology proper. In both cases the aim is the same: to bring divergent and influential approaches to these subjects together in volumes accessible to students of theology.

In his discussion of pneumatology, Kärkkäinen's approach is both contextual and cultural. That means not merely paying attention to classic formulations, but listening to other (mostly corrective) voices, voices which speak out of a wide pneumatological experience. Theology and experience combine, therefore, to enrich our understanding.

Kärkkäinen's discussion of the biblical doctrine of the Spirit forms one of the shortest chapters of the book, and he is in a much greater hurry to move on to ecumenical perspectives. Montanism, the Eastern Fathers, Augustine and medieval mystics are all discussed under 'the historical unfolding of the doctrine', while the discussion on ecclesiastical perspectives surveys with broad brush the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Pentecostalism and the Ecumenical Movement. This is followed by a 'pneumatological smorgasbord' (the phrase is Kärkkäinen's!) of theologians, including John Zizioulas, Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann and Clark Pinnock.

For Kärkkäinen, this exploration is only the beginning of a new path, a new and exciting venture on the Spirit's work. Unfortunately, by the time we have begun this new quest, we have moved away from the controls of

the biblical text into an experiential and theological free-for-all. One feels that Kärkkäinen has not taken us to new heights of understanding, but into new depths of existentialism.

Much the same is true of *The Doctrine of God*. The first two chapters deal with the Old and New Testament traditions, respectively. He is to be applauded for his insistence on the biblical metaphors of divine governance, which highlight the personal character of God. These are much to be preferred to the abstractions of discussion of attributes. Welcome too is the insistence that 'the New Testament presupposes the teaching about God as explicated in the Old Testament' (p. 37). This cannot be stressed enough in an age which tends to assume that the New Testament is talking about some deity other than that of the Jews.

The second part deals with classic theistic traditions in patristics, medieval theology, Reformed theology and modern theology. Kärkkäinen provides a fair summary, but concludes that the common fault in classic theism has been a lack of contextualisation. This is remedied, apparently, by the theologians cited in the following four sections, dealing, respectively, with contemporary European theologians (including Barth, Tillich, Küng, Moltmann and Hick), North American thought in dialogue with the classical formulation (including process theology and open theism), North American thought emphasising the need to contextualise (including African-American and feminist theologies), and non-Western perspectives (including African and Asian theologies).

The whole work is, like *Pneumatology*, a tour de force, summarising diverse and influential thinkers, and setting the discussion in a broad context. These are books to which one ought to turn to survey the lie of the land. They mark the developments of thought and the richness of the dialogue. But the discussions move quickly from their biblical moorings, and are too quick to fault the classic formulations for being time-bound and archaic. I am not so sure, however, that they leave me lost in wonder, love and praise, delighting in God and worshipping him. They leave me amazed that so many have been so quick to re-create him in the image of their secular context; and I wonder if the net result is a God so small that we can fit him in any of our boxes. I want a discussion that leaves me crying out 'Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God!' It's not what I say after reading Kärkkäinen.

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

## **Created For Worship. From Genesis to Revelation to You**

Noel Due

CFP Mentor, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2005; 310 pp., £10.99; ISBN 1 84550 0261

This recent addition to the Mentor series is subtitled *From Genesis to Revelation to You* and, in many respects, that sums up the book. It is essentially a consideration of the subject of worship throughout the whole Bible. It is scholarly, detailed and immensely thought-provoking. It is evident from the extensive bibliography and the many notes that the author has researched the subject thoroughly, and it is correctly referred to by David Jackman as a 'tour de force of Biblical theology'.

Certain themes develop as the book progresses with Due regularly emphasising his conviction that 'worship lies at the heart of true human identity and vocation. It is not something that can be confined to one particular venue or time (e.g. the sanctuary between 11.00 and 12.00 on Sunday)' (p. 34).

The section on Abraham and Isaac at Mount Moriah and the portions dealing with 'The worship which Christ offers' and 'The worship offered to Jesus' were insightful and fresh. Due also reflects throughout this volume, but most particularly towards the close, on the eschatological dimensions of worship. It was encouraging to read of the author's irritation with worship leaders who welcome people into the house of God: 'At best the worship leader may welcome the house of God into the building in which they are meeting!' (p. 234).

The present reviewer was filled with admiration for the scholarship which characterised this volume and recognises that as part of the Mentor series it is designed for the more serious student of the Scriptures. However, the very contemporary cover did convey the impression that this was a much more popular volume than is in fact the case, and some who consult this book will be disappointed by how little engagement there is with the current ongoing debate on worship. The author himself recognises this in his brief applicatory chapter at the close of the book in which he states: 'There are many areas in which further reflection is needed, some of which may appear in another volume' (p. 230). The appearance of this companion volume would greatly enhance the usefulness of *Created for Worship*. Having laid an excellent biblical foundation in this work, a rigorous application of these scriptural principles to the current debate on worship would be greatly valued by those seeking to make sense of the 'Worship Wars'.

*Gareth Burke, Stranmillis Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Belfast*

## Perspectives on an Evolving Creation

Keith B. Miller (ed.)

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003; 528 pp., £20; ISBN 0 8028 0512 4

In seeking to be faithful to the 'two books' of revelation and nature, a key issue in engaging with the secular world is whether Darwinism and atheism can be separated. This multi-disciplinary volume of essays, edited by a palaeontologist from Kansas State University, maintains that they can. It presents a wealth of argumentation from geology, biology, theology and philosophy to make a strong case for theistic evolution. Whether or not that case is ultimately persuasive is more debatable.

In the introductory chapter the editor maintains that the 'evolving creation' of the book's title is a 'fruitful insight' rather than an 'oxymoron'. For Miller, 'the explanatory and predictive power of evolutionary theory' means that evangelical Christians '*must* [emphasis added]... pursue the integration of an evolutionary understanding... with theological understandings of God's creative and redemptive activity' (p. 14). This sets the tone of the volume but is surely too dogmatic. Well-qualified critics of evolutionary theory, such as Professor Phil Skell of the US National Academy of Sciences, have argued cogently that reports of evolution's explanatory and predictive power have been greatly exaggerated.

The volume is divided into 21 chapters grouped into three sections, headed 'providing a context', 'scientific evidence and theory' and 'theological implications and insights'. There are helpful devotional excursions throughout. In the first section the chapter by Mark A. Noll and David Livingstone on Hodge and Warfield and their respective reactions to Darwin is particularly illuminating. On the face of it, Hodge rejected Darwin's theory as 'atheism' while Warfield seemed more accepting. But the authors' careful reading of context and terminology shows that the respective positions of the Princeton men were in fact very close. Significantly, both rejected the ateleological emphasis of Darwin's theory – which with the advent of the modern 'intelligent design' movement is the very aspect that is still most controversial today.

Section II consists of 8 chapters on scientific evidence and theory, with chapters on cosmology, paleontology, anthropology and biochemistry. The cosmology chapter by Deborah Haarsma and Jennifer Wiseman is thrilling and relatively accessible. Elsewhere in the section the detail presented may seem overwhelming to the non-specialist, but there is no need to think that evolutionary conclusions of the authors are demanded by the evidence. The accepted preservation rate of fossils of only 0.1%, calculated on the evolutionary assumption that the others must have existed, means that a

highly ambitious theory is being built with 99.9% of the purported evidence missing! The chapter on biochemistry makes only a passing reference to non-Darwinist Behe's carefully-argued work on irreducible complexity and makes no mention of the answers he has given to his vociferous critics.

The final section on theological implications contains chapters on themes as varied as providence and chance, animal pain, the environment, original sin, and the cross. While there are some valuable insights here, the insistence that evolution must be true will limit the value of the essays for those who do not accept the premise. Of course God could have done his creating using evolution. The question is whether the evidence itself is so strong as to demand our acceptance that he did.

*Alistair Donald, New Deer, Aberdeenshire*

## **Mission Implausible. Restoring Credibility to the Church**

Duncan MacLaren

Paternoster Press/Authentic Media, Milton Keynes, 2004; 209 pp., £15.99; ISBN 1 84227 295 0

Duncan MacLaren, Associate Rector of St Paul's and St George's Episcopal Church, Edinburgh, has written a very passionate account of the situation and decline of today's church in Britain, and how that crisis can be addressed. His starting point takes issue with Calum Brown's thesis in *The Death of Christian Britain*. 1963 is not the start of our problems, nor is the current malaise of the church's own making. Rather, 'the long-standing tradition of sociological thinking about religious change provides a far more complete account of religious decline'.

The problem for us today is that the church has lost credibility and it is the restoration of that credibility that is key to our missionary effectiveness. MacLaren identifies the causes of lost credibility in part one, titled 'The Rise of Incredulity', from the standpoints of the history of ideas and the impact of changing social processes and social institutions. The latter shows us how secularisation has been brought into the mainstream of life and therefore it is no surprise that the church has felt the impact of secularisation.

However, all is not lost: part two, 'The Dynamics of Credibility', begins with outlining eleven scenarios where sociologists identify religion to be holding its own or growing. MacLaren then looks at why these succeed, the key being how their inner credibility is constructed and maintained. MacLaren himself is convinced that Christianity is objectively true, and has far better credentials that its lack of credibility would lead us

to suspect. Which is why all is not lost – by rebuilding the right conditions to enhance its credibility, the truth and worth of Christianity will be seen. He looks at how beliefs achieve and maintain plausibility and identifies key ways to maintain religious world view: by constructing plausibility structures, through maintaining socialisation and conversations to put beliefs in the mainstream, and through cognitive defences, asserting the worth of particular beliefs and showing the flaws in alternatives.

It is often thought that the church must adopt one of two strategies: that of stressing her distinctiveness and being somewhat withdrawn from the world, or allowing religion and culture to interpenetrate. Christendom, which MacLaren regards as somewhat successful in its time, is an example of the latter. However, today a third strategy is needed: what he calls ‘the significance strategy’. This lies between resistance and accommodation, and creates plausibility for belief and social strategies to support such plausibility. It does so by addressing the shared values and norms that remain in contemporary society, by winning the competition for attention, and by building on the public relevance so achieved. It can be done – he claims it has been done before – and chapter eight is a description of how the Columban Church successfully adopted this strategy.

Some may regard the reliance on sociological analysis as too worldly. MacLaren is aware of the criticism and ends with a defence of his approach. Christians are social beings, churches social institutions and so can be looked at with the tools of social sciences. It is a valid perspective but only one perspective. Of course, the working of God in and through the church and in the world must be taken into account. The book does not replace the need for prophets, pastors and theologians, but is ‘offered to them to flesh out a missiological practice capable of restoring credibility to the church’. And a valuable offering it is too. It is not very easy reading, the material being quite densely packed, and MacLaren’s familiarity with sociology might not be shared by the reader. Nevertheless it is certainly worth persevering for a rigorous and thought-provoking analysis which challenges a number of ‘flavour of the month’ approaches – Calum Brown’s I mentioned – but also words of warning for the emerging church movement, for those dismissing Christendom as an entirely bad thing, for those who see church decline as an indication of the church’s shortcomings.

MacLaren takes time out from the detail of the argument, in chapter six, to discuss particular steps and strategies that could and should be taken – points such as using small groups, youth and children’s work, adult education, building belief structures, and re-enchanting the world, i.e. the fact that what happens in corporate worship seems unreal to the rest of life

not because what we do there is wrong or irrelevant but because seeing and tasting God has been driven out of daily living.

There is a great deal here to challenge and inspire. This is one of the best books I have read in the last few years. He made me rethink in a number of areas and even if, like me, you might not be ready to swallow all the arguments here, engaging with this book's thrusts will be of enormous benefit.

*Gordon R. Palmer, East Kilbride*

### **Contending for Our All: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen**

John Piper

IVP, Leicester, 2006; 186 pp., £8.99; ISBN 978 1 84474 135 9

Charles H. Spurgeon once said, 'Controversy is never a very happy element for the child of God: he would rather be in communion with the Lord than be engaged in defending the faith.' Such is the tenor of this fourth and latest instalment in 'The Swans Are Not Silent' series. Each of these volumes originated as biographical addresses given by Piper at The Bethlehem Conference for Pastors in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The derivation of the book lends to its devotional and hortative style. Piper does not attempt to provide a dispassionate, comprehensive intellectual biography of his subjects. Rather, his method is to present three biographical portraits unified by a single pastoral point: 'some controversy is crucial for the sake of life-giving truth' (p. 17).

Piper's introduction discusses the twin dangers of pride and cowardice in the face of controversy. Pride results from revelling in controversy, where cowardice runs from it. If 'gospel-defining, gospel-defending' controversy (pp. 18, 19) is necessary, humility must be in order. However, 'Humility loves Christ-exalting exultation more than Christ-defending confrontation' (p. 17). At this point, a brief definition of controversy and discussion of when it *is* necessary may have been helpful. Nevertheless, Piper suggests that controversy is crucial when 'our all' is at stake, echoing the words of Athanasius, 'Considering that *this struggle is for our all*... let us also make it our earnest care and aim to guard what we have received' (pp. 20, 58, emphasis original). The implication is that when essential elements of the gospel are jeopardized, controversy is not simply inevitable but necessary. Contrary to the opinion that the church will not prosper amidst controversy, Piper argues from both the witness of history and Scripture to the vital though painful place of controversy for the expansion and

fortification of the church. In short, without doctrine-clarifying controversy, there would be no New Testament, no gospel, and no church (pp. 33, 23).

Three biographical chapters form the centre of the book and follow a general pattern: overview of the individual's life and teaching appended by observations for the church today. Each voice is given a platform to speak as chapters are filled with ample quotations from primary sources. Far from being anachronistic or antiquated, Piper successfully laces select citations with sufficient contextual commentary to give the reader an adequate sense of the historical setting before extrapolating practical application.

Piper's analysis of Athanasius (298-373) *contra mundum* is perhaps the best chapter. While rightly highlighting the fundamental importance of the incarnation in Athanasius's theology, Piper does not fall into the central-dogma trap of suggesting it is *the* controlling doctrine by also noting the emphasis Athanasius places upon substitutionary atonement as the 'especial cause' of the incarnation (pp. 60-3). His discussion on the relationship of deification and glorification is also a sympathetic reading of Athanasius and will surely provoke thought. Next, Piper provides an overview of Owen's life (1616-1683) and helpfully conveys the scope and solemnity of his ministry. His discussion focuses on two well-known themes of Owen's: personal holiness and communion with God. Unlike the chapters on Athanasius and Machen, no extended life-lessons section is provided. Lastly, Piper's examination of Machen (1881-1937) is the most critical but concludes that 'God uses men who are persistently flawed' (p. 154). He ably summarizes Machen's battle with modernity on the one hand and his reluctance to align himself with fundamentalism on the other. Piper's warning against the dangers of doctrinal 'indifferentism' in preaching and teaching evidences his ability to intermingle historical analysis with penetrating application (p. 141). The book concludes with an insightful exposition on the relationship of truth and love and an earnest prayer in times of controversy.

*Contending for Our All* is Christian biography with a purpose. Readers will not only discover their interest piqued in this bishop, pastor, and professor, but will be emboldened to join them in contending for the faith once delivered to all the saints.

*John W. Tweeddale, New College, University of Edinburgh*

## **The Search for a Common Identity: The Origins of the Baptist Union of Scotland 1800-1870**

Brian R. Talbot

Volume 9, Studies in Baptist History and Thought

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2003; xviii+402 pp., £24.99; ISBN 1 84227 123 7.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, there were four strands of Baptist life in Scotland. This monograph admirably disentangles the threads of their diversity and traces the slow path to the formation of the first enduring Baptist Union of Scotland in 1869.

At the start of the century, there were about four hundred Scotch Baptists, with about one thousand adherents. Others, known as English Baptists, had one-tenth of these numbers. 'English' and 'Scotch' had no racial or nationalist meaning in this context, but indicated differences in church practice; one example was in leadership – English churches had a salaried minister, Scotch Baptists were led by unpaid elders acting as co-pastors.

A third strand emerged in 1808, when Robert and James Haldane, who had built up a network of Independent churches in many parts of Scotland, accepted Baptist principles. Within 20 years, there were 16 'Haldenite' Baptist churches. The fourth strand developed in the 1840s, reacting against the Calvinism of the other three groups, and teaching that Christ died for all.

Chapter 1 outlines the areas to be explored, and gives a helpful – and rightly critical – review of two dozen earlier monographs and articles. Chapter 2 analyses the contribution of the Scotch Baptists; chapter 3 covers the Haldenites; chapter 4 deals with the growing significance of the English Baptists. Chapters 5 to 8 explore early attempts to bring the bodies together, through the Baptist Home Missionary Society (Chapter 5), the short-lived Union of 1827 (Chapter 6), and the second Union of 1843 (Chapter 7). The formation of the enduring Union of 1869 is explained in chapter 8, and the final chapter draws conclusions.

The text is easy on the eye and well laid out; the subheadings are useful signposts, and there is an excellent bibliography and index. There are numerous footnotes, both citing sources and cross-referencing to chapters and pages of the book (especially useful with a complex subject).

Grasping the overall picture is not made easier by the author's assertion, twice in the introductory chapter, that there were three (not two) attempts to bring Scottish Baptists together prior to 1869 (pp. 5, 22). Only slowly did it dawn on this reviewer that an approach by one

Edinburgh church to another, in 1806, was being treated as 'the first attempt to promote union amongst Baptist churches of different ecclesiologies' (p. 141). Much to be preferred are the opening words of Chapter 6: 'The first attempt to promote the case for closer association amongst Scottish Baptist churches took place in March 1827' (p. 191).

Readers who bought this book when it was first published in 2003 may wonder why there is no mention here of some obvious printing errors, items that the author had marked but which were not picked up; they have been corrected in the print-run now on sale. Which is which? The original printing has the publishers' Carlisle address, and the current one has their address in Milton Keynes.

A few minor errors still offend the eye, such as abbreviating the Scotch Itinerant Society to SIS and S.I.S. in the same paragraph (p. 192). Words and numerals are used inconsistently throughout the book, sometimes in the same paragraph; on the first page, for example: English Baptists had 'up to one hundred hearers and the Scotch Baptists around 400 members'.

These are minor niggles; this is a major addition to the Paternoster series. Non-Scots will find useful references to wider (chiefly English) dimensions as the four disparate groups of Scottish Baptists overcame differences of practice and of theology and came together.

*Ian L. S. Balfour, Edinburgh*

## **John**

Andreas J. Köstenberger

Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004; xx+699 pp., £31.50; ISBN 0 8010 2644 X

Like the man who was so impressed with the electric razor which his wife had bought him that he bought the company, the reviewer was so impressed with this commentary on John, that he bought the whole available eight volumes of New Testament Commentaries in the Bible Exegetical series.

In the commentary on John's Gospel we have an example of evangelical scholarship at its best. Köstenberger has read extremely widely and in great depth, taking ten years to prepare it. There are ninety-seven pages of references, some double, some triple, some quadruple columned, containing works cited, and indices of subjects, authors, Greek words, Scripture and other ancient writings.

The commentary works through the Gospel passage by passage, each one preceded by a short introduction followed with verse by verse

exposition of the author's own translation. Still more information is divulged by extensive use of footnotes, and additional notes at the end of each section.

Köstenberger admits the contention that it is impossible to come to the text without presuppositions of one's own theological tradition, personal experience, and understanding of biblical authority. He argues, however, that it can be an advantage to approach it with an active born-again faith in Jesus Christ, the enabling work of the Holy Spirit, and pursuing thorough and careful exegesis with openness to the findings of others of different traditions. In this way he believes that a reading can be unfolded which conforms most closely to the author's intended message. John's original audience consisted of Diaspora Jews and proselytes but he most likely envisaged an ultimate universal readership.

Köstenberger admits to a very high doctrine of Scripture which leads him to accept the Johannine authorship, despite the assaults of post-enlightenment German theologians, and the widely-held view that the Gospel was written by the Christian Jewish 'Johannine Community'. He maintains that to hold that St John the apostle was the author is as plausible as any other argument, but that all opinions should remain on the table without undue dogmatism by any party. The Gospel seems to have been written at the end of the first century when John was a very old man. If he *were* the author of the Gospel it is unlikely that he did not know of the synoptic Gospels but did not use them extensively. This Gospel was recognised as canonical by the end of the second century.

Between the prologue (1:1-18) and the epilogue (21:1-25) Köstenberger sees the Gospel as being divided into two parts, 'The Book of Signs', seven signs offered as an aid to faith, and 'The Book of Glory', Jesus' preparation of the new Messianic community.

'John's favourite designation for Jesus', Köstenberger argues, 'is that of the Son *sent* by the Father.' His mission in turn is to prepare the new worldwide missionary community. The old Jewish community is now redundant. Jews may enter the new community but only by faith like everyone else.

Köstenberger sums up: 'From the majestic prologue to the probing epilogue, the evangelist's words are as carefully chosen as they must be thoughtfully pondered by every reader of his [John's] magnificent work.'

*Peter Cook, Alston, Cumbria*

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