

## REVIEWS

### **Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology**

A. T. B. McGowan (ed.)

Apollós/IVP, Leicester, 2006; 365 pp., £19.99; ISBN-13: 9781844741304

This collection of essays represents an attempt to (re-)engage conservative Reformed theology with the contemporary theological scene. In the words of the editor, the writers were ‘to assess the current state of scholarship in [their] area, before indicating areas where further work, development, restatement or clarification is required’ (p. 17). The aim is thus more broad than deep and for an audience not entirely expected to be familiar with the issues – perhaps a case in point for the need of re-engagement. The parameters provided give the explicitly evangelical orientation of the work, but encourage the reader to expect something more than a restatement of confessionalism.

Such is admirably fulfilled with Gerald Bray’s opening essay on the Trinity, a model of clarity and breadth. Bray is clearly fluent in many of the contemporary discussions of divine personhood and other important trends in the theological scene, and closes with a number of questions to which Reformed theology in particular might have a significant contribution to make. Likewise the essay on justification by Cornelis Venema sweeps from the Reformation to modern ecumenical discussions and into ‘new perspectives’ on Paul, attempting to balance historical theology, concern for nuance, and openness to continuing exegesis.

The high point is the article by Kevin Vanhoozer on the task of systematic theology. As always, Vanhoozer is well-read in contemporary and historical literature and puts his reading to good use in an informative and provocative look into systematic theology as an ‘imaginative, practical and spiritual enterprise’ of living out biblical interpretation.

Further essays include Richard Gaffin on ‘Union with Christ’ and Stephen Williams offering a brief essay on approaching theological systems – appealing to theological ‘rules’ rather than ‘moves’. The editor contributes an essay on the atonement as penal substitution and Derek Thomas closes the volume with an essay on ecclesiology that is interesting, even if somewhat lacking with regard to extra-evangelical interaction.

However, there are also a number of significant disappointments in the volume. Richard Gamble’s essay on biblical theology is little more than a restatement of Geerhardus Vos, with no dialogue or seeming awareness of the immense work on the subjects that have occurred since the early

20th century. Whether or not one sees recent work as an advance is, for this purpose, irrelevant. A simple restatement in a louder voice is unlikely to be the way forward. Likewise Robert Reymond's essay on Christology is a wonderful restatement of classical Christology – a task that is always welcome. But within the goals of the volume the essay interacts so little with any contemporary disputes on Christology, outside of rejecting James Dunn, that the reader might be forgiven for thinking the debate a rather simple one of just looking at the biblical evidence.

Henri Blocher's essay on 'Old Covenant, New Covenant' is (as expected) insightful and resourceful, but refers so sparingly to the exegetical work being done on the question that his appeal for a remodelled covenant theology appears anachronistic at best outside of conservative Reformed circles. Passing reference is made to a number of evangelical authors, but the main concern is re-presenting Herman Witsius' 17th century solution, bypassing the exegetical disputes and the large body of contemporary literature on the text – especially in recent Roman Catholic discussions. The assumption of the article is that the biblical texts are self-explanatory and the difficulty is doing justice to them all: an assumption that cannot stand given the historical and contemporary discussions.

The impression from these latter articles is the unsettling notion of a Reformed world that sees itself as simply needing to 'iron out' some of its details in dialogue with other conservative evangelicals (if that): precisely against the stated intent of the editor. So while the collection holds forward some hope for the tradition, it likewise holds some of its common pitfalls.

*Joshua Moon, University of Saint Andrews*

## **Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity**

Tom Smail

Paternoster, Carlisle, 2005; 304 pp., £9.99; ISBN-10: 1842273426; ISBN-13: 9781842273425

Tom Smail has led an interesting career – Church of Scotland minister, leader in the charismatic renewal movement, and canon in the Church of England. Smail is also an accomplished theologian of the Barthian variety, and in *Like Father, Like Son*, he formulates a theological anthropology starting from the perspective of the *imago Dei* as specifically triune. This book embodies much of what is right, and much of what is wrong, with contemporary neo-orthodox theology: it takes the Bible seriously enough to do sustained exegesis, and it offers creative answers within the bounds of faith. On the other hand, its deeply flawed doctrine of Scripture

(p. 286) means that in practice, problematic material can be dispensed with at will, thereby undercutting its own laudable attempt to move beyond the religion of human invention.

Smail's discussion of Trinity-imaged anthropology is wide ranging, interacting with issues from the family to penology – giving an *apropos* recommendation for restorative justice (p. 180) – to ecclesiology. Throughout these discussions, Smail is refreshingly insistent on the need for differentiated roles in the context of interdependent equality. The material I found most interesting, however, was on gender (chapter 7). Barth-like, Smail decries that the debate 'has been so crowded and controlled by egalitarian and feminist ideologies of one kind or another that the biblical witness is hard to hear' (pp. 240-1). He then offers a rather plausible theology of gender:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the same nature of love in freedom, but they express it in different ways.... So, it is in line with the Genesis presentation to say that the same humanity in which both Adam and Eve are created has distinctive but inter-dependant modes of being in each of them. The distinction between them is not one of diverse qualities but of distinct vocation. The distinct calling of the man is the care of the garden; the distinct calling of the woman is the care of the relationships that make human life possible (p. 245).

Just as there are essentially equal but functionally different persons in the Trinity, so it is with humanity made in God's image. This correlation of theology proper with anthropology seems to be exactly how things in fact play out: where Jesus is on a different ontological plane than Allah, women and men are likewise thoroughly unequal. Conversely, Christian feminism is logically consistent enough to disparage all 'power over' roles, not only among humans, but also in the Godhead. In distinction to these positions, the Bible teaches full ontological equality coupled with meaningful role distinctions, both in God and among people, and Smail should be congratulated for seeing this.

Regrettably, Smail demurs from applying this insight consistently to the hugely relevant issue of women's roles in teaching ministry. And despite his ostensible rejection of 'pick and mix' approaches to Scripture (p. 241), Smail recognizes the validity of women as ministers and priests (pp. 258-9) without interacting with the *loci classici* of 1 Corinthians 14:34ff. and 1 Timothy 2:12ff. He concludes his chapter, tellingly, with a suggestion that the Pauline material he did discuss was perhaps 'provisional and in process' (p. 268).

There are many other significant highs in *Like Father, Like Son*, such

as Smail's discussion of christology and the Trinity (chapter 3) and his creative application of *perichoresis* to anthropology; as well as other lows, such as his rejection of the historicity of Genesis with regard to human origins (pp. 40-1) and to the fall (pp. 212-13). On the whole, however, there is more than enough in this volume to recommend its critical perusal.

*William Schweitzer, New College, Edinburgh*

## **The SCM Press A-Z of Thomas Aquinas**

Joseph P. Wawrykow

SCM Press, London, 2005; 190 pp., £22.99; ISBN-10: 0334040124; ISBN-13: 9780334040125

The concise dimensions of this paper-bound reference work scarcely hint at the lifetime of scholarship required to produce it. A cursory scan could mistake this volume for a mere dictionary of theological terms. But those who scrutinize the contents will regard Wawrykow's new book as an indispensable companion to studying Aquinas. More than lexicographical definitions, these articles bring readers into a thick web of interconnected doctrines: a carefully-reasoned ordering of God's revealed truth in Scripture.

This book challenges readers unacquainted with Aquinas, for Wawrykow writes from decades of immersion in the literature on this great theologian. Yet the informative 'Introduction' will guide the diligent in reading this volume and in exploring primary and secondary references. However, an initial familiarity with Aquinas will significantly boost the value of this resource. *The SCM Press A-Z of Thomas Aquinas* may not serve well as a stand-alone, ready reference. Rather, readers should use this tool as a knowledgeable guide to Aquinas' own works, principally the *Summa Theologiae*, as well as recommended secondary resources. Wawrykow thus provides a detailed outline of the *Summa Theologiae* prior to the articles (xii-xiii).

For seasoned students, Wawrykow facilitates ready acquaintance with Aquinas' key theological concepts. Rather than dredging through primary sources, thick reference books or massive databases, scholars, particularly doctoral students and theological faculty, can quickly 'get up to speed' with Aquinas and the related scholarly literature. Tagging each article with references to the primary literature, Wawrykow coordinates the study of Aquinas' own writings with the secondary literature and facilitates mastery of this theologian within an abbreviated period.

A close reading of selected major articles, e.g. Epistemology, Theological; *Esse*; Fittingness; Grace; Philosophy; Predestination; Scripture;

Theologian; and *Viator*, reveals a key advantage of a single-author reference work. A renowned Aquinas scholar, Wawrykow diligently parses the major issues associated with each concept while citing relevant passages in the primary literature. He also introduces readers to key debates pertinent to the concept—but he doesn't leave these issues unresolved. Wawrykow cogently brings the insight gleaned from decades of study to bear on these questions, and leads readers to a state-of-the-art grasp of current scholarship on Aquinas.

A further benefit of a single-author reference work drawn from a lifetime of study is the sense of consistency that readers will pick up as they work through the text. Wawrykow interprets each theological concept within the framework of related sections of the primary literature, and establishes a network of cross-references among his articles. For example, from the article on Grace he directs readers to *Viator*, Predestination, Original sin, and Merit (to name only a few) and further refers to articles on concepts denoted by prominent Latin phrases such as *Facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*. As a further mark of his expertise, the author interprets these concepts contextually within the structural arrangements of the primary source material and thus mentors his readers in his interpretive methodology. Along with consistency, Wawrykow enables readers to gain a developmental perspective of the primary literature. For example, in the article on Preambles of Faith (pp. 115-18) he distinguishes features related to this concept as contrasted between the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Summa contra Gentiles*.

Every serious student of Thomas Aquinas should own this book, especially graduate students and university faculty. Novices should consult 'A Note on the Literature' (p. 175) as an entry point to secondary literature. Wawrykow includes a brief lexicon of Latin terms common to Aquinas' writings (pp. 171-3), and extensive primary and secondary bibliographies. University and divinity school libraries should especially consider the purchase.

*Barry W. Hamilton, Northeastern Seminary, Rochester, New York*

## **Beyond the Box: Mission Challenges from John's Gospel**

Tom Stuckey

Inspire, Peterborough, 2005; 128 pp., £6.99; ISBN-10: 1858522854; ISBN-13: 9781858522852

Dr Tom Stuckey is the current President of the Methodist Conference. He believes that God is reshaping the 'institutional church' and this book presents his thoughts on the reshaping process for the 21st century. These thoughts are gathered around a particular interpretation of the Gospel of John: that it was written in Ephesus as an alternative Gospel to the synoptics; a Gospel 'rooted in Jesus himself'. Stuckey propounds that it was written as a call to an over-structured and authoritarian apostolic church to return to a clearer, purer expression of Jesus' vision for the church. This view obviously resonates with Stuckey's own views on the contemporary church. He seems aware that many will challenge this interpretation and his response is to acknowledge early on that he is no New Testament scholar. He states that the book is aimed at the 'ordinary church member' who wants a 'fast food' version of John's Gospel. Consequently, he gives his book a 'health warning' for its flaws and limitations.

The book itself is well presented. The intriguing title is backed up with inventive chapter headings. Each chapter closes with questions for reflection and a prayer, based on the content of the chapter. Stuckey does identify many real needs in the contemporary church: the need to be focussed outward, meeting the needs of a lost world; the need for the church to be open to the leading of God's Spirit; and the need for the church to avoid focussing on 'glory days' to the detriment of ministry and mission in the here and now. However, Stuckey's arguments can be hard to follow, overly laden with metaphor and anecdote, simplistic, and couched in unfamiliar language. In a chapter entitled 'The breaking of the waters' where Stuckey draws lessons for the church from what he understands as images of 'birthing' in the Gospel, we find the statement 'When the waters break in a rebirthing process we swim in a sacramental sea of possibility', which leaves the reader floundering, even when read in its context. Again, images of liquids in the Gospel develop into a call for a 'liquid' rather than a 'solid' expression of church. Stuckey cites an eclectic mix of authors along the way, with quotes from Frank Lake, John Bunyan and Joe Simpson the mountaineer, amongst others. A flavour of how provocative these can be is seen in the chapter 'Martha's Keys' where Stuckey is arguing for a gender-inclusive approach in leadership. He quotes Edwina Gateley (*A Warm Moist Salty God: Women journeying towards wisdom*, Anthony Clarke, Wheathampstead, 1994, pp. 38-40) who, in commenting on Peter and Martha's confessions of Christ's sonship, concludes that

Christ's differing responses to Martha in John 11:27 and Peter in Matthew 16:16 demonstrates 'a basic level of unfairness'.

There is little hint of a clear, coherent ecclesiology behind this book. It has the feel of a pick-and-mix – the author never gets stuck into any particular issue to any real depth. The theme of moving beyond the box is constant, the box changing from chapter to chapter, being identified with the particular issue at hand. At times this comes perilously close to a view that there are no absolutes. At several points Stuckey leaves things hanging ambiguously. Many passages will leave evangelical readers feeling uncomfortable: in later chapters he appears to limit God's omnipotence and to question his knowledge. The 'box' of the book's title is cast as the limitations of inactivity, tradition, fear, self-interest, and who could argue but that the church needs to move beyond these limitations. However, if the church is to move beyond the box of its ineffectiveness, it needs a framework and a clear message: both provided by God's inerrant Word.

*David Kirk, South Uist & Benbecula Free Church of Scotland*

## **The God Centered Life: Insights from Jonathan Edwards for Today**

Josh Moody

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2006; 176 pp., £ 8.99; ISBN-13: 9781844741311

Recent scholarly focus on Jonathan Edwards has scrutinized almost every conceivable aspect of his life and work, examining even his paper and ink. One could outfit a small library with the articles and books written about this pastor-theologian. Yet in this case there is room for one more.

Josh Moody, who earned his Ph.D. (thesis on Edwards) at Cambridge, has done us a service by illuminating the relevance of Edwards' thought and insights to the many challenges facing the contemporary church. His purpose is 'both to find Edwards in his times and to apply him to ours'. Moody argues that the cultural shifts that Edwards faced are paralleled by the lurching movements of our own time.

The book is well structured. The reader's interest is quickly engaged by Moody's account of his exciting discovery of Edwards in the main library at Cambridge and by the author's discussion of current directions and approaches in Edwards scholarship.

Moody begins with a clear explanation of why we need to read and apply Edwards' substantial theological and practical insights. Eight chapters follow, each presenting an aspect of Edwards' thought or practice, and in the final section, which helpfully summarizes the book, each chapter's conclusion is recapitulated in a paragraph.

The book examines, as may be expected, such topics as Edwards' views on revival, religious experience, and the importance of judging religious movements by their fruit. Other less anticipated themes include the human-centredness of modernism, the necessity of a biblically grounded church leadership, family life and effective ministry, and secondary issues in the church. The value of these journeys into the extensive Edwards corpus is not the mere reporting of his thought on particular subjects, but the application of Edwards' biblical insight on issues that remain relevant to the contemporary church, demonstrating once again the timelessness of biblical truth applied to the human condition.

Moody is not reluctant to confront modern issues. He addresses questions of charismatic gifts, freedom of the will, reason and faith, and self-esteem: topics or categories that may not often arise in a sermon or church meeting but which raise underlying principles that drive much that is troublesome in the present time. Moody demonstrates that Edwards' deep insights penetrate to the root of each of these questions by repeatedly asking and answering: 'What would Edwards do?'

While largely sympathetic with Edwards theologically, Moody is not all praise. A chapter titled 'Human Leaders Fail' reminds us of the dangers of enthroning saints of days gone by, and it may well caution the discerning reader's own tendencies in that direction.

The book is not aimed at the academy but invites all serious Christians into Edwards' literature. While conversational in style it demands the reader's full attention, which is readily engaged by the author's very readable prose. Some of the vocabulary might be a little beyond the average reader, though Moody usually defines his terminology.

This reviewer would have welcomed a few more details in the attribution of sources. Many of the quotations are from *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* published by Yale University Press. Readers without access to that anthology will have difficulty tracking down the relevant work of Edwards, as the titles are not always noted. The bibliography is a disappointment, listing the twenty-three volumes of the Yale edition of Edwards' works and only eleven other books, an incredible understatement of available titles.

These minor negatives aside, this is a valuable addition to the now-extensive Edwards scholarship. It is pastorally helpful and will be read with profit by many in the church. It is highly recommended.

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Massachusetts*



## **Get a Grip on Mission: The Challenge of a Changing World**

Martin Goldsmith

Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2006; 240 pp., £9.99; ISBN-13: 9781844741267

Martin Goldsmith has poured his considerable experience into a very informative, interesting and readable contribution to mission literature. *Get a Grip on Mission* is essentially a practical book. Its chief concern is to arouse awareness of the need for the church not only to engage in mission, but to recognise that in order to do so she must learn to adapt to an ever-changing and cross-cultural world.

Among the many helpful issues tackled in this book are those of globalization, pluralism, urbanization and the increased mobility of large swathes of the world's population. In these areas there are many well-illustrated insights. The author is correct to stress that involvement in mission is not the prerogative of a specialised few, but the concern of the entire body of Christ. Furthermore, though not as peculiar a problem to our age as we like to think, the author properly identifies the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ as the only way back to God as a major obstacle in reaching those living in a post-modern world. Nevertheless, he also wants the church to recognise that great opportunities still exist for missionary endeavour.

Sadly, for all the author's good intentions, there are a number of areas in his general outlook and approach which ought to be challenged. I will limit my observations to a consideration of three of these. First, in my view it is a mistake to define mission simply in terms of everything that Jesus sends his people into the world to do (John 20:21). Despite stated intentions to the contrary, the tendency of this increasingly popular approach is to make evangelism and church-planting simply one of a number of equally competing responsibilities for the church in the world. In practice this often results in humanitarian, political and ecological issues assuming priority. It is disappointing that we rarely find mission commentators these days asserting that a necessary distinction ought to exist between those responsibilities which are the normal province of the church and those which primarily belong to the Christian as an individual.

Secondly, somewhat more disturbing is the author's tendency to regard non-evangelical viewpoints as secondary to the greater task of mission. Although he regularly calls for 'discernment', his minimalist requirement for cooperation in mission ('faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross and resurrection', p. 147) enables him to play down differences which ought to form a barrier to cooperation. For example, although

Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox groupings may sometimes be seen as 'in need of the reviving work of the Holy Spirit' (p. 142), he does not seem to consider there are even more fundamental issues that divide us. Indeed, he is happy to use the word 'great' to describe Vatican II and its essentially 'liberal' deliberations (p. 150).

Thirdly, although as an evangelical the author is constantly reminding us of the necessity to place all things under the authority of the Bible (including cultural considerations), I am not convinced that he actually does this. Time and again, and despite his own warnings to the contrary, the driving consideration in his conclusions appears to be more pragmatic than biblical.

Notwithstanding these general reservations, I would not wish for these criticisms to detract from the author's central concern. It is imperative that all Christians everywhere alert themselves to the great need to advance the course of the gospel. Clearly recognising the peculiarities and opportunities of the days in which we live, we must also retain a firm grip on the biblical principles which informed and guided former generations.

*Daniel Webber, European Missionary Fellowship, Welwyn,  
Hertfordshire*

## **John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist**

(American Reformed Biographies: 2)

D. G. Hart

P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2005; 263 pp., £13.95; ISBN-10: 0875526624; ISBN-13: 9780875526621

When Darryl Hart declares that 'John Williamson Nevin should matter to American Presbyterians and Reformed Christians more than he does' (p. 17), the tone of the most recent biography of the nineteenth-century Mercersburg theologian is set. *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* is both a solid intellectual biography and a provocative endorsement of Nevin's sacramental ecclesiology and critique of evangelicalism as warranting renewed attention within Reformed circles.

Biographical details of Nevin's long life (1803-1886) are prefixed by a lucid survey of the American colonial and post-colonial process whereby historic Protestantism was democratized and 'Americanized' into evangelicalism through political rhetoric and religious revival. This trading of altar for anxious bench, catechism for conversion, in much American Protestantism unseated the Reformation's liturgical practices, confessional theology, respect for ecclesial hierarchy, and esteem for the church as a visible means of grace. It is this altered theological landscape that provides the locus of Nevin's career: subsequent chapters trace his

Scottish-Irish Presbyterian upbringing; his college 'conversion' which, argues Hart, set him on a future collision course with evangelicalism; his Princeton education under Charles Hodge; his teaching career at the Mercersberg, Pennsylvania seminary of the German Reformed Church, and collaboration with Phillip Schaff.

The weight of *John Williamson Nevin* is devoted to Nevin's impressive theological contributions. Inspired by German idealism and the historical consciousness of the Romantic movement, Nevin attacked evangelicalism's conversion gimmicks as excessively subjective and corrosive to proper Christian nurture (*The Anxious Bench*), Puritan departures from Calvin's eucharistic teaching (*The Mystical Presence*), and ecclesiastical voluntarism which undermined the one catholic and apostolic church (*The Anti-Christ*). Nevin's historical sensitivity and theological convictions found expression later in life through his chairmanship overseeing a revised liturgy for the American German Reformed Church.

Hart is to be commended for a thorough perusal of primary-source church periodicals which detail the controversial effects of Nevin's opinions and liturgical suggestions; further, he considers reviews buried in the *Mercersberg Review* which indicate Nevin's reading material and, more importantly, disclose the depth of his agonized wrestling over the nature of the church, a struggle which sent him back behind the Reformers to the Fathers and, indeed, almost to Rome. Hart considers Nevin's various theological efforts as serving an overarching aim of countering evangelicalism's democratic and subjective religion with an organic concept of the church as the continuing incarnation of Christ in history and, therefore, the means of salvation. Against prevailing interpretations of Nevin as a liberalizing or romanticizing figure, Hart reads him as a paleo-Calvinist who condemned evangelicalism as aberrant Protestantism because its worship and mental habits effectively denied its supernatural origins and organic nature as the body of Christ.

A concluding assertion that Nevin's critique of revivalism might help historians assess the 'crisis' of the Protestant church in the nineteenth-century according to theological rather than pragmatic criteria, thus finding root earlier with Edwards and the Great Awakening rather than later in Darwinism or biblical criticism, is extremely challenging. Unfortunately, this maverick case is made by side-stepping, rather than refuting, prevailing interpretations. Richard Wentz's recent assessment of Nevin is never engaged, nor are the many valuations of Nevin as an American conduit for German idealism and romanticism adequately addressed. Instead, Hart's interpretation forces readers into two choices, the first of which is obvious in the title of the opening chapter, 'Romantic or Reformed?'

But the *either* Reformed *or* romantic grid seems artificial: it neglects Nevin's creative reworking of selected elements of Reformation-era Protestantism, his considerable debt to philosophical idealism and mid-century German theology, and renders him a sort of *deutschen* Old Side Presbyterian. The second choice that Hart (formerly of Westminster Seminary) implies Nevin as posing, is between 'evangelical' and 'Reformed' as incompatible forms of Protestantism. This more significant choice seems to me to depend on the validity of the first question – that Nevin was not romantic but Reformed – but more so upon ecclesiological presuppositions regarding the historical contextuality of the church and its missional responsibility with which many evangelical and Reformed Christians will not agree. That *John Williamson Nevin* is clearly written and free of academic jargon means that laypersons and scholars alike will be able to consider Hart's interpretation of this challenging figure.

*Todd Statham, McGill University, Quebec*

### **Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicalism and the Francophone 'Reveil' 1816-1849**

Kenneth J. Stewart

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2006; 281 pp., £19.99; ISBN-13: 9781842273920

About the same time that the Napoleonic Empire collapsed with the defeat of its ruler in 1815, a remarkable revival of Christian fervour and evangelistic endeavours occurred which was especially pronounced in French-speaking areas of Europe. This phenomenon comprises the basis of Kenneth Stewart's careful examination of the *reveil*, especially with regard to its connections with and influences upon the Evangelical movement in the British Isles.

Stewart, a professor of theology at Covenant College in Georgia, has in this work demonstrated great thoroughness in research, as the massive documentation and extensive bibliography attest. This book is a revised and updated version of the author's doctoral dissertation in which the author was scrupulously careful to support his assertions and conclusions with an impressive array of evidences. This feature could be both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength if the author intended the book for professional historians and theologians, but a weakness if he wanted to interest intelligent general readers. In either case, appreciation for Stewart's contribution will require patient reading and frequent reference to the copious footnotes.

In the judgment of this author, the revival which began in Switzerland and France was not due primarily to influences coming from British

evangelistic efforts after the Napoleonic Wars, but was the result of the Holy Spirit's work on the continent, a work to which some Britons eventually contributed and which many of them supported, even with financial donations and occasional preaching missions. Stewart is quick to give all due credit to such British efforts as well as to the encouragement from Moravians in Germany.

After a survey of spiritual conditions in England during the eighteenth century, Professor Stewart concluded that Reformed authors of the preceding two centuries continued to exert much influence upon eighteenth-century Protestants, but that the reading of Calvin's own works was not as common or influential as the use of others such as Turretin, Ames, Baxter, Gill, and others. One might wonder why Stewart regards the doctrine of particular redemption as 'restrictive to the free preaching of the gospel' (p. 13), especially since this widely-held conviction did not deter the zealous mission work of both British and continental evangelists during the period under study.

One of the most valuable features of this study is the substantial coverage of selected evangelical leaders who brought intense fervour and scholarly competence into the service of the *revival*. There are informative accounts of J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, Cesar Malan, Louis Gaussen, as well as an exciting description of the work Robert Haldane conducted in Switzerland, a ministry which this author does not consider altogether admirable. He criticized Haldane for being poorly informed about the actual condition of the state church in Geneva and therefore acting in a prejudiced manner in his relations with Reformed clerics who, while within that body, had not departed from the historic confessions of that church. Stewart displays a dislike for Christians he has denominated 'separatists and restorationists', which is a rather odd disdain, since it comes from one at a college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America, a body which separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1973 as a protest against the prevailing liberal theology in the older denomination. Stewart is, at least by implication, not convinced the state churches in Switzerland were in a state of irretrievable apostasy, yet he described policies of repression some of those bodies employed in their efforts to thwart the work of independent preachers critical of the religious establishment. The brutality with which state authorities attempted to repress religious dissent, which efforts church leaders approved and encouraged, would seem to justify the posture of orthodox believers who could not, without seriously compromising their faith, remain within the churches established by law. The free churches which developed in connection with the *revival* did far more than the older state bodies to promote

the resurgence of the Reformed faith and the vigorous evangelism which attended it.

Despite some dubious interpretations, this book is a compendium of factual information about a very important period in church history, an example of thorough research and clear writing. Although is not light or devotional reading, the time required to comprehend it will be a fine investment, especially for serious students of modern church history and theology.

*James Edward McGoldrick, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, USA*

### **Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square**

Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (eds)

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2005; 167 pp., £13.99; ISBN-10: 0664227503; ISBN-13: 9780664227500

In this volume, fourteen members of the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary write on the nature, necessity and practice of lament. The essays are grouped under three headings, 'Reclaiming Lament in Christian Prayer and Proclamation'; 'Loss and Lament, Human and Divine'; and 'Reclaiming the Public Voice of Lament'. A concluding essay follows these on the theme of lament and grief, expressed as a tapestry of poetry and theological reflection.

Brown and Miller indicate that the essays arise out of the conviction shared by the contributors 'that lament, particularly biblical lament, provides the church with a rhetoric for prayer and reflection that befits these volatile times, a rhetoric that mourns loss, examines complicity in evil, cries for divine help, and sings and prays with hope' (p. xix). The 'shared conviction' is evident, but this does not translate into a strong internal coherence. The essays cover a diverse range of topics, and the essayists themselves are free to acknowledge their own divergence from other contributors. One of the clearest examples of this occurs in Miller's own essay 'Heaven's Prisoners: The Lament as Christian Prayer', which argues that the Psalms of lament (and other prayers for help) are private utterances, not designed for use in public worship. While recognising that this claim 'is somewhat against the grain of much contemporary thinking, including the voices of others in this volume' (p. 18), the contradiction is left to stand, and thus acts as a helpful counterweight to some of the more strident voices regarding the public nature of lamentation and its implications for liturgy, preaching and ecclesiastical practice.

The essays form a divergent set of reflections on the general theme. Some of the essays address issues that are deeply controversial (e.g. Robert Dykstra's discussion of exhibitionism, homoeroticism, love and desire in relation to God's self-disclosure and the rending of the Temple curtain). Others address the matter of lament from the perspective of suffering minorities (e.g. Luis Rivera-Pagán's 'Woes of Captive Women: From Lament to Defiance in Times of War') and others address the matter of grief and lament, sometimes from tangential angles (e.g. Donald Capps' 'Nervous Laughter: Lament, Death Anxiety and Humor').

With one or two exceptions, the essays consistently adopt an approach to the biblical text that questions traditional assumptions about its meaning and implications. For example, William Stacy Johnson's 'Jesus' Cry, God's Cry and Ours', takes up what has commonly been understood as our Lord's cry of dereliction on the cross, and argues (unconvincingly, in my view) that this was not a cry of abandonment at all, but a cry of solidarity with the human race in which he knew God's presence with him. The cross was, in this view, no place of propitiation, but of God's patient suffering with us.

One of the disappointing features of the book is the lack of sustained engagement with the text of Scripture itself. In many of the essays, the Scriptures become one voice to be heard along with many others. One of the implications of this is that the issues that give rise to lament in the biblical drama fail to be treated with proper balance. For example, one of the key biblical themes connected to lament in the Bible is the reality of human sin. One's personal sin and God's response to it in holy wrath is often a cause of the lament, as is the sin of a nation/people group (e.g. Psalm 38; the book of Lamentations respectively), but the biblical connection between sin, judgement, and misery is a theme almost wholly missing from these essays.

This is not to say that I read the book without profit. I found a number of helpful insights, and I was stimulated to go back to Scripture itself to examine many of the interpretations. On balance, however, the essays are too divergent to be truly satisfying, and leave too many areas of biblical theology behind in their quest for contemporary engagement.

*Noel Due, Coromandel Baptist Church, South Australia*

## **He Came Down from Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith**

Douglas McCready

IVP/Apollos, Leicester, 2005; 349 pp., £16.99; ISBN-10: 1844741044; ISBN-13: 9781844741045

This book will strengthen your faith that Jesus Christ is unique and that none other than a preexistent God could be our Saviour. While there is nothing sensational or revolutionary in terms of theological insights, McCready makes a good job of proving that Christ did preexist. His main argument is that Christ is God and therefore he preexisted. McCready demonstrates the necessity of our Saviour having to be God, and also man, otherwise he could not save humanity. The book covers the whole spectrum of critics from the early church to the present day.

McCready does not shy away from the post-modern arguments of present day skeptics. As everyone comes to the Scriptures with his or her own preconceived ideas, even on preexistence, McCready shows how the early church received the doctrine because the evidence was plain. He shows how those who first encountered the doctrine had to accept the evidence on its own credentials. Modern skepticism comes, not from new evidence which has arisen, but from a changed outlook towards Scripture. That outlook comes from a new worldview and its definition of reality. One popular view which McCready constantly exposes as false, is the 'ideal preexistence' of Christ. This view means Christ existed in the mind of God prior to the incarnation, but did not exist personally prior to that same incarnation.

The six main challenges to the traditional preexistence of Christ are dealt with. These challenges are the exegetical, presuppositional, philosophical and ecumenical, theological and ecumenical, Christ's deity at the expense of his humanity, and finally the adoptionist challenge. McCready argues from the New Testament witness, Paul's writings, other New Testament writings, John's writings, the Jewish and Hellenistic background, and Postapostolic developments. He refers much to the doctrine of the Trinity. McCready reminds us of an important point which is relevant for today: 'Too many conservative Christians, even today, describe Jesus simply (and incorrectly) as God, and in doing so they fail to realize that the early defenders of orthodoxy fought as hard to defend Christ's humanity as they did his deity. Seeking to defend Christ's real humanity against its absorption into an utterly divine Christ, Schleiermacher for all intents and purposes gave up Christ's deity.'

McCready's evangelical concern comes through often. He brings his arguments to bear upon our need of a Saviour and how this doctrine



brings great comfort. 'Because Jesus is the preexistent Son, we can be confident God is not too busy for us, unconcerned about us, or ignorant of what we face daily. Instead, we know God loves us, values us, and has acted personally and decisively to restore our broken relationship with him.' This doctrine tells us about a God who came himself to save us, instead of sending an emissary and is thus a God who really loves us. It is a doctrine which should be relevant to a world lost in its search for meaning and happiness.

In reply to the modern ethical charge that a God who inflicts punishment on an innocent victim to satisfy his anger is not a God worth having, McCready responds by saying it was God himself who chose who should suffer. And he chose himself as the victim – it was God himself who suffered and paid the price of sin. 'Substitutionary atonement may be a horrible doctrine, but its horror lies in the human sin that made it necessary, not because God is a mean, unfeeling deity who condemns the innocent to death.'

This book strengthens faith, but is not bedtime reading. One needs to be fully awake and able to concentrate on the various arguments.

*Donald C. Macaskill, Associated Presbyterian Churches, Dundee*

## **Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church**

E. A. Livingstone (ed.)

Oxford University Press, revised 2nd edition, Oxford, 2006; xi+655 pp., £11.99; ISBN-10: 019861442X; ISBN-13: 9780198614425

The first edition of this book was based on the second edition of F. L. Cross (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (published in 1974). The latest version of the *Concise Dictionary* depends primarily on the revised third edition of the parent volume published in 2005. This abridged work contains over 5,000 condensed and accessible entries. It provides coverage of theology, patristic scholarship, churches and denominations, the church calendar and organisation, and the Bible, as well as entries on theologians, philosophers, painters, musicians, and writers of religious works.

The aim of this book is to provide basic information in an accessible form for those who may not need, or who cannot afford the more substantial edition. For example, fuller information and books for further information will not be provided in the *Concise Dictionary*, but will be found in the corresponding article in the larger volume. Biblical quotations are taken from the Authorised Version in the absence of a consensus regarding the best modern translation.

The updated information includes recent changes in various Christian denominations since the last edition. For example, the installation of Joseph Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI in 2005 is a necessary updating of the information on the papal office. However, this updating is not consistent in every place. For example, the article on Baptists ought to have mentioned the departure of the Southern Baptist Convention (USA) from the Baptist World Alliance, a decision taken in June 2004. The Evangelical Alliance and Evangelicalism in general merited larger entries than have been allocated to them. The former organisation surely deserved more than a reference to its foundation in 1846 and union with a similar American agency to form a World Evangelical Fellowship in 1951.

The majority of the article on 'Evangelicalism' focuses on British Anglicans, yet there is no reference to the increasing importance of African, especially Nigerian, Evangelical Anglicans, within that communion, though the developments in the Episcopal Church in the USA are updated to 2003. The article on Presbyterianism may be accurate in what it states, but was it necessary to state that 'most Presbyterians now recognise that the Early Church had Episcopal and congregational as well as Presbyterian elements'? The entry on Pentecostalism appears to subsume this tradition under the charismatic movement in the mainline denominations after the 1960s, but even in the briefest of entries on the charismatic renewal movement more space is given to its entry into the Roman Catholic Church. The world-wide spread of Pentecostalism in recent decades and the emergence of 'New/House Churches', over the last forty years, not just in the United Kingdom, surely was entitled to some acknowledgement even if only in the entry on the charismatic movement.

Issue could also be taken with some other entries. For example, in the article on Christianity in Burma, a country where the horrific slaughter and persecution of Christians and ethnic minorities by the military government of that country is very widely acknowledged, to state that: 'Reports of recent persecution of Christians are denied by the government' is an extremely weak description of what is happening in that country. Despite these criticisms the book is recommended and the information provided broadly accurate; its failings are in the area of omissions and balance of Christian perspectives.

*Brian Talbot, Broughty Ferry Baptist Church*

## Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views

Myron B. Penner, (ed.)

Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, 2005; 240 pp., £12.99; ISBN-10: 1587431084

For about two decades, evangelicals have pondered and debated what approach they should take toward postmodernism. While many have conflated postmodern *culture* (or postmodernity) with postmodern *philosophy* (or postmodernism), this academically-oriented book sticks almost entirely to the philosophy of postmodernism.

*Christianity and the Postmodern Turn* collects six perspectives on postmodernism and its relationship to Christian thought. Three contributors are enthusiastic supporters of postmodernism (James K. A. Smith, Merold Westphal, and John Franke), two are strong critics of postmodernism (R. Douglas Geivett and R. Scott Smith), and one is situated somewhere between both groups (Kevin Vanhoozer). Vanhoozer, who is more closely aligned with the critics than the enthusiasts, responds to all the other contributors, while the other exchanges consist of mostly J. Smith, Franke, and Westphal arguing against Geivett and R. Smith. (Geivett, R. Smith, J. Smith, and Westphal are philosophers. Vanhoozer and Franke are theologians. Vanhoozer evinces more philosophical acumen than Franke, who stumbles when articulating philosophical arguments, particularly concerning foundationalism, as Geivett and R. Smith note.)

Including this many authors, all of whom are called to respond to the other authors, makes for a bit of a jumble. This is a debate book with too many voices. Had there been only two or three contributors, one pro-postmodernist, one anti-postmodernist, and perhaps someone in the middle, it might have pushed further into the issues.

Given the plethora of perspectives, it is impossible to do justice to the arguments of each author. One can, however, chart two essential epistemological items of debate: realism and foundationalism. Geivett and R. Smith are realists in epistemology. They argue that language refers to and (when true) corresponds to an extra-linguistic realm through propositions. Both take this feature of language (there are, of course, other features) to be non-negotiable for the Christian worldview and its rational defence (I have defended these claims as well in *Truth Decay*). They also defend a modest foundationalism: the theory that our knowledge is divided between basic (non-inferential) beliefs and those derived from them. Postmodern thought in its many forms is non-realist (or anti-realist) and non-foundationalist in epistemology.

Geivett and R. Smith focus like laser beams on epistemology, carefully defending their own account of knowledge and critiquing those who

oppose it. J. Smith, Westphal, and Franke accuse them of hitching Christianity to a defective modernist program and claiming a hubristic ‘God’s eye’ view of the world that is impossible for finite, fallen mortals. We must rather, they claim, emphasize our contextual and enculturated situation and our immersion in language. Westphal, in an intemperate rhetorical flourish, even accuses Geivett of being like the Pharisee who ‘justified himself’ before God instead of humbly admitting his sin (p. 239). Of course, trying to justify a proposition about God intellectually is a far cry from trying to justify oneself morally before a holy God.

To my mind, the pro-postmodernists fail to demonstrate the compatibility of postmodernism with Christianity. This is largely because they fail to undermine realism or foundationalism. The claim that one must be postmodern to be epistemically humble is a *non sequitur*. Even realist/foundationalists admit the limits of knowledge and the defeasibility of many of their beliefs. Moreover, the postmodern perspective endangers knowledge itself, collapsing language and meaning into cultural contexts, thus rendering objective truth unattainable. The pro-postmodernists’ claims to the contrary are unconvincing.

Despite my philosophical agreement with the two strongest critics of postmodernism, I must state that the rest of the contributors are able exponents of their respective viewpoints. A careful reader of this volume, despite its overabundance of contributors and the ensuing over-stimulation, will come away with a solid acquaintance with the core issues at stake in this debate. One hopes he or she will also come away with a measure of wisdom as well.

*Douglas Groothuis, Denver Seminary, USA*

## **The Holy Spirit**

Mateen Ellass

Geneva Press, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY, 2005; 94 pp., £8.99; ISBN-10: 0664501370; ISBN-13: 9780664501372

‘This series enables readers to learn about contemporary theology in ways that are clear, enjoyable, and meaningful...’. This book does more or less exactly what it says on the cover.

The book has many strengths. It is concise at ninety-one pages (eight chapters) and readable. Aimed at the ‘layman’, it uses bright, contemporary illustrations and anecdotes to carry home its biblical theology. The language is up-to-date: ‘The “church-goers” of his day recognized with excitement that Jesus brought some new power to the table.’ And in a foreword, Ellass explains why he resists contemporary pressure to ‘de-gender’.

Chapter one sets forth the writer's wish to redefine 'spirituality', amongst Christians at least, in terms of the work of the biblical Holy Spirit: 'even among God's people the link between holy and Spirit has been severed in day to day life'.

Chapter two, 'Playing Twenty Questions', seeks to 'clarify the nature of the Holy Spirit'. The author works quickly (though not inadequately given the introductory nature of the book) through key biblical and confessional material.

'Getting Tuned In' (chapter three) introduces the critical connection of Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit, who is 'God's Internet technology, the enchanting connection who makes the incarnate, and now glorified, Jesus accessible to all who desire to become apprentices of the kingdom of God'.

Chapter four, 'The People of the Spirit', looks at the work of the Spirit in and for the church. It avoids a merely individualistic view of the Spirit's influence.

'Spirit-filled Worship' (chapter 5) begins with an evaluation of today's 'worship wars'. Ellass takes a middle ground between 'Reformed soberness' and 'charismatic disorder': 'When our services reflect a business-as-usual attitude, we can be sure that our hearts or minds, or both, have derailed somewhere. On the other hand, excitement does not necessarily mean jumping up and down...'. The chapter does not get entirely 'hung up' on this one issue, however, as Ellass proceeds to discuss the critical role of the Spirit in preaching and the sacraments. Prayer, consequently, features large.

Chapter six, 'The Gift that Keeps on Giving', enters another controversial area: spiritual gifts. Some will feel that Ellass is here more than a little dismissive of the view that the 'supernatural' gifts have ceased. This Ellass puts down 'at least partly' to post-Enlightenment rationalism – a little hard on Calvin *et al.* He does not discuss the other possible reasons for this view. However, Ellass is careful to keep all the gifts under the control of love, order and, of course, the sovereignty of the Spirit to distribute as he pleases.

Chapter seven moves into 'safer' territory with the title 'Fruitful Lives' and a discussion of the lifestyle qualities produced by the Spirit – 'the fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:22, 23). How does the fruit grow? Ellass draws on C. S. Lewis's analogy: 'the good infection'. 'For those "infected" with the Spirit, their actions and attitudes begin to show the symptoms of his presence.' This is not, however, pure passivism, but: 'The Scriptures make clear time and again that God calls us to respond to his overtures of love, to exercise our wills to walk by faith, to act in the world on the basis of our trust in the divine promises found in the Bible, to open ourselves to

the life of Christ so that every day, every hour, every moment, we think, intend, dream, hope, speak, act, surrender to the Father, with the mind of Christ.' (Not dissimilar to J. I. Packer's 'God-dependent effort' as key to Christian living.)

The final chapter is entitled 'Furrows in the Heart' – a look at 'means of grace' employed by the Holy Spirit to channel his transforming grace into renewed hearts. The scope of this chapter is impressive. Ellass discusses six 'disciplines of abstinence' – fasting, simplicity, silence, solitude, chastity, Sabbath-keeping – then eight 'disciplines of engagement' (two more positives!) – Sabbath-keeping (again), worship, prayer, study, meditation, confession, fellowship, service. As promised on the cover, this chapter is particularly 'enjoyable' and 'meaningful'. Examples: 'Many of us have... discovered that the more we possess, the more we tend to be possessed' (simplify!); 'In confession of sin... we not only recognize our wrong, but seek the grace of God and the accountability of the community to keep us from falling again into the same traps.'

All in all, Ellass has provided a sound and thought-provoking introduction that I would have little trouble in recommending.

*Oliver Rice, Bow Baptist Church, London*

## **A Clear and Present Word. The Clarity of Scripture**

Mark D. Thompson

Apollos, Downers Grove, 2006; 196 pp., £12.99; ISBN-10: 083082622X; ISBN-13: 9780830826223

This is the 21st book in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series and in it the author seeks to defend the biblical doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, which Thompson defines as 'that quality of the biblical text that, as God's communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it by faith'.

In the opening chapter, Thompson outlines the traditional objections to the doctrine, referring back, in general terms, to the time of the Reformation, and in doing so he prepares the reader to have these objections thoroughly, systematically and very clearly addressed throughout the remainder of the book. Also in the opening chapter, Thompson addresses the doctrine in the contemporary light and context of the postmodern age in a section entitled, 'Postmodern Philosophy: Radically questioning epistemological certainty'. Interestingly, Thompson claims that whilst postmodernism has 'generated a series of fresh challenges' to the doctrine, in many respects it has merely 'amplified the protests of the past'. In other words, there may well be nothing very new under the sun when it comes to arguments against this doctrine.

Thompson launches his description and defence of the doctrine by claiming that with God as the effective communicator, the clarity of Scripture must be guaranteed. He claims that 'if God chooses to speak to us personally, in his Son and through those whom he commissioned and enabled to write his words for us, then it is no transgression of his majesty to take him at his word'. He then proceeds to survey and unpack the biblical texts from the Old and the New Testament which assert the veracity of the doctrine. Thompson addresses the objection that Scripture acknowledges its own difficulty in places, e.g. the meaning of parables being hidden (Mark 4) and the Ethiopian eunuch requiring Philip to interpret the meaning of a text (Acts 8:30-31). He proposes that 'clarity is not the same as uniform simplicity or even transparency' and in saying so explains why the so-called problem texts are actually more to do with the individual than with the text of Scripture.

Thompson devotes the final chapter to reviewing in fuller detail the arguments for and against the clarity of Scripture which took place at the time of the Reformation (1520s) and later (1580s). Here Thompson argues that what formed the substance of these debates has not changed in principle from then to the present day debates on the issue. He outlines Erasmus's challenge against the doctrine which Luther rebutted in the mid-1520s, then describes how in 1586, Robert Belarmino, Professor of Controversial Theology, again challenged the doctrine, and was responded to by many Protestant scholars, of which the most significant was the response of William Whitaker, a Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in 1588. Much of the material in this section was novel to the reviewer, particularly in relation to the debate which took place in the latter part of the 16th century. This I found to be most enlightening and informative.

One important pastoral issue regarding the doctrine for today, which was also a concern on the part of Whitaker as a defender of the doctrine, is that Scripture's clarity (or lack of it) could be used to dissuade Christians from private reading and study of the Bible.

This book was a pleasure to read and served to reinforce the belief in the clarity of Scripture. The historical background material relating to the Reformation was especially helpful. The book was well referenced in terms of a Scripture index and an author index, and uses footnotes in a helpful and moderate manner.

*Colin L. Macleod, Leith Free Church of Scotland, Edinburgh*

## **Revelation and the Spirit: A Comparative Study of the Relationship between the Doctrine of Revelation and Pneumatology in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel and of Wolfhart Pannenberg**

Graham J. Watts

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2005; 230 pp., £24.99; ISBN-10: 1842271040; ISBN-13: 9781842271049

In this work Watts explores the relationship between revelation and pneumatology by comparing the theology of two apologetically-minded Lutheran theologians, Eberhard Jüngel and Wolfhart Pannenberg, in the context of the postmodern rejection of metanarrative and truth. He aims to 1) provide a theological explanation of truth, 2) clarify the language of revelation and the Spirit, and 3) construct a trinitarian doctrine of the Spirit emphasizing participation. The comparison of Jüngel and Pannenberg proves interesting and insightful, as their unique contributions are highlighted by their commonalities: both are influenced by Barth's christocentric understanding of revelation – being as becoming, existence as act/event, and God's presence-in-absence – yet they also share an apologetic bent largely alien to Barth. Jüngel's theology serves as an apology to philosophical atheism, while Pannenberg directs his apology to the scientific academy.

In attempting to answer philosophical atheism, Jüngel expounds an existential, cross-centered theology emphasizing the death of God, the effect of the resurrection, and the ontological primacy of possibility over actuality. In response to the scientific community, Pannenberg offers a scientific theology focusing on the historical actuality of the resurrection, the death of the Son, and the future as determinative of being. Watts rounds out this comparison by drawing ably on notable contemporaries such as Moltmann and Jenson, and influential forerunners, especially Luther and Barth.

Watts concludes that, although Jüngel and Pannenberg's theologies furnish rich insights and provide fertile ground for development, their pneumatologies are ultimately deficient. Jüngel's emphasis on the interruptive nature of the Spirit's activity is restrictive, Pannenberg's emphasis on the idea of the Infinite does not mesh well with the biblical witness, and both tend to conflate the person of the Holy Spirit and God's spiritual being. As a corrective to these deficient pneumatologies, Watts suggests an eschatologically-grounded pneumatology emphasizing communion. He proposes a plan for developing a fully trinitarian, practical pneumatology of doxological and semantic participation in Christ, in harmony with the doctrine of creation, and attentive to the prophetic public field of



force created by the Spirit by drawing on the thought of Alan Torrance, Michael Welker, and Ingolf Dalferth. This plan, however, is no more than a sketch, a direction in which the next step should be taken.

This work shines as a comparison of the theology of Jüngel and Pannenberg and as an exploration of the correlation of revelation and pneumatology in recent theology. Although this work originated as a doctoral thesis and Watts does not write at the introductory level, this exploration results in a broad introduction to Jüngel and Pannenberg. Those unfamiliar with their theology but interested in the topic ought not to be deterred, though the Jüngel material is quite dense. The lack of a clear exposition of his eschatological and trinitarian evaluative criteria mars Watts's comparative and constructive effort. In particular, while Watts holds the full personhood of the Holy Spirit to be a *sine qua non*, his definition of divine personhood remains ambiguous. The same is true of his conception of the eschaton, which is broad enough for both Jüngel's cross-centered and Pannenberg's future-oriented eschatology. Similarly, the emphasis on God's being as event seems to require some nuancing of the 'three persons, one substance' formula. Overall, the work is an excellent comparative study, though with errata throughout and a few missing or misattributed citations.

*Luke Ben Tallon, University of St Andrews*

### **Caspar Schwenckfeld: Eight Writings on Christian Beliefs**

H. H. Drake Williams III (ed.)

Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, 2006; 183 pp., \$20.50; ISBN-10: 1894710649

This small book comprises a number of the theological treatises of the minor Protestant Reformer Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561). The most important of his works is entitled: 'A German Theology for God-fearing laity from Christ and the Christian teaching of Godliness'. It was produced at the request of Philip Melancthon, a fellow-Reformer who had complained that Schwenckfeld had not produced a systematic view of his theology. This document written in 1560 was possibly his final major work and was his considered statement of his views.

The second document in this volume is entitled, 'The Confession of our Common Christian Belief'. It was dated from 1542 and sent as part of a larger letter to Dr Johann Kneller from exile in the hope that he might be allowed home to Silesia, if his faith was accepted as orthodox.

The third document, 'Statement on the Unity of God and the Holy Trinity', is undated. It is an affirmation of the Apostles' Creed and a declaration of his acceptance of mainstream Christian belief on this subject.

The fourth document is 'How to study the Scripture', dated 1529. It explained his hermeneutical principles with respect to the Old and the New Testaments.

The next document is a summary of his 'Faith and Confession of the Lord Jesus Christ', a summary of his teaching on the person of Jesus Christ. 'Confession of the Beliefs of Caspar Schwenckfeld' is a resumé of his teaching sent in 1545 to Herzog Christoph of Württemberg, to rebut false claims regarding this Reformer's views on the major doctrines of the faith. The seventh document is 'A Discourse on Freedom of Religion, Christian Doctrine, Judgement and Faith'. This work was written in 1561, the last year of his life. It indicates the open-ended nature of his thinking and emphasized that Christians ought never to be bound by creeds or confessions of faith; fidelity to the Scriptures was paramount.

The eighth document is 'What, Who or Where the true Christian Church is'. It provided a brief illustration of how Schwenckfeld viewed the Bible and the early Christian creeds and applied them to his understanding of the Christian church. Its dating is unclear, possibly 1530. This volume also reproduces the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the statement on Jesus Christ from the Council of Chalcedon. It concludes with a brief history of the interpretation of Schwenckfeld's thought by theologians in the twentieth century.

The production of this book, a compilation of the key writings of this Reformer, translated into English, was intended to provide greater understanding of the central points of the thought of Schwenckfeld and ultimately to encourage 'more Confessors of the Glory of Christ', to use a phrase from his vocabulary. It was acknowledged by the compilers of this volume that interpreters of his thought in the last century had varied opinions and did not interact with each other as could have been expected. They are hoping that this work will assist future theologians and historians gain a clearer understanding of Schwenckfeld's views and also to stimulate further interest in a Reformer whom they believe has not received the attention that could have been expected. This book is clearly laid out with appropriate endnotes and index. It is easy to read and accessible for readers who would not count themselves Reformation specialists. Anyone interested in finding out more about the theological views of Caspar Schwenckfeld would find this work a good place to begin their investigations.

*Brian Talbot, Broughty Ferry Baptist Church*

## **Confessing our Hope: Essays Celebrating the Life and Ministry of Morton H. Smith**

J. A. Pipa, Jr and C. N. Willborn (eds)

Southern Presbyterian Press, Taylors, South Carolina, 2004; ix+328 pp., \$24.00; ISBN-10: 1931639043

This collection of essays is an enriching and illuminating summary of the Southern Presbyterian theological tradition in the United States. It was compiled to mark the eightieth birthday of Morton H. Smith, whose own earlier work on the Southern Presbyterian tradition introduced many of us to such luminaries as Dabney, Girardeau and Thornwell.

Smith was stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church of America for fifteen years as one of the founders of Reformed Theological Seminary. In his ninth decade he is still teaching theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Carolina, with which he has been associated since its inception in 1987.

A native of Virginia, Smith is described in Pipa's biographical introduction as a bridge between the faith of the nineteenth century theological giants and the present generation. Pipa describes Smith's theology as exegetical, Reformed, evangelical and experiential. That helpfully serves as a blueprint for the nature of the collections in this volume.

In addition to the biographical summary there are eleven essays in this volume. Of these, nine deal with historical themes, while two deal with ecclesiastical themes. The church topics are the diaconate and the role of women. Of these only the latter is exegetical, as George W. Knight III defends male headship and the differing roles for men and women in the church. C. N. Willborn's discussion of the diaconate is within the context of the southern ecclesiastical tradition.

Ligon Duncan discusses Irenaeus on the covenant, demonstrating that federalism was an early development in theological reflection. One could not do better than read this essay as a fine introduction to patristic literature. Jerry Crick introduces us to Anselm in an essay on Anselm's doctrine of satisfaction, while Ian Hamilton discusses Amyraldianism, and is at pains to point out that Amyraldianism is no modified Calvinism.

Discussions which focus specifically on the Southern Presbyterian tradition include David Hall on confessional relaxation, Robert Penny on the Mayhew Mission, examining church-planting and educational ministry among the Choctaw Indians in the early nineteenth century, Mark Hezer on the Scottish influence on Girardeau's philosophy, Douglas Kelly on Dabney, David Calhoun on William Childs Robinson, and Willborn again on 'Southern Presbyterianism: the character of a tradition'.

As with any kind of festschrift, the collection is mixed and a little eclectic. However, they amply convey the interests of the scholar whom they celebrate: a Reformed tradition firmly rooted in Scripture and in patristic literature, a defence of Calvinistic views on the atonement and the application of redemption, and, of course, a high regard for the Southern Presbyterian ethos.

That ethos is not foreign to Scottish Presbyterianism; though forged in different historical contexts, commonalities abound. The romantic view of 'Our Southern Zion' strikes a chord with lovers of Christ's church everywhere. In our day of confessional laxity, confused theology, and shallow piety, we would do well to recover the doctrinal and spiritual emphases of the Southern tradition. This collection would not be a bad place to start.

*Iain D. Campbell, Isle of Lewis*

## **Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology**

John E. Colwell

Paternoster, Milton Keynes, 2005; 284 pp., £13.99; ISBN-10: 1842274147; ISBN-13: 9781842274149

Works on sacramental theology written from a Protestant perspective have been the opposite of plentiful in the period since the release of D. M. Baillie's *The Theology of the Sacraments* (1957). If one were to ask for something written on the subject from a broadly evangelical perspective, the supply of titles would not appreciably increase. One thinks of I. H. Marshall's exegetically-informed *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (1981) and the similar approach seen in C. K. Barrett's *Church Ministry and Sacraments in the New Testament* (1985). In the North American context, two recent titles, both leaning more to the side of theological reflection are Leonard Vander Zee's *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (2004) and Gordon T. Smith's *A Holy Meal* (2005). John Colwell's welcome *Promise and Presence* deserves to be seen in connection with the two latter titles, not because of any observable overlap or dependency, but because the works are all responsive to and symptomatic of recent evangelical engagement in what could be called the 'ecumenical theology' project.

In the UK setting in which Colwell has written (Spurgeon's College and the Baptist Union of England and Wales) this ecumenical context has been provided both by the inter-confessional structure of theological study established in the university faculties of theology and by his own denomination's involvement in the 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry' (B.E.M.) project of the World Council of Churches since its inception in

1982. It is the latter influence which, even more than the former, goes some considerable distance to explain the tendency being worked out across the pages of *Promise and Presence*.

I will term this the tendency to sell short one's own particular denominational theological heritage (irrespective of whether that heritage is Baptist, Anglican, Pentecostal or Presbyterian) in the hope of appropriating some wider, wiser, more 'catholic' theological expression bearing the stamp of antiquity and permanence. In this respect, John Colwell's wrestling with his subject is a timely case-study of what can become of an evangelical theology (in his case, in the Baptist tradition) when it is reduced to being just another voice in the ecumenical theological discussion. The remarks which follow are not a plea against that theological discussion, but only against the reduction in it of evangelical theology to a mere 'variant'.

The author insists (p. 253) that he has not provided us with a detailed theology of the sacraments in this book. I think him too self-effacing. He has provided us with a stimulating sacramental theology: the question is: 'of which kind?' Given this reviewer's concern (expressed above) about the tendency of B.E.M. to mute the distinctive theological contribution of various theological traditions, the reader might expect that there will now follow a charge that Colwell is on the road to Rome or Antioch. What one finds instead in *Promise and Presence* is that, in interaction with Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Methodism and the other voices represented in B.E.M., Colwell has constructed a thoroughly eclectic approach to the sacraments which, while it incorporates a wide range of insights and sympathies drawn from across the ecumenical spectrum, really conforms to the views of no single communion – his own included.

Working out the principle that God is known in this world through mediated action (Jesus Christ, the mediator, being the epitome of this action), Colwell lays out an interesting argument that evangelicalism in its various expressions has generally prized the idea that God is known (in Christ) by immediate, that is direct, divine action. Such an emphasis on immediate knowledge of God as standard can regularly seem to render not only baptism and the Lord's Supper, but also the church and ministry (to give but a few examples) peripheral and even superfluous to the life of the modern Christian; he contends further that Christian life lived out on the principle that knowledge of God is gained immediately entails the taking of a subjectivistic and perilous road.

To his credit, this concern for mediated knowledge of God (commended as offered to us not only through baptism and the Lord's Supper but also through Church, Word, Confirmation, Cleansing, Healing, Confirmation, Ministry, and Marriage – each added 'sacrament' receiving

a chapter) does not lead him to embrace the Roman Catholic error that God's working in the world is 'imprisoned' in these forms of mediation, such that the mere administration of them binds God. Yet, about this interesting proposal, several concerns can be registered.

The first is a biblical concern. To its credit, Colwell's treatment is regularly informed by appeal to biblical and particularly New Testament passages. However, at a deeper level, Colwell has not shown either that our Scriptures contain even a latent theology of the sacraments taken collectively, let alone that his quite elaborate scheme of multi-channelled mediation of knowledge of God is scripturally authentic. As for the first, the only New Testament scripture which even mentions baptism and the Lord's Supper in conjunction with one another is 1 Corinthians 10; a sober reading of this passage would not lead one to believe that Paul was himself there and then building an elaborate theology of the sacraments. This being so, if scriptural warrant is critical, and the biblical material is in short supply, simplicity has much to commend it in sacramental theology.

There is a greater scriptural burden of proof on John Colwell than he seems to have acknowledged in this matter of multiplying rites, calling them sacraments, and building up a theology of mediation. It is not enough to speak of the 'implicit ordaining of each of these ecclesial rites by Jesus' (p. 5). This theology lacks a substantive biblical foundation-laying.

Secondly, the concomitant of Colwell's insistence that in this world, God is known only by mediated means (hence the need for multiplied rites) seems to have the unintended effect of rendering God less accessible under his scheme than the one he aims to displace. If God is, in this world, only available to us, in connection with the gospel, by the media Colwell specifies, then the heavens are relatively closed under this scheme compared to another, which Colwell has rejected from his past exposure to evangelicalism and the charismatic movement.

Here there are two considerations which concern me. For one, it follows from his view that exceptional biblical cases aside (the penitent thief of Luke 23:43, and Paul on the Damascus road in Acts 9), the believers of the New Testament era either had experience of God through these media, or not at all. I cannot see that Christian experiential knowledge of God in the New Testament is so confined to these media as is proposed. Does the account of Lydia's conversion conform to it (Acts 16), or that of the Galatians – who were reminded by Paul that they had received the Spirit by 'hearing with faith' (3:2) or that of the Ephesians, for whom Paul prayed that Christ might 'dwell in their hearts by faith' (3:17)? The emphasis here is not so much on the media employed by the Spirit in reaching the believer as on there being a divine action which engages and engenders

faith. It is significant that Protestant theology has long emphasized that divine regeneration, when narrowly conceived, is itself an immediate act of the Spirit. While he has avoided 'imprisoning' the Spirit in the *ex opere operato* sense, it is not clear that that he has avoided the error entirely. (This is not a plea for the opposite error of an utterly casual relationship between Word, sacrament and divine action.) For another, there are the numerous and persistent reports from the Arab world of sincere men and women who encounter Jesus in dream and vision; Jesus is reported to advise them of a person who will soon speak to them or soon offer them a book. So, unmediated knowledge of God has not vanished from this world. The categories are too tight. Colwell is riding a pendulum, which he hopes will deliver from subjectivism; but at the end of this pendulum swing stands ritualism.

Third, there lingers the difficult question of the relationship of the Word to the sacraments. Historically, Protestant theology has seen the two sacraments, baptism and the Supper, as auxiliary to the preaching of the Word. The grace offered in one is offered in the other, yet the two sacraments stand in a position of dependency on the Word for their meaning and for their proper administration. They are the word of the gospel made visible. In Colwell, this relationship is under new management. The Word is numbered among his multiplied sacraments, but is – in the end – only ranked with them. There is no primacy reserved for the Word, written and preached. Knowledge of God can be gained as truly through the sacrament of healing, or confirmation – apparently – as through the Word. Whatever this is, this is not theological advance. J. I. Packer, describing Thomas Cranmer's sacramental theology in 1964, wisely cautioned against any view 'that awarded more efficacy to the sacraments than to the preaching of the Word'. Colwell ranks all his multiplied sacraments equally, and the danger of doing so seems identical to the one against which Packer cautioned.

Here is an engaging, thought-provoking book based on very wide reading and deep reflection; it is an interesting example of what evangelical theology can absorb (and sadly, jettison) through ecumenical dialogue. That it in some respects disappoints should provide no-one who is eager to advance in understanding sacramental theology with an excuse for shunning it.

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