ANVIL
BOOK REVIEWS

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I would not normally do a full review of a second edition, but this particular second edition is well worth investing in. This is a sociological, big picture view of the religious context of the UK that is an informative and stimulating read. For some readers it will be more a case of articulating and clarifying what you already know, but for those who are thinking through these issues for the first time, this is an excellent introduction to the religious landscape of the UK.

Much has changed in Britain since the first edition of Religion in Britain was published in 1994, when Davie first introduced the notion of “believing without belonging” to describe the religious habits of many in the UK, and the place of religion within public life. The secularisation hypothesis of the increasing marginalisation and personalisation of religious belief and practice has come in for serious scrutiny, but to simply declare it wrong is perhaps an oversimplification of a complex picture. Davie herself has developed her own thinking on the topic, introducing the notion of “vicarious religion” to complement that of “believing without belonging,” by which she means a small minority believe on behalf of the masses, and are subject to critique if they “do not do this properly” (6).

Davie identifies six key factors shaping religious life in the UK: the role of the historic churches in shaping British culture; an awareness that while these churches have a place at particular moments in the lives of British people, they are no longer able to influence the beliefs and behaviours of the majority of the population; a shift from a model of obligation to a model of choice or consumption in religious activity; the recent arrival of immigrants who have a variety of religious aspirations; the reactions of Britain’s secular elites to the increasing salience of religion in public as well as private life; and a growing realisation that patterns of religious life in the UK (indeed in Europe) are the global exception, not the global norm. These six factors are discussed at length throughout the book.

Davie writes as an outsider, a sociological observer who asks questions of those whom she terms “religious professionals” (arguably anyone serious about communicating faith). As an Anglican cleric, the concepts of “vicarious religion” and “believing without belonging” do resonate with my experience of the occasional offices. Mourners at funerals want me to believe in the bodily resurrection even if they are uncertain themselves; all those at a wedding – at that moment at least – ascribe to the concept of a faithful life-long marriage between one man and one woman. The reality that most will not then involve themselves at all in the worshipping life of the church does potentially support Davie’s argument that belief has been outsourced to me as a religious professional. As she puts it:

Those that minister to a half-believing, rather than an unbelieving, society will find that there are advantages and disadvantages to this situation, just as there are in any other. Working out appropriate ministerial strategies for this continually shifting and ill-defined context is the central and very demanding task of the religious professional. A firm and necessary grasp of the sociological realities is the beginning. (80).

Religion in Britain offers an overview of these sociological realities, in a very readable and accessible form. The book is divided into five parts, covering preliminary issues; religious legacies; shifting priorities (from obligation to consumption); public religion and secular reactions; and finally a concluding chapter. The discussion is wide ranging, but focuses primarily on Christianity. This is one weakness of the book: at least some discussion of how those of other faiths practise their beliefs would have given a fuller picture. There is much for Anglicans to engage with, including discussions of chaplaincy, faith schools, women bishops, same-sex relationships, and why cathedrals have a lot in common with large charismatic churches. From Davie’s sociological perspective, “both the cathedral and the charismatic service embody religion in the sense of the sacred or ‘set-apart.’ It seems that late modern populations respond warmly to this feature” (143).

Davie has written sociology, not theology. This is clear from her observation that Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons are, sociologically speaking, difficult to distinguish from some smaller Protestant denominations. Her aim in writing is simply to increase the religious literacy of her readers, and in this she succeeds. She acknowledges areas of growth as well as those of decline. Her summary of the overall state of the nation is cogent:

Britain is markedly more secular than it used to be, but by no means totally so; it is also more diverse, but unevenly – the regional variations
are considerable. Indifference, moreover, interweaves with unattached belief on the one hand, and more articulate versions of the secular on the other. Each of these elements depends, moreover, on the others (223).

This book should be read as a complement to the discussions of the church growth movement. It provides a good overview of the state of religion in Britain today (although, as noted above, this is perhaps overly biased towards Christianity) and thus gives people a place from which to begin. If you want to help anyone who lives primarily in a Christian environment understand the whole of British society, this is an excellent place to start.

Tom Wilson
St Philip’s Centre, Leicester


Walker and Parry begin with the same sociological realities that Davie carefully charts, but rather than simply making sociological observations about them, offer a theological critique and response. In their view, Christianity has historically faced three great schisms. The first great schism was the divide between the Western and Eastern churches, which began with the controversy over the addition of filioque (“and the Son”) to the Nicene Creed. The second occurred with the Reformation and the third is underway in the West at present. They describe this third schism as follows:

“Growing numbers of people want to remain Christian in some way, despite the fact that they can no longer assent to many of the doctrines of the creeds, believe in the Bible as a broadly reliable record of historical narratives, or find credible the possibility of miracles in either the past (including the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ) or the present” (9)

Walker and Parry respond by drawing on the notion of “Deep Church,” which they define as deep in both a solid and a liquid way, having both a historical and an existential reality. The solid depths of Deep Church are the bedrock of faith, built on Christ himself. The liquid depths are the flowing streams of the Spirit. The historical reality rests on God’s self-revelation to the world of himself in the person of his Son and on the Son’s institution of the Church. We must avail ourselves of all the historical resources at our disposal if we are to adequately build Deep Church for the twenty-first century. But at the same time we must have existential, not just historical or intellectual, experience of God; we must be part of the Church constituted by the Spirit, experiencing the presence and indwelling of the Spirit. Rooted in history, the Church should seek spiritual experiences in the present.

Walker and Parry outline the roots of the third schism through a clear and concise overview of the rise of modernity and postmodernity. They are realistic about the present situation: Christendom has ended and the model of church that presumes Christendom is therefore no longer useful. While this may be lamented, they also believe it to be an opportunity for “a fresh improvisation of the faith that is both deeply rooted in Scripture and tradition but also alive to the worlds we now inhabit” (28). Deep Church Rising begins this process.

The issues are discussed in seven chapters which tackle issues such as the relationship with Scripture and Tradition, the nature of Orthodoxia (Right Believing and Right Worship) and Orthopraxia (Right Practice), the need for catechesis and Deep Church as a Eucharistic Community. Walker and Parry’s arguments are primarily directed towards the evangelical and charismatic wings of the church. They argue for Christians to establish deep roots in their history, to avoid becoming like orphans bereft of family history. They understand the creeds as “national borders” defining Christian territory and argue in favour of the historic understandings of the Christian faith. They challenge consumerist approaches to worship and any form of passive engagement with church services. They suggest a cruciform approach to ethics, argue for the value of catechesis and the significance of the Eucharist. They are strong advocates of recognition of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, whilst recognising the diversity of opinion “from pious agnosticism to transubstantiation to Luther to Calvin” (155).

Deep Church Rising is a stimulating and challenging wake-up call to the Church to remember rightly, to be rooted in tradition but engaged in the present, to remain faithful to Jesus but alive to the present. Where it perhaps falls down is in the lack of specific examples of what the Deep Church response to the present issues facing the church might be. Debates about the environment, sexuality and the place of women in church all hinge on the relationship between the historic teaching of the church and its present expression. Some more moves from theory to practice would have strengthened an already strong book and given specific insights into how
Walker and Parry envisage Deep Church engaging with the complex reality of twenty-first century Britain. When I finished reading, I was still not entirely clear as to what constitutes the “third schism” and what constitutes “a fresh improvisation of the faith.” Perhaps Walker and Parry’s aim was simply to get me to think harder about these questions. In this they succeeded, and for this their book is to be warmly commended to all thinking Christians. But a slightly clearer idea of their own views might have helped me begin to see my way through the fog.

Tom Wilson
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David Goodhew, (Editor), Towards a Theology of Church Growth, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

This is an important book. It is the first time such a diverse group of scholars and church leaders from across the different traditions of the church have come together to explore church growth in a positive way. That, in itself, makes it worth the read. But it is not without its flaws. The book is the product of a conference and as such is something of a mixed bag.

In Part 1 editor David Goodhew offers a comprehensive introduction summarising each chapter and seeking, not altogether successfully, to weave a common thread through each whilst passionately making the case that church growth is both good and necessary.

In the second chapter David Marshall calls for a confident Christianity comfortable with proclamation, conversion and church growth even from within a diverse interfaith context. He offers a devastating critique of John Hick, arguing persuasively that, with appropriate humility, proclamation and dialogue can effectively complement one another.

Part 2 offers a biblical account of church growth. In one of the stronger chapters Mark Bonnington locates church growth within a broader kingdom theology that expresses itself through the proliferation of local churches.

C Kavin Row explores the ecclesiology of Acts. In a particularly academic chapter that appears to draw on earlier work, he argues that though the church in Acts was fundamentally counter-cultural it was never revolutionary. It was not clear to me why this chapter was included, other than, perhaps, to challenge the complacent and reassure the skeptical that church growth does not have to be triumphalistic.

In Part 3, three essays explore church growth and doctrine. The first by Alistair McGrath and the second by Martin Warner are the most disappointing. They seem to be a mishmash of previous work and peculiar interests that do little to develop a theology of church growth. Thankfully, this section is rescued by a superb essay by Graham Tomlin examining the pneumatology of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that have seen some of the most significant church growth. He develops a pneumatological doctrine of mission that is compelling, elegant and practical.

In Part 4, the focus shifts to church growth throughout history. Ivor Davidson offers a solid essay on the growth of the early church, but one can’t help but feel there is a hidden agenda here as there is with Benedicta Ward’s chapter on the early English church. Though they both offer some fascinating insights into what made Christianity so attractive in these particular historical contexts, both authors seem nervous about overt evangelism and mission, arguing instead that Christians simply lived well and that this in itself was enough.

The final three essays are the strongest and most interesting so the book ends on a high. Miranda Threlfall-Holmes considers church growth in the medieval period. She highlights the more organic understanding of church growth in which church leaders sought to keep the weeds at bay whilst allowing the garden to grow, a helpful corrective to more modern managerial approaches to growth. Ashley Null examines Cranmer’s systematic approach to the re-evangelisation of the nation, an approach which is breathtaking in its scope and determined intentionality, as Cranmer sought to form, not right doctrine, but right desire across the nation, recognising that liturgy could be effectively contextualised whilst still alluring the soul with the truth of the Gospel. Dominic Erdozain brings us up to date with the growth of the church in the modern period, contending that the church has too readily embraced a narrative of doom and a theology of resignation instead of a more positive, joyful spirituality that engages the affections and is optimistic for the future.

Goodhew ends with a recognition and celebration of what he describes as a “modest missional ecumenism” and suggests some areas for further research. Despite its flaws and frustrations, it remains a pioneer in its field and, I hope, the shape of things to come as the Church of England embraces the growth agenda.

Rod Green
London
2. BIBLICAL STUDIES


Anyone who wants to get a better grasp of Biblical texts in their original context will be an avid reader of Kenneth Bailey’s books. This volume is no exception to that rule. His central thesis is that there are echoes of Psalm 23 running throughout scripture, and he demonstrates this with reference to a variety of texts. Chapter one is packed with Bailey’s wealth of knowledge of the Middle East. He illuminates details of the Psalm, restoring it to its original context. I was especially struck by the discussion of the causative polel of shuv (return) in verse three, indicating a translation along the lines of “he causes me to repent” being much more accurate than the KJV “he restores my soul,” and by Bailey’s discussion of the image of the host in the Psalm. He argues strongly that preparing food was a woman’s job, and so if God is the host who prepares food in Psalm 23, then female imagery is being ascribed to God.

The next three chapters pick up echoes of Psalm 23 in three Old Testament texts: Jeremiah 23:1-8; Ezekiel 34; and Zechariah 10:2-12. I found these the weakest chapters. There are clear echoes of Psalm 23, but Bailey perhaps magnifies them slightly louder than they really are. The chapters which follow, on Luke 15:1-10; Mark 6:7-52; Matthew 18:10-14; John 10:1-18 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 are stronger, especially the discussions of the Gospels. Bailey’s point about Jesus’ hermeneutic Christology and his suggestion of the idea of Jesus as the Good Shepherd offering a suitable starting point for dialogue with Islam were two ideas that I will consider further. If you regularly preach on Psalm 23, then buy and read this book for chapter one alone. If you want to understand a bit more about Jesus the Good Shepherd, then buy this book. It is a rewarding, enriching read.

Tom Wilson
St Philip’s Centre, Leicester


This is an excellent and timely book. It is some time since the last attempt to produce a collection of essays offering an up-to-date conspectus of evangelical thinking on a broad range of topics. On the whole, this volume does not disappoint. In well over a thousand pages, the book comprises thirty-five essays, preceded by a substantial introduction by the editor, who has also provided a series of FAQs based upon the essays. As this is really a book of reference, there are helpfully four indexes.

The book is structured around four main areas of concern. First, historical topics. Here are essays ranging from Scripture in the Patristic Period through to recent Roman Catholic Views of Biblical Authority, taking in (inter alia) the Reformation, Karl Barth and a very helpful essay on the issue of Accommodation. Next comes Biblical and Theological topics. This includes Reflections on the Unity and Diversity of OT Theologies, a substantial essay on the Question of Double Authorship (human and divine) and a piece on Myth, History and the Bible, which in parts I found too technical. There are also two essays on the use of the OT in the NT. But the essay by Kevin Vanhoozer on the problem of doctrinal development is the one which will repay closer study. More on this later. The third section deals with philosophical and epistemological questions; not the most appetising topics perhaps! But there are two worth further comment in a moment. One on the endlessly debated matter of inerrancy and the other on Science and Scripture. The fourth section tackles Comparative Religions, dealing specifically with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Finally there is an essay by Daniel Doriani of a more devotional nature on thinking holistically.

Having attempted to outline the broad scope of the book, I think it might be useful to focus on three essays which I found especially helpful in expanding my own thinking.

First, Vanhoozer on doctrinal development. The very terms used may sound suspiciously liberal. All I can hope to do here is to show how Vanhoozer’s argument is not just legitimate but necessary. It is not sufficient to reiterate the Reformation mantra *sola Scriptura*, without pausing to ask what this actually connotes. The sheer variety of genres which make up the Bible means that doctrines cannot simply be read straight off the page. Thus, to take one example, the doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere explicitly stated in Scripture, but early Christian experience of the worship of Jesus as the divine Son led to the OT monotheistic doctrine of God being “expanded” to include Jesus. In the course of time, the divinity of the Holy Spirit was acknowledged and Trinitarian orthodoxy became the norm. The essential point to note is that Scripture is the basic source, but interpreted in the light...
of both experience and doctrinal controversy. Thus, in this way, doctrine goes “beyond” the strict letter of Scripture. For those readers wanting to pursue this, I strongly recommend his 2005 book The Drama of Doctrine.

The idea of inerrancy is another contested area. Paul Helm’s helpful essay on this topic is written from a philosophical perspective. He develops his argument based on the premise that inerrancy connotes more than being wholly true. He takes issue with the well-known propositionalist approach by way of the newer and more fruitful speech–act approach so ably expounded by Vanhoozer. Helm’s sophisticated essay goes some way towards removing some wrong perceptions of this much misunderstood tenet.

The third essay I would commend is from the pen of Kirsten Birkett on another hotly debated question: Science and Scripture. Birkett writes as a specialist in the History and Philosophy of Science. In this lucidly written essay, she covers a lot of ground, guiding the reader expertly through some of the earlier history of this debate, before focusing on some contemporary writers and issues. One such issue concerns chronology, the age of the earth and the days of Genesis. She is able to demonstrate that the ‘days’ of Genesis have been controversial since the days of the early church. She helpfully characterises the most recent debate as the rise of Creationism: Scripture against Science versus the alternatives: evolution alongside Scripture, moving on to science dominating Scripture. Birkett develops these approaches by focusing on the writings of exponents of the latter two. In his book Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?, Denis Alexander’s answer to the question is that we don’t and his is a brave attempt as both an evolutionary scientist and a conservative Christian to explain why this is so. As representatives of the ‘science dominates Scripture’ position, Birkett selects the theoretical physicist John Polkinghorne and Arthur Peacocke who developed his views over a lifetime. It may be a little unfair to bracket these two since Polkinghorne is decidedly more orthodox than Peacocke. Birkett tacitly acknowledges this, but still sees Polkinghorne as a thinker whose scientific training drives his interpretation of certain key aspects of Scripture. There can be no doubt, however, that Polkinghorne’s numerous books written at a popular level have contributed greatly to our understanding of the place of science in relation to theological issues. Birkett sums up Peacocke’s position as a “naturalism that allows for theism, but not supernaturalism.”

The target readership of this book is not indicated, but it will certainly be read by both scholars and students.


This commentary has been thirteen years in the making. It has been worth the wait. Three specialist scholars on the Psalms have worked collaboratively, yet with their distinctive contributions marked (for the most part), to produce a strong, long, one-volume commentary on the Psalter.

The NICOT series is both evangelical and critical. The former highlights respect for the text, concern for theology and the desire to hear God’s voice for today through the text. The latter emphasises the appreciative use of critical methods in the making of the commentary.

The commentary comprises a lengthy introduction, brief orientations to each of the five books of the Psalter (and to The Songs of the Ascents), a fresh annotated translation of every Psalm preceded by opening comments and (usually) followed by detailed analysis of the stanzas (or, sometimes, verses) and some reflections. The commentary helpfully ends with three indexes, of authors, of names and subjects, and of scripture and other ancient literature. The index of names and subjects is somewhat intimidating, with around 280 places where “humanity” is discussed!

In terms of division of labour, DeClaissé-Walford wrote the introductory section on the canonical shaping of the Psalter, while Jacobson wrote the rest of the introduction. The psalms of Book I (1–41) are divided between Jacobson and Tanner (22, 25, 26, 31, 32, 35, 37, 38); Book II (42–72) are divided between DeClaissé-Walford (42–51) and Tanner (52–72); Tanner comments on the whole of Book III (73–89) and, in Book IV, on 90–99. Jacobson tackles the rest of the psalms of Book IV (100–106). DeClaissé-Walford addresses all the psalms of Book V (107–150). Only the introductions to Book I (Jacobson) and Book III (Tanner) are attributed.

At points the collaborative nature of the production of the commentary is evident. In the introduction, Jacobson
mentions “we” (e.g. 8-9, 19); there is a collective decision to regard the Hebrew word hesed as a loan word, like shalom, and leave it untranslated (8). At other points, differences are evident. Jacobson is more positive about constructing a theology of the Psalter than Tanner (44). Tanner is less convinced of the Psalms telling a story of Israel’s history than deClaisse-Walford (compare 685 with 21-38). Jacobson’s analysis of individual psalms is more detailed than the others (357 pages for 40 Psalms, as opposed to Tanner’s 303 pages for 56 Psalms and deClaisse-Walford’s 260 pages for 54 Psalms). Jacobson alone marks concluding comments on individual psalms with a title, “Reflections,” and his reflections are significantly longer than the others’. DeClaisse-Walford had finished her contribution by 2007, while Jacobson cites works years after that, both in his commentary and in the introduction. This reader would have appreciated an explanation of the assigning of the psalms, especially in Book I, and an account of the input that the other authors had to each individual’s work.

The introduction is well-written and incisive. The psalms’ authors are anonymous; the superscription ledavid did not originally indicate authorship. Historical superscriptions are a clue to early interpretation rather than an indicative of the occasion of composition. The discussions of form-criticism and canonical shaping are concise and strong. The select bibliography includes many of the main works in English. The compositional process of the commentary explains why deClaisse-Walford’s 2014 work, The Shape and Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter, occurs here, but not in the introductory section on shaping.

Commentary on the psalms themselves pays close attention to text-critical questions, gives careful translation and thorough attention to poetics and theology. This reader would have appreciated more in the way of biblical-theological / christological reflections in the final section. Overall, this is an impressive work, valuable for scholars, for pastors and for seminary students.

James Robson  
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Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy is one of the stronger volumes I have encountered in this series. As a project, it brings clarity and sensitive debate to a contentious subject of Christian identity. While Christians all see the Bible as very important, there remain substantial differences on how it should be approached and handled.

Each writer is given space to both introduce a viewpoint and critique the other outlooks. This ensures that the merits and liabilities of each perspective are brought to the fore. To guard against overly abstract arguments, each contributor is required by editorial directive to apply their perspective to three biblical case studies. The first case study, Joshua 6, invites exploration of the link between biblical interpretation and archaeology. The second involves Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9, which contain an ostensible contradiction. The third requires grappling with whether or not the teaching of Matthew 5 is terminally at odds with Deuteronomy 20.

The first contributor, Albert Mohler, affirms inerrancy along the lines of the notable (or notorious) Chicago Statement. For Mohler, the Bible – in its autographic form – is wholly inerrant. Mohler’s assertion appeals to historical evangelicalism and ancient Christianity. He sees particularist inerrancy as a longstanding “theological reflex” of the church.

The second contributor, Peter Enns, is sharply opposed to Mohler. While the Bible possesses a historical impulse, its depiction of events has been transformed by centuries of tradition. As such, inerrancy – as conceptualised by 20th century American evangelicalism – fails to capture the varied character of the biblical texts. More than this, it creates all sorts of problems. It stymies the kind of critical dialogue that is part-and-parcel to any healthy intellectual pursuit. In this posture, Enns is much more open to extra-biblical interpretative input than Mohler.

The third contributor, Michael Bird, sees inerrancy as a focal point of debate largely in the American context. Simply put, it is not exceedingly relevant to global evangelicalism. While invariant concepts have guarded the integrity of the American church, they are not an “essential facet” of the faith. Bird laments the way that American biblicalist battles have falsely assumed universal significance. He reminds us that the majority of evangelicals have been content with attesting biblical infallibility and truthfulness.

Kevin Vanhoozer’s perspective is a carefully tailored, nuanced view of robust biblical authority. Though Vanhoozer quickly contends that inerrancy is not the issue that “separates the sheep from the goats,” he does acknowledge its importance. After critiquing the Chicago Statement, Vanhoozer requisitions the “Augustinian Theology of Veracity” to develop an alternative. Accordingly, he characterises biblical inspiration as “the authors speaking truth in that which they affirm.”

Pastors, scholars, and students will all enjoy grappling with the insights in Wesley Hill’s fresh take on Paul’s letters and the Trinitarian faith of the Christian tradition. Mindful of the many pitfalls associated with clumsily reading Trinitarian categories into scriptural passages, Hill resists the move to set aside Trinitarian thought and instead deftly articulates the “hermeneutical fruitfulness of Trinitarian theology” for Pauline scholarship. As he crafts his argument, he expertly unites scriptural exegesis and systematic theology in ways that will inspire those who desire a closer relationship between the two and politely challenge anyone who might initially resist such a synthesis. Hill’s particular style of theological exegesis allows him to transcend the usual disciplinary boundaries and speak not only to those within the “guild of biblical and Pauline interpreters” but also to the broader Christian community of believers.

Hill displays an impressive command of the Pauline corpus and the relevant Pauline scholarship as he steadily builds a compelling argument for a shift away from debates about just how “high” or “low” Paul’s Christology really is. He suggests that these debates assume a vertical relationship between God and Jesus that subtly distracts or even prevents Christians from realising that we cannot really know who God is without reference to Jesus, and vice versa. Furthermore, conversations about “high” and “low” Christology tend to miss the Spirit’s constitutive role in Paul’s theology. This blind spot is of vital importance if Hill is correct that “...For Paul, the Spirit is necessary if we are to identify God and Jesus, just as we must have recourse to God’s and Jesus’ identities if we are to identify the Spirit.” According to Hill’s careful reading of key Pauline texts, Paul did not merely place Christological and pneumatological concepts alongside an independent, fully formed monotheism. Instead, Paul’s theology relies on a complex “matrix of relationality” (165) between Father, Son, and Spirit that frustrates attempts to portray Paul in binitarian or unitarian fashion. Hill thus argues that a carefully crafted Trinitarian hermeneutic that recognises different levels of speech about God in Paul’s writings best coheres with Paul’s intricate understanding of the relations between God, Jesus, and the Spirit.

Hill succeeds with this project for many reasons, but here I will highlight two. First, he does not shy away from the strongest arguments of those who disagree with his convictions about the Trinitarian character of Paul’s theology. Hill consistently chooses to engage the same scriptural passages that his interlocutors use in their formulations and shows how those passages could be read differently. His Trinitarian hermeneutic enables him to trace a clear continuity between Paul’s thought and later theological statements from both Eastern and Western perspectives. Second, in addition to being well researched and convincingly argued, *Paul and the Trinity* is pastorally relevant. As Hill notes throughout the book, Paul’s letters contain “tensions and trajectories” that push readers to try to move past surface level
readings. Hill’s book beautifully charts pathways for Christians to follow that move through Paul’s letters and into the mystery of the relational, triune God.

Nick Mayrand
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One telling difference between the Psalter of the ASB and that of Common Worship is that those rather awkward parts of some of the Psalms are no longer presented to us in parenthesis. There are no convenient square brackets releasing us from urging God to slay the wicked, or contemplating dashing Babylon’s children against the rocks. Instead are left with what Mark Klitsie describes as “raw scripture,” the biblical text without the difficult bits taken out. Having recently sat through a deeply thought provoking Bible study on the uncomfortable sections of Ps 139 I can recognise both the desire to avoid these harsh texts and the value of engaging with them. The importance of that engagement lies at the very heart of this fascinating book.

A central argument of Minority Reports is that post-modernity, with its distrust of meta-narratives, leaves open the possibility of giving greater space to discordant voices within scripture and for marginalised texts to be considered anew. When these texts are heard we face the contradictions of an omniscient and immutable God who can be surprised and change his mind. We have an all loving God who also expresses jealousy, anger, vengefulness and hate. Theology becomes messy and less buttoned down, as we encounter a God who is deeply, even vulnerably, invested in relationship with humanity, a “Most Moved Mover.”

It is very evident in his writing that Klitsie’s reading of scripture is deeply influenced by Jewish writers, drawing heavily on the work of Abraham Heschel, whom he describes as his virtual rabbi. The spectre of the Holocaust, and its influence on Jewish thought, lies behind some of his reflection on the paradox and ambiguity of God’s relationship with his people. He also notes that while Western-modernist thought seeks to iron out paradox, creating flows of logic, Hebraic thought contains “block logic” where apparently contradictory units of thought can sit alongside one another without needing to be harmonised or synthesised. It is here that he identifies some parallels with post-modern perspectives.

The book very helpfully critiques a sanitised reading of scripture in which God comfortably conforms to our own notions of what it means to be good. Instead he directs us towards the competing truths concerning YHWH whose holiness transcends our over manicured concepts of goodness. However, it does contain some paradoxes and contradictions of its own. While Minority Reports highlights the diversity of thought within scripture, the final, and very wide ranging, chapter on application occasionally lacks that space for competing truths, uncritically adopting very conservative perspectives, evidenced on issues such as gender. The book also exhibits its own marginalised texts. A section on ethnocentrism makes the critical point that exposure to the testimony of Christians from around the world will help Westerners see that they do not have a monopoly on truth about the Bible. However, the book gives scant space to Christian voices from the majority world, drawing almost exclusively on Western and Jewish thought. This seemed like a missed opportunity, particularly for a writer originating from South Africa.

This is a thought provoking book which does, as one endorsement notes, “rush in where angels fear to tread.” It poses some important questions and, while I found myself at odds with a number of its conclusions, it is well worth a read particularly for the way it engages with the parts of scripture that we may be tempted to put our own brackets around.

Colin Smith
Dean of Mission Education, CMS


Nearly thirty years after one of his first books, How to Read the Psalms (1987), the prolific pen (or keyboard) of Tremper Longman III has produced two-volumes-in-one in the revised series of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries.

Warrant for revision does not arise from the lack of quality of the previous volumes by Derek Kidner (1973-1975). Longman describes them as “incisive, tightly written, insightful” (10), an analysis with which I wholeheartedly agree. Nor does it derive from a change of outlook. The conviction of both the editor and the authors in the series remains that the Old Testament is the word of God for the contemporary church. Further,
the target audience is the same: thoughtful Bible readers, students and pastors. It is the conviction that the series should reflect an up-to-date reading of the text, taking into account recent scholarship, that demands fresh work. That same scholarship has meant that the format of the Old Testament series has changed slightly, with each Psalm having three sections: Context, Comment and Meaning. Longman has a distinctive perspective on the first and last of these, to which I shall presently return.

The opening introduction covers the expected territory: the title of the book; the titles of individual psalms; composition, collection, organisation, and use; genre and types of psalms; poetic style; theology of the book of Psalms; the Psalms and human experience; the psalms in worship.

There is unabashed acknowledgement of the role of editors or redactors in giving titles to the psalms, along with the insistence that such titles are “canonical” (24); to take these titles “seriously” is to view them as indicating authorship (e.g., ledavid = by David) and particular historical circumstances (31); these circumstances are intentionally omitted from the psalm itself, so as to enable wider use (32). Discussion of genre or type surprisingly omits mention of Hermann Gunkel and includes a new type, “remembrance” (41).

Throughout the commentary, there are helpful and lucid comments on the text. The distinctiveness lies in Longman’s treatment of Context and Meaning.

The series as a whole, drawing on recent linguistic emphasis that “texts communicate in large blocks” (8), expects that Context will consider the literary context of the passage within the book. Longman, however, is critical of the conclusions of Gerald Wilson (and others), who have, since Kidner’s commentary, discerned a shape to the Psalter as a whole (34-5). Longman maintains that there is “no systematic and overarching structure” to the Psalter, so “each psalm is treated separately from its immediate context” (54). Some connections are allowed or acknowledged. This is most obvious in the case of Ps. 1-2 as the introduction to the Psalter (35), Ps. 146-50 as the climactic doxology (25), and the Psalms of Ascent (409-10). It is also evident in occasional comments elsewhere (e.g., on Ps 16:8, “shall not be shaken” (cf. Ps 15; 105), on Ps. 20-1, “a pair of royal psalms” (121), and on 80:1-2 (cf. 79:13; 298). I wonder whether scepticism about overall shaping, even if justified, warrants a near-disregard for connections between Psalms (e.g., Ps. 1-2, “meditate/say” in 1:2; 2:1; “happy” in 1:6; 2:12; “way” and “perish” in 1:6; 2:12). The editorial explanation for the Meaning section is that this gives the “message the passage seeks to communicate within the book, highlighting its key theological themes” (8). Longman moves beyond this, sometimes a bit too quickly, but with characteristic biblical-theological acumen rooted in Jesus’ warrant in Luke 24, to help readers consider the Psalms christologically. The three main ways of making connections are very helpful for readers and preachers: the psalms as words to Christ, as words of Jesus, and as words about Jesus (48-50).

This commentary does not supersede Kidner’s, but provides a worthwhile complement.

James Robson
Wycliffe Hall, Oxford


When I picked up Moberly’s Old Testament Theology, I was expecting to read a distillation of theological themes from the Hebrew Bible and an exposition of their influence and impact on the theologies of the New Testament authors. In fact Moberly’s book is much more interesting that that! Instead of theological abstraction he takes key texts from the Old Testament and examines how they have been treated in the subsequent tradition. Rabbinic and Christian theological sources are referenced but Moberly reads the text as a Christian exegete. As the sub-title says, Moberly reads the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. Reading *Old Testament Theology* felt like I was sitting in on a brilliant seminar on the Old Testament; the book is the fruit of years of scholarship and prayer.

The eight main chapters cover eight texts/topics from the Old Testament. Chapter One deals brilliantly with the *Shema* in Deut. 6 and the theme of loving God. In Chapter Two Moberly grapples with the very difficult concept of *Herem*. I found this chapter to be ultimately disappointing, perhaps I hoped for a “solution” to a problematic tradition where none exists. Chapter Three is an entertaining and informative exegesis of the manna from heaven in Exodus 16. Chapter Four, one of the highlights of the book, looks at the issue of whether God changes His mind or not. Chapter Five, Isaiah and Jesus, is the one that I was most looking forward to reading and proved to be perhaps the weakest in the book; not for any real problem or shortcoming, rather the exegesis was simply not as interesting and engaging as the rest of
the book. Chapters Six and Seven, Jonah and Psalms of Lament, were for me the most thought provoking in the whole book and both sent me not only to my study but, more importantly to prayer and worship. In Chapter Eight he looks at Job and asks what wisdom is in the Biblical tradition. In the Epilogue Moberly lays out for the reader his understanding of how to do Christian theological exegesis of the Old Testament that learns from and engages with other traditions, but retains its Christian perspective.

This book is well written and the style is clear and readable; it works in two different ways, first as brilliant exegesis of particular texts and issues within Biblical theology, and second more generally as a model for how to do Biblical theology. I learned a great deal about the Old Testament reading this book, and I enjoyed reading it. Old Testament Theology is the fruit of many years of prayerful grappling with the text of the Bible.

In the preface Moberly writes: "I try to model a way of doing Old Testament Theology that is built around a dialectic between ancient text and contemporary questions, within a Christian frame of reference that is alert to other frames of reference." Moberly amply succeeds in these aims and in doing so he models for us a way of engaging with the Biblical text that is both scholarly and faithful. Reading Moberly's Old Testament Theology increased my understanding of the Bible considerably; but more than this it deepened my love of the Bible and of the God who reveals himself in the Bible. Thoroughly recommended.

Tim Gill
Liverpool


The title of this book is intimidating. I started reading it on an airplane; I was a bit worried what the folks next to me would think! Notwithstanding, this project is one to which I will return time and again. It is a gift that has been many years in the making, reflecting the thoughtfulness therein.

Provan does not systematically work through the books of the Old Testament. Instead, his chapters are organised around a series of ten questions. These questions are chosen because they are “precisely the kind that religions and philosophies have always tried to answer.” These “big questions” govern the book’s shape. Chapter 2, for example, takes up the question: What is the world? Here, in tune with Genesis, Provan advances several key points: the world is not eternal, it was created by a person, it has order, and creation is distinct from God. The points are developed against the backdrop of prevalent ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. Along these lines, Provan displays the Old Testament’s subversion and displacement of familiar ancient theories about creation. Part-and-parcel to this is a construal of “Eden” that is both intriguing and compelling.

In each chapter, one discovers a delightful series of historical, literary, and poetic anecdotes and illustrations. Besides studying the Bible, Provan is well read in ancient philosophy, literature, and scientific theory. He is also well-versed in three extant theories about the world, alternative “big stories” about the nature and purpose of creation. These include the “axial age theory” (connected with Karl Jaspers, Karen Armstrong, and John Hick), the “dark green golden age theory” (associated with the work of David Suzuki and Thomas Berry), and the “scientific new age theory” (linked with new atheists such as Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris). As he articulates the theological, material, and moral vision of the Old Testament, he does so over and against these influential rival narratives.

Among its many virtues, readers will be pleased to encounter the comparative discussions at the end of each chapter. These reflections contrast the Old Testament’s perspective on a given topic with alternative outlooks on offer. For example, after describing the function of hope in the Old Testament, Provan surveys ideas about hope found in other religious traditions (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.). These comparisons enable the unique features of biblical reality to gain clarity and appeal. This facet of his project is more than timely.

In drawing out the distinct features of Old Testament religion, Provan gives profound exhibition to its dangerous ideas. The religion of the Old Testament is dangerous because it unmasks idols. It exposes ideologies that all too often demean human dignity. It is dangerous to those who worship family, tribe, or nation instead of God. It opposes the vestment of such constructs with sacred qualities, using them then to justify the blood sacrifices required to sustain them. It is dangerous to all who worship money and possessions, which all too easily collude in the economic trampling of the world’s least. It is dangerous to those who espouse the utopianism so often at the heart of modern economic ideology. The Old Testament is dangerous to those who think that humanity is merely the result
of evolution and who would, in correlation, organise society along such brutish principles. In these and other ways, Provan reminds that the theological vision of Israel’s Scriptures is seriously dangerous. At least in its opposition to pernicious ideologies and practices and norms that are readily taken for granted in our world.

If pressed to comment on the book’s drawbacks, I would only mention one thing. I would like to see a bit more engagement with others who would guide our reading of the Old Testament. How might Provan square with Brueggemann’s Testimony/Counter-Testimony rubric? Or Christopher Seitz’ efforts to approach the Old Testament in light of the New? Such supplements, perhaps, warrant a second volume. If so, I’ll anticipate it, for my suggestion here does not diminish the accomplishment of Provan’s undertaking.

Roger Revell  
St Peter’s Fireside Anglican Church, Vancouver


The True Herod is a book that Geza Vermes long wished to publish, but sadly the project only came to fruition after his death. The lavishly illustrated colour volume is an easy and engaging read, even if many Christian readers may have difficulties with some of Vermes’ arguments.

The book is divided into three sections. The first introduces the historical background to Herod’s reign, the second the man himself, and the third his descendants. Each contains maps, photographs of historical artifacts and ruins as well as very accessible text. This is a very engaging and readable book.

The account of Herod’s own life is beautifully supported by many photographs, which the extant ruins of many of Herod’s great building projects. Vermes’ mastery of the historical detail provides a rich and detailed portrait of Herod’s life, supporting Vermes’ central argument that Herod was not the evil man most Christians regard him as being. He regards him as a many-faceted personality, capable of reaching great heights as well as sinking to great depths. He was both staggeringly generous and staggeringly cruel. Vermes wants the reader to appreciate the complexity of Herod’s personality, and in this he succeeds admirably.

Where Christians may take issue is over Vermes’ views on Herod in relation to Jesus. Vermes casually dismisses Matthew’s account of the slaughter of the innocents as a fabrication, arguing it to be a fantasy based on Pharaoh’s order to kill the Hebrew boys. Vermes argues Matthew is working with Jewish Midrash of this story rather than historical fact. However, the standard Christian argument that even if it is unattested elsewhere, it is still in keeping with the character of Herod the king is, in my view, just as persuasive as Vermes’ assertion. After all, by Vermes’ own argument, Herod could be incredibly cruel. To give but one example, when Herod was summoned to Alexandria to appear before Mark Anthony in order to account for the death of the High Priest Aristobulus (killed on Herod’s orders), Herod gave orders that his beautiful young wife Mariamme be killed should he fail to return.

The final section of the book, which covers Herod’s descendants, brings them to life. It is especially useful for those wishing to clarify who all the different Herods mentioned in the New Testament are, and for understanding the relationships between them. Here also Vermes’ own views are clear, as he, for example contrasts the New Testament’s very negative picture of Herod Agrippa with the much more positive one given by Josephus. I found myself wondering why in Vermes’ view, Matthew and Luke must be subjective and biased, while Josephus objective and balanced.

This is a very engaging book, and would be a valuable resource for libraries. Christian readers will probably not always agree with Vermes’ dismissal of New Testament sources, but this should spur them to examine their own assumptions, rather than just meet assertion with counter-assertion. All sources have their biases, as do all interpreters of sources. Vermes’ book has much to offer, and even if I did not agree with all his conclusions, my understanding of the Herodian dynasty has been enriched by reading this book.

Tom Wilson  
St Philip’s Centre, Leicester


This is a timely and useful book, a slim volume which is an attempt to offer a summary of his much bigger two-volume study Paul and the Faithfulness of God. The larger work is itself the final volume in Wright’s massive four-part study begun in 1992, with the overall title Christian Origins and the Question of God. The scholarship demonstrated in this monumental undertaking is breathtaking and Wright’s work has been reviewed in glowing terms by many of his peers. However, it will come as no surprise that he has also
ruffled many feathers, especially amongst Evangelicals, since Wright unambiguously identifies himself as a member of that constituency. Why then the furor? To answer that question, it would be necessary to offer a resume of Wright’s entire project, but in a brief review, that is not possible. I therefore propose to look briefly at his treatment of Justification, since this is regarded by Evangelicals as a, if not the, key Pauline doctrine. To put it simply, Wright believes that Justification is not about how someone becomes a Christian, but is a declaration that they have become a Christian. Or again, Justification is not an account of how people get saved, but a proclamation of the lordship of Christ. To understand just how Wright arrives at this conclusion, it would be necessary to understand his treatment of the basic Jewish doctrines of Monotheism, Election and Eschatology. These in turn lead us back to a fresh appraisal of Jewish self-understanding in Second Temple Judaism and the status of Gentiles in relation to the Covenant. Looked at in this fashion, it begins to be possible to see how terms like Justification and Righteousness find their place in the broader context of Paul’s theology against his background as a Pharisaic Jew.

The book contains five chapters: 1. Paul and the Messiah, Knowing the Name or Having the Mind. 2. How to Begin with Jesus, and How Did He Come to Know It? 3. Apocalyptic, Covenantal Narrative or Cosmic Invasion? 4. The Justified People of God, Messianic Israel or Saved Sinners? and 5. Theology, Mission and Method, Paul’s and Ours. Any reader, keen to gain an introduction to Wright’s work will find here the ideal starting point. Wright has an uncanny ability in explaining difficult or unfamiliar topics in an accessible and engaging style. If the appetite is sufficiently whetted by this exercise, then I would recommend moving onto Wright’s Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision, a book not in the main series, but written in response to The Future of Justification by John Piper, an attempt to refute Wright’s principle arguments. Wright’s is a combative book, but not at all hostile as he patiently rehearses his basic position with helpful exegesis of the important texts.

It will be evident from the above that Wright’s work has attracted much criticism, mainly from those who maintain the traditional understanding of Paul stemming from Reformed positions. But it has also been welcomed by a good number of Evangelicals who regard his radical attempt to breathe new energy into the study of early Christianity as an exciting, even exhilarating change of direction. But it is perhaps ironic that when the dust has settled, the Tom Wrights and the John Pipers are fundamentally on the same side in placing their trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead and promises those in Christ a glorious future in His presence.

Howard Bigg
Cambridge

3. DOCTRINE AND PHILOSOPHY


Few aspects of life lead to more passionate discussion and debate than religion and sports, so those who try to bring the two together face quite a challenge. Anthony Maranise tries to negotiate this tricky task by expounding on practical experiences as an athlete, coach, and sports chaplain that have convinced him that God can and should be found in the sporting world despite the raised eyebrows that such claims often inspire. He offers his takes on a rather stunning number of topics ranging from the pressures of parents on youth athletes to Trinitarian doctrine to what qualifies as an appropriate tattoo. At his best, Maranise is able to weave the theological and the athletic together as he does in his discussion of sports and the Benedictine integration of ora et labora (prayer and work). Unfortunately, some questionable assumptions and deeply problematic arguments tend to overshadow such moments of insight.

Maranise states openly that his book is primarily a work of spirituality rather than an academic text, a distinction that those used to the latter will need to keep in mind as they read. Maranise draws on personal experiences and his particular religious sensibilities in an informal, conversational style that conveys his passion for the task at hand. His willingness to make known his commitments may work well for readers with affinities for a deeply countercultural Christian worldview. Readers who do not fit that profile may still find the book of interest but should expect to struggle with certain assumptions and turns of phrase throughout the text. For example, a particular political agenda surfaces awkwardly at various points in the text, perhaps most evident in Maranise’s blunt dismissal of those who do not vote in a certain manner. Also, the author’s attempts to anticipate objections from his readers tend to be rhetorical caricatures of “fundamentalist” positions that few actually occupy (e.g. 69, 107).
I agree with Maranise that sports and spirituality are not mutually exclusive, but I fear that this particular effort to connect the two fails to deliver a healthy synthesis. Efforts to speak theologically about sports must attend to the messy details of our existence as embodied creatures. Unfortunately, Maranise tends toward dualisms that cause him to miss opportunities for a more compelling account. For example, he appeals to “simple, basic metaphysics” to say that the “spiritual world” is “more real than anything we shall ever know or experience in the finite physical world.” These competing worlds align with stark divisions he draws along the way between temporal bodies and eternal souls or rational thoughts and wild emotions. His worries about the physical body as a source of sin are especially clear in the way he chooses to employ Augustine’s Confessions. He chooses to focus on Augustine’s struggles with issues of bodily temptation (including a strange, undocumented reference to legends that Augustine fathered up to fourteen illegitimate children) and Augustine’s “cold-turkey” conversion in the garden as he builds a case for a sport-spirituality of self-denial. Even more troubling than this surface-level reading of Augustine’s long, winding path to conversion is Maranise’s willingness to change (without any explanation) the scriptural passage that Augustine “picked up and read” to one that apparently better suits the sort of disembodied spirituality he is advocating (Luke 9:23 replaces Romans 13:13-14).

Despite the book’s significant flaws, Maranise has provided a passionate book capable of provoking further reflection on the links between sport and spirituality. I certainly do not recommend that readers take this book as anything resembling the last word on these matters, but perhaps wrestling with Maranise’s claims could be beneficial for those who wish to help Christians sort out the potential relationship between their sports and their faith.

Nicholas Mayrand
University of Dayton

4. ETHICS AND PASTORAL MINISTRY


When, two years ago, I briefed my newly-arrived diocesan bishop that, in the previous eight years, only two curacies in the diocese had failed he expressed delighted amazement that the casualty rate was so low. This book perhaps helps to redress that balance! It is based on a series of case studies, fictitious but built on actual material derived from a recent online survey of curates and training incumbents. Each one forms the subject of a chapter and they are addressed by means of a three-way conversation between the authors. All three have wide experience of the Church of England, two being ordained and one being a clergy husband. Here they are making use of their professional expertise – one is a theological educator, one a therapist and one a management consultant.

Their conversations are warm, good-natured and supportive – there is no competition or point scoring and they are genuinely concerned to get to the bottom of difficult situations and to encourage good practice. Indeed each chapter ends with “points for reflection” for curates, for training incumbents and for dioceses. I guess that these three groups will be the target audience for the book but therein lies a weakness since its focus is broad rather than sharp and any one of the three groups might consider it was not actually sharp enough for their specific needs. Nevertheless, being about practical issues and being written in a conversational style the book has a freshness and maintains a rhythm that keeps the reader’s attention and does not drag.

There is the minor anachronism of references to “IME 4-7,” which is now “IME Phase Two” thus dating an otherwise up-to-date book.

But two substantive criticisms may be made. First the overwhelming bias towards stipendiary ministry. Now of course it can be argued that when a stipendiary curacy goes wrong this can be far more traumatic since both home and source of income are affected. This is undeniable yet since so many curacies are now of self-supporting (over 47% of ordinations in 2012 were to self-supporting curacies) it is highly unrepresentative. Living in their own homes SSMs may not feel “under siege” in
the same way that some stipendiaries do but there are other pressures that specifically affect them and this book fails to address them. It wasn’t until Chapter 7 that the first reference to a self-supporting curate was made. But to regard Chapter 7 as addressing SSM issues would be mistaken since that case study is really about a curate with health problems and the realism (or otherwise) of ministry working agreements. The fact that the curate in question is an SSM appears to be purely coincidental.

I accept that my second criticism may be regarded as less than fair since the title of the book is Curacies and How to Survive Them. For some years now I have been giving a talk entitled: ‘Surviving or Thriving?’ to the curates for whom I am responsible. It is a challenge to make the most of their ministries, to flourish despite the inevitable difficulties and to rise above mere survival mode. And therein lies my concern; to focus purely on negative case studies can be seen as colluding with the “curacies from hell” narrative that has become far too prevalent in the contemporary church. Consequently, though this is an honest and thoughtful book with good practical advice, the overall feel is a discouraging one because it does not tell the whole story! A curacy needs to be a time not merely to survive, but to thrive and to flourish. But perhaps the authors have a companion volume in mind…?

John Darch
Diocese of Blackburn


This book is, in the author’s words, “an attempt to see what it means for Christian life to put reconciliation at the heart of who we are and what we do.” In doing so, he aims to follow the lead of the apostle Paul, whose central concern was “to inspire reconciling communities of Christ to illustrate and proclaim God’s reconciliation of the world.” So the book is not a “how to” of reconciliation so much as a call to a way of life, geared towards a “full and complete realisation that we are embraced by the infinite love that is God.” It draws on Brian Castle’s experience of ministry in Africa and in theological education before being appointed Bishop of Tonbridge.

The first part of the book lays out what Castle calls a tapestry of reconciliation. There are, he suggests, certain drivers for reconciliation: memory, victimhood, forgiveness, otherness and gift (i.e. reconciliation is not within any one person’s control). These “provide coherence to groups or individuals in their seeking of reconciliation.” Furthermore, one can characterise 15 “marks”, at least some of which need to be present if genuine reconciliation is being pursued. These are the marks: reconciliation is a lifetime’s quest and journey; it flourishes and deepens in a climate of celebration and thanksgiving; it is a source of new energy, life and hope; it draws all involved into the “desert”; it requires listening; storytelling and narrative are important; it involves conflict; it is costly, painful and requires self-giving; it requires transformation; it involves living with contradiction; it is sustained by hope; it requires willingness to be vulnerable; it is confirmed, celebrated and strengthened by ritual; reconcilers establish reconciling communities; relationship is a cornerstone of reconciliation.

The second half of the book explores what a reconciling life, a reconciling church and a reconciling society may look like, making connections with the “curacies from hell” narrative that has become far too prevalent in the contemporary church. Consequently, though this is an honest and thoughtful book with good practical advice, the overall feel is a discouraging one because it does not tell the whole story! A curacy needs to be a time not merely to survive, but to thrive and to flourish. But perhaps the authors have a companion volume in mind…?

John Darch
Diocese of Blackburn

CHURCHMISSIONSOCIETY.ORG/ANVIL – LEARN, PRAY, PARTICIPATE IN MISSION

It is hard to believe that it is over a decade since the publication of the Windsor Report sought to address the splits within Anglicanism over same-sex relationships. This book, by the Archbishop of Adelaide, is a reflection on the nature of Anglicanism and its ecclesiology – its concern for historical contextuality, dispersed authority and proceeding through persuasion and reception of new ideas – in the light of these developments and earlier tensions over women’s ordination. It offers both an account and interpretation of recent decades and its own proposals as to how conflicts could be better handled from an Anglican perspective.

The second and third chapters offer a helpful overview of the series of reports from The Grindrod Report on women bishops for Lambeth 1988 through the Eames Commissions and Virginia Report to Windsor and then the development of the covenant. There is much here of value but the account also raises some questions. These relate to gaps in the history (such as the growth of the language of “instruments” and ACC reports on the Communion) and in the secondary literature (such as Doe’s major study of the covenant which is not referenced) and also to emphases (too much is made of the draft covenant in an appendix to Windsor and, despite his post-colonial concerns, it is the northern rather than Global South critiques of the covenant drafts that get attention). I remained unpersuaded by his overall argument that Windsor and the final covenant text marked a significant centralisation of authority. This fails to recognise the protection of provincial autonomy internally while setting out agreed processes to oversee the inter-provincial life of the Communion.

The next two chapters set out some of the bases for Bishop Driver’s critique and own proposals: a study of open reception and an informative account of the distinctive structures of his own province’s polity and how it might help the Communion as a whole. He then sets out a way in which the Communion might move from restraining destructive conflict (the focus until now) to enabling appropriate and creative conflict within koinonia. His vision of a “polity of persuasion” with a focus on relationality, giving time and space for discernment, conciliarity and creative conflict has much that appeals although it is surprising that more attention is not given here to the Continuing Indaba Project (perhaps reflecting the fact no Australian diocese was involved in the initial conversations). There remains, however, a need for more clarity about how churches or Instruments should respond when the Communion clearly views a development as an unbiblical error and calls on provinces to pause but is ignored, as happened over same-sex unions but not over women’s ordination. Here his important critique (most fully set out in his final chapter) of the idealism behind appealing to Trinitarian communion as a model for ecclesial communion needs to go beyond the realities of human frailty and brokenness to the need to respond to sin and disobedience.

Questions of faith and order within global Anglicanism, although currently not as high-profile, will inevitably surface again soon. This book is a valuable contribution which needs to be read by all interested in how we now move forward. Despite its weaknesses, its vision of a “polity of persuasion” as a gift that Anglicans can offer to the wider church and the world is an attractive one which needs to shape the new structures that are going to have to develop if we are in any sense to remain a global Communion.

Andrew Goddard
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It would be interesting to know how much the average Christian knows of the life and theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He or she may be vaguely aware of *Letters and Papers from Prison* and maybe *Cost of Discipleship* but probably not much else. Some may know that 10 of the plinths above the west door of Westminster Abbey are occupied by statues of 20th-century martyrs, one of which is the subject of this splendid biography. It follows hard on the heels of the biography by the German scholar Ferdinand Schlingensiepen *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945, A Biography* published in Germany in 2006 and translated into English in 2010. Both cover similar themes, but for me, Marsh is the more gripping account. Stephen Plant, himself a distinguished Bonhoeffer scholar, in the blurb, calls Marsh “the finest Bonhoeffer scholar of his generation.”

Unlike most protestant theologians of the 20th century, Bonhoeffer was not the son of a minister. Rather, Marsh tells us, he was the sixth of eight children (his twin sister Sabine being the seventh) born into a family of
prodigiously talented humanists who would rather spend religious holidays with relatives or friends than in church. The young Dietrich could have pursued a musical career as a pianist, but it became clear quite early on that he wanted to study theology. It seems that his mother Paula recognised his attraction to ultimate questions. This review will attempt to trace the course of Bonhoeffer’s relatively short life in the context of his quest for truth and its practical outworking in the turbulent years culminating in his death on 9 April 1945 at the hands of the Nazis barely a month before the end of the Second World War.

Dietrich was aware of his exceptional intellect and he graduated from Grunewald Gymnasium by the age of 17, two years ahead of most of his class. He became fluent in Latin and Greek, competent in Hebrew and French and over the next five years he would learn Italian, Spanish and English. Dietrich also loved travel and in an extended visit to Italy in 1923/1924 he was captivated by Rome and awed by the pageantry of the Catholic celebrations of Easter week in St Peter’s Basilica. Although he never seriously contemplated embracing Roman Catholicism, Dietrich was deeply affected by what one might call “the beauty of holiness.”

But university studies beckoned and Dietrich found himself at the theological faculty of Berlin’s Friedrich-Wilhelm University at that time dominated by three liberal protestant luminaries, Adolf von Harnack, Karl Holl and Reinhold Seeberg. But Dietrich soon gave notice that he was not content to tread the well-worn paths of liberal Protestantism. When he submitted his doctoral dissertation, Sanctorum Communio in 1927, his examiners were slightly baffled. Its themes adumbrated Dietrich’s emerging vision and life’s work: Christ, community and concreteness were the key words, his conviction that knowledge of God begins in personal encounter. Apart from this, the doctrine of justification vanishes into thin air.

For Bonhoeffer, people mattered and in the course of his life, he entered into several intense relationships, both intellectual and personal. At this stage, the publication of his dissertation brought Dietrich into contact with Karl Barth who recognised in the young scholar a kindred spirit who was not afraid to challenge the status quo. Dietrich devoured the early volumes of Barth’s Church Dogmatics and the two men remained in contact. Dietrich agreed with Barth on most of the basics: the theologian must be a servant of the church and the basis for thinking truthfully about God is Jesus Christ. But he found Barth’s imperviousness to the social and ethical dimensions of doctrine disconcerting. Dietrich found theology in America shallow and disappointing when he spent a year at Union Theological Seminary, New York in 1930/31, although he was fascinated by the energetic American social theology of Reinhold Niebuhr.

Bonhoeffer’s need for close relationships is nowhere better illustrated than in his friendship with Eberhard Bethge, who survived the war and wrote the first full-length of his friend and mentor. The two met at Finkenwalde, where in 1935, Bonhoeffer set up a seminary for pastors of the German confessing church as the menace of Hitler’s Nazism was making things increasingly difficult for those who were determined to remain faithful to the gospel when many took the line of least resistance in joining the state-sanctioned German Christian church. This experiment in communal living appealed to Dietrich’s ascetic streak which existed quite happily alongside his love of high culture. Bethge soon became Dietrich’s inseparable companion, although there was never any hint of sexual impropriety. Dietrich had never felt such a bond with a female, although he later became engaged to Maria von Wedemeyer, his death preventing their marriage. Finkenwalde represented a fusion of theology and life and produced a delightful little book Life Together. But it was not to last. The seminary was closed by the Gestapo in 1937.

Bonhoeffer was now a marked man. It is remarkable, however that as Marsh observes, for all his activity and spadework on behalf of the Confessing Church he had been mostly passive, “ever bobbing and weaving amid the raining blows of authority, never standing still to face the consequences of real action.” But in New York again in June 1939, he forged a new resolve to join the struggle in Germany that would cost him his life. Dietrich would pray and plot for the defeat of his country. He was finally arrested in April 1943 and remained in Tegel prison until shortly before his execution at Flossenberg on 9 April 1945.

There are aspects of Bonhoeffer’s life and theology which have not been covered, perhaps most importantly his decision to be involved in the plot on Hitler’s life. What had become of Bonhoeffer’s theology of non-violence? Again, his radical call to discipleship has not been explored, but his book The Cost of Discipleship is still a classic. Finally, how is his coining of the expression ‘religionless Christianity’ to be understood today?

This is a truly great account of a truly great man of God, and I heartily commend it.

Howard Bigg
Cambridge

This stimulating book is a published version of the author’s PhD thesis presented to the University of Nottingham. It appears in the Ashgate Contemporary Ecclesiology Series. Percy has filled a gap in relation to the controversial issue of the application of feminine terminology to God. The stimulus for the topic of the book was her ministry as parish priest in Holy Trinity, Millhouses, Sheffield for seven years. Her purpose is to reflect on her experiences of being a mother and a parish priest, more specifically on the “analogous relationship between the contingent nature of the practice of mothering on the one hand, and ministry on the other.” The analogy is a good one since the contingency arises from the fact that the work of both mothers and priests is connected to specific people who are constantly adapting and changing.

After a brief introduction, the book is divided into three parts, each containing three chapters. Part 1, Exploring Ministry, examines (a) Ministry: Ontology and Function, a useful study of differing theologies of ordination which have evolved over time, (b) Ministry: Relationship and Grace, which recognises both the universal priesthood of believers and the ministerial priesthood of persons commissioned and recognised as having a more specific role to minister and bear witness to the gracious work of God, but without being regarded as ontologically different from those to whom they minister. At this point, Percy introduces the maternal metaphor as an aid to exploring the role of a parish priest. (c) Maternal Imagery for Clergy in the Christian Tradition. Here, Percy looks at complicated issues around the idea of “Mother Church” and the Roman Catholic attention to Mary as having an ongoing role as a nurturing mother. As an Anglican, Percy does not endorse this tradition, but does see the appropriateness of regarding the Church as a mother nurturing her children without following the Catholic insistence on the essential maleness of the ordained priesthood.

Part 2, Mothering: Gender, Theory and Practice, explores the more cultural and sociological aspects of mothering. These three chapters deal with (a) Mothering: Gender and Culture. In this heavily contested area, Percy tackles issues such as gender and priesthood, contrasting the essentialism of a male-only priesthood as required by Rome with constructivist theories of gender, taking in the Conservative Evangelical view of the biblical idea of essential male headship. Percy helpfully challenges stereotypical notions of what is masculine and feminine. “Defining differences beyond basic biology is problematic.” (b) Mothering: Questions of Instinct and Inter-Subjectivity. Here, Percy examines specific issues concerning the nature of mothering. It may sound logical to think that the bodily experiences of mothers makes them the natural carers and nurturers of children. She questions this, however, in suggesting that this is more of a social expectation than it being an essential female skill. Whoever takes responsibility for the care of a child – male or female – has to learn and develop the necessary skills. (c) Mothering as a Practice. In this chapter, Percy draws on the work of the political philosopher Hannah Arendt. Human activity can be divided into three categories. Labouring deals with immediate human needs, while work provides for the production of lasting objects. The third, action, concerns human interaction – speech, relationships and politics in a broad sense. Summarising her argument, Percy identifies mothering with labour and action. Work is not a suitable category as it is not concerned with something with the associated ideas of blueprints, formulas and targets. Action is open-ended and concerns what mothers do as necessary for the flourishing of the child.

In part 3 Percy applies her earlier findings to ministerial practice in Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry. (a) Chapter 7 is a densely argued study in Using Mothering to Think about Ministry. She focuses her attention on parish ministry although it may be applied in more specialised sector ministries. She draws a direct parallel between mothering and ministry as involving committed, attentive and responsive relationships and this naturally equates to the building up of the body of Christ. She explores the ideas of preservation, fostering growth and acceptability by which she means the requirement to work within the structures of (in this case) Anglicanism in all its complexities. It also has the dimension of the priest’s acceptability before God. (b) Chapter 8 deals with The Virtue of Humility and the Issue of Power. The abuse of power by clergy is not uncommon and Percy warns against looking for blind obedience which she describes as “a degenerate form of proper trust.” But the priest does have a responsibility to model values and on occasions to challenge behaviour and holding these in balance is no easy task. Finally, chapter 9 uses maternal language to articulate some examples of parish ministry. She treats such matters as multitasking and multi-attending, which involves the ability to move between different environments without bringing inappropriate attitudes into each. Most of what she says here could be articulated without the support of maternal language, but the parallels certainly add weight to the various examples.

This is a book which might usefully form the basis
of post-ordination training and would provide both challenge and encouragement to those engaged in parish ministry. Readers might also like to know that Emma Percy has also written a more popular book with the intriguing title What Clergy Do Especially When it Looks Like Nothing. I commend both.

Howard Bigg
Cambridge


Stephen Plant is Dean of Trinity Hall, Cambridge whose doctoral work was on Bonhoeffer’s theology has brought together a collection of articles previously published in various journals. The book is divided into three sections, dealing with historical context, Bonhoeffer and the Bible and Bonhoeffer and Ethics. It is likely to be of interest to historians and academics who wish to bring themselves up to date on Bonhoeffer scholarship or to consult particular chapters. There are, however, some chapters which non-specialists will find helpful and which offer a flavour of Bonhoeffer’s approach to the message of the Bible and perhaps correct certain misconceptions. An obvious example is the expression “religionless Christianity” often bandied about to convey the impression of Bonhoeffer as a dangerous radical. A response to this may be found in chapter 3, ‘How Theologians Decide: Theologians on the Eve of Nazi Rule’. Here, Plant goes into some detail about the reasons why theologians decided to either to oppose or endorse Nazism. In hindsight, the case against Hitler seems clear-cut, but as Plant explains, the situation was less so at the time. Chapter 4 is also well-worth reading. This is the A S Peake memorial lecture delivered by Plant to mark the centenary of Bonhoeffer’s birth. A S Peake (of Peake’s commentary fame), is portrayed as an old-fashioned liberal in his handling of Scripture, which for him is nothing more than a record of human experience of revelation. Bonhoeffer, by contrast, is first and foremost a biblical theologian, who while acknowledging that a return to the pre-critical era was not possible, nevertheless saw the Bible as a witness to God’s saving purposes. Plant takes as an example the treatment of Genesis by both writers. Peake predictably begins with the question of sources and tells us that the proper approach to the text is one of “dispassionate enquiry.” For his part, Bonhoeffer is content to see the two creation narratives as complementary, but is clear that the combined narratives are “quite simply the source of knowledge about the origin of humankind” expressing the physical nearness of the Creator to the creature’. Of course, Plant recognises that historical criticism was not understood in precisely the same way by the two writers, but nevertheless, Bonhoeffer did not find that such criticism was an obstacle to a proper theological interpretation of Scripture. Indeed, it may be argued that his approach has borne the more lasting fruit. Finally, I would recommend chapter 5, entitled ‘Guilt and Promise in Bonhoeffer’s Jonah’. The way in which Plant weaves together Bonhoeffer’s personal circumstances and the text of Jonah is beautifully done. I would add that the final chapter ‘Reading Bonhoeffer in Britain’ will help the reader to understand the changing fortunes of Bonhoeffer’s theological legacy in Britain and perhaps encourage some to explore this further.

Howard Bigg
Cambridge


I received my review copy of New Morning Mercies back in November 2014 and resolved to begin using it daily in 2015. I also decided that I would not write a review for the March 2015 edition of Anvil as the timings of getting the review published would mean I would have written it only a month or six weeks into using it. I wanted to see if I still wanted to read New Morning Mercies every day after more than six months. And I did.

Tripp has written a genuine Gospel devotional, 366 thoughts (yes, it does include one for 29 February should it be needed) that remind you every day of your need for grace and the wonderful mercy of God in making that grace freely available. Tripp writes with a pastor’s heart, recognising that our willful disobedience towards God is at the root of all human problems. He writes to remind us that each and every day we must return to God, whose mercies are new every morning, utterly dependent on his grace.

Each day there is a single page to read. There is a headline thought, and then that thought it expanded upon in some detail, ending with a suggested Bible passage to read. The headline thoughts were originally tweets that Tripp shared each day, and that have now become the basis of more substantial reflections. Tripp varies between poetry and prose, between exposition of Bible passages and discussion of his pastoral experience.
This variety is what has help hold my attention over the months. The outline structure is the same each day, but the precise shape of the content varies. Whatever form it takes, it is always well written, easy to read and with a clear challenge to live a grace filled life.

I read New Morning Mercies as part of my morning devotional pattern, but for those with more limited time, there is enough here to become the foundation of a daily quiet time. Perhaps a short prayer at the end of each reflection might have helped some, but I am content to be pushed towards my own conversation with God. My only real request is that Tripp writes a companion volume for the evenings, to help me ground my reflection on the day in God’s grace and commit the joys and sorrows into his hands before I sleep.

Tom Wilson
St Philips Centre, Leicester


The former Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology at Birmingham University has given us a profoundly moving theological memoir on parenting, love and disability. Building on her 1985 work in this area Face to Face, which was a narrative essay in the theology of suffering, Arthur’s Call is a masterful example of a theological and pastoral memoir.

The book divides into seven chapters; the first three of which are written primarily as biography. In the opening seventy pages we are given a parent’s eye view of what it is like to live with a child with severe learning disability. We are granted access to Young’s inner life. We hear first hand what it was like for Young, having successfully defended her PhD thesis at Cambridge a few weeks earlier, to give birth to Arthur and then be told he was “brain damaged, microcephalic (that is with an abnormally small head)” which would mean he would likely be dependent on her for the rest of his life. Young, with great grace and dignity, allows us to experience the pain and challenge this meant for her from the daily difficulties in feeding to the attachment Arthur made to a plastic hammer that he still uses 46 years later.

Young writes “Consciously or unconsciously all parents have dreams for their children. We had to accept we would dream no dreams. We began to reflect on how important it is to let children develop their own lives...” I was struck by how significant the words of both friends and strangers were to Young during those early days of coming to terms with Arthur’s condition. Young allows us to witness the inner wrestle of her faith in God, even to the point where she describes her own faith as being 50:50. Evangelicals will struggle with some of Young’s theology but will benefit from her questions, her honesty and many of her observations. For example when reflecting on miraculous healing, Young explores the fact that healings from the kind of genetic abnormalities that her son lives with are unheard of and indeed wonders whether a healing would rob her son of his identity. This is a fascinating question but Young’s conclusion that “extraordinary things happen maybe, but the definition of a miracle as a breaking of the laws of nature is surely theologically suspect,” makes me wonder how she understands the resurrection narrative.

For me the most powerful part of the book is when, in light of her own personal story, Young moves on to theological reflection. The key chapters for me were chapter 4, 5 and 7 which are Creation, Cross and Arthur’s Vocation respectively.

One of the most interesting ideas at the heart of Young’s chapter on creation was a fresh perspective on the nature of suffering. Young argues that modernity left no room for God because it was humanistic and optimistic. Modernity thought suffering was eradicable if humanity could simply come up with the right formula. Postmodernity has not shifted our assumption that life was meant to be perfect and thus “the biggest problem for religious belief remains the issue of arbitrary suffering.” Reflecting on this, Young observes that having read a great deal of Christian literature from early centuries, she found a “lack of concern with this problem.” Despite the ubiquitous experience of suffering, Young concludes that in earlier centuries there was a greater understanding of the nature of creatureliness and our dependence on God.

Similarly in her chapter on the cross, Young’s argument is that it is “through tragedy that we discover what is most deeply life giving, and the clue is provided by the cross along with lives like Arthur’s.” Young raises questions about the classical, evangelical and liberal approaches to the atonement: “the whole approach to atonement offers a moralistic and individualistic gospel. The question remains: what relevance has this to Arthur? Isn’t he so limited as to be innocent as a baby?” Young’s thoughtful exploration of these questions nevertheless left me frustrated. Without any substantial engagement with scripture she concludes: “Just as I couldn’t believe in a devil of a God who would punish me for some misdeed or other with a child like Arthur, so I could not believe that the cross was a sacrifice to propitiate or placate God’s wrath.” What do we do if scripture demands this
and we can't bring ourselves to believe it? Do we bend scripture to the limits of our beliefs, using our own rationality, experience or emotions as the standard to which scripture must measure up?

In her chapter on Arthur’s vocation Young gives us a rich reflection on not just Arthur’s call in the world but how all of us no matter how broken, fallen or damaged can be useful in God’s purposes. Young writes of Arthur “might not he and others like him have a vocation to enable the shift in values... away from individualism, dominance, competitiveness, to community, mutuality?”

I found Young’s conclusions here very profound especially as someone who regularly brings children from vulnerable backgrounds, many of whom also have learning difficulties, to church. Our foster children have benefitted in numerous ways from being included in our church family. But our church has also benefitted through the presence of these children in their midst. Like Arthur they point to a broken yet beautiful creation, the majestic power of the cross to include all people and how tragic circumstances somehow draw the best out of community.

Frances Young has given the church a great gift in this book. Her honesty and humility as she has wrestled with the joys and challenges of caring for Arthur alert us to pastoral, practical and theological concerns we may well have ignored. You won’t agree with all of her conclusions but you will find yourself both profoundly moved and challenged.

Krish Kandiah
President, London School of Theology


In the contemporary Church of England where public worship is overwhelmingly Eucharistic, is there a place for the deacon other than as an apprentice priest? The title of Francis Young’s study, Inferior Office? (a phrase taken from the Prayer Book Ordinal), both suggests and questions the perceived role of deacons as the poor relations in the three-fold Anglican ministry.

In a well-written and erudite study, demonstrating detailed knowledge of Anglican history and based on documentary evidence, Young examines the role of deacon in four periods of Anglican history. These periods are 1550-1642, 1660-1832, 1839–1901 and the Twentieth Century. A further chapter ‘Deacons in the Church of England Today’ examines the current position and future possibilities. A final Conclusion presents the case for and against a distinctive diaconate.

The picture that emerges is of far greater variety than is often imagined. That said, numbers are small. A few years ago Paul Roberts described Alternative Worship as “a microscopic phenomenon that gets far more attention than it actually deserves.” Might this observation be equally well applied to the diaconate and the debate that it has engendered? Discounting one-year “transitional” deacons and the temporary “bulge” of women deacons between 1987 and 1994 one cannot help feeling that there may almost have been more reports and debates about the diaconate in the Church of England than actual deacons.

What also emerges is a long standing discussion that seems no nearer to resolution than when it first started. In Young’s words: “Even for a church that is renowned for its indecisiveness, for the Church of England to have vacillated on the question of deacons for 175 years is a remarkable, if dubious achievement.”

Perceptively, Young quotes Bishop John Hind as asserting that the Church of England’s position is one of “not knowing quite what to make of the diaconate.” This does not seem to be far from the actuality; after centuries of inconclusive debate the diaconate is increasingly appearing as a historic title looking for a function and role in the contemporary church. Surely the priority is to have a ministry fit for purpose in the 21st century (no matter what name we give it) rather than desperately trying to shoe-horn a named ministry from the first century into the 21st century church. Steven Croft’s view of a diaconal component to all ministry rather than a separate “order” seems to have much to commend it.

Young’s book leaves the reader much better informed about the history and purpose of the diaconate; it does not, however, bring the debate any closer to a resolution.

John Darch
Diocese of Blackburn

5. MISSION

This is definitely a "Ronseal" book, which does exactly what it says on the tin. Glaser and Kay have written a thoroughly Biblically rooted, stimulating and interesting book, which will enable a Christian reader to reflect further on how best to understand Islam and engage with Muslim friends and neighbours. Thinking Biblically About Islam is divided into four parts. The first, Genesis, contains two chapters, which discuss the creation narratives of Genesis 1-11 and contrast them with the Qur’anic accounts. Having explained how they engage with the Biblical text, the authors set out their understanding of the worldview presented by Genesis. They argue it presents a world in which all sorts of people reach out to God through all sorts of sacrifices; and God speaks with all sorts of people. They suggest religion is linked with power, evil persists in the world and there is a tension between salvation and judgement as ways of dealing with evil, which runs through the whole of the Bible. The comparison with the Qur’an notes similarities but also brings out the significant differences, and explains the implications of those differences.

Part two, Transfiguration, is really the foundation on which the argument of the whole book stands. The essential argument is that the transfiguration reveals Jesus’ true nature and that the Qur’an reverses the transfiguration, going back towards Judaism whilst simultaneously neglecting the significance of sacrifice and covenant, both of which are integral to the Jewish faith. Four chapters discuss Biblical and Qur’anic understandings of Elijah; Moses and mountains; Messiah; and Jesus.

Part three, Islam, draws together the discussion of Islam and of Muslims, which have been kept distinct in the first two parts. A series of short chapters tackle the topics of Elijah and Moses in the Qur’an; the Qur’an itself; Muhammad; the Ummah; Shari’ah; and finally Islam. I found this section the most disappointing, not because of the quality of the content, but because of the brevity of each chapter. They are very good introductions, but it is clear that the authors have a wealth of knowledge which they did not utilise in their writing. A greater depth of analysis and discussion would have enhanced this section, and thus the book overall. I was also unconvinced by the attempts to draw parallels between Judaism and Islam. I accept that there are many parallels and believe a strong case can be made, but it was not made that effectively here.

Part four, Transformation, returns to Biblical reflection. A more convincing argument is made for comparison between Muslims and Samaritans and the book closes with an exposition of Romans 12 and 13 as a call to send out disciples into the Lord’s harvest field.

Thinking Biblically About Islam is an easy read. The discussion is punctuated with short reflections of real life experience and questions to discuss, both of which help ground the book in daily reality. It was one of those questions which made me think about the audience of the book. The authors ask “What word is used to translate huios [the NT Greek for ‘son’] in Luke 1:35 in your language? Are there other words that mean ‘son’ in that language?” This made me think that this is not simply a book for a UK audience, but rather one designed for global distribution. I think it is particularly suited to that international market. Those who wish to begin thinking biblically about Islam are well served by this book, whatever country they live in. In that sense it has particularly significant missionary value and can be used as a primer or textbook for basic theological education in seminaries the world over.

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