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As its title suggests, this book focuses on canon lists from early Christianity. Thus it sets out and analyses how a range of people in positions of influence or authority understood which books were or were not (or should or should not be) included in the Christian Bible. One chapter discusses Jewish lists; others consider lists from Greek, Latin and Syriac Christian sources. All lists are presented in their original language, with a facing English translation, and followed by an illuminating critical discussion, which makes the volume a very useful reference tool.

But the book offers much more than that. One appendix discusses a selection of Greek, Syriac, Latin and Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible, so readers are able to consider a range of examples of what scribes actually included in manuscripts of the Bible, and how those contents do or do not match what other authors said about what books that the Bible should contain. Another appendix discusses a range of disputed texts (“Antilegomena”), which did or did not become recognised as part of the Christian Bible. Among the former are Ecclesiastes, Esther and Hebrews. Among the latter are the *Letter of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter* and other writings now found in collections such as the “Apostolic Fathers” or “Early Christian Apocrypha”.

The volume also includes a very useful introduction, which provides a good, accessible and scholarly introduction to the study of the history of the formation of the Christian Bible, and covers more ground than simply the lists that are the focus of the book.

Their primary objective, note the authors, was “to seek understanding into the history of the Bible by returning to the ancient sources that comment on it”. They have certainly succeeded, and have produced a book that will be a useful resource for readers who wish to engage academically with how the Christian Bible came to take the forms in which it is found today. The book is not cheap, but is much less expensive than might be expected of an academic book of this size that includes original languages as well as English translations. It is therefore encouraging that a major university press must think that there is still a large market for quality works of this kind.

Andrew Gregory, University College, Oxford


God as sacrificial love, a common but controversial theme in contemporary theology, is explored in some depth by Eikrem in this monograph. Chapter one introduces the theme and chapters two and three give a detailed historical overview of Christian theologies of sacrifice and the critiques of these theologies. His overview takes us from the patristic period with theologians such as Origen and Gregory Nazianzus, through the medieval period, taking in the very different theologies of Anselm and Peter Abelard, through the Reformers, particularly Luther, onto the Modern period from Schleiermacher onwards. Alongside his exposition of various Christian theologies of sacrifice, Eikrem considers various feminist postmodern and liberationist theologians and philosophers who challenge atonement theology. The amount of ground covered in this section is impressive.

In chapters four to six Eikrem examines the issues that lie at the heart of the disputes about sacrificial theology: violence and bloodshed and death, which he approaches from various angles. He argues that we must look at Jesus’ sacrifice from the perspective of the whole of his life and not just his death. He cites with approval those thinkers who define sacrifice as self-limitation rather than self-destruction or self-victimisation, and those who understand sacrifice as the gift of self for others. In the final chapters Eikrem explores the idea of worship, particularly the Eucharist, as sacrifice. He rejects this and instead argues that communion is not sacrificial but is rather an expression of the self-giving love that characterises the relations within the Trinity. He further argues that sacrifice has a place in inter-human relationships as we engage as finite beings in moral struggle in a sinful world.

*God as Sacrificial Love* is a demanding book, requiring a commitment of time and concentration from the reader. It is also a very rewarding book – I learned a great deal from it – but at times was so taken with the details of the history of the theology of sacrifice that I lost sight of the larger questions that Eikrem was exploring. Eikrem has given me cause to look again at some of the theologians whose work has most influenced me, notably Barth and Girard. More than that, his work has made me ask exactly what I mean if and when I speak of the death of Jesus as sacrificial, or speak of worship as a “sacrifice of praise”.

Andrew Gregory, University College, Oxford
The remaining essays, by Susan Lucas, Malcolm Brown, Matthew Bullimore and Peter Manley Scott, each reflect on Anglican Social Theology from contemporary perspectives. Evangelical readers will likely have had some preconceptions about “Christian Socialism” and its assumed association with the state dissolved by this point, but Bullimore’s essay on whether Anglican Social Theology is “public theology” or “ecclesial theology” is especially recommended for their reflection. This is because Evangelicals tend to avoid both these kinds of theology—preferring to believe social change comes more through individual transformation than public policy, and not liking to over-idealise the institutional church. Nevertheless, Anglican Evangelicals will want ultimately to ensure that their social mission has a theological rationale in who they are—the body of Christ. As Bullimore shows, Anglican Social Theology can help with this. Furthermore, Anglican Evangelicals noticing that their social mission is expanding to fill voids left by a withdrawing state will want to develop a more nuanced and engaged understanding of the state, as both “a temporal, provisional phenomenon under judgement” and “a present good” more capable of achieving fairness than most alternatives (p. 160). Anglican Social Theology can help with this. For this reason, this book has much to offer readers across the church—whether they are “revisiting” this tradition of social theology or meeting it for the first time.

Philip Lockley, Oxford

3. ETHICS AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

Kate Bowler, Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I’ve Loved (London: SPCK, 2018)

It’s difficult to talk about death, it’s difficult to talk about dying, but into this arena Kate Bowler strides confidently. Her book is an honest, funny, and heartbreaking account of her own experience of stage-four cancer. At the age of 35, and having recently become a mother, she learns of her diagnosis. Her book Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I’ve Loved charts her path, her struggle and her faith.

This short and accessible read has quickly become a bestseller, with endorsement from the likes of Bill Gates and others. The book’s wide appeal is in part due to her excellent writing, grounded in her experience. It is raw and beautiful. But the book is much more than a gritty and heartwarming tale. Professor Bowler is one of the leading theologians writing about the influence of prosperity gospel theology in the church in America. She writes of her struggle in coming to accept her illness and discusses the unhelpfulness of faith stories...
that overpromise and offer a cure for tragedy. The book is accessible to those with no formal theological education, but equally is not simplistic in its theological engagement. It could be read by those supporting others professionally, or those facing the loss of a loved one, or their own illness and death.

With an uncomfortable honesty, she writes about the loneliness of dying but also the gift of death; that the inevitability of death can open us to a brightness and beauty lost on us in normal life. Charted in her very personal experience, Bowler critiques modern Pentecostal and charismatic theology in their denial of death and draws on Aquinas and Augustine to discuss the oddness of this beauty she is finding in facing death. While it is clear that her writing is underpinned by theological rigour, it is always her personal journey that is shared. In this way, the book feels both heavy and light, easy to read but cuts deeply into the soul.

In sharing her journey towards death, and without covering over the heartbreaking reality, Bowler opens up the possibility that in the tragedy of death we can be drawn further into God, and further into love. Written firmly within the discipline of practical theology, Bowler moves from experience to reflect on God’s presence with us in birth, life and death. In birth and death, we are inextricably wrapped up together in God, for we come from God and to God we shall return. There is so much in between that distracts, so much that pulls us from our connectedness to God and stretches the bonds of love. But, somehow love persists, somehow God is present.

The book makes no attempt to explain away the horror of tragedy, or minimise the pain of grief, but holds onto a love that persists, love that braves the horror of broken and left undone. Bowler suggests that this is the work of God; that somehow the world can become more beautiful when life is at its most bleak. This is God: God with us, present in our dying, present in our living.

Beth Keith, Sheffield


This book is vintage McGrath: clear, accessible, engaging, informed, authoritative and applied. It provides an introduction to the two principal Christian creeds, the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, which McGrath treats as maps to the landscape of faith, to which he is a sympathetic guide. Its clear structure makes it easy for readers to dip in and out, and it is suitable for private reading or as a basis for group discussion, and could be used for adult catechesis.

The book is in four parts, with a brief conclusion. Parts two to four focus on what McGrath describes as the three articles of the creed – one on God the Father, one on Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, and one on the Holy Spirit and the Christian life.

Throughout these 14 chapters McGrath offers a broad exposition of the central tenets of Christian faith, beginning with the question of what it means to believe or to have faith in God, and noting that it is about much more than intellectual assent to a set of propositional statements. “Yes,” he writes, “Christianity is about certain ideas, which we believe, but it is more fundamentally about a God whom we discover to be trustworthy, and invite to become the foundation and lodestar of our lives.” Thus, he notes, the creeds begin with an assertion of the need for faith in order to lead a meaningful life: “For the Christian, faith is both trusting that there is a ‘big picture’ of life, and a decision and commitment to step inside this way of seeing ourselves and our world, and live it out.” To have faith in God is a matter of personal commitment, so the creeds sketch the outline of a Christian pattern of life and thought, which McGrath helps fill out in his discussion of what it means to believe in God, in Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit and the life of the church both now and in the future.

Whereas parts two to four focus on the nature and content of Christian belief, part one focuses on the nature of the creeds. Here McGrath argues that they are best approached not as dull catalogues of ideas, but as triggers for the recollection of the rich deposit of Christian faith, summary descriptions that involve further exploration.

He also offers four analogies of how the creeds may be approached. First, as one of several overlapping maps that help Christians to find and understand their way in the world, as they travel through the landscape of faith. Second, as a light, an aid with which to see, and a reminder of our partial vision, which we may seek always to improve. Third, as a lens, through which we may see the world in new ways, and that can help bring things into focus. Fourth, as threads of a tapestry, woven together to reveal a pattern that could not be seen if any one thread were viewed in isolation. Thus, he suggests, the creeds are both resources that guide believers as they develop their own understanding of faith, and also public statements of communal faith, that emerged after much deliberation, and that individuals are not free simply to change.

Andrew Gregory, University College, Oxford

This book was written to be used for either personal or group study during Lent. It contains a series of 40 short Biblical reflections on the theme of reconciliation, subdivided into six main sections, which could form the overarching theme of a six-week long Lent course. Each reflection ends with three or four questions or statements for further reflection. The author, Muthuraj Swamy, is director of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide and is currently in the process of editing three volumes for the Lambeth Conference, on the themes of Evangelism and Witness, Reconciliation, and Prayer.

The opening section offers a brief overview of the ministry of reconciliation from a Christian perspective. Swamy argues, on the basis of 2 Cor. 5:17–20 and Col. 1:19–22, that there are three components of reconciliation. First, that God is reconciled to us through Jesus Christ. Second, through this we are invited to reconcile with each other. Third, Christians have both a responsibility and a vocation to reconciliation in the world. He further suggests that reconciliation is both a particular, specific act and also a process in life, and defines the process of reconciliation as “building and strengthening relationships with radical openness to the other” (p. 7).

The first main section examines God’s reconciliation with us as the foundations of reconciliation. There are five studies. First, relationships and reconciliation as the heart of the Christian life, based on the discussion of the greatest commandment in Matthew 22. Second, God, the creator of relationships, utilising Genesis 1 and 2. The third has no specific text, but reflects on Jesus Christ who reconciles us with God and one another, utilising the themes of the Word becoming flesh, Emmanuel, God becoming slave and Jesus the mediator. Fourth, the Holy Spirit, the reconciler, which again utilises themes, of the Holy Spirit reconciling us with God, helping us cross boundaries in mission and as unity and bond of the Christian community. The fifth, final section examines the church, tackling the church as fellowship, as an inclusive community, the need to be self-critical and the church’s ministry of reconciliation, although there are no specific sections on each of these topics. This first main section has the potential to be five weeks of studies in and of itself, and it is a shame they are all dealt with so swiftly.

The second main section takes impediments to reconciliation as its theme. The seven studies in this section do all take a specific passage, and examine the Fall in Genesis 3; prejudice and stereotyping (John 1:45–51); wealth, greed and conflict (Gen. 13); being silent when we have to speak and act (Luke 14:1–6); rushing to judge (Luke 18:9–14); revenge after reconciliation (David and Shimei, 2 Sam. 16:5–14, 19:18–23; 1 Kings 2:8–9); and when someone says sorry (Jonah 3–4).

The third section turns to risks to the self that are entailed by reconciliation. Here the seven studies take in “let your servant remain a slave” (Gen. 44:18–34); “blot me out of the book that you have written” (Exod. 32); if he owes you anything, charge that to my account (Philem.); the courageous little girl (2 Kings 5); “if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4); a friend who risked himself for his friend (1 Sam. 19–20); and “not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:41–42). I struggled to see how some of these passages are primarily about reconciliation: Moses’ willingness to be blotted from the book of life as a consequence of the Israelite’s sin (Exod. 32) is more about a leader admitting failure and accepting the punishment that comes with that failure as it is about reconciliation. It is also a bit tenuous to suggest that the servant girl who recommends that Naaman, the husband of her mistress, goes to Elisha to receive healing is engaged in reconciliation, whether between individuals or countries. At least Swamy recognises that Esther 4 is not about “overt reconciliation”, but even his suggestion that there must be reconciliation between the king and the Jews if they are to be saved is not entirely true. The king has the power to save them entirely of his own free will. Finally, Jesus’ submission to his Father’s will in Gethsemane was necessary for our salvation, but using this text to argue that Christians must be humble in order to engage in reconciliation is not entirely convincing. These are certainly Bible studies about those taking personal risks, but presuming that those risks are necessarily about reconciliation stretches the definition of reconciliation beyond useful parameters.

Section four discusses humility and self-criticism. The seven studies are learning self-criticism from the antagonists (John 8:1–11); Am I God? A study in contrast (Gen. 30:1–2, 50:15–21; 2 Kings 5:5–8); who is my neighbour? (Luke 10:25–37); “she is more in the right than I” (Gen. 38); the king who humbled himself (2 Chron. 33); be a servant (Matt. 20:20–28); and the problem with those who claim they see (John 9). As with section three, these are good studies on humility and self-criticism but whether they are all about reconciliation is a moot point. Taking just one example: who is the reconciliation between in the story of the man born blind in John 9?

Section five explores radical openness to the other. Here the studies are initiating reconciliation in hostile contexts (John 4, 21); a lesson in radical openness (Matt. 20:1–16); Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10); the lost son who distanced himself from his own (Luke 15); Ruth “your people are my people” (Ruth 1); becoming friends: Jesus’ way (Luke 9:49–50); and learning to see God from the other side (Luke 4:25–30), that is seeing
God at work among the Gentiles. Again, good studies on radical openness, but whether reconciliation is the focus is not always clear.

Section six focuses on reconciliation as peace with justice. Here the topics are peace with God, justice to fellow humans (Isa. 1:11–17, 58:1–14; Mic. 6:6–8; Amos 5:18–27); peace expects justice (Mark 7:24–30); when justice is not done (2 Sam. 13–14); restoration and reconciliation (Luke 19:1–10); fear, magnanimity and justice (Gen. 32–33); to forgive is to do justice (Matt. 18:23–35); and reconciliation only with God? (Ps. 51; 2 Sam. 12–13). Here the focus is much more clearly on reconciliation and the studies feed more directly into this theme.

I can see how this book could provide useful stimulus for six Lent study group meetings; the six main themes provide plenty of food for discussion. Indeed, there is arguably too much material to cover in a one- to two-hour small group session. I wonder if individual readers will struggle with the shift from reading a single verse to two or more chapters of the Bible in each single study. Finally, there is a sense of Swamy having to find 40 studies on reconciliation and, at times, forcing the theme on the passage rather than exegeting it from the text. A worthwhile book for Lent, albeit with that slight reservation.

Tom Wilson, St Philip’s Centre, Leicester

4. MISSION

Michael W. Goheen, ed., Reading the Bible Missionally (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016)

This volume of essays divided into 15 chapters and five main sections deals with the nature of a missional hermeneutic of scripture (up to p. 103) and how, when it is applied, this can shed light on the Old Testament (pp. 107–71), the New Testament (pp. 175–237), Scripture and preaching (pp. 241–81) and Scripture and theological education (pp. 285–329). Nearly a third of the book’s content explores a definition, justification and criteria of a missional hermeneutic. The beginnings of this compilation of chapters emerged from a conference, “A Missional Reading of Scripture”, hosted by Calvin Theological College. The keynote addresses and ensuing discussions have been edited into this helpful volume. It is not therefore a comprehensive or even a wide-ranging discussion but does reflect the theological persuasions of the 14 male authors, who are mainly from the USA with British contributions from Richard Bauckham, Christopher J. H. Wright and N. T. Wright – three whom I have always found worth reading, along with Michael Goheen.

I found some of the first 100 pages repetitive and wondered whether I would get through the book to review it but there were always sufficient biblical analysis to understand even if I wished the first section to be more succinct. George R. Hunsberger’s four characteristics of a missionary hermeneutic are helpfully laid out: the missional direction of Scripture, a missional purpose, the need to recognise the mission-locatedness of the people and the received tradition in a new context. Mark Glanville offers a fifth one: the prophetic challenge to every society.

I would have liked more on intercultural hermeneutics in that section of the book but that may have to wait for another such conference. Most of the authors have an impressive grasp of breadth and depth of the biblical narrative and they demonstrate in their many different works.

Each of the following four sections have valuable and stimulating contributions to read and the majority are very worthwhile reading as discrete condensed articles on summary of mission in the Old and New Testaments and missional readings of Deuteronomy, Psalm 67 and Psalm 96, James and Colossians.

The implication of a missional reading has a bearing on the public communication of the Bible and how it also should be used in theological education for Christian discipleship and training. The Scriptures are not merely meant to be read and understood but communicated, and proclaimed in the world. The need to retell the foundational story in contextual ways is still vital as is the need to equip God’s people to use it to generate new followers. There is perhaps too little recognition though of how mission societies and agencies have been engaged in this very task, although it is acknowledged strongly that there is a real need “to set aside the long-standing division between theology proper and practical theology”. Goheen quotes David Bosch when he advocates “a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a theological agenda for mission” and that “Third World theologies are missionary theologies” that could become a force for renewal in the West (p. 305).

Not merely is curriculum development along the lines advocated in the book but there is a reality that there still has to be a spiritual disposition for people to hear God speak through his Scriptures, and I also would add that those who teach need be mission practitioners.

The bibliography is a useful collection, but very few women are referenced or given as examples in the book, which only partially could have compensated for the lack of female authors. There could also have been more reference and examples from the world church. Given these limitations, the book is still very helpful in working out what it means to “Reading the Bible Missionally”, but I look forward to a further volume that takes the discussion and practice much further.

Paul Thaxter, CMS

This is a very useful book that provides an overview of the way in which many figures found in the Jewish and Christian Bibles are portrayed in the Qur’an and (where applicable) also in later Islamic sources known as “The Stories of the Prophets”. Its introduction includes a brief orientation to the Qur’an and to “The Stories of the Prophets” and the authors note that readers who are familiar with the Bible may find the Qur’an confusing, so they offer factual information to help them understand the structure of the Qur’an. They also advise that non-Muslims do not use the Bible or any other text as a yardstick by which to evaluate the Qur’an, and they include a short list of further reading to help readers to understand the Qur’an on its own terms.

The bulk of the book consists of introductions to characters found in Jewish, Christian and Muslim Scripture. Most vary in length from one page (e.g. Elisha) to six (e.g. Abraham, Joseph [son of Jacob] and Mary). The entry for God is also six pages in length, but the longest entry is for Jesus, at eight pages. Most entries are for named individuals, but there is also an entry for groups (e.g. angels, Christians, Jews, jinn, messengers, prophets and unbelievers). References are given for where each character or group is found in the Qur’an, and there follows a useful discussion of each, which begins with their portrayal in the Qur’an (and, when applicable, in “The Story of the Prophets”) before comparing it to Jewish and Christian accounts. Each entry finishes with references for further reading, and with questions for discussion.

The book is a useful tool for non-Muslims wishing to earn more about Islamic scripture and belief, but could also serve as a resource for people engaged in Scriptural Reasoning or in text-based forms of interfaith dialogue. Thus we may note some words from its introduction that may encapsulate what its authors hope that their readers might take away from this book:

> The Qur’an relates the stories about these figures in ways that allow them to serve as models for Muslims about how to accept the message of Islam and submit oneself to the will of God. Therefore, rather than viewing the Bible and the Qur’an as competing with one another, the stories about Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others within them should be seen as shared traditions that speak to different communities in diverse ways in order to address each one’s unique concerns and contexts (p. 4).

Not all Christian readers may wish to finish there. But it is certainly a good stage to reach in the search for mutual understanding between people of different faiths.

Andrew Gregory, University College, Oxford


In this book, Lois Lee offers a nuanced account of how secular society sits in relation to religion. Rather than seeing all those without religion as part of one category of secular, she distinguishes between the insubstantial secular, which is a “relative disengagement from religious culture and authority”, and the substantial secular, which is “a potentially powerful but dissenting form of engagement with religion” (p. 21). While non-religion as a term often is used more generally for people rejecting or being detached from religion, Lois Lee’s use is particular to refer to “a set of social and cultural forms and experiences that are alternative to religion and framed as such” (p. 13). As she helpfully illustrates, non-religion is related to religion in the way that non-violence is related to violence (p. 32). Things are not simply non-religious in the absence of religion, but because of being meaningfully differentiated from religion (in the same way things are only described as non-violent when seeking to differentiate from violent alternatives). It is this sense of non-religion (which she sets in a discussion of studies of secularity) with which the book is concerned, and she develops the concept drawing on ethnographic fieldwork from south-east England.

The book is well written and carefully argued. The first two chapters particularly are helpful in defining the vocabulary used in discussing religion and secularity (including: anti-religion, a-religion, indifference, post-religion, irreligion, anti- and non-theism, as well as a discussion of secularity and secularisation) and in exploring how these terms convey ideas of antagonism, indifference, opposition, rejection, absence to/of religion (and, usefully, the vocabulary is summarised in a glossary of 17 distinct terms for phenomena used in relation to religion). Attention to these pages will assist us, when we come across these terms in our reading and conversations, to ask questions about how they are being used, the assumptions undergirding them and the impact on the particular point being made.

In the rest of the book, Lois Lee develops and illustrates her concept of the non-religious, reflecting on the nature of the task of identifying the non-religious – that which is formed in relation to the religious other. While intellectual positions are not neglected, she explores visual, spatial, material and embodied forms of non-religiosity, the existential cultures and social relations...
they produce, and the meanings they hold for people, arguing against “the tendency to transpose mind/body dualisms on to secular/religious ones” (p. 103). She discusses the more public forms of New Atheism, but is careful to show the range of non-religiosity and how it constitutes the everyday, and also that because non-religiosity is focused on difference and not simply rejection, non-religious individuals and institutions may “feel different from but positively disposed towards the religion of others” (p. 33).

The book contributes to the vocabulary, theory and methodology of studying and understanding religion and secularity and will be of interest to anyone versed in these sociological debates (with appendices of empirical research interview schedules and demographic information). However, there is value too for non-specialists; for anyone interested in engaging with society around them, it expands how we might think about people’s relation to religion. In particular, in contrast to the more public and polarised debates, the book attunes us to ordinary everyday occurrences of non-religion that feature in a society formed in relation to a religious other.

Fran Porter, The Queen’s Foundation, Birmingham

Philip Lewis & Sadek Hamid, British Muslims: New Direction in Islamic Thought, Creativity and Activism (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018)

This is an engaging read, a joint effort from two academics specialising in the study of lived British Islam, and of particular value to anyone wanting to understand the current situation in the United Kingdom. They state in the preface that their aim in writing is to produce a short and accessible book aimed primarily at professionals such as teachers, social workers, journalists and politicians who work among and with Muslim communities but who are often confronted with confusing and contradictory accounts of what exactly is going on (p. vii). They certainly succeeded in producing a work that is short; it is fairly accessible, although their tendency to list lots of different figures and groups is, at times, a bit daunting; and, as with any book, it primarily presents the views of the authors, some of which others (including this reviewer) would dispute.

One commendable aspect of British Muslims is the fact that it gives a lot of time and attention to the place of Muslim women, often the unheard voices and unseen actors within Britain’s diverse Muslim communities. A second strong point is the recognition of diversity within British Islam and a third the fact that they do not shy away from the challenges and complex issues facing British Muslims today.

There are five main chapters. First, an overview of the British Muslim population, definitely Philip Lewis’s stock-in-trade. It not only gives the main facts and figures but also delves into some of the more complex issues, such as the fact that not all Muslim communities follow the standard three generations trajectory of migration, as there are many areas where, primarily because of marriage practices, every generation includes first generation migrants. Particular strengths of this chapter are the discussion of homelessness and the Muslim prison population, especially the experience of Muslim women in prison. Based heavily on the Muslim Council of Britain’s “British Muslims in numbers” publication, it is a good overview of modern British Islam.

Chapter two examines Islamic seminaries. The subtitle, “between crisis and renewal” aptly captures the subject discussed. The nature of the crisis is spelt out clearly, and there is a solid introduction to the key figures and institutions within Islamic education. They discuss the experience of Islamic seminary students and hold out Cambridge Muslim College as a good example of an Islamic seminary undergoing renewal and offering promise for the future. The third chapter tackles Muslim engagement with democracy and renewal, with another solid introduction to the main figures and key events, and a useful discussion of the role women have played, including in mainstream politics.

I found chapter four the most problematic. The focus is on radicals, extremists and terrorists, and at times it unfortunately falls into being no more than a typical example of the Muslim narrative of victimhood. The chapter begins well, with a robust discussion of the issues, including a clear explanation of takfiri (excommunication), Salafist jihad and an explanation of the key figures who have attempted to radicalise British Muslim youth. Their emphasis on British foreign policy as a key driver of grievances among British Muslims is important, but they do not address the issue of why, say, there were no violent Christian responses even though millions of Christians shared many of those same concerns. Moreover, sadly the criticism of the Prevent strategy lacks the academic robustness of the rest of the book. To give one example, the authors uncritically assume that between 2008 and 2011 the Prevent strategy had a budget of £186,710 million (that is £185 billion). In fairness, the mistake is in an article they cite, whose authors where no better at maths. (The actual figure is £186 million. To put this in context, the total counter-terrorism budget for 2017/2018 was around £15 billion). Their criticism of the figures associated with Channel is equally unresearched, and they make no effort to engage with the reality that much Prevent work focuses on the far-right nor with the stories of those who have been successfully diverted from violent
extremist activity. The organisation I work for employs several staff working in Prevent, and this type of ill-informed criticism is all too common within the Muslim community, so in that sense this section is a useful introduction to the reality on the ground. I had hoped that such qualified academics would have been more careful though.

This final chapter is an excellent introduction to “creating Muslim cool”. Focusing initially on music, the discussion also takes in comedy, Muslim television, authors, artists, poets, photographers, fashion, consumerism and “Generation M.” This is arguably the strongest chapter of the book, providing information on the diverse cultural life of British Muslims in a format that is accessible and engaging, and it is the chapter I would most strongly encourage the professionals whom Lewis and Hamid are targeting to read.

Overall, Lewis and Hamid do succeed in their main aim. This is a well-researched, accessible book, providing a comprehensive overview of British Muslims today. There is a danger that those coming completely new to the issues will be overwhelmed by the detail and data, but most readers will have at least a passing familiarity and will find much of value here. Anyone whose work involves engagement with Muslim communities in Britain would benefit from reading this book.

Tom Wilson, St Philip’s Centre, Leicester


In their introduction, Silverstein and Stroumsa stress that the purpose of comparative study of the Abrahamic religions is not to emphasise commonalities, but to “illuminate our understanding of each individual religion by situating it appropriately in its spiritual, social, and historical context(s)” (p. xv). The intention is to ensure that all three sides of the triangle are present, as it were, that each faith is understood in the light of its relationship with the other two. The handbook is divided into six parts. I will give a brief overview of each before making some comments that evaluate the book as a whole.

Part one tackles the concept of Abrahamic religions. Reuven Firestone discusses how Rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam all appropriated and recast Abraham as the ideal figure of their belief system. Gil Anidjar also examines the different Abrahams, but from a philosophical, rather than a textual perspective. Adam Silverstein then makes the case for Abraham as a figure of unity, a common denominator that allows Judaism, Christianity and Islam to dialogue and compare and contrast with each other. Guy Stroumsa sets out the history of the study of Abraham in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century comparative religion, while Mark Silk discusses usage of the terms “Judaeso-Christian” and “Abrahamic” in the same period. Finally, Rémi Brague expands on the problems of terms such as “the three monotheisms” or the “three religions of the book”.

Part two focuses on communities. Richard Bulliet defends his term “Islamo-Christian civilization”, arguing the two faiths emerged from the philosophical, institutional and cultural milieu of Hellenism; that they have much in common in their understandings of scripture, salvation, spirituality, seeking conversion, sanctioning violence, the presence of clergy and emphasis on education and mission. David Abulafia suggests the shores of the Mediterranean are the focal point for historical interaction between the three faiths. Uriel Simonsohn examines the legal institutions of Jewish and Christian communities under Islamic rule and John Tolan the place of Jews and Muslims under Christian law. Dorothea Weltecke ends the section with a discussion of the balance between exclusivist and more inclusivist interactions between the three faiths.

Part three focuses on scripture and hermeneutics. Nicolai Sinai explores the historical-critical method as applied to both the Bible and the Quran. Carol Bakhos introduces key figures in the history of Jewish, Christian and Muslim scriptural interpretation. David Powers focuses on prophecy, especially the Islamic understanding of Muhammad as the final prophet and the implications for how other prophets are understood. Finally Lutz Greisiger discusses apocalypticism, millenarianism and messianism, finding points of connection and separation across the three faiths.

Part four examines religious thought. Peter Pormann discusses how philosophers and theologians of the Abrahamic faiths engaged with Greco-Roman culture and philosophy. Sidney Griffith explores how the concept of the oneness of God was developed in ninth-century Baghdad among philosophers of all three faiths. Carlos Fraenkel sets out the case that Christian, Muslim and Jewish thinkers of the 11th and 12th centuries argued that the God of Abraham and the God of the philosophers were one and the same. William Carroll discusses how medieval understandings of science engaged with doctrines of creation in the Middle Ages. Moshe Idel explores mysticism in the Abrahamic religions, while Anthony Black focuses on political thought and Yuri Stoyanov discusses dualist.

Part five examines rituals and ethics. Clemens Leonhard and Martin Lüstraeten compare and contrast prayer; discussing posture, texts, communal and solitary prayer and issues of space and time. Moshe Bliedstein focuses on purity and defilement and David Freidenreich tackles
dietary laws. Harvey Goldberg examines life-cycle rites of passage both contemporary and historically while Yousef Meri considers the cult of saints and pilgrimage, primarily in medieval Syria. In the penultimate chapter David Nirenberg and Leonardo Capezzone discuss the Abrahamic traditions as religions of love, examining love of God, fellow humans and the self, and the love of God for humans. In the final chapter Malise Ruthven explores historical and contemporary examples of fundamentalism in all three faiths.

Part six consists of three epilogues which take a broader view on Abrahamic studies. Peter Ochs provides the Jewish perspective, David Ford the Christian and Tariq Ramadan the Islamic view.

The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions is a valuable resource for any library whose readers wish to engage in serious study of the relationship between the three faiths. Oxford University Press are to be thanked for their decision to release the 2018 paperback edition of the 2015 original hardback as this will make it more affordable and accessible to a wider audience. In the main the essays would be useful to those with some general knowledge of the field, although some do require a degree of specialist knowledge. Part five is probably the most open to the general reader and Richard Bulliet’s essay perhaps the most controversial. A useful reference work for libraries and the dedicated (and well financed) individual student of religions.

Tom Wilson, St Philip's Centre, Leicester


In 1996 Andrew Walls collected a number of his shorter writings in The Missionary Movement in Christian History. That work has a regular place on many mission history bibliographies. A second volume, Cross-Cultural Processes in Christian History, followed in 2002 and after a further 15 years the present volume completes Walls’s trilogy.

As a compilation of articles and papers, each one standing alone, this is a book to dip into rather than to read from cover to cover. Not a book for the general reader, but a mine of wisdom and information for those familiar with the field of study. Essentially each chapter stands alone – which is both a strength and weakness. Nevertheless, a degree of continuity is achieved by the book being divided into three sections: the transmission of the Christian faith, Africa in Christian thought and history, and the missionary movement and the West. Grouping them thus gives this collection of disparate writings from a period of 47 years a greater degree of corporate identity. Moving in time from Origen to the 1910 Edinburgh conference provides a sense of continuity and development, but such a lengthy time-frame is likely to be problematic in terms of the interests of Walls’ readership; with such a wide-ranging collection of writings individual readers will inevitably find some of them of much greater interest than others.

Focusing specifically on Africa gives the second section a greater sense of unity than elsewhere in the book and, perhaps because he himself once worked in Africa, Walls demonstrates here an ability to empathise with the missioned as well as with the missioning, an important factor in contemporary mission studies.

But for this reviewer the article on “Missions and the English Novel” proved the most stimulating. Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot and Charles Dickens are the more well-known among a number of novelists whose works are examined for evidence of mission references and themes. Here Walls demonstrates (a) how fictional sources can effectively supplement factual ones and often cover areas that have not been officially recorded and (b) how missions and missionaries came to have an increasingly important place in 19th century popular culture, a very different situation to that of the 21st century.

John Darch, Ellesmere