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Book Reviews from 2011 to 2013

The new format of *Anvil* has meant a re-think in how we publish book reviews. From now on they will take the form of a single journal article, with many different contributors offering their views on the books you should be reading. The reviews article begins with reviews of four books I think everyone should be reading. These are, of course, my own opinion, rather than a decision of the management team as a whole, but they are well worth reading. The article then looks at specific areas of more specialist interest, with reviews from a variety of authors.

Tom Wilson, Anvil Book Reviews Editor

1) Everyone should be reading

David Goodhew (Editor). *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the present.* (Ashgate, 2012)

Every church leader interested in church growth should buy a copy of this book, which challenges the universally acknowledged truth that Christianity is declining in Britain. It recognises that some churches in some areas of the country are declining, but that other areas have shown sustained growth over the past thirty years. Whether your own church is growing or declining, this book can help instill a message of confidence and hope in the Gospel and the way God is as work in Britain.

Following an introductory overview, the book is divided into three main sections. The first two sections tackle England covering mainstream churches and new churches and the final section contains a chapter each on Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Reading the book with the Acts of the Apostles in mind, the picture that emerges of church growth centred on urban areas, trade routes and new plants, is perhaps unsurprising. *Church Growth in* Britain argues that the Church is growing significantly in London, amongst both mainstream and newer churches; that there is some growth along trade routes, in major cities and areas of significant mobility; and that in other areas there is a tendency towards decline, but individual churches do buck this trend.

The picture presented in *Church Growth in Britain* is only partial, but since this is the first in a projected three volume series, that is to be expected. The book contains a lot of data and a fair amount of analysis of that data, but perhaps it would have benefitted from some more big picture work. Goodhew's opening and closing chapters do partially address this deficit, but I am hopeful that the next two volumes do a lot more work in this area. In particular a more sustained and nuanced analysis of the secularisation thesis, changing trends and expectations regarding gathered church and the regional variations in how Christianity is expressed and spread would greatly enhance the picture presented.

Christians have much to be hopeful about, but also much to be concerned about, and *Church Growth in Britain* helps to us to be real about both. Anyone who is interested in the state of Christianity in Britain today would do well to read this book.

Trystan Owain Hughes. *The Compassion Quest.* (SPCK, 2013)

In the prologue, Hughes suggests that there are times when theology is worthless. Theology is worthless if it remains 'black ink on the page … incarcerated in academic textbooks or caged up in religious buildings.' Hughes expects our study of the life of Christ to impact our own lives, to transform us. He expects us to engage in a quest to live compassionately in relation to ourselves, our neighbours and the world around us. This much is perhaps unremarkable for a committed Christian. What is striking is the accessibility of Hughes' writing. This short and very readable volume is a clear and challenging call to live compassionately.

Hughes' central thesis concerns interconnectedness and the need for compassion that flows from that. We should not think of ourselves as the centre of the universe, but rather recognise that God is, and that we are called to a radical compassion modelled on the suffering and now exalted Jesus. Packed with contemporary illustrations, especially from films and music, without pulling the punches of the challenge, *The Compassion Quest* will make you think and then act in compassion for others. The chapter 'There but for the grace of God' is powerful reminder of how fragile our lives are and how important it is for us to be compassionate to others less fortunate than ourselves.

Any work of popular theology has to balance academic rigour with accessibility of the discussion and Hughes largely manages that well. His discussion of the Incarnation could perhaps have been developed further with some more concrete proposals for an operant theology, and at times I was left questioning his explanation of the fallen nature of humanity, but these are not major concerns. *The Compassion Quest* leaves the impression of a learned

scholar who has made his learning accessible to others, encouraging them to develop their discipleship, their learning about Jesus. This is a book to read and to share with others. I would recommend it particularly for book groups and home groups who want stimulus for discussion on how to live compassionately in contemporary society.

Michael P. Jensen. *How to Write a Theology Essay.* (Latimer Trust, 2012)

This is not quite a book for everyone, but it is a book anyone embarking on (or already engaged in) formal theological education would do well to read. Most students find it difficult to know how to write a theology essay, especially when they are first starting out at college. For some it has been a long time since they did any type of formal study, whilst for others it is the change of discipline that is daunting. For virtually everyone attempting to write something about God and his interaction with the world, there are at least a few twinges of self-doubt. Can I really say anything worthwhile in just a few thousand words? Where do I begin? What should I read? The questions can easily become endless.

Michael Jensen has written a short book, Latimer Briefing 11, which addresses the challenge of writing a theology essay. Although it is written from the perspective of a theology lecturer, much of what he says is equally applicable for an essay in Biblical studies, Christian ethics or missiology, or indeed in many humanities subjects. The book is very readable, but also hugely informative. Jensen is brilliant at explaining both why it is important to write theology essays, but also, how it is possible to actually enjoy the process of doing so. The short chapters and pithy writing style, with a good dose of humour mean that even the most nervous student facing her first essay will find this book a comfort, as well as a challenge. Jensen manages to combine both reassurance and clear guidance together with an encouragement to sophisticated writing and in depth analysis of the student's work. One example will illustrate: in explaining the style an essay should take Jensen suggests students abandon a black and white, right or wrong approach, typified by an 'on-off' switch, in favour of a 'volume knob' type of approach, which had gradations, and allows for a much more subtle and sophisticated analysis. Everything a student needs to know is covered here, from why to write, how to pick a question, prepare to answer it and write the essay itself.

As with any such text, Jensen's personal preferences are clear, and not every institution will agree with all his suggestions about the use of footnotes or which is the most appropriate referencing system to use. But the vast majority of markers will share the vast majority of his

concerns, and will welcome the guidance offered to students. This book is a must read for all students of theology.

Samuel Wells. *Be not afraid: facing fear with faith.* (Brazos Press, 2011)

Samuel Wells' *Be not afraid* is a book to be savoured, chewed, and slowly digested. It is a challenging and stimulating read that I cannot recommend highly enough. So many people in the world today are afraid, and we live in a society dominated and organised fear. This book is an antidote to such insularity and lack of faith in Jesus, picking up the oft-repeated refrain of the Bible to not be afraid. Wells suggests that we show our faith by how we respond to fear and how we show our love, and has written to help us respond better in both.

Be not afraid tackles six common areas of fear: death, weakness, power, difference, faith and life. Each area offers five or six reasons as to why we should not be afraid, utilising different passages of scripture to aid reflection and challenge us to look and think again at the message of the Bible. Wells is a master craftsman with words, and *Be not afraid* is worth reading simply to appreciate the rhetorical skill and literary artistry of the prose. There is also much that will benefit all readers. The section on being unafraid of power should be read by all those in any position of authority. Wells suggests we should live with the authority of truth: those who let their yes be yes and their no be no, those who do not shout, ingratiate, exaggerate, or present a false picture of themselves to the world, those who admit their mistakes, those who embody grace while under pressure. At the same time we should be slaves, with our identity totally bound up in our master in heaven.

The message each of the thirty-one chapters brings also deserves deep and careful consideration, although I am unsure I completely agree with all of them. To give one example, in a chapter in the section on being unafraid of death, Wells suggests that in John 13, Jesus is preparing his disciples for death, by washing their feet just as Mary had recently anointed his (John 12). I concur that there is a close link between Jesus' feet being anointed in preparation for his burial (John 12) and his willingness to wash his disciples feet (John 13), but understand Jesus' actions more as an enacted parable of his service of others to the point of death, rather than specifically as preparing others to also take up their cross and follow him (that is, to die to self and follow him). But this is the beauty of *Be not afraid*: it takes you back to Scripture, forces you to think hard about how you understand the text, and in particular, the message of freedom from fear that runs through it.

Anyone who has ever been afraid, anyone who wants help in thinking about what it means to be a Christian should read this book. It is an excellent resource and a worthwhile investment for any theological library.

Tom Wilson, Gloucester, Anvil Reviews Editor

2) Biblical Studies

Craig Keener & M Daniel Carroll R. (Editors) *Global Voices: Reading the Bible in the Majority World.* (Hendrickson, 2013)

The majority of these writers in this symposium are evangelical academics in North American colleges but whose origins are in what this book title calls the 'Majority world' or what a Western writer might call the 'Third world.' What we have after an initial essay by the editors setting the scene (with a response) are four essays: one applying Galatians to the post war Sri Lanka; one using Daniel as a survival manual for those who are a minority in a new land; one on Ephesians 6:10-18 from an African perspective and finally one of how the Bible is used as a talisman, specimen and dragoman (interpreter) in African Pentecostalism. All the four main essays have a response from another non Western scholar. What is a common theme is an attack on what is seen as sterile Western rationalist scholarship, such as the failure to rationalise spiritual warfare and forget the strongly held African sense of a more literal warfare. Some of the responses are more perceptive than others. I found the last two responses particularly helpful ones which asked some sharp questions. It is fascinating to see the wide range of scholarship and literature in the area the book covers; sometimes the essays are a little dense. For example Barbara M Leung Lai's essay on Daniel mentions almost in passing the concept of pre-novelistic Menippean satire to get into the text –more explanation would be helpful! Overall, an interesting and challenging read to the way we look at texts and how we are conditioned by our culture.

Peter Ballantine, Milton Keynes

Lee Martin McDonald. *Formation of the Bible.* (Hendrickson, 2012)

This is a book clearly aimed at the 'educated' layman (sic) who wants to know more about the origins of the Bible and why we have the Canon that we do have. The text is enriched by useful diagrams and list and photographs (of varying quality). There is a full (though perhaps slightly dated) bibliography at the back. Most of the usual areas are covered such as bringing out the lack of clarity of the Jewish Canon of the Old Testament (he does not use the more

modern academic term Hebrew Bible) at the time of Jesus and in fact for long after. He feels that the rise of 'heresy' did not produce the stimulus for defining the canon that many scholars have suggested and feels that the real and almost defining stimulus came from Constantine and his order for 50 copies of the 'New Testament.' Later chapters are taken up with issues of how the Scriptures were actually written down, textual criticism, translations and the like. May be in the end he covers too much territory in what feels a slightly dated book but nevertheless is a good read.

Peter Ballantine, Milton Keynes

3) Old Testament Studies

Walter Brueggemann. *Disruptive Grace.* (SCM Press, 2011)

Disruptive Grace is not so much a single book as a collection of addresses delivered by Brueggemann during the period 2002-2009, to a variety of audiences. Though the addresses would no doubt stand alone they have been structured into categories covering: Torah, Prophets, Writings and Canon that assist in clarifying some of the central themes of Brueggemann's theology.

The title of the book reflects Brueggemann's stance that God's call and God's grace are always disruptive to the way life is being lived, and much of what follows reflects how our own corporate living (at least for those in Western economies) may be challenged by the summons of God's grace. It also reflects his conviction that apparent tensions within Scripture (such as the unconditional covenant with Abraham and the conditional covenant at Sinai) are to be taken seriously and held together in some way, without either being negated. It is from this standpoint that Brueggemann makes a case for a relationship with God being dialogical, rather than a case of engaging with a settled certitude.

In the course of presenting this view, and in issuing challenges to the way that Scripture is to be read, Brueggemann is prepared to make provocative and sometimes controversial statements, such as asserting that God cannot be omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. Perhaps it is the nature of the source material (addresses to unspecified groups rather than fully argued theology) but those points are not always sufficiently established. For example there are repeated warnings against certitude in interpretation and many references to the use of imagination in being faithful in our relationship with God and in correctly using his Word, but though Brueggemann defines imagination not as making something up but rather receiving things given by God's Holy Spirit, he does not give an answer as to how to

establish whether that imagination is from God, or whether truth is being spoken. Nor does he fully address how his understanding is to be prevented from ending up in a hopeless relativism.

Nonetheless, despite this shortfall and whilst disagreeing with the author on a number of issues, this book is very thought provoking and contains a number of insights which can enrich the study of Scripture. His suggested viewpoint as to how we might categorize some of the major prophets, into dealing with warnings against commoditization, anti-neighbourliness and pornography is thoughtful and helpful. Likewise his encouragement to see the importance of lament is something which should be taken seriously by today's church. There are also useful contributions on wisdom as practical theology and prophetic ministry, as well as challenges for the way we respond to prevailing (secular) culture and priorities.

Overall, a book to be recommended for those who want a tool to help them look at things in a slightly different way, to enrich their study and understanding of Scripture, without necessarily buying-in to all the authors assertions or conclusions.

Andy Frith, Moreton

Mark Leuchter *Samuel and the Shaping of Tradition*. (Oxford University Press, 2013)

This short book (just under 100 pages) follows a familiar recent Old Testament theme of seeing earlier traditions as a kind of metaphor for later ideological battles. For instance, Samuel's role as a Levitical priest as intercessor between God and people is subsumed into the prophetic role which later writers (Deuteronomists) saw as a better bulwark against the excesses of monarchy than would the priesthood at the royal cult. In such a short space, there is not time to unpack all the assumptions (e.g. the Deuteronomist put the Song of Deborah into her mouth much later) and one learns new words like 'to helm'. He carries the varying reading strategies around Samuel into Rabbinic and later times. For an academic book, it is quite readable but assumes a good understanding of the basic critical readings of the Old Testament text, so it is probably aimed at post first degree in theology. There are copious footnotes.

Peter Ballantine, Milton Keynes

Fleming Rutledge. *And God Spoke to Abraham: Preaching from the Old Testament.* (Eerdmans, 2011)

This is the most splendid book. It contains fifty-four sermons on Old Testament themes. This is a book by somebody absolutely steeped in the Old Testament who loves the Scriptures and who wants to pass on that love and enthusiasm. She succeeds spectacularly. This is a treasure-trove which anybody who cares about biblical preaching will want to have on their shelves. The footnotes show that Rutledge is also widely-read in both literature and theology. Robert Browning and Paul Ricoeur are just two of the names selected at random. She is also utterly frank about her own failings and shortcomings in an unobtrusive way which will encourage users of this superb book. These are sermons which can and should be read by ordinary Christians.

An added benefit is the twenty-six page introduction. Here, Rutledge sets the task of Old Testament preaching in a broad context, with a brief overview of Old Testament theology and an insistence that the Old Testament provides rich nourishment in its own terms whilst recognising that its fuller significance cannot be grasped without its New Testament counterpart. Rutledge is especially helpful in showing how the Old Testament is indispensable in the quest for knowing God experientially. She also demonstrates a sensitivity towards Jewish readers of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible), especially in the light of the Holocaust.

This is the finest book on OT preaching I have read in years. Buy it, relish it, dwell in it and pass on its wisdom in preaching.

Howard Bigg, Cambridge

4) New Testament Studies

Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson (Eds.). *Paul and the Second Century.* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011)

This edited collection examines the interpretation and use of Paul's writings in the second century. There are discussions of the impact of Paul on Ignatius of Antioch, the Epistle to Diognetus, Polycarp, Marcion, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian, as well as examinations of Paul's impact on the Valentinians, Jewish Christians and women in second-century Christianity. Additionally, the links between the Acts of Paul and Paul himself are discussed as is the 'triumph of Paulinism' by the mid-third century. The substantial

contribution of many of the essays in this volume comes in documenting which aspects of Pauline thought and which texts influenced with second-century church father in what way. This volume thus in some senses documents the early history of Paul's influence in shaping thought within the church and without.

Tom Wilson, Gloucester

Trevor J. Burke and Brian S. Rosner (Editors) *Paul as Missionary.* (T&T Clark, 2011)

This book, titled *Paul as Missionary*, is not primarily about mission or missiology per se, but rather it is a collection of essays written by a variety of New Testament scholars reconstructing the identity, activity, theology and practices of St Paul as a missionary himself from the Pauline texts. My instant thought upon reading the opening pages of this book was how it stands in such a stark contrast to the classical missiological text by Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours* (written almost a century earlier in 1912), as even though both books draw on much of the same biblical source material, that book was a 'how to do it like Paul', whereas this book does not even attempt to ask such practical questions. It is a book by New Testament scholars for New Testament scholars.

The book is split up into four sections: part one is on Paul's identity as a missionary, part two is about Paul's missionary activity, part three focuses on Paul's theology of mission, and part four looks at Paul's missionary practice. Each of the four parts of the book contains between four and six essays written primarily by scholars from North American and Australia, with a few contributions from the UK and Scandinavia. As such, although the approach is textual, historical, and critical, it still represents a very western, developed-world understanding and handling of Paul, scripture and mission.

The lion's share of the source material comes from Romans and 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and quite surprisingly for a collected work from the hands of Pauline scholars, no discussion is given as to which of the Epistles are used here as they are generally regarded as historically and authentically Pauline, and which are not used here as they are not regarded as historically authentic. The prioritisation of the source material used here either suggests a cautious and liberal approach to authorship, or (and reading the list of contributors I suspect this is more likely the case), it is simply down to convenience, as Romans and the Corinthian Epistles seem to suit the central hypothesis more readily. Further to this point, the majority of ordinary Christians do not make such a distinction between the disputed and undisputed Pauline Epistles when reading the New Testament to find out, for instance, about Paul's

missionary identity, activity or theology. The reason why I mention this basic yet often overlooked fact is that if the authors had drawn attention to this point in the introduction, they could have then drawn on a much wider and broader selection of scriptural sources than the narrow focus taken here.

As one would expect from a book written by New Testament scholars, it is not very practical in its approach, and for any book on 'mission' this is a lost opportunity and saddens me a little. However, the book does, occasionally, give missiologists some enfleshment of theory. For example the conclusion to essay 1.2 provides an excellent application of the biblical text as a basis for the practice of mission, especially of local leadership succession, community engagement, and pastoral care, whilst essay 2.6 specifically seeks to apply lessons from Paul to the challenges of cross-cultural world mission today. I was disappointed by the conclusion of essay 2.7 on missionary activity and suffering, which failed to draw out an important and valuable application that could potentially be useful for today's missionaries. Also, only the authors of essays 1.3 and 4.19 applied any evidence gained from their own personal experience to their papers.

Once again, the Library of New Testament Studies (formerly JSNTSup series) have commissioned a world-class standard scholarly work on the New Testament, drawing on a variety of linguistic, textual, and historical methodologies. Yet whilst it was a stimulating and enlightening read, it says little new that preachers have not said from pulpits for centuries, and its failure to apply such insights into the practical world of mission closes down its potential readership, and thus limits its usefulness and right to be found in libraries outside of biblical studies departments of Higher Education institutions.

James Harding, St Mellitus College, London

Allan J. McNicol. *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation.* (London: T&T Clark International, 2011)

This monograph is the result of decades of in-depth study of the book of Revelation. McNicol's particular concern is the apparent inconsistencies between the defeat of the kings of the nations in Revelation 19:15-21 and their joyful welcome in 21:24-26. He argues that 'John was convinced that it was the time of the last days' as the people of God experienced exile again with Rome (Babylon) ascendant and the people in disarray. Soon this situation would be reversed, Babylon defeated and the people of God vindicated when God visited his divine wrath on the nations. McNicol proposes John believed in an 'eschatological

covenantal restitution', that is to say, after the great and terrible day of the Lord, the subjugated nations would become participants in the new creation through a restitution of the covenant with them. McNicol further argues that Revelation was written out of a pastoral concern to persuade Christians out of compromising with contemporary society.
Tom Wilson, Gloucester

5) Doctrine and Philosophy

Thomas G. Long. *Faith What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith.* (Eerdmans, 2011)

Books on the problem of evil and suffering are pretty commonplace these days. I started reading it with no great expectations, but found that it was worth persevering with. It began life as the 2009 Thomas White Currie Lectures at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas. For such a weighty topic, the book is quite short: just five chapters. He begins with the story of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 to epitomise the 'Shaking of the Foundations' (to quote Paul Tillich). We, says Long, are all children of Lisbon and more broadly of modernity. The common dilemma of the average person, including many in our churches is that belief in a loving and powerful God is deeply challenged by the irrationality and inexplicability of innocent suffering. He illustrates this dilemma by the case of Bart D. Ehrman, a young New Testament scholar whose faith in this supposedly benevolent God gradually dissolved in the acids of contemporary life and thought. Ehrman's approach is a combination of rigorous intellectual thought and personal despair, because the fervent evangelical faith of his youth was unable to sustain the weight of the challenges ranged against it. He calls his dilemma 'the impossible chess match'. Later on he engages with Rabbi Harold Kushner's bestselling book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (1981), in a chapter called 'Fellow Pilgrims.' Kushner writes of his anguish in losing his son Aaron from progeria, a rare and universally fatal genetic disease of rapid aging. Much of the book, then, rehearses well-known themes relating to theodicy.

There are, however, two quite original features which make this book worth buying. The first is an exposition of Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). This is regularly expounded as teaching that good and evil exist side by side in the world, and that God will deal with the separation of the Wheat from the tares at the final judgment. In other words, this is a straightforward parable about eschatology. In Long's hands, however, this is a parable of protest: 'How can this be in a good creation?' Evil and suffering are wounds in

creation, and a deeply Christian response is to turn is to turn toward God in pain and protest. The way Long develops this theme is both skillful and I think convincing. The other novel contribution is a masterly handling of the book of Job. This is contained in an interlude between chapters 4 and 5. It is difficult to summarise Long's exposition, but the way he builds a bridge between Job and the New Testament is to my mind convincing. Here is his conclusion: 'Do we ultimately want to offer our own scheme of moral order.....in other words to be God, or are we willing to move toward being the kind of human being who, even in the midst of inexplicable pain, trusts the one who is God?' It is a Gethsemane-sized decision.

Howard C. Bigg, Cambridge

Anthony Thiselton. *The Last Things: A New Approach.* (SPCK, 2012)

As he approaches the end of his own life, Anthony Thiselton's mind has turned to death and eternity. Being the astute and gifted scholar that he is, his thoughts are not wishful thinking or fantasies, but carefully explained and evidenced Biblical exegesis intermingled with some excellent insights based on the work of a variety of philosophers. This book is well worth reading. Thiselton attempts to write in a personal and engaging style throughout the book, and on the whole succeeds, although at times his use of the first person plural does seem slightly out of place. One real benefit of his chosen style is that he clearly signposts the more technical aspects of his discussion, with judiciously placed comments such as 'the next four paragraphs are quite technical, and many readers may wish to skip over them.' This is a book designed for both the serious academic and the more general reader.

Thiselton is unafraid to tackle the controversial issues related to the end times. He begins with the subject of death, tackling issues of trust and doubt and what it means for God to be faithful to his promise to raise the dead. The discussion of the nature of 'promise' is quite technical, but students of linguistics in particular will relish Thiselton's use of 'speech-act' theory here. In the chapters that follow, there is a particularly fruitful discussion of whether we experience intermediate state, where Thiselton uses the metaphor of sleep to explain his view that our next conscious experience will be of being with Christ, even if this does in fact not happen immediately. The same chapter also tackles differing views on the millennium. Thiselton leaves no sacred cow untouched!

Other stimulating discussions touch on the return of Christ, and the nature of the resurrection of the dead: there is much food for thought both for those thinking through these issues for

the first time and also for those who have pondered the issues over several decades. The chapter on 'hell and wrath' is honest and clear: not everyone will agree with Thiselton's conclusions, but he argues in a clear and cogent fashion. The book ends with a note of hope, discussing the beatific vision of God.

Thiselton's real strength is as a teacher and communicator of complex ideas: a lifetime as a university lecturer has honed these skills, and they are put to great effect in this book. At times the discussion will be too technical for some, and on occasion Thiselton takes a long time to make a relatively straightforward point, but this is a book that can be read on a number of levels. It has much to offer both the novice and the veteran, and is a worthy addition to anyone's theological library.

Tom Wilson, Gloucester

6) Ethics and Pastoral Ministry

Edward Dowler. *Theological Ethics. (SCM Core Text Series).* (SCM, 2011)

The *SCM Core Text* series has produced some first rate introductions by exceptional scholars to key fields of theology and religious studies since its inception a few years ago. The series aims to give readers a sense of the contours of each area of study, and to highlight the important concepts, thinkers, and traditions that have informed and shaped the various sub-disciplines today. Edward Dowler's *Theological Ethics* is a strong contribution to the series, and will be an asset to students, teachers, and clergy alike. Here then is a text that is intellectually rigorous whilst being pastorally sensitive, Christian in scope and content, and accessible in style.

The book divides into three parts. The first is essentially explanatory, and deals with key concepts in the Christian moral tradition: Sin and Grace; Natural Law; Virtue; Conscience. The list of key concepts is not exhaustive, but is helpful in orientating the book and revealing Dowler's concerns as a Christian ethicist. It introduces some of the major figures in the history of moral theology, and leads readers gently into the big questions that surround Christian ethics.

The second part discusses 'Contrasts and Controversies' between "Catholic and Protestant Ethics" and "Modern Approaches to Ethics." The first of these addresses themes in Christian ethics, and then provides a rundown of Catholic and then Protestant approaches to each, normally in dialogue with key figures from each confession. Dowler shows his own Protestant tendencies here: he has a much greater breadth of material on Protestant

approaches than on Catholic (where he mainly draws on Papal material). This narrowness is slightly frustrating, and compounded by the lack of formal delineation of the strands of Protestantism (or Catholicism) giving the potentially unhelpful impression of polarity. The second chapter is a good introduction to the development of ethics after the Enlightenment. The bulk of Dowler's work here goes into exploring various positions in the traditions of Kant, Bentham, McCoy, and Ayer. The survey style of this chapter does not quite live up to the title *theological* ethics though. Few theologians or theological ethicists are discussed here, and the impression is given that only post-Enlightenment philosophies supply tools for modern Christian ethics.

The final Part is 'Further Perspectives' on Natural Law; Conscience; Virtue; and finally a chapter on "Love and the Moral Life." These further perspectives consist of contemporary re-workings and critiques of the themes discussed earlier. Dowler gives greater depth to the earlier material here, and shows how creatively some of the themes have been appropriated or opposed in recent moral theology/philosophy. Readers are introduced to more up-to-date material in this section, and exposed to a wider variety of modern Christian thought on complex moral themes.

As an introductory textbook to Christian ethics this volume is worth considering, certainly for undergraduates and interested clergy, and can be read as a helpful complement to other introductions to the field. It certainly should not be considered definitive, nor would I suggest it be a core text for theological ethics. All that having been said, I enjoyed this book. I was pleased to see a scholar/parish priest writing on theological ethics, and in such an accessible and interesting way. *Theological Ethics* deserves a wide audience: both those who will agree and follow his lead, and those who will disagree but be challenged by it to think through Christian moral theology afresh in dialogue with Dowler's ideas.

Michael J, Liverpool Diocese and Chester University

David H.J. Gay. *Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists.* (Brachus, Biggleswade, 2011)

In one sense this book does exactly what it says on the tin: it warns Baptists against sacramentalism! Specifically the warning is that there is an increasing number of Baptists who claim that saving grace and the Holy Spirit are conveyed through water baptism and that such an understanding is 'unbaptist', theologically unsound, and ruinous to the gospel.

The author seeks to establish the need for this warning by contrasting early Baptist theology (17th-19th Century) with perceived current trends. Finding little or no place for a sacramental understanding in the Baptist theology of that early period (hence 'unbaptist'), he seeks to establish that it is now more pervasive, citing many examples from recent Baptist theologians that appear to espouse some level of salvific action by God in baptism.

Elements which he believes will continue to drive this trend (such as ecumenism, mass evangelism, the charismatic movement and the 'new perspective') are then discussed before Scripture is examined to see whether the passages frequently appealed to by sacramentalists will bear the weight of a sacramental interpretation.

The book concludes by assessing the likely (indeed to his mind already present) consequences, namely: a diminished place for preaching, a distorted gospel, Papistry, and many people erroneously assuming that they are 'saved'.

There are some good points to this book. It is written in easily accessible language and the reader is left in no doubt as to the author's position at any point. Simple and clear definitions are given as to what the author understands by certain terms – including (importantly) sacramentalism & Baptist. There is also evidence of considerable research and, as a Baptist, I was both interested and surprised by many of the quotes from theologians such as Beasley-Murray, Fowler and Cross. The book does encourage an examination of the difference between a sacrament and an ordinance, and how that difference can impact on practice.

That being said, the fact that the book is primarily a warning heavily influences its style and structure in a negative way. It is charged with rhetoric, which can become tedious and distracting. It is also repetitive, with arguments returned to in ways that confuse rather than develop the point being made. Indeed many of the assertions lack sufficient evidence or argument to back them up (the exception being the examination of the Biblical foundations for a sacramental understanding of baptism). The lack of clarity is only exacerbated by the use of both extensive and extended footnotes and endnotes, so that the reader is forced to decide whether to interrupt the flow of the piece or miss out on the information they provide (some of which has direct impact on the argument.) What is more, it is uncertain as to whether Gay has really engaged with those he is seeking to critique, or whether he imposes his own understanding of what their sacramentalism must mean before seeking to demolish that case.

Ultimately then, though this book raises some interesting questions, it is more interested in promoting 'sound bite' warnings than exploring the matter in a thorough and convincing way, and so does not make much headway in providing answers.

Andy Frith, Moreton Baptist Church

Michael P Jensen. Sydney Anglicanism: An Apology. (Wipf & Stock, 2012)

It has been said that if the Reformation's chief protagonists had been Cardinal Contarini and Philipp Melanchthon rather than Leo X and Martin Luther, the outcome would have been entirely different. Apart from stating the obvious, it is an interesting reflection on the way in which different personality *types* handle conflict.

Michael Jensen was a doctoral student at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, during my time there, and he helped me to see what I have always known instinctively, that deep theological disagreement takes on an entirely different character when those engaging in the debate have heart.

Michael has heart, and that is what makes the book a hopeful and helpful one. A Lecturer in Doctrine and Church History at Moore College, he comes from one of the great families of Sydney Anglicanism. He tells the story of Sydney Anglicanism from a privileged insider's perspective, but with sensitivity towards those who disagree and with clear warnings for that conservative diocese, lest it become beleaguered, inward-looking or self-righteous.

The book is in both senses an apology. It regrets mistakes that Sydney Anglicans have made, but it is a convinced (and convincing) apologia for the inherently Anglican character of that diocese.

Written in a ten-week period, the book has the spark and energy of a journalistic enterprise, and a few of its weaknesses. For me, not knowing the detailed context, the historical background of the debates within the Australian church was very helpful. Of course, it covers the areas of primary media attention: lay presidency, the ministry of women, the accusation of fundamentalism, but the twin theses of the book are the doctrines of scripture and ecclesiology.

Inevitably, Michael has to deal with the most virulent attack on that diocese in recent years, in the shape of Muriel Porter's 2011 *Sydney Anglicans and the Threat to World Anglicanism: The Sydney Experiment.* Her book is a cheap and easy swipe, against which Michael responds with dignity and clarity. I hadn't realized quite how polarized Anglican Australia was between a liberal Catholic centre and a smaller evangelical constituency, and that was a

special sadness. It reminded me of the 1920s vitriol of Anglo-Catholic/Evangelical demagogic debate and response in the UK, a scene that has long since passed.

This book does not stray into the global discussion about what Anglicanism is, where the centre lies, the role of GAFCON, and so forth, and is the stronger for its focused agenda. Michael answers the question about whether Sydney Anglicans really are Anglicans (yes) and he is right. The bigger questions remain: for Sydney Anglicans, does the Communion really matter (probably yes, but not at all costs), and is there hope for a more gracious and integrated Australian Anglican church in the future (not at the moment, I fear).

His last word is his best word: for the mission of the church, "Sydney Anglicans need to return, with due humility, to the sources of their faith. The only recipe for security is a prayerful commitment to meet Jesus Christ as he is revealed in Scripture." [176]

Adrian Chatfield, Ridley Hall, Cambridge

David Pullinger. *A Desire to Belong – Thinking about single people in church. (*Deedot Press, 2011)

The author states in the introduction to this book that he does not wish "to be definitive" in what he writes; rather he wishes to "begin a discussion". He has written this book, he says, for church leaders, in order to introduce some of the key issues facing single people. He feels that this is necessary since the subject is rarely addressed in churches, and can be a source of pain and frustration.

He examines some of the changes which have taken place in British society in recent years. 1 in 3 adults are now single, and the personal and social impact of this is high. In spite of these societal changes, he says that most single people would still wish to have a life partner.

He outlines the diversity of church teaching on this subject, and makes reference to the question of whether or not singleness is a 'gift' or a 'calling'. He notes how wide is the variety of experiences of single people, and discusses some of the assumptions which married people can make about those who are single.

He says that the thing which single people most want is to feel included in church life, that they belong there and are a full part of it. He ends with a chapter on how to support those single people who are hoping to marry, while recognising that this is not the case for all singles.

The book makes some interesting points and raises some interesting questions. My frustration with it was its length – at just 56 pages long I felt that it was over before it had really begun!

It also really only just begins to cover some of the key issues at a very surface level. There are lots of areas which aren't discussed at all, and some which are only hinted at.
I realise that the author stated at the start that it was only his intention to begin a discussion, but I personally would have liked him to give more of his own opinions and draw more conclusions. I hope that this book will be read by church leaders, and will be used to generate discussions which are indeed very important – and I hope that its length and style won't mean that it is overlooked.
Kate Wharton, Liverpool

John Stuart. *British Missionaries and the End of Empire: East, Central and Southern Africa, 1939-64*. (Eerdmans, 2011)

This book, which is part of the 'Studies in the History of Christian Missions' series, tells the story of British Protestant missionary activities in Africa during the end of the British Empire and the ensuing period of decolonialisation that happened in those African countries. As such I found it a fascinating read. Whilst much has been written about missionary activities during the colonial period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, much less has been written about Christian mission at the end of the colonial period in mainland Africa, a period which began in the early 1920s in Egypt and continued into the 1980s with Zimbabwe (and arguably even into the second decade of the 21st century if one considers recent events in South Sudan). Moreover little has been written of the challenges and opportunities the British missionaries in those places faced during the turbulent and exciting period of decolonialisation which followed the dismantling of the British Empire. This book address part of that story, insofar as it covers some of the countries and some of the historical time period involved in the greater history of Christian mission and African decolonialisation.
Historical surveys, like this one, can tend to read in a shopping list kind of way, and even more so when they have been written primarily as a doctoral thesis, as is the case here. It is often hard to find the central questions being answered or the hypothesis being argued for in such a sub-genre. Perhaps here it is the impact of political changes on missionary activity, or perhaps it is the challenge of African nationalism on British missionaries (rather than the *vice versa* challenge of British mission on African identity during the earlier colonial period), or perhaps it is an evaluation of the impact or legacy of British missionary activity during that time period on the current explosion of Christianity in contemporary Africa? I'm left feeling not completely sure what the central hypotheses of the book are, but I am sure that this book

is really beautifully written, and I found the author was able to take me deep into the world of postcolonial Africa, and even deeper into the challenges, anxieties and successes of the British missionaries who inhabited that rapidly changing world.

As a missiologist myself I was stuck by the immediately un-practical nature of the book. This book is, after all, written by a historian from an historical perspective, rather than being written by a theologian taking a theological perspective. As such it needs an extra bit of effort to mine out from the text any points of enduring worth or any valuable lessons or principles for Christian mission today. You could say that Stuart does the hard graft by spending time in the archives, yet he doesn't present his data as principles or lessons, but rather as a scholarly historical survey of the interface of mission carried out in the stress point between African nationalism and British Colonialism.

Conscious, then, of what my students might ask of and require from the book, I had to dig much deeper for some answers than I would from a book that was about mission *per se* rather than the history of missions. And even then, this book is actually the history of Protestant (mainly Anglican) mission to a relatively small geographical area and in an even more narrowly defined time period, and as such neglects the long and rich tradition of Catholic (mainly Jesuit) mission in the area, or the late 19th and early 20th Century endeavours of the Plymouth Brethren missionaries such as F.S. Arnot, Dan Crawford or the Fishers, or indeed the nascent and what would become immensely influential Pentecostal missionaries of that time period (I'm thinking here of the early Assemblies of God missionaries to Africa such as WFB Burton, Jimmy Salter and James McKeown).

Yet some points of enduring worth are hidden within these pages. For example, Stuart draws out the importance of ecclesial autonomy and self-governance when he writes 'only gradually did missionaries acknowledge that the best solution to the church's ills might lie within the church in Africa itself, primarily in an indigenous ministry' [56]. Stuart highlights the emancipatory role some female missionaries had in promoting the importance of women's voices in the church when he writes 'it seemed to Lehmann that African women were undervalued and under-utilised by mission and by the church. She pressed church elders to expand the number of woman lay preachers… conscious of the important social role of women' [104]. Stuart also draws our attention to the importance of an African church in the development of African national identity, when he notes that 'the Lumpa Church was indeed an African church for Africans … [an] extraordinarily powerful manifestation of Christian

independency …' [105]. And, in what I find a moving sentence of gospel liberation, Stuart writes: 'no longer did missionaries speak for Africans; Africans spoke for themselves' [193]. I recommend this book to anyone willing to put the work in to find the gold, as long as the reader remains cognisant of the denominational, geographical and chronological limitations of the book.

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