

Book Reviews

TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH

Scripture, community, worship

Edited by Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber

Nottingham: Apollos (IVP), 2009 262pp £14.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-380-3

As most of the contributors to this book are quick to affirm, Trinitarian theology has enjoyed a renaissance over the past generation. Stemming ultimately from the work of Karl Barth, but going beyond him in many respects, this revival of interest has been both ecumenical and comprehensive, touching as it has done on almost every aspect of Christian theology. The 2008 Wheaton theology conference was devoted to this theme, with particular application to the life of the church, perhaps because the organisers were aware that surprisingly little of this has seeped down to the ordinary worshipper in the pew.

Whether the Wheaton conference will have done much to change this is hard to say. It was, after all, a gathering of theologians talking to their colleagues about other theologians and their work, and so much of it will undoubtedly baffle the uninitiated. On the other hand, many of the papers have made a good attempt to assess the current state of Trinitarian theology and have not hesitated to suggest where changes and additions to the generally received picture can be made. The book is a stimulating symposium for those able to follow it and it is encouraging to see how nuanced some of the contributors are in their judgments. In particular, they are mostly not happy with the standard division into 'Eastern' and 'Western' Trinitarian theologies and some are not afraid to point out that the ancients, and especially the Cappadocian Fathers, have often been misunderstood by their modern admirers. On the whole, they resist the temptation to blame Augustine and the West for having distorted Trinitarian thinking over the centuries, and in one or two cases have even made bold attempts to reappropriate that tradition for the present day.

The first two papers are by Kevin Vanhoozer, who dissects the notion of a 'speaking God' as this has been understood by both theologians and philosophers before going on (in his second paper) to offer a positive reconstruction. His initial conclusion is that theologian Karl Barth and philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff both have important contributions to make, but that each one was strong in precisely the area where the other was weak.

Barth knew his theology but had little to say about the mechanics of divine discourse, whereas Wolterstorff knows all about speech-act theory but comes up with conclusions that are not specifically Trinitarian, or even Christian. Vanhoozer argues that their strengths need to be combined in a new synthesis, which is what he proceeds to offer. The result is that Barth's well-known Trinity of Revelation, in which the Father is the Revealer, the Son is the Revealed and the Holy Spirit is the Revelation is transformed into a Trinity of Communication, with the three persons of the Trinity in the corresponding relationships. Whether this will work in the longer term remains to be seen, but it is certainly an interesting attempt to update Barth, as it were, and overcome some of the weaknesses of his Trinitarianism, and so is to be welcomed.

The paper by Mark Husbands is also very interesting and potentially of long-term significance, because it tackles the whole issue of the so-called 'social Trinity' developed in recent years by Miroslav Volf and Catherine LaCugna among others. Husbands points out that it is based on a misreading of the Cappadocian Fathers and that Trinitarian relations cannot be used to construct social theories without the latter becoming fanciful. He prefers Karl Barth's approach, and his paper is impressive for the way in which he seeks to rehabilitate Barth in the face of his recent critics.

The other papers are less original or surprising in what they conclude, but they are all worth reading and contain valuable insights. A common thread running through them is the notion that somehow the Trinity is a 'missional' concept. Quite what this means is hard to say, but it is clear that the authors almost all regard 'mission' as fundamental, not merely to the life of the church but also to the being of God. Here it seems that they have got hold of the latest fad and are pushing it for all that it is worth, and then some. Nobody wants to downplay the importance of mission, but it is not helpful to overdo it either, especially when many of the contributors have been critical of similar excesses that they have perceived in the insistence of others on such concepts as 'relationality'. As always, the trick is to find and maintain the right balance.

The book is subdivided into three sections, the first of which deals with Scripture, the second with 'community' and the third with worship. Each of them tends to be weighted to the theoretical end of the spectrum, with the section on Scripture (for example) saying much about hermeneutics but little

about actual exegesis. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is the final section on worship which is the weakest in this respect, with chapters on preaching and the sacraments that can only be regarded as idealistic. As John Witvliet points out in his concluding chapter, the fact of the matter is that most people have not integrated these insights into their own devotional or pastoral practice, and it must be said that it is hard to see how they could, even if they wanted to. Adding an epiclesis to the liturgy of Holy Communion would not make it more Trinitarian, but it would raise other questions like the nature of the real presence of Christ, which most Protestants want to avoid. Likewise, it is hard to see how a preacher can make his sermons more 'Trinitarian' other than by bringing out all three persons of the Trinity in every text he preaches on, which is not very realistic (or responsible) either. So nothing much is likely to happen in this area, and for understandable reasons.

The book does not include all the papers given at the Wheaton conference, apparently because of constraints of both time and space. The rush to get the material out may also explain why the conversational style of the papers has been preserved intact and readers must make allowance for this. The Vanhoozer papers in particular must have been exciting to listen to, but the wisecracks and somewhat odd allusions fall flat in print and could have been edited out without losing anything of significance. Other papers could likewise have benefited from some editorial trimming, which would have made their points stand out more clearly. But as conference papers go, this collection is stimulating and of unusually high quality, and the book deserves to be read and pondered by all who have a serious interest in its subject.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

THE UNQUENCHABLE FLAME: Introducing the Reformation
Michael Reeves

Nottingham IVP, 2009 192pp £8.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-385-8

In a day when many ecumenists are seeking to paper over the Reformation divides, it is good that this concise and readable introduction to the subject should be published. It is also to the credit of IVP that they should produce such material for the student world (as well as the general reader) in an age when it is the fashion in so many circles to ignore the lessons of history.

Whereas many writers focus on the English reformers, the author, who is Theological Adviser to UCCF, does his readers a service by bringing to life those from the continent and assessing their different emphases, strengths and weaknesses in an engaging manner: the English Reformation is reached only after the first 114 pages. The book is easy to read, well illustrated with black and white etchings, and has highlighted sections introducing individuals and drawing attention to various issues. These help to bring the central characters to life, and the author includes helpful quotations from their writings.

While the Reformation freed Protestant Christians from believing that the Bible can be understood properly only when interpreted by the priest, today's Christians are in danger of being brought into a different fresh bondage, this time to the scholar. For there are those who would have us believe that the Bible's apparently clear teaching on issues of doctrine and ethics (such as justification and sexuality) must be viewed through the spectacles of the scholar. Against such a denial of the perspicuity of Scripture, Reeves summarises Zwingli's teaching (pp. 65-6) in these terms; 'we do not have to be previously enlightened to understand God's Word, for we do not bring our own light to the Word. On the contrary, the Word is light and brings light to our natural darkness. This belief was central to Zwingli's reformation project: he could preach the Scriptures to all because the Scriptures can be understood by all. They were no longer to be the preserve of the educated elite. But by saying that God's Word brings its own enlightenment Zwingli also meant that we do not recognise the Bible to be God's Word because of what anyone tells us or because of any rational argument, but because when God speaks, we are compelled to recognise His Word for what it is.'

The chapters on the continental reformers make the reader aware of how much the movement owed to the Swiss style of government and its ruling authorities, as well as the political upheavals of the day. The English section moves beyond the sixteenth century to introduce the Puritans and to assess the subsequent progress of reform. A neat epigram (p. 138) reminds us that 'Elizabeth's long reign ensured that the nation was Protestant. What it could never do was ensure that the people were themselves evangelical'. The book concludes with an extremely relevant chapter asking the salutary question, 'Is the Reformation over?' There are two appendices containing a timeline of dates and a most helpful list (not too long, and not too erudite) for further reading which

includes reference to its own website for more materials, audio resources and links. These help to make the book an invaluable source for any reader wishing to deepen his or her knowledge of this important subject.

DAVID WHEATON
Blandford Forum

**SHEPHERDS AFTER MY OWN HEART:
Pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible
New Studies in Biblical Theology 20
Timothy S. Laniak**

Downers Grove: Apollos/IVP, 2006 313pp £12.99pb ISBN: 9-781844-741274

It seems strange to start a book by drawing attention to how much help the author needed in trimming down his material! But as one reads Laniak's book every chapter gives the impression there is much more to be said, especially given the full footnotes, thorough appendix and impressive bibliography. This book is a labour of love and a result of thousands of miles travelled.

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 is background, potentially this could have been quite boring but was a surprising highlight. It contains chapters on metaphors and their use, shepherds in the ancient world and shepherd rulers. As well as being fascinating Laniak draws some interesting parallels and contrasts with the Bible. As enjoyable as some might find this, he may have used up valuable space here (see later). Part 2 'Biblical Prototypes' contains two chapters, on Moses and on David. He traces the leadership of YHWH held out through Moses, the anticipation of David, idealisation of kingship and how we are left longing for the true Shepherd. Part 3 traces the promise of the Messiah shepherd in the second Exodus through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah, highlighting the failure of their 'shepherds', God's promise to be their shepherd and to provide 'Shepherds after my own heart'. Part 4 on the gospels shows Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of all the shepherd imagery and how his sheep are to follow. This section ends with Jesus' command to Peter to 'Feed my sheep' which leads nicely onto the Part 5 on 1 Peter and Revelation about following and serving the shepherd-lamb, before concluding in Part 6.

Readers will be familiar with the shepherd imagery of God, Moses, David, Jesus and Church leaders. However connections and observations are made

which may have been missed. Laniak sweeps through large sections of the Bible giving feel for the big picture whilst able to focus in on details. Laniak's stated aim is that his book would equip Pastors and while reading, implications begin to become obvious. It seems therefore a glaring omission that he doesn't end with either a call to rise to the challenge or some practical help to live out these implications. Rather it ends with a small Epilogue raising the question of use of dynamic equivalents.

Despite the abrupt ending and lack of explicit application to the modern Pastor, he helps us through the biblical material and connections so well, which is intrinsically valuable, but also gives plenty of implicit application. Buy it and gain a more wondrous view of the good shepherd and a clearer view of the job of those who shepherd after his own heart.

DARREN MOORE
Tranmere

THE ORDINARY HERO

Tim Chester

Leicester: IVP, 2009 221pp £8.99pb ISBN: 9781844743773

Books on Christian living are two-a-penny with anyone and everyone offering their advice. They frequently take the form of 'How to...' books, or promise a quick fix: Live like this then God will bless you like that. And so it is unusual, yet refreshing, to find Tim Chester's latest book subtitled *Living the cross and resurrection*. Chester introduces his subject matter as being 'about what it means to follow the Christ who died and was raised'. He posits that as Jesus' life is a model for all Christians so our lives should reflect the cross and the resurrection.

At the outset the author sets the scene by showing that the cross demonstrates how much God loves us. He acknowledges that what people mean by the phrase 'God loves you' differs radically and therefore argues from Romans that the cross is how we know God loves us: 'What's the demonstration of God's love? The cross. How do we know God loves us? The cross. What's the basis of hope that doesn't disappoint? The cross. The cross stands forever as the great demonstration of God's love.' Chester is careful to reaffirm penal

substitution throughout the book just in case we were to mishear and think the cross is only a demonstration of God's love and little more, as some have suggested in recent times.

Having set the scene and shown that our right response to the cross is humble confidence in Jesus, the author sets about helping his readers to live a cross and resurrection shaped life. Instead of peddling the all too frequent triumphalist, power wielding, all-conquering 'gospel' he suggests that true Christian identity is seen in humble service of others, taking the lead from Jesus in John 13. Words like sacrificial, self-denial and martyrdom soak these pages as Chester grittily spells out what living the cross might look like. He asserts that no matter the earthly cost, the value of Jesus is worth every penny and the way of the cross is the way of true joy.

Chester spots a universal pattern: 'The kingdom of God is a hidden kingdom until Christ is revealed in glory. So the pattern for Christians is one of suffering now, followed by glory.' (p. 91) He avers that this pattern fits Jesus (no glory without the cross), the world (bondage followed by liberation), God's kingdom (hiddenness followed by revelation) and Christians (suffering followed by glory). Carefully placing all of these manifestations of the great pattern within a clearly defined now and not yet framework the author avoids a seriously over-realised eschatology and too optimistic post-millennialism. Quoting 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Chester raises our eyes heavenward and to the glory we will receive on the Last Day. The resurrection gives us power to be weak, frees us to serve and enables us to spend our lives wisely, asserts the author. Finally, in his concluding chapters Chester says that the resurrection allows us to live in certain hope of a new world for which it is worth dying and in which there will be no injustice, a world with all the hallmarks of resurrection.

This is a refreshing book which succeeds in the aim stated in the introduction. However, stylistically it feels like lightly edited talks. This leaves the reader heavily reliant on imagining the author's intended intonation in order to grasp the meaning of (deliberately) incomplete sentences lacking a verb or a subject, and paragraphs of rhetorical questions. It makes for slow progress until the reader has 'tuned in' to the writer's style. Nevertheless, this is a welcome book.

JOHN TELFORD

London

JESUS AND THE GOD OF ISRAEL

Richard J. Bauckham

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008 285pp £14.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84227-538-2

Richard Bauckham asks, and then seeks to answer, a seemingly innocent question: How could first-century Jewish monotheists believe and teach the divine status of Jesus, making him the object of full divine worship, while retaining their Jewish monotheism?

The question is far from innocent, cutting as it does to the very heart of the identity both of God and of Jesus. Indeed, in order to answer the question he shows it is necessary to first have a uniquely identifiable God, different from all others, so that the pattern of daily life and cultic worship of the Jews is justified. Why have religious laws that differ from those of other nations unless there is a reason to? What reason can there be other than that Israel worships a different God? Israel does have a different God, as is clearly seen both from divine pronouncements and from the actions that result from obedience to those pronouncements.

The question of divine identity is not the same as the question of divine nature: Bauckham is answering the question ‘Who is God?’, not the the question, ‘What is God?’ Consequently he offers little help to those interested in ontology, and views the contribution of Greek philosophical concepts as being at best secondary to the primary question of identity. Israel’s God is identified by two key criteria, which distinguish him from all other gods and from all other reality (the created order). The first is that God is the uncreated creator of all things. At a stroke this form of identification puts every other god and every part of creation below God. He is over everything. No other being, no matter what is claimed for it, can compete with God for the prize of being identified as God. The second criterion is that God has revealed himself exclusively to Israel, so that they alone had the knowledge of God. Anything any other nation ‘knew’ about ‘God’ had not been revealed by God and so was not true knowledge. Only Israel possessed the truth as a direct consequence of divine revelation.

Coming to the New Testament, Bauckham demonstrates how these same criteria are directly applicable to Jesus, and are applied to him by all the New

Testament writers. When Paul declares Jesus to be the Creator of all things, Colossians 1:16 etc., he is not speaking of Jesus as the instrument or means of creation, but is identifying Jesus as God. When he speaks of Jesus as Saviour he is giving to him the same identity as the God who saved Israel at the exodus and on many other occasions. Yet none of the New Testament writers are confusing Jesus with God. Their position is clear, that Jesus is truly and fully part of God, not a separate God, nor, to use an old term, a mode of God. He is God in his own right, and so one part of the Trinity.

All this, and much more, make up the first chapter which is a reprint of the author's 1998 work 'God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament', and is worth the price of the volume itself. Subsequent chapters deal with various objections to Bauckham's thesis, much of which will mean little to those unfamiliar with the debate. However, there are also chapters which deal at length with biblical exposition, and which seek to throw new light on much-debated passages such as Philippians 2:6-11 (which he sees as being a re-statement of the end of Isa. 53) and on less obvious passages such as Hebrews 13:8 to name but one. His work on our Lord's cry of desolation, Mark 15:34, would likely breathe new life into many a Good Friday sermon; one can see the connected work on the Psalms of lament spawning a new wave of well-intentioned 'counselling' works for the troubled and bereaved.

It will be very interesting to see just how the scholarly world reacts to this well-argued, thoroughly-researched and very readable volume. It deserves careful attention, because it puts Jesus firmly on the throne of heaven, as the fit and proper object of Christian worship. It also poses some very awkward questions for Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims and Jews, and any others who have a unitarian view of Jesus the Son of God.

EDWARD J. MALCOLM
Reading

RUN TO WIN THE PRIZE — Perseverance in the New Testament
Thomas R. Schreiner

Nottingham: Apollon, 2009 131pp £9.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-369-8

In this book based on his lectures at the 2008 Oak Hill Annual School of Theology, Professor Schreiner offers a more accessible version of his recent

longer work (*The Race Set Before Us*, Leicester; IVP, 2001), clears up some misunderstandings which arose from the former book, and considers the pastoral implications of his thesis more directly. Through careful and concise exegesis, with an extended treatment of Hebrews, Schreiner concludes that the warning passages of the New Testament are addressed to real believers and are real warnings about final and definitive rejection of Jesus Christ, the punishment for which is eternal damnation. His exegesis will not allow the interpretation that they speak hypothetically.

Immediately one suspects that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is under threat. Nothing could be further from Schreiner's point. He explicitly denies three explanations of these passages: that they teach that full salvation can be lost; that they teach that rewards (but not salvation) can be lost; or that they are addressed to unbelievers. Rather, the passages are a means God uses to keep his chosen people. So they are not retrospective warnings which 'accuse their readers because [they] have fallen away. They admonish them so that they will not fall away' and are thus prospective warnings. God uses these warnings to ensure that every real believer perseveres. Their purpose is redemptive and salvific. 'Warnings are not opposed to promises.'

Schreiner then spends chapters 3 & 4 effectively answering the critics who see him teaching that persevering faith is perfection and works—righteousness. As might be expected, chapter 5 deals with how this reading of the passages impacts on the assurance of the believer. In short, all true believers heed the warnings. This does not mean believers attaining perfection or a works—righteousness, but believers, as conscious sinners, continuing to trust Christ with humility and obedience. A positive response to the warnings ought, in itself, to build assurance in the believer. Schreiner interacts briefly with the Federal Vision and Arminianism finding them both unpersuasive but the latter a more consistent system. Whilst to some his interpretation may seem novel, he is able to draw on a number of serious historical figures for support.

The book concludes with a sermon delivered at the School of Theology on Galatians 5:2-12 where the pastoral import of the book is most evident: we must not say I cannot fall away, so I don't need the warnings; our greatest danger is trusting ourselves or trusting our faith; and we ought to recognise we need the warnings because God has given them to believers. Schreiner is

holding the standard Reformed doctrine of perseverance, but, for this reviewer at least, he has succeeded in opening up the pastoral use of the warning passages for real believers. It is to people who are already running the race that these warnings are given. Only the true believer will be warned by them and therefore persevere. Thus they become of direct use to the pastor in dealing with believers.

Schreiner has achieved his aim of an accessible presentation which remains thorough. Illustrations are clear and regular. Those who hold a more objective view of the covenant will find the subjective view which pervades this book (Schreiner is a Baptist after all) a little frustrating. However, that should not be used to dismiss what is a provocative and useful exposition of the warning passages of the New Testament.

PAUL DARLINGTON
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FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT:

The Trinity in John's Gospel

Andreas J. Kostenberger and Scott R. Swain

Nottingham: IVP, 2008 224pp £12.99pb ISBN: 9781844742530

Since the rise of modernity biblical studies and systematic theology have drifted apart and too often too far apart. Bible commentaries are regularly thin on theology, and doctrinal works frequently lack rigorous engagement with the Scriptural text. This problem is only intensified as the disciplines pursue research into exceedingly specialised nooks and crannies. All this, of course, is to the detriment of the church. Biblical studies and theology are not simply friends, they are mutually necessary for the proper functioning of each. Hence, it is a great pleasure to discover that New Testament scholar, Andreas Köstenberger, and systematic theologian, Scott Swain, have teamed up to write a very helpful book on the Trinity in John's Gospel. Köstenberger and Swain harness their different skills in order to produce a rich product.

The book is divided into three sections. Section one (ch. 1) situates John's gospel in its historical context. Here the authors particularly draw on the work of Richard Bauckham and the notion that Jewish monotheism is not compromised by a Christ who is human, because he is included in the one

God's identity. Christ's actions, claims, and work, which reveal his divinity in no way contradict a robust monotheism, but in fact serve to illuminate the divine identity. In the second section (chs. 2–6) the authors turn to the text of John itself to see what is said about God (ch. 2), the Father (ch. 3), the Son (ch. 4), the Spirit (ch. 5), and finally Father, Son, and Spirit together (ch. 6). These chapters work from the beginning to the end of John's Gospel looking at the specific texts that touch on the chapter's topic with some fascinating results.

The third section (chs. 7–10) turns to theological reflection arising from the prior exegetical harvest. There is firstly a chapter on Christology (ch. 7), which analyses what it means for Jesus to be 'Son'. Here the seemingly contradictory ideas (to late modern ears), that Father and Son are equally divine, and yet the Father commands and Son obeys, is explained precisely by the fact that their relationship is defined as Father and Son. The Father enjoys a 'personal priority' in the order of triune life, which in no way mitigates equality with the Son. In chapter 8 discussion moves to the Spirit, whose person is revealed in the distinctive 'ways in which he relates to the Father and the Son'. The thesis is that the Father sends the Spirit to 'rest and remain' on the Son, so that through the Son the Spirit may 'rest and remain' on Jesus' disciples. Chapter 9 takes up the theme of mission. Here the authors argue that John's mission theology is tied to the Trinity, and indeed, that John's presentation of the Trinity is a function of his mission theology and not *vice versa*. The 'revolutionary' implication is that the church must understand her mission in Trinitarian terms: originating from the Father, mediated by the Son, and empowered by the Spirit.

Chapter 10 summarises John's presentation of Trinity using Christ's high-priestly prayer (John 17). Interestingly, and arguing against Karl Barth, the authors find proof in this prayer for the so-called *pactum salutis* (or covenant of redemption), a doctrine which flowered in high Protestant Orthodoxy. They contend that the *pactum salutis* is not so much about eternity past as it is about the eternal persons-in-fellowship. In a concluding chapter the authors portray John's phrase 'eternal life' as having a Trinitarian character. It is a personal knowledge of God the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit, which consists in sharing in the Father's overflow of love for his Son in the Spirit. Such a relationship includes the responsibility of continuing the apostolic mission of the church, so that ultimately the Father may be glorified in the Son.

This book is rich fare indeed, full of stunning theological insights, but closely argued from the text of John's Gospel. The earlier exegetical chapters can be difficult going, and an open Bible will be needed close at hand. However, the theological integration in the second half repays the effort. I finished the book with two particular questions. First, when discussing the Son's filial relationship to the Father, was there not more to be said about the credal notion of 'eternal generation'? Even if *monogenes* means 'unique' rather than 'only begotten', is there still not evidence of eternal generation in John (5:25, 6:57; see also 1 John 5:18) which demands exploration in a book like this? Second, I wonder if the idea of the Spirit as the one who 'rests and remains' on the Son, so that 'through' him he can 'rest and remain' on the church is an adequate summary idea? Does not the filioque demand that we see a much more active role for the Son in the divine economy? These questions aside, this book is a good model that we hope will encourage further collaborative efforts from scholars of different disciplines.

MARTIN FOORD
Perth, Australia

THE BIBLE FOR SINNERS: Interpretation in the present Time
Christopher Rowland & Jonathan Roberts

London: SPCK, 2008 119pp £10.99pb ISBN: 978-0-281-05802-0

There is something a little ironic about a book on the interpretation of the Bible that rests on false dichotomy, caricature, and a weak, even negligent, understanding of the Scriptures. Unhappily, that is what Christopher Rowland and Jonathan Roberts have achieved in *The Bible for Sinners*.

Their central contention is that discerning the voice of God should be done by subordinating the text of the Bible to our perception of what the Spirit is now saying in our current circumstances. The emphasis ought to be on circumstances: life, compassion, and humanity take precedence over the letter of what was written. This, we're told, is the hermeneutic of the Bible itself, which 'point[s] us to a form of Christian commitment that never bids us look to texts from the past as the prime source of understanding of the divine will...' The authors maintain that Jesus, Peter, and Paul were all such radical interpreters of Scripture, freely jettisoning what was written when it contradicted their perception of the human need in front of them. Their more

‘conservative’ opponents may have ‘had all the best arguments’, but seeing the work of God in those that the letter of Scripture would deem ‘sinners’ persuaded them to adopt a new ethic of acceptance. This, say Rowland and Roberts, is the hermeneutic we should pursue.

They make their case by presenting a series of perspectives on interpretation. There is an approving chapter on Liberation Theology as an example of ‘contextual interpretation’. Two chapters give a potted history of radical Christian hermeneutics: Hans Denck, Gerrard Winstanley, William Blake and William Stringfellow are held up as model interpreters, ready to listen to the voice of the Spirit over against the dead letter of Scripture. Their penultimate chapter features a fictional dialogue between a conservative and a liberal on the subject of marriage and divorce. But the message of each chapter is the same: right hermeneutics are open. Interpreting the Bible Christianly means a willingness to revise the literal contents of Scripture in the light of the way people actually live. Right interpretation should be done by sinners in their life circumstances, not by experts in ivory towers.

The implications of this approach become apparent in the second chapter of the book, a discussion of same sex relationships. Although the authors claim to be more interested in questions than answers, here at least their answer is clear. An ‘open’, ‘Spirit-oriented’ understanding of the Bible will prioritize homosexual ‘sinners’ in their personhood over ‘what the Bible says’. More precisely, it will support the appointment of Gene Robinson and Jeffrey John to the episcopacy. Here, I think, is the axe these authors are really grinding.

The Bible for Sinners is not a good book. The authors seem more interested in argument by adjective than serious engagement with the issues. Who would not rather be ‘open’, ‘Spirit-oriented’, ‘imaginative’ and ‘attentive’ in their interpretation of the Bible than ‘closed,’ ‘legalistic’ and ‘inflexible’? The position they oppose is little better than a caricature. Loyalty to Scripture, entrenched traditionalism, theological elitism, the higher critical methods, legalism and the cowardly hypocrisy of the Church of England all get bound up into one coherent group of people: ‘conservatives’. At times I found myself cheering their anti-elitism and their opposition to applicationless interpretation. Then I realized they thought they were talking about me. As for their use of Scripture, at times it was scandalous. Romans 4, 2 Corinthians 3:6, the

Sermon on the Mount and the entire Pauline corpus all suffer either negligence or wholesale abuse at one point or another. Most of all, though, this book pays such scant regard to the words of the living God that it twice declares: 'the Bible itself is part of the problem.' For the sake of writing this review, I read *The Bible for Sinners* through twice. I will not be reading it again.

GWILYM DAVIES

London

A SHORT LIFE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

George M. Marsden

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008 152pp £10.99pb ISBN 10: 0802802206
ISBN 13: 978-0802802200

George Marsden (author of the award-winning *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*) aims in *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* to make Edwards accessible to a wide variety of readers—the general reader, but also church study groups and history students. Marsden is successful in this aim. It would be a useful book to a reader who is familiar with an overview of church history and now wants to understand specific periods or people in more detail, but yet does not want to read a weighty, multi-volume biography.

The book is structured chronologically, opening with a scene-setting chapter, "Edwards, Franklin and Their Times", which takes the reader into the unsettled America of 1723. Marsden spends time comparing and contrasting Jonathan Edwards with Benjamin Franklin. Both sons of 'pious New England Calvinist families at a time when their heritage faced a severe crisis', both precocious, and extraordinarily curious as boys, they responded differently: Franklin rebelling 'against old authorities' and rejecting 'the whole Calvinistic enterprise' by his early teens; Edwards finding deeper meaning through his struggles, realizing that the 'most important issue in life was one's relationship to God'.

This comparison is revisited at various points in the book which is helpful in rooting this personal history in the wider history of America. "Wrestling with God" takes the reader from Edwards' childhood of piety through to his first position as pastor of a church in Bolton, Connecticut. "Transitions and Challenges" follows him from Bolton to his appointment as a Yale tutor (and marrying Mrs. Edwards) to an appointment as assistant pastor in

Northampton, a frontier town on the western edge of the settlements. The majority of the book deals with life in Northampton for the Edwards family, and the challenges Jonathan Edwards faced in that particular ministry before considering the short period of his life as ‘A Missionary, a Scholar, and a President’.

Marsden concludes with his thoughts on what we should learn from Jonathan Edwards’ life. He argues convincingly that understanding Edwards’ life in the context of the development of modern America is key to understanding its paradoxical heritage (being exceedingly secular in many respects, yet also remarkably religious). He also considers Edwards’ approach to enquiry helpful in deepening our theological insights—the existence of a creator God means that the most essential relationships in the universe are personal and all enquiries must start with reference to him. Marsden’s view that Edwards was a man of God-centred integrity ‘driven by an overarching and passionate concern about a right relationship to God’ is demonstrated clearly in the book, through details of Edwards’ personal tragedies and struggles in ministry.

This book is purposefully brief ‘without any scholarly apparatus’ (the reader is directed to “Jonathan Edwards: A Life” for documentation of points made in this book). This is generally successful. It makes the book easy to read, particularly for those who might not have the appetite for a full-scale biography. It would have been helpful to have had a few of Jonathan Edwards’ key sermons included as appendices, so that the reader is able to read the context, the sermon itself, and then the reaction to that sermon. This is a very minor point, however. At 152 pages this book is small enough to be portable, scholarly enough to be informing, and entertaining enough to be readable.

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DARWIN, CREATION AND THE FALL: Theological Challenges

R. J. Berry and T. A. Noble (eds.)

Nottingham: Apollos, 2009 208pp £9.99pb ISBN: 9781844743810

Christians who hold to both a high view of Scripture and a positive approach to evolutionary theory face opposition from two sides at once. On the one side are the atheists and liberals whose commitment to Darwin leads them to

dispense with Adam and the Fall; and on the other are those whose commitment to Adam and the Fall lead them to reject Darwin and all his works. The Fall is therefore a key issue for theological conservatives who remain convinced that neither opponent is right. The authors of this book come into this category and are drawn from worlds of science (Berry, Falk and Wilkinson) and theology (Hess, Noble, Lane, Blocher and Mortimer).

Wilkinson's outline of the doctrine of creation reminds us of what is so often missed in the debates about creation and evolution—that it is wonderful to know God as Creator. Berry's chapter 'Did Darwin dethrone humankind' reviews the history of evolutionary theory in relation to Christianity. He shows how there would be no inherent conflict between Darwin and the Bible, were the fires not being stoked by both atheists and the theological anti-Darwinians. So he finds himself on the one hand having to 'respond to the arch-reductionists who insist that we are no more than survival machines controlled by selfish genes' (p. 60) and on the other the contemporary creationists whose rejection of Darwin 'stems from the cry "No Adam, no Fall; no Fall, no Atonement; no Atonement, no Saviour [*sic*]"' (p. 64).

Two solid chapters are from Richard Hess on reading the early chapters of Genesis in their literary and historical context, and Henri Blocher on the theology of the Fall. While both are drawing on material available elsewhere, it is useful to have them collected together. Blocher quotes with approval Ricoeur's statement that 'Evil becomes scandalous at the same time as it becomes historical' (p. 158). He also shows brilliantly that since evil is not intrinsic to creation, any theodicy that fails to see it as 'other' is inadequate. For this reason, 'A historical fall is a non-negotiable article of faith' (p. 169). Mortimer's review of Blocher's chapter defends the conservative view against those Christian writers who buy into sociobiology's rejection of any fall.

While there are useful chapters in this collection, overall it suffers from having to interact with both liberals and literalists at the same time. The effort of looking both ways impairs clarity, and so this is not the clear exposition of the pro-Adam and pro-Darwin position that it could have been.

ED MOLL
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PRAYING THE PSALMS: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit **Walter Brueggemann**

Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2007 98pp £6.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84227-552-8

I'm not sure what I quite expected when picking up this book to read one afternoon. As a person involved in both teaching and doing pastoral care I have great love for the Psalms which engage so well with the human condition. I was looking forward to a stimulating but not too demanding a read. I certainly thought it would be a quick read—after all it's only 98 pages! It was not what I expected.

Brueggemann wants to address two main issues which will help his readers engage more fruitfully with the Psalms. The first issue is that of the function of language in the use of the Psalms and the second is the Christian use of poetry which is so obviously Jewish. Originally the material was written as a series of printed papers. Brueggemann also makes it clear that this book is not meant to be either comprehensive or complete in its exploration of the Psalms. It is helpful to bear both of these things in mind when reading this book.

In the preface to this second edition Brueggemann reflects on the shift since his first publication commenting that 'most specifically, the pretensions of "objective scholarship" have given way to a more candid involvement of the interpreter in the interpretive project'. This can be no bad thing, as we seek to read the Psalms both engaging our minds and our hearts. The author's emphasis on the interactive nature of the Psalms, which he unpacks throughout this book, is most helpful. He draws on his understanding of Jewish practices to help him see the dialogic interaction of the Psalms. He looks at five main areas beginning with 'Letting experience touch the Psalter'. Here the focus is on how we go from being securely oriented (in our relationship with God) to being painfully disorientated (the state that many of the Psalms are written from) back to being 'surprisingly' re-orientated. Brueggemann helps us to connect with the humanity which the Psalms reflect as he says 'Psalms offer speech when life has gone beyond our frail efforts to control'.

The Liberation of Language takes us into looking at how we understand the genre of the Psalms and try to read that less as straight descriptive, since they are full of metaphors. As Brueggemann says 'it evokes into being what does not

exist until it has been spoken'. The language itself helps connect the speaker and listener and goes beyond mere description; it is part of the transforming work of God.

Language Appropriate to a Place—here we discover how the Psalms can help us engage and face difficult times in dialogue with God and be able to move on towards a time of celebration and thanksgiving, which are so much part of Psalms. Christians in a 'Jewish Territory'. This is an interesting insight into the strong Jewish nature of the Psalms, which Christians sometimes fail to properly acknowledge. Brueggemann encourages us to understand more of their context. He suggests looking more carefully at the prayers of Jesus, where we can see the link between a Jewish way of praying and Christological interpretation.

Vengeance—Human and Divine. Brueggemann, in acknowledging that the agenda of vengeance is the most difficult dimension of the Psalms, helps the reader understand the dynamics of what is going on. He brings us to the place where we also can acknowledge that despite our own longings, at times, for vengeance, that is God's role.

This book is not a straightforward devotional book nor is it a weighty academic book on the Psalms, it straddles the two areas. It challenges us to think more carefully about the nature of the Psalms—the language, genre, etc. in a way that helps us to better engage with the Psalms and to be able to use them in our prayer life, as we struggle with similar issues. It is not what I had expected but I was glad to have read it.

CLARE HENDRY

London

JOHN CALVIN — A Pilgrim's Life

Herman J. Selderhuis

Nottingham: IVP, 2009 287pp £9.99pb ISBN: 9781844743759

Five hundred years after John Calvin's birth, this biography makes the enigmatic reformer live again. There are a slew of books on Calvin's life and theology; whether this would be your fiftieth or first such read, Selderhuis' biography is worth spending time with.

The reason this book makes a contribution in the overcrowded market of Calvin studies, is that Selderhuis has based his account primarily on Calvin's letters. As a result, Calvin jumps off the pages as a man of flesh, with passion, wit, suffering and complexity. Few will expect a section on Calvin's sense of humour (p. 212). The author offers insightful observations, such as that when Calvin left the law for theology, in a real sense he never left the law – he merely became God's advocate (p. 22). Selderhuis has picked his way through swathes of primary sources, and presents the tasty morsels. We meet the Calvin who married an Anabaptist and wrote that the reformed ought to learn from the Anabaptists, who with God criticised the 'damned slowness' of the reformed (p. 74). The chapter on Calvin's preaching (p. 110) portrays Calvin in the pulpit, timing his hour long sermons with an hourglass—while his chief sermon recorder scribbled furiously. Interestingly, the man responsible for recording the sermons was paid half the salary of a pastor, and profits from publication went to exiled French refugees—social action flowing from the word! (p. 131).

When attempting to outline a 'typical day' in Calvin's life, Selderhuis paints a portrait of a man who 'prayed a lot' (p. 161). As Calvin was earthed in God, this biography is rooted in a convincing portrayal of the social setting Calvin lived in. Few books build up a better understanding of the immensely turbulent and tense Genevan political culture: torn between city officials, French refugees, pastors and the Roman Church. Careful exploration of the social setting paves the way for helpful comments on the execution of Servetus.

The biography is constantly nibbling away at our preconceptions, for example, while many realise Calvinism had positive effects upon capitalism, it is worth remembering that Calvin himself was useless with money (p. 95). John Calvin is a man who has been greatly misrepresented by history—as cruel, dull, tyrannical. This book sets the record straight.

PETER SANLON
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