Book Reviews

THE MESSAGE OF ESTHER: GOD PRESENT BUT UNSEEN

David G. Firth

Nottingham: IVP, 2010 £8.99pb 160pp ISBN: 978-1-84474-444-2

David Firth is successful in bringing to life the generally neglected book of Esther, combining a firm grasp of its historical setting with apt application to analogical situations in the contemporary world. He does not limit the book to parallels in Jewish history such as the Holocaust, but universalizes the book's relevance to modern genocides like those in Rwanda and Bosnia. For the Christian community of our times, he highlights the significance of the lessons of this secular book, which explicitly avoids religious language, for living and moving within similarly thoroughly secular contexts.

Firth does not overwhelm the lay reader by being over-scholarly. He offers just the right amount of information to make the reader aware of debated matters, textual issues, and historical puzzles, without letting these seams interfere with the thrust of the narrative's purposes. Firth's primary concerns are literary, and his reading betrays great attention to the 'twists and turns' of the plot, the style, the ironies, the character contrasts, and the intertextual allusions to Israel's broader canon.

Firth acknowledges the existence of different forms of the book of Esther but chooses to base his commentary on the Hebrew form. He then deals with matters of genre and, after exploring various models within which the book could be read, he concludes that 'dramatized history' would be the appropriate description for the book of Esther: 'someone preaching from the past to their contemporaries'. Firth does not think that the Purim celebration exhausts the purpose of the book, but suggests its aims are broader: it intends to entertain, to inspire faithfulness in Diaspora contexts where Jews are a minority, to explore possibilities of engaging with the dominant culture and to raise questions about God's activity in the world and how dependent that is on the faithfulness of his people. The reader is then introduced to the individual characters of the book, and, although some aspects of their personality are repeated in the course of the commentary, it is useful to have a fully drawn profile of the main players in the beginning. Furthermore, Firth does not fail to note the difference it makes to the understanding of the text when one reads it as part of the

Jewish canon. Recognizing the book's place in the canon helps one hear the echoes of Israel's tradition (e.g. wisdom traditions of the wise and the fool).

The subversive character of the book regarding the use of political power, the use of economic power, and the role of women, which Firth brings to the fore, calls for the recovery of this book for Christianity in the present world.

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HERMAN BAVINCK: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman and Theologian
Ron Gleason
Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010 511pp £22.99pb ISBN: 978-1596380806

Herman Bavinck deeply mined the past in order to deeply penetrate the present. This last decade has introduced him to English speakers with the translation of his four volume Reformed Dogmatics (RD), kindling an explosion in Bavinck studies. Systematicians are often accused of ahistorical exegesis, yet are themselves read ahistorically (the church still lacks biographies of men such as Hooker and Witsius for example), but with this first biography of Bavinck in English, Ron Gleason's personal and intimate portrait enables Bavinck's work to be understood in historical context, something Bavinck was acutely sensitive to both biblically and ecclesiastically.

Despite Jim Packer's glowing endorsement on the back of RD, evangelical Anglicans are way behind our Presbyterian siblings in discovering what Bavinck can offer. Bavinck was a leading light of the Dutch Reformed church at the turn of the twentieth century, a period more commonly associated with Abraham Kuyper. While Bavinck and Kuyper worked together closely to make the Reformed worldview a major cultural force in Holland, Gleason spends much of his book carefully delineating the difference between the two men.

For example, theologically Bavinck stands on far firmer, confessional, ground than the more speculative Kuyper. Salvation by Grace, Bavinck's critique of Kuyper's doctrine of 'presumptive regeneration' (recently made available in English) receives a concise summary. Yet Gleason points out that despite

Bavinck's orthodoxy, he failed to insist that Kuyper and his followers conform to the church's confession on this point, as the majority of conservative Christians viewed the relevant aspect of the confession as passé. This failure to insist on confessional consistency led to the eventual split of the Reformed church.

It is pastoral lessons such as this that Gleason's biography majors upon, each chapter highlighting a particular pastoral area from a Reformed perspective: Christian parenting and education, engagement with a liberal denomination, facing disappointment, opposition in ministry, and personal tragedy. While Gleason, himself a leading Bavinck scholar, more than ably handles the theological issues necessary to serve this aim, the book is not written as an introduction to Bavinck's thought. More suitable starting points for this would be Bolt's introduction and chapter summaries within the RD volumes, or Bristley's *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck*.

For all its strengths the book feels in desperate need of an editor. The writing can be laboured, the warm and encouraging prose made cumbersome with much unnecessary repetition. While this may aid those who read biographies in fits and starts, various structural oddities can make the narrative hard to follow. Whole discussions about the significance, theology, and evaluation of an event take place before the event is defined or described. Furthermore, as others have noted, Gleason falls foul of hagiography, with far too much space given to describing Kuyper and his faults. I longed for a more penetrating analysis of Bavinck's indecision, introspection, and potential depression.

Still, the book is a welcome addition to the growing pool of Bavinck resources, and with the recent discovery of a near complete, and previously unknown, manuscript of his four volume *Reformed Ethics*, it looks like Bavinck studies are only going to get more exciting from here on.

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A HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
Volume 2: The medieval through the reformation periods
Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, eds.
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009 581pp £27.99hb ISBN: 978-0-8028-4274-9

This is the second of three projected volumes covering the history of biblical interpretation in both Jewish and Christian contexts. It covers the millennium from 600 to 1600, with some individual contributors reaching back to the time of Jesus and forward almost to the present day. Most people assume not only that the Reformation was quite distinct from the middle ages which preceded it, but that it was the rejection of medieval approaches which helped cause it in the first place. On that interpretation, this book ought to be split in two, but one of the advantages in combining them is that it enables us to appreciate just how much continuity there was from one to the other. The distinction is not lost sight of, but the nature of the transition is emphasised, and that must be one of the great strengths of this volume.

The other great strength is the attention which is paid to Jewish exegesis and textual transmission. The importance of this has been recognised for some time, but it is still difficult to find a concise and comprehensible summary of it, and here the editors and contributors have excelled. Students of the history of biblical interpretation will find the chapters explaining Midrash and medieval Jewish commentaries extremely helpful, and anyone interested in the Hebrew Bible will profit from the way it is presented and analysed by Russell Fuller in his contribution, 'The text of the Tanak'.

Less successful, it must be said, are the chapters devoted to Christian interpretation. One problem is that the subjects have been assigned in a way that has produced a great deal of overlap. For example, the twelfth-century Victorine school in Paris is discussed no fewer than three times, first in the chapter on early medieval exegesis, next in the one on scholastic interpretation, and finally as part of 'Biblical interpretation in medieval England and the English Reformation', the excuse for that being that the Victorines were mostly Englishmen. English translations of the Bible are also analysed twice, once in the above-mentioned chapter and again at the end of the volume, in the essay devoted to Bible translation up to 1800. This makes it hard to follow a particular subject without paying close attention to the index and being

prepared to cover the same ground several times.

Having said that, there are helpful chapters on Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin which, taken together, give us a good picture of how the leading Reformers read the Scriptures and (just as important) how they interconnected with one another. There is also a helpful chapter on the Anabaptists, which gives a clear analysis of the principles that underlay their reading of the Bible. For various reasons, the Anabaptists did not write commentaries and it is difficult to pin them down on particular books or subjects, so a general approach of this kind is both necessary and enlightening. Another important tradition which is weak on commentary writing is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church, but here the treatment is less successful. Most of the chapter concentrates on the patristic period and relatively little is said about the middle ages, which is understandable but disappointing.

On the whole, this volume pays a great deal of attention to textual transmission and translation, and relatively little to actual interpretation. Of course it is true that translation involves interpretation, but that is secondary and often incidental. In the chapter devoted to the English tradition, Thomas Cranmer is placed before William Tyndale, presumably because he was a few years older, but nothing is said about his most important work of biblical interpretation, the homily on Scripture which is contained in the First book of homilies and which was regularly read to congregations throughout the sixteenth century and beyond. Nor is any attempt made to analyse biblical commentaries written in English, relatively few though there were, and the impression is given that it is enough to read the prefaces of the different translations of the Bible to understand how the text was interpreted during and immediately after the Reformation in England.

Nevertheless the conclusions of the different contributors are generally sound and the information they provide is often very worthwhile. A number of chapters contain summary tables listing the major interpreters they cover and their works and the volume would have been even better if the editors had insisted on more of these. For example, it is easy to discover what Luther wrote and when because of the table which tells us, but Melanchthon and Calvin are more difficult to pin down because comparable tables are missing for them. The overall verdict must be that this volume is extremely useful within the

parameters it sets for itself, but frustrating and at times incomplete when different questions are put to it, particularly by people who are interested in special topics that are dispersed across a number of separate contributions.

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THIS MOMENTARY MARRIAGE: A Parable of Permanence
John Piper
Nottingham IVP, 2009 192pp £7.99pb ISBN: 9781844743926

This is a superb book on marriage and singleness. It is hard to improve on the summary given by Raymond Ortlund's commendation printed on the first page: 'Theologically, this books exalts human marriage as a metaphor for the ultimate love story in Christ. Practically, it applies that glorious vision of grace to our daily experience in marriage, singleness, parenthood and the most universal of human realities—sin.' This is a God-honouring, Christ-exalting, covenant-keeping, confusion-busting, reader-challenging exposition of salvation and its showcase, marriage. By lifting our eyes to heaven's love, Piper aims to transform our man-centred motivations into Christ-centred ones. It is aimed at, and suitable for, a wide readership.

If marriage is about God's covenant, then staying married is not about staying in love: 'the highest meaning and most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display. That is why marriage exists. If you are married, that is why you are married' (p. 25). Husband and wife should therefore reflect the grace of Christ in their forbearance and the design of God in their respective headship and submission. He writes, 'When a man joyfully bears the primary God-given responsibility for Christlike, servant leadership and provision and protection in the home…I have never met a wife who is sorry she married such a man' (p. 92).

It is perhaps surprising in a book on marriage to find such a positive and persuasive explanation of how singleness displays the gospel. Marriage is after all momentary: we are born as single people and many of us who are married will be single when we die. To those who are single, Piper says that God 'calls you to display, by the Christ-exalting devotion of your singleness, the truths about Christ and his kingdom that shine more clearly through singleness than

through marriage and child-rearing', namely that the kingdom grows by spiritual birth, that 'relationships based on family are temporary. Relationships based on union with Christ are eternal. Marriage is a temporary institution, but what it stands for lasts forever' (pp. 106, 111).

Returning to marriage, Piper has a practical chapter on protecting your marriage, including some blunt but undeniably sound advice on sex and spiritual warfare (see p. 133). Two chapters on raising children follow—including an excellent observation on anger between fathers and sons. Piper's section on divorce takes an admittedly minority position today, of advocating no grounds for remarriage. He gives his reasons gently to press his case on this, recognising that evangelicals take different positions on the question. Each chapter is prefaced by a striking quote on marriage from the prison writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an engaged man whose martyrdom brought him directly into the Reality of which marriage is but the Parable.

This readable book should help both marrieds and singles live for the glory of Christ and look forward all the more to being in his presence.

ED MOLL
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PURITY IN THE AGE OF PORN
James Warren, Gordon Cheng, Simon Roberts
Kingsford NSW, 2009 15pp £1.25pb ISBN:978-1-921441-50-9

This Matthias Minizine is a mini-magazine made up of brief articles originally published in Sydney's *The Briefing*, including adverts and a discussion guide with a couple of prayer points. It is designed to 'start a conversation'. Occasionally the Australian origins show but they should not prove a barrier to British readers.

This issue offers 'The naked truth about porn' by James Warren. Warren looks at what porn really is and why it is such a problem. It departs from God's design for sex, distorting it, our relationships and even ourselves. Gordon Cheng provides 'Some thoughts from Corinth' on sexual immorality, arguing that the problems are essentially spiritual and that Paul's antidotes to the Corinthian Christians' immorality focus on the doctrines of the cross and

resurrection rather than primarily on moralism or practical tips. I wondered if Cheng perhaps risks being a little too dismissive of God's law? Simon Roberts discusses 'Avoiding the traps of an online world' and gives advice on internet filters. There is also a one page editorial by Paul Grimmond.

Although freely and secretly available internet porn has changed things a great deal, the authors contend that the real problem is our sinful, straying hearts. The solution remains guarding our hearts with the truth and wisdom of God's word (Psalm 119:9). We are urged to treat God's good gift of sex with respect and to be open and honest with one another. The design is clear and attractive. As the blurb says, the magazine is short, economical, easy to read and ideal for giving away or discussing, either one to one or in a group.

MARC LLOYD
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INSIDE STORY: The life of John Stott
Roger Steer
Nottingham: IVP, 2009 288 pp. £12.99 hb ISBN: 9781844744046

John Stott towers over the history of twentieth century evangelicalism, and remains a man of enormous influence through his writings, his preaching and his personal leadership. Roger Steer has written an accessible account of John Stott's life.

The biographer's first challenge is to reckon with the sheer number of people who are significant in the story—and in whose stories John Stott is significant. The Table of Contents helpfully doubles as a timeline as we follow the subject through his early steps in life and then as a Christian into his emergence as a leader. From the moment Stott hits his stride, the pace of the book is fairly breathless. If this were a stage play rather than a book, then it could be set on a moving stage so that a long succession of leading Christians may efficiently be shuffled on stage left, be introduced, and then slide off to stage-right.

Perhaps life around John Stott was really like that. As the book continues it is with some relief that the train of visitors subsides and more of the man's personal passions emerge: the certainty that life for Christ is the only and best

way to live; his personal discipline and holiness; his passion for preaching; his gifts coupled with humility and sense of humour. The middle section manages not to leave the reader intimidated; the final section manages to leave the reader inspired. John Stott is also a prolific author and Steer does a good job of summarising the major works and the contexts from which they sprang.
This is a good introduction to John Stott's life and writings given the space available, but we get little chance to reflect on his inner thoughts. We discover that he was criticised by people who did not work as hard to understand his position as he did to understand theirs. But there is no clear engagement with his evangelical critics' views, and the struggles he faced are mentioned but hardly analysed: tensions with his father about war service; differences with evangelicals over Billy Graham's mission and methods; divergence with Martyn Lloyd-Jones; differences between the 'narrow' and 'broad' views of evangelism in the Lausanne process; disputes over conditional immortality. We also hear little of the theological currents at each stage, again for lack of space.

The fact of John Stott's birdwatching is of course mentioned: the passion of it does not quite come across. (And there is no 'quest for the snowy owl'). Those who did not live through these times personally will do well by reading a biography of Stott, and Steer's life is an excellent introduction, much shorter than Timothy Dudley-Smith's two volumes. It will help us begin to appreciate the influence of Stott's writings in shaping evangelicalism today in Britain and beyond. And readers of any age should be inspired by Stott's example, humbled by his godliness, and stimulated to serve his Master.

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JESUS AND PAUL: Global Perspectives in Honour of James D. G. Dunn: A Festschrift for his 70th Birthday
B. J. Oropeza, C. K. Robertson and D. C. Mohrmann (eds.)
London: T&T Clark, 2009 240pp £70:00hb ISBN: 9780567629531

Jimmy Dunn's seventieth birthday is marked here by seventeen essays written by his former students, with a couple of forwards from Tom Wright and Richard Hays thrown in for good measure. Such an honour is thoroughly deserved, for whilst evangelicals have rightly raised serious questions about Dunn's account of New Testament Christology and his work on Paul's

understanding of the Law (to take two examples), he has undoubtedly been one of the most influential biblical scholars of his generation. Alas, as with most Festschriften, this volume proves something of a curate's egg—the provocative entries rub shoulders with the pedestrian, the insightful with the incomprehensible—and the topics covered are rather too disparate to reveal any unifying sensibility or vision, beyond the contributors' common association with Dunn himself.

The first ten essays engage primarily with the Gospel accounts of Jesus. James McGrath probes the interaction between oral and written traditions, Stephen Wright and Ellen Christiansen offer quirky (and ultimately unconvincing) re-interpretations of the Matthean parables and the Anointing of Jesus respectively, while Simon Gathercole presents a judicious survey of recent British scholarship on New Testament Christology (ideal as an introduction for students). There are two rather splendid little vignettes: Jey Kanagaraj navigates the tension between the Kingdom of God as 'present' and 'future' with admirable clarity, whilst Graham Twelftree argues persuasively that Luke distinguishes magic from Jesus' miracles by consistently associating the former with false prophecy, and the latter with the 'Word of the Lord'.

Other contributions in this section are less satisfactory. Helen Bond's account of the Gospel depictions of Barabbas is too quick to slide into historical scepticism, and J. Martin Scott struggles to make his case for revising our understanding of Jesus' opponents in John's Gospel. Arie Zwiep's attempt to rehabilitate Judas Iscariot is spectacularly unsuccessful, driven more by a desire to purge the New Testament of alleged 'anti-Semitism' than to get to grips with key verses (such as Mark 14:21). Finally, in contending that Hebrews presents Jesus as becoming divine Son only after he is exalted cosmic king, Kenneth Schenck ignores the evidence of Hebrews 1:2, where Jesus is already 'Son' when appointed 'heir of all things' (i.e. before even creating the world).

The seven essays on Paul are largely taken up with detailed studies of particular verses. Acts 7:58 is linked to the Elijah-Elisha handover (Gal. 2:2) is re-examined in the light of Habakuk 2:2-4 (Paul's 'running' is thus seen as more prophetic than athletic), Romans 1:5 is given some Old Testament back-ground, Galatians 3:28 is interrogated for its take on ethnicity, and interpretive surveys are provided for Colossians 2:14 and Romans 10:5/Galatians 3:12. A

rather touching final essay by John Byron considers Paul's pastoral approach in the Letter to Philemon.

There are mercifully few typographical errors, although readers may be surprised to discover that some scholars believe John's gospel was written by the Beloved Disciple in the 'early-mid 1980s' (p. 85)! Ultimately, this volume must be considered a most fitting tribute to Professor Dunn—not in spite of its flaws but because of them. For it is marked by the same mixture of insightful commentary and dubious exegesis, of ingenious argument and occasionally heterodox theology, as that which has consistently characterised the accumulated works of its eminent subject.

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AMONG THE GENTILES: Greco-Roman Religion & Christianity
Luke Timothy Johnson
Yale: Yale University Press, 2009 £25pb 480pp ISBN: 0-300-14208-0

'What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' So asked the second-century apologist Tertullian. It is a question which many in today's church see little need to address, working on the assumption that the church grew up isolated from all other systems of thought. Yet it is an answer to this issue which Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson seeks to provide here. Specifically, he seeks to persuade the reader that while the relationship between Judaism and Christianity has been widely appreciated and studied in great detail, that between paganism and Christianity has not only commanded much less interest, but has also been considerably undervalued.

Johnson adopts a descriptive comparative religious approach, identifying four different ways of being religious in the Greco-Roman world around the time of the emergence of the church: (a) religion as participation in divine benefits, (b) religion as moral transformation, (c) religion as transcending the world and (d) religion as stabilising the world. He exemplifies each case with an individual or body of works which exemplify it. Having laid this groundwork, Johnson proceeds to see if these means of being religious may be detected both in Judaism between 300 BCE and 300 CE and early Christianity between the first and fourth centuries CE, devoting the majority of the second half to the

latter. His findings are illuminating: both Judaism of this period and Christianity in its first few centuries are seen to exhibit different elements of all four ways of being religious.

In the final pages of the book, Johnson considers the value of study of a similar analysis of other religious systems and conflicts, and suggests that his model may in fact be applied universally. He draws particular attention to the value of the model for analysis of the Protestant Reformation as well as to the divisions present within Islam. Assessing the potential role of the analysis for critiquing the church of today, he wonders if its manifold divisions might be best explained primarily with recourse not to theology or morals but to a difference of religious temperament.

The book is exceptionally clearly and engagingly written, and synthesises a huge amount of material in a small space. Since this book is self-avowedly a reaction to a desire to write off any connection between Greco-Roman religiosity and Christianity, it may appear to play down the considerable differences between Christianity and Greco-Roman religion, in particular the centrality and uniqueness of Christ. Yet taken as it is it will be of considerable interest to anyone concerned with the birth and early growth of the church, providing as it does a wealth of information on the various thought worlds competing for the hearts and minds of later antiquity. Furthermore, those with an interest in the church's role in engaging with the thought worlds of today with the gospel will find much in here to ponder and learn from the experiences of her ancient forebear.

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SPIRITUAL COUNSEL IN THE ANGLICAN TRADITION
David Hein and Charles R. Henery (eds.)
James Clarke and Co., 2010 177pp £25 pb ISBN978-0-227-17270-4

This book of extracts from the writings of fifty authors, some well known and others less so, probably depending on which side of the Atlantic your ministry is exercised, is something of a lucky dip. This is not meant in any way in a disparaging sense. As one dips into the articles one finds a number of comments which are not particularly helpful but then comes the gold nugget. That

is the point of the book. What may not be of any use for one purpose and one person at one time may be very useful for another person on another occasion.

David Hein with Charles R. Henery have put together extracts from the writings of fifty authors of mainly an Anglican background. As usual C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) is helpful and with counsel from Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), spans the centuries. With them is Phillips Brooks, (1835–1893), and Studdert Kennedy, of 'Woodbine Willie' fame of the World War I. The fact that this should be so should not be surprising as human nature does not change even though the outward circumstances may vary in their context and culture. There is a short biography of every author which is very helpful in assessing the contribution.

Perhaps a more serious criticism is the selection of authors. There are some significant omissions such as John Stott and the earlier author, J.C. Ryle. Obviously, this is a matter of personal selection and to some degree church-manship which indicate the editors own spiritual understanding. One other use is that there are a number of illustrations which might be useful in sermon preparation as well as helping in pastoral situations.

The book seeks to reflect the 'Anglican tradition of spiritual reflection' with emphasis on spiritual responsibility and the use of the mind. However, what is missing is the spiritual counsel of the Gospels and the epistles. Has Christ nothing to say in the Gospels? Are the epistles without spiritual wisdom? As a back up in illustrating the Scriptures, these selections can be helpful but to use them without the Scriptures is almost substituting a form of psychology for spirituality. Nonetheless, an interesting book and one never knows what golden nugget may be forthcoming in the lucky dip.

DAVID STREATER

HELP FOR A SICK PRAYER LIFE
Tony Payne, Paul Grimmond and Colin Marshall
Kingsford NSW, Matthias Minizines, 16pp £1.25 ISBN: 978-1-921441-51-6

I need all the help I can get with praying—perhaps that's why there are so many prayers in the Bible to help me; the 150 Psalms are a great place to find the various seasons and moods of prayer.

Those clever chaps from Matthias Media have produced a handy bite sized minizine on praying; it is theological without being heavy and it is practical without being the latest quickfix which I fail at after a week or so! Three short articles—why we don't pray (our prayerlessness shows how ingrained our sin is), basics to get started (a breeze through the Lord's prayer) and then some very practical hints for praying in small groups—the last I found most helpful as small groups are the place where we often learn or fail to learn the most. I am hoping to take my small group through its suggestions. Warmly recommended but don't let it be all you read about prayer.

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1-2 THESSALONIANS: IVP New Testament Commentary Series 13
G. K. Beale

Downers Grove, Il: IVP Academic, 2003/2010 279pp £ 9.99
ISBN: 978-0-8308-4013-7

Of the writing of commentaries, there is no end (to paraphrase Ecclesiastes). With the huge number of commentaries pouring off the printing presses, for me, a commentary has to be special to either buy it or recommend it. This is a special commentary by the evangelical New Testament scholar, Greg Beale, on the Thessalonian letters. What are the features that make this commentary special? First, Beale's evangelical theological stance makes him a reliable guide to these inspired letters. Secondly, Beale convincingly, in my view, defends the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians.

Thirdly, the series is written for the preachers and teachers in mind. So, the commentary itself is clearly written and focuses on the text and not the views of other scholars, yet is based on meticulous scholarship. Technical scholarly debates can be followed in the footnotes. Further, Beale has some good illustrations and applications that flow from the text. Fourthly, the commentary is indebted to biblical-theology. There is an excellent biblical-theological essay on New Testament eschatology in the introduction. Beale's expertise in the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is well known, and here Beale's scholarship is put to good use by revealing how Paul' thought in the Thessalonian letters is shaped by the Old Testament. The section on 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 is a good example of Beale's skill.

Fifthly, Beale's view on the eschatology of these letters is sensible, reformed, and based on thorough exegesis. While readers may disagree with Beale on minor detail, Beale's approach is a considerable virtue since these letters have become a happy hunting ground for all sorts of odd pre-millennial positions on the rapture and the anti-Christ. Beale sees the problem in Thessalonica as being 'over-realized eschatology' and Paul writes both these letters with different emphases to correct this false 'over-realized eschatology'. The section on the 'restrainer' in 2 Thessalonians 2 is a good example of Beale's approach. (Beale believes that the 'restrainer' is a holy angel, citing parallels from Daniel and Revelation). Sixthly, and exceptionally, Beale works hard at establishing the 'melodic line' of both letters. Each section of the commentary is aware of how each particular passage builds on the previous passage and contributes to the overall theme of the letters. Beale's introduction is especially valuable in having two essays on the argument, its development, and the major theological themes of the letters. These essays, and the commentary, use discourse analysis, and are very helpful to any preacher think of preaching through the letters.

For all the above reasons, this wonderful commentary is highly recommended for all preachers and teachers.

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2 PETER AND JUDE
Robert Harvey and Philip H. Towner
Nottingham IVP, 2009 249pp £9.99hb ISBN978-0-85111-677-8

With Michael Green's Tyndale commentary, and Dick Lucas and Chris Green's contribution in the Bible Speaks Today series, one might well wonder at yet another volume sub-headed The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. The General Preface defends this decision by claiming that 'no other series has yet achieved what we have in mind—a series to and from the church, that seeks to move from the text to its contemporary relevance and application. No other series offers the unique combination of solid, biblical exposition and helpful explanatory notes in the same user-friendly format. No other series has tapped the unique blend of scholars and pastors who share both a passion for faithful exegesis and a deep concern for the church.'

While it may be felt that these claims are somewhat exaggerated, the volume makes a useful and welcome contribution to commentaries on these often neglected books of the New Testament. A unique feature lies in the format, whereby the text is expounded in uninterrupted form on the upper portion of each page while other issues are dealt with underneath in verse-keyed notes. After the untimely death of Robert Harvey in the midst of writing this work, Philip Towner took on the task of writing the commentary on Jude and supplementing Harvey's notes on 2 Peter, the bulk of which had already been written. Together the authors have combined to present us with a seamless robe.

There are helpful introductions to both letters from a conservative point of view, with a robust examination of the claims of those who would attribute them to pseudonymity or pseudepigraphy, defending the traditionally ascribed authorship and date in each case. In particular, the authors offer a perceptive analysis of the theological character of Jude. There is also a very exhaustive eleven page bibliography.

In several places the commentary bears traces of its American origin, as it was originally published by the Downers Grove branch of IVP, and while Robert Harvey was a pastor in Iowa, Washington and Illinois, Philip Towner is at the time of publication both Dean of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship of the American Bible Society in New York City and New Testament Research Professor of an evangelical theological school in Poland. British readers will be heartened, however, by the several quotations from Dr. M. Lloyd Jones, J. I. Packer and J. C.Ryle.

Apart from the extremely thorough commentary with appropriate application there are a number of helpful discussions, e.g. on the inspiration and authority of Scripture and on the identity of those referred to in 2 Peter 2:20-22, as well as the usual investigation of which writer made use of the other. In spite of the many other commentaries available on these letters, this volume will make a valuable addition to the library of anyone who is concerned with the study and teaching of the Word of God.

DAVID WHEATON
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