

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **MORE PERFECT UNION: Understanding Same-Sex Christian Marriage** Alan Wilson

London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2014    160pp    £9.99pb  
ISBN: 9780232531251

The news that Alan Wilson, the controversial suffragan Bishop of Buckingham, has published a book on same-sex marriage should come as no surprise to anyone. Alan has for a number of years been a vocal advocate for the revisionist position on homosexuality, but this is his first serious public offering in print on the subject. And it's very disappointing.

*More Perfect Union* is less a reasoned theological argument and more a collection of half-developed thoughts without any serious engagement with a challenging alternative view. Whilst it contains some points of interest (once you get past the rumour-mongering about partnered gay bishops for which no evidence is provided, the rest of the first chapter is a great, if slightly biased, summary of how we have got to where we are today in the Church of England), there are large flaws in the approach to many of the areas of concern in this debate.

The main problem with *More Perfect Union* is that it picks straw men to argue against, and having demolished those straw men it rests on its revisionist laurels, surveying the field before it, oblivious to the cries of the champions of conservative theology stood behind it wanting to have a proper engagement on the issues. Take, for example, chapter 7 on 'The irresistible rise of Christian Marriage.' Bishop Alan spends a large part of this section critiquing secular views of marriage for the past millennium. All very well and good (there is a lot to criticise), but the orthodox Christian position on marriage does not rest in the state's view, changing as it does over time and in context (some nations today still allow and formally recognise polygamous marriage).

Of course, the previous chapter attempts to explore some of the biblical material on the subject, but in doing so Bishop Alan exhibits some egregious blind spots. For example, the notion that marriage may have one of its essential goods as the procreation of children (a theological thought embedded deeply into the marriage service of the Church of England) is dismissed without any serious engagement with the contrary position. One literally gets the feeling that Bishop Alan is erasing Genesis 1:28 from his Bible, together with any good conservative scholarship on the issue from the likes of Gordon Wenham or Robert Gagnon.

But none of these is the most serious error in the book. The most serious error is not even the cursory way that the key texts on the issue of homosexual activity and desire are dealt with. For example, *physikos*

(Romans 1:26, 'natural') is interpreted as universally meaning 'human convention, custom or expectation,' with no reference to contextual first century CE Greek examples. Moreover, *arsenokoites* (1 Corinthians 6:9, 'male homosexual') is viewed as a term with economic provenance, again without providing any contemporary examples—the ones given are in vice lists with sins ranging well beyond economic exploitation. Rather, it is the complete absence of any doctrine of the Fall in chapter 2 which discusses the diversity of human experience (and specifically sexual desire) which reveals the heart of the book's failure to present a rounded biblical argument on the issue.

The thesis of chapter 2 ('Unnatural?') can be summarised as follows. Everyone is made by God and this is a good thing, the people made by God have varied sexual desires, therefore those sexual desires must be good. There is no deep analysis as to whether any of those sexual desires might be fallen, broken, or corrupted in and of themselves (beyond the usual condemnation of exploitative and abusive sex), no engagement with the notion that fundamentally every human being is fallen and a sinner by nature, no desire to explore whether science can help explain how the Edenic model of Adam and Eve had been corrupted by sin.

Even the discussion of intersex never attempts to explore whether such human variation is in any sense good or bad in an objective, natural, theological sense. One wonders how Alan Wilson would handle a serious discussion as to whether paedophilic desire was an integral 'good' aspect of God's natural creative diversity of human sexual expression.

If you want to read a good example of revisionist theological argument on human sexuality, Bishop Alan's book is one to get. As you read it, the questions that it raises in your mind demonstrate the holes in reasoning, the ignoring of key biblical verses and the special pleading that typifies this position. As an example of its genre, it's excellent. As a reasoned argument to convince conservatives of a biblical case for same-sex marriage, it never gets off the starting blocks.

PETER OULD  
peter-ould.net

**TIME TRAVEL TO THE OLD TESTAMENT: An Essential Companion for the Christian Explorer**

**Chris Sinkinson**

Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013 208pp £9.99pb ISBN: 9781844749041

This is quite simply a stonking book. The heretic Marcion famously argued that the Old Testament was a sub-Christian book and should be ignored by followers of Jesus Christ. His views were and still are recognised as profoundly wrong, and yet the sad fact is that the church in the 21st century is in danger of doing precisely what he wanted—ignoring the Old Testament.

This brilliant book, by the Moorlands Old Testament lecturer, takes the reader on a journey through time to the ancient world where he acts as a witty, stimulating, and succinct tour guide, firmly putting the Old Testament back into the hands of the normal pew-sitting believer.

Chris Sinkinson writes with a lightness of touch and an engaging style which makes his material incredibly accessible—I would very happily give this book to a reasonably new Christian—and yet he addresses a whole range of knotty issues with a rigour and clarity which is often breathtaking: he blends insights from archaeology, theology, exegesis, and comparative ancient cultures in a way that meant I regularly found myself experiencing ‘light bulb’ moments as understanding began to dawn!

Sinkinson uses the motif of time-travel to take us on a guided tour of the world of the Old Testament. He provides an overview of storytelling techniques, laws, people, beliefs, geography, and warfare. In each instance he knows precisely how much to say to give his fellow travellers a richer understanding of the Old Testament, but resists the scholarly danger of drowning us in too much detail. He effortlessly picks off all manner of questions—whether apologetic, about the historic reliability of the Scriptures; practical, about the applicability of the Mosaic law to us today; theological, about the genocide of the original Canaanites or historical—constantly leaving the Christian with a greater confidence in the Scriptures and a greater clarity in the message which they teach.

It is perhaps a small thing, but I particularly appreciate the fact that this is an *English* book, with illustrations regularly drawn from this side of the Atlantic—it is refreshing to be able to read a pastorally helpful, theologically rich book which doesn’t need translating out of American.

Finally, each chapter ends with a Bible study to help root the teaching—ideally suited for doing with a book group who want to grow in their confidence handling the Old Testament. Now that’s an idea that would make Marcion turn in his grave!

BEN THOMPSON  
Moreton-in-Marsh

**SURPRISED BY GOD: Lives Turned Upside Down****Faith Cook**

Darlington: EP, 2014 192pp £7.99pb ISBN: 9781783970087

First published in 2002 as *Lives Turned Upside Down*, this is a selection of eleven mini-biographies of some 'unsung heroes' from bygone years, including some dramatic instances of the converting work of God: William Mackay, the 19th century doctor who pawned his Bible, then later came across it in the possession of a dying man he had to treat... William Clowes, who walked out on his wife, but took his mother's prayer book and read it later, took to heart its warnings about taking communion without due preparation and was converted... Or Ruth Clark, the fiery tempered cook of Henry Venn, who was utterly transformed during almost fifty years' service in one godly family... There is great encouragement here for us in our personal witness to family and friends.

One recurrent theme is the persecution these characters suffered: for example, Marion Veitch who married one of the Scottish covenanters and therefore ensured that life was lived 'on the run' or at least with great difficulty from then onwards; or John Cennick, the hymn-writer, who died aged only 36 after enduring a punishing mix of itinerant ministry (often travelling on foot) and mob violence. Many of the figures chosen were involved in drinking, dancing, gambling, and womanising before they followed Christ. It is striking that they were willing to trade the superficial pleasures of the world for true joy—hand in hand with bitter suffering and persecution.

In all their variety (different centuries, social standings, intellectual abilities, men and women, lay and ordained, young and old, Scottish, English, American, Dutch), they were ordinary people in the hands of an extraordinary God. This is very healthy lesson for us, in a culture which prizes celebrity status: a Sovereign God can take countless ordinary people from very different eras and from all sorts of Small-ville locations, convert them and weave them together into his master plan for the salvation of his elect.

In case we missed the point, the last biographical snapshot is of a believer from more modern times, introduced simply as David (no surname). Here the tale of childhood dreams and dashed hopes, failed relationships and illness is a story which will strike cords with many people. But an ordinary life in the hands of an extraordinary God is always an encouragement and Faith Cook has done us a valuable service in preserving these lives for our day.

SIMON SCOTT  
All Saints, Little Shelford

**GOD IN THE WHIRLWIND: How the Holy-love of God Reorients our World**

David Wells

Nottingham: IVP, 2014 266pp £14.99pb ISBN: 9781783590339

‘Today...we need a fresh vision of God and his character of holy-love. Our understanding of his greatness gets worn down, sometimes worn out, by the constant rubbing against our highly modernised lives. It is this vision, though, this knowing of God, that puts steel into spines and fire into Christian hearts.’

*God in the Whirlwind* is the fifth and final volume in David Wells’ 20 year project to assess the state of the American Christian scene

Wells’ core argument is that modern (or post-modern) Christianity has become entirely self-focused rather than God focused—its greatest concern is its own happiness rather than its holiness, and thus it is attracted to psychological therapies that ‘heal’ the ‘wounded’ rather than gospel redemption that saves the sinner. This has done profound damage to the church and must be resisted by a regained knowledge of the Living God and in particular his character of ‘holy-love.’

Wells devotes five chapters to the biblical and theological revelation of God’s character, proving that both his holiness and love must be celebrated and held together, not played off against each other. He ends by demonstrating how a deeper knowledge of God’s holy love speaks into the areas of sanctification, worship, and service.

Wells’ great strength remains his insightful critique of culture and in particular how this leads us to a distorted view of both holiness and love which does us great harm. For that reason alone I would recommend the book. However there are parts of the book that feel uneven—his chapters on the biblical revelation of God’s character oscillate between systematic and biblical theology in an unpredictable way; he critiques the New Perspective and Liberation Theology but doesn’t engage with the Openness of God debates or the recent work of Rob Bell which would seem more pertinent; his rejection of a self-focused theology is less nuanced than Calvin’s recognition that knowledge of self and knowledge of God are inextricably linked; he rightly diagnoses the post-modern mind-set as idolatrous, but the modernist worldview is equally idolatrous and there is a danger in speaking as though things were always better in the past (Ecclesiastes 7:10); why is there no application to evangelism...?

A powerful and I suspect correct critique, though not as satisfying as I would have hoped.

BEN THOMPSON  
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**GOD HAS SPOKEN: A History of Christian Theology**

Gerald Bray

Nottingham: Apollos (IVP), 2014 1264pp £34.99hb  
ISBN: 9781433526947

In recent years we have benefited from several ambitious projects to describe aspects of Christianity. On the one hand, we have the late Jaroslav Pelikan's multi-volume series on the development of Christian doctrine, and on the other more recent hand, we have Diarmaid MacCulloch's history of Christianity. In *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology*, Gerald Bray exhibits both the doctrinal detail of Pelikan and the historical attention of MacCulloch, and produces a wonderful single volume work of historical theology. What makes this rather large book even more impressive is the style of writing, which aims to assist nonspecialists and researchers alike.

One of the creative features of this book is the use of a Trinitarian lens for observing the development of doctrine: the bulk of the chapters are arranged under the headings of the person and work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is not intended to be a watertight framework discretely linking each theological movement to a member of the Godhead, but rather as a conceptual tool to allow the warp and woof of Christian reflection to shape the narrative of the book. Therefore it has a very different approach to others which give the history of particular doctrines as more or less hermetically sealed entities (e.g., Gregg Allison's *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*).

So, for instance, one might find discussions about the doctrine of the Word of God in various parts of Bray's book, but in a single location in Allison's. There are obviously strengths and weaknesses to both methods. The beauty of Bray's approach is that the causes of doctrinal development are well preserved, whether theological ideas, political moves or cultural trends. This allows the drama of the doctrinal development space to breathe and gives the book a compelling narrative to follow. So, one could easily sit down after the Sunday roast and enjoy a good read.

A different way of reading also comes with a different way of researching, and Bray provides plenty of tools for the keen theological student. There is a detailed table of contents, two lists of chronology (for persons and events), various tables (e.g., a comparison of Greek, Latin, English and Slavonic vocabulary for important theological terms), insightful footnoting with helpful references to relevant subject material (with a dose of Bray's good sense of humour), and a reasonably exhaustive index. I had need recently to research some ecclesiological developments between the 14th and 16th centuries and whilst there was no single chapter entitled 'The Church,' there were plenty of easy ways into good material on precisely what I was after.

Suffice to say that this book comes with my strongest recommendation. With characteristic erudition and lucidity, Bray achieves his aims of being accessible to a wide readership. It would be perfect for ministers who are eager for a manageable regime of continuing education, or theological students who are looking for an introductory reference book, or keen laypeople who are looking for an edifying book to read throughout the year. As with his companion book of biblical and systematic theology, *God is Love*, Gerald Bray has given the church a great gift in *God Has Spoken*.

MARK EARNGEY  
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**MISSION MATTERS: Essays on the Theory, Practice, and Contexts of Mission**

**Kieran Beville**

Darlington: EP, 2014 310pp £10.99pb ISBN: 9780852349403

The subject of mission remains a much debated one: what is God's great agenda, and what is the role of his people? Some mission agencies refer to themselves as 'church,' others call themselves mission societies which seek to serve the mission agency of the local church. Some remove the propagation of the gospel from their names, others such as the Anglican Communion hold to the Five Marks of Mission (to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptise, and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation; to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth). Kieran Beville tackles this issue alongside many others in this book of 'essays relevant to the theory and practice of mission.'

As independent essays each chapter can stand on its own which allows the reader to pick and choose. For me the most value comes from the earlier chapters of Part One where Beville analyses cultural trends in essays on: Aggressive Atheism, Militant Secularism, and Understanding Postmodernism. There is lots of good material here looking at how these approaches have emerged and the challenges they present together with the recognition that Europe 'once the continent from which the torch of evangelicalism was lit is now the spiritually darkest continent on the planet.' These chapters of analysis are important, as Beville states: 'if we are to communicate effectively with postmoderns we need to understand them. In a sense all Christians are missionaries in a foreign culture.'

Beville has done us a favour here. All Christians, as 'resident aliens,' are missionaries in a foreign culture; it is still a mystery that training in

cross-cultural mission work is still thought to refer to those who go to foreign countries as if we do not need to cross cultures as we engage with non-Christian neighbours. When I moved from being in the army (with very few Christians) to be set apart as a missionary in Paraguay (where most claim to be Christian) it seemed odd to be described as going 'into mission.'

His next chapter on The Church Community in Contemporary Culture looks at the phenomenon of 'missional church': 'The missional church is calling for a revolution in inclusive community in which the masses will want to participate' and concludes that 'the missional church is not heretical but it is a movement which has potentially harmful effects...it cannot be dismissed as a work of Satan.' After this helpful analysis Beville moves on to the question that causes heartache for many: 'What About Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel?' He declares that 'though God in his sovereignty may do as he pleases we know his *modus operandi* is outlined in [Romans 10]. For our part we must insist that one is saved by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Essay 6, 'Identifying the Way Forward: Keeping Mission Central to Church Life' is the beginning of where I have more questions for Beville. He states that unpacking the meaning of mission 'might mean helping people to unlearn what they have received (or assumed) and labelled and dismissed as the "social gospel".' Beville maintains that mission must have evangelism at its core. There is much that is great here, and the following chapter continues with 'The Rhythm of God's Heartbeat: Biblical Perspective on Mission Theology.' He quotes extensively from Eric Wright and David Bosch but surprisingly does not engage with those like Chris Wright, P.T. O'Brien, Köstenberger, or Eckhardt Schnabel. This may reflect that the essays are more dated than the 2014 book.

After two interesting chapters on William Carey, and contemporary India and China, the author returns to his theme in 'A Call for Holistic Mission.' He says early in this chapter that 'All Christians agree that the church has a missionary purpose but what constitutes mission is debatable.' I understand the issues he is grappling with but am not completely convinced by his conclusions which seem to mix the work of mission with its fruits, even after a helpful survey of historical trends. Beville states that 'Christian development agencies are mission agencies striving to reach the neediest peoples of the world'; they are often admirable and reach the world's neediest but somehow, sometimes the eternal consideration is forgotten. Again contemporaries such as Piper have proposed solutions such as: 'God cares for all suffering, especially eternal suffering.' Crosslinks has made a modest contribution in this contested arena, defining holistic mission: 'God is concerned with the whole person and we seek to emulate that concern. We recognise that people's greatest need is eternal salvation and that that depends on people's response to the gospel in this life.'

Part Two contains short essays as a kind of ‘virtual tour of the mission field’ showing how the ‘rubber hits the road’ in contexts known to the author, and indeed there is a travel diary feel to this part. Whilst there are some interesting anecdotes here I found this section less helpful than Part One.

All in all I found this a stimulating and readable volume, though with the hesitations as indicated on the whole issue of the definition of mission and the travel diaries of the short second part. O’Brien, Köstenberger and Schnabel provide, for me, a more helpful view on the questions of holistic mission. The chapters on the Western contexts do however make this book well worth the read.

ANDY LINES  
Crosslinks & AMiE

### **ATHEISM: What Everyone Needs to Know**

**Michael Ruse**

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 304pp £10.99pb  
ISBN: 9780199334582

Michael Ruse is Professor of the history of Science at Florida State University, and sometime contributor to the *Guardian*. This book is by an atheist, for atheists, and is an attempt at a more balanced approach to the subject than afforded by the ‘New Atheists’ (Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, Dennett). It is also a more comprehensive offering: it not only covers the familiar arguments against faith, but also the history of atheism, thoughts within atheism, reasons for Christian faith, and arguments against it.

The positives first—this is a book which at least tries to understand Christianity in all its breadth, and one which advocates for a milder form of engagement. The author is not as intent on the extermination of all ‘superstition’ as Dawkins, and even wonders where atheists might learn from religion—for a brief moment. Unlike Dawkins et al, Ruse has attempted to understand some of those who would disagree with him, and has tried to relay the history and debate to his atheist readers in a methodical way. His section on the history of atheism is helpful, and his data on the geography and demography of atheism is fine, though it all helps to serve his theory which, bluntly put, equates modernisation and civilisation with atheism.

The negatives, however, would give me pause to think twice before recommending it, even if I were an atheist. The writer claims a higher moral ground than Dawkins, and yet we still have all the trademarks of the New Atheists themselves: straw-men, insufficient research, a surprising lack of self-criticism, and the occasional unedited rant.

For an apologist, some of this section might be interesting—seeing how an atheist understands the argument (such as the Anthropic principle or the Ontological Proof) and then rebuts it, or not. For example, rebuttal of the Causal Argument (the universe must have a cause) was an eccentric exercise in obfuscation and took five readings to understand, and concluded with a no-score draw. It didn't even mention Stephen Hawking's flawed theory on origins, and failed to really address the question it set itself on how to end infinite regress.

Likewise, in his discussion of miracles, to my horror, he uses David Hume's heavily debunked argument which is, in short: 'If I didn't see it, it didn't happen.' Ruse, being a professor of this stuff, should be well aware that rejecting miracles on the basis that they do not fit an observed pattern is called 'Induction,' and is profoundly bad science.

On the discussion about the problem of evil, one is impressed to discover a discussion on libertarianism and compatibilism; and then disappointed to see the compatibilist position tossed aside in one sentence because Calvinism is distasteful. That's not an argument.

If anything is to be learnt from this book, it is that even a moderate atheist has an unquestioning loyalty to science in general, and evolution in particular as a superior metanarrative. Frequently, Ruse tries to make room for religion when it doesn't interfere with science (Gould's 'non-overlapping magisteria'). In Tim Keller's words, evolution is therefore a 'Defeater belief'—an idol that makes faith in Jesus implausible until dealt with. Christians who wish to evangelise such people must be able to expose the difficulties in both science and evolution. We must be able to show that evolution says nothing to the facts of Christ, and that the rules on how to do science are not scientifically derived, but a set of principles taken, quite literally, on faith. Ruse, for his part, was either unaware that the scientific project is a matter of faith, or felt no desire to address the subject when preaching to the choir.

For readers of *Churchman*, I would instead recommend the Apologetics 101 blog, the bethinking.org website, anything by John Lennox, or for the masochist—go straight to Dawkins, Hitchens etc. for the untainted source.

JASON DAVID WARD  
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**SEEING BEAUTY AND SAYING BEAUTIFULLY: The Power of Poetic Effort: George Herbert, George Whitefield and C.S. Lewis**

**John Piper**

Nottingham: IVP, 2014 158pp £7.99pb ISBN: 9781783591107

If the content of a sermon is faithful and true, has the preacher done his job? Should any attention be paid to the manner in which a sermon is delivered? What about other forms of communication? Is the message what matters and the manner in which it is communicated irrelevant?

In this short book, John Piper continues his series of books on influential Christians, considering here how ‘poetic effort’ was a hallmark in different ways of the lives and ministries of George Herbert, George Whitefield and C.S. Lewis. In the context of Piper’s usual theological emphases it is perhaps not surprising to hear him argue that the manner in which we preach is important not just because of how it may better magnify the message for the hearer, but because the manner of preaching in itself can draw the preacher closer to Christ and glorify him.

Piper begins with an important objection: surely the apostle Paul explicitly rejects the use of eloquence or persuasive words at the beginning of 1 Corinthians. This chapter is important and worth reading even without what follows. Piper shows very carefully that the eloquence that Paul rejects is a self-glorifying eloquence, not the God-glorifying eloquence of Herbert, Whitefield, Lewis et al. A particularly striking point is that the language Paul uses to argue against the eloquence of the super-apostles is itself poetically eloquent. Clearly he cannot be ruling out all poetic eloquence in speech.

Piper then considers what we may learn from Herbert, Whitefield and Lewis. Herbert teaches us that careful consideration of how to say things about God will help us see new things about God in fresh ways; it will in itself draw us closer to God, as it did Herbert. Many preachers speak about unseen realities as if they were imaginary, but the ‘actor-preacher’ Whitefield in his ceaseless preaching spoke about unseen realities as if they were real. Lewis, who Piper is at pains to point out was not a Calvinist in contrast to the other two, nevertheless was a supernaturalist who used ‘myth and story and metaphor and poetry’ to show how the perceived world is both like and unlike heavenly realities.

There is much detail about the lives and works of each of these three that whets the appetite and encourages further study of them all. Preachers, theologians and other wordsmiths will find much to stimulate them here.

TOM WATTS  
Chesham

**GRACE WORKS!: (And Ways we Think it Doesn't)****Douglas Bond**

Phillipsburg, NJ.: P&amp;R, 2014 302pp £8.00pb ISBN: 9781596387430

This is certainly a challenging book in that it cuts right to the chase and claims that unless we believe in salvation by grace alone through faith alone then we are believing in a different gospel to that of the Bible.

The author starts with a sobering view of the decline of the great Reformation centres of Geneva, Amsterdam, Scotland, and New England whilst linking their modern decadence to slow 'fudging and tweaking' of the gospel. From this beginning he moves onto various topics such as how Satan twists the gospel, how we twist the gospel, and why all of this matters so much. Whilst clearly aimed at a Reformed Presbyterian audience, given the references to *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in the closing questions of each chapter, this book is most certainly of universal importance. Undoubtedly, it will convict ministers more than anyone as it powerfully argues for the need to be crystal clear in teaching so that no one could ever walk away thinking that works played any part in our salvation. Yet the constant refrain at the end of each chapter to pray for our ministers is refreshing and often forgotten.

The book has twenty-nine relatively short chapters which makes it an easy book to pick up and put down when one has a free moment. Bond's writing style is both highly engaging and relational. One does wonder though if the book could have been a fair bit shorter if there were fewer but longer chapters, as each chapter's introductory stories and anecdotes take up a fair part of the book. Doing this, however, would have made the book as a whole less accessible to the layperson. The provision of three questions for discussion at the end of each chapter and a prayer request is a good touch but given the shortness of the chapters I am not sure this book would be suitable for a book club unless you read a number of chapters at a time. Ultimately, *Grace Works!* is a timely and very accessible work on the foundational importance of the good news about grace which sets Christianity apart from every other world religion and philosophy. At a time when many are occupied with secondary (and even tertiary) matters in the church it is refreshing to once again have the window opened and smell the fresh air of God's amazing grace.

ADAM YOUNG

Emmanuel Church, Saltburn-by-the Sea

**THE BAD CHRISTIAN'S MANIFESTO: Reinventing God (and Other Modest Proposals)**

**Dave Tomlinson**

London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014 256pp £13.99pb ISBN: 9781444752250

This is a very accessible and readable piece with an excellent aim—to get people asking questions about spirituality and moving away from dead and cruel religion. Unfortunately, however, this is where its strengths end.

Most of Tomlinson's arguments rely on poorly constructed straw men, misrepresentation, mangled constructions of church history, and countless examples of Christians messing up. Indeed the underlying message that I left this book with was that Christians (except the author and his associates) are terrible people to be pitied and avoided.

Perhaps the most frustrating flaw in Tomlinson's work is his Christology. Having barely mentioned Jesus in any significant sense throughout the first 8 chapters of the book, chapter 9 turns to Jesus. On the one hand, he is 'the definitive revelation of God' whilst at the same time an ordinary, albeit spiritually aware, bloke whose true identity has been lost in history and hijacked by wicked theologians. According to Tomlinson, the core doctrines of historical Christianity are all false; the resurrection was made up; the Trinity is an abomination conceived at the council of Nicaea (that tired old chestnut again); and the faith birthed after Jesus' death was a terrible mistake.

The end result of this book is a hollow Jesus stripped of all that makes him significant; a god who lurks in the shadows, and humanity scrabbling about in the dark trying to find an impersonal and unreachable power that is there somewhere.

To those who have seen and experienced the glory of the gospel this obviously falls short. Unfortunately the lure of this false gospel could be strong to those who haven't tasted the glory of the Triune God or want a god who demands little.

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**CONFIDENT AND EQUIPPED: Facing Today's Challenges in the Church of England**

**Lee Gatiss, ed.**

Watford: Lost Coin Books, 2014 106pp £5pb ISBN: 9781910307076

In the busy calendar of any gospel minister, a whole raft of training opportunities vie for a portion of limited time. The Junior Anglican Evangelical Conference (JAEC) has established its presence and usefulness

with a focus that is as urgent as it is sharp: encouraging convinced evangelicals to also be clear and confident about their Anglican identity. This concise book takes its name from the third JAEC: ‘Confident and Equipped’—and presents edited versions of addresses first given there. Like the conference, these short, stimulating chapters cut to the chase with a gritty realism about the task Anglican evangelicals face in an increasingly hostile Church of England.

For a book rooted and steeped in exegesis, theology and history, two standout features permeate and contribute to make it pastorally useful and practically applied. First, there is a refreshing focus on people (not just strategies or strategic places). Second, the book is contagious in its evangelistic passion.

Expositions from 2 Timothy 1 by Lee Gatiss give grounds for confidence and call for loyalty to our rich gospel-centred Anglican heritage. Ben Cooper and Sam Allberry then address the bang-up-to-date issues of how to present graciously as beautiful and positive, a biblically-balanced gender complementarity, and the challenge of reclaiming the good news of the gospel in the human sexuality debate. Simon Austen then considers ‘why stay in the Church of England?’ and the two concluding chapters capture the late John Richardson, sounding a wake-up call as to the state of the Church, and passionately urging us on in the task of evangelism.

Whilst many voices suggest it’s time to go, this practical volume, like the conference, is a vital resource which equips practically, and encourages gospel-rooted confidence for those convinced by the urgent need and opportunity of staying in, without caving in.

MATT GRAHAM  
Christ Church, Little Heath

**PREACHING THE FAREWELL DISCOURSE: An Expository Walk-Through of John 13:31–17:26**

**L. Scott Kellum**

Nashville, Tenn.: B&H, 2014 368pp £16.49 ISBN: 9781433673764

In this book Scott Kellum aims to fill a gap in the market between commentaries and sermons which are accessible to lay people.

His book breaks into two with the first part outlining his method and tools of exposition. This opening section’s great strength is its emphasis on text as action. This theory ensures sermon preparation centres around mining a text for the author’s intended meaning: ‘If you get this wrong the entire sermon will be off kilter at best.’ That strength is matched by Kellum’s conviction that understanding this meaning primarily comes from identifying the flow of thought of a particular passage.

The second half of the book is an attempt to demonstrate how the tools of exposition would get us from the text to a series of sermons on the Farewell Discourse, each of which is presented in outline form. Unfortunately, Kellum rarely leaves behind the detail of the tools he employs which means that the sermons he gives will fail to be accessible to some lay folk. For example his sermon on the relatively short John 14:8–14 has 3 main points, and some 14 sub points—8 of which are applications.

Furthermore, for all his emphasis on flow, Kellum's desire to preach three separate sermons on John 14:1–14 means he struggles to demonstrate the links between the sections of that unit, an issue which arises at various points.

We can commend the refreshing reminders to preachers in this book to keep the main thing the main thing, and see the sermon as an act just like the text is. Unfortunately, one has to wade through much which is familiar and some which doesn't fulfil the book's aims of accessibility of the sermon to get there. There is still a gap in the market.

PAUL KERRY

St. John's Houghton with St. Peter's Kingmoor

### **1 CORINTHIANS: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary 28)**

**Mark Taylor**

Nashville, Tenn.: B&H, 2014 473pp £21.99 ISBN: 9780805401288

The variety of topics raised in this particular epistle, as well as its comparative length, means there is probably a greater chance with 1 Corinthians that readers will differ on how they perceive the epistle to be fitting together and working as a whole.

This offering from Mark Taylor, who serves as professor of New Testament at Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Texas, argues for a thematic approach. Taylor understands Paul to be intentionally tackling one key topic after another. Although he does acknowledge common connective themes, in particular the Corinthians' pride, their fascination with the 'spiritual,' and an emphasis on transformative grace, Taylor is hesitant to offer an overarching message of the epistle. Whilst this may put some readers off, it is very evident that Taylor wants to listen carefully to the apostle's particular authorial intent throughout, and I was blessed by his thoughtful attention to the text.

For those unfamiliar with the NAC format, its aim, as the book's title suggests, is to be a theological *exposition* of Scripture. In practice this means Taylor writes as a believer seeking to take seriously this portion of God's word, including its place within the wider biblical narrative and

a systematic framework. He is adept at surveying the major opinions on matters of contention, yet most of the technical information is wisely kept to the footnotes (although these are ever-present, well-resourced, and conversant with recent scholarship).

Each overall section begins with a summary, before each subsection of verses within the section gets its own summary, and then Taylor comments on each individual verse or pairing of verses within that subsection. Given the expository remit, I probably expected to see a little bit more connecting the text to the church today. Although the commentary is practical for the pastor or layperson in the sense of developing their understanding, I didn't feel it was hugely practical in the sense of drawing out present day application.

Ultimately this is a sturdy addition to the 1 Corinthians library, offering a more detailed, thorough step-up from the likes of Vaughan Roberts' *True Spirituality* or David Jackman's *Let's Study 1 Corinthians*, whilst also being much more readable (and cheaper) than a full-on commentary such as David Garland or Roy Ciampa/Brian Rosner (and frankly summarising the best of their work anyway). With Taylor, one gets a strong sense of being led along by a thorough guide, yet a guide who always has one eye on the goal of helping the preacher make a few more steps toward the pulpit.

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### **THINKING THROUGH PAUL: A Survey of his Life, Letters, and Theology**

**Bruce W. Longenecker and Todd D. Still**

Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014 408pp £28.99hb  
ISBN: 9780310330868

This is a frontier book. It is on the frontier between the academy and the pastorate. It is on the frontier between conservative and open evangelicalism. It is on the frontier between traditional (Reformation) understandings of Pauline theology and the so-called 'New Perspectives on Paul.' As a result, prospective readers will come to different conclusions on its orthodoxy; irrespective, I strongly endorse its utility.

The book is divided into three sections;

Paul's life—a synthesis of material garnered from Acts and the autobiographical portions of Paul's epistles, supplemented by fascinating notes on the historical context of the Roman Empire and Diaspora Jewry.

Paul's letters—each chapter itself divided into three sections: situating the letter in its socio-historical context, briefly elucidating its

main point(s), and dealing with the contents of the letter with special attention on the questions it raises for scholars and pastors.

Paul's theology—three chapters on the Apostle's theology across the Pauline corpus: on the 'apocalyptic narrative' behind his thought; on the relationship between Paul's gospel and Israel, the Law, and Roman imperial ideology; and on Paul's vision of the Christian life, ethics, and hermeneutics.

For many *Churchman* readers, *Thinking Through Paul* will be 'beyond the pale' on account of the authors' doubt that Paul wrote Titus and 1 Timothy—even though, by academics' standards, their affirmation of Paul's authorship for the remainder is strikingly conservative. Despite my own hang-ups with the book on this and other matters, I am glad to own a copy and happy to recommend it to evangelical theological students and pastors, for two chief reasons.

First, the historical parts in each of the three sections are interesting, lucid, and occasionally hermeneutically enlightening. Second, the book introduces the reader to all the main movements, disputes, and fads in recent Pauline scholarship with an admirable even-handedness that invites the reader to weigh up the issues at hand. Longenecker and Still's textbook familiarises one with the history of the debate, the technical vocabulary, key personnel and the current battle lines. Most of the time, Longenecker and Still defend the conservative position; occasionally—as with the section on first-century Jewish notions of justification and election—they synthesise two conflicting positions, seeking to enable evangelical appropriation of the good and useful insights to come out of the last thirty years of Pauline scholarship. Where they endorse a position conservatives are normally uncomfortable with (such as on pseudepigraphy), they articulate conservative concerns and arguments fairly, always pointing to resources for further research.

The popularity of N.T. Wright (and others) among British readers means that debates in the academy are not far from the pews—for this reason, *Thinking Through Paul* will not be far from my study.

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**INSTRUCTION IN THE WAY OF THE LORD: A Guide to the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer**

**Martin Davie**

London: Latimer Trust, 2014 62pp £5.99pb ISBN: 9781906327255

**TILL DEATH US DO PART: 'The Solemnization of Matrimony' in the Book of Common Prayer**

**Simon Vibert**

London: Latimer Trust, 2014 64pp £5.99pb ISBN: 9781906327262

The commendable 'Anglican Foundations' series from The Latimer Trust continues apace with these two latest volumes: Martin Davie's analysis of the Prayer Book Catechism, and Simon Vibert's exploration of the Prayer Book Marriage Service. Both are erudite and judicious contributions, and provide the kind of thorough 'exegesis' of the BCP text that has been severely lacking since the heroically tedious Tutorial Prayer Book was first published over a century ago. Moreover, Davie and Vibert are able to provide us with helpful contemporary applications of the teaching of the Prayer Book, at a time when the nature of what constitutes truly 'Anglican' doctrine has become an extremely hot potato.

The great achievement of Davie's volume is to remind us that the Catechism is a much-neglected treasure: 'for centuries it provided the framework for instructing young Christians in the basics of Christian belief and behaviour, but in recent years it has come to be almost forgotten.' The displacement of the BCP Baptism service in favour of the Common Worship alternative has meant that the clear stipulations in that former liturgy—not least that the baptised child shall be 'instructed in the Church Catechism'—have dropped almost entirely off the radar of most modern clergymen. Davie nicely situates the Catechism within the wider context of the Prayer Book liturgy, and provides a brief history of its composition. The real meat, though, comes in the analysis of the Catechism itself. Davie walks us through the various statements of the Catechism, demonstrating their biblical basis and their implications for godly living. The prominence of the Ten Commandments, for instance, helps to remind us that, in line with Article VII, the Church of England takes a Calvinist, rather than Lutheran, stance with regard to the continuing demands of the moral Law.

An insightful appendix gives a brief run-down of more recent Anglican catechetical material, noting especially the 'Pilgrim' course, and the ACNA Catechism. Concluding his account, Davie writes: 'the Catechism does not tell us everything that we may want to know theologically, but it tells us those things that we most need to know, and it does so succinctly and truthfully.' One closes Davie's volume with a renewed enthusiasm for giving the Catechism a central place in the process of preparing candidates for Confirmation.

Vibert's book is just as impressive. He is under no illusions that many of the assumptions of the BCP Marriage Service—which remains the official statement of the Church's teaching on Marriage—are now significantly at odds with wider cultural views regarding the nature and purpose of marriage. A useful overview of the Bible's teaching on marriage helps to draw out key themes such as complementarity, and ensures that Ephesians 5 is given its due interpretive weight (one hopes that this will also be the case in the upcoming 'facilitated conversations!'). Vibert then gives a commentary on the liturgical text itself, drawing out, for instance, the Prayer Book's distinctive three reasons for which marriage was ordained. He also compares the Prayer Book service with the ASB and Common Worship, and offers a (largely positive) evaluation of the recent report 'Men and Women in Marriage' from the Faith and Order Commission.

Perhaps most helpfully of all, Vibert concludes by addressing a series of issues raised by the BCP Marriage Service, although the excellent content here is marred by a significant error in the layout. Nonetheless, it is tremendously encouraging to see the Prayer Book's liturgy being commended to modern evangelical Anglicans so wholeheartedly. Vibert leaves us in no doubt that the BCP Marriage Service is 'rich with a biblical understanding of the unfolding of God's mystery in and through human marriage, so that the watching world will have a greater appreciation of God's saving plans through his Church, and anticipate all the more eagerly the final marriage of Christ, the groom, to his spotless bride, the Church.' Amen and Amen!

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## AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

Peter T. Sanlon

Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014      244pp      £26pb  
ISBN: 978145148278

In an age when many Christians are suggesting that the sermon is an outmoded means of communication, it is good to read this refreshing account of Augustine's ministry as a preacher of the gospel. The author rightly begins with historical background and the debt which Augustine owed to pagan oratory. This is particularly instructive with reference to the delivery of a sermon. In the main, pagan orators like Cicero never read from a manuscript. They would memorise the content of what they wanted to say and then speak 'ex tempore.' Augustine followed this practice. Indeed, he would often change his approach in the light of

what he discerned in the reactions of his listeners. There are lessons here for contemporary preachers. It is much more difficult to apply a sermon effectively if you are tied to a manuscript, because of the lack of personal interaction between preacher and hearer.

Notwithstanding the need for delivery skills, Augustine argued that it is more important to teach the truth than to be eloquent. This leads our author to the use of Scripture in preaching. The Augustinian approach is to soak oneself in the word of God, since every sermon should be an exposition of Scripture. In this regard Sanlon uses two hermeneutical tools in order to analyse Augustine's sermons—what he calls, 'temporality' and 'interiority.' 'Temporality' is defined as 'the successive flow and teleological development of God's plan for creation from beginning to consummation.' Scripture is a temporal narrative, and Augustine made great use of the liturgical calendar so that listeners could be drawn into the space-time story of the people of God. 'Interiority' is 'the inner realm of desirous longing, evaluation and prayer.' And so it is the task of the preacher not just to rehearse the great facts of salvation history, but to apply the truths of the Bible to the heart and the conscience of the hearer. For Augustine 'the heart' was paramount. The preacher should therefore search his own heart, as well as expose the heart of the listeners. Of course ultimately only God can search the heart, which necessitates a humble dependence on the Holy Spirit.

In the second half of the book, the author demonstrates how these two key principles are worked out in Augustine's sermons, with many case studies on the themes of money, relationships, death, and resurrection. Again, here are lessons for preachers. Many sermons today from so-called 'evangelical pulpits' are not much more than historical lectures. They singularly lack what the Puritans called 'heart-work,' addressed to the interior man.

Peter Sanlon has done us a great service in highlighting these important aspects of Augustine's preaching ministry.

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