

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Book Reviews

FAITH TO FAITH: CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM IN DIALOGUE

Chawkat Moucarray

Leicester: IVP 2001 327pp £12.99pb ISBN 0-85111-899-2

For many evangelicals dialogue is a dirty word. It has been taken to suggest a readiness to compromise on the uniqueness of Jesus, and a willingness to accept other religions as on a par with the Christian faith. But its sub-title should not deter potential readers from reading this book.

Following the events of September 11 last year there have been many attempts on the part of Christian churches to understand their Muslim neighbours, and in some cases to enter into a form of dialogue with them. In this book Moucarray argues convincingly that genuine dialogue must accept that conversion must be a possible outcome. He writes, 'To be tolerant is neither to deny nor to minimise the theological differences between Christianity and Islam. Christians and Muslims will be genuinely tolerant only when they have accepted the idea that debate, or dialogue, may lead to conversion either to Christianity or Islam. True tolerance is to accept the other not by ignoring the distance between us, but by measuring that distance accurately and by recognising that whoever wants to cross over has the right and freedom to do so' (p 20).

The author is well-qualified to take this position. An Arab Christian who studied in a predominantly Muslim high school where he puzzled the Islamic education teacher by asking if he could attend his classes, he found that Muslims were equally interested to find out about the Christian faith. While living in France he gained a doctorate in Islamic Studies at the Sorbonne and now teaches the subject at All Nations Christian College.

With this background Moucarray gives an excellent grounding in the teachings of Islam together with a useful apologetic for the Christian faith. This latter provides evidence which is valuable for any pastor or lay person involved in discussing, perhaps in a house group, Basics or the Alpha course, the doctrines of the faith. Beginning with the fundamental issue of the Scriptures—the Bible and the Qur'an—the writer faces in turn all the allegations made within Islam about the Christian faith: that the Bible has been falsified, that Jesus is not the

Son of God, that He did not die on the cross and therefore there was no resurrection, etc. After examining Jesus's claims in the Gospels and the Islamic interpretation of those claims in Part 3 he then submits the claims of Muhammad to an equally rigorous scrutiny in Part 4. In his chapter, 'Is there revelation in Islam?' Moucarray is prepared to argue that 'God-fearing Muslims worship the true God even if they do not know Him in the fullness of His revelation in Jesus Christ', but that this is not to say that they have enough of God's revelation. 'On the contrary, they still need to hear of Jesus Christ as much as anyone else: they still need to respond to the gospel and put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour' (pp 269-70).

The book is written in a very readable and non-technical style and provides important material for those who would understand the Muslim mind. Lest it should be assumed that it is all theory there is a challenging Part 5 on contemporary issues which gives an Arab Christian's view on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the biblical imperative to love the immigrant as ourselves, and the need to face the implications of one God, one humanity and one world. The writer concludes with an appeal to his Muslim reader to get a copy of the Bible and examine seriously the claims of Jesus Christ before responding to the decisive question, 'Is Jesus merely who the Qu'ran says he is, or is he really 'the Saviour of the world?'

In the two appendices there is further helpful information about Muslim theologians and mystics, and a time-line of Christian-Muslim relations. In giving dates in Islamic as well as Christian terms (pp 12, 17 and 296ff) there needs to be an explanation of the fact that the Muslim year has fewer days—hence the fact that Ramadan features earlier in the calendar each year, and it is not possible to determine the year in the Islamic calendar by subtracting 622 (the first year of the Islamic calendar) from the AD date.

This will be an important tool for any minister or house-group leader who in our present multi-cultural society will sooner or later encounter questions of what Muslims believe and how we can defend our own faith in the light of their denials.

DAVID WHEATON
Chesham

PRAYING BY THE BOOK: Reading the Psalms**Craig Bartholomew & Andrew West (editors)**

Carlisle: Paternoster 2001 190pp £9.99pb ISBN 1-84227-129-6

Reading the Psalms is the result of the collected writing of Craig Bartholomew, Zak Benjamin, Jamie Grant, Gert Swart, Gordon McConville, Karl Moller, Gordon Wenham and Andrew West. The book combines the skills of preachers and academics as well as an artist. It began life as a Lenten course, and the reader will find applicatory and devotional sections at the conclusion of each chapter. Craig Bartholomew comments in his chapter—'The five-fold structure of the Psalter alerts us to the fact that to every word from God there must be an answering word from us. God's word relates to all of our lives, individually and communally, and we are called to live out the totality of our lives before God' (p 6).

The chapter divisions break down as follows: Psalms 1 and 2, The Way of Blessing; Psalm 15-24, The Picture of the Faithful; Psalms 73 and 89, The Crisis of Faith; Psalms 90-106, Rejoice the Lord is King; Psalms 145-150, 'Let everything that has breath...'; and a final chapter on the Psalms in the New Testament.

The book includes some good applicatory sections combining meditative and thoughtful reflection and a practical prayer guide. For example, on the difficult section on imprecatory Psalms, Gordon Wenham encourages prayer and support for the Barnabas Fund (supporting Christians in Muslim countries) and for Bosnia. This helps the reader see that the prayers for judgement expressed by Psalms 101, 104, and 94 are not just designed to bring the wicked to repentance in the ancient world, but have much to say to us today.

The book is not as intellectually satisfying as, say, reading the Tyndale commentary on the Psalms by Derek Kidner (although the final chapter by Karl Moller deals helpfully with some of the issues surrounding the New Testament interpretation of the Psalter). On the other hand, I would not use Kidner's book for my daily devotional time. I felt that I could do that with *Praying by the Book*.

The Psalms are, above all, a marvellous collection of hymns and songs of praise. The final theme (Psalms 145-150) reaches a grand finale in Psalm 150

– ‘Let everything that has breath praise the Lord’. Andrew West comments, ‘In doxology we lose ourselves in the acknowledgment of the glory of God. We are lifted from the pain and the drudgery of this life, from the second-best, into a world of awe. We join our praises with the heavens, the skies and all God’s creation’ (p 141).

I am not sure about questions such as ‘In the picture at the beginning of this chapter what do you think is the significance of the crown above the scroll?’ (p 131). The whole point about the Psalms is that they are to be read and heard, and I did not find the sketches assisted that dynamic. However this may be a personal bias against any visual expression taking away from the word.

I welcome the reflective style of the book. The prayers and questions at the end of the chapters are useful for turning the teaching into devotion. The authors are to be commended for giving us an example of how to turn a careful analysis of the text into a rich compendium for spiritual nourishment.

SIMON VIBERT
Wimbledon

THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN DONNE

Jeffrey Johnson

Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer 2001 162pp £16.99pb
ISBN 0-85991-620-0

John Donne is well known for his religious poetry, but it is sometimes forgotten that he was also one of the most powerful preachers of his day. Few preachers from any period have produced sermons of the beauty and energy that we find in Donne. Although Donne wrote no theological system, he practised theology as a preacher, and his sermons provide a wealth of theological material.

Jeffrey Johnson has performed the valuable task of extracting from the whole body of sermons the principal features of Donne’s theology. Johnson is convinced that Donne should be regarded ‘as a theologian in his own right who is worthy of study in the development of seventeenth-century theology and in the history of the Church of England’ (ix). Johnson portrays Donne as a thinker both traditional and original, who sought, in the midst of his embattled religious environment, to develop an authentically catholic theology.

The ‘clear theological vision’ which emerges from the body of sermons is, says Johnson, ‘Donne’s own eclectic *via media*’ (x).

Johnson emphasises the communal nature of the Trinity in Donne’s thought, and in this respect Donne seems to anticipate certain features of modern Trinitarian theology. In the fellowship of the Church, human beings are able to participate in something analogous to the divine community. Johnson explores Donne’s theology of common and private prayer, his views on the use of images in devotion, and his deeply liturgical understanding of repentance. In all these areas, the communal focus of Donne’s Trinitarian theology is evident.

The final chapter, ‘O Taste and See’, provides a fascinating discussion of Donne’s soteriology. Being shaped by a desire to foster ecclesiastical and theological unity, Donne’s theology of grace blends together elements of Catholicism, Calvinism and Arminianism. The book closes with a fine discussion of the Trinitarian and communal focus of Donne’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

Johnson’s study offers both a weighty contribution to Donne scholarship, and a fascinating contribution to our understanding of the development of seventeenth-century English theology. The study is grounded firmly in Donne’s historical and theological contexts, providing nuanced glimpses into several of the early seventeenth-century controversies. And for those of us who have not read Donne’s prose as often as we should, not least of the book’s charms is the wealth of delightful quotations from the sermons. It is to be hoped that the book will inspire interest in the theological significance of one of England’s greatest poets and preachers.

BENJAMIN MYERS
Townsville, Australia

PREACHING TO A POSTMODERN WORLD:

A guide to reaching twenty-first-century listeners **Graham Johnston**
Leicester: IVP 2001 189 pp £9.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-490-3

This book aims to address the gap between what is said and what is heard. The problem arises when those who preach to postmodern people are still working from modern assumptions. The challenge of postmodernism is that it creates

in its denizens new obstacles to hearing and accepting the word of truth, obstacles with which the effective communicator must be familiar. Johnston's concern is to equip preachers to make the message of Christ heard by postmodern people.

Preaching to postmoderns is not about theological compromise—'... when we speak of effective preaching, this is not to say the preaching necessarily works or gets results. Effectiveness must be understood in terms of bringing the listener to a clear appreciation of the biblical message' (p 62). The first step in communicating to a changing culture is to understand how our hearers are changing. An opening chapter traces some of the implications of postmodernity for preaching, and is followed by a longer treatment of postmodernity itself, mainly with reference to modernity. We discover, for example, that 'Where modernity was cocky, postmodernity is anxious. Where modernity had all the answers, postmodernity is full of questions; where modernity clung to certainty and truth, postmodernity views the world as relative and subjective' (p 26).

As Johnston points out, such developments leave the preacher at a point of decision, 'For some, this emergence of postmodernity means closing the shutters and holding on tight in the hope that the tempest soon will pass. For others, the insurgence of postmodern times represents a fresh breeze with a whole new realm of possibility—a long overdue wind that could lift a stale and musty order [*sic*] from our sanctuaries. Whichever the case, each of us as preachers of God's Word will have to decide how to address new generations of the twenty-first century' (p 174).

The rest of the book is dedicated to pointing out opportunities and obstacles, and abounds with helpful insights. Johnston is spot on with the observation that dealing with sin may be one of the greatest challenges to twenty-first century preaching. It is encouraging to know that 'Deep, deep down, people want life to make sense. Absurdity is all right in small doses, but nobody wants to live with it' (p 141). It is important to know why clichés, assertions of authority, dogmatism and truth-claims are turn-offs to postmodern hearers. And it is reassuring to know that communicating past such obstacles is not some terrible novelty, but has been modelled by biblical parables and Paul's opening with contemporary concerns at Mars Hill.

If a second edition were to appear, it would be interesting to have a comment about the effect on modern people of being taught in a postmodern-friendly way. For instance a preacher may, for tactical reasons explained in this book, choose not to expound the Scriptures as authoritative but rather allow that authority to develop in time. How will pastoral care and discipline in the congregation be affected when boundaries are not clearly drawn in public teaching? It may be that experience has shown this to be a non-problem, but it would be interesting to hear Johnston's view. On another note, it is probably pedantic to list typographical mistakes, but three of the four spotted by this reviewer led to ambiguity and could usefully be corrected. They are found on pages 52 (fugitive), 101 (need we fear preaching Jesus?), 109 (the Christ message?), 174 (a musty order [odour?] see quote above).

This is an excellent book for preachers at all stages. Johnston provides lots of creative ideas and, more importantly, inspires the preacher to see the opportunities ahead for preaching Christ so that he may be heard and received in a postmodern world.

ED MOLL
Basingstoke

THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE **Benson Bobrick**
London: Weidenfield & Nicolson 2001 376pp £20 hb
ISBN 0 297 607723

In a very readable book Benson Bobrick traces the history of the translation of the Bible into English. Starting with a brief history of the Vulgate he then dedicates long chapters to Wycliffe and Tyndale before tracing the development of the Bible through the reigns of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and James I and on into the commonwealth era. The final chapters seek to trace the Bible's influence on the constitutions of the UK and US.

The purpose of his work is part eulogy to the work of the early translators (particularly Tyndale), part tracing of the beauty of the language of the translations and their impact on the wider language, and part tracing the wider impact of the Bible in the vernacular tongue on the church and politics of England and also the US.

There are many good things in this book: it is easy to read and gives very helpful sketches of the lives of the key players most notably Wycliffe and Tyndale. The interaction between Thomas More and Tyndale is fascinating and the way that different translations fared and were developed in Elizabeth's reign is intriguing.

However in many ways it is a frustrating book which ultimately does not achieve all that it sets out to do. Bobrick is more interested in the translation of the Bible and the beauty of the language (especially the AV) than with the message of the Bible and its central character. Again and again he recites passages from various translations hoping to show the magnificence of the language, whilst not really engaging with the message itself. His deep love of the various translations does not mean a belief in its infallibility. He is happy to refer to some of the Old Testament as 'Legends' (p 276).

His thesis that having the Bible in the vernacular tongue led ultimately to the rise of constitutional government is more stated than argued. It is as if he feels he only needs to state the case to make the point. This was somewhat disappointing. The book would have been better for a longer and more detailed argument to this end, looking at all the other influences which were at play at the time.

DAVID GIBBS
Leytonstone

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD — PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE Paul Helm & Carl Trueman (editors)
Leicester, Apollos: IVP 2002 289pp £14.99 ISBN 0-85111-476-8

Understanding the interface between who God is and what we have come to know of him personally (if we are Christians) is essential for Evangelicals, for therein lies the backbone of our doctrine of Scripture. What we believe about the nature of Scripture must be derived from what we understand about God's identity and character. If God is trustworthy, then so ought the Scriptures to be; otherwise how can their claim to be his word to us stand up to scrutiny? As the editors remark of the Bible as a whole, 'that God is, in a sense, the words he speaks, or, perhaps better, that God is towards his people the same as the words he speaks to them, is a recurring theme.' [p x]

Amongst many questions, this raised two significant ones in my mind at least: (i) what does it actually mean for God to be trustworthy, and once that is established, (ii) can/does the Bible fit into categories which tally with the answers to (i)? They are different questions, and require a broad range of skills and understanding that cross the disciplinary boundaries of modern theology. Hence the successful (in my view) endeavour of the editors to compile an anthology from a number of walks of contemporary theology. As the editors are right to bemoan, the fragmentation of knowledge has meant that the vast majority of us involved in any area of theology are almost inevitably going to be 'ignorant of, and certainly incompetent in' scholarship in other areas.

This reviewer can certainly relate to the cold reality of this phenomenon! So this book is a treasure trove, forcing one to face issues with a rigour and attention to detail that is challenging but also accessible and enjoyable to read. The whole approach is refreshing and significantly hones a more robust doctrine of Scripture for our times, while never claiming to be an all-encompassing analysis. The explicit aim has been to draw outsiders into particular theological disciplines and by and large this has been successful—a couple of the more philosophical essays towards the end are not as accessible as others.

Having more of a biblical studies focus meant that they lost me at times, thus confirming the phenomenon of knowledge's fragmentation! However, the vast majority of the essays were extremely stimulating, as were the two responses at the end (by Colin Gunton and Francis Watson). I did feel that both my questions were amply addressed with some helpful and sometimes unexpected implications. Particularly striking were Paul Helm's frustratingly brief application of the theme to the adherents of the 'Openness of God' school (pp 249-52), Timothy Ward's challenging proposal of viewing Scripture's diversity as a 'canonically limited polyphony' (p 218) and the link between God's faithfulness and his words that emerges as a running theme in many of the earlier biblical essays (especially those by J Gary Millar, Gordon McConville, Drake Williams and David Peterson).

I cannot recommend this book highly enough and have already given one of the essays to my students here to read.

MARK MEYNELL
Uganda

THE MESSAGE OF EZEKIEL**Christopher J H Wright**

Leicester: IVP 2001 pp 368 £9.99 pb ISBN 0-85111-548-9

Readers of *Churchman* will be familiar with the *Bible Speaks Today* series of commentaries published by InterVarsity Press. These provide a high standard of readable and affordable exposition and application to contemporary life of the books of the Bible, and those purchasing this volume will not be disappointed.

The author was formerly Principal of All Nations Christian College and has recently moved to become the first International Ministry Director of the Langham Partnership International, an organisation which has been set up to continue the global ministry of John Stott. As well as being a missiologist of some repute, Chris Wright is also no mean Old Testament scholar, and obviously feels considerable affinity with Ezekiel. In a careful, thorough and invaluable introduction he tells of the challenge he felt during his theological studies when asked to think about Ezekiel as a theologian with a mind of his own and a distinctive theological agenda: 'in short', he says, 'I was hooked by the sheer fascination of hearing the living voice of a man whose theology was born in the pain and passion of his own and his people's suffering. Biblical theology came to life for me, thanks to an essay on Ezekiel'.

With such a background it is not surprising that the character of Ezekiel is brought to life in this volume in a remarkable way. The writer has thought himself into the prophet's situation, and encourages the reader to enter into the struggles of Ezekiel's life—calling us to realise the 'immense personal, professional and theological shock' it must have been when on the very day when he should have been entering upon the priestly ministry for which he had been trained he found God breaking into his life and calling him to a task he may well have viewed with suspicion—the lonely, friendless, unpopular role of being a prophet, the mouthpiece of Yahweh' (p 27). Readers involved in parochial ministry will identify with the comment on the prophet's role as a watchman that 'the long ministry of Ezekiel combined the roles of pastor and evangelist as he struggled to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed and to build a community of repentance, faith and obedience out of the ruins and traumas of the exile' (p 30).

After this masterly introduction, subsequent chapters follow the basic sequence of Ezekiel's writing, though at certain points the commentator does not hesitate to exchange a section-by-section treatment for a thematic approach. For example in chapter 4 Ezekiel's chapters 16:1-63, 23:1-49 and 20:1-49 come together under the heading 'History with attitude', while chapters 15, 17 and 19 are dealt with in an appendix. This makes the book difficult for those who would use it as a commentary for consecutive personal Bible study, but nevertheless stimulates the reader to do more thinking for himself or herself.

Wright encourages the reader to enter with sympathy into the prophet's frustration during the period of imposed silence for seven years from chapter 3:27 to 33:22, taking the view that during that period he was to say nothing in ordinary human conversation but simply to speak when directed by Yahweh. He quotes with approval J B Taylor's comment in the Tyndale Commentary, 'when he spoke, it was because God had something to say. When he was silent, it was because God was silent' (p 72). Equally moving is his treatment of the feelings that the prophet must have experienced when the 'delight of his eyes', his wife, was taken from him in untimely death over which he was forbidden to mourn (24:16 see pp 216-9).

Yet there is also a delightfully light touch, epitomised in some of the captions such as 'Jerusalem: My Fair Lady' and 'Cinderella and the two ugly sisters (in reverse)' as well as the parenthetic 'what did poor Ezekiel's wife say?' following the description of the prophet's hasty packing and undignified exit through a hole in the wall of his house (p 95)! Wright has a great way with words in summarising the book's teaching as on p 203, 'Ezekiel has insisted (the bad news) that only the righteous can be saved, but also (the good news) that only the wicked need perish'. There is also shrewd application, as on p105, 'It is well worth regularly checking where we have drawn the line between the wisdom that makes prudent provision for the future for ourselves and our families and the idolatry that builds all our hopes and security on the modern equivalent of the gods and armies of Egypt'.

In wholeheartedly recommending this worthy addition to the series the reviewer has one suggestion to make. Most preachers would probably shy away from attempting to expound their way through Ezekiel, and have probably limited themselves to select passages: this commentary will make us

realise how relevant it is for the times we live in. It would have been helpful if there had been a study guide appended as has been done with some of the other volumes in this series. This would have helped to highlight some of the great themes and possibly indicated seed-thoughts for a sermon series. The reference on p 44 to the final destruction of the city in 598/7 BC should probably be amended to 587/6 BC in the light of the historical references on p 20, where again the date of 599 for the second rebellion should be amended to 589, and the 'urbane' Egyptians in the footnote on p 91 should be 'urban'. The proof-reader has overlooked quite a number of misquoted scriptures (*e g* pp 72, 88, 103, 116, 117, 118), but this is a niggle when there are so many to check.

DAVID WHEATON

Chesham

FAITHFULNESS AND HOLINESS, THE WITNESS OF J C RYLE

J I Packer

Chicago, Crossway: 2002 hb 272pp Unpriced ISBN 1-58134-358-2

This volume consists of the 1877 edition of 'Holiness'. That is the basic seven chapters to which a further fourteen chapters were later to be added. The fuller edition has been in print continually ever since publication and today can be obtained from more than one publisher on different sides of the Atlantic.

In addition there is an appreciation by Dr Packer. Certainly it will not replace the biographies but it is none-the-less welcome. In a way we have here an encapsulation of Ryle's basic theology and approach; so we learn a good deal about him and his thought. It is therefore exceedingly valuable even though it only consists of 87 pages. There is a good bibliography and many notes on both sections of the book. He says that he felt it necessary to print the shorter 'Holiness' in the same volume to avoid the insertion of many long quotations.

There is so much of value in the book that it is by no means otiose. In a way it is likely that the volume will act as an advocate for Ryle to a new generation. Too many people dismiss him as dated and irrelevant whereas in fact Ryle penned the most satisfactory study of sanctification which has ever been written. It would be a major advance in the whole flood of writing about spirituality if instead of concentrating upon St Ignatius, St. John of the Cross and the like, people went first to Ryle. This is because of his rounded approach

to the subject dealing, as he does, with the foundation of a right understanding of the Christian doctrine of sanctification and also how it is obtained, together with clear guidance about the actual living of the Christian life.

Dr Packer brings all this out and points up some issues which are too often disregarded. Most especially he shows how, in a sense, Ryle is the last of the Puritans (although some of us would wish to suggest that he is wrong—in the fact that Dr Packer himself has assumed that mantle!).

But the appreciation also shows how Ryle taught and enforced a model of pastoral and evangelistic work which has been the most effective in building the Church of God. Indebted as he was to Baxter's work in Kidderminster, Ryle sought to persuade the clergy of the Church of England to be assiduous visitors—to have no more than 5000 souls in their parishes and to visit on average 75 families a week.

There is a model which was once the clear aspiration of the good clergyman but which has been abandoned wholesale in favour of 'managing the parish'. If we could persuade the clergy to become once again house-going, we should certainly have a church-going people. In fact research has shown that of all the methods of 'growing a church' this is by far the most effective method and, in fact, is a tradition which goes back a long way in 'successful' parishes. So Packer does not only deal with 'Holiness' in his appreciation but points out the many ways in which we are still in Ryle's debt.

JOHN PEARCE
Bury St Edmunds