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Reviews of Books

Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship, Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xix + 539 pages, £75, ISBN: 978-0521470124

This is the first major volume from Kevin Vanhoozer not devoted, in one way or another, to questions of method—he describes himself as having been guilty of 'procrastinating in the prolegomenal fields' (xii). It has been worth the wait. Following extensive treatment of theological methodology in *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), he has begun to put serious legs on that proposal, showing us what dogmatics in Vanhoozerian vein looks like.

Remythologizing Theology offers us Vanhoozer's account of the doctrine of God. It is not a comprehensive exposition of God's being, attributes, and triunity, but is nevertheless wide-ranging in scope, with well-chosen subjects that get to the heart of a number of contemporary debates. Vanhoozer states his goal as 'to lay out the contours of a theodramatic metaphysics whose categories derive from descriptions of God's word-acts, and to bring this account into dialogue with other forms of theism.' (32) In particular, he sets himself against the panentheisms of, *inter alia*, Moltmann, process theology, and the open theists.

The book is in three parts. Part One is exploratory, sampling some significant biblical texts before laying out and evaluating the theologies with which Vanhoozer will take issue with his own proposal. Part Two outlines that proposal, a Trinitarian 'communicative theism' that 'retools' classical theism by leaning on communicative rather than causal categories. Part Three applies this to the God-world, particularly the God-human, relation, exploring divine sovereignty, human freedom, evil, and prayer. He concludes

with two chapters on divine (im)passibility and compassion. In all this, the relationship of God and creatures is cast in a 'theodramatic' model, with God as Author and humans as heroes of the play.

Vanhoozer styles his account post-Barthian Thomism. Thomist because, following recent accounts of Aquinas's theology (e.g., Fergus Kerr, Thomas Weinandy), God is no static entity; he is eternally, fully realized being-in-act. Post-Barthian because rather than dealing in categories of being per se, he more explicitly allows the plot of Scripture to shape his proposal, focusing on God as an eternally communicative agent. Thus, rather than speaking of God as being-in-act, he prefers to talk of God's being-in-communicative-act. Taking a broad definition of communication, as far more than transmission of information, and utilizing speech-act theory, he argues that 'No activity is as characteristic, or as frequently mentioned in the Bible, as God's speaking.' (212)

Throughout, Vanhoozer makes extensive use of covenantal categories and biblical theology. As one of the leading figures in the contemporary revival of the theological exegesis of Scripture, he interacts fruitfully and insightfully with Scripture; one of the side benefits of the volume was a number of exegetical insights as he expounded a wide range of biblical texts in their canonical interconnectedness. All of this is in keeping with the title of the work. 'Remythologizing', as well as evoking, though not raising, the ghost of Bultmann, refers to the *mythos* of Scripture, where *mythos*, following Aristotle, refers to dramatic plot. That is, in accounting for the Who and What of God, Vanhoozer seeks to be governed by the plot of God's Scriptural self-revelation, particularly, though far from exclusively, as it reaches its climax in the person and work of Christ.

Vanhoozer's proposal, method, and conclusions have many strengths. Not least is the way he repeatedly brings the Creator-creature distinction to the fore. This highlights the asymmetry in God's relationship with us, and emphasizes the importance of analogical language in our talk of God. Related to this, he deals what should be a death blow to Feuerbachian projections of human relationships, community, love, reciprocity, suffering, onto God—what he terms 'Feuerbachian slips', and which he finds theologians such as Moltmann and Pinnock guilty of. God is the Lordly Creator; for every likeness between him and us, there is a far greater

unlikeness. His love is a Lordly love, a love that endures and conquers suffering, rather than becoming passively subject to it. Similarly, although he invites us into dialogue, it is never the dialogue of equals. When we pray, we are always creatures, actors in the play answering the prior word of the Author.

Vanhoozer's desire to be Scriptural is also related to his refutation of Feuerbachian strategies. Perhaps the foundational strength of this volume is that Vanhoozer is confident that God has spoken and we should listen. He has revealed himself not only in his mighty acts in history, but also, and vitally, in his words about those acts. He is known not only in his Son in a reductionistic way, but also in the covenant history that the Son brings to its climax and fulfilment.

Vanhoozer also does well to put the Trinity front and centre in his account of God's being and attributes. There is no hint of dealing with the One God prior to consideration of his triunity. However, in contrast to some currents in contemporary trinitarianism, he distinguishes the immanent and economic Trinity, refusing to collapse the immanent into the economic, such that God becomes dependent on the world. God's words and acts in the economy reveal who he is in himself, but do not constitute his being. One specific proposal that merits careful thought is the way in which this trinitarianism shapes Vanhoozer's account of God's eternality and relationship to time. His emphasis on triune communicative relationships, rather than only relations of origin (begetting, spirating), in the immanent Trinity means that rather than regarding eternity as bare timelessness (or as eternal time), he sees it as the space in which God enjoys ceaseless communicative activity. It is the medium of the fully realized (and so immutable, but not static) communication of love between Father, Son, and Spirit. These ordered relationships within God's eternal life provide an analogue to the successive flow of created time, the space in which God communicatively relates with creatures (253-4).

Finally, given its centrality to Vanhoozer's thesis, we should note his defence of divine impassibility, which is nuanced, Scripturally derived, and Christologically-focused, affirming that God has strong affections, but is not passively acted upon. Space prevents an exposition of his view here; suffice to say that he brings much needed conceptual clarity to the definitions of suffering and emotions, and to

considering how God's relationship to sin, suffering, and evil contrasts with ours.

In a work of this size and scope, any reader will, of course, have a number of niggles and questions. I see one significant weakness, at least viewed from the perspective of a pastor theologian. It is hard not to be dazzled, and often charmed, by Vanhoozer's virtuosity with language. The text is full of artful puns and allusions, and newly minted vocabulary. To give a far from exhaustive list: being-in-communicative-act, Feuerbachian slips, kyriotic (as compared with kenotic) compassion, remythologizing, theodramatic, theo-ontology (as compared with ontotheology). Some of these are not entirely unique to Vanhoozer, but none are common coin. Many will be familiar to those in the know as witty variations upon the themes of other writers. But unless you are already familiar with ontotheology, for example, this might prove rather heavy going.

This is not to say Vanhoozer does not write well; his prose is often elegant, sometimes brilliant. Nevertheless, sentences like 'God's compassion is a covenantal concern-based theodramatic construal' (443, cf. 464) do not appear calculated to invite the more timid reader into the conceptual world Vanhoozer is constructing. It is unfair to cite all of these out of context. He does a good job of explaining his terms, technical terminology is, to some degree, unavoidable, and one or two examples would not hinder communication unduly. But the cumulative effect is that this is an enjoyable, but also an unnecessarily difficult, reading experience.

In fairness to Vanhoozer, in this volume he is writing mainly for fellow academics, in a prestigious series for a university press; he has two more popular volumes forthcoming where he will summarize his more academic works. Nevertheless, he *is* also intentionally writing theology for the church, theology with pastoral relevance. This is a major theme in *The Drama of Doctrine*, where he argues that doctrine is a practical discipline, aimed at right living. However, I fear that what he gives with his right hand, he then partially takes away with his left. Pleasing as his linguistic virtuosity is, I suspect that it hinders accessibility. If this theology is to help the church (which, if absorbed, preached, and lived, it will), it must be accessible to busy pastors who may be willing to continue learning, but lack the time or breadth of reading to benefit fully from what Vanhoozer has to say. In short, I

suspect that in choosing to write like this, Vanhoozer loses clarity and accessibility for many, without necessarily gaining in depth.

These criticisms should not, however, detract from Vanhoozer's accomplishment. This is a conceptually rich, Scripturally faithful, theologically edifying account of a subject more important than which cannot be conceived. If we agree, as we should, with Eberhard Jüngel, that God is interesting in and for himself, and with Augustine that nowhere is error more dangerous, inquiry more laborious, or discovery of the truth more profitable than in considering the Holy Trinity, we can be deeply grateful to Professor Vanhoozer for working hard himself, and making us work hard, in order to serve up a profoundly interesting and rewarding account of the God who lives and loves in eternal communicative act.

MATTHEW MASON
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Can God be Free? William L. Rowe. Oxford: Clarendon, 2004. 173 pages, £24.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-920412-0

This study addresses the 'problems concerning [God's] *freedom* and *praiseworthiness* in relation to his *perfect goodness*' (2). Particularly it examines the question of whether God is compelled to create the best possible world. This may seem an abstruse question to many Christians, but it has two important ramifications. First, it affects our view of the character of God and his creation and, second, it ripples out into the wider debates around predestination. If God himself does not have the libertarian type of freedom which Arminianism would claim for humanity, why should that definition of freedom be so central to human nature?

The author is a professor of philosophy, and this book is a work of philosophy rather than theology. It is framed firmly within the Christian tradition, but lacks any engagement with Scripture. It is also highly specialised, and so will not appeal to many busy pastors, though there is much of value for those who will invest in it. Rowe examines his question mostly through four Christian writers. It is no coincidence that all four may be considered philosophers as well as

theologians. One of the book's values to those less familiar with the subject matter will be the overview of these four major contributors.

Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) is well-known for his argument that God created the best of all possible worlds and, given his perfection, could not have done otherwise. His less illustrious contemporary and dialogue partner, Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), agreed with his conclusion, but contested that God could not have done otherwise. He considered that God's freedom in this was such that he could have done otherwise. From the outset, Leibniz versus Clarke frames much of the terms for the debate, as Leibniz was a compatibilist and Clarke a libertarian, in their conceptions of freedom.

Rowe then introduces Aquinas to the debate, with his contention that there is an infinite possibility of worlds God could have created, therefore there cannot be a best possible one. Aquinas uses this premise to combine God's necessary love of his own nature with his contingent willing of creation. Rowe ultimately rejects this balancing act. Finally, Rowe considers Jonathan Edwards' importance as one who reconciles human freedom and moral responsibility with causal determinism, and as a successful opponent of Arminian thought.

There are some concerning moments where the author seems to have misrepresented a particular tradition or thinker. The most egregious example perhaps was in suggesting the Arminian tradition sees the future as open (55). In recent years, the openness of God movement has tried to push Arminianism down that road, and a Reformed analysis might agree that Arminianism tends in that direction. But from Arminius through Wesley and beyond, classical Arminianism has upheld God's sovereignty over and foreknowledge of the future, thus remaining within the bounds of historic orthodoxy. Despite this, Rowe is clear in his analysis of Edwards' encounter with Arminianism, concluding that Edwards is victorious in this contest. 'It should be clear that Arminian theologians cannot have it both ways' (64). God is not a free agent in Arminian terms.

This book suffers from three main related flaws. First, Rowe does not define freedom at the outset. Throughout the book there are references to compatibilist and libertarian understandings, and Rowe seems to tend towards the latter as a necessary ground for moral responsibility, but this needs to be established from the beginning. Second, there is no engagement with Scripture. Rowe is working

within the three great monotheistic religions (1) or rival Western conceptions of freedom (14). Rowe might argue this is a work of philosophy not theology, but it displays all too clearly the limitations of human reason without divine revelation. This is particularly shown in Rowe's own views on moral responsibility. He does conclude that God does not enjoy libertarian freedom with regard to creation. But he goes further: 'non-libertarian notions of freedom in which God may be said to be free with respect to creation are insufficient to support our being thankful and grateful to God for creating the world he has created' (7). This is because, according to Rowe, 'in thanking and praising an agent for doing something we presuppose that it was in the agent's power not to do that thing' (31). However, if revelation is allowed to frame the debate, we would see in Isaiah 6 that it is precisely God's holiness (his inability to act contrary to his own nature) which is the cause for praise.

Third, Rowe allows contemporary anthropocentric norms to define the debate, rather than the eternal, theocentric verities. He outlines two rival Western conceptions of freedom (14): that God is not determined by anything outside of himself, or that God is free not to act as he does. And he asks whether the first is 'sufficient to establish that God is *genuinely* free? … With respect to human beings, the defender of [this] view can agree that the mere absence of determining external agents or forces is not sufficient for an individual's action to be free' (15). Yet this is exactly what Reformed compatibilism would argue. There are frequent uses of 'as commonly thought' or 'we commonly think'. Most disturbing from a Christian perspective is Rowe's first reason for rejecting Jonathan Edwards' account of moral responsibility. 'Our first criticism of Edwards' view … is that it is not in accord with current moral standards' (68). Surely the question is whether it accords with God's eternal standards revealed in the Bible. The irony of Rowe's case at this point is that the case study he quotes of the 2001 Texas case of Andrea Yates undermines his position. Some US states continue to follow what we might term an Edwardsian position, so Rowe's 'current moral standards' depend on whether one is writing in Indiana, Texas or elsewhere.

To those who have the time to give to it, this book will be a useful primer on the history and arguments surrounding these issues, but it

is unlikely to persuade any who derive their theology and philosophy from God's written Word.

REV'D NEIL JEFFERS
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Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians, Bradley G. Green, ed. Nottingham: Apollos 2010. 398 pages, £19.99, ISBN 978-1-84474-436-7

As the title suggests, this book deals with the writings of ten theologians of the early and mediaeval church in eight chapters: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, The Three Cappadocians, Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas. Each chapter is written by a different contributor, with Bradley Green also providing a brief introduction. The book seeks to help readers engage with these theologians. The aim is to persuade evangelicals to access these early and mediaeval writers, to read them for their theological insights, and to read them to learn how to think theologically.

Looking at the book as whole, there are a number of ways in which it seeks to help the reader to engage. First, each of the chapters is a good length, on average around 45 pages, which gives sufficient scope to go beyond the basics, and to provide an overview of the thought of each of the theologians. Second, the chapters are well structured, with some brief biographical details followed by a major section dealing with theology, and ending with an evaluation. Each chapter also includes the blessings of a short, annotated bibliography and suggestions for further reading. Third, there are extensive quotations from the works of the theologians, allowing the reader to engage not with a couple of lines here or there, but with a developing argument.

Reading through from Irenaeus to Aquinas, and despite this not being a history of the early and mediaeval church, a fairly coherent narrative of the development and codification of doctrine emerges. From Irenaeus to Athanasius we see the development of the 'rule of faith'. We see the development of ideas surrounding the person of

Christ, and in particular the Trinity, as well as catching a glimpse of the world of scholastic theology which Anselm, and especially Aquinas, inhabited. We see Irenaeus against the Gnostics, Athanasius against the Arians, and Augustine against Pelagius, but what is refreshing about this volume is that we also see other aspects of the thought of these theologians.

Each of the chapters has its own flavour. For example, Gerald Bray offers an encyclopaedic tour of Tertullian's theological views on twenty topics ranging from theology and philosophy to sexual continence. He does this by letting Tertullian speak for himself - and thus provides a window into this readable and accessible theologian, and then gives us five reasons for taking seriously Tertullian's theology and perspectives today. Bryan Litfin perhaps has a harder task, in dealing with Tertullian's near contemporary Origen. He introduces us to the threefold senses of Origen, providing a rationale (martyrdom) for Origen's asceticism, a sympathetic study of his exegetical method, in particular of his allegorical understanding of Scripture, and an overview of his theology that details his eccentricities whilst seeking to understand him. One may or may not be convinced about what Origen the ascetic, exegete, and theologian has to teach us, but this is nevertheless a stimulating analysis which seeks to show the positive challenge that Origen presents.

When it comes to Athanasius, Carl Beckwith of course focuses us on the main feature of his life — his fight against Arius and his followers, and gives a clear indication of the main issues at stake. However, he also introduces the reader to more of Athanasius' thought, for example life in the city and the desert, and the importance of the Easter feast. He encourages us to respect Athanasius because he held just as steadfastly to scripture as Ignatius of Antioch — even if that does mean being accused of being a gangster by some modern historians!

Moving forward to the two mediaeval theologians on view, David Hogg reads Anselm against his monastic background, and introduces us not just to his work on the atonement in rejecting the mediaeval view of ransom, but also his prayers and work on the existence and beauty of God. Hogg is keen to show the way in which Anselm's thought works in a thoroughly biblical fashion, and the place of his speculations, although he acknowledges Anselm's devotion to Mary

is problematic. Mark Elliott then grapples with Aquinas' thought; here one becomes conscious of the complexities of mediaeval scholasticism as he unravels a little of Aquinas' theology, but we do get to see the main contours.

All the authors want us to read sympathetically — not a difficult task with an Athanasius or an Augustine perhaps, but more of a challenge with Origen or Aquinas. The point of this work is to appreciate and understand and to look for the good in what these theologians have said, and that surely is a laudable and often neglected pursuit. That is not to say that problems of emphasis or theological direction are not highlighted, for example the way the Cappadocians pave the way for the Eastern emphasis on icons and the incomprehensibility of God, or Tertullian's Montanist and rigourist leanings. But it is to say that this book is appreciative of the contribution of all ten theologians.

In conclusion, I would thoroughly recommend this book to anyone who wishes to grapple more deeply with any of these theologians. This is not always easy but then neither are the theological insights with which the book deals. However, the eight contributors would, I am sure, unanimously say that these theologians are worth the effort.

REV'D JAMES T. HUGHES
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The Sermons of George Whitefield, 2 vols, George Whitefield, edited with an introduction by Lee Gatiss, Reformed Evangelical Anglican Library. Watford: Church Society, 2010. 504 and 462 pages, £33, ISBN: Part 1: 978-0-85190-084-1; Part 2: 978-0-85190-085-8

Real Anglicans are Reformed Anglicans. That appears to be the premise of the series to which these volumes belong. From the Reformation on, the Church of England has been broader than this in practice. Nevertheless, confessionally, it is indeed a Reformed Church. The Articles and Prayer Book have a Reformed soteriology and doctrine of the sacraments. The Ordinal presents a Reformed view of the ordained ministry, albeit one that maintains episcopacy as a distinct order, over against the Continental Reformed churches. The

Reformed Evangelical Anglican Library thus represents a kind of Anglican *ressourcement* project, seeking to recover the voices of significant Reformed Anglicans from history. These two volumes of sixty-one sermons by George Whitefield (1714-1770) are the first in the series.

Whitefield is an interesting choice. In *Evangelical Leaders of the Eighteenth Century*, J. C. Ryle emphasises that Whitefield, along with most of the leaders of the evangelical revival, was, in his words, a 'Churchman'. However, in the twentieth century, the principal torchbearers for Whitefield's legacy were non-Anglicans: Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Arnold Dallimore. The Church Society, and the series editor Lee Gatiss, deserve credit for reaffirming that Anglicans should also pay attention to the great evangelist.

Whitefield is known as an evangelist and an extraordinarily prolific preacher. During his 30 years of ministry, he is estimated to have given an average of 1,000 talks per year. In addition, there is the story of one of Whitefield's young associates asking 'Mr Whitefield, why do you always say, "You must be born again?"' To which Whitefield is alleged to have replied, 'Because, you must be born again.' This might mislead us into assuming that he was simply a hack homiletician, mass-producing oratory for the credulous, or that he was a one-trick pony. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, as Whitefield's Reformed theology would teach us, God is sovereign and can use any instrument to bring blessing, but the sovereign God uses means and, in preaching, the means he ordinarily uses are godliness, giftedness, prayerfulness, and preparation.

This was true in Whitefield's case. As an itinerant evangelist, he was able to reuse and refine his messages, and the sermons in these volumes are generally carefully crafted and expository in style. Although the written word cannot capture Whitefield's gifts as an orator, these transcripts demonstrate that the power of his preaching came from more than dramatic flair. Sermon after sermon reveals Whitefield as theologically astute, exegetically insightful, and pastorally wise, as well as evangelistically compelling. He quotes or interacts with a wide range of other interpreters of Scripture—church fathers, puritans, and contemporaries—as well as secular, particularly classical, texts. As a committed Churchman, he also often alludes to the formularies of the Church of England. However, these are no dry

exegetical lectures; they are full of powerful, personal applications and appeals. Although the gospel is his central theme, he addresses many subjects, including 'the education of children and family religion (Sermon 4), persecution (Sermons 55 and 56), how to listen to sermons (Sermon 28), drunkenness (Sermon 52), cursing and swearing (Sermon 18), prayer (Sermon 54), and even British military victories (Sermon 6).' ('Introduction', 19)

The usefulness of these volumes is further enhanced by the introduction and editorial notes. Gatiss has published pieces on Reformed theology and history in the sixteenth century (Calvin), seventeenth century (Owen; the Great Ejection of 1662), and eighteenth century (Toplady), so he is well placed to understand Whitefield theologically, and locate him historically. In the introduction, he offers a sympathetic account of Whitefield as a Reformed divine, committed to the authority and sufficiency of the inerrant Scriptures, with a passion for evangelism, an entrepreneurial spirit, and most importantly, a prayerful confidence in the power of God's Word to do God's work. In the footnotes to the sermons, Gatiss has done sterling work tracking down obscure references. He also provides glosses for eighteenth century words that have fallen into desuetude, and fascinating comments on historical events and persons.

Gatiss says that these sermons have been made available once more because 'we need a heavy dose of [Whitefield's] theology, we need his inspiration, and we need his urgent international vision for evangelism, working with others of like mind whatever denomination they may be but without compromising the precious truths of the gospel.' (41) May they inspire a new generation of Real Anglicans, and, indeed, evangelical Christians of all stripes, to strive prayerfully to proclaim Whitefield's gospel afresh today.

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Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective, Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, eds. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 272 pages, £14.50, ISBN: 978-0-8010-3242-4

Craig Evans begins his introduction to this volume by observing that, 'Most people who read the Bible have little idea how complicated its origins, transmission, preservation, and history of compilation truly are' (15). If nothing else, the various essays collected here given an indication of just how complicated was the process by which the book we now know as the Bible came into existence. Evans' introduction gives a useful overview of the various different ancient manuscripts that provide evidence for the origins of the Hebrew Bible, as well as introducing the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, and setting the scene for discussions of the NT canon. This introduction is written in a style which makes it extremely accessible for the interested non-expert. The rest of the book, however, is more varied in its style and content.

Emanuel Tov discusses the significance of the Septuagint for study of the Hebrew Bible by means of a number of examples which he analyses closely to demonstrate that where the Greek text differs from the Hebrew, this is not normally due to corruption by the translator. Rather, the Greek text reflects a different Hebrew tradition, sometimes earlier than that attested to in the Masoretic Text and sometimes later.

The question of canon formation is used by James Charlesworth as an introduction to the intertestamental writings now known as apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. Charlesworth argues that these writings are crucial for a correct understanding of Second Temple Judaism and highlights several ways in which this Jewish literature corrects long-standing misconceptions of early Judaism. While he is certainly right on this point, his idiosyncratic definition of canon as 'the measuring standard by which to discern God's Word in many other words' (84) leads him to give greater weight to some of these writings than they truly deserve, along with a dismissive swipe at traditional Christian and Jewish scholarship along the way.

Stephen Dempster's chapter on the emergence of the tripartite canon engages with the recent scholarly opinions on the nature of 'canon consciousness' and community formation of the canon which have challenged the traditional view of canon formation by councils. He discerns an overall shape to the Hebrew canon which indicates that there was a process of deliberate shaping so as to give primacy to

the Torah, to demonstrate an eschatological impulse, and to reflect practical concerns. The external evidence for a tripartite canon is gathered together and persuasively demonstrates that a third division of the canon associated with David and the psalter was widely acknowledged.

The order of the canon in the Hebrew Bible is very different from that found in the Christian Old Testament. R. Glenn Wooden's chapter examines the role of the Septuagint in the formation of the canon throughout the Christian era. He suggests that, since the Septuagint, a translated text, was widely used as the Bible of the early Christian church, not least in the NT, this raises a question regarding the doctrine of inspiration. For Wooden, 'the locus of inspiration is not in the words of the text as originally produced, but in the text as received and used in the church at various times and in various languages' (144). He further challenges the Protestant view of the deuterocanonical material, pointing out that 'we stand in opposition to two thousand years of church practice' (146). Wooden overstates his case and fails to engage with the counter-arguments, but nonetheless, the questions he raises are important ones.

Craig Evans' chapter looks at the evidence of the apocryphal gospels which in recent years have attracted a great deal of popular interest. He notes that the majority of these documents have a significantly later date than the NT gospels and argues that the Secret Gospel of Mark may be dismissed as a modern hoax. The Gospel of Thomas and Papyrus Egerton 2 are, however, early and important texts worthy of study. The other chapter on the NT canon focuses on the Pauline corpus. Stanley Porter assesses five theories of the development of this corpus and finds them lacking. He proposes his own theory which shows how the processes of writing, gathering, and transmitting the collection may have overlapped to a greater degree than is normally supposed.

The notion of canon is closely linked with that of authority and this is the issue which Lee Martin McDonald addresses in his chapter. He first considers the books which were recognised as canonical by the early church, looking at the evidence of lists and codices. The process was far more fluid than is often realised and it is striking that there are no manuscripts from the first millennium of the church's existence which contain all the books currently recognised as

canonical and no others. Indeed, as McDonald points out, 'the church has never fully agreed on which books comprise its Bible' (209). McDonald also gives a brief introduction to the world of textual criticism, explaining the nature of textual variants and text types, and pointing out that there is, as yet, no established authoritative text for either the NT or the OT. For McDonald, this relates to the crucial question of authority. In what sense can the bibles that we read claim to have authority, if the texts on which they are based are still in dispute? This is, as McDonald rightly acknowledges, a theological question but his plea for 'statements of faith that are more reflective of the actual state of canonical inquiry, textual investigation, and translation practice' (239) is a valid one.

The book concludes, unusually for a volume on canon, with a discussion of canon and theology. Jonathan R. Wilson begins with an observation of the growing dichotomy between systematic theologians and biblical scholars and notes that canon is one such area of separation between the two fields. While theologians may treat the notion of canon with 'conceptual clarity' (242), biblical scholars deal with it in 'the messiness of politics and history' (242). Wilson explores the relationship between canon, community and theology and his essay is a most helpful conclusion to a volume which will no doubt unsettle some of its readers, for he reminds us that '[i]t is the Holy Spirit who worked in history and guided the writing of Scripture and the formation of the canon' (253). On this basis, no matter how complex its origins and development, we can indeed have confidence in the canon.

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The Gender Agenda: Discovering God's Plan for Church Leadership, Lis Goddard and Clare Hendry. Nottingham: IVP, 2010. 175 pages, £8.99, ISBN: 978-1-84474-494-7

The Gender Agenda takes the form of an extended email conversation between two women who have been ordained in the Church of

England, and who both identify as conservative evangelicals. Lis Goddard has been ordained priest and Clare Hendry has been ordained to the permanent diaconate. Lis takes an egalitarian position on men and women's roles, while Clare holds to a complementarian position.

The conversation between the women is a model for Christian discourse. Throughout their discussion, which took place over several years, it is easy to see how these two women grew in their trust and respect for each other, even while they maintained their disagreement. They shared their lives as well as their theology and throughout, they loved each other as sisters. As Lis writes in the final chapter, 'If only the trust and love that you have shown me as we have grappled with Scripture were evident across the evangelical constituency, as they engage with one another on this issue' (150). Indeed.

The discussion follows conventional lines, beginning with Genesis 1-3, the two women move on to discuss the role of women in the OT and in the NT, and then address some of the controversial passages in the NT in more detail. The first and last chapters are bookends for the conversation in which Clare and Lis talk about their own journeys into ministry and the ways in which their discussion has changed them. This provides a vital reminder that the issue of gender can never be approached from a purely academic perspective. For women, it is always a personal and a practical matter, which touches the heart of their identity and service of God, as Lis explains:

> …as I wrote, I found that this issue matters a great deal to me. I slowly realized that, for me as for you, this issue of women in leadership is not an isolated one: it is tied up with so much else of how I understand the nature and purposes of God as revealed in Scripture. And because of that, it is tied up with how I understand myself in relationship to him. (150)

While the email format of the book makes this a useful and accessible resource, especially for people who are just beginning to think seriously about this question, there are significant weaknesses. The nature of a discussion such as this is to leave questions hanging. The book does a fair job of looking at relevant passages from both complementarian and egalitarian perspectives but makes no attempt

to analyse the relative weight of the two points of view or to judge between them. Yet the reality is that God's word is coherent and unambiguous. There is a right and a wrong interpretation of Scripture and we should be wary of implying that contradictory viewpoints can be equally valid.

A more serious weakness is the failure to address the question of gender from a systematic and ecclesiological perspective. As Lis came to realise, the issue of women in leadership is not isolated, rather it touches on a whole host of other theological loci. For too long, however, gender questions have been addressed as an exegetical and hermeneutical issue. If only, we think, we could finally decide what 1 Timothy 3 or 1 Corinthians 11 or Galatians 3 *really* means, then we would know how to order our churches. If only we could agree on what Deborah's role was, or Huldah's, or Miriam's, then we would know what kinds of public ministry are acceptable to women. But without a systematic approach to gender and to ministry, these kinds of exegetical questions will necessarily lead to confusion. I should have liked a book such as this one to include chapters on priesthood, pastoral ministry, the nature of the church and the sacraments, and preaching and authority. For without a proper understanding of those things, any discussion of women's roles with respect to them will be extremely limited in its usefulness.

The book is presented with questions and pointers for prayer at the end of each chapter. It could be a useful starting point for women considering their own ministry or for church leaders grappling with divisions in their church. Lis and Clare are right that it is important for us all not only to be aware of our own views on this issue, but also to understand the arguments of those who disagree with us, and this book provides a good insight into many of the standard arguments on both egalitarian and complementarian sides. As such, I would recommend it with caution, but strongly advise pastoral follow up to address the questions raised by the book.

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