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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbet-01.php

Reviews

Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian. By Ron Gleason. Philipsburg: P&R, 2010. ISBN 978-1-59638-080-6. 512 pp. £22.99.

In its access to Bavinck biographies, the anglophone world has historically had to make do with a selection of short works. Each edition of *Reformed Dogmatics* is introduced by a brief, helpful summary of Bavinck's life; Bristley's *Guide to the Writings of Herman Bavinck* also contains a useful, concise biography; various journal articles have given biographical overviews and so on. In the past, those who sought longer biographies had no choice but to learn Dutch and read the works of Valentijn Hepp (*Dr. Herman Bavinck*, 1921) and R.H. Bremmer (*Herman Bavinck en Zijn Tijdgenoten*, 1966).

Ron Gleason's English biography is to be praised for making a vast amount of information accessible to Bavinck's anglophone readership. While many of these historical tidbits will simply serve to delight a small band of über-Bavinckophiles, some of the information yielded is of considerable significance to the development of his theology: his teenage experience of less-than-compassionate theological conservatism in Kampen prior to his scandalous switch to the modernist Leiden Faculty is a prime example. In its most important points, however, this material presents little new that one could not already find in Hepp and Bremmer.

The critical distance between the biographer and his subject is, of course, crucial. Although Gleason is far from the outright hagiography of Henry Elias Dosker's 1922 biography (in which one learned that Bavinck's *de facto* perfection seemingly extended even to his physical attributes), it is hard to find instances where Gleason was open to asking hard questions. While Kuyper is given a firm, critical reading, Bavinck is spared this rigour. If Bavinck was ever at fault, it seems, it was only for minor indiscretions, and for these, he was merely a child of his time.

However, for those who admire Bavinck's commitment to Reformed orthodoxy in the face of his Leiden education, surely the most interesting questions centre on how his orthodoxy survived in the classrooms of Scholten, Kuenen and Rauwenhoff. This is the case particularly in the light of his well publicized crisis of faith while at Leiden (a crisis which, incidentally, receives no mention in this book). It is unfortunate that this period receives so little attention in Gleason's work. While he does ask 'Did Bavinck have to struggle with keeping his faith intact?' (p. 48), the answer (in summary) that, 'he survived because his parents taught him to believe the Bible, he went to a good church and knew his Catechism'

underplays the gravity of Bavinck's situation at this time. Although his upbringing, local church involvement and confessional commitments played an enormous part in his theological interactions with the Leiden school, the lack of explanation as to *how* these factors were used to engage with Scholten *et al.* represents a missed opportunity for Reformed theologians to examine one of their own entering (as Gleason terms it) 'the Lion's Den' and emerging with his orthodoxy intact.

It is written in a somewhat folksy style. As such, in places it is beset by inelegance of language and inaccurate choice of wording. Within the genre of intellectual biography, the biographer also makes the rather unusual choice to include his own jokes. It is claimed, for example, that amongst the initial expenses in Bavinck's move into the pastorate were monies for furniture, books and bottles of gin left by the previous (alcoholic) minister (p. 76—Gleason alerts the reader in a footnote: 'This is true, except for the gin part. I just couldn't resist.') Telling jokes in written form is always a risky venture, and one suspects that in this instance the comedic effect is less than successful.

One cannot help but read this biography as written for an American market. Dutch distinctives are consistently explained with reference to their American equivalents, and the regular excursions into various current ecclesiastical issues are also (one assumes) of primary interest to American, rather than European, readers.

Those interested in Bavinck's theology and life should read Gleason's work. It offers various important insights into a fascinating set of life circumstances which, in turn, produced a remarkable theologian. However, while this is a worthwhile effort, one hesitates to say that this is the definitive Bavinck biography.

For those who have read *Reformed Dogmatics* and wish to find a good introduction to Bavinck's life, this book is useful. Biography is, however, a subjective genre: the fact that Bavinck had two *primary* Dutch biographers (whose accounts differ on many significant points), between whom Gleason's biography moves, is a case in point. The presence of a longer English language biography does not free the most serious Bavinck-readers from their obligation to read the likes of Hepp and Bremmer for themselves. *Ad fontes!*

James Eglinton, Theologische Universiteit Kampen, Broederweg

Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke. By Seyoon Kim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8028-6008-8. 228 pp. £16.99.

Seyoon Kim's work *Christ and Caesar* is a timely contribution to the discussion of the impact of imperial Rome on New Testament authors' thought. Kim argues that neither Paul nor Luke actively encouraged political resistance to imperial ideology or cult. However, he does agree that Christians today in liberal democratic countries might take a more active political role. The book's first section is comprised of five chapters and focuses on Pauline material. After surveying the arguments that Paul writes with an anti-imperial focus, Kim addresses the assumptions and methodological weaknesses of this reading. The second section launches into a similar critique of the Luke/Acts material. Kim concludes by pointing to the Revelation of John as an example of direct anti-imperial speech.

Kim argues that Paul's imminent eschatology and political realism charted his course; Paul promotes a salvation that is 'transhistorical and transcendental' (p. 67). Kim finds only a few general anti-imperial claims in Paul's works (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 5:1-11; 1 Cor 6:1). Overall, Paul does not address directly the imperial cult, the Roman military machine, or the Empire's exploitation or despotism, nor does Paul imagine the church replacing the Roman Empire. In most cases, Kim does justice to the arguments of his interlocutors' (among whom exists diversity of opinion). In his analysis of N. T. Wright's position on Paul's argument in Philippians, however, Kim perhaps reads too much into Wright's claims. Specifically, he suggests that Wright sees Paul establishing revolutionary cells throughout the Roman Empire. Although Wright does use the term 'cell' in speaking of the local churches, he explains them as groups that model Christian values and stand fast in the face of persecution.

Kim contends that nowhere in Luke does Jesus encourage specific acts or attitudes of direct resistance to Rome. He accepts that Luke both creates an *inclusio* between Luke 2:1-14 and Acts 28:30-31 that highlights the backdrop of oppressive Roman rule, and that in several places he also makes implicit contrasts between Caesar's rule and Christ's reign (Lk 4:18-19; 19:41-44; 21:20-24; Acts 10:36-43). Yet Kim maintains that Jesus' redemption was not deliverance from Roman power; instead, he asserts that Christ's salvation delivers individuals from the realm of Satan through the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus' healings are symbolic of the eschatological promise of God's kingdom, not a direct assault against imperial Rome.

Kim points to the strong anti-imperial stance of Revelation as an example of a New Testament author's resistance to the demands of the imperial cult. He concludes that the various approaches to the imperial cult seen in the New Testament provide different models for today's churches. For example, because many Christians at present do not hold to the imminent *parousia* and are not small minorities in their countries, these new circumstances might allow for a more active role in the political arena. He suggests that Christians can 'help materialize the redemption of the Kingdom of God politically as well as in other spheres of existence' (p. 201). The church must recognize the provisional nature of its political engagement, and not reduce salvation to a this-world-only reality.

Kim is well read in the field and interacts with current major theories, including, for example, those of Karl Donfried, Neal Elliott, Richard Horsley, and N. T. Wright. Kim anticipates the reader's questions and methodically lays out his arguments with sufficient detail. Those interested in the questions, methodologies, and assumptions surrounding the debate over the New Testament's engagement with the imperial cult and the Roman Empire will greatly benefit from Kim's *Christ and Caesar*.

Lynn H. Cohick, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL USA

Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism. By William J. Wright. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8010-3884-6. 208 pp. £14.99.

William Wright, a careful and thorough historian, offers in this work a historically situated account of Luther's doctrine of God's two kingdoms that self-consciously stands in contrast to two particular theological proposals on offer. It is, in other words, a work that operates in the mode of *response*.

In the first place, Wright responds to heirs of John Dillenberger who argued that 'Luther did not bother to suggest even the minimal lines for a new philosophical view of the world' (p. 14). *Pace* Dillenberger, Wright contends that the doctrine of the two kingdoms is not only foundational for the whole of Luther's theology but also comes into being due to a deep struggle for *certitude* within the context of late medieval humanism. And this philosophically contextualized Luther is precisely what Wright gives us, most directly in chapters 2 and 3. Wright contends that the 'threat to certainty' posed by the humanists (particularly in Erfurt) can be bifurcated into two primary streams: the first originating with Valla, searching for 'an original dynamism' in the texts of Scripture, and emphasizing appeals to the heart in religious matters; the second being a uniquely Florentine brand of Neo-Platonic thought seeking to 'synthesize classical and Chris-

tian ideas'. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, Wright argues, was born within the creative tension of these two patterns of thought. Using Valla's new rhetorical epistemology, Wright tells us, 'Luther developed what amounted to a new understanding of reality for the Christian in his time' (p. 80). The concept of God's two kingdoms, therefore, cannot be reduced to any singular feature of Luther's thought; it must be understood as 'his basic premise about the nature of reality' (p. 114).

Wright's work also stands squarely against those who have understood the doctrine of the two kingdoms persistently and inaccurately as a *political* doctrine—as a subset of Luther's social ethics—rather than the philosophical underpinning of his entire theological scheme. Just how this foundational theme of Luther has become politicized is therefore the subject of the first chapter, wherein Wright gives a detailed and magisterial account of the evolution of Luther's original thought into a 'spurious' political doctrine. Of note in this account is the discussion Wright offers of early twentieth century political debates surrounding Luther, particularly the pre-war debates between Paul Althaus and Karl Barth. Unsurprisingly, the narrative surrounding this political reading of Luther centres first and foremost on Troeltsch and Weber at the turn of the century and the rarely contested status of Niebuhr's reading of Luther in mid-century America. Later, chapter 4 is a reading of various Luther texts that seeks to demonstrate how, in fact, the doctrine of the two kingdoms is present in a variety of 'diverse contexts' within Luther's corpus.

In the final analysis, there is much in Wright's work on this oft-discussed aspect of Luther's theology: most notably the historical eye with which Wright approaches the topic and Wright's demonstrated facility with a wide range of debates outside of the anglophone world. But Wright's contribution extends beyond the careful and learned account that it undeniably is; moral theologians, church leaders, reformation historians, and laypersons alike can all utilize Wright's work with great profit.

Philip A. Lorish, University of Oxford

Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought. By David VanDrunen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8028-6443-7. 512 pp. £23.99.

David VanDrunen seeks to reclaim the doctrines of natural law and the two kingdoms as the particular legacy of Reformed social and political thought against neo-Calvinists who see these as inimical to the tradition. While often a valuable gadfly to historical studies, such polemical histories do run the risk of forcing the history onto a Procrustean bed. Unfortunately, such seems the case here.

VanDrunen claims that not only were the doctrines of natural law and of the two kingdoms deeply embedded in the Reformed tradition from the beginning, but the Reformed can also take credit for integrating them through the larger theological framework of the two covenants (of grace and of works) and the two mediatorships of Christ. According to this synthesis, human existence is divided into two kingdoms, the civil and the spiritual, corresponding to Christ's mediatorships over creation and over redemption, respectively. As such, these two kingdoms direct distinct dimensions of our lives and function according to fundamentally different and seemingly incompatible principles. The civil kingdom, administered by the Son as Creator according to natural law without need of special revelation, is only for the provision for humanity's physical, cultural, and social needs; it serves no eschatological or particularly Christian goal, and thus cannot and should not be 'Christianized'. The spiritual kingdom, ruled by Christ as Redeemer according to Scripture alone, concerns human redemption from sin and attainment of eternal life; pertaining mostly to things invisible and eternal, it is thus largely irrelevant to temporary civil communities. The dualism of ends and standards means that the two kingdoms are separate and that neither realm has the competence to interfere with the other.

This looks suspiciously like modern liberalism, and seems hard to square with the blurring of religious and civil matters that we find in Calvin's Geneva or the Puritans. But VanDrunen is not so much interested in past Reformed political practice (which he is forced to admit was 'inconsistent' and compromised) but in the revolutionary significance of their doctrines, which it took the Reformed centuries to implement. Indeed, it was not until the Enlightenment-assisted rejection of Christendom around the time of the American Revolution that VanDrunen sees the Reformed beginning to properly act out the implications of their theory. However, even up through the current century, VanDrunen seeks in vain to find a theologian unalloyed with the inconsistency of allowing that there might still be *some* spiritual dimension to civil affairs that the Church might feel called upon to address. The supposed legacy of Calvin thus remains tantalizingly out of reach throughout this narrative.

Every finite theology is plagued with inconsistency. But when the same inconsistencies arise over and over it raises the question whether the problem lies with the sources or with the interpretive grid. Here, the latter seems likely. Chapter after chapter, VanDrunen begins with a fairly abstract account of the relevant theological paradigms and only then turns to consider how each theologian applied it to his conception of culture and politics. When faced with what he perceives as a disconnect, VanDrunen repeatedly sides with the ideas, as the true spirit of Reformed

social thought, and marginalizes the practice as an unimportant husk that the tradition overcame in time. But surely this is not the fidelity the historian owes to his subject.

As it is, these doctrines as VanDrunen presents them are far from clear. VanDrunen gives us only the barest definitions of 'natural law' and 'the two kingdoms' at the outset, and they become only more vague. With the second term, VanDrunen seems at least to recognize the ambiguity, though without ever properly resolving it. For instance, he is keen to equate the civil kingdom more or less with the state, with political life, and yet he seems to also want to subsume under this heading all 'cultural' dimensions to human life, indeed, everything that pertains to humanity as created. The spiritual kingdom, on the other hand, often seems to be something of an invisible kingdom, and yet it is also equated with the visible church. But where does something like marriage—intended to manifest the relationship of Christ and the Church—fit into this schema? Where, indeed, is the domain for Christian holiness and ethics, if so much of human life is classified as 'civil' matters that should not be 'Christianized'?

With 'natural law,' the terminological vagueness is even more frustrating, because VanDrunen does not even seem aware of it. He generally appears content merely to demonstrate that a theologian appealed to *something* called natural law, or even just appealed to 'extra-Biblical sources,' without ever resolving some of the thornier questions that any doctrine of natural law must address: just how much epistemological authority does natural law carry, versus special revelation? How detailed are the prescriptions of natural law? How knowable is natural law by fallen humanity? etc.

Most troublesome, though, is the junction between these two doctrines, a point upon which VanDrunen lays particular stress as the chief contribution of the Reformed. As mentioned above, VanDrunen suggests that natural law, the common possession of believers and unbelievers, governs life in the civil kingdom, while Scripture alone governs the spiritual kingdom. Yet such a sharp separation of these two standards is strikingly absent from his sources. While they certainly support the contention that natural law was a resource for life in the civil kingdom, they do not seem to say that it was even the most authoritative resource, much less the *only* resource. For the early Reformed, Scripture clearly remains the chief authority in political theology, a far cry from the liberal separation of church and state (to which VanDrunen's narrative leads us). Moreover, 'natural law' was simply not separable from Scripture; indeed, it was summarized authoritatively in the Decalogue. Thus it was that civil authorities, governing by the *natural law*, could prosecute idolatry.

But, despite these historical difficulties, does VanDrunen offer us a compelling theological paradigm to employ today? Here too several obstacles appear.

First, we might ask what VanDrunen means when he tells us that a key distinction between the spiritual and civil kingdoms for the Reformed is the 'redemptive character' of the first and the 'non-redemptive character' of the second (p. 73). To say that the civil kingdom is 'not redemptive' for him appears to mean that it is 'not redeemed'; it is the realm of creation, *not* redemption, and the civil kingdom merely 'preserves the creation order' (p. 312). But isn't the creation order fallen and in need of redemption (Rom 8:18-23)? VanDrunen doesn't appear to think so, and indeed repeatedly criticizes the use of a 'creation-fall-redemption motif,' since it falsely attributes eschatological significance to the civil kingdom. Rather, any eschatological destiny for creation was lost at the Fall, and our 'eschatological destiny—the spiritual kingdom of Christ—is reserved in heaven for believers, and present participation in this kingdom occurs only *in the (visible) church*' (p. 383).

Christ thus brings a new creation not in the sense of a *renewed* creation (as in Rom 8:18-23), but in the sense of *ex nihilo*, a spiritual creation. Redemption does not, it appears, restore this world, but takes us away from it, and our eschatological destiny appears to ultimately entail the abandonment of creation. Calvin is thus applauded when he 'lifts his readers' eyes away from present earthly existence toward a future, heavenly life' since 'everything which is earthly, and of the world, is temporary, and soon fades away' (p. 77). What thus begins in VanDrunen as an apparent affirmation of the integrity of creation and the natural law that governs it ends in a renunciation of a creation that, not to be redeemed, is ignored by the 'spiritual kingdom' of the church.

This gulf between creation and redemption has, for VanDrunen, a Christological root: the doctrine of the dual mediation of Christ, which he considers a cornerstone of Reformed social theory. VanDrunen connects this doctrine with the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*, the notion that when the Son became incarnate, his divine nature was not confined to his humanity, but continued to exist even outside of his flesh, upholding the universe even while he was stretched on the cross. This doctrine means, as VanDrunen approvingly quotes John Bolt, that 'as mediator, the divine Logos is not limited to his incarnate form even after the incarnation. He was mediator of creation prior to his incarnation and as mediator continues to sustain creation independent of his mediatorial work as reconciler of creation in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth' (p. 75).

This surely introduces deep tension into the heart of the Christian creed. As long as one merely draws a heuristic distinction between Christ's rule over creation and his rule over his church, all is well. But when one asserts that the two kingdoms he rules are essentially unrelated and even incompatible, then the unity of Christ's work, and thus of his person, begins to fragment. We are told 'that the Son of God rules the temporal kingdom as an eternal member of the Divine Trinity but does not rule it in his capacity as the incarnate mediator/redeemer' (p. 181) and the converse also seems to be claimed. So rigid is this distinction that VanDrunen argues that we cannot rightly attribute the name 'Christ' to the Son as mediator over creation—'Christ' is mediator over the church, but only 'the Son' is mediator over the world (pp. 314-15). Such language almost implies a duality of persons within the second person of the Trinity; and unquestionably, it puts a sharp rift between the immanent and economic Trinity. The Scripture doesn't seem to share VanDrunen's hard bifurcation of the Son: 1 Corinthians 15, for example, describes the whole creation being put under the feet of the incarnate and resurrected *Jesus*.

Despite inviting such serious concerns, VanDrunen's study is not without merit. Contra many forms of contemporary neo-Calvinism, VanDrunen clearly establishes that natural law theory is an integral part of the Reformed tradition. Moreover, he suggests in the Introduction that various contemporary movements—Radical Orthodoxy, Hauerwasianism, and the Emergent Church—have been much more consistent than neo-Calvinism. Deeming the pacifism of these movements unacceptable, he urges neo-Calvinists to resolve their inconsistency in his two-kingdoms direction, happily affirming the other-worldly peacefulness of the church *and* the this-worldly violence of the state. Unfortunately for VanDrunen, however, few readers are likely to prefer his solution.

W. Bradford Littlejohn, University of Edinburgh

Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution. By John Howard Yoder; edited by Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker. Grand Rapids: Brazos 2009. ISBN 978-1-58743-231-6. 480 pp. £14.99.

The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking. By John Howard Yoder; edited by Glen Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, and Matt Hamsher. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009. ISBN 978-1-58743-260-6. 240 pp. £15.99.

The posthumous publication of these two books significantly deepens our understanding of the nuances of John Howard Yoder's views regarding both peace and war, both 'nonviolence' and 'violence'. (The scare quotes

denote that these two pairs are not, for Yoder, semantic equivalents.) Each book offers acute insight into the nature, interrelations, and distinctions of these realities from one of 20th century theology's best social ethicists. While it would be too artificial to divide these books into two genres or types of analysis, it is fair to say that *War of the Lamb* (hereafter *TWL*) foregrounds the 'systematic' theological task of conceptually clarifying a given topic by discussing scripture, doctrine, and other texts or events in relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ, whereas *Christian Attitudes* (*CAWP*) has a more explicitly descriptive-historical approach.

The genre of these texts is, of course, not unrelated to their originating contexts. *TWL* is comprised of various essays that materially revolve around a singular (set of) concern(s), and its structure largely follows Yoder's own plan for publication. *CAWP*, however, emerged out of a survey course in historical theology that Yoder taught from 1966-97, first at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and later at the University of Notre Dame. Yoder's lectures were transcribed in the early '70s, and the present volume of *CAWP* is based upon a manuscript Yoder last redacted in 1983. Despite slight (and seemingly well-informed) changes in content, which are dutifully recounted in the editors' prefaces, the most substantive revision to either text is *CAWP's* narrowing by nearly 40% of its manuscript length—an editorial labour that most readers of the still-400 page work will greatly appreciate. Yoder organized the course from which *CAWP* derives as a critical survey of Christian ethical thinking about non/violence, one carried out in dialogue with English church historian Roland Bainton's classic *Christian Attitudes to War and Peace*—the increasing unavailability of which was one reason Yoder expanded and considered publishing his own manuscript (see p. 10).

Yoder believed 'objectivity' in historical study to be a disciplinary goal rather than a presupposition, and was equally aware that a 'history of ideas' can only capture in part the reality under investigation. Thus the modest aim of *CAWP* is simply to present what Yoder took to be the most serious moral positions concerning the legitimacy of political violence. The emphasis falls less on the statistics of Christian (non-)involvement in military proceedings than on the different *logics* of state-violence one finds in the church's intellectual tradition—their theological coherence or conflict with one another and with the gospel. The resulting chronology is a narrative that hinges upon the foundational alternatives of either a kind of 'just war' or 'pacifist' position—with the caveat that both are judged to be and analytically explored as decisively *theological* commitments.

After an opening chapter clarifying his 'Typology of the Ethics of War', Yoder spends roughly the first third of *CAWP* evaluating the mean-

ing of the church's shift from the baseline of a nonviolence critical of empire to an increasing theological alliance with 'Constantinianism'. It is not overstatement to say that this set of binaries—a kind of 'pacifism' tied to early Christian anti-imperialism, coupled with an emerging 'just war' rationale undergirding Christendom—besets the history of *CAWP* all the way through the Protestant reformations and into the various modern movements and impulses Yoder treats. Readers must judge for themselves their sympathy with or criticism of this approach, but for this reader it was especially illuminating to see just how much insight into and leverage against the whole range of *modern* sentiments about war and peace Yoder's narrative is able to provide. Even as an exercise in 'descriptive' historical theology, the constructive theological payoff is clear especially in the last third of the book, as Yoder brings his analysis to bear upon those positions—e.g., the Niebuhrian 'realist' legacy, democratic humanism, concern for political 'liberation' and 'revolution'—that remain live options for so many today.

TWL nicely complements the survey undertaken in *CAWP*, offering a host of essays that argue in various ways for a theological commitment to, as the subtitle has it, an 'ethics of nonviolence and peacemaking'. The second of the book's three sections—'The Dialogue with Just War: A Case for Mutual Learning'—convincingly displays many of the intellectual moves crucial to understanding the pacifist/just-war alternative driving *CAWP*. This 'dialogue' is couched between two sets of essays that demonstrate both the wide range of conceptual resources from which Yoder's theology of peace is derived and its relevance to a variety of practical concerns. Just like the 'historical' work of *CAWP*, each section's essays are thoroughly theological, yet the first most closely approximates the tenor and rationale of Yoder's most popular published works (e.g., *The Politics of Jesus*). While most chapters interweave the various modes of theological reasoning, essays such as 'A Theological Critique of Violence', 'Creation, Covenant, and Conflict Resolution', and 'Politics: Liberating Images of Christ' foreground doctrinal considerations; 'Gospel Renewal and the Roots of Nonviolence' is a fascinating analysis of what '*radical* reformation' has meant throughout Christian history; and 'From the Wars of Joshua to Jewish Pacifism' is an excellent overview of what is perhaps Yoder's most original contribution to biblical studies, which involves the question of the increasing normativity of prophetic (specifically Jeremianic) 'exile'—as opposed to imperial ('Davidic') stability—as the most fitting witness of God's people to God's liberating grace. It is one of the great strengths of *TWL* that readers are able to see Yoder's skills as dogmatician, biblicist, historian, and interdisciplinarian, all deployed in fine-grained analysis of

the theological roots and historical possibilities of Christian peacemak ing.

A final word on what is perhaps the most central theme of *TWL*. A: Glen Stassen notes in his introduction, *TWL* convincingly overturns on(dominant caricature of Yoder's thought—namely, that it opposes believers 'faithfulness' to Christ and 'effective' involvement in the secular world morally prioritizing the former at the expense of the latter. That stere· otype, whose predominance in mainstream Christianity finds groundin; in Troeltsch's 'sect'-type and later in Niebuhrian 'realism', is with respeci to Yoder's own work at least superficially entertainable, since there ar(instances where Yoder's church-world dichotomy appears to play off such a contrast. But the previously attentive Yoder-reader will have alread) known what this volume now makes especially clear: Yoder's theology i: concerned with resisting *not* the identification of (Christian) discipleship with (secular) social involvement, but rather a certain way of construing the biblical and theological foundations of discipleship that in fact severs fidelity to Christ and neighbour, precisely by isolating these foundations from a morally normative account of 'the way things are' in human history and society. Only once a fundamental opposition between love and justice—between Christ's call to neighbour-love and proper attention to material, socio-political needs—takes root does the logic of 'effectiveness' take on a life of its own, functioning as an authoritative criterion in its own given sphere. It is precisely this 'givenness' that Yoder's work queried, and these two books together serve as excellent introductions to the precedence in history, scripture and Christian tradition for Yoder's lifelong presumption against socially effective violence.

Scott Prather, University of Aberdeen

Powers and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder. Edited by Jeremy M. Bergen and Anthony G. Siegrist. Scottdale: Herald Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8361-9447-0. v + 187 pp. £16.00.

A mere decade after his death, the American Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder's influence is growing rapidly. This collection of ten essays offers an overview of how young scholars are receiving and transforming Yoder's legacy. Most of the essays are from a broadly Anabaptist perspective, but all are engaged with the ecumenical and biblical concerns that so occupied Yoder. The reflections on violence, politics, gender, theological method, and doctrinal issues will be of interest to a variety of evangelical readers.

Glen Stassen, a former friend and colleague of Yoder's, provides a foreword that acts as a sort of blessing of the new generation's quest to extend

Yoder's thought into new areas. Chris Huebner's introductory chapter concurs with Stassen, albeit reflecting more on the necessarily critical dimensions of reception. Though largely appreciative of Yoder's theology and ethics, these essays are unflinchingly critical of his shortcomings. Some of those shortcomings concern Yoder's use of scripture in developing a constructive theological program.

Nekeisha Alexis-Baker draws on womanist theology to provide a defence and corrective of Yoder's reading of the household codes as 'revolutionary subordination'. Philip Stoltzfus and John Nugent explore the relative merits of Yoder's treatment of Jesus' nonviolence in relation to other parts of the Bible, especially holy war passages. Whereas Stoltzfus calls for an expanded doctrine of a nonviolent God, Nugent is concerned to show the limited validity of a Christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament.

Paul Martens also takes issue with Yoder's relation of the testaments, but his essay is decidedly more negative than the others. In a reversal of the standard critique of Yoder as a sectarian, Martens sees Yoder's late efforts to identify Jeremiah as a forerunner of Jesus as the abandonment of Christian particularity. Far from cultural withdrawal, Martens depicts Yoder as urging an assimilative Social Gospel.

The rest of the essays are more positive about Yoder's refusal of sectarianism, even as they challenge his followers to strengthen the case for socio-political participation. Branson Parler contends that Yoder's Christocentric hermeneutic of the creation narratives can support an engaged critique of culture and the State. Parler's essay will be of special interest to readers of this journal, as it argues for a rapprochement between Anabaptist and Reformed theologies of creation. Similarly, Richard Bourne fills out Yoder's eschatological and exilic account of Christian witness to the state with a Barthian doctrine of election; such a doctrine, according to Bourne, heightens the missiological impact of Yoder's understanding of the voluntary, nonviolent church. Andy Alexis-Baker offers a systematic rebuttal of advocates of 'just policing' who enlist Yoder in their cause. A proper Yoderian response to global disorder finds more creative resources in the church. Finally, Paul Heidebrecht responds to Yoder's sharp contrast between social engineering and doxological participation in God's transformation of the society. Heidebrecht rehabilitates the role of the engineer, demonstrating its compatibility with doxology.

In the remaining essay, Andrew Kaethler raises questions about Yoder's caricature of Aquinas and Protestant scholasticism—Yoder's own insistence on dialogical patience would urge a more careful, irenic portrayal. This methodological point indicates the larger tension in Yoder's work witnessed to by this collection of essays, that between potential and ful-

filment. Yoder stands at the forefront of twentieth-century theologians who attempted to construct a biblical, Christ-centred ethic. These essays sketch directions and raise questions for a new century of construction.

Jamie Pitts, University of Edinburgh

The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Post-material Citizens. By Graham Ward. London: SCM, 2009. ISBN 978-0-3340-4350-8. 304 pp. £25.00

Graham Ward issues a challenge at the outset of his new book. He says his is not a polite book but one that invites and encourages contestation. I shall endeavour to take up this challenge. But I want to preface my remarks by saying how much I appreciated this book and the masterful way in which it traverses the intersection between theology, social theory, and political thought while displaying a deep passion for the Christian faith and the question of how to respond to the dilemmas and difficulties of the contemporary context. I should also say that I am in wholehearted sympathy with the intention of the book, and while my position may differ from Ward's on specific points and on the theological rationales I might deploy, there is a synchronicity and common aim shared across our respective approaches. What I propose here should be read as an attempt to extend rather than oppose what Ward argues for.

A constructive way to read this book is as a theological response to Carl Schmitt and both his antecedents (notably, Hobbes and Spinoza) and his contemporary interlocutors from Johan Baptist Metz to Georgio Agamben and the increasing array of post-modern critical thinkers who have engaged with Schmitt's work. As a constructive theological answer to the challenge Schmitt's work poses the book helps diagnose the nihilism at the heart of much contemporary culture and social theory. However, in responding to Schmitt the book is somewhat enthralled by the darkness of modernity and, while Ward is seeking a way beyond Schmitt, what he proposes seems locked in a reaction largely determined by modernity's critics and outriders. So, for example, the first three chapters spell out a declension narrative of depoliticisation in which contemporary politics is a realm without hope or substance. Within the account of the conditions of political life Ward develops it is impossible to make sense of such things as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, or other such moments of democratic insurgency. In turn, the book's proposals are more defined by what they are against than what they are for.

What is strange for a book bearing this title and which gives an account of what Christian action entails is the absence of any systematic engagement with either resources within the tradition of Christian political thought that set out accounts of what faithful political witness

involves; or with strands of modern political theory that attempt to give accounts of what constructive public action for the common good might entail; or with any actual forms of contemporary Christian political witness. One can read this book and have an excellent overview of various debates about metaphysics, enjoy fascinating and insightful ruminations on such cultural phenomena as Harry Potter and *American Psycho*, and be edified by profound meditations on Scripture, but still have little idea of what in practice a politics of discipleship might involve or demand. Given the stated aim at the outset of the book is not just to interpret the world but to change it and the emphasis throughout on the importance of embodiment and the threat of dehumanization and dematerialisation, this is a serious flaw.

Ward does not want to tell people how to vote but there is much to say before one gets to that point. We can contrast Ward here with Jacques Maritain's account of Christian democracy, Niebuhr's Christian Realism, John Howard Yoder's advocacy of pacifism, Oliver O'Donovan's upholding Christian liberalism and natural rights over and against their apostate modern corruptions, or even the hints we have of John Milbank's 'blue socialist' theo-political vision. In each of these cases we have a sense of what the thinker is for and by what criteria one might evaluate practice. It is difficult to discern what constructive vision Ward is articulating by which we might guide the pilgrim's journey through our contemporary Babylon.

As Ward himself says: 'To avoid becoming too abstract, too amorphous, too liquid, we need to return to specifics' (p. 258). But where might we find these specifics? Moreover, Ward is exactly right: 'If we cannot act politically, then we cannot counter the enemies either of dehumanization or of dematerialization?' (p. 262). But if, as Ward contends, 'to act is fundamental to being political' (p. 261) what constitutes constructive forms of Christian political action and how might we account for them? Ward is too nervous about action, too *polite* perhaps, to suggest what should be done.

I detect the disabling stasis in an over-emphasis on the apocalyptic in Scripture combined with a heavy investment with post-modern tools of criticism. As a way of unveiling 'what is the case' or 'what is really going on' under the shimmering surfaces of the post-modern city and beyond the all-enveloping clamour of the entertainment industry such a combination is a powerful and prophetic mode of description. Yet, while this combination of the apocalyptic and the post-modern might be very revealing, it leaves us with little scope for concrete public action and long-term, mutually responsible forms of association (and the building of the kinds of institutions that can sustain them) that are central for any real

Christian politics. Moreover, the apocalyptic is not the only genre in the Bible. Indeed, it is used rather sparingly in Scripture. To emphasize the Bible's apocalyptic voice as against its other modes of address is to do a disservice to the Canon.

On Ward's account (and here his work is at the forefront of an increasingly common move by those engaging in political theology), the combination of the apocalyptic and the post-modern limits faithful politics to modes of cultural production. But such a move is too abstracted and, I would suggest, is itself a form of depoliticisation because it reduces the political into the aesthetic thereby leaving the political utterly vulnerable to dissolution through the commodification of dissent. Without risking any concrete prescriptions we do not end up with bodies 'full of meaning' but anemic and lifeless bodies. Beyond description we need reception, both of the gifts our neighbours have to give us and, ultimately, of the gift of God's presence.

Luke Bretherton, King's College London

The Theological Origins of Modernity. By Michael Allen Gillespie. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-2262-9346-2. 400 pp. £15.50.

Michael Gillespie argues that certain theological ideas, long since masked and transformed into non-theological guise, undergird contemporary cultural conflicts between East and West. To truly understand these conflicts is to uncover the theological origins that shape them; this is the task Gillespie sets for himself.

In chapters 1-2, he begins by taking a well-trodden path. He locates the roots of modernity within the nominalist revolution. This revolution famously denies that God's intellect guides God's will; God neither creates nor moves creation through a predetermined set of universal forms. Each creature, accordingly, bears a unique design, a *novum* which God relates to individually. From this ontology emerges two important traditions, the humanist and the reformational, both of which are outlined in chapters 2-5.

The founder of humanism, Petrarch, redescribes ethics in individualist terms. This grounds the humanist tradition in a confidence concerning the ethical capacities of human beings. One of Petrarch's northern successors, Erasmus, utilizes this same confidence in terms of Christian salvation. Though Erasmus certainly does not believe quite so manifestly in human nobility as Petrarch, he still moves theologically in a semi-Pelegian to Pelegian direction, believing that the will is effectual for attaining *aspects* of salvation. Erasmus thus conjures the wrath of Luther.

Luther and reformational thought looks not toward the power of humanity but divinity. Reflecting on the nominalist's notion of a *potentia absoluta*, God is understood as moved by nothing beyond Godself, meaning there is no action that can earn humanity salvation. Accordingly, Luther is convinced that, as a *Deus Absconditus*, God predestines some for salvation and others damnation, controlling the processes of history in terms of that goal. The only comfort Luther finds is located in the revelation of Christ, the one who, as the *potential ordinata* is revealed as the means through which God mercifully justifies sinners.

It is in chapters 6-8 that Gillespie really begins to develop a novel and penetrating analysis. He claims that Descartes and Hobbes are the symbolic successors of Erasmus and Luther. Thus the possibilities contained within the very ideas that spawn both humanist and reformational thought—newfound human power and an unpredictable God—are also those which extend the humanist and reformational debate into distinctly modern horizons.

As Gillespie correctly notes, the horizons of these early modern goals are naturalistic. But early naturalism wants nothing more than to alleviate humanities' contemptuous and miserable place in nature. It does so by focusing on natural causation, whose study helps humanity exert mastery over the natural order. A problem remains: in order to focus on nature, previous concerns about God and God's potentially volatile will must be put to rest. So, by redefining infinity, Descartes tames God's will, reducing it to the blind forces of nature subject to human mastery through Descartes' new science. In the case of Hobbes, a hard conception of divine providence makes God's will irrelevant for daily affairs. What will happen in terms of an afterlife will take place regardless of humanity's own machinations; therefore, humanity's immanent goal ought simply to be one of understanding anthropological mechanisms to limit social conflict.

As Gillespie develops in chapter 8, the relative successes of each of the above projects leads modernity down a path of simultaneous progress and despair. While Western humanity certainly gains some control over both nature and human social orders, it also places itself in an ontological position once reserved for God. But the contradictions of this position surface even as early as Kant, who struggles explicitly with nature and freedom in his Third Antinomy. According to Gillespie, much of modern intellectual history is a working out of this Antinomy, more often than not, toward positions implicitly reifying human divinity. This surfaces an important problem.

The particular will of a human is unable to act with the same disinterested justice as the universal will of God; as particular, the human can order neither nature nor society apart from any one human's particular

desires. Combined with its universal aspirations and a concealed belief in its divinity, Western humanity has believed the opposite, something which has lead not only to such abortive attempts at social and natural ordering as France's post-revolutional Reign of Terror, but also the disorders of the World Wars, and now, indirectly, 9/11. This latest travesty especially is Gillespie's direct concern. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the global export of the Western free-market, history was perceived as coming to a close. All ideas and cultures were to be subsumed under the economic majesty of the invisible hand undergirding Western economies. 9/11, symbolized as Islam's 'no,' called this self-proclaimed divinity into question. Islam would not be subsumed in the West's implicit idolatry.

With this summary in mind, what should one do with this book? It is well-researched, well-written, well-argued. Also, at least this reviewer agrees with Gillespie's main arguments: (1) that an honest understanding of the West's intellectual and cultural history is necessary for sorting out the causes behind, say, a 9/11, even if such an understanding can (2) only help in creating a more *honest*, though not necessarily less violent, relationship with Islam.

What remains less clear is what comes next; when and *if* the modern West is ever honest about its theological roots, it does not seem as though much would change in terms of its current cultural trajectories. Perhaps there would be more humility in terms of the West's machinations—economic, environmental, and otherwise—but much of the immanent joys experienced by individuals in the West depend *directly* on this humanism turned naturalism (a tough, but I believe, necessary pill to swallow).

Then again, maybe some humility would go a long way? A bi-condition of affirming oneself as divine is the impossibility of seeing that one's machinations lack perfection; it holds, too, that an affirmation of humility is a denial of one's divinity. It is not clear, then, that a fully *theological* understanding of the West's hubris is necessary when a simple 'we are imperfect' might do, unless Gillespie believes that sin is only known in light of the Gospel; I, at least, would be interested in hearing Gillespie out on this point.

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The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought. By Eric Nelson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-6740-5058-7. 240 pp. £20.95.

The traditional secularization narrative claims that in the aftermath of the Wars of Religion, Europeans sought to secularize the public square. Despite a recent barrage of criticisms and alternative narratives (whether

from strident modernity critics like William Cavanaugh or more ambivalent voices like Charles Taylor), it still holds sway in many circles.

Eric Nelson, through a focused study of seventeenth-century political Hebraism, takes another whack at the foundations of this paradigm. When it comes to Western political thought, argues Nelson, the secularization narrative gets it almost precisely backward. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, he says, under the dominance of Renaissance humanism, 'generated an approach to politics that was remarkably secular in character'; while in the seventeenth century, 'political theology reentered the mainstream of European intellectual life', as political discourse appealed more and more frequently to Scripture and called for contemporary societies to conform themselves to the image of the 'Hebrew Republic'—the constitution of OT Israel. In this quest, Nelson shows, Protestant political theorists began to rely heavily on rabbinic writings, and to deploy them in political debates. What's more, says Nelson, they did this at precisely the points in their political thought that are most *modern*, and thus most often regarded as products of a secularizing impulse.

After a fascinating and lucid narrative of the rise of Hebraism in the period, Nelson explores three of these Hebrew-inspired political developments, devoting a chapter to each: the rise of republican exclusivism, the notion that governments have a duty to redistribute wealth, and the concept of religious toleration.

In the first chapter, Nelson argues that John Milton and his contemporaries got the idea that monarchy was idolatrous and republicanism was the only legitimate form of government by reading Midrashic rabbis on 1 Samuel 8. Both his exegesis and the resulting political theory were completely novel in the Christian political tradition, but both proved immensely influential.

Chapter 2 is equally surprising, particularly to Christian conservatives accustomed to seeing wealth redistribution as the diabolical brainchild of the Enlightenment. In fact, shows Nelson, those who first argued for the imposition of 'agrarian laws' that would regulate wealth distribution and ensure relative equality among citizens did so in explicit imitation of ancient Israel's law, again following rabbinic sources.

The argument of the third chapter is the most interesting and complex, and aims to show that an Erastian constitution was not, as is commonly assumed, inimical to religious toleration, but was in fact the basis for it. Seventeenth-century political theorists deployed Hebraic sources to argue both for state supremacy over church affairs and for religious toleration in all matters that were not of civic import. Even toleration, then, that poster-child of secular modernity, arose from a self-conscious fusion of Scripture and politics.

Surprising as many of these claims may at first appear, Nelson weaves a compelling narrative, one that benefits not merely from its close and incisive analysis of texts, but from lucid and graceful writing that keeps the tale from bogging down under barrages of bloc quotations. Best of all, Nelson succeeds, like the best historical writing, in using a narrow and focused set of phenomena to shed light on very broad and deep interdisciplinary questions.

However, it is worth asking whether Nelson attempts too much in too little space. It is doubtful that Nelson has done enough (yet, at any rate) to overturn the traditional narrative of early modern political thought, though undoubtedly he has complicated it and opened up some important new debates. Aside from strengthening his case, a more thorough treatment could have helped in at least two ways:

First, substantial discussion of Protestant political thought in the sixteenth century would have provided helpful context for his survey of the seventeenth century. Second, more attention ought to be given to the transition from the thoroughly biblical seventeenth century into what Nelson admits was a much more secular and naturalist eighteenth century. As it is, a defender of the traditional narrative might object that all Nelson has done is push the narrative back a few decades.

Nonetheless, Nelson's work is sterling as far as it goes. He has laid excellent groundwork for future inquiry and provides a model of thorough but accessible historical scholarship.

W. Bradford Littlejohn, University of Edinburgh

The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict. By William T. Cavanaugh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-538504-5. 285 pp. £32.50

A reconsideration of modernity is underway on several fronts. Within the guild of theology, there has followed from John Milbank's landmark *Theology and Social Theory* a trend of works that demythologize the historiography of its emergence against the chaos of confessionalism. In this book, the focus is on debunking the common complaint that religion is prone to violence, which Cavanaugh sees as a founding myth of modernity. Importantly, this is not another iteration of the claim that 'secular' institutions are just as capable of violence as 'religious' ones. Rather, it disputes that such a distinction can be meaningfully made. This isn't petty semantics. The effect is disastrous, according to Cavanaugh: the *hallowing* of violence done in the name of the state.

The first of four chapters explores arguments that violence inheres religion. He identifies three types and examines three scholars for each:

religion spawns violence because it is (1) absolutist (John Hick, Charles Kimball, and Richard Wentz); (2) divisive (Martin Marty, Mark Juergensmeyer, and David Rapoport); and (3) irrational (Bhikhu Parekh, R. Scott Appleby, and Charles Selengut). In each case, Cavanaugh reveals how a definition of religion either eludes these thinkers or cannot exclude 'secular' enthusiasms like nationalism, patriotism or military vows. Despite this, these scholars continue to classify certain phenomena as 'religious' and blame them for violence.

Such persistence suggests the categories of 'secular' and 'religious' are ideological rather than analytic. Thus in chapter 2 Cavanaugh inspects the history of the term 'religion'. Looking at figures like Nicholas of Cusa, Herbert of Cherbury, and John Locke, Cavanaugh finds it wasn't until the early modern era that 'religion' is distinguished from 'secular'. This distinction, he argues, was wrought to authenticate both the ascent of the modern state and colonialism. His examination of the latter, particularly the treatment of British occupation of India and the invention of Hinduism as a religion, is quite forceful and shows how labeling certain things 'religious' often served to validate colonization and suppress impediments to Westernization.

Chapter 3 looks at the so-called Wars of Religion. Cavanaugh presents a catena of details that problematize the impression that the wars were fought along religious lines. There are significant occasions on which 'members of the same church fought each other and members of different churches collaborated' (p. 150). In fact, through a dialogue with numerous notable historians, Cavanaugh finds that these wars must be seen in the larger dynamic of the emergence of the modern state and its absorption of the church's power. Not power only, the state accumulated Christian rituals and symbols as well, such that one could say the state wasn't secularized but sacralized.

The final chapter explores how the myth has been deployed in the domestic and foreign policy of the United States. In this chapter too, Cavanaugh criticizes New Atheists Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens who use the myth to advocate violence against Muslims.

In sum, an important and highly interesting work, perhaps in need of more substantiation, but compelling enough to make one doubt the modern dogma of religious violence and be alert to its ideological function in the West.

James R. A. Merrick, University of Aberdeen

Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies. By David Bentley Hart. London: Yale University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-300-11190-3. xiv + 253 pp. £14.99

In seventeen curt yet keen chapters, Hart responds to the so-called New Atheism. This is not a typical work of apologetics, however. He does not counter the arguments of Dawkins, Dennett, Harris or Hitchens. Nor is he concerned with validating belief. Instead Hart undercuts the rationale for their cultural crusades by exposing as mythology the historiography of modernity as the great saviour of Western humanity from the darkness of Christendom. This demythologization proves fanatical the New Atheism's antagonism towards Christianity and its dream of a purer modernity.

Two lines of argument generally recur: First, Hart unveils the spuriousness of the history, whether simplistic, simply conjectural or blatantly skewed. He takes Ramsay MacMullen to task, for example, for misrepresenting a report of Jerome's concerning the trial of a woman charged with adultery and citing it both as evidence of Christian disdain for women and as an illustration of the moral regress Christianity introduced into antiquity. MacMullen's account is wrong in almost every detail. First, Jerome's letter is manifestly not the approval of the trial's proceedings that MacMullen takes it to be. It is actually 'a long, poignant, even somewhat mawkish denunciation of the injustice of the trial, and of the sentence passed upon the accused woman, as well as a celebration of the 'miracle' by which she was ultimately spared' (p. 151). Moreover, the laws that mandated torture and death for women adulterers 'were of pagan provenance, and long antedated Christian custom in the empire' (p. 151). Hart highlights a number of Christian reforms of pagan legislation that significantly dignified and protected women.

Second, when there are genuine instances of the church's mistake, Hart interprets them as general human depravity not as consequences of Christian faith. To consider a classic case—Galileo's censure by the church—Hart establishes that it was not the church suppressing free inquiry and natural science out of irrational superstition but a clash of two men's egos aggravated by the anxiety of the times. In truth, Galileo was an inheritor of a long Christian tradition of astronomy, mathematics, and physics from which modern science was born and which overturned faulty Greek cosmology that could be said to have inhibited scientific discovery, did not offer adequate evidence for his view, and routinely alienated his colleagues. Page after page, Hart disabuses readers from modernity's soteriology, shows how in fact Christianity did not introduce an intellectual stupor into antiquity but advanced classical learning all the

while supplanting much of the brutality of ancient society and effecting profound change in Western humanity's moral consciousness.

Indeed, finding modernity to be parasitic on Christian morality is the other burden of this book. Here we are treated to some explorations of what Hart calls the 'Christian revolution,' its transformation of the human imagination, and reflections on whether modernity can sustain the values currently residual from Christendom. Modern sensibilities such as progress, charity, personhood, human equality and dignity all seem intuitive to us today only because we live in a culture shaped by the Gospel.

Hart casts this book as an essay, and it is best read as such. It's argument, even in its most thorough and devastating moments, is never more than suggestive. Yet, *Atheist Delusions* is possibly the best kind of response to the New Atheism. For it shows that without Christianity this atheism wouldn't be possible, wouldn't have appeal to begin with. A provocative work, vigorous, humorous, erudite.

James R. A. Merrick, University of Aberdeen

Faith and Its Critics: A Conversation. By David Fergusson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-956938-0. 195 pp. £17.99

Originally the 2008 Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Glasgow, this book enters into dialogue with so-called New Atheism. Unlike most respondents (e.g. David Bentley Hart), Fergusson thinks this movement is serious and, indeed, that Christians have much to learn from it. He occasionally remarks how he has benefited from Dawkins as well as how theology stands to profit from certain fields (e.g. evolutionary psychology) utilized by New Atheists. Thus Fergusson does not leave readers with a sense for New Atheism's implausibility, only its inadequacy.

His goal is to mark the limits of the various discourses they employ while also arguing for the necessity of different modes of description, with faith being one. In essence, he finds that faith is not invalidated by but compatible with the claims of New Atheists since reality is multivalent and thus capable of multiple explanations. I suppose the book is a sort of polite protest against hard materialism and scientism.

Fergusson interacts with a variety of sources. This is indeed a 'conversation', more exploratory than apologetic.

James R. A. Merrick, University of Aberdeen

Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate. By Terry Eagleton. London: Yale University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-300-15179-4. xii + 185 pp. £18.99.

Terry Eagleton has a deserved reputation as one of the most influential of British literary critics and cultural commentators who has developed over his many publications a highly effective communicative style. This book is no exception. What is unusual about it perhaps is the extent to which he allows himself to be identified here with a sophisticated though also uncompromising commitment to the value of religious belief.

Eagleton comes from an English Catholic working-class background with Irish roots. He combines a long-term passion for the politics of social justice with what he himself calls a 'papist, semantic-materialist style' (referring to Robert Bolt's *Thomas More*, p. 130). This fosters a literary approach which flourishes in a colourful and pugnacious polemics, in this case against the influential modern detractors of religion Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens (unceremoniously combined under the persona 'Ditchkins'). As with most sustained polemics, there is amusement and caricature here, and much debunking, but also the uncertainty as to who the intended readership is. Is this an educational, cathartic or dialogical polemics (Eagleton would be the first to recognize that dialogue here is the least likely outcome!)?

Where the book breaks new ground is in chapter 3 with its discussion of faith and reason. Eagleton knows his way around the different philosophical accounts of reason and, with his literary background, has a superb understanding of its different social, cultural and personal contexts. In several memorable pages he sets out a immensely generous understanding of how faith and reason overlap and combine in ways that reflect not just the humanity of religion but also the way that human beings are already embedded in contexts of relation and presupposition, gift and risk, before reasoning ever resolves into questions about itself. Against such a vibrant picture of the fundamental unity of mind and body, of reasoning and materiality, in an irrepressibly fertile cross-over of sensibility and meaning, wherever human life is lived in depth, specious oppositions between religion and reason seem to be inconsequential scratchings on the surface of things. The real opposition that comes into view is one between reasoning which is openly embedded in life and relationship on the one hand and reasoning which is closed against life on the other, with the further distinction that the former can never become objectified to itself except as continuing discovery, while the latter is always objectified to itself as something impenitently self-sufficient.

There is a great deal here that readers from different backgrounds will find informative. It is a polemical book, but the deeper sense of the polemic is the subtle and multi-formed argument that what is at stake here, in the distinction between religious and secularist values, is actually a way of being alive. As Eagleton powerfully states, faith is never about the superficial use of reason, which might allow someone to renounce their faith in the event they are persuaded of the force of a new idea (as a die-hard conservative can be persuaded to a revolutionary perspective under circumstances). There is simply too much at stake in faith for this to be the case: 'It is just that more is involved in changing really deep-seated beliefs than just changing your mind. The rationalist tends to mistake the tenacity of faith (other people's faith anyway) for irrational stubbornness rather than for the sign of a certain interior depth, one which encompasses reason but also transcends it' (p. 139).

Oliver Davies, King's College London

God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens. By John F. Haught. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-664-23304-4. xvi + 124 pp. £11.99.

John Haught, senior fellow at Georgetown University's Woodstock Theological Center, seeks to dismantle the core assumptions of the 'new atheism' as inaugurated by the works of the three listed in the subtitle. He begins by summarizing the arguments shared by these 'soft-core' atheists who share the assumption of strict naturalist materialism (e.g., that there are only 'natural' or 'scientific' explanations for events in the universe). Haught then responds with a series of questions whose answers throw doubt on the validity of this new atheism. He closes by proposing a positive response on the part of Christian theology to its critics.

Haught first asks what exactly is 'new' about the 'new atheism'. Worse still, it is a particularly shabby version of atheism, as comparison with the much more consistent atheism of, say, Friedrich Nietzsche reveals. It is, according to Haught, an atheism that is not particularly atheistic, but merely a 'cosmetic correction' to contemporary life, conveniently silent about the fact that genuine atheism is impossible to live out and requires 'exacting standards' for behaviour (pp. 20, 24). Haught also makes much of the fact that these recent critics of faith do so in the absence of any substantive dialogue with 'serious' theologians (Barth and Tillich—despite being strange bedfellows—are repeatedly offered up as examples). The new atheism's ignorance of 'serious theology' means it attacks a straw man or the weakest target, particularly evident when it admits only a rigidly literalist reading of the Bible.

Haught further questions whether God can even be a scientific hypothesis. Attempts to reduce the divine to such betray a woefully thin understanding of knowledge, one that defines knowledge as that which is open only to scientific or perhaps better a 'scientistic' understanding. This leaves mysterious but very real and fundamental things like love outside the bounds of knowledge. Haught highlights the impossibility of strictly materialist (evolutionary biological) explanations for morality. This is betrayed by the new atheist's repeated though perhaps unconscious appeals to very un-materialist explanations for morality. Haught finally questions the new atheist distaste for a personal God. He locates this discomfort precisely in a commitment to physicalist explanatory monism. They reject the notion of a personal God because it would make such an explanation impossible.

Haught's positive reply to atheism is that Christians embrace the embodied, incarnate particularity of their faith in a personal God. Earlier in the book Haught identified the oddly 'Gnostic' quality of modern scientism which reduces the complexity of human being to natural processes precisely to contain and control it, ostensibly due to some embarrassment at the way it actually is. Christianity, Haught insists, eschews such bizarre anti-worldly thinking in favour of a theologically robust acceptance of creation and its relation to a loving, personal God.

God and the New Atheism succeeds on a number of levels. Its material critique, while not particularly unique, is clearly articulated and in places devastating. Its brevity makes it convenient for busy clergy or laypersons seeking guidance in responding to this popular trend. If there are any weaknesses they lie with Haught's unilateral rejection of 'literalist' readings of the Bible. Sure, 'serious theology' is immune to many of the cheap charges that the new atheists level against Christianity. But the fact is, most Christians are not serious theologians, most are more or less literalists. Does Haught therefore take down with his opponents those he's seeking to defend? Furthermore, his repeated implication that first year theology students are more sophisticated than the atheist critics seems petty, farfetched, and contributes nothing to the overall work. Ultimately, this book works best as a critique, less so as a substantive proposal. Coupled with readings in 'serious theology' it will aid all who wish to have an answer to the hot air of new atheism.

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Contending with Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors. Edited by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8054-4936-5. viii + 293 pp. $19.99.

This collection is an attempt to respond to some of the more prominent issues that recent atheist literature presses, but also to a number of other contemporary challenges to traditional Christian doctrines. It follows in the footsteps of the editors' earlier *Passionate Conviction* (2007); both are the fruits of the Evangelical Philosophical Society's annual conferences. Neither volume is a popular work (the literature with which the authors interact is often quite sophisticated, and there are no lists of recommended works for further study), but both are clearly tailored for the educated lay reader (technical details are kept to a minimum and the authors make an obvious effort to avoid jargon).

The book has three parts: 'The Existence of God', 'The Jesus of History', and 'The Coherence of Christian Doctrine'. Each part has six chapters, and the range of topics covered is remarkable: There are papers on everything from evolutionary explanations of religious belief (Michael Murray) to Bart Ehrman's sceptical line on the transmission of the text of the New Testament (Daniel Wallace). This breadth has obvious advantages, but it does mean that criticisms from the New Atheists and their ilk are not covered as thoroughly as one might have expected (e.g., Sam Harris' popular—albeit hopeless—contention that religious belief inevitably leads to extremism). This is not a reason for complaint, of course, but it is illustrative of the fact that the book is not as occasional as one might infer from its title.

There are three standards by which one can evaluate a volume like this one: the significance of the topics covered, the quality of the arguments, and the accessibility to the intended audience. How does this volume fare?

The answer is quite well. Though I have quibbles with some of the arguments that are advanced, I think that there is, on the whole, little not to praise. Mark Linville offers a searching critique of evolutionary theories of morality, Gregory Ganssle makes short work of Richard Dawkins' main argument against theism, Michael Wilkins soundly thrashes revisionary reinterpretations of Jesus' self-understanding. The book even contains well-wrought (if all too brief) arguments for the coherence of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement (the first two by Copan, the third by Steve Porter). Gary Habermas' contribution is particularly delightful; he argues that even current critical scholarship supports early dates for the reports of the resurrection, providing further evidence that the indi-

viduals who testified to its occurrence genuinely believed that they were eyewitnesses. It is slightly odd that the editors include a piece on Open Theism (by David Hunt), since this strikes me as an in-house debate, not an apologetic issue. But given the furor over the topic, a defence of the traditional view is not wholly out of place.

It is easy to take potshots at volumes that try to make the best apologetic material accessible to non-specialists. The contributors to this volume surely know that they have glossed over details that they would not spare their colleagues. For what it is, though, this is a fine collection, and Copan and Craig are to be commended for assembling it.

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People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology. By Michael S. Horton. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008 (UK: Alban Books). ISBN 978-0-6642-3071-5. 325 pp. £23.99.

There is much to admire in this book, the ecclesiological installment of a series that began with *Covenant and Eschatology* (2002), and includes a volume on christology (2005) and another on soteriology (2007). As he has in previous volumes, Horton aims to overcome misleading polarizations, such as that between participationist and forensic soteriologies, and between the church as 'purely passive recipient of grace' and as 'active bearer of that grace'. Horton's series has much to offer, but it is precisely in his efforts to overcome dualisms and dichotomies that we encounter habits of mind that rob Horton's project of a significant portion both of its theological energy and of creativity, not to mention its ecumenical potential. The problem is this: While Horton uses covenantal categories to sublate dichotomies on specific issues, in his fundamental theological system all remains dichotomous. The deep structure of Horton's theology is thoroughly binary.

For Horton, the primary structuring dichotomy is an eschatological one, that between the 'now' and the 'not yet'. That is a useful emphasis, since it places the basic duality of Christian theology on a temporal rather than a spatial axis. 'Now'/'not yet' is not a dichotomy at all. The 'not yet' indwells the present by the Spirit of the Risen Christ, so that all who are in Christ are new creations and the power of the age to come operates in this age. In Horton's telling, however, this complex, quasi-perichoretic distinction becomes dichotomous.

It emerges early on, in the course of what is mainly a salutary reminder of the 'real absence' of Christ in the present age. Horton wants the church to take Christ's transcendence seriously, to recognize in Christ's departure and his promised return a sign of our place in the *middle* between the

already of resurrection and the not yet of final judgement. Ascension and Pentecost go together, but the Spirit, in Horton's view, is not a 'replacement' for Jesus and does not 'fill the gap between the Jesus of history and our history' but instead 'both measures and mediates the eschatological difference' (p. 22). Rather, where the Spirit is, there is the eschatological tension; not an overcoming of the gap between glorified head and earthly body, but its sometimes anguishing intensification. Horton later qualifies his emphasis on the real absence of Christ, urging that Jesus' coming in the Spirit is 'a real coming'. In fact, the Spirit is so 'closely identified' with Christ that it is possible to say 'wherever the Spirit is said now to be present, Christ is present'. Only the second coming of Jesus in the His exalted flesh at the end will bring Him 'immediately' present to us (p. 29). On the very same page, however, he recognizes that 'in one sense . . . the Spirit makes Christ more present than he was even to his disciples'. So, the Spirit's presence is Christ's presence, and an 'immediate' presence, more intimate than his bodily presence to the disciples.

A similar habit appears in the pervasive discussion of *totus Christus* ecclesiology. Early on, Horton charges that *totus Christus* ecclesiologies conflate Christ and the church, ignore the Spirit, turn human into divine action, immanentize the eschaton. It comes as something of a surprise when at the end of chapter 1, Horton briefly concedes that the Spirit 'secures and guarantees the genuine yet often empirically ambiguous unity of the *totus Christus*' (p. 34). How exactly does this view differ from that of Zizioulas, which Horton rejects? Horton's only explanation is that Zizioulas's is an 'overrealized eschatology'. In this end, this only means that Zizioulas makes more of the 'now' than Horton does, which leads Horton to think he is minimizing the 'not yet'.

Horton's habits of mind are, I suspect, the habits of a certain kind of confessional Reformed Protestantism. Though he criticizes some manifestations of Reformed theology and church life, what Horton regards as 'classic Reformed' theology is simply assumed. Horton's arguments often amount to little more than the repeated assertion that 'my dichotomy is better than yours'. Horton has the theological resources at hand both to make an important Reformed contribution to contemporary theology and to expose Reformed theology to a healthy leavening from the broader church. If he was more open to the latter possibility, he would more thoroughly fulfil the promise of the former.

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The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities. Edited by Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart. Nottingham: Apollos, 2008. ISBN 978-1-8447-4254-7. 432 pp. £19.99.

This volume considers the origins of evangelicalism in light of David Bebbington's thesis in his monumental book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Unwin Hyman, 1989). There are two primary issues with Bebbington's analysis that underlie the essays. The first is whether the evangelical movement had more in common with expressions of Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than had previously been thought. The second is a question of the impact of the English and Scottish Enlightenment in shaping the opinions, beliefs, and behaviors of eighteenth-century evangelicals.

In the section 'Regional Perspectives', five authors address the main issues noted above. Andrew McGowan and Joel Beeke both advance the idea that, contrary to Bebbington's thesis that the Enlightenment altered the evangelical notion of assurance, there is indeed a strong degree of continuity between their doctrine and that of their Reformed forebears. The remaining three authors, Densil Morgan, David Jones, and Thomas Kidd, argue that Protestants in Wales, England, and New England, respectively, displayed new revivalist tendencies, and, though Bebbington overstates the discontinuity of eighteenth-century evangelicalism from earlier forms of Protestantism, there were enough distinguishing marks (new networks of communication, emphasis on conversion and outpourings of the Spirit, for instance) to suggest that evangelicalism did indeed constitute a new religious movement.

The second part, 'Era Perspectives', is arranged chronologically and contrasts the theology of several sixteenth-century Reformers and various seventeenth-century Puritans to that of Calvinistic evangelicals in the eighteenth-century. The majority conclude that the evangelicals held many of the same beliefs as the Reformers and Puritans and thus it cannot be said that evangelicalism was a novel movement in the eighteenth century. An additional essay explores nineteenth-century perceptions of the relationship between the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival, arguing that these figures viewed the eighteenth century revivals as a 'renewal, or restoration, of what had gone before in the Reformation and Puritan eras' (p. 317). One essay in particular gets at the nub of the issue by pointing out the fact that Puritanism itself is 'a rather artificial construct' and that seventeenth-century 'Puritanism' was much more fractured and doctrinally diverse than most historians have heretofore been willing to acknowledge. This reality leads the author to convincingly argue that there is a greater degree of continuity between eighteenth-century evan-

gelicalism and seventeenth-century Puritanism—loosely and broadly defined. Yet, the author goes on to suggest that new developments did emerge in eighteenth-century Protestantism, particularly through a new clerical and lay passion for revival and the use of practical methods to promote religion.

Under 'Evangelical Doctrines', four authors explore four doctrinal topics important for evangelicalism: salvation/conversion, assurance, eschatology, and biblical inspiration. Bruce Hindmarsh argues that evangelical conversion was indeed a new and distinctive mark of Christian experience in the modern period but that this mark appeared in the middle of the seventeenth century rather than in the early eighteenth (as Bebbington suggests). Through an examination of Bebbington's quadrilateral more broadly and the doctrine of assurance more specifically, Garry Williams concludes that the Reformation and Puritanism were actually evangelical movements. Crawford Gribben describes the variety of eschatological views that existed among evangelicals and Puritans and suggests that the discontinuities between the two cannot with certainty be linked to the Enlightenment. Lastly, Kenneth Stewart takes issue with a heretofore less debated argument within Bebbington's book, contending that a new preference for verbal inspiration within Victorian evangelicalism did not represent a more strict view of biblical inspiration.

A few significant qualifications emerge in Bebbington's response. The first concerns the doctrine of assurance. Bebbington acknowledges that there was more uniformity of opinion between Puritans and evangelicals concerning the doctrine, and that the form it took in the eighteenth century cannot be so strongly linked with the Enlightenment but, rather, with the Christian past. A second qualification is that for the movement as a whole the revivals formed a greater 'thread of continuity between the periods before and after the appearance of Whitefield and Wesley as travelling evangelists' (p. 431). These qualifications lead him to remark that 'there is a higher degree of continuity with the Puritans than the book of 1988 recognized' (p. 427) and that 'the chronology of the early stages of evangelicalism needs to be extended in both directions' (p. 428). They do not, however, lead Bebbington to discount the significance of the discontinuities, and he concludes his essay by arguing that 'evangelicalism did represent a revolutionary development in Protestant history' (p. 432).

This work is an excellent contribution to the discussion of the nature and historical origins of evangelicalism that advances our knowledge of those figures who and the ideas that contributed to the movement. There are a few ways in which it could have been improved, however. The most superficial is that the volume as a whole would have benefited from a good trimming, allowing several similar chapters to be condensed into one.

As a second improvement the authors should have placed greater emphasis on examining, as one contributor puts it, 'the innovativeness of evangelicalism as a social and cultural movement' (p. 112). It seems to this reviewer that an inordinate amount of focus was placed on the transmission of ideas, as if the social and cultural surroundings in different periods and regions had little changing effect on those ideas. Furthermore, is one supposed to believe that scholars' and ministers' views were shared by all religious-minded folk occupying the pews? I suspect an examination into these areas would have drawn out more of the discontinuities Bebbington has highlighted.

A third improvement would have been to ensure there was more doctrinal objectivity throughout the volume. It is troubling to see a few authors allow their theological agendas influence their scholarship to such a degree that it leaves the impression that evidence was distorted. One contributor writes, for instance, that if Bebbington's dating of evangelicalism to the 1730s is correct

> it leaves us with the impression that Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley are the fathers of evangelicalism. The result of this controversial position is that Wesley's Arminianism could then no longer be viewed as aberrational theology within a solidly Reformed movement (p. 168).

While some of the contributors challenge Bebbington's thesis it does appear that, notwithstanding some minor qualifications, a majority agree that eighteenth-century evangelicalism was a new religious movement which, while advancing doctrinal positions similar to the Reformers and Puritans, formulated theological emphases of their own while developing new techniques and organizational structures for spreading the gospel.

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J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought. Edited by Timothy George. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8010-3387-2. 253 pp. £12.99.

The book reviewed here, a *Festschrift* honoring James Innell Packer, does not explicitly address the much-debated question of what evangelicalism is. Yet, because of Packer's stature and decades of contributions the essays, taken collectively, do offer insight into the issue, albeit largely reflective of Packer's interests and theological commitments.

Some affirm and commend Packer (e.g., Edith Humphrey, Mark Dever, Paul House, and a tribute by Gary Parrett); others engage in thoughtful

critique (e.g., Don Payne, and Dever); and some of the essays only minimally engage Packer's work, focusing rather on some facet of evangelicalism (e.g., Bruce Hindmarsh, and Carl Trueman) or Christianity more generally (Richard Neuhaus).

The thirteen essays are not organized around a selected few themes. (In its own way, this might be ironically, though certainly not intentionally, symbolic of the disappointment of some people with the fact that Packer never devoted himself to crafting a comprehensive systematic theology.) Rather, the topics engaged are reflective of both the influences and sources on which Packer has drawn and the rather diverse topics and causes to which he has devoted himself. Thus, they include Packer's engagement with 'The Great [Christian] Tradition' (Alister McGrath, and Humphrey), his theological 'journalism' (David Neff), his theological method (Payne), his view of Scripture (House), his debt to the Puritan tradition (Dever, and Charles Colson), eighteenth century evangelical spirituality (Hindmarsh), the English non-conformist tradition (Trueman), Christianity and culture (Neuhaus), and knowing God (James Massey). The editor summarizes lessons he has learned from Packer, and the book concludes with reflection and response from Packer himself. There is also a bibliography of Packer's works, through August 2008.

With no pretense of attempting a comprehensive, synthetic analysis of the essays, I will simply and more modestly offer four brief observations among others which emerged for me as I looked through these varied, Packer-shaded lenses. First, theology matters. And, the church matters. Packer has devoted a large portion of his life's work to writing for the church and for 'lay' Christians. And, they have responded with appreciation. If those who are 'professional' theologians (Packer describes himself as 'a catechist') truly believe that theology matters, our work will also reflect that the church matters. Second and extending the preceding observation, theology and 'the Christian life' are intimately related. One of the ways in which theology serves the church is by attending—directly and explicitly—to life lived in and for the Triune God. And, the living of life *coram deo*—not for theology, but for God—is a fundamental context and foundation for doing theology. Third, good theology is historically informed. Packer has never hesitated to acknowledge that he stands on the shoulders of giants, and neither should anyone else who presumes to do theology, at whatever 'level'. Fourth, theology's service to the church is advanced by ecumenical conversation carried-out with informed, thoughtful conviction in a Spirit-enabled irenic spirit.

Like most collections of essays, this one does not present either a vision or an argument. And, like many tributes it is proscribed by the limitations and contributions of its honoree. For those interested in evangelical the-

ology, this book does, however, offer occasions for reflection on where it can and should go as prompted by the work of a significant contemporary voice.

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Inside Story: The Life of John Stott. By Roger Steer. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-84474-404-6. 288 pp. £12.99.

John Stott has been a fixture in evangelical circles. Roger Steer's warm and well-constructed biography of Stott does a grand job of revealing why as it opens windows on a life well lived, in service to God and humanity.

Although I knew Stott through his many influential books, I found that I really didn't know the kind of life he lived. From his persistence in his calling in spite of early parental opposition, to his signal cooperation and abiding friendship with Billy Graham, his fast-tempo teaching trips to scores of climes and cultures, his long involvement with the Keswick and Urbana conventions, and his foundational role in the Lausanne Movement, almost every page of Steer's book reveals nuggets that illumine not only this individual life, but also the state of the evangelical arm of the Church of England over a span of 60 years.

There are two aspects of Steer's work that I especially appreciate. *First*, the revealing of some of Stott's personal habits and foci imparts wisdom that I and many other ministers would do well to take to heart: his commendable hospitality; his love for the spiritually lost and the materially and mentally disadvantaged; his commitment to training his parishioners for evangelism; his commitment to evangelical unity; his monthly 'quiet day' for reflection and renewal; his starting each day with an orienting, Trinitarian prayer; and his daily post-luncheon HHH, 'horizontal half-hour'! *Second*, Steer effectively and nearly seamlessly weaves synopses of two of Stott's most important books into the fabric of this book. Steer masterfully sketches *I Believe in Preaching* and *The Cross of Christ* such that the reader is left wanting more. If more biographers did this sort of thing, the ongoing impacts of the lives they depict would be compounded.

My only criticism is Steer's overuse of the word 'unique' on the last two pages of the text. In so far as unique literally means 'one of a kind', I bristle at the suggestion that Stott is actually unique in so many ways, especially 'in generating love through his endearing blend of humility and mischievous humour', 'in his commitment to the cause of the gospel', and even 'in his ability to relax'. Stott may indeed be remarkable or even exemplary in these things, but unique?

Happily, and in spite of the foregoing criticism, this book is not a hagiography. Stott reportedly instructed his first biographer, Timothy Dudley-

Smith, that any biography prepared about him should be 'warts and all' (p. 20); Steer's account is noteworthy because it is just that; on page after page there is testimony to the fact that 'Uncle John' has his share of foibles and weaknesses. Moreover, this 'life' makes it eminently clear that Stott is a man who sees himself in ongoing need of the Gospel that he preaches.

As would be expected from an experienced chronicler, this biography has all of the features that are standard to the genre—the obligatory parts about childhood, family, education, avocations (Stott's foremost being bird-watching!), vocation and contributions. But what Steer presents remarkably well is the practical, principled, focused life of a man to be emulated primarily because he has taken Christ as his own model (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). In fact, Steer reports that in 2007 Stott, sensing that he was approaching the end of his earthly pilgrimage, thus summarised God's purpose for His people: 'God wants His people to become like Christ. Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God' (p. 271).

Steer's book ably demonstrates that Stott has, by all accounts—with his long life of generosity, preaching, teaching, leadership, writing and practical service—been steadily becoming like Christ. I unreservedly recommend this rich volume not just because it commends Stott, but more importantly because it commends Jesus Christ.

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BOOK REVIEWS

RON GLEASON: *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (James Eglinton)........ 127

SEYOON KIM: *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Lynn H. Cohick)........ 129

WILLIAM J. WRIGHT: *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Philip A. Lorish)........ 130

DAVID VANDRUNEN: *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (W. Bradford Littlejohn)........ 131

JOHN HOWARD YODER: *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution* (Scott Prather)........ 136

JOHN HOWARD YODER: *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking.* (Scott Prather)........ 136

JEREMY M. BERGEN AND ANTHONY G. SIEGRIST (EDS): *Powers and Practices: Engaging the Work of John Howard Yoder* (Jamie Pitts)........ 139

GRAHAM WARD: *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Post-material Citizens* (Luke Bretherton)........ 140

MICHAEL ALLEN GILLESPIE: *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Eric Hall)........ 142

ERIC NELSON: *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (W. Bradford Littlejohn)........ 145

WILLIAM T. CAVANAUGH: *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (James R. A. Merrick)........ 147

DAVID BENTLEY HART: *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (James R. A. Merrick)........ 148

DAVID FERGUSSON: *Faith and Its Critics: A Conversation* (James R. A. Merrick)........ 149

TERRY EAGLETON: *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (Oliver Davies)........ 150

JOHN F. HAUGHT: *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Beau Pihlaja)........ 151

PAUL COPAN AND WILLIAM LANE CRAIG (EDS): *Contending with Christianity's Critics: Answering New Atheists & Other Objectors* (R. W. Fischer)........ 153

MICHAEL S. HORTON: *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Peter J. Leithart)........ 154

MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN AND KENNETH J. STEWART (EDS): *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Andrew Tooley)... 156

TIMOTHY GEORGE (ED): *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought* (W. David Buschart)........ 158

ROGER STEER: *Inside Story: The Life of John Stott* (Steven K. Mittwede)........ 160