Reviews

Original Sin: A Cultural History. By Alan Jacobs. London: SPCK, 2008. ISBN 978-0-2810-6046-7. 320 pp. £12.99

Sin is 'the ultimate preexisting condition', says Alan Jacobs, who notes that the doctrine of original sin adds insult by declaring that even if we inherit sin we are 'fully, terrifyingly responsible for our condition'. So here we have a doctrine that is at once repulsive and, in major respects, undeniable, given Scripture and our sad experience of the great, rolling momentum of evil across the generations. But it's not quite as crazy as it seems to believe that a person can be sinful without choosing to be: many racists simply inherit their culture's racism, and that doesn't necessarily get them off the hook where blameworthiness is concerned.

Still, plenty of commentators have hated the doctrine of original sin, including many Christians of Pelagian stripe and the evangelist Charles Finney, who believed it undercuts evangelism (tell a man he's dead in his sin, and can't repent without a miracle, and he might believe you). Humanists have long rejected the indignity of being called sinners and Rousseau actually declared children innocent. But Rousseau is out of favour, because child psychology has found the psyches of tykes to be as spotty as our own and, anyhow, 20th century horrors blew away most people's optimism. Now what? Jacobs: 'We feel that we have left Christianity and its "baleful," "repulsive" doctrines behind. But we have also left Rousseau's naiveté behind, so where the hell are we?'

In his book, Jacobs explores how various people have thought about original sin and its like. The exploration is masterful—dense with irony, revelation, and wit. Travelling across centuries and cultures with Jacobs we discover that the ancient Greeks had something like a doctrine of original sin (the Dionysian spark in humanity is in an otherwise Titanic nature), that the doctrine of original sin is inherently democratizing (*all* are born sinners) and that various elites have therefore resented it. We find that Pelagius had good intentions: he wanted people to take responsibility for themselves, but inadvertently sent a cruel form of religion down the ages. What is crueller than driving people into the inevitable oscillation between pride (I'm making it) and despair (I'll never make it)? We get a terrific discussion of the mystery of iniquity via Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. ('Do we sin because we heed the devilish voice in our ear? Or do we heed the devilish voice because we have already sinned?') Jacobs gives us Shakespeare on both the majesty and venality of humanity, tells us how Jonathan Edwards defended original sin using a gambling analogy, and why Ben Franklin once emptied his pocket into the collection basket at

a Whitefield rally. We find that Steven Pinker has a secular doctrine of original sin. And there is much, much more of interest.

But for me, the saddest and most revealing part of the book is the portrait of the elderly St Augustine, being taunted by Julian of Eclanum, a much younger man he had once mentored. Augustine believed that infant baptism removes original sin and let Julian's taunting drive him to stiffen his conclusion that unbaptised babies, still stained by original sin, therefore go to hell. During succeeding centuries—ones of high infant mortality—Augustine's teaching was believed in Catholic churches, driving to frenzy uncounted mothers and fathers of dead babies who had lost the race to get them into the hands of a priest. All because 'the brilliant and devout old bishop could not resist the controversialist's temptation—to take even a caricature of his view and defend it to the death, rather than show dialectical weakness'. Augustine had spent his Christian life writing against pride.

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI USA

Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World. By Serene Jones. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009 (UK: Alban Books). ISBN 978-0-6642-3410-2. 200 pp. £16.99.

Serene Jones, Professor of Theology and President of Union Seminary in New York, has long been interested in a retrieval of Christian theology, particularly the Reformed Tradition, in the interest of ministry to suffering people in a hurting world. In this book she correlates the field of trauma studies with the theology of Calvin and some selected biblical materials. Proposing 'a dramatic rethinking of some basic categories and rituals', she begins her book with the question, 'How do people whose hearts and minds have been surrounded by violence, come to feel and know the redeeming of God's power?'

First she draws upon a case study from her own pastoral experience, utilizing the story of a traumatized woman in her congregation. She delves into the characteristics of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in which people deal with the threat of annihilation. Jones says that trauma studies show that a traumatic event produces in the victim predictable emotional states such as hyperarousal, numbness, dissociation, intrusive memories, compulsions to repeat the event, diminishment of memory, and so forth. I have no way of judging the validity of trauma studies but Jones is convinced that trauma is a widespread emotional malady of modern people and she finds it difficult to 'think of a task more central to Christian the-

ology' than to find a way for the church to minister to the traumatized through the 'reordering of the collective imagination of its people'.

While Jones criticizes the 'liberal Protestant church' for conceding 'its storytelling, meaning-making powers' and 'giving over its imaginative sway to science, to experts, to the rational certainty of modernity', it's difficult to see how Jones avoids doing just that in her deference to the wisdom of 'trauma studies' and its conception of PTSD as a disease and its prescriptions for healing.

Jones' thoughts on trauma seem driven more by certain prior psychological assumptions than by theological ones. When she does theology, her theology feels like a veneer, and a thin one at that, laid over an essentially anthropological solution to a huge human problem. When it comes to a theology of ministry to traumatized people, Jones says to begin with those 'traditions of Christian thought that assert the universal value of human beings'. She also stresses 'grace', though she gives little indication of the content of her definition of grace. With the exception of her creative reading of the story of the walk to Emmaus, seeing it as an instance of Jesus' ministry to the traumatized, disordered imagination of Cleopas, Jesus plays a minor role in Jones' story of what the church offers the traumatized. Jones' imaginary dialogue between Mary and Rachael, women traumatized by a violent world, is evocative but I suspected that her own ambivalence about the Christian concepts of sin and grace, cross and resurrection prohibited her from finding much more to offer these troubled women than a vision of 'beings created and re-created by our Creator God and endowed with creative abilities ourselves'. She is quite taken with Calvin's reading of the Psalms as therapeutically valuable, but her reading of Calvin seems vague and devoid of Christological content, rather 'un-Calvinistic' in my opinion.

Jones' tendency to disregard Christology in her "dramatic rethinking" of the church's ministry to the traumatized is odd, considering the church's historic claim that Jesus is the victim of trauma par excellence. After some wrenching stories of real life trauma, when Jones brings God on the scene, God is at best gracious and creative but not very redemptive. Perhaps her disregard of Christology and her apparent lack of interest in soteriology is due to her lingering feminist concerns about the value of theories of the atonement and her suspicion that some orthodox theologies disempower people and destroy human agency. She does hint that those who have jettisoned some of the violent aspects of Christian salvation have made a mistake – the evil that inflicts trauma is a mysterious, ambiguous phenomenon. And yet Jones seems to find little specifically to commend to the traumatized from within the great theological tradition other than some rather indistinct commodity called grace.

Trauma and Grace is a caring, sensitive work that focuses the church's attention on the tragedy of the traumatized. I learned more about the nature of human trauma and some specific ways that we pastors can minister to people in extremis. I also saw the fruitfulness of reading scripture from a position of solidarity with the traumatized. And yet I felt by the end of this book that the church has much more to offer traumatic people than Jones' therapeutic, gracious word. As Jones says, trauma tends to disorder the imagination of its victims, terribly disrupting their world and robbing them of their sense of agency. Jones has convinced me that trauma is a real, devastating, disrupting intrusion of evil into human life. And yet this book also convinces me that trauma is so serious that it calls for a story more hopeful, more sweeping and eschatological than the merely anthropological and the modestly therapeutic. Human trauma is so devastating that anything less than the cross and resurrection of Jesus is too small a response.

William H. Willimon, United Methodist Church/
Duke Divinity School, USA

Against the Tide: Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities. By Miroslav Volf. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8028-6506-9. xii + 211 pp. £11.99

This is a collection of short pieces previously published as a regular column in the American periodical *Christian Century.* The section headings indicate a broad scope: God and the Self, The Reality of Evil and the possibility of Hope, Family matters, Church, Mission and Other Faiths, Culture and Politics, Giving and Forgiving, Hope and Reconciliation, Perspective.

It is not easy to review this remarkable volume. Volf, Director of the Yale Centre for Faith and Culture, is a highly respected theologian who makes substantial contributions to systematic theology and to interfaith dialogue. The numerous apposite illustrations from different continents testify not only to his intensive international activity but to his sharp eye for significant imagery.

Volf is from Croatia, and the studies are not lacking in sobering reference to collective horrors. Yet the style is quintessentially American, and cheerfulness keeps breaking through. There is much reference to wife and family – though mercifully not to the family pets. And the messier contemporary aspects of Christian life and community leave a number ungrasped nettles. To be fair, the note of hopeful expectation may stem as much from the author's Fuller Seminary evangelical roots as from transatlantic optimism.

It would be tedious to go through the pieces one by one. Yet the combined effect is anything but tedious, and the thoughtful reader will be rewarded by all manner of sound theological insights into the deep perennial issues of God and community. If there is a single thread, it is of grace as an underlying unforceful force to produce healing and reconciliation out of the most unpromising situation.

George Newlands, University of Glasgow

A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology. By Alister McGrath. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009 (UK: Alban Books). ISBN 978-0-664-23310-5. 262 pp. £26.99

In *A Fine-Tuned Universe*, the publication of his 2009 Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen, Alister McGrath applies and expands the natural theology renewal project developed in his book *The Open Secret.*[1]

While most people associate natural theology with the well-worn Enlightenment aspiration of conclusively demonstrating God's existence and predicates through autonomous rational effort, McGrath takes a critical realist approach, recognizing that a person contributes ready-made concepts to all intelligible experience. Thus, the way one 'sees' nature is a joint product of the way one chooses to interpret the phenomena and the way the world is. This 'renewed' natural theology interprets nature with a trinitarian schema that explains the 'surprising' phenomena observed in the universe, and these 'surprising' facts in turn provide an 'empirical fit' or empirical justification for the schema (p. 58). C.S. Lewis aptly describes the approach: 'I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else' (p. 21).

By adopting a trinitarian lens for interpretation, McGrath inherits a wealth of resources from the Christian tradition. Drawing from that tradition, he updates Augustine's doctrine of creation, which asserts that divine creation is a singular (not six) act(s) with built-in potencies sequentially actualized through divine providence, with contemporary evolutionary theory and the big bang theory. Through this modified Augustinian lens, McGrath schematizes nature such that God fine-tunes the big bang to produce a world where the evolutionary process can beget human beings.

Of course, the success of this fine-tuning project hinges upon clear 'surprising' facts that 'fit' empirically with the trinitarian schema. In physics, he notes the vast improbability of the values and ratios of values between the four fundamental forces of nature being such as they are

[1] Reviewed in *SBET* 27 (2009), 215-26.

to permit life. In chemistry, he considers the unique and the apparently life-essential qualities of carbon, water, and transition metals. In biology, he mentions at least three ways that evolutionary science points beyond itself: (i) the very ability of evolution to fine-tune itself; (ii) the well-documented convergence consonant with teleology; and (iii) the concept of emergence.

I see this book making two important contributions to the church. First, it provides a plausible and insightful reconciliation of science and religion. All people that are exposed to both spheres of knowledge have at least a 'working' view of how they relate. Some adopt Steven Jay Gould's no-talking policy between science and religion. Others, less coherently, manifest a cross-disciplinary schizophrenia where they 'believe' certain propositions in a scientific context and 'believe' others in religious contexts. McGrath offers another alternative. He writes, 'a Trinitarian nature theology – can act as a point of convergence between the Christian faith . . . [and] the natural sciences, opening up important possibilities for dialogue, cross-fertilization, and mutual enrichment' (p. xiii). This book provides a framework for a unified account of knowledge that joins a robust Augustinian account of divine creation with the most pervasive scientific account of the universe and our world.

Second, his approach is well suited for a distinctively Christian apologetic. While Paley-type apologetics, if successful, prove a relatively thin concept of deity, McGrath's natural theology argues for a robust trinitarian theism. This is because McGrath's approach begins with an open Bible and certain Christian beliefs. In doing so, McGrath restricts the application of his apologetic. Paley's reason-alone appeal to public evidence can demand assent from anyone if it is victorious, but the success of McGrath's apologetic is limited to those who are willing to view nature Christianly. Is this a problem? I doubt it. In my own experience, apologetics do not bear much fruit without some sort of openness.

Robert J. Hartman, Trinity Christian College and College of DuPage, IL USA

Engaging With Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques. Edited by David Gibson and Daniel Strange. Leicester: Apollos, 2008. ISBN 978-1-8447-4245-5. 416 pp. £16.99.

Karl Barth continues to draw approbation and criticism from evangelicals; this volume offers both, with an accent on the latter. While the twelve contributors are exclusively Reformed—unlike Sung Wook Chung's anthology, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Baker, 2008)—this line-up provides a sustained, cohesive comparison between Barth

and his own tradition. Four contributors discuss Barth's method: its Christocentricity (Henri Blocher), use of logic (Sebastian Rehnmann), and relation to Reformed orthodoxy (Ryan Glomsrud) and ecclesial tradition (Donald Macleod); seven discuss doctrinal loci: covenant theology (A.T.B. McGowan), election (Gibson), Scripture (Mark Thompson), Trinity (Michael Ovey), atonement (Garry Williams), God's visibility (Paul Helm), and reprobation (Oliver Crisp); Michael Horton concludes by assessing Barth's legacy.

Although the discussion is wide-ranging, two interrelated themes predominate: Barth's 'Christological concentration' and election. Indeed, one of the distinctive strengths of this work is its attention to these elements of Barth's theological infrastructure. Regarding the first, Barth goes beyond Christ's *soteriological* centrality by construing '*every* dogmatic concept in Christological terms' (Blocher quoting Ingolf Dalferth, p. 29). This can be seen in Barth's revisions to covenantal theology: McGowan complains that Barth's Christology tends to collapse all the covenants into one Christological event. The more concerning consequence, though, is hermeneutical: Barth's supposedly 'concrete' Christology is challenged as an abstract Christ principle which over-determines his exegesis; this prompts Macleod to inquire how we know when to accept Paul at face value or when to correct him with the Christ principle and Thompson to remind us that the only Christ we have is the one brokered by Scripture, for Jesus himself unequivocally calls the Scriptures the Word of God. Meanwhile, Glomsrud chastises Barth for accusing the Reformed tradition of anthropocentrism when, in fact, they discussed human reason only insofar as it was *subordinate* to revelation.

The critiques of election are equally penetrating. Gibson offers the news in brief of his doctoral thesis—published as *Reading the Decree*[2]—contending that Barth's exposition of Romans 9-11, the exegetical foundation of his doctrine of election, is brilliant yet inconsistent and unconvincing. Others critique the metaphysical backdrop of election: Barth's account of divine freedom. God cannot freely perform logical contradictions (Rehnmann), is free from external pressures but does not self-assign his identity (Helm, rebuffing Bruce McCormack), and is Triune by nature, not will, lest God's unity modalistically antecede his diversity (Ovey). Additionally, Williams charges that God's self-election in Christ privileges God's mercy over God's justice, in contrast to the Reformed tradition's equal emphasis on both. Finally, Crisp asks whether it is even coherent for Christ to be simultaneously elect and reprobate— after all,

[2] See the following review. *Ed.*

if the *divine* Son's reprobation is essential for salvation, how is the intra-Trinitarian breach overcome?

While some essayists are more persuasive than others, each succeeds at offering cogent criticisms of Barth while acknowledging his positive contribution to theology. Probably the chief weakness of the essays is that their impressive critiques of Barth are not balanced with substantial counter-proposals – though the authors pose difficult questions to Barth, they often do not tackle the questions Barth was asking as fully as they might. On the other hand, the contributors' criticisms are generally constructive, heeding Horton's concluding appeal for evangelicals to learn from the Swiss master by 'moving beyond Barth through Barth' (p. 372). He reminds us that Barth's insistence on the primacy of God's grace makes him an ally in the larger theological world and, indeed, far more 'evangelical' than many 'evangelicals' today. Barth's commitment to Scripture and God's sovereignty make him a crucial conversation partner for evangelical theology, an engagement for which this volume is sure to serve the church well.

Stephen J Palmer, Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA USA

Reading the Decree: Exegesis, Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth. By David Gibson. London: T&T Clark, 2009. ISBN 978-0-5674-6874-1. 240 pp. £65.00.

One can read Calvin and Barth appreciatively for years without deciding which one was right about the doctrine of election. But if one ever gets around to this question—and takes as seriously as they did one of their most basic concerns, viz., 'Does it stand in Scripture?'—then David Gibson provides an excellent introduction. Applying Richard Muller's distinction between a 'soteriological christocentrism' and a "principial christocentrism" to analyze Calvin's and Barth's doctrine of election, Gibson expands its application to two corresponding hermeneutical programs which he describes as 'christologically extensive' and 'christologically intensive'. It turns out Calvin reflects the former and Barth the latter. But the theological and exegetical evidence Gibson amasses to compare their positions and the care with which he presents them are impressive. The upshot is: both were painstakingly rigorous in their biblical exegesis, but Calvin's soteriological christocentrism and Barth's principial christocentrism (which is sometimes difficult to distinguish from simply an inconsistent and consistent christocentrism) led them to different conclusions. Yet there are surprises along the way.

Contrary to passages where Calvin seems to point to Christ himself, Gibson claims: 'Calvin does not hold to Christ himself as the basis of the

revelation of the doctrine of election' (p. 176). Calvin 'does not assert a Christological ground as the basis for overcoming either curiosity or anxiousness about election; rather, he establishes a textual ground'. He gives 'methodological priority to the written rather than the incarnate Word' (p. 175). Gibson recognizes the dilemma he poses and asks: 'What, then, of Calvin's repeated insistence that we can only have certain knowledge of our election by looking to Christ?' Gibson suggests 'it may be helpful to adopt a simple distinction between the doctrine of election, and the assurance of election. The former can be described as a specific Christian teaching apprehended cognitively, but the latter as an emotional or psychological state requiring cognitive recognition of certain facts but which is actually experienced as a spiritual grace' (p. 176). Yet does Calvin really draw such distinctions or leave the material source of our election so ambiguous, Christ or Scripture? If so, he certainly does not seem to do so in his doctrine of faith or Scripture where the question of assurance (though not as 'as an emotional or psychological state') is so important and the object of faith and Scripture is so clear.

Gibson is surely right in claiming Barth overstated his case if he was thinking of Calvin when he accused former interpreters as having set up the doctrine of predestination as an 'independent entity' apart from Christology. But if the distinction between the written and incarnate Word is so important for Calvin, 'with the former truly the source of the revelation of election' (p. 177) and 'Christ's voice is still one voice among a range of witnesses' (p. 176), then it seems Gibson is claiming that it is not Barth, as is often alleged, who forces a choice of emphasis between the Word and the words, but Calvin. And it is owing to his 'biblicistic emphasis' that Calvin emphasizes the latter at the expense of the former, at least with respect to the doctrine of election. But if this is so, how does this square with what Calvin says and does elsewhere? This book raises many such fascinating questions.

Though admittedly short on evaluation, this is an extraordinarily helpful and intriguing study, especially for those who think theology ought to have to do with biblical exegesis and vice versa.

Richard E. Burnett, Erskine Theological Seminary, South Carolina, USA

Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans. By Thomas P. Scheck. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-2680-4128-1. 304 pp. £55.00.

This is a marvellous book. The standard wisdom when it comes to the doctrine of justification by faith has been that the writers of the early church fell short of its primary meaning: which was Paul's true intention

(despite the fact that Paul never uses the phrase "justification by faith alone") and only rediscovered by Luther and the reformers. The implications of this logic have been enormous, not least of which is that ancient Christianity never grasped Pauline theology.

Thomas Scheck challenges this construction by looking carefully at how Rufinus' Latin version of Origin's Commentary of the Romans was received and interpreted by Augustine, Erasmus, Luther and several writers from the post-reformation in the 17th century. Scheck contends that Origen's use of Paul was completely in keeping with the apostle's thought, a point which Augustine—for all his criticism of Pelagius—himself recognized. If the legacy of Protestantism has been to accuse Origen of salvation by good works, it is partly because Origen comprises that history of the church which had 'fallen' and would not be corrected till the 16th century. It is significant that Origen's faulty exegesis of Romans is factored into the Protestant history, the *Magdeburg Centuries*, as contributing to the church's corruption of the Gospel. The point here is that Origen's theology was not merely regarded as 'Pelagian', but has also suffered from an ignominious historiography for nearly five hundred years.

Scheck begins by looking at the dynamics of Origen's teaching of justification. He rightly observes that the Alexandrian's doctrine is driven by refuting the Christian fatalism of Valentinian Gnosticism and Marcionism. Justification of the sinner must always take into account the free will of the soul since the connection between faith and post-baptismal moral action is inseparable. In this particular sense, justification cannot be by faith alone. And yet Origen felt free to speak of Paul's justification by faith with the qualifier 'alone'. This is because of a further and related element of Origen's theology on salvation: the intimate and inseparable connection between faith and good works as complimentary, not dichotomous. Based on Romans 5:5, justification is described 'as an inpouring of love that enables us to love God' (p. 33), quoting directly from Origen on this important feature: 'For the love of God . . . abounds and is shed abroad into our hearts in view of the fact that it is not sought by human skill but is flooded through the grace of the Holy Spirit.' This is a grace of righteousness infused into the believer. Justification, then, is the beginning of sanctification. In sum, Scheck is claiming that Origen understands the reception of justifying grace as a divinization of the human being.

When we come to Augustine's use of Origen, an important part of this book, Scheck shows that Augustine's early exegesis simply repeats ideas verbatim found in *CommRom*. Like Pelagius, Augustine was dependent upon the exegetical tradition that included Origen for understanding the book of Romans. Following the controversies with Pelagius, Augustine still accepted Origen's fundamental principles but *contra* the Alexandrian

came to interpret Paul's polemic against the 'works of the law' as more complex than the Jewish Law which Origen had limited it. Throughout this chapter Scheck interacts with the conclusions of C.P. Bammel who, in several articles in the 1990s, argued that Augustine was far more indebted to Origen's *CommRom* than had previously been recognized. Nonetheless, Bammel maintains Augustine went in a different direction from Origen because of the former's (faulty) understanding of the Latin term *iustificare*, interpreting it to mean a process of becoming righteous or being made righteous. Origen described justification, which Bammel supposes to be the true meaning of the Greek *dikaioune*, 'as a momentary event in which sins are forgiven and the new convert is accounted righteous before God' (p. 101). It would be completely ironic and unexpected if Origen's approach to justification agreed with the later Protestant interpretation of the term: 'to count as just'. Indeed, Scheck wonders whether Bammel is adhering to Alistair McGrath's argument (or perhaps Martin Chemnitz' from the later 16th century) which defends the Protestant view of justification in the same way, and conversely, faulting Augustine for affirming the Latin interpretation of 'being made just'.

Diverging from Bammel's conclusion, Scheck insists that Augustine and Origen were closer to one another in the fundamentals than in the differences: 'It appears to me that both Origen and Augustine conceive of justification as an interior process of 'being made just' through the transformative indwelling of Christ and the Trinity, a process that only begins at faith and baptism' (p. 103). Scheck proceeds in the argument that Paul's terminology, in Greek or Latin, allows for a greater flexibility that the post-Protestant dogmatics have acknowledged. Given his obvious Roman Catholic bias, Scheck reviews Luther's and Melanchthon's estimation of Origen and, not surprisingly, finds them wanting. Regardless of whether one agrees with the author's position, it is perfectly reasonable to question the long-standing assumption that the only biblically appropriate view of justification is the one articulated by Luther *et alia*. Scheck has shown us that Origen was no less biblically oriented and that his works in Latin played an influential role in shaping a millennium of church doctrine. It is wholly inadequate for Protestant writers to assess the patristic era according to the 16th century reformation(s) as if the latter is the doctrinal 'canon' for the former. One does not have to be Roman Catholic to see the faulty assumptions in this line of reasoning.

While the coverage of secondary resources was very adequate, Scheck may have found some grounds for enhancing his argument by interacting with several recent articles that address the same subject but do not

appear in Scheck's account. Otherwise, this study will have to figure of any future evaluation of the topic.

D.H. Williams, Baylor University, Texas USA

The Christ's Faith: A Dogmatic Account. By R. Michael Allen. London: T&T Clark, 2009. ISBN 978-0-5670-3399-4. xii + 243 pp. £65.00.

Does Jesus Christ have faith? R. Michael Allen demonstrates the importance of the question and why dogmatic theology – not biblical studies alone – must answer it. When 'faith' is properly defined, it becomes clear that what is at stake in what appears to be a matter of curious exegetical semantics is nothing less than the full humanity of Jesus. In *The Christ's Faith* Allen, a graduate of Wheaton College (where this project originated as a doctoral dissertation), proves himself well-suited to the task.

Can a Christ who does not have faith be fully human? Or, if he does have faith in God the Father, does this diminish his divinity? What role does Christ's faithfulness play in the redemption of sinners? The correct translation of *pistis Christou* in Paul, such questions make evident the theological importance of Allen's question. In Chapter 2 he introduces Thomas Aquinas as his primary interlocutor, explicating and critiquing the thirteenth century divine's position on the faith of Christ. Thomas casts the issue primarily in terms of faith understood as knowledge, based on Hebrews 11:1—faith is 'the certainty of what things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'. Jesus, Thomas argued, does not possess the attribute of faith as we do because, unlike other human persons, he possesses the fullness of divine knowledge and lived his earthly life in immediate possession of the beatific vision. Allen challenges this on the grounds of Scripture's portrayal of Jesus' kenotic limitedness. Christ certainly did not possess a 'human omniscience' on earth, which at once both affirms the reality of his humanity and disqualifies Thomas's objection that he did not need faith because he had perfect knowledge.

In Chapter 3 Allen presses Thomas for a fuller definition of faith. The conclusion is that Thomas is wrong on two accounts—not just the dehumanising attribution of perfect knowledge to the human Christ, but also defining faith so narrowly that he misses 'the breadth required by Scripture' (p. 69). To identify this breadth, and thus the definition of faith, Allen turns to Calvin and the Reformed confessional tradition. Thomas identifies faith as the chief virtue of the human turned to God, but for Calvin faith is tied up in God's relation to his people through Christ. Thus it is no surprise that later Reformed thinkers tied faith increasingly to the *ordo salutis*. Yet this dogmatic relocation is equally problematic, Allen says, because it 'considers God from a position of sinfulness' and

limits faith to a redemptive function—thus ruling out any possibility that Christ could have faith (p. 73). Theologians must therefore acknowledge a difference between faith in general and faith in Jesus unto salvation, a categorical subset.

Chapter 4 explores the labyrinth of the metaphysics of the incarnation. Here the author's agenda is to demonstrate that dogmatic space exists, particularly within Reformed theology, for the doctrine of Christ's faith, perhaps surprising to those who think the New Perspective must be rejected for the preservation of Reformed soteriology. He argues well that divine transcendence is a controlling doctrine for classical christology, maintaining the very Creator-creature distinction which makes possible the incarnation as a dyophysite phenomenon. Jesus Christ may be constituted as fully divine and human, in other words, because these two things are qualitatively distinct. Transcendence further demonstrates the metaphysical asymmetry (superiority) of the divine, while stressing that divine and human agencies are non-competitive in their relational unity. It also commends the use of analogy as the basis for theological speech, on Allen's account. Though faith is rightly associated with human existence and not with divinity, he concludes that this transcendence, accompanied by a distinctly Reformed approach to the *communicatio idiomatum* as a hermeneutical device (and not a metaphysical explanation of the *unio hypostatica*) as well as affirmations of the fallenness of Christ's humanity and the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify that humanity, combine to open up space for speaking of Christ's faith.

Chapters 5 and 6 consider the place of Christ's faith within the *loci* of soteriology, covenant and eschatology. The first engages in a 'thought experiment' that considers how Christ's faith would impact these areas in the theologies of Thomas, federal theology and Barth. The final chapter turns to ethics, where Allen lifts up *imitatio Christi* and suggests that Christ's faith is for Christian disciples the example *par excellence* of witness to the grace of God. Christ's faith must inform Christian ethics 'precisely because the human life of Christ not only includes Christians redemptively but also invokes their own corresponding acts of faithfulness' (pp. 199-200).

Allen's study is lucid and engaging, but not without its problems. Insofar as Allen confines himself to the metaphysical categories of orthodox Christology, his discussion is illuminating. Yet, theology today would be better served by attention to a postmetaphysical reckoning. Despite the author's attention to Barth, this is unfortunately absent from the book. How he can suggest that Barthian christology follows the project of classical metaphysics (p. 177) is mystifying. Accounting for the postmetaphysical critique (for example, that which Barth lays out with specific reference

to the *communicatio idiomatum* in §64.2 of *CD* IV/2) would, on the one hand, give greater insight into contemporary figures such as Wolfhart Pannenberg, who as it stands receives only a passing glance in the prolegomenal chapter. On the other hand, it would allow him to transcend the very problems he himself notes in medieval theology (defining 'perfection' and 'true humanity' in abstraction, without reference to Christ, cf. p. 41). For he himself must assert 'true humanity' and 'God' as predefined categories into which the human life of Christ's should fit (p. 37). The fourth chapter, for example, opens with the insistence that 'to say that Christ is God requires some awareness of the term "God" prior to predicating this term of Jesus' (p. 106), which Allen then tries to fill out with YHWH's self-definition in Exodus 3:14 (and, secondarily, even secular philosophy, p. 146). Though he acknowledges the postmetaphysical critique of this move, he does not engage it (cf. p. 109), turning instead to a broad affirmation of classical theism and the 'attributes of God'. This certainly colours his dogmatic conclusions in significant ways. One example is his insistence upon treating the *communicatio idiomatum* as strictly 'hermeneutical'. This means that christology must be controlled by a metaphysical doctrine of God which says, for example, that God cannot bleed. And so the New Testament texts which affirm such things without qualification (e.g. Acts 20:28) are judged, however 'true and appropriate', to be imprecise and theologically troublesome (cf. p. 125).

The Christ's Faith is remarkably accessible and commendable to pastors and educated laypersons, as well as academics. Allen's presentation is straight-forward and unambiguous, making this book a challenging entry into a live debate over *pistis Christou*—demonstrating in particular how the subjective genitive is not only commensurate with traditional theology but also beneficial to it, so that a retreat from the exegetical debate to the dogmatic impropriety of 'Christ's faith' is no longer permissible. Thomas' rejection of Christ's faith based on his understanding of faith as knowledge, and Christ's humanity as existing continually in the presence of God the Father, no longer stands unchallenged—nor does the Reformed tendency to read 'faith' flatly as a subjective element of humanity's *ordo salutis*, that which justifies the sinner (and perhaps does nothing else). If faith is a vital trust in and obedience to God, as well as a real correspondence to Christ, then neither of these calcified positions are sufficient.

Darren Sumner, University of Aberdeen

The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies. Edited by Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009. ISBN 978-1-8422-7641-9. xix + 350 pp. £14.99.

Few debates amongst biblical scholars have mustered energy, fervour, and feistiness quite like the *pistis Christou* debate. The question is remarkably simple: how should we translate and interpret the phrase 'faith of Christ' that appears several times in the letters of Paul—as human faith in Christ (the 'objective' reading) or Christ's own faith or faithfulness (the 'subjective' reading)? Michael Bird and Preston Sprinkle have compiled essays on this debate, seeking to 'lead others to understand more properly what the debate is about, what the main options are, what is at stake, and why there is a debate in the first place' (p. xiii). Beyond that, they manage to include some voices and proposals that are either new to the debate or as yet underappreciated.

Bird introduces the volume and the debate. His essay is followed by two background studies: Debbie Hunn's account of the history of the debate in the twentieth century and the linguistic analysis of Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts. Exegetical essays appear at the hand of Douglas Campbell (on Romans 3:22), Barry Matlock (on Gal 2-3, Rom 3, and Philippians 3), Paul Foster (on Eph and Philippians), and Richard Bell (also on Eph and Philippians). 'Fresh approaches' are then provided by Mark Seifrid (arguing for a reading of the phrase as faith brought by Christ: a source genitive), Francis Watson (showing that the rendering of the phrase is bound up with Paul's reading of Hab 2:4 in a non-Messianic manner), Preston Sprinkle (who looks to Gal 3 for help in understanding the phrase as a reference to the Christ-event or the gospel message itself), and Ardel Caneday (who surveys the function of the phrase in Galatians as a whole). The wider New Testament witness is brought in to test the canonical fittingness of differing interpretations, with contributions from Peter Bolt (the synoptic Gospels and Acts), Willis Salier (John's Gospel), Bruce Lowe (Jas 2), and David DeSilva (Rev). Finally, Mark Elliott addresses the history of interpretation with a keen eye to patristic and medieval exegesis, and Benjamin Myers considers the approach of Karl Barth as a helpful framework for the debate.

This volume attempts to survey the territory by including perspectives on linguistic, exegetical, canonical, and theological aspects of the debate. In most respects, it should be viewed as a success in that it fairly represents the current state of discussion and even offers new proposals for possible paths forward. Essays by Watson and Sprinkle are especially fruitful, suggesting new paths forward. The contrasting interpretations of Foster and Bell showcase careful exegesis going in two directions, provid-

ing an illuminating point/counterpoint for students new to the debate. Bird's introduction and Matlock's essay would also serve well as introductions. There is much to celebrate here, and much from which those as yet uninitiated and those familiar to the debate may learn.

The biggest lacunae are surely the missing chapter on Christ and faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the pressing need for a dogmatic analysis of the whole issue. Too many of these essays continue to overload the debate with significance that it cannot possibly bear: with the 'subjective' reading fuelling a supposed 'christocentric' approach to Paul and the 'objective' reading funding an 'anthropocentric' (and individualistic) paradigm (e.g. pp. 68-71). Watson goes some way to showing that such cataclysmic claims are altogether inaccurate (p. 159), and Myers suggests that Barth managed to avoid any reductionistic dichotomy between 'christocentric' and 'anthropocentric' approaches, but a wider doctrinal proposal would further solidify these promising analyses. All told, then, this book goes far in sustaining a viable and vital conversation, but the debate still needs to include more synthetic analysis.

R. Michael Allen, Knox Theological Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, FL USA

Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Edited by Cilliers Breytenbach and Jörg Frey. WUNT 205; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007. ISBN 978-3-16-149252-5. xiii + 364 pp. £80.00.

This volume represents a mixture of New Testament scholars and Systematicians discussing the place of New Testament Theology (NTT) within the wider domain of New Testament studies and theology. The monograph was occasioned by the publication of Ferdinand Hahn's two volume *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2002).

The opening essay by J. Frey presents a very thorough overview of the issues that NTTs have wrestled with since J.P. Gabler's distinction between biblical theology and dogmatic theology. These issues include the meaning of 'theology', the limitation of a canon, unity and diversity, and history and dogma. R. Hoppe summarizes the contributions of Catholic scholars to NTT in the twentieth century (Schlier, Schelke, Gnilka, Weiser, Thusing) and proceeds to discuss the church's role in the making of a NTT. J. Reumann looks at the utility of biblical theology in an ecclesial and ecumenical context where he gives an overview of the state of biblical theology in the USA and notes different functions of the Bible in various ecclesial settings. Robert Morgan notes in his essay that the NTT genre has been very much a German and Lutheran endeavour. He notes trends and tensions in the field of NTT and proposes his own 'Anglican' approach that is more canonically shaped than merely an exercise

in *Sachkritik*. He would approach NTT with Gospels (Part I), authentic Pauline letters (Part II), and the rest of the NT (Part III).

Jürgen Becker tackles the subject of theological history or theology of the New Testament as alternatives to the study of the religious history of early Christianity. Largely in dialogue with Ferdinand Hahn, Becker strives to integrate historical and theological perspectives in the task of NTT. Jens Schröter analyzes the interpretation of the canon for a theology of the New Testament where he identifies the canon as part of the religious growth of early Christianity and not necessarily an artefact opposed to a religious-historical approach to the New Testament. François Vouga sets forth several theses and hypotheses about the task of NTT as it relates to hermeneutics, history, and the church in his essay 'Die Aufgaben der Theologie des Neuten Testaments'. Heikki Räisänen advocates a move 'Towards an Alternative New Testament Theology' in the Wredean tradition that focuses on religious history instead of theology. To that end, he examines different concepts of divine and human roles in the economy of salvation in early Christianity. He identifies a plurality of views and finds a shared core belief restricted to (a) God's mercy and grace are indispensable but only effective when humans cooperate with it; and (b) the Messiah is indispensable as the indicative element of salvation. C.K. Barrett examines the link between history and theology in 'Historia Theologiae Genetrix' by looking at issues in Paul, John, and Jesus that show how history can flow into theology. James Dunn's essay 'Not so much "New Testament Theology" as "New Testament Theologizing"' believes that the primary task is 'theologizing' rather than 'theology'. That means an ongoing engagement with the living world of the texts and contexts of the New Testament. Johan S. Vos engages the topic of 'Theologie als Rhetorik' that looks at NTT in light of British, American, and German studies on rhetoric. For Vos, rhetoric is a way of identifying a core and contingency in the NT.

The final section of the book represents a number of engagements with NTT from the vantage point of Systematic Theology. Contributors include Notger Slenczka, Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, Peter Neuner, Wolf Kröotke, Karl Kardinal Lehmann. There is a final afterword by Ferdinand Hahn at the close of the book. Hahn's afterword engages with several of the essays and affirms the challenges of doing NTT that were identified in the volume.

The book is dense, but is a good synopsis of debates and currents in academia about NTT, especially in dialogue with Ferdinand Hahn. The introduction by Frey was a very good opener to the book and to the subject. The essays by Schröter, Morgan, Barrett, and Dunn were the most

helpful in my mind. This is a very technical volume. But anyone engaging the subject of NTT at a serious depth will want to access it at some point.

Michael F. Bird, Crossway College, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Paul and Scripture. By Steve Moyise. London: SPCK, 2010. ISBN 978-0-281-06103-7. viii + 151 pp. £12.99.

Steve Moyise adds to an extensive list of publications on the use of the Old Testament in the New this volume on Paul's use of scripture. Less of a focused argument than an extensive exploration, *Paul and Scripture* investigates how Paul uses and interprets various parts of the scriptures of Israel. After some introductory notes, the first four chapters assess Paul's engagements with various parts of the Pentateuch, beginning with creation (ch 1) and then looking at Abraham (ch 2), Moses (ch 3), and the Law (ch 4). Two chapters cover the prophets, one focusing on Israel and the Gentiles (ch 5), the other covering life in Christian community (ch 6). After one chapter on the writings, with special attention to the Psalms (ch 7), Moyise concludes with a survey of modern approaches to Paul and scripture (ch 8).

As this outline indicates, Moyise chooses to follow the Old Testament as the organizing principle rather than the order of the quotations in Paul's letters. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages for the reader. On the positive side, Moyise is able to draw attention to passages that command more of Paul's attention, reflecting on ways that the passages themselves have shaped Paul's thinking. Moreover, by assessing various employments of the same passage side-by-side, Moyise is able to draw the reader's attention to the diversity of ways in which Paul might interpret or deploy a given OT story. One of the greatest strengths of this approach comes when Moyise takes the opportunity to explore both the original author's intent and Paul's Christologically reinterpreted use of the passage in question, thus highlighting the differences.

The drawback to Moyise's approach is that his allusions to Paul's letters, and the significance of the OT passage being cited there, can at times be difficult to follow. In addition, the import of Paul's citations for the arguments in which they appear in the letters is lost. What the book gains in drawing attention to various uses to which Paul might put a single OT passage it often loses in the area of helping the reader make sense of Paul's letters themselves.

The other major strength of the book comes when Moyise engages different scholars' approaches to a given passage or issue. When this is done, the book becomes much sharper. It could have profited from more of such engagements. In particular, the reviewer would have liked to see direct

engagements with scholars who explain Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament as giving little more than the natural, grammatical-historical reading of the passage in question. While Moyise presents considerable evidence to the contrary of such a position, the overall lack of explicit engagement with such potential conversation partners might leave the full ramifications of his project underappreciated by some readers.

In all, Moyise has written an accessible introduction to Paul's use of the scriptures of Israel. The book provides pastors and seminary students with a solid overview of the Old Testament as it impacts Paul's writing and it raises several guideposts for those who wish to delve deeper into this exciting field of study.

J.R. Daniel Kirk, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA USA

An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible. By Walter Brueggemann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8006-6363-6. xx + 212 pp. £14.99.

This is a revision of portions of Brueggemann's 1997 *Theology of the Old Testament*, namely Part 3, 'Israel's Unsolicited Testimony'. The topic is worthy of further attention in its own volume because it addresses a timely and relatively unexplored dimension of Old Testament theology: 'the God of ancient Israel... is *a God in relationship*, who is ready and able to make commitments and who is impinged upon by a variety of "partners" who make a difference in the life of God' (p. xi). To put it another way, the God of Israel is in dialogue with numerous parties, and that dialogue—by virtue of what the very term connotes—is 'potentially transformative for all parties... including God' (p. xii). Foundational to Brueggemann's thesis is that the Old Testament's own portrayal of God leads invariably to this conclusion.

Brueggemann begins in chapter one with an important and programmatic point that is central to his argument. He reminds his largely Christian readership that YHWH is portrayed in the Old Testament as a 'dialogical character'. Rather than an apathetic sovereign or philosophical principle, YHWH 'is a fully articulated personal agent, with all the particularities of personhood and with a full repertoire of traits and actions that belong to a fully formed and actualized person' (p. 2). In order to embrace this biblically demonstrable characteristic of God, Brueggemann encourages Christians to refrain from tidying up the text by imposing foreign theological categories, and instead to allow the complexities of the text to stand as is. This is to say, Brueggemann is asking Christians to adopt a Jewish model of reading, which embraces the provisional quality of all readings of Scripture rather than the Christian tendency to provide

closure. The Old Testament itself, because of its dialogical nature, not only invites but also demands such an open hermeneutical posture.

The heart of the book is Brueggemann's patient review of four of God's dialogue partners that are not only prominent in the Old Testament but 'continue to be front and center in our contemporary world' (p. xiii): Israel; the Human Person; the Nations; and Creation. The resulting portrait of God is in tension with classical theology, where God's being in relationship is characterized by his immutability, aseity, and sovereignty, not his willingness to take risks and engage in actual give and take with his creation. Certainly some theologians will protest that such a God is not very God-like. But Brueggemann understands these classical formulations of God, that focus primarily on his omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, to take inadequate account of what the Bible says about God.

Such a classical one-sided portrayal of God is 'no longer adequate or satisfying for either faith or intellect', and Brueggemann finds a way forward by engaging the 'complex, dynamic, and fluid character of the faith of ancient Israel' (p. xii). Questioning traditional Protestant doctrinal formulations, therefore, is not naïve or trendy, but necessary in view of the disjunction between those formulations and the biblical data. The Hebrew Bible presents a God who is affected by those with whom he is in dialogue. He is moved, persuaded, angered, convinced; he loves, enjoys, rejoices, pities—in short, everything one might expect of someone who is in true relationship with another. Any Christian reader, regardless of his or her own portrait of God, will need to account for the plentiful biblical data. Brueggemann's treatment is a compelling place to start.

Peter Enns, Lansdale, PA USA

The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate. By John H. Walton. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8308-3704-5. 193 pp. £9.99.

John Walton is a professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, and his new book is short, ambitious, and original. His goal is to show that Genesis has nothing to do with science and thus can be accommodated to Darwinian biology. First, he argues that 'people in the ancient world believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, *but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered system*' (p. 26; his italics). In other words, the author of Genesis thought that things do not really exist until 'people (or gods) are there to benefit from functions' (p. 27). Genesis accepts (as does Walton) that God created the material that comprises the

universe. Nevertheless, Walton is convinced that the Bible evinces absolutely no interest in how or when God brought matter into being.

Second, Walton wagers that Genesis teaches the purpose of the cosmos is to give God a place for divine rest. Walton shows that ancient Near Eastern religions typically treat temples as microcosms of creation. In Egyptian temples, for example, floors represent the earth, columns are decorated with plant life, and ceilings symbolize the sky. Genesis, according to Walton, reverses this relationship by using Temple imagery to illustrate how God constructs the cosmos as a kind of temple. The six days of creation are the installation of the cosmic temple furniture, one could say, while the seventh day is God making himself at home.

Both of these points are creatively presented, but there is little if any biblical evidence and even less theological or philosophical warrant for holding either of them. Indeed, this book gets into so many exegetical and theological conundrums, if not downright contradictions, that it demonstrates how far some scholars will go to make Genesis look like anything but an account of the origin of all things.

Let me make several points. First, Walton is not clear about what function (his key term) means. At one point he says, 'Creation thus constituted bringing order to the cosmos from an originally nonfunctional condition' (p. 35). This means that whatever existed before creation was fundamentally changed by becoming informed with purpose (chaos turned into cosmos). Presumably, for something nonfunctional to become functional, it has to go through substantial, visible alteration. Function is merely an alteration in how we perceive something. Contradicting this insight, however, Walton frequently claims that divine creation as depicted in Genesis did not change the material or empirical aspect of the world in any way. Creation for the Israelites, he argues, simply meant 'assigning functions', (p. 46), and a function means that something becomes meaningful to humans. In fact, Walton equates functionalism with the idea that 'in Genesis, creation is not set up for the benefit of God but for the benefit of humanity' (p. 69). In other words, Genesis gives the world an anthropomorphic feel, but tells us nothing about what the world actually (re: scientifically) is. (Walton admits that the great sea creatures of day five do not appear to serve any purpose for humanity, but he tries to save his thesis by declaring that Genesis tells us that these creatures have a purpose for God.)

The problems with this account of functionalism are deep and wide. To suggest that the Israelites (or any ancient people other than the Greeks, for that matter) distinguished form and substance so clearly attributes a metaphysical depth to them that they did not possess. Indeed, Walton's definition of function—that looking at what a thing does involves

bracketing how a thing exists—is utterly modern (even, one dares to say, Husserlian). The Greeks, of course, underwent tortuous metaphysical complexities in trying to understand what matter is shorn of form, but I do not think those metaphysical difficulties led the author of Genesis to focus solely on the function, rather than the origin, of the various kinds of things in the world. In fact, Walton's separation of purpose from the origin of things is made possible only by a Darwinian worldview. Darwinism teaches that purpose is in the mind of the beholder, rather than being an aspect of things in themselves, and that is precisely what Walton thinks Genesis teaches. Ironically, his attempt to save Genesis from evolutionary critique ends up reading Darwin back into the minds of the biblical writers.

Second, Walton does not consistently follow his own hermeneutical principle, which is a strict adherence to the intention of the author. This principle is, of course, extremely problematic with regard to the creation account in Genesis, and, in fact, Walton offers virtually no source criticism or analysis of the original audience of the text. But the real problem is that he repeatedly muddles and often downright violates this principle when he insists that 'it was not God's purpose to reveal the details of cosmic geography' (p. 18). That is a theological, not a hermeneutical point, and cannot be based on an analysis of what the original author thought. Moreover, he even contradicts this point when he admits that Genesis does teach cosmic geography. For example, he writes that the Israelites, like all ancient peoples, believed in a solid sky, so that, if the Hebrew term for firmament 'is to be taken in its normal contextual sense, it indicates that God made a solid dome to hold up waters above the earth' (p. 57). So how can Genesis reduce creation to mere functionalism while at the same time depicting how God created a solid dome to hold back the cosmic waters? Walton deals with this problem by declaring, 'We should not worry about the question of 'truth' with regard to the Bible's use of Old World science' (p. 61). In other words, Genesis does refer to material origins—how things got to where they are and what they are doing there, not just what they mean to us—but if we interpret Genesis to refer only to functions, then we will more easily accommodate the Bible to Darwinian science. Thereby Walton undermines his own hermeneutical principle in order to facilitate Christian acceptance of evolution.

Third, his theology of biblical authority is inconsistent and confusing.

He appeals to similarities between Genesis and other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts to make his key points, even though he also insists he believes 'the nature of the Bible to be very different from anything else that was available in the ancient world' (p. 13). He is also convinced that God would not inspire an ancient text to speak to modern

scientific problems. He supports this move by insisting that, 'Through the entire Bible, there is not a single instance in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture' (p. 19). Yet the idea that God can inspire authors to convey meanings that transcend their own particular culture is the foundation of any theory of divine inspiration.

Fourth, he presents minimal evidence that the Israelites considered the cosmos to be a divine temple. Indeed, Genesis is much closer to describing the Garden of Eden as God's holy place than the world as a whole. Heaven is the location of God's throne, not the earth, which is a mere footstool (Isa 66:1-2). Where are the sacrifices, if the cosmos is God's temple? And what happens to Walton's anthropomorphism if the world is now seen as a place God made just for himself? Scholars are not even sure if Israel practiced enthronement festivals at their Temple, which makes the idea that the six days of creation are an inauguration account of the world as God's Temple a real stretch. The Bible is full of evidence that Solomon's Temple was connected to the Genesis creation account (Solomon gives a speech with seven sections and so on), but arguing the reverse—that divine creation is a template of temple construction—is another matter altogether. The Israelites were much too wary about pantheism and divine combat myths to depict the cosmos as a temple.

Fifth, and finally, Walton unequivocally rejects any attempt to accommodate Genesis to Darwinian science (he groups such attempts under the rubric of concordism), yet that is precisely his own goal. Indeed, he devotes more pages to arguing why his approach is better suited to Darwinism than he does to defending his particular interpretation of Genesis. In his anxiety to demonstrate that Genesis has nothing to do with science (ancient or modern) and that its meaning is purely religious and symbolic, he ends up where all liberal interpretations of Genesis end up—a concordism of a higher order.

Stephen H. Webb, Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN USA

The Historical Jesus: Five Views. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8308-3868-4. 312 pp. £14.99.

The book under review brings together essays on the historical Jesus by five scholars, whose views are quite diverse. Following each essay are four responses by the other four scholars. It makes for interesting reading and, in a way, creates a measure of coherence that normally would not be found in a collection of studies.

The book begins with an excellent introduction to the quest of the historical Jesus. The editors trace the quest from Reimarus to Schweitzer,

from Schweitzer to Käsemann, from Käsemann to James Robinson and others, and from the 1980s to the present. Major figures during this period include Ben Meyer, E.P. Sanders, John Meier, N.T. Wright, and some of the members of the North American Jesus Seminar (Borg, Crossan, Funk, and the like). The balance of the introduction is given over to an assessment of assumptions, goals, methods, and prospects. This probing discussion is alone worth the price of the book.

The order of chapters begins with the most radical perspective and moves toward the most conservative. First up is Robert Price who thinks the evidence for Jesus is so thin that we may wonder if he really existed at all. What leads Price to this eccentric position (which is followed by almost no bona fide historian) is the presence of many parallels with other traditions. What Price fails to do is to make the distinction between the historical figure (be it Jesus of Nazareth, Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar), on the one hand, and the way this person's story is told (with implicit or explicit comparisons with epic events of the past or myths or whatever), on the other hand. Alexander and Caesar do not "vanish" because those who narrated their lives and accomplishments sometimes indulged in myth-making. Neither does Jesus, even if it turns out that the evangelists presented his activities and teachings in the idiom and imagery of Old Testament Scripture.

Next comes Dominic Crossan who rightly emphasizes Jesus' place in the context of the Roman Empire. Jesus, Crossan believes, taught his disciples to resist evil (oppression, violence, injustice) in non-violent ways. For Luke Timothy Johnson, questers go astray in seeking after the details of the historical Jesus and neglecting to embrace the living Jesus today. James Dunn does not agree, arguing instead that the faith of Jesus' followers provides the 'surest indication of the historical reality and effect of his mission' (p. 202). Dunn is rightly critical of the criterion of dissimilarity that insists that the authentic Jesus be different from his Jewish context and what his dear to his own followers. And finally, Darrell Bock, relying on multiply attested material, cites a number of actions that Jesus almost certainly performed (e.g., associating with sinners, proclaiming God's kingdom) and things that almost certainly happened to Jesus (e.g., condemned for blasphemy, executed as king of the Jews) that provide pretty clear indications of Jesus' aims, which in turn cohere with the four portraits of Jesus provided by the evangelists.

Space does not permit discussion of the mostly excellent and insightful responses to the five essays. Readers will find them very helpful. The publisher and editors are to be commended for putting together a collection of studies that clarify many important issues so well.

Craig A. Evans, Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada

The Historical Jesus of the Gospels. By Craig S. Keener. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8028-6292-1. 869 pp. £40.99.

Reading Craig Keener is an event. Whether it is his commentaries or his other topical treatments on subjects pastoral and theological, Keener is always worth reading. He has a penchant for leaving readers with a helpful overview both of scholarly arguments and of the historical perplexities surrounding texts. His handle on both primary and secondary sources is remarkable.

The Historical Jesus of the Gospels is par for the Keener course. Though the bulk of the book is an intimidating sight—the book nears 700 pages!—the actual reading of the volume is surprisingly manageable. The reader need only read 349 pages to walk away with a beginner's grasp of the issues surrounding the study of the historical Jesus, the main players and ideas currently operative, and a sense of what the sources for historical reconstruction are. The other chunk of the book is a vast expanse of endnotes, appendixes, indexes and bibliography. In this sense, the book is really two books in one: the first half or so for the general reader and the second for the more advanced and daring student.

Keener's guiding assumption throughout the project is that 'there is much that we can know about Jesus historically, and that the first-century Gospels preserved by the church remain by far the best source for this information' (p. 349). In Keener's estimation, talk about the "historical Jesus" invariably centres on the 'nature of our sources'; this 'is the primary subject of this book" (p. xxxii). This is key for Keener: his focus is not on reconstructing another portrait of Jesus but on the nature of the historical sources themselves. Nevertheless, Keener does offer something of a profile, suggesting that 'Jesus prophetically summoned his people to prepare for the kingdom, offering radical ethical demands to prepare them for it. But Jesus himself had a mission that would involve confronting the ruling elite, as the powerful figures of this present age, and lead to his martyrdom. This, too, was connected to the coming kingdom, a connection understood by his followers in terms of the resurrection' (p. 164).

The book is divided into three main sections: 'Disparate Views about Jesus'; 'The Character of the Gospels'; and 'What We Learn about Jesus from the Best Sources'. Sadly, Keener decides to bracket out any discussion on miracles for a 'separate work' (p. xxxii). But given the size of the volume as it currently stands it was perhaps the right move.

Despite its glowing strengths and shrewd judgments—and it is difficult to overstate them—there are a few deficiencies worth noting. Keener is heavily swayed by an eschatological framework for understanding the mission of Jesus. This is fine. But to suggest that those who doubt such an

orientation are paying 'insufficient attention to Jesus' immediate Jewish environment' strikes me as too much (p. 18). As Fiorenza has argued, "eschatology" is a social construction, and the realities behind the label of "eschatology" are hardly as neat as often purported. I confess I was a bit uncertain what Keener was on about with respect to what seemed like equating later sources (non-canonical "Gospels") with the "lives of Jesus" from nineteenth-century Germany (p. 48). There is a notable difference in using third or fourth century texts which may or may not be appropriating authentic memories of the historical figure and scholarly reconstructions eighteen hundred years later. I was also a bit unsure what it means to speak of "literary liberties" on the part of ancient historians and biographers (p. 127). The aim of the so-called quest for the historical Jesus is to present Jesus *in the common vernacular.* It is precisely *because* sensibilities are different that (modern) historical reconstructions persist. I also wonder if his assertion that 'early Christians plainly did not indulge the temptation to create answers for their own situations in the Jesus tradition preserved in the Synoptics' (p. 143) seems to be in tension with the favourable quote of E.P. Sanders on page 150. The fashioning of the Gospel material betrays communal concerns. Moreover, sprinkled throughout the volume are statements like 'Christians would not have invented this' or the like (e.g. pp. 258, 260, 290, 331). Frankly, such statements strike me as a bit too confident. From time to time there are odd repetitions—sometimes verbatim (pp. 93 and 127; 434 n.106 and 436 n. 8; 439 n. 64 and 443 n. 44; and 435 n. 130 and 458 n. 198), and here and there the project feels a bit apologetical—perhaps stemming from a conversion from atheism (pp. xxxv, 383-88)?

But these criticisms hardly soften the enthusiastic recommendation from this reviewer. The book is a model in the rigorous handling of sources, judicious selection of thematic investigation, organization of material, clarity of thought, and charity toward opposing voices. In the so-called quest for the historical Jesus, Craig Keener is an admirable guide.

Michael J. Thate, University of Durham

World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age. By C. Kavin Rowe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-1953-7787-3. x + 300 pp. £40.00.

Kavin Rowe teaches New Testament at Duke Divinity School and has quickly established himself as an authoritative voice on Luke's writings. Having previously written on Luke with his well-received *Early Narrative Christology,* he now turns his attention to Luke's second volume. Reading

Acts within its Graeco-Roman context, he finds that Luke does not have an apologetic purpose, but writes for his fellow Christians. His aim is that of culture-formation (p. 4). That is, Luke directs his readers' attention to the manner in which the knowledge of God is instantiated or embodied in the life of Christian communities. The knowledge of God, according to Rowe, is a community that functions as an utterly unique body politic.

In the first stage of his argument, Rowe describes how the worship of the Christian God directly confronts all forms of pagan religious behaviour. Because day-to-day life patterns are the embodiments of religious 'belief', the holistic Christian way of life—socially, economically, and politically—stands utterly unique in the Graeco-Roman world and is incommensurate with any other way of life. The inevitable collision between Christians and their surrounding cultural contexts arises from the breach between God and his world (p. 50). Worship of the one true God, therefore, will inevitably confront and collide with forms of life that embody idolatry and ignorance, resulting in cultural destabilization.

This effect of the Christian mission is not because of any subversive or seditious impulse, however, as Rowe argues in chapter 3. In fact, when Roman officials have opportunity to rule on leaders of the Christian movement, they judge in their favour, finding no fault with them. This is so because 'Paul and his crowd preach the resurrection of the dead Jesus, not the treasonous overthrow of Rome' (p. 87).

We have, then, this tension: Christians proclaim repentance unto an alternative form of life, destabilizing established cultural patterns. At the same time, however, they eschew treason and sedition and do not seek to gain political power nor march on Rome. This tension, as Rowe demonstrates in chapter 4, is the necessary correlate of the Lordship of Jesus and the communal performance of this reality. That is to say, when Christian communities embody the reality of the resurrected Lord Jesus (i.e., holistic worship of God as the 'body of Christ' on earth), a collision with idolatrous forms of life is inevitable, and a resistance of the temptation to grab for power.

This is a work of impressive scholarship. Rowe engages the literature on Acts and an astonishing range of Graeco-Roman sources without producing laborious prose. Rowe has also given a wonderful gift to the church. Pastors preaching through Acts will do very well to begin with this volume as it provides a compelling vision of ecclesial life as the covenanted community of alternative and life-giving practices that bears witness to the God who raised Jesus from the dead. His articulation of this reality fires the imagination with possibilities for cultivating contempo-

rary practices that will simultaneously confront the world and announce the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

Timothy G. Gombis, Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH USA

In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity. By Hal Taussig. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8006-6343-8. x + 262 pp. £25.99.

It is generally a delight to read a work produced by a mature scholar which builds on a lifetime of study of a single aspect of early Christianity. Hal Taussig's *In the Beginning Was the Meal* is just such a book. Taussig's expressed intention is 'to study a major social practice of early Christians and ask what the social practice says about early Christian identities' (p. 9). He has admirably accomplished his objective in this engaging and stimulating scholarly monograph.

His treatment ranges from (a) careful social description of Hellenistic meals and their Christian parallels to (b) a sophisticated consideration of how social identity was constructed in the context of specifically Christian gatherings. Taussig (correctly in my view) finds the stylized setting of the Hellenistic meal—where eating together (the *deipnon*) preceded a more informal time of entertainment and interaction (the *symposium*)—to be the primary social environment in which the early Christians met together to negotiate both in-group social relations and their stance vis-à-vis the dominant Roman imperial culture. The more theoretical portions of the book (where Taussig draws upon ritual analysis and social identity theory) will appeal to some readers more than others, while the background materials on Hellenistic meals alone are worth the price of the book.

The payoff of Taussig's study for our understanding of the NT is considerable. Any attempt to read early Christian texts through the lens of a single social practice will necessarily be somewhat reductionistic. This is both a strength and a weakness of this treatment. Not all of the readings convince. One wonders, for example, whether a meal is actually in view in the *koinonia* of 1 John 1:1-3.

Given the centrality of meals in early Christianity, however, most of the Taussig's interpretations are at least plausible, and many are, in fact, quite probable. Two examples will suffice. Consider Taussig's understanding of Ephesians 5:18-19 ('Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts', NRSV). This reviewer's tendency (as an individualistic Westerner) is to read the initial prohibition (v. 18a) in terms of personal morality and

the rest of the passage (vv. 18b-19) in terms of activities at a formal church service. Taussig convincingly demonstrates that this text assumes the *symposium* portion of a (Christian) Hellenistic meal, where wine-drinking and the singing of songs (often hymns to a god) were the norm. The second chapter of Galatians also potentially benefits from Taussig's meal paradigm. Given the importance of the vexing issue of table fellowship in Galatians 2, Taussig may very well be right to suggest that the 'right hand of fellowship' in 2:9 refers not to a handshake but, rather, 'to having a meal together where—according to standard practice—one ate only with the right hand' (p. 50).

Finally, a word about the author's theological location as a NT scholar: Taussig is not evangelical. To be sure, his treatment is not beset by the extreme historical pessimism characteristic of some minimalist scholarly traditions, and the focus on social practice will prove helpful to readers of all theological persuasions. Nonetheless, Taussig's methodology is almost exclusively constructivist in its orientation. To his credit, he is explicit about his approach from the outset: 'It is not possible to account for Christian beginnings by identifying who the founding figure was, what the essential beliefs were, what the guiding social principles were, or what transformative event triggered it all' (p. ix). Readers of this journal, many of whom will disagree with this categorical assertion, will nevertheless benefit significantly from Taussig's study of the importance of meals as the social context for the negotiation of early Christian theology and community formation.

Joseph H. Hellerman, Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA USA

When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community. By Joseph H. Hellerman. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8054-4779-8. v + 231 pp. £17.99.

This volume explores the metaphor of family for Christian community in the first few centuries of the church. It subsequently considers how these ancient aspects of church life might be recaptured in today's churches (principally engaging with the contemporary, 'individualist', American, evangelical scene).

The identity of the individual in ancient Mediterranean society was bound up with the group, and the individual was expected to give priority to the needs of the group when making decisions. A person's strongest group affiliation was that of his or her family. Within this family context, the relationship and solidarity between siblings offered the closest relational bond in the ancient world, closer even than that between husband and wife, or parent and child. It is this familial/sibling bond that lies at

the foundation of the Jesus movement. This bond is further extended by a counter-cultural prioritizing of the fictive 'sibling' relationships of the church family even over one's natural family and siblings. Thus, for Paul, his contemporary conceptions of sibling language are at the heart of his church values, including unity, loyalty, solidarity, and material needs. These remained core, admired features for the first three centuries of the Christian church.

Subsequent sections of the book focus on the consequent conclusion that salvation should distinctively be worked out in a community context (rather than individually). One's relationship with God's people is integral to one's restored relationship with God, and is evidenced by radical solidarity with the church family, rather than consumerist individuality. The 'group comes first' philosophy means that one's own life decisions are made with a view to the over-riding priority of the good of the broader Christian group within which one is embedded.

This volume offers a profound challenge to dominant patterns of church, which both assume and pander to Western consumerist individualism. It helpfully highlights ways in which contemporary notions of family and brother/sister are so very different from ancient concepts. This allows Hellerman to redress widespread misreading of the Bible, which transpose onto the familiar vocabulary of the New Testament meanings that are quite alien to the original authors and contexts.

In my view, the only anomaly, in an otherwise consistently compelling picture, are elements of the chapter on 'Leadership in the Family of God'. It is clear that Hellerman is making a critique of the executive, senior pastor model, so prevalent in American, evangelical churches. His argument is based, in large measure, on evidence that a plurality of leaders is a fundamental feature of the earliest Christian communities. The anomaly, as I see it, occurs at two points. First, the post-New Testament period was one which witnessed the emergence of the singularly preeminent leader over a large congregation – notwithstanding Hellerman's evidence for its continuing, strong focus on community. Secondly, it seems to me that the Pauline communities, by virtue of their 'household' setting were fundamentally focused on a single, 'head of household' model (the overseer). Key to this, of course, was the basic unit of a local church consisting in a number of related small, domestically-located groups, each with its own head (overseer), rather than a single, large congregation. The role, authority, and sphere of influence of the plurality of elders differed from those of the overseer, who alone had pastoral jurisdiction for his own small, household group. The metaphor of the church as family is most strongly played out in such small groups, with their overseeing head of household. This feature of the early Pauline congregations offers further support to

the 'church as family' motif, while nonetheless opposing the 'executive' model, in which power lies in the size of a single, centralized congregation together with a complex hierarchy of subordinate leaders. Paternal authority was at the heart of the ancient family, and was a feature also of the Pauline communities (including Paul's relationship with them). Paul's 'family' model lay in adopting and adapting the widespread model of an authoritative 'head of household' (overseer), and combining it with the equally widely understood model of a 'village eldership', which had a different role and sphere of influence.

Although a book clearly aimed at local church leaders (including those with roots in the emerging church scene), rather than academics (there are few footnotes and no bibliography), this volume is the product of much detailed research, especially during the 1990s, together with many years of reflection on pastoral praxis. Joe Hellerman writes as both Professor of New Testament language and literature at Talbot School of Theology, and one of the pastors at an evangelical church in California which is seeking to focus on church as family. This book is readable and challenging, and I highly commend it.

Andrew D. Clarke, University of Aberdeen

Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition. By Paul Avis. London: T & T Clark, 2008. ISBN 978-0-5670-3357-4. 234 pp. £25.00.

Paul Avis has quietly emerged as one of the premier Anglican and Protestant theologians of his generation. The author and editor of over two dozen books, he has written extensively on ecclesiology, ecumenical theology, and – importantly for this book – on related fields of political and social thought. The latter have not always been brought to bear upon Christian thinking about the church, except in certain avowedly ideological contexts. But they should be, and Avis' book on the Conciliar Tradition provides a powerful case for why, historically, and how, more constructively.

'The right combination of conciliarity, collegiality and primacy is the Holy Grail of modern ecumenical dialogue', he writes (p. 184); but it has also proved the common goal for each separated church's self-ordering. Each depends on the other, Avis writes, noting that today 'all Christian churches are in the same boat' in terms of their ongoing failures to shape their own lives faithfully in this regard (p. 185). Understanding the Conciliar Tradition is an essential element in ecclesial health.

Much of Avis's volume constitutes an historical overview of this tradition, first articulated clearly by the late medieval Conciliar Movement

in response to the weakness of the Western church that culminated in the 'catastrophic event' of the Great Schism of 1378-1417 that divided the Roman church into two competing papal jurisdictions. The book traces, in a generally chronological fashion, the thinkers and main events from this period, and the outworking and revision of their ideas by Protestants, mainly, during the Reformation and after.

Along the way Avis teases out key elements of ecclesial life and self-definition, to which he returns in his final more analytic chapter: notions of the Common Good and Natural Law, especially, as they must continue to shape the Christian Church's existence. Avis argues that the common Conciliar Tradition both 'bridges' the apparent disjunctions among post-Reformation churches, but also provides the necessary tools for a 'realistic' understanding of the Church that can take account of human sin as it distorts, often destroys relations, and corrupts institutions and polities. The Conciliar Tradition's focus on the sociality of the Church, in terms of its forms, dynamics, and lived responsibilities remains a key basis for the contemporary healing and renewal of the churches in their life within the world.

This is a survey, but an analytic and evaluative one that lays out material, material that, as Avis notes, has been forgotten, especially by Protestants, and only fitfully and often antagonistically and narrowly reassessed by some Roman Catholics, all to our common detriment. As in all surveys, some important elements are lost or unduly diminished, others aligned in contestable ways (e.g. his treatment of Wycliffe). And, often, Avis tends to work with general concepts, rather than lived appropriations – there is no historical or social analysis of synodical life itself in its political outworking – so that the actual significance and risks of certain ideas from a Christian perspective are obscured. These drawbacks are minor.

Although the prose is not inspiring, Avis writes with a clarity, the cumulative force of which is quite powerful. With Francis Oakley's more Catholic-oriented *The Conciliarist Tradition* (2003), Avis has provided a superb historical and conceptual framework for ecclesial renewal that all Christians must seriously engage.

Ephraim Radner, Wycliffe College, Toronto

BOOK REVIEWS