Reviews

Augustine and the Trinity. By Lewis Ayres. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-83886-3. 376 pp. £50.

During the last twenty years of his life, in the midst of pressing pastoral business as a bishop and urgent theological polemics against Donatist, Pelagian and anti-Nicene currents, requiring a large correspondence, a constant flow of pamphlets and a preaching commitment that in itself would have made an impressive literary legacy, Augustine devoted his spare moments to two literary compositions of grand proportions, one on the church, the other on the godhead, the *City of God* and his *De Trinitate*, working on them for much of the time in parallel. Both were prompted by the external challenges of his day, but both went far beyond a response to challenges, becoming the vehicles of the exploratory and architectonic ambitions of his intellectual character. The long investment of time in their composition, the public standing of their author and the always-curious, never satiated circles of literary admirers ensured that both works suffered the fate of premature circulation in incomplete and unsatisfactory versions much to the author's annoyance while he was still working on them.

Each was to have an extensive influence on Western European thought, and to be subjected to a variety of conflicting interpretations. The twentieth century, which, for all its sins, has valued Augustine's foundational place in Western theology and philosophy more highly than any period since the Reformation, has seen major reappraisals of both these major works. That of the work on the Trinity has been slower coming, which is hardly surprising. It is a dense and daunting work to read, uncompromisingly philosophical in style and with none of the wide-ranging variety of interests and historiographical curiosity that serve to lighten the theological texture of the *City of God*. Yet in it, perhaps, the older Augustine came as close to revealing his heart as he had done as a young man in the *Confessions*. There is, indeed, much continuity between the long meditation on the first chapter of Genesis which concludes the earlier book and the interrogations of the *De Trinitate*, and the prayerful ardour which produced the most famous purple passages of Western literature burns again, though with a whiter, more intellectual heat in the later work.

The *De Trinitate* left much scope for misunderstanding, partly because of an unexpected structural conception. Dividing its fifteen books into two major sections of seven and eight books respectively, Augustine devotes the first of these to the main topics that had been in contention during the eighty-years of argument that arose from the repudiation of Arius at

the Council of Nicaea. The second develops a wholly original project, that of developing an understanding of the threefold godhead in parallel with an exploration of the dynamics of human thought itself, so taking seriously the claim that the mind of man was made in the image of God. Later this was to become a focus of controversy between East and West, especially when the influence of his speculations led to the unauthorised insertion in the West of the phrase 'and from the Son' into the confession of faith in the Holy Spirit of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. This, combined with his explicit reservations on the use of the term 'person' of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, helped to create a standard view of his approach which prevailed into the twentieth century. The West, the textbooks declared, under the influence of Augustine had favoured a more unitarian, the East, under the influence of the Cappadocians, a more trinitarian conception of the persons in the godhead. The view has even had some distinguished defenders among twentieth-century theologians. It has been a valuable achievement of the new scholarship on the work to pull the scholarly floor out from under these textbook caricatures.

How much else has been achieved is apparent from Lewis Ayres' new book, which will be at the centre of any future discussion of Augustine's trinitarianism. Professor Ayres' long involvement with the study of post-Nicene debates makes him the obvious figure to present what is, in effect, a *status quaestionis* on the reappraisal of Augustine's trinitarianism, drawing not only on work of his own but on the contributions of a range of scholars over the past forty years. At the centre of interest, now, is the first part of the *De Trinitate*, often dismissed in the past as a conventional *résumé* of prevailing orthodoxy before the interesting stuff began. It is much clearer now to what extent the two parts of the work support and suppose one another. The second half, meanwhile, is read not merely as a search for "psychological analogies" of the divine trinity, but as a spiritual pedagogy, training the eye of the mind to look beyond the image to the reality. The whole composition comes then to be seen as an unfolding sequence of explorations, a journey taken over twenty years in a spirit of prayer, rather than a statement of dogmatic conclusions. Much more in view, besides, is the use Augustine made of his Latin Nicene predecessors, Novatian, Damasus, Hilary, Ambrose, Marius Victorinus, as well as such minor figures as Optatus of Milevis, Phoebadius and Gregory of Elvira, who represent a Latin school of Nicene argument with its own preferred style and vocabulary, not merely occasional and compromised adaptations of the work of Greek-speaking pioneers.

The index page of Ayres' book declares the shift in emphasis: only two chapters of his twelve are devoted to the second half of the *De Trinitate*. The spotlight is to fall on the major doctrinal undertakings of the first part,

paying close attention to the chronology of the composition, on which we are now much better informed. Also of great importance—especially because of their past scholarly neglect—are Augustine's repeated engagements with the question of the Trinity in the first ten years of his authorship up to and including the *Confessions*. Here we are to be persuaded of two complementary things: Augustine has applied himself to the existing Latin interpretations of Nicene orthodoxy with a fidelity that has rarely been appreciated; his adaptation of the tradition has been in the service of his own major apologetic concerns, not least, in the early years, his concern to assert against sceptics and Manichaeans the intelligibility of the created world. There are constant anticipations, even in the earliest writings, of moves that will become weight-bearing in the mature trinitarian thought: the *proprium* of the Holy Spirit is already identified as Love in the *De moribus*, written before his return to Africa in 389, and as Gift a couple of years later in *De vera religione*. Especially illuminating is the spotlight Ayres throws on the local gathering of bishops at Hippo in 393, when the young intellectual presbyter was charged with presenting an account of the points at issue in trinitarian controversy—anticipatory of many episcopal gatherings since, where some theologian or other has been called in to acquaint their lordships with the faith they were ordained to teach and defend! Ayres effectively uncovers the extent of the theological reading Augustine did in preparation for his presentation (which we know as *De fide et symbolo*) and the way in which directions taken at that point were decisive for his subsequent thinking. It is to this study that Augustine's reticence about the use of the terms *natura* and *persona* is to be traced.

There are many other points at which Ayres' presentation of the findings of the new scholarship is likely to be the key point of reference in future discussion, not least the very carefully nuanced conclusions on the perennially fascinating question, 'Was Augustine a Neo-Platonist?' This book, then, is a significant milestone in Augustine scholarship—a moment at which doubts about regnant orthodoxies, new questions posed, new explorations successfully concluded over something like half a century converge to take over the role of a 'prevailing wisdom'. It is against these positions, and not against the textbooks on which we were brought up, that all future discussions will have to be measured. What it is certainly not is an easy introduction to the topic suitable for passing a relaxed hour of theological meditation. Although the author makes serious efforts to formulate his principle contentions clearly at the head of each section, they can hardly be appreciated unless the reader is prepared to plunge with him into the long passages of close exposition. He will need his copy of Augustine at hand—preferably in Latin, though a consistent attempt is

made to keep the argument accessible to those whose Latin is limited and who depend mainly on English translations.

Nothing was ever going to make this an easy book, but the author could possibly have done a little more to mitigate the difficulties than he has. An occasional witty allusion to a Hollywood movie is, to be sure, welcome relief, but not as welcome as a more carefully combed English style might have been, as well as clearer indications of how one paragraph follows another—even more explicit section-headings. To which minor complaint there is one other to be added. A major work of scholarship deserves scrupulously careful presentation, and this one is let down, whether as a result of slack proofreading or of electronic accidents in reproduction it is hard to say. The work sometimes known as *Eighty three Questions* and sometimes as *Various Questions* is referred to on one occasion by the unheard of title, *Eighty eight Questions*—if only Ayres could produce the extra five! Small errors in Greek and Latin orthography are mainly self-correcting for the reader informed enough to care about them, but there is one instance in which the argument of a whole page (p. 231) is made unintelligible by a careless failure to present the correct grammatical forms of the adjective *alius*.

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Orthodox Readings of Augustine. Edited by Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008. ISBN 978-08814-1327-4. 314 pp. $24.

Orthodox Readings of Augustine is a collection of papers presented at a 2007 conference, one which brought together scholars from several traditions to explore Augustine's relevance to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The essays expose readers to a long and complicated history of translation, circulation, and reception of Augustine's oeuvre in the Greek-speaking the world. I was surprised to learn, for instance, that no Greek translation of Augustine's works existed until the twelfth century (p. 12). More surprising still is that Orthodox theologians endorsed the Latin Father's legacy up to the late nineteenth century, when its theology came under the critical eye of Théodore de Régnon (1892). The familiar charge attributable to de Régnon (pp. 22, 87, 153–4, 195–6) is that Augustine privileged the divine essence over the divine persons, promulgating what many Orthodox believe to be fatal errors in the Western Trinitarian tradition (notably, the *filioque*). Though contributors from both traditions find this standard criticism conceptually wanting (even versions of it from Gunton and Zizioulas), it is also made clear that disagreements between 'East' and 'West' are not easily dismissed on the basis of mistaken assumptions.

The ecumenical aura that these scholars generate is offset in some ways, though enriched in others, by lingering confusions concerning Augustine's metaphysical heritage. The intra-volume dialogue between David Bentley Hart and David Bradshaw is a paradigm example. Hart's essay is a characteristically dense and ambitious discussion of 'metaphysics after Nicaea'. It proposes that fourth-century developments in theology East and West implicitly situated Christian thought in opposition to ontological schemes inherited from its (pagan) philosophical predecessors. A 'new conceptual language had to be formed' among first generations of Nicaean theologians, one which included apophatic strictures that Hart says played no less central a role in Augustine than they did in his Greek counterparts (pp. 206–8). Both Lewis Ayres and Jean-Luc Marion raise analogous claims, with Marion basing his case on the metaphysically loaded (mis-)translation of Augustine's term *idipsum* as 'Being-Itself'. What adjudicates 'apophaticism' in Augustine, however, is not how we render the meaning of certain terms but how we interpret Augustine's statements to the effect that the soul can directly perceive the divine essence. On this question, Bradshaw (and to some extent John Behr) arrives at a different answer. He claims outright, *pace* Hart, that Augustine 'rejects apophaticism'. To the 'key question of whether God is intrinsically an object of intellect... his answer is consistently affirmative' (p. 240).

This important debate will be a familiar one to students of Augustine. Nevertheless, it is not the only debate worth having. Later essays by Carol Harrison, David Tracy and Andrew Louth are illuminating in a different sense. Their focus rests largely on Augustine's sermons and commentaries, which they present as fruitful though often neglected departure points for evaluating his 'orthodox' credentials. Perhaps, they suggest, more need be said about Augustine the *pastor* than Augustine the *metaphysician*, a thought which has been echoed in more recent research on Augustine.

Orthodox Readings of Augustine gives members of both traditions a balanced and suggestive engagement with the famous, and infamous, fifth-century Bishop of Hippo. It opens up important questions for future ecumenical discussion, and lays the groundwork for rethinking Augustine in the light of both Eastern and Western traditions. Its only shortcoming is its incompleteness: a forgivable sin, perhaps, given it has shown us how much more work faces those of us who identify with 'East' or 'West'.

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The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times. By Charles Mathewes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6508-3. 288 pp. £12.99.

In The Republic of Grace, Charles Mathewes reflects theologically on today's world, particularly our public life in the West: our politics, and our problems. Mathewes, Professor of Religion at the University of Virginia, undertakes this quite intentionally as a Christian—even styling his book as 'a primer on politics for Christians' (p. 6)—and delves deeply into the human situation and its ambiguities, dissatisfied with tidy 'us versus them' schemes. In this task, his major conversation partner is Augustine of Hippo, whom Mathewes knows well, and who brings illumination to the analysis.

To summarize very briefly, Mathewes proposes that Christians ought to consider involvement in the politics of the nation-state as a worthy calling, although one also always fraught with risks and ambiguities as one attempts to exercise legitimate power and authority. Mathewes sets out the church's political task as embodying the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love; these are the 'distinctive contributions' that Christian citizens can make (p. 33). Of these he prioritizes hope as especially necessary in the contemporary West, suggesting that this is an essential element for any Christian serving in (or even thinking about) politics today.

According to Mathewes, this hope is not optimism but something engaged with the real: it recognizes the gap between what is and what should be, but does not expect to find 'the solution' to such a problem in history itself. Rather, hope for the Christian is eschatological, oriented towards God's coming new creation. This is the root of what he terms the 'eschatological imagination', which trusts that, in God, all will be well, yet without insisting that it knows just *how* all will be well. The effect of inhabiting this imagination is attentive engagement with the world (p. 39). Over against this, Mathewes places the 'apocalyptic imagination', which he describes as a temptation to believe we understand everything now and know precisely how all will work out; this renders any engagement with the actual world unnecessary. Although Mathewes does not weigh in on the partisan wrangling of the moment, one could find current examples of the 'apocalyptic imagination' with dismaying ease.

Mathewes elaborates this case through two sections, the first entitled 'seeing as Christians', the second, 'looking like Christians'. Through the first, he analyses what he sees as the contemporary cultural, social, and economic climate and how Christians might live in this context through the virtues of (in his ordering) hope, faith, and love. The second section changes focus and asks 'if Christians live those virtues, how might they

appear to others?' This section turns from analysis of society to a more constructive account of how Christians might be involved in politics and culture. Here, Mathewes discusses political authority and its relation to love; the value and limits of liberalism, particularly in relation to faith; and hope and an eschatological imagination shapes Christians' political engagements. For the Christian, Mathewes maintains, political involvement may even be, in some measure, 'sacramental' (pp. 158, 249).

Mathewes makes a persuasive and balanced case for Christian involvement in politics, attentive to the real perils of such a project, and eminently realistic about its potential success. In it, he steers a middle course between the Scylla of 'sectarianism' and the Charybdis of 'Constantinianism', the former of which would disdain any Christian involvement in politics, the latter of which would see no possible tension. This is a real strength of the work, yet also touches on a dissatisfaction of mine.

Perhaps for the sake of appealing to a broader audience, the work does not contain footnotes or endnotes. Instead, Mathewes provides an appendix with references and suggestions for further reading. This can be helpful, but there are points at which I really wanted him to corroborate his case with specific references. For example, on page 191, he contrasts 'two bad positions' Christians often take in relation to the polities we inhabit: collaboration or opposition. But there is no indication in the text of who specifically takes such positions, nor any reference in the appendix. This is too bad, as motivated students might have wanted to read further in this area, and motivated scholars might have wanted either to substantiate or contest Mathewes' point.

Those wanting an account of politics from a strictly biblical-exegetical perspective might best look elsewhere: this is not Mathewes' task. Likewise, those wanting Mathewes to fix his standard to one or another political party or ideology as 'the' Christian option will be disappointed. But if Mathewes is right about the value of hope, and an eschatological rather than an apocalyptic imagination (and I think he is), then perhaps this really is the book such folks *ought* to read. In any event, postgraduate students, as well as some advanced undergraduates and motivated seminarians will find here a readable, engaged and wise approach to the vexed questions of the church and politics.

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Race: A Theological Account. By J. Kameron Carter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-515279-1. 489 pp. £22.50.

The issue of race is multifaceted, politically and socially complex, and rhetorically volatile. But it is always considered to be important. Precisely

why race is considered important has long been a topic for psychologists and sociologists. The role of theology in the creation of race is not something that has received as much consideration, until now. J. Kameron Carter's excellent book opens up the debate around theology and race in fresh and exciting ways and offers a perspective that is not only deep and challenging but potentially transformative.

At the heart of Carter's argument is the suggestion that 'modernity's racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots'. In their striving for independent identity, the early Christians cast the Jewish people as a racial group who contrasted with Christians. In this sense race is created in the striving for identity. Western Christians in turn, ably assisted by theology and philosophy, began to perceive themselves as a racial group. Jewishness and the Jewish people were situated as belonging to the Orient; a culture and a race apart from the Christian west. Western culture began to take on an identity as specifically Christian. The creation of this distinction led to racialism, that is, the creation of distinct racial groups. Having racialised the Jewish people as 'a people of the Orient' and Judaism as a religion of the east, the door was open for the emergence in the early modern era, of assumptions about Jewish inferiority to Western Christians. Within this 'gulf enacted between Christianity and the Jews, the *racial*, which proves to be a *racist*, imagination was forged'. Viewed in this way race can be seen to be at root a deeply *theological* problem.

The book is divided into three parts. In part one Carter offers a theological account of modernity focusing on the work of Michel Foucault and Immanuel Kant. He carefully traces the movement from a racialised theology that sought to separate Christians from Jews, to a more racist theology that focused on people of African descent. The basic thesis of this section is that Western racism was something that was a direct invention of Christianity. Christianity had its origins in a Jewish sect. in order to develop its own identity it had to show clearly the ways in which it was separate from that sect. The creation of racial differences was a mark and a product of this process. Once this dynamic was achieved it wasn't difficult to apply it to a new racial group: people of African descent.

In part two Carter focuses on three African American theologians, Albert Raboteau, James Cone, and Charles Long. He finds these approaches less than adequate. Liberational approaches are deeply flawed because in effect they leave 'the problem of whiteness uncontested, insofar as at root it is a *theological* problem' (emphasis in original). The issue with liberation theology is that it is not radical enough because it leaves whiteness in its place. The problem of whiteness, like the problem of blackness is much deeper than rights and politics.

The third part of the book is given over to Carter's constructive theological proposition. Building on the work of Raboteau and Cone he develops an Afro-Christian theological vision that points to fresh and new ways of reframing the theology and practice of race. In calling for the rejection of forms of modernist theology that are inherently racist, he asks for a return to a theology within which Jesus' Jewishness and his humanity are seen to be the basis for a reordering of our thinking about race and racial encounters.

This book is an excellent contribution to the complicated debates that go on around issues of race. By drawing the argument into a theological framework Carter challenges the church not only to re-think its theology and its implication in the on-going construction of race, but also to change its practices in response to such new understanding. The book deserves a wide audience.

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Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage. By Christopher C. Roberts. London: T & T Clark, 2007. ISBN 978-0-5670-2746-7. 266 pp. £19.99

Somebody had to write this book, and the right person did. Christopher Roberts tackles the issue of gay marriage indirectly by asking what theologians have had to say about the significance of sexual difference. His question does not have to be a prelude to debates about homosexuality—sexual difference should be an important topic of its own—but nobody will read it from any other perspective. Christians looking for a critique of gay marriage will not find that here. Instead, they will find something much more valuable: a defence of sexual difference as a vocation rather than an accident of biology.

Sexual difference is a physical constraint, a material boundary, we could say, that limits the way the shared physical form of humanity constitutes our common experience. As a genuine constraint, it is productive of meaning. Put in other words, gender is a task—or we could say that gender makes sexual desire a task. The task of sexual desire is an adventure in self-understanding, and like all adventures, it works only if there are real limits to what we are capable of accomplishing as well as real mystery about the ultimate destination of our voyage. The question is whether these benefits of limitation and mystery bestowed by sexual difference can be reduplicated by same-sex desire.

Roberts does not address that question in detail, but he provides all the right resources for a full-fledged theological discussion of homosexuality. Most of the book is historical, though he does develop a narrative

arc through a wide range of material. In chapter one he examines five patristic theologians: Tatian, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome. He finds no consensus about the theological significance of sexual difference because some Church Fathers thought it could or should be transcended 'en route to an angelical like existence' (p. 13). There is diversity, but Roberts is careful to show that the result is not chaos. No Church Father treated sexual difference 'as a trivial or indifferent matter' (p. 33).

Chapter two shows how Augustine integrates the created goodness of sexual difference into salvation history. Even celibates, Augustine argued, anticipate an eschaton where sexual difference will persist without complicating or distorting relations between men and women. For married couples, sexual difference disciplines sexual desire to the point of providing a way to distinguish between love and lust. Marriage and continence are thus mutually reinforcing; neither can be fully understood without the other.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the subject of chapter three, builds on Augustine's thought by showing how sexual difference in marriage provides allegorical testimony to God's love for us. Chapter four is, perhaps, a too brief treatment of Aquinas, with the emphasis on his connection of procreation to the common good of the species. Chapter five, on Luther and Calvin, shows how the reformers understood marriage as an act of gratitude for sexual difference. In chapter six, Barth grounds sexual difference in Christ, who teaches us that bodily form is essential to divine revelation. In chapter seven, Roberts shows how Pope John Paul II went further than Barth by appealing to female experience in the light of the person of Mary. Roberts calls this a departure from 'the traditional [theological] theory of sexual difference' (p. 180), but he does not do enough to warrant that claim (aside from an objection to the Vatican's alleged lack of theological discipline—see p. 181). The appeal to gendered, especially female experience might be a modern theological move, but unless one holds up Barth at his most anti-natural theology worst, then specifying the actual content of gender differences is a fulfilment of, not a departure from, the theological tradition. Roberts notes that such specifications 'have tended to lapse into apparent arbitrariness and been vague about their premises' (p. 181). Perhaps so, but unless sexual difference makes a difference in the way men and women experience the world, as well as each other, then it can hardly be said to be grounded in the enduring order of creation.

The last chapter is where things really get interesting. Here Roberts criticizes three theologians whose views of marriage end up legitimating gay marriage: Graham Ward, Eugene Rogers, and David Matzko McCarthy. Ward's postmodern Barthianism makes biology vanish altogether,

Rogers' reduction of procreation to a species good that not every union needs to pursue renders marriage without any criteria other than desire, and McCarthy's emphasis on the social function of marriage strips it of its allegorical depth. In the end, some theologians prize marriage too highly and thus turn up the heat against those who deny its benefits to gays, while other theologians minimize the sanctity of marriage and thus make it seem peevish to limit it to heterosexuals.

All in all, this is an excellent book. But it suffers from a lack of ambition. Roberts keeps his focus on theologians who insist on the created value of sexual difference, but he resists grounding that value in any particular aspects of human nature. This is his bottom line: 'To be what we are, we must find ways of life that thank God for having made us male and female' (p. 237). Is that enough? Sexual difference is given, but surely God gives it to us for a purpose. One leaves this book wondering if Roberts has not sold the farm by downplaying the importance of procreation in sexual desire. Perhaps even more importantly, Augustine's tricky balancing act between affirming sexual differences here and now while arguing that these differences will continue in the afterlife without serving any specific function needs more elaboration. If there is no sexual desire in heaven, then what are the sexual organs, ultimately, for? If they don't wither away in the afterlife, then won't they have an eschatological purpose that is in continuity with the created order? Won't we have desires for others in heaven? On these and other questions, I hope to hear more from this fine young theologian.

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Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship Beyond an Age of Individualism. By Dale S. Keuhne. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8010-3587-6. 235 pp. £10.99.

The premise of this book is that contemporary 'postmodern individualism' (the iWorld), has produced a society in which sexual freedom is the most prized value. Only three taboos limit individual autonomy: criticizing someone else's life choices or behaviour; behaving in a manner that coerces or causes harm to others; engaging in a sexual relationship with someone without his or her consent. The pursuit of individualism has, inevitably, produced a fear of loneliness, and many are 'on a never-ending quest for acceptance, love and fulfilment while looking in the wrong place'. All this is in contrast to the 'tWorld' (t = traditional), which was based on Aristotelian values of relationality rather than materialism, and hence on obligation to extended family networks and communities. However the iWorld doubts its values, in particular with regard to sexual

behaviour. Why, for example, are sexual relations outside marriage to be considered immoral? The modernist scientific mindset cannot answer such questions.

While there was much good in the tWorld, Keuhne does not advocate a return to it, since it fostered such evils as slavery, sexual hypocrisy and the subjection of women. Similarly, good has come of the iWorld, but its materialism and disdain of the transcendent are proving harmful. Keuhne's alternative is the rWorld (r = relationality), so called because human fulfilment is found 'when living and engaging in the full constellation of healthy human relationships'. As both politics professor and pastor, Kuehne is interested not only in the theological and Biblical grounding for such a world but also in how public policy might promote and sustain it. This latter would include governmental endorsement of marriage and the extended family, collective self-restraint and promotion of gender equality. A practical example would be the ending of Sunday shopping to support family recreation time.

Keuhne recognises that his thesis is not new. His aim is to help readers rediscover the kind of relational world advocated by Scripture. His undogmatic, informal style, together with illustrations from popular music lyricists such as Joni Mitchell and Bono, help make this an accessible argument which will be convincing and stimulating for many readers. For those unfamiliar with philosophy, the broad-brushed presentation of ideas influencing social change (ranging from Aristotle to Nietzsche) is helpful. Unfortunately, however, the thesis lacks adequate theoretical foundation. Lack of critique renders the argument one-sided. Nor are the sweeping generalisations made about Biblical evidence satisfactory. For example, it is not enough to summarize Leviticus 18 as the 'just say no passage' regarding extra-marital sex, citing only an unpublished manuscript in support. One wonders why the book has been published under an 'academic' imprint.

The main difficulty, however, is Keuhne's failure to consider worldviews other than his own. For example, he claims not to be speaking specifically to Christians, and hopes that his vision of the rWorld can transcend religions, but non-Christians will hardly accept that its 'very foundation' is the Incarnation—and he does not say why they should. Similarly, the many who do find happiness in non-contracted relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual, will want to challenge the assertions that the development of love and spiritual intimacy is impossible outside marriage, and that 'any union less permanent than marriage is detrimental to children'.

In sum, I suspect this book will be heart-warming and stimulating for many Western Christian readers, but there is a good deal of work to be done before the rest of the world is convinced.

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Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community. By Andrew Marin. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8308-3626-0. 204 pp. £9.99.

This important book has a message that merits very careful consideration by the evangelical church. The author is founder of the Marin Foundation, which ministers to the gay and lesbian community in the Boystown area of Chicago. He was brought up in a conservative evangelical home and church, and describes himself as having been homophobic until at college no less than three close friends confessed to him over a three month period that they were gay or lesbian. A major rethink of his attitudes to the issue ensued, in due course leading him to his present clear sense of calling by God to reach out to gays and lesbians with the Gospel in a new way. His book of ten chapters is written in an easy and accessible style, strong on anecdote and personal story but by no means devoid of biblical and theological reflection.

Marin stresses the importance of using the right terminology for any meaningful engagement with what he terms the GLBT community (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered; in the UK LGBT is more familiar). Readers who are unfamiliar with such engagement may be surprised to learn that describing someone as a 'homosexual' is considered offensive. Such offence may appear over-sensitive, yet British readers over the age of 40 will recall a time when one referred to the local Pakistani shop or Chinese take-away by using terms which would nowadays be avoided at all costs. The fact that those words were used without any offensive intent is beside the point: if offence is caused, then we must simply learn to change our language.

The thesis of the book is that meaningful conversation between the church and gay and lesbian people has become well-nigh impossible and that a new bridge-building approach is needed. Marin insists that it is the church that must make the first move. He characterizes the current problem thus: 'Whenever I speak at GLBT events... the very first question I am always asked is, "Do you think homosexuality is a sin?" Whenever I speak at Christian events the very first question I am always asked is, "Do you think that gays and lesbians can change?"' (p. 103). He is surely correct to point out that *beginning* with closed questions like these will hardly be conducive to meaningful dialogue. There is also no doubt some truth in

his observation that 'Christians look at a gay or lesbian person and see a potential behavioral change instead of a person longing to know the same Christ we seek' (p. 85).

In the first half of the book, Marin explains in sometimes painful detail exactly what the GLBT community thinks of the church, especially the evangelical church. Yet he is properly critical of the GLBT insistence on equating sexual behaviour with personal identity. He reminds us that 'eternal validation is not from humans' (p.86), helpfully setting the subject of the book in the more general context of human alienation and longing for God. Chapter 7 is the key engagement with the main biblical texts, what he calls 'The Big 5' (Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). The approach he takes to these could best be described as novel, with both the positive and negative connotations implied by that term. Thus while the 'hospitality violation' theme in the Genesis passage is highlighted, and the traditional 'judgment on sexual sin' angle is not denied, the author concludes that 'the story of Lot's wife and Sodom and Gomorrah teaches us that until people (straight and GLBT) learn to shift their own mind frame from earthly issues, there can never be any forward movement in a personal relationship with Jesus.' In a similar manner each of the 'Big 5' passages is used in turn to derive one of Marin's 'Big 5 principles' that might act as a bridge for the genuine dialogue he espouses, with for example the Timothy passage being used 'to keep open a path for God to accomplish his will for a person's life, even until their last breath'. This is all well and good, although it is hard to avoid concluding that the method adopted results in a downplaying of the clear subject matter of the various texts—sexual ethics. This is of a piece with the author's earlier stated intention, that 'The way forward with the GLBT community is not a debate on the Bible's statements about same-sex sexual behavior but a discussion of how to have an intimate, real, conversational relationship with the Father and Judge' (this reference to both designations of God clearly helps guard against imbalance). The final three chapters contain a manifesto for engagement, with sixteen 'commitments'—putting the 'Big 5 Principles' into practice—which Marin challenges the church to adopt in a meaningful Gospel outreach to the GLBT community. These are extremely helpful and thought-provoking, and could indeed be usefully applied in mission to any situation where cultural factors prove to be a barrier.

While there is a great deal to commend in Marin's approach, his seeming reluctance to reach conclusions on some important matters can lead to a real sense of frustration on the part of the reader. Discussion of the rightness or wrongness of homosexual practice is not merely to be deferred at the start of a conversation to enable that conversation to pro-

ceed, it seems that it is off the menu completely. Marin's sympathies do appear to be with a traditional understanding of sexual practice, yet he is content to allow God to show individual gays and lesbians what 'he feels is best' for their lives—celibacy, practice or change—without saying how the divine will is to be discerned. This over-emphasis on the subjective is consistent with Marin's apparently weak ecclesiology. There is surely some irony that he doesn't see much place for the Christian *community* in helping members of the GLBT community to work these matters out before God.

So is this book worth buying and reading? Most definitely. Christ himself was 'full of grace and truth', but Christians have generally found this ideal combination much more difficult to achieve—not least in the matter of relating to gay and lesbian people. It is understandable that a strong stand needs to be taken for truth, not least when the historic position of the church is being challenged as forcibly as it is at the present time. It is also important that the God's grace should not be misused in the way described in Jude 4. Yet surely Marin's call for an 'elevation' of dialogue, based on unconditional love, is a timely one. As we have seen, his book is certainly open to criticism in various respects, but after all he is undertaking Christian outreach to gays and lesbians when most churches seem content to leave them as 'other'. The thoughtful reader might well call to mind the words of D.L. Moody in responding to criticisms of his method of evangelism: 'I prefer the way I do it to the way you don't do it.'

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The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life by Dennis P. Hollinger. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8010-3571-5. 272 pp. £12.99.

A Conversation Waiting to Begin: The Churches and the Gay Controversy by Oliver O'Donovan. London: SCM Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-3340-4210-5. ix + 123 pp. £14.99.

The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality: A Resource to Enable Listening and Dialogue. Edited by Philip Groves. London: SPCK, 2008. ISBN 978-0-2810-5963-8. 332 pp. £14.99.

Numerous mainline Protestant churches in north-Atlantic countries are experiencing serious internal conflict over the issue of homosexuality. In the Reformed tradition, the dispute currently threatens the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church USA. A similar process erupted recently among the Lutherans in the Church of Sweden and the Evangeli-

cal Lutheran Church of the USA. The question of same-sex relationships and gay clergy has also brought the unity of the global Anglican Communion as a whole into question, while causing serious divisions in the internal structures of its member churches, such as the Church of England, the Episcopal Church USA, and the Anglican Church of Canada. Homosexuality has become the presenting issue in moral and ecclesiological debates within many contemporary Protestant churches. For some, the issue is a symptom of the theological poverty of liberal Protestantism. Others frame the dispute as a prudish distraction from more pressing economic and social challenges confronting the contemporary church. Many Christians caught up such conflictual rhetoric report that they are exhausted and disoriented by seemingly endless debate. The three volumes under consideration are symptoms of this current stalemate.

Of the three volumes under consideration here, Dennis P. Hollinger's *The Meaning of Sex* offers the broadest approach to the problem of homosexuality, setting it within the context of a more general Christian understanding of sex. Hollinger, professor of Christian Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, presents what can be described as a traditional approach to sexuality. Although sex is described as a 'good gift from God', he emphasises that it has been created with 'very specific purposes' in mind, and is to be expressed 'in a very specific context' (p. 13). According to Hollinger, sex ought to occur only within the confines of marriage between a man and a woman, and ought to have procreation as part of its purpose and telos.

The book begins with a general survey of different theoretical approaches to ethics, followed by a chapter on different historical 'worldviews' towards sexuality. Both of these discussions set up what is the primary piece of the volume, a presentation of 'The Christian Worldview and Sex'. This chapter is a straightforward articulation of the view that the Christian scriptures affirm a distinction in the order of creation between male and female (which Hollinger describes as both divine and natural 'givens'), and that the biblical portrayal of sex (which he largely locates in Genesis and some brief references to Pauline passages) is one which locates it within a covenantal relationship, out of which emerge offspring (p. 82). Having defined the meaning of sex in this fashion, Hollinger makes light work of contemporary issues in sexual ethics. Pre-marital sex (including masturbation and oral sex) violate the definition outlined above (chapter 5), as does anal sex (p. 156), homosexuality (chapter 7), and pornography (pp. 157–8).

Hollinger never leaves the reader uncertain about his position on any matter under discussion (including whether there will be sex in heaven—p. 90). Nevertheless, there are significant limitations to the volume,

which hinder its capacity to further the contemporary debate over homosexuality and sexuality more generally. The argument lacks methodological precision, in that it flirts with both an ethics grounded on revealed morality as well as on natural theology. For Hollinger, the proper meaning of sex is discernible in Scripture *and* by observing nature. What remains unclear, however, is how these two normative sources relate to each other. Is this a work of 'Evangelical' biblical ethics or a renewed form of natural law ethics? Hollinger is not explicit about this, although his references to scientific 'givens' generally play a supporting role in the argument. But his references to scientific 'givens' renders his argument vulnerable from a variety of directions. First, he largely ignores the breadth and complexity of contemporary studies of sexual behaviour, in which there is little consensus on a number of issues, including gender identity and the genetic basis of homosexuality. More to the point: should a scientific study raise a substantial challenge to any one of his claims (e.g. that 'sexual restraint' promotes 'cultural flourishing', p. 236), does that imply that this new finding should be seen as trumping biblical authority? Hollinger opens the door to such tensions without attending to the consequences. Both Scripture and science are employed to support his reading of the Christian 'worldview' on sexuality, but without attending very deeply to the diversity of hermeneutical issues surrounding biblical interpretation, or to the conflicting nature of scientific theories within the wider medical and scientific communities. As such, the argument may well fail to convince any reader not already inclined to agree with Hollinger's position.

Those sympathetic with the general perspective outlined by Hollinger may find that his concern to challenge the 'highly sexualised nature of contemporary culture' is not complemented by much analysis of the problem. The closing chapter, 'Living in a Sex-Crazed World', is largely a lament over a fallen society, paired with a call for the church to be a 'visible representation of Christ himself' to such a world. When Hollinger acknowledges, however, that 'the church has failed miserably in this realm' (p. 231), this admission does not lead to an analysis of the causes of this failure, anymore than it results in a careful diagnosis of how it is western culture has become so 'sex-crazed'. As such, the discussion's engagement with the problem falls short both pastorally and theologically. At the practical level, the analysis does not diagnose any particular dynamics influencing contemporary attitudes towards sex. This results in a theological approach that slants towards works righteousness: though 'the church has failed miserably', it is told that it simply must be 'the embodiment of the meaning of sex' (p. 243). One might suggest that the church's act of confession and self-examination need go further than this.

Oliver O'Donovan's recent collection of essays, *A Conversation Waiting to Begin*, seeks to be a more probing and reflective contribution to contemporary sexual ethics. These self-described 'polemical essays' are no less than Hollinger's intended to be rooted in an 'Evangelical' approach to biblical ethics, but O'Donovan recognises that, at least within his own Anglican tradition, the traditional arguments over sexuality, along with the hermeneutical issues surrounding the passages relating to homosexuality, have been repeatedly rehearsed without resolving the matter for his church. He suggests that the crisis over homosexuality is the result of the failure of the 'liberal paradigm', which falsely imagines itself to be independent from traditional spiritual authorities (p. 6). By acclimatising itself too closely to contemporary culture, liberal Anglicanism, according to O'Donovan, lost its critical and theological purchase on that culture (p. 13).

The volume offers more than a rehearsal of evangelical criticisms of liberal theology, however, for O'Donovan accepts as a given the presence of gay (he does not specifically mention lesbian) Christians within the church. It is with such a constituency, he suggests, that a conversation has yet to begin, for he argues that the status and identity of homosexuals in the church has only be framed by the liberal paradigm as a question of 'justice' or 'liberation'. According to O'Donovan (somewhat puzzlingly), until now the 'Liberal Paradigm' has been speaking for gay Christians. O'Donovan intends this volume to be a call for gay Christians to articulate for themselves their own understanding of their Christian experience and vocation, in a manner which sets the dialogue 'within the basic terms set by the Christian faith.' (p. 110) O'Donovan's intriguing expansion of the way the debate over homosexuality is frequently engaged is summed up by his suggestion that 'the challenge gays present the church with is not emancipatory but hermeneutic' (p. 117). That he is willing to concede that a properly theological description of homosexual Christian life has yet to be done, and his insistence that such a project must be done in dialogue with gay Christians, is the principal contribution of this book.

In seeking to make room for such a conversation, O'Donovan is self-consciously trying to respond soberly and charitably to the realities of the contemporary Anglican churches. One might ask whether his references to 'gay experience' (in the singular, p. 117), or his stereotypical characterisation of the 'roaming character' of gay relations (p. 111) betray some unhelpful assumptions about his intended dialogue partners, but a generous reader cannot but recognise that a real effort to extend a hand across a fractured divide is being made in these essays. O'Donovan is willing to go so far as to acknowledge that 'we cannot rule out the possibility that we may reach a "revisionist" conclusion' after a healthy debate, so long as that

discussion has been characterised by a 'deep appropriation' and engagement with the Christian theological tradition (p. 108).

The hand that is extended to gay Christians in the book is not offered to the same degree to 'liberals' in the church. Such 'revisionists' (who are never concretely identified) are portrayed as having refused to question their own assumptions (p. 110), of practising 'managerial juridicalization' (p. 115), and of valuing conciliation over truth (p. 19). It is difficult to deny that all of these failures can be found within the contemporary Anglican churches, but the projection of all these exclusively onto his theological opponents violates the hospitable tone O'Donovan self-consciously seeks to set in the book. A symptom of such misrepresentation is present at the volume's outset, when he describes the election of Gene Robinson as the first openly gay bishop in 2003 as being an instance where 'New Hampshire has an idea to sell' (p. 1). Many commentators, both locally and internationally, have since noted that it is more accurate to say that Anglicans in that diocese simply voted for who they wanted as their bishop; they had little intention of sending a 'message' to the world, nor did they imagine they were 'selling a story'. Describing this as merely another instance of some monolithic 'liberal paradigm' falls far short of the standard O'Donovan sets for himself: 'setting stubborn issues within a new and more radically Christian framework' (p. x).

One hopes that O'Donovan would acknowledge this criticism as fair. It can also be imagined, however, that he would consider Philip Groves' edited volume, *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, as an example of the 'Liberal Paradigm's' propensity towards managerial bureaucracy rather than deep theological reflection. The book offers much more than that, but there is a sense in which it reads as a cumbersome summary of past Anglican documents and committee rulings. To a degree, this is a helpful contribution, for many Anglicans do not know the history of their church, and yet if the volume's intended aim is to 'help us listen to one another' and to 'listen to God' (p. 1), then the end result falls somewhat short of this. Although each topic of focus (Mission, Scripture, Sexuality, Science) receives treatment from more than one theological perspective in the church, these differing contributions largely talk past each other. The result is less an example of 'dialogue' than a collection of differing summary reports from conversations that have occurred elsewhere. Although it is understandable that the volume 'does not attempt to "solve" the theological disagreements over homosexuality', it must also be said that it is also unlikely to move the debate any further along the road towards such a goal. The book is a useful reference resource, and can serve as an

instructive introduction to someone new to the debate. What is does not offer is any new insight or direction for future conversations.

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Sex and the Single Saviour: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation. By Dale B. Martin. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006. ISBN 978-0-6642-3046-3. 224 pp. £19.99.

This volume contains a valuable collection of mostly previously published works by Dale B. Martin, Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University, which address both broader hermeneutical issues and specific exegetical themes, including same-sex relations, sexual passion, marriage, divorce, and celibacy. The collection begins and ends with a challenge to faith. The introduction calls into question what it calls textual foundationalism, the belief that the text of the Bible 'speaks', and so provides a sound basis for ethics and doctrine, as if its meaning is self-maintained and uncontaminated by the stance of interpreters. Both life experience and methodological discussion of the way texts and their interpreters work show that such an approach is naïve. Equally naïve is the belief that we can know an author's intentions or can know events behind the texts. Even theological considerations, he argues, should warn us against misplacing the meaning of texts to the author's intent and things beyond them, for faith has seen in the texts themselves the Word of God.

At the end of the Introduction one is left wondering what remains beyond subjectivity and is encouraged to find in each following chapter an exposure of false claims to objectivity with a promise that the final chapter might point to a way ahead. Having worked with some of those chapters, I headed straight for the epilogue to read how Martin sees himself as a postmodern Christian historicist. Here he confesses to historical criteria which direct his path away from anachronistic reading: 'I see myself as a responsible historian, attempting to describe what I take to be historically probable by the normal, public methods of modern historiography' (p. 162), though not, as he hastens to add, stopping there as though this were the sole path to meaning. Against reduction of Scripture to a theology of divine narrative or a set of propositions or scholarly reconstruction of the history behind it, Martin urges that Scripture be allowed to be Scripture. The meaning of Scripture resides in its enactment and performance in the community of faith, so that it is like a museum which moves us, a cathedral that evokes our awareness, and a painting which engages us and which we engage with our various ways of seeing and sensing.

With almost evangelical piety he invokes the vulnerability and humility which postmodernism asserts, to call for a hermeneutic of faith. Kierkegaard's image of our being afloat on 70,000 fathoms of ocean is to be one not of panic but trust. 'We must learn to float and accept the risk with joy' (p. 184). It is clear, however, that Martin is not looking out into nothingness, but has his own vision of what abides and needs to be. Love is to be 'our ruling guide for our interpretations of Scripture' (p. 165). He defends this well against the denigration of love in some discussions of ethics, arguing that this biblical principle keeps us 'on our guard that our interpretations of Scripture do not harm but actively promote what is truly good for our neighbor' (p. 169). 'The possibility offered to us now—with the collapse of confidence in scientific or historical or textual foundationalisms and the rise of antifoundationalist philosophies and theologies—is to learn to live faithfully without foundations—or without any other foundation than faith in Jesus Christ' (p. 185). Expressions like 'what is truly good' and 'faith in Jesus Christ' need unpacking, but Martin has produced a strong case for a hermeneutic which allows engagement, including connection and discontinuity, with Scripture. It makes sense of an inclusive ethic which in relation to sexuality affirms the dignity of all whatever their orientation.

The intervening chapters demonstrate Martin's commitment to historical method, challenging attempts to construe meaning convenient for interpreters or their communities, such as when some explain away Jesus' prohibition on divorce, or fail to acknowledge how their contexts have shaped the meanings they see, whether in relation to same-sex relations or marriage. This reviewer reaches different historical conclusions on many points, including on what drives Paul in Romans 1 and how he sees passion, which cannot be canvassed here (see my *Sexuality in the New Testament*, 2010). Martin's reading also renders the ancient texts more remote at points than I see them, but his careful assessments certainly expose the need for authentic engagement, which needs to be open to weigh competing strands in biblical thought, in both assent and dissent, and to embrace such encounter in humility and faith.

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Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church, revised and expanded edition. By Jack Rogers. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-664-23269-6. ix + 228 pp. £11.99.

Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality aims to justify the church's acceptance of homosexuals by calling it back to the Gospel it preaches, emphasizing

God's love as available to all and all in need of it. Neither Jack Rogers nor anyone in his family is homosexual, so he makes his case that the church should accept homosexuals not from personal experience, but from historical analogies in chapters two and three (i.e. the church changing its stance on the ordination of women and the morality of slavery) and Biblical reasoning in chapters four, five, and eight. He is frank with the reader that he is neither a Biblical scholar nor a historian proper, but a theologian and a historian of doctrine. Thus, he examines the issue from within his own branch of the church and traces the development of various official Presbyterian documents as doctrinal stances have shifted.

Chapters four and five are the heart of his argument. Chapter four lays out the seven Presbyterian guidelines for interpreting Scripture, which Rogers contends are applicable to all evangelical denominations. In his explanation of these guidelines are his two most significant arguments against using certain texts to condemn homosexuality: (1) The Spirit sometimes provides the church with a new understanding of Scripture, thus the church's traditional interpretation is fallible and should always be subject to revision; and (2) 'the assumption of male gender superiority is a significant aspect of the historical and cultural context of the biblical passages that seem to discuss homosexuality,' (p. 63) and since the Gospel does not teach that men are superior to women, the message in these passages is questionable.

In chapter five, Rogers makes a convincing case that the common proof texts against homosexuality (Genesis 19:1-29; Leviticus 18 and 20; 1 Corinthians 6:9; and 1 Timothy 1:10, to name a few) need to be seriously reconsidered. He spends the most time on Romans 1, arguing that the main thrust of Paul's point is warning against idolatry, not sexuality. He claims that Paul's reference to 'natural' and 'unnatural' relations in Romans 1:26-27 is referring to cultural norms, not laying out a theology of natural law or creation. Indeed, he sees natural law merely as a way to argue 'divine sanction... for cultural assumptions' (p. 77).

It is obvious that Rogers has studied the official Presbyterian documents with great care. In chapter seven, he explains his discovery of a flaw in the Presbyterian *Book of Confessions*, in which 'homosexual perversion' was added to a list of sins that would prevent a person entering the kingdom of God. This phrase was not in the original Heidelberg Catechism from which the text was taken—it was added to a subsequent translation in the 1960s—and because of Rogers' discovery steps have been taken to correct the error. He also outlines other corrections that, when rendered, would demonstrate greater inclusivity in the PC(USA) documents.

Rogers' ending statement sums up the argument of the book: 'The more deeply we delve into the biblical word, the more instances we find

of God's radical welcome for all who have faith' (p. 136). His emphasis on returning to the Bible to find the truth of God's love—and then turning to the world to show it—is a welcome contribution to the debate on homosexuality.

This edition includes an expanded chapter seven, an appendix on the progress that has been made toward LGBT equality in the U.S., and a group study guide.

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God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship. By Kenton L. Sparks. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8010-2701-7. 415 pp. £14.99.

This erudite book seeks to persuade evangelicals to embrace mainstream critical scholarship's methods and general conclusions about the Bible, not merely in regard to history, but also in regard to some moral judgments that are made against the biblical text. At the same time Sparks wishes to hold onto a doctrine of divine inerrancy, i.e. that 'God does not err in Scripture' (p. 139). Sparks' *tour de force* takes us through a sweep of church history, complex epistemological discussions, and, of course, biblical scholarship itself, of which he shows real mastery.

The author begins by relating how around the age of 27 he himself had come to embrace such critical scholarship, ironically, through encountering the writing of biblical conservative K.A. Kitchen. Sparks concluded that Kitchen's argument was like that of someone who maintained that the earth was flat. 'At that moment I began to doubt that evangelical scholars were really giving me the whole story when it came to the Bible and biblical scholarship' (p. 12). In fact the themes of flat earthism and of geocentrism recur as analogies for conservative biblical scholarship throughout the book (pp. 17–18, 21, 23, 33, 37, 50, 53, 136, 275, 285–86, 335, 373), which is somewhat unfortunate given the fundamental difference in the level of certainty scholarship is able to achieve concerning what is currently observable in such basic questions of cosmology and questions of unobservable literary processes from the past.

The Introduction contrasts the conclusions of 'modern scholarship' on the Bible with traditional understandings of history and authorship. Chapter 1 'Epistemology and Hermeneutics', which some will find technically challenging, seeks to argue that conservatives have had an unhealthy addiction to certainty in knowledge which can largely be traced to the influence of Descartes. Humans 'understand things always partially and always, in some respects, wrongly' (p. 42).

Unfortunately, this point is foundational for all that follows and is repeatedly assumed throughout the rest of the book, but alternative formulations of the ever-present limits of human knowledge were not considered. Sparks says we should avoid thinking that we as humans can have 'error-free, God-like knowledge' (p. 52). 'Is it therefore possible that God has selected to speak to human beings through *adequate* rather than *inerrant* words, and is it further possible that he did so because human beings are *adequate* rather than *inerrant* readers?' (p. 55). After failing, to my mind, to establish that error has to be involved in all human knowledge, there seems to be a further leap when the level of error which is attributed to human knowledge in general is then ascribed to words from human language which God may choose to use. It seems that Sparks does not adequately distinguish between weakness and limitation in communication or perception on the one hand and straying in communication and perception on the other.

Chapter 2, 'Historical Criticism and Assyriology', traces the discovery of creation stories such as Enuma Elish and the flood story in Gilgamesh 'that were older than, and uncomfortably similar to, the biblical creation and flood stories in Genesis' (p. 60); he also considers Mesopotamian writings such as annals and chronicles, *ex eventu* prophecy, and king lists. From these he draws three conclusions: (1) 'the average person is in no position to evaluate, let alone criticize, the results of critical scholarship' (p. 70); (2) there are eight features shared by Ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts (narratives with the appearance of history which contain fiction; long literary prehistories; bias; inaccuracy; pseudoprophecy; fabrication of facts for propagandistic purposes; two pieces of literature may appear similar in genre but on further inspection turn out to be fundamentally different; being written by people other than the alleged author); (3) that critical scholars do not approach the Bible with greater scepticism than they have for other texts and that evangelicals do not have a problem with historical criticism per se, but with historical criticism applied to the Bible (pp. 71–72).

Chapter 3, 'The Problem of Biblical Criticism', seeks to show that 'biblical criticism arises from a careful and thoughtful reading of the Bible rather than from reckless impiety' (p. 76). Sparks then considers a barrage of generally well-chosen biblical problems. These include arguments that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, that there are problems of chronology in the different texts of Genesis 5 (MT, Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX) and that the most likely original text agrees with none of the extant versions completely, that many of the peoples mentioned in Genesis 10 'date no earlier than the first millennium' (p. 82), that two different genealogies in Genesis 4 and 5 have been created out of one list of names, that the flood

narrative is a composition based on two sources dating probably 'no earlier than the first millennium BCE' (p. 87), that there are many number contradictions between Samuel/Kings and Chronicles, that the book of Isaiah is composite, that Ezekiel got his prophecy about Tyre wrong, that Matthew's account of the Nativity was 'not strictly biographical but was instead a creative composition designed to illustrate the Savior's relationship to Moses' (p. 111), that the Pastoral epistles were probably not written by Paul, that both Daniel and the book of Revelation foretold an eschatological kingdom, but that kingdom did not arrive within the timeframe they predicted. Nor are the problems merely historical. There are also major theological tensions in the Bible and texts can be propagandistic. As an instance of this Sparks considers the stories of David in the books of Samuel, which portray him as kind towards Saul and his descendants, but may hide a much more sinister historical reality in which David was in fact complicit in the death of some of Saul's family.

In chapter 4, '"Traditional" Responses to Biblical Criticism', after briefly dealing with fideistic and philosophical responses, Sparks moves on to consider 'Critical Anti-Criticism: Conservative Evangelical Biblical Scholarship' (p. 144). This sort of scholarship has resorted, apparently, to eight strategies: 'artificial presentations of the evidence' (e.g. K.A. Kitchen on Isaiah 40–55); 'artificial comparative analogies' (e.g. Kitchen's *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*); 'selective and illegitimate appeals to critical scholarship' (e.g. Richard Schultz's appeals to scholars who speak of a 'unity' to the book of Isaiah); 'lowering the threshold for historicity' (e.g. Provan, Long, Longman, Harrison, Hoffmeier, and Kitchen on the Exodus); 'red herrings—the misleading use of "test cases"' (e.g. T. Desmond Alexander on Pentateuchal source criticism); 'misleading and illegitimate harmonizations' (e.g. Brian Kelly on whether Manasseh persisted in evil as in Kings or repented as in Chronicles); 'critiquing biblical criticism with the biblical "testimony"' (e.g. references to Christ's attitude to the OT); 'pleading ignorance and obfuscating the issues' (e.g. Dillard and Longman not being sufficiently clear that they believe Isaiah 40–66 was written during or after the exile).

The remaining chapters are interesting and important, but build upon the foundation of the first four chapters. Chapter 5: 'Constructive Responses to Biblical Criticism' (e.g. the approaches of Barth, Childs, and Barr, who attempt to build a theology having accepted the standard conclusions of biblical criticism); chapter 6, 'The Genres of Human Discourse'; chapter 7, 'The Genres of Divine Discourse'; chapter 8, 'The Context of the Whole and Biblical Interpretation'; chapter 9, 'Negotiating the Context of the Whole'; and chapter 10, 'Biblical Criticism and Christian

Theology'. For reasons of brevity alone these will not be considered here in detail.

If I were to try to summarize the main points which Sparks makes in the book I would say that they are (1) that human knowledge must involve error and therefore God's own revelation must involve error; (2) that scripture contains numerous examples of historical and moral errors so clear that they should be acknowledged by all who have studied the matters carefully; (3) that it is possible, while acknowledging (1) and (2) to create an adequate theology and to accept scripture as God's word.

Conservatives as well as many non-conservatives should have little difficulty in showing that point (1) has not been demonstrated and that Sparks has not yet made even an initial case for the presumption of the validity of point (3). Therefore the most weighty part of Sparks' argument remains point (2), which is, of course, the billion dollar question. We will therefore focus on that question, though of necessity our response will have to be selective and therefore open to criticism.

Let us consider, for instance, the repentance of Manasseh, which Chronicles records and Kings says nothing about. What is interesting about this case, which Sparks finds so persuasive a demonstration of historical error, is that there are few relevant data around today which were not available to pre-enlightenment interpreters. A host of Bible experts from the past considered this difference and were content simply to harmonize by adding the details of the narratives together. Thus it seems unlikely that it is the data of the text themselves which are driving the change in interpretative model. Rather it is the framework with which the interpreter begins that dictates their approach.

Secondly, Sparks takes a rather negative view of the work of K.A. Kitchen, and in fact cites reading Kitchen as the cause of his overnight conversion to critical scholarship. He likens Kitchen's approach to flat earthism. It is, however, as well to remember that Kitchen has probably read a greater range of Ancient Near Eastern texts than anyone else alive and that his appeal is to data, and that those who reject Kitchen's approach usually ignore or fail to explain data which he adduces. Furthermore, the amount of comparative data which he has published, for instance in his classic *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 2003) represents only a sample of the amount of unpublished relevant data which he appears to have. The onomastic data which K.A. Kitchen and Richard Hess, for instance, have adduced as suggesting earlier dates for biblical material do indeed constitute a weighty argument which is usually ignored. In fact I meet many Old Testament scholars who are simply *unaware* of very significant patterns in the distribution of the names in the

Old Testament. If anyone is like Galileo being prepared to look through the telescope it is Kitchen, not his opponents.

Thirdly, Sparks believes that those who reject the Documentary Hypothesis of the origin of the Pentateuch are unfair because they pick off one argument for the hypothesis at a time and do not admit that the arguments *together* have a greater plausibility than singly. I sympathise with Sparks' argument here. However, my own personal difficulty in assessing the Documentary Hypothesis stems from the fact that, to my knowledge, there is no presentation of the arguments for it which weighs both its power to explain data and its need to adduce secondary literary hypotheses in order to support the system as a whole. What someone like myself needs is a 'balance sheet' in which the Documentary Hypothesis is awarded credibility points when it can explain data and loses such points when one is obliged to posit editorial interference in an *ad hoc* way in order to support the hypothesis. Without such honest setting forth of the arguments, it is hard to evaluate its probability. In my experience, when editors or redactors are believed to have inserted a verse or to have changed a divine name scholars usually assess the likelihood of this from a position of a prior belief in the hypothesis as a whole.

One's evaluation of the general correctness of critical scholarship will probably determine one's evaluation of Sparks' book. However, it should be stressed that Sparks' section on critical biblical scholarship is far stronger than any other part of the book and conservatives need to provide better responses than heretofore not merely to Sparks but to such scholarship as a whole if their position is to be credible. In addition, the following observations can be made about the argument as a whole:

Sparks' spectrum. Sparks believes that there is a spectrum of views on the Bible. At one end are those for whom 'the embracing of biblical criticism has had the effect of desacralizing the Bible. According to this view, the results of biblical scholarship provide "sure evidence" that Scripture is a thoroughly human product rather than a divinely inspired book' (pp. 18–19). At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that the conclusions of such scholarship 'would represent a serious threat to biblical authority' (p. 19). In the middle, of course, is Sparks with the *tertium quid* option of embracing both biblical scholarship and faith. This spectrum is very important and underlies the whole of his rhetoric. He invites people to see themselves as on the conservative end of the spectrum and to move towards his central position. His is the view, supposedly, which affirms the most important beliefs of both sides. This is why nowhere in the book does he see the need to justify whether his view is coherent or rational. It would be equally compelling to construct a spec-

trum with conservatives and secular scholars at one end in agreement that certain forms of current biblical scholarship, if valid, are indeed incompatible with belief in divine inspiration of scripture, and Sparks at the other end of the spectrum maintaining that they are compatible. But then, of course, the vulnerability or even fideism of Sparks' position would be rather more exposed.

Faulty understanding of conservative epistemologies. Although there is plenty of confusion in evangelical epistemologies, it is not right to trace evangelical desire for certainty, infallibility, or errorless knowledge to Descartes, when one can find so much precedent for language of certainty within the vocabulary of early Christianity. It is also wrong to say that desire for errorless knowledge 'assumes human beings have the capacity to see the world as God sees it' (p. 171). Again, Sparks fails to distinguish between weakness or limitation on the one hand and straying or erring on the other.

Logical fallacies. In certain sections of the book there are unwarranted leaps in the arguments as Sparks speeds over crucial moves, uses key terms equivocally, and fails to consider alternatives. Just as he does this with the epistemological introduction, claiming that all knowledge involves error, he likewise argues that divine accommodation makes room for error in chapter 7 ('The Genres of Divine Discourse'). For instance, Sparks believes that if one disallows human errors in the text one is obliged to 'reject the conceptual validity of accommodation altogether' (p. 247). The idea of something being simultaneously imperfect (i.e. incomplete in some regard) and without error does not even seem to enter his mind as possible. For him the frailty of accommodation has to involve error. Simplification involves misinformation. Terms for error and finitude are used almost interchangeably (e.g., p. 249). The middle is excluded.

Interpretative cherry picking. Sparks is consistent in allowing accommodation to error not merely to involve matters of history, but also of theology and ethics. But this lands him with the new difficulty of deciding which principles of scripture to adhere to. When he sees a text saying that women could speak in church (1 Cor. 11:5; 14:1–33) and one refusing this permission (1 Tim. 2:11–15), Sparks follows the former as that which 'seems to incarnate Scripture's highest ideals' (p. 247). But one wonders how one can judge what is higher. To deal with this Sparks proposes a model of trajectory hermeneutic. One looks not just at scripture, but at the direction in which it is going. One must move 'beyond its explicit words' (p. 289). One will not, however, do so unless the direction is 'vouchsafed by the fact that some parts of the Bible already point us in this new direc-

tion' (p. 289). The problem, of course, is that it is hard for a trajectory hermeneutic to exclude later developments like the strict Augustinian view of sex as a natural development of the NT which itself restricted sex more than the OT. It is hard for me to see Sparks' proposal as anything other than a call to utter subjectivity.

To conclude, it seems to me that Sparks' arguments leave much to be desired. This is a brilliant, though problematic, book. Very substantive points have been made by him concerning biblical studies, but these represent the only parts of the book for which an answer is outstanding or necessary.

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Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God. By Timothy Ward. Nottingham: Apollos, 2009. ISBN 978-1-8447-4207-3. 192 pp. £9.99.

This is an excellent book which lives up the recommendations from Donald Macleod, Paul Helm, and J. I. Packer. Tim Ward has put us in his debt by producing a clear and profound treatment of doctrine of Scripture for the present day. It is accessible and scholarly, anchored in Scripture's own self-testimony and attuned to the pastoral needs of Christians in the twenty-first century.

After a brief introduction, the argument unfolds in four chapters. In the first, Ward treats us to a biblical theology of the speaking God. Whatever else must be said about God, he presents himself in Scripture as one who speaks. His words make a difference, calling the world into existence, bestowing blessing, executing judgement and drawing men and women into a saving relationship with him. Far from words being an alternative to presence, Ward insists that '*communication from* God is... *communion with* God, when met with a response of trust from us' (p. 34). Jesus Christ, the Word-made-flesh who 'comes as the fulfilment of everything "the word of God" in the Old Testament had been anticipating' speaks the words of the Father and gives his Spirit that his apostles might pass those words on to the ends of the earth and the end of the age. This great chapter might have been made even better by some reflection upon Genesis 11 and the impact of Babel on human language and communication.

The next chapter presents a more systematic treatment, relating Scripture to each divine person of the Trinity in turn. Aware of criticisms sometimes made of standard evangelical handling of the doctrine as abstracted from the biblical narrative of salvation history, overly systematised and lacking in dynamic spirituality, Ward embeds his treatment of the doctrine in the person and activity of the living God. Here Ward makes use

of speech-act theory, but in a careful way which serves rather than dominates his theological discussion.

This is followed by a chapter in which Ward examines the classic attributes of Scripture: necessity, sufficiency, clarity, authority. His treatment of each of these is fresh and edifying. Here is a strong biblical and evangelical case for taking Scripture seriously on its own terms. Particularly refreshing was his clear embrace of biblical inerrancy together with a warning that this aspect should not occupy the central place in our doctrine of Scripture. He is clearly aware of the recent debates, and handles the issues with skill. Very helpfully, he provides advice on how to deal with difficulties that arise (apparent contradictions, alleged errors).

A final chapter deals with the place of the Bible in the Christian life. Particularly helpful here is a little section on the relation of private Bible reading to corporate Bible reading and preaching. He takes seriously the present work of the Spirit, the significance of wisdom gleaned from fellow Christians, and the witness of the Christian conscience; however, he concludes that 'the one place where the voice of God, and therefore what [he calls] "the semantic presence of God" may always reliably be found, is in his speaking and acting in the words of Scripture' (p. 178).

This book should be given to and read by every theological student. Not only will they be encouraged by such a fresh and profound exposition of the doctrine of Scripture as it has been taught and believed by the vast bulk of Christians over the past two thousand years, they will be treated to a master class in how to 'do' theology. Tim Ward's book has deep roots in the explicit teaching of Scripture; it isn't afraid to tackle criticism and hard questions head-on; it engages important contributions directly rather than through the opinions of later commentators, and it evaluates contrary views with courtesy, care, and the courage to show clearly why we must say 'no'. Perhaps as much as anything, it maintains proper biblical and theological proportions. Wide reading and deep, careful thought have produced a book which will edify all who read it.

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Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine. By Peter J. Thuesen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-517427-4. xiv + 309 pp. £19.99

The only serious weakness in this fine book is that it is too short. As the subtitle indicates, it concentrates on American disputes and theologians, although in less than 300 pages it also goes back in time to Augustinian foundations and extends outwards to a great deal of British history (including John Wesley *versus* Augustus Toplady). It does not, however,

include the Scotland of Thomas Boston, James Hogg, or John McLeod Campbell, which would have provided grist for unusually interesting comparative history. Peter Thuesen's goal, however, was not to provide a comprehensive account of all the serious arguments over predestination that have occurred in just American history, but, while treating the theological debates seriously, to set those disagreements into broader religious, social, political, and cultural contexts. As a result, if some students might wish for more on Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of Will*, the long and involved history of reactions to that landmark work, or the views of consequential theologians like E. Y. Mullins or Charles Hodge, all readers are amply rewarded by the wisdom of what Thuesen does provide.

The book's survey, though moving rapidly, explains how predestination factored differently among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritans, depending on temperament and setting as well as exact convictions; how it suffered as a doctrine after the American War for Independence when themes of republican liberty undercut all notions of sovereign supremacy; how it pushed a wide array of sectarians (including Mormons, Adventists, and Christian Scientists) away from traditional orthodoxy; how it engaged the energies of earnest and creative women like Catherine Beecher who, with considerable personal anguish, eventually abandoned the doctrine; how it dominated intra-Lutheran and Lutheran-Calvinist disputes for much of the late nineteenth century; and how in the late twentieth century the doctrine has made a comeback among resurgent Southern Baptist conservatives and some prominent preacher-theologians like John Piper. The survey's great success is to outline the convictions of all participants clearly while also explaining the inner logic that, as examples, moved some Arminians to link their Calvinist opponents with antinomianism and Islam, even as Calvinists were labelling Arminians as papists and naïve perfectionists.

Apart from its expert historical survey, the book is also important for a noteworthy theological argument: that the key theological division in western Christian history has not been between defenders of divine sovereignty and proponents of human free will, but between Christian communities keen to understand the divine-human relationship precisely and Christian communities defined by their sacramental practice. In Thuesen's own phrases, 'there are two larger ways of being religious—two forms of piety, two religious aesthetics—that have existed in tension in Christian history. . . . In place of predestinarianism's mystical awe before God's electing decree, sacramentalism cultivates mystical wonder before the power of priestly ritual' (pp. 6-7). While Thuesen does not oversell this argument, it recurs at strategic points. Thus, when Harriet Beecher Stowe like her sister Catherine Beecher gave up the family's ancestral Cal-

vinism, Stowe did not embrace an anti-predestinarian defence of free will, as Catherine did; rather, she turned to the reassuring sacramentalism of moderate Episcopalianism as a way of both leaving behind the exact theology in which she had been raised and continuing on with much of its ethos, seriousness, and devotion. Again, when American Lutherans ended their internal quarrels over which of their number had slipped into 'crypto Calvinism', it was more because they all agreed on the efficacy of a Real Presence in the Lord's Supper and the salvific character of baptism than because one particular view of predestination triumphed.

If the careful erudition of Thuesen's wide-ranging survey provides evangelical Protestants with fresh insights about their own contentious history, his gentle case for the superiority of practical sacramentalism over predestinarian precisionism also turns this relatively short book into a major theological challenge.

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New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture and the World. Edited by Tom Greggs. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. ISBN 978-0-415-47733-8. xvi + 223 pp. £19.99.

Tom Greggs' edited collection of essays, written by younger scholars on various doctrinal topics in an intentionally post-critical key, is intended to provide a formative agenda for the next generation of evangelical theologians. David Ford's appreciative foreword finds the lack of a 'single, strict definition of "evangelical"' (p. xiv), conversational tone, and engagement with key figures from the tradition and Scripture congenial. Richard Hays' postscript suggests that the essays partake of Hans Frei's elusive 'generous orthodoxy' by seeking to move evangelical theology from a bounded activity that focuses on gate-keeping to one centred on God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

In compressed summary form: Richard Briggs argues for a reading of Scripture which takes the surprising God to whom the Bible witnesses as central for the reader, a disciple who is open to the complexities of Scripture's functional clarity, patiently persevering in being transformed. Paul Nimmo deploys Barth's reformulation of the doctrine of election in critique of Calvin's double predestination and defends Barth's account from evangelical charges of universalism, a flawed doctrine of God, and inadvertently making God's identity dependent on creation. Paul Dafydd Jones also (not unsympathetically) critiques Calvin by Barth, here on the atonement and much associated dogmatic ground; perhaps most strikingly in Jones' reconstruction of substitution and in emphasizing the effects of the atonement in recreating humanity. George Bailey urges

evangelicals to adopt a Wesleyan dynamic view of entire sanctification. Simeon Zahl argues that evangelicalism contains a pneumatological contradiction (between Lutheran and Pietistic understandings of the effects of sin) at its heart, which neither Wesley nor Edwards can solve, and recommends a Blumhardt-inspired 'charismatic theology of the cross' (p. 90) that prioritizes negative experiences of the Holy Spirit. Ben Fulford appreciatively reads Calvin on the Lord's Supper, but suggests that Calvin neglects the social implications (in the church and for the world) in Paul. Elizabeth Kent criticizes evangelicalism for an inadequate theology of the body, accommodated to the modern liberal state, preferring the incarnate and ecclesial Body of Christ as the one (and community) to whom our individual bodies belong. Donald McFadyen extends Daniel Hardy's insight that human (including church) life is intrinsically social by reading the Gospel of John, Richard Hooker and his own experience as an Anglican village priest to call for a vision of the church as dynamic social truth. Jason Fout offers a 'gift' reading of Paul's letter to the Corinthians that depicts human response to the glory of God as a non-heteronomous dependence which overflows into renewed sociality. Tom Greggs emphasizes the grace of Jesus Christ in an attempt to unsettle the eschatological binaries that entrench separationist tendencies in evangelicalism. Andi Smith uses Yoder to criticize evangelical individualism for failing to prioritize the political consequences of the cross of Christ for the ecclesial community. Sarah Snyder describes Islamic and Christian understandings of the relationship between Scripture and the Word of God, concluding that the differences (especially the Christian insistence on the divine and human authorship of Scripture) need not prevent engagement between 'People of the Book'. Glenn Chestnutt uses Barth to counter evangelical tendencies to supersessionism, and suggests that Barth's negative descriptions of Judaism can be corrected by Barth's later 'parables of the kingdom', opening a place for truth outside the church.

The book is best read as an assortment of trailers advertising films yet to be released; it highlights more substantial work to come from these scholars. As with any collection, the quality is somewhat uneven, but most do promise thought-provoking material in the future. Unfortunately, almost all of these essays begin with largely unsympathetic critiques of evangelicalism; despite the conciliatory tone of Greggs' introduction and the frequent gestures towards the (exploited) difficulty of defining evangelical theology, most of the authors are clear that their targets are evangelicals. Readers of this journal may wish to seek new perspectives for evangelical theology in resources less critical towards the tradition.

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BOOK REVIEWS