

# Book Reviews

## AN EXPLORATION OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

**Don Thorsen**

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008 453pp £19.99hb ISBN: 9781565632363

Finding a systematic theology textbook that ordinary people can read and learn from is not easy, but Dr. Thorsen has come up with one. The format resembles an idiot's guide, or theology 'for dummies' but the content is well-researched, clearly presented and deeply serious. He starts with what he calls the foundations—the nature of theology itself, the meaning of revelation and authority, the place of Scripture. He then talks about who God is, how we can know him and what he has done. After that we come to creation, humanity and sin, before reaching the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is followed by a section on the Holy Spirit, which takes us into salvation, the church and the future, in that order. In all there are twenty-eight chapters, each of which lays out a range of different views on the particular subjects with which it deals.

Dr. Thorsen tries to be fair to as wide a spectrum of Christian belief as he can be, treating Roman Catholics and Pentecostals with equal respect and pointing out what the real disagreements are—as well as reminding us where the weight of majority opinion has generally lain. His own position would probably be on the left of standard American Evangelicalism. For example, he supports the infallibility of Scripture but not its inerrancy, and prefers what he calls a semi-Augustinian view of the great doctrines of grace and salvation. On matters that are currently dividing the mainline Western churches he can be quite circumspect. There is not a word anywhere about homosexuality, although we can assume that he does not approve of it. When dealing with women's ministry, he is careful to present the traditional position fairly before going on to surrender to current feminist thinking. Even there, he is honest enough to admit that the feminist arguments do not hang together as a coherent whole, and that they depend on what he calls the 'trajectory' of biblical teaching rather than the teaching itself.

The design and layout of the book is superb, but one is left wondering who will use it. Liberals will not like the traditional tone of much of what he says, and conservatives will focus on the concessions he makes to modern secular thought, leaving him falling between the two stools. Yet there can be no doubt

that Dr. Thorsen has set a new standard and a benchmark for conservative Evangelicals trying to get their beliefs across. Just as it is far better to produce something more orthodox than to criticise the Alpha Course, so it is to be hoped that other, more trustworthy theological guides will learn from this and develop their own manuals accordingly. He has shown us the way in matters of form; clean up the substance and someone could be on to a winner.

GERALD BRAY  
Cambridge

## A LITTLE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH COUNTRY CHURCH Roy Strong

Jonathan Cape: London, 2007 264pp £16.99hb ISBN: 9780224075220

Anyone picking up this book, expecting a gently bucolic history redolent of tea, scones and cricket on the village green will be very disappointed. It is vivid, lively, and delightfully written; and, as one would expect from the former director of the National Portrait Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum, beautifully illustrated. Each chapter begins with a portrait of a particular church, explaining why they look as they do. But the book is also a *crie du coeur* from someone who knows that rural churches face a crisis that threatens their existence. By ‘church’ Sir Roy Strong means a church building; but he could not be farther from the antiquarianism of Pevsner and Simon Jenkins, who have seen churches as ‘museums’. He recognizes that churches are working buildings that have always adapted to the needs of the times; and that the cold, dead hand of twentieth and twenty-first century conservationism is slowly killing them. This is not a book about architecture and furnishings alone: it is about ‘what ordinary people experienced when they attended church on Sunday’. Despite the reservations below, I would recommend this book, especially for anyone living and ministering in a rural area.

Strong’s own view of a church’s nature is clear: it is ‘sacred space, blessed and set aside to God’. His sympathies with the Laudian restoration of this ideal are obvious. It is interesting then that he recognizes that the writers of the New Testament were disinterested in buildings, and saw Christians gathered together as the church; and that this view was shared by the Puritans, (whom he detests). Furthermore, at the very end of the book he states that ‘This concept of the Church as sacred space has contributed to today’s problems by divorcing religion

from daily life'. It was this separation that the Puritans were concerned to prevent; maybe if we had listened to them, we would not be in such a mess now.

The Reformation looms large in Strong's narrative, and he is implacably hostile to it. According to Strong it was a 'great cataclysm', 'savagely imposed from above', with 'no popular roots'. This is in contrast to his sympathetic portrayal of the late medieval church, which he commends for embracing the 'world of superstition', and successfully harnessing lay enthusiasm. Strong acknowledges Eamonn Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* as his 'greatest inspiration'; it is a shame he did not draw more on the work of Diarmaid MacCulloch (there is a single reference), which would have given a more balanced and positive perspective. In describing the impact of the Reformation there is too much reading between the lines; too often are we told what 'must have been', without evidence.

Whilst Strong's knowledge of art and architecture is of course superb, his understanding of theology is abysmal: for example, he attributes a Zwinglian understanding of the Lord's Supper to the 1552 Prayer Book, and completely fails to understand that Cranmer, Parker, Jewell, and Hooker were thoroughly Protestant in their beliefs, not precursors of Laudianism. The Reformation is seen as a solely destructive force, and he makes no attempt to understand why the reformers acted as they did. Strong (unlike MacCulloch) seems to lack the capacity for imaginative sympathy with those he disagrees with which marks the great historian. His portrait of the Puritans descends into caricature, and again he is inaccurate and misleading when it comes to their beliefs.

Strong's account of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is fascinating (and much less infuriating for evangelical readers). It is also a desperately sad story of how the clergy became country gentlemen, and the Church of England an arm of government. Despite attempts to make the parish system work, by enforcing residency, rooting out pluralism, and building more churches, (many of which have never had a full congregation), the Church of England utterly failed to gain the confidence of the working classes. Strong does not draw out the point, but there is an important lesson for Evangelicals here, as it is not only Anglo-Catholics who are prone to idealise the past: the parish system has never been an effective system of pastoral care and mission. Strong finishes his story in the nineteenth century with Tractarianism and the Camden Society.

Perhaps few realise how greatly the internal appearance of parish churches changed at this time; or how much of what we think of as traditionally and quintessentially ‘Anglican’ (including organs, choirs, and even such small matters as flowers in church), is a product of a late nineteenth century development of the Romantic movement.

Unfortunately, Strong’s historical narrative stops at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, he does not deal with the revolution in parish life caused by two factors: the birth of PCCs, (which have only existed since 1919), and the insane idea of the multi-parish benefice. The latter represents a reversal of the reforms of the nineteenth century, and means that the parish system has, in many rural areas, ceased to exist. Strong touches briefly on this, and the impossible burden it puts on clergy, in his epilogue.

I found the epilogue on the future of the rural church to be the most interesting part of the book. Strong combines deep affection for rural churches with a clear-headed lack of sentimentality. He recognizes that the decline of the parish church must be seen against the background of the transformation of many villages into ‘dormitories for commuters’, and that rural churches cannot remain ‘frozen in time’. His solution is, however, rather naïve: that churches should be given back to the local community, and used for every kind of activity. As anyone who has ever tried to remove a pew or build a toilet knows, this will result in them being preserved in formaldehyde.

Behind Strong’s work (and, I think, that of Duffy’s) there is an unspoken assumption: that the purpose of a church is to satisfy people’s emotional needs, and that this is the measure of its ‘success’ or ‘failure’. But this is what in the end makes their criticisms of the Reformation an anachronism. For neither the reformers nor their opponents were operating with the assumptions of twenty-first century consumerism. They believed in Truth; and that the ‘success’ of church was to be measured by how it served that truth. Strong rightly points out that if the country church was subject to ‘normal commercial pressures’ it would have ‘been abandoned years ago as unviable’; there can be no justification for keeping open hideously expensive buildings that are only used once a week or even month. Furthermore, as he rightly says, ‘the real challenge lies in giving the country church a reason to survive’. But who will decide what that reason is—rural consumerism, or God? Is the purpose of a church building

to give people what they want, or to communicate the truth? If churches are there solely to serve peoples' felt needs, then indeed the Reformation was a disaster—and the Church of England is not Christian.

STEPHEN WALTON  
Marbury

## TAKING DERRIDA, LYOTARD, AND FOUCAULT TO CHURCH

**James K. A. Smith**

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006    156pp    £11.99pb  
ISBN: 978-0801029189

Who's afraid of postmodernism? Not James Smith, that's for sure. In this slim volume, designed to be accessible to non-specialists in philosophy, he outlines the benefits to the church that he believes would come from a richer understanding of the French roots of postmodernism as found in the writings of three of its major exponents: Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault. After an introductory chapter, Smith devotes a chapter to each, before applying their thought in a proposal for the emerging church.

Discussing Derrida, Smith unpacks his claim that 'there is nothing outside the text'. He says this is not a statement that nothing exists except texts, but rather that everything is interpretation. There is no 'view from nowhere'. Even the gospel is interpretation; not everyone accepts that the cross is God's saving intervention in human history. This does not mean that it is untrue: some interpretations are better than others, some are plain wrong. But (and here Smith draws on John Owen), we need the Spirit to illuminate our understanding and transform our hearts before we will believe the gospel. Further, texts are interpreted in communities; and so the appropriate context for interpreting Scripture is within the Church.

Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as 'incredulity towards metanarratives' appears to be inimical to the gospel: does not the Bible itself offer a meta-narrative? However, says Smith, when Lyotard condemns 'meta-narratives', he is not condemning all claims to offer an overarching narrative within which all other, smaller narratives must find their place. Rather, he is making a specifically anti-modern claim: he is opposing narratives that claim to be founded on universal reason, rather than on faith. Thus, post-Lyotard,

Christianity need not fear being accused of faith bias, because in every interpretation of reality, some kind of faith commitment is presupposed.

Foucault's works revolve around careful analyses of power relations in institutions such as prisons, asylums, and schools, emphasising that knowledge and power are inextricably linked. What counts as knowledge is constituted within networks of power. Foucault recognized that disciplinary mechanisms in society make us into particular kinds of people, with particular habits. In contrast, argues Smith, the church needs to recognise the importance of counterformation (discipleship) by counterdisciplines, such as prayer, fasting, and corporate worship.

In the final chapter, Smith seeks to flesh out what these lessons might look like in the life of a local church. He argues against a watered-down ecumenism, and for a 'thick' confessional Christianity. However, he also takes a number of potshots at the 'certainties' of fundamentalism and evangelicalism. He also argues for an appreciation of liturgy, and of historical liturgical resources, and for a commitment to a particular place and people—one is reminded here of the Church of England's parochial system. This, however is the weakest section of the book. Rather than arguing at length for the value of various postmodern practices, Smith assumes that the church will be strengthened by post-modernism. In particular, the liturgical practices that Smith describes owe much to the emerging church, but little to any obvious reflection on scriptural norms for corporate worship. Given his professed commitment to respecting 'tradition', it is somewhat ironic that the service he outlines is something of a hodgepodge of elements, culled from various traditions and contemporary practices; rather than respecting the particularities of any one tradition, the service picks and chooses in a somewhat 'thin' and arbitrary fashion.

The book is engagingly written, although at times the use of film to illustrate his points feels somewhat laboured, not least in the lengthy description of the *Whale Rider*, which Smith takes nearly seven pages to describe, thus all but negating its use in illuminating other material. It works best as a description of the thought of Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault, but is less successful as a prescription of how they might be taken to Church.

MATTHEW MASON  
Tunbridge Wells

## HERESY, SCHISM AND APOSTASY

Gerald Bray

London: The Latimer Trust, 2008 100pp £4.00pb ISBN: 9780946307616

I sometimes wonder whether in a previous incarnation Dr. Gerald Bray was the small boy who loudly exclaimed ‘The Emperor is wearing no clothes’—but perhaps without the lad’s innocent naivete. Dr. Bray has this wonderful capacity for stating the obvious, often with delightful relish, when others for various reasons remain silent. His latest contribution to the Latimer Studies series entitled *Heresy, Schism and Apostasy* is no exception.

The opening chapters set the scene with a description of the current confusion in the C. of E. with the limits of our much-valued but over-emphasised comprehensiveness carefully defined. At its best Anglicanism can claim to be the most balanced and most ecumenical expression of Christianity which exists in the modern world, but there are boundaries to be observed. Any encounter with God must be initiated by Him; the most important mark of a believer is a spirit of humble obedience in the presence of God and His Word. This humility will also acknowledge that we cannot know everything about Him.

There follows a magisterial survey of what has counted as heresy and how it was dealt with in the history of the church. This begins with what has been termed ‘Gnosticism’ although that word was not used until the early nineteenth century. Legislation—and even worse punishment—was counter-productive as it turned heretics into martyrs, though it might sadly be said that the Crusade against the Albigensians was ‘successful’ as they were virtually eliminated by the French King Philip Augustus in 1215. On the other hand failure to do anything about heresy has left today’s church in paralysis and chaos. The chapter on schism also gives an historical perspective but modern examples include that of the parish church of Christ Church, Dead Duck (*sic*) Alabama which put itself out of communion with the rest of the Anglican world by seceding from its local Episcopal diocese only to re-enter the Anglican Communion by becoming a mission of the Church of Uganda. Such examples, often demanded by necessity, are nonetheless Gilbertian. The charge of ‘apostasy’ although too frequently flung at both individuals and churches, is sometimes valid as with the Emperor Julian (an individual) and with the Churches of Asia Minor.

The final chapter amounts to a passionate appeal. Again the ludicrous situation of today's Church of England is spelt out. It would be hard to find anyone who has been denied ordination for failing to believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus but many ordinands can testify to the problems they have had with their bishops when they refused to wear a stole—as if a piece of cloth round their necks was more important than those left behind in the empty tomb!

Dr. Bray amounts a superb defence of the traditional rules of interpretation going back to the Fathers and the Reformers. Appeals to Hooker to a three-fold basis of authority—Scripture, Reason, and Tradition are easily refuted. *Sola Scriptura* is the Church of England's court of appeal. The C. of E. must once again be defined theologically and confessionally, not structurally. Accredited teachers and preachers need to be better instructed on the doctrines of Anglicanism—as there is a woeful ignorance. There needs to be a climate of opinion that those who will not accept the theological formularies ought to resign their offices, or failing that, be dismissed from them.

This short book is not only a joy to read for many felicitous turns of phrase, it is also full of vital historical and current information of which many will be ignorant. It also amounts to a powerful and passionate plea. Oh that it might be read not only by subscribers to Churchman, but also by those evangelicals who read Anvil or who are supporters of Fulcrum.

JONATHAN FLETCHER  
Wimbledon

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (eds.)

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008 428pp £15.99pb ISBN: 978-0-8028-2717-3

In 2003 the University of St. Andrews hosted a new kind of theological conference, one whose declared intention was to bridge the gap between Biblical studies and systematic theology. The subject chosen was the Gospel of John and a number of very distinguished academics and churchmen were invited to contribute to it. The edited results have now been published in a handsome and very useful volume which has been carefully subdivided so that readers can go straight to the themes of greatest interest to them. Inevitably, some chapters are better than others and few readers will find them all equally



interesting or informative, but the editors are to be congratulated on having produced a book which offers a good deal of food for thought to almost anyone with a serious interest in the Fourth Gospel.

The first two sections deal respectively with the context of what is called modern 'pluralism' and the history of interpretation, and it has to be said that they are the weakest in the book as a whole. Whether our modern context is really as 'pluralist' as is generally assumed is at least an open question, and to reproach John for being both exclusivist and supernatural in the claims he makes for Jesus is anachronistic at best. There is no doubt that the Evangelist was writing from a particular perspective and with a clear message of his own, but his greatness has stood the test of time and ought to be respected. Those with a different agenda may not like it, but he was writing with the conviction that his point of view was the correct one, and the Christian church exists today because it agrees with him.

Making exclusive claims about Jesus may not go down well with the politically correct in our midst, but the Roman Empire was also a multicultural and multifaith society which did not like John's claims either. It is not the business of Christians to bend to prevailing fashion, but rather to preach the eternal and unchanging Word to each new trend as it comes along. The history of interpretation bears this out, but unfortunately the book contains few examples of it. There is a good chapter on Irenaeus and the Archbishop of Canterbury has written about several modern Anglican interpreters of the Gospel, but too much has been left out. There is scope here for a volume on its own, which would demonstrate how John has spoken afresh to different generations and situations throughout the history of the church.

Of more substance are the sections dealing with the Jews and the raising of Lazarus. Here we get into the text of the gospel itself and examine issues which have become contentious for quite different reasons. John was generally negative towards the Jews, though by no means exclusively so, and it is hard to know precisely to whom he was referring. Sometimes it seems that the 'Jews' are the Temple clique in Jerusalem, whose hostility to Jesus and his message was especially strong, but the term can also apply to the entire Jewish nation which stands in sharp contrast to its Samaritan rivals as the only bearer of salvation. Whether John's approach to the Jewish question can be blamed for

more recent outbreaks of anti-Semitism is hard to say, but of course it is a question that must engage all modern exegetes to some extent. That they should arrive at different conclusions is not surprising, and it is good to see that a range of views is presented in this symposium. The raising of Lazarus touches on a different subject altogether—the historicity of miracles—and here there is a robust defence of the traditional position by Alan Torrance. More broadly, most of the contributors recognise that ‘historicity’ is a somewhat elastic term. If it is dependent on evidence, then the New Testament as a whole is scarcely ‘historical’, but if personal testimony is allowed to have its say, it is another story altogether. Suffice it to say that testimony is the inevitable basis of the claim of John’s Gospel to historicity, and that in the circumstances, such a claim is not an unreasonable one to make.

A further section deals with Christology, which has always been a major theological theme on the Fourth Gospel. There are outstanding essays by Martin Hengel and Murray Rae which will repay careful study. It is surprising that relatively little is said about the Holy Spirit or the Trinity, though Jürgen Moltmann touches on the latter in his concluding paper. The stature of many of the contributors is such that it is worthwhile pondering what they have to say even if it is not the reader’s primary concern. The editors are to be congratulated on having produced such a valuable book and it is to be hoped that the others planned for the series will achieve a similarly high standard.

GERALD BRAY  
Cambridge

## INTRODUCING THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE RECOVERING A CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

Daniel J. Treier

Nottingham: Apollos, 2008 224pp £11.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-311-7

This short book provides an excellent introduction for the non-specialist to what is fast becoming something of a movement in academic theology. Treier’s work is in two parts. The first part describes the essential elements of Theological Interpretation of Scripture, its genesis within the context of Catholic and Evangelical biblical scholarship that sought to maintain a theological function for biblical studies, the theological interpretations of pre-modernity in which it is interested as well as the ideas and methods of some of

its key practitioners. Readers who are new to the field of TIS will be introduced in some depth to David Yeago, Francis Watson and Stephen Fowl, all of which might bear fruit for Evangelicals.

The second part of the book discusses some of the challenges Theological Interpretation of Scripture faces, some of the areas of particular debate within the movement. Treier explores how it interacts with the work of the earlier Biblical Theology movement, exemplified by the work of Brevard Childs and others and dominated by an historical approach to the Bible. He goes on to outline some of the controversies regarding the need for 'special' theological hermeneutics and the movement's relationship with the 'general' hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and others. Finally, Treier explores the challenge posed by the need for contextualised biblical interpretation, with the increased dominance of the global south and the decline of the western liberalism that has shaped so much of academic biblical studies within the Christian Church.

Treier writes as an Evangelical, firmly committed to orthodox theology and the authority of Scripture. Despite this, he is perhaps overly generous towards a movement which has many aspects of concern to Evangelicals. In particular, the dominance of a 'rule of faith' (according to which biblical texts are interpreted in so much Theological Interpretation of Scripture) tends towards subversion of historical particularity, making all texts alike. It is perhaps worth remembering that the earliest critical scholars of the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries did not have solely dishonourable intentions. Many were keen to free the Bible from the dogmatic and exclusivist reading of the Roman Church which read the Bible with such a rule. They often wished to enable the Bible to speak on its own behalf, which is a natural desire for anyone committed to *sola scriptura*.

Despite this, Treier's book is to be recommended to any who feel that their academic study of the Bible has been limited by the historical-critical method, those who are interested in the interface between Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology or who are considering taking one of the many courses now offered by universities on theological reading of the Bible.

BENJAMIN SARGENT  
Oxford

## TRINITY IN HUMAN COMMUNITY

Exploring congregational life in the image of the social Trinity

**Peter R. Holmes**

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006 230pp £11.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84227-470-5

What do you do when you discover that the institutional church is failing large numbers of deeply troubled people who need shelter and a shoulder to cry on at least as much as traditional preaching and teaching? You start a church community to meet their needs, which is what Peter Holmes has done at Christ Church Deal. He evidently comes from a fairly conservative non-conformist background, but is adamant that his congregation is non-denominational and accepting of anyone in sympathy with its aims. It has been running now for a number of years, and appears to be highly successful. It has also linked up with a number of other churches that cater to similar types of people, though Mr. Holmes is clear that he has nothing against traditional churches and does not want to change their theology in any significant way. His claim is that he is pioneering a church whose beliefs are orthodox but whose practices often are not, because the people to whom it ministers are not conventional either.

It is impossible to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Christ Church Deal from a book like this and very difficult to know how much of what it says can be adapted to other situations. The thought of going to church on Sunday to share your 'story' alongside other people who are sharing theirs will be very appealing to some and equally off-putting to others, but that is the kind of fellowship it is. The Christianity is certainly present, but it is soft-sell, 'caught' at least as much as taught in the formal sense. Again, this will appeal to some more than to others, and we must not imagine that one size fits all. What Mr. Holmes has developed seems to work very well for certain types of people and his church is to be commended for reaching out to them. How far it can be a model for others though is a question to which there does not appear to be any straightforward answer.

This is important because this book is a sharing of the story of Christ Church Deal, couched in a theological framework that advocates its approach as more faithful to the nature of the Triune God than much of what we see in our churches. Loving community, mutual acceptance and respect, therapeutic practices designed to unblock the psychological logjams that mar so many

people's lives and block their capacity to develop to the full—all this and more is supposed to be what the Trinity is all about. As he warms to his theme, it soon becomes clear that the reason why this vision has not prevailed in the church for so many centuries is that we have fallen victim to the theology of Augustine, rooted as he thinks it is in pagan Greek thought. If only we had paid more attention to the Cappadocian Fathers, with their deeply Biblical and Hebraic perspective, we would have done so much better!

This line will be familiar to anyone who has read the writings of people like Colin Gunton and John Zizioulas, though Mr. Holmes is honest enough to point out that Colin Gunton (at least) never went as far as he does in developing this theme. That is just as well, because Mr. Holmes' interpretation of classical Christian theology is a simplistic fantasy. The picture he portrays of Augustine shows that he has never read the man in any depth, and is a travesty of his Trinitarian doctrine. The Cappadocians are all very well, but a church based primarily on their approach will not necessarily look more like Christ Church Deal than the average English congregation does. The Eastern Orthodox churches can fairly claim to be Augustine-free, but nobody would say that they are noticeably more welcoming to the kind of people Mr. Holmes has in his sights.

Elsewhere in his book he makes an equally fantastic foray into the early history of ancient Israel, which he seems to think was a community rather like his own church, though on a wider scale. Unfortunately, even a cursory reading of the Old Testament will quickly reveal that pre-exilic Israel was no such thing. God's people had to fight for their very lives, even against members of their own nation. Just ask Elijah or Elisha how spiritually idyllic their society was! The Judaism that emerged in later times may have had its faults but it did not represent a catastrophic falling away from the purity of earlier times. On the contrary, in many ways, such as its dedication to the worship of the One God, it was superior to what had prevailed before the exile.

Mr. Holmes has made the classic mistake of taking his own successful experiment and reading it back into the past, looking for evidence to confirm what he is now doing and rejecting or slighting anything which appears to go against it. He has read widely but not deeply, and that shows in the way he jumps from one modern authority to another, with little apparent awareness of

what they were really saying or of how significant they are as thinkers. His hero is John Macmurray, but how many people in the wider Christian world have heard of him? That is not a criticism of Mr. Macmurray, but it shows that Mr. Holmes needs to make his case with greater awareness of the true situation of the churches he is addressing. For better or for worse, *Christ Church Deal* is an unusual phenomenon which cannot be easily replicated elsewhere. That in no way invalidates its witness, but it must make us careful not to elevate it into a model reflecting the ‘true’ understanding of the Trinitarian Godhead.

Augustine will be around long after Mr. Holmes is forgotten, and it is as well to bear that fact in mind. Making him the bad guy and trying to restructure the church in such a way as to filter his influence out is a strategy that is bound to fail. A book like this should concentrate on telling the story of what God has done in Deal and not try to make exaggerated and ill-founded theological claims about what the church should be like. Read it by all means and rejoice in what has been achieved, but do not fall for the caricature of Christian theology that is presented here as the underpinnings of true church growth.

GERALD BRAY  
Cambridge

**SERVING GOD’S PEOPLE: Rethinking Christian ministry today**  
**Harold Rowdon (ed.)**

Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006 250pp £14.99pb ISBN: 0-900128-35-8

While the contributors to this symposium are drawn with one exception from the independent churches, there is valuable material for Anglican readers in it. Many of the chapters reflect the thinking of what were formerly Brethren meetings who have found the need to ‘call a pastor’ and have therefore turned into independent evangelical churches. It is from this background that the editor, a former member of the faculty of the London Bible College comes. In the introduction he expresses ‘the hope and prayer of the [eighteen] contributors that it will make a real, if modest, contribution towards the current debate [on ministry] and—perhaps more importantly—will serve as both stimulus and guide to those who are involved in Christian ministry which, if Ephesians 4:14-16 is to be believed, should include every member of the body’. Each contributor writes from personal experience of their subject. The first part is given over to considering the biblical pattern for ministry and

stressing the need to implement the New Testament teaching pointing to the importance of working in teams with every member ministry. These ideas should by now be familiar in Anglican thinking, but there are still valuable insights to be gained from these pages.

Part two contains helpful chapters on various forms of ministry: Bible teaching, pastoral, diaconal, evangelistic, leadership, administration and management and youth and community work. The third part has invaluable advice on 'Caring for ministers' and here the one Anglican writer (lay reader Robert McLeish) makes a significant contribution. Ministers should buy the book if only for this section, but the whole deserves a place on our bookshelves.

Part Four on 'Finding and Keeping Ministers' reflects the Free Church rather than the Anglican situation concerning appointments, but in days when many evangelical parishes are appointing ministerial apprentices, lay, children's and youth workers and other agents the advice contained here is extremely relevant, especially in the light of current employment legislation, as the Bishop of Hereford recently discovered to his cost. These chapters are followed by most helpful appendices on appointing full-time staff, equal opportunities policy and policy for working with offenders.

Each chapter concludes with a useful bibliography recommended by the contributor, but it would have been helpful if there had also been a list of addresses and details of organisations mentioned in the book (and others which could be helpful). 'Partnership' is mentioned four times in the book, but the reader is left in the dark as to who or what this is! There is a statement that Anglicans do not have a course to prepare women about to become vicars' wives (p. 178): this is a surprising piece of information as theological colleges known to your reviewer have been doing this since the end of World War II. One wonders how many pastors/incumbents would be content to be allowed to be responsible for only up to thirty per cent of the biblical teaching (p. 216), and those unfamiliar with current jargon will want to ask what people have to be released from in order to enter Christian service (p. 224).

DAVID WHEATON  
Blandford

## PREACHING CHRIST FROM GENESIS

### Foundations for expository sermons

Sidney Greidanus

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007 518pp £16.99pb ISBN: 978-0-8028-2586-5

As its title suggests, this book is aimed at helping preachers proclaim Christ from the first book of the Bible. The bulk of the book comprises 23 expository essays on selected passages of Genesis and these turn out to be a cross between a commentary and the application of the author's seven ways of preaching Christ that he first presented in his *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, published in 1999. In the introductory chapter, Greidanus considers issues that arise in preaching Christ, in interpreting Genesis and in preaching the Genesis narratives. He emphasises the importance of not only appreciating what the original audience were meant to hear but of understanding the text in the context of the whole Bible and redemptive history. The Old Testament text is not complete in itself but part of one big narrative that centres on Jesus the Messiah.

Reasons are given for selecting Genesis and then issues of interpretation are covered including source criticism, structure, the genre of the narratives, their historical reliability and the original readership. Finally, the author gives helpful advice on preaching the narratives of Genesis including the length of a particular series of sermons and the importance of keeping to an oral, more familiar style over-against a written style when recounting the Genesis stories. All this introductory material comes into play as the author works through the selected passages. He is anxious to encourage preachers to produce sermons that are not based on a single verse that might catch the eye but the whole story of which it is a part. His first expository essay begins with the creation narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:3, moves to the account of the Fall, 2:4-3:24, and continues with the Cain and Abel incident, then the Flood, the tower of Babel, the call of Abram, the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17, the birth of Isaac, the sacrifice of Isaac, the burial of Sarah and the bride for Isaac. There are seven essays relating to Jacob, one on Judah and Tamar and four on Joseph.

Each of these expository essays follows a similar pattern in which Greidanus considers the text and context, literary features, the plot line, theocentric interpretation, textual theme and goal, ways to preach Christ, sermon theme



and goal, the sermon form and sermon exposition. The book is brought to a close with five appendices that include ‘Ten steps from text to sermons’, ‘An expository sermon model’, and three of the author’s own sermons written out in full from Genesis 1:1-2:3, 4:1-26, and 11:27:12:9. There follows a select bibliography, and a subject and select Scripture index.

The illustrations should not be slavishly reproduced, as some are appropriate only to the USA. An error was noted in the first essay. While the author picks up on the number seven and its multiples, the Hebrew for ‘heavens’ does not occur twenty-one times in Genesis 1:1-2:3, only eleven times. If taken to heart the contents of this book will prevent a new generation of preachers from concluding that the only way to preach Christ from Genesis is to allegorise the text or engage in typology that is unconvincing to the congregation.

PHILIP H. EVESON

London

**SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR GOD: CELEBRATING THE  
BIBLE’S CENTRAL STORY**  
**CHRISTOPHER J. H. WRIGHT**

Leicester: IVP, 2008    208 pp    £6.99pb    ISBN: 9781844742431

The Global Christian Library invites international authors to provide readable surveys of key Christian doctrines. Authors so far published in this series are Roland Chia, Samuel Escobar, Ida Glaser, Joe Kapolyo, and the series editors David Smith and John Stott. While Christopher J H Wright is admittedly not an ‘international’ (he comes from Northern Ireland), he writes as one with considerable experience and involvement with cross-cultural mission as a former lecturer at Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India and then Principal of All Nations Christian College before his present appointment as International Director of Langham Partnership International.

‘Salvation’ is explored through the lens of Revelation 7:10, each phrase of which resonates with themes from the Old and New Testaments. The survey draws Wright to touch on covenant, blessing, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the scope of human need, holistic mission, universalism, and more issues besides. In each case the treatment is indeed readable, balanced, brief and (for this reviewer) persuasive. Readers familiar with Wright’s other works on the

Old Testament and Mission will find much that is familiar: the purpose of this series is to provide a survey rather than to advance any particular new thesis.

Some of the applications could have been given more impact. For example, a right understanding of ‘blessing’ within the context of biblical covenant addresses the distorted version of ‘blessing’ promoted by advocates of prosperity teaching. But this is mentioned quite gently. When the negative application is given so much less force than the positive, some of the application’s ‘bite’ is lost. This may be an unavoidable aspect of writing for such a broad intended readership. As a survey of the themes related to ‘salvation’ in the Bible this is a good introduction which should benefit readers—wherever they are.

ED MOLL

Wembdon, Bridgwater