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Book Reviews

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON JESUS

What the quest for the historical Jesus missed

James D. G. Dunn

London: SPCK, 2005,

136pp. £10.99pb

ISBN: 0-281-05742-7

This book is a lecture series originally delivered at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, together with a concluding essay originally given as a lecture to the Society for New Testament Studies but which covers the same general topic. Professor Dunn takes the quest for the historical Jesus as his theme, and traces its development from Schleiermacher to Sanders. The presentation is brisk but always engaging, and he has a remarkable gift for being able to synthesize a vast range of scholarship in a comprehensible (and defensible) manner. Readers unfamiliar with the history should not be put off—this is the book which will clarify the major points at issue for them in a way that no other general introduction is likely to do.

The author's main point is that two centuries of Gospel criticism have gone seriously wrong because they have regarded their texts as literary compositions, rather than as the fruit of an oral transmission which was broadly similar but which probably took slightly different forms. He does not exclude the possibility that Matthew or Luke may have 'copied' Mark (or one another) at different points, but he stresses that this is not the most important aspect of the synoptic gospels problem. Both the great similarities and the differences between the first three Gospels can be more easily explained by positing an oral tradition which maintained a generally similar content but occasionally expressed it slightly differently or added extra material.

Throughout the lectures, Professor Dunn concentrates on the great impact which Jesus himself made on his hearers, and the equally great desire which the latter must have felt to preserve his words in as authentic a form as possible. He demolishes approaches to the 'historical Jesus' which reduce the Saviour's teaching to those elements of the gospel which are unlike anything found elsewhere, for the very good reason that these elements are relatively few and do not present a coherent picture. But he also stresses that Jesus must have shared a great deal with other Jews of his time, if not quite to the extent claimed by men like E. P. Sanders, who turn Jesus into such a good rabbi that it is hard to see how he could ever have fallen out with the Pharisees, let alone been crucified at their insistence.

This book is a short but important corrective to many of the current trends in Gospel scholarship, and its accessibility should give it a wide audience. Professor Dunn has little affinity for the fourth Gospel, and wisely leaves it more or less out of the discussion altogether, but on the Synoptics, his views deserve serious consideration and may well provide a viable alternative for future researchers, which will bring them back to a more positive view of the texts themselves as witnesses to the true, historical Jesus. In the end, says Professor Dunn, the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same, and the Synoptic Gospels bear witness to his life and work in a way that no other sources ever can.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Richard Lints, Michael Horton, Mark R. Talbot (eds.)

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006 232pp \$20/£11.99pb ISBN: 0-8028-2893-0

In 1998 a group of ‘confessionally oriented’ theologians decided to embark on a series of ten biennial conferences to discuss issues of common concern. This book is the product of the third conference, held at Colorado Springs in 2002. There are ten contributors, mostly from evangelical seminaries and colleges, though with a sprinkling of others, like Robert Wilken of the University of Virginia and David Kelsey of Yale Divinity School. The volume is subdivided into three sections, of which the first is called ‘Setting the Context’ and consists of four papers, covering the doctrine of man as this has been understood in the patristic period (Robert Wilken), by Lutherans (William Weinrich) and by the Reformed tradition (Michael Horton). A fourth paper by the late Stanley Grenz discusses the question of the image of God in the postmodern context, and was originally published in 2001. Dr. Grenz participated in the conference and made a number of interventions at different points, but rather than turn those into a chapter for the book, the editors decided it would be better to reprint this article as a fuller and fairer representation of his views.

The second section is entitled ‘Significant Challenges’ and contains two papers. The first of these is by Nancey Murphy, who makes the case for a ‘physicalist’ understanding of human nature, and the second, written jointly by Stanton

Jones and Mark Yarhouse, discusses the whole question of human sexuality, arguing that traditional heterosexuality is the norm intended by God for his creation. The third section, entitled 'Suggestive Proposals' contains papers by David Kelsey on 'personal bodies', Mark Talbot on 'moral anthropology', Michael Horton on the covenantal implications of human personhood and Richard Lints on the sociality of personhood as this is expounded in the Bible.

Robert Wilken demonstrates the essential unity of the patristic tradition by showing how Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo, who represented Eastern and Western thought respectively, held complementary rather than contradictory positions. Both men, and indeed the entire patristic tradition, focused on the image of God as the basis of human 'deification' in Christ, a doctrine which sounds strange to modern ears but which clearly derives from the New Testament and was their way of explaining the Christian's eternal destiny as one of fellowship with God in heaven.

The Lutheran tradition has naturally focussed on the way in which sinful man has been redeemed by the grace of God, and how he can now function in ways which transcend his natural handicaps if his life is fully submitted to the grace of God working in the power of the Holy Spirit. Michael Horton and Stanley Grenz point out that the Reformed tradition was the first to develop the social dimension of the image of God, and both contributors expound the implications of this for our theology.

Nancey Murphy's paper challenges both the trichotomist and dualist views of human nature which have dominated theological thought for so long. She favours the 'physicalist' view, which is held by the vast majority of secular thinkers and scientists today, and argues that this is compatible with traditional Christianity, though she admits that the dimensions of her paper are inadequate to allow a full exposition of this thesis. This is a pity, because of all the papers, hers is potentially the most creative and we must hope that she will soon be able to develop her ideas with the depth which they deserve.

Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse tackle the tangled skein of modern sexuality and make a spirited defence of heterosexuality in the face of pressures from both the homosexual community and those in sympathy with them. They demonstrate that deviations from the creational norm are due to the effects of

the fall, which have led people to put themselves in the place of God and so pervert what he intended for us.

David Kelsey's paper takes modern biological and psychological theories for granted and attempts to adapt our theological understanding accordingly. This is the paper that is likely to raise the greatest objections from conservative Christians who will want to view this question from the other end. For example, Dr. Kelsey assumes that theologians have borrowed the word 'person' from modern psychology and says that although we are forced to use it, it is not very satisfactory as a vehicle for expressing Christian beliefs. In fact, the word 'person' was taken over by the modern human sciences from theology, which developed it not from any ancient philosophy (as Kelsey assumes), but from Roman law, which originally got it from the theatre!

Mark Talbot's paper is couched in parabolic terms and must have made a very entertaining lecture, though it reads somewhat oddly in print. Michael Horton's contribution is more satisfactory in this respect, and presents a very thorough examination of the concept of the divine image in the context of a covenant theology which gives it shape and purpose as the expression of the relationships, both human and divine, which constitute human personhood.

Richard Lints' concluding essay takes up the theme of human personhood once more and after sketching the different models which are currently in vogue, sets out the biblical understanding of the image of God, which has been classically perverted by the phenomenon of idolatry. He concludes by asserting that modern Evangelicals have erred on the side of individualism and need to recover a deeper sense of community relationships. This is not a new theme, but it is expounded here with a more solid biblical basis than is usually found in such discussions.

Given that the book is a symposium, the quality of the contributions is remarkably high overall, and readers will derive stimulation and profit from virtually every paper in it. They must, however, be prepared to accept that it is written in that peculiar dialect of English which we might call 'Academic American', a circumstance which occasionally makes it difficult to figure out what exactly is being said. Nevertheless, the importance of the subjects covered is such that it is worth making the effort to overcome this barrier,

and it must be hoped that the substantial nature of the contents will ensure that this book is widely read and influential in the shaping of modern theological discussion.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

ANSWERS TO PASTORS' FAQs

Howard F. Sugden and Warren W. Wiersbe

Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2005 190pp £7.99pb ISBN: 0-7814-4156-0

In 1973 the authors of this book published *When Pastors Wonder How* which they revised as *Confident Pastoral Leadership* in 1993. Since then Sugden has gone to be with the Lord and Wiersbe has taken the opportunity of retirement from pastoral ministry to revise the text to deal with some of the contemporary issues pastors face.

Twenty chapters answer on average just under five questions each, so it is obvious that the answers will be somewhat sketchy. The material is also geared inevitably to the American Free Church market, as it was originally published by Moody Publishers and Baker Book House. Having said that, there is useful information for pastors this side of the pond! In the current Church of England situation the chapter on 'The Call to a Church' has some wise advice on being interviewed for a post, and there is treatment of unusual subjects such as 'The Pastor and his Books'. Chapters on 'Dealing with Problem People', 'Church Discipline', 'The Pastor and Home' and 'The Ministry of the Pastor's Wife' are well worth reading, while in 'Miscellaneous Ministerial Matters' there is a salutary warning for churches whose ministers are tempted to model themselves on CEOs—a feature of some of the current craze for 'managing' churches. Here Wiersbe quotes Campbell Morgan's dictum that 'The church did most for the world when the church was least like the world' (p. 184). That quotation draws attention to the fact that in the Preface the author says, 'If you are a young preacher, you may find this book quoting preachers from the past who are strangers to you. I urge you to get acquainted with them and read their sermons and their biographies. They will enrich you.' (p. 7). Consequently Bishop Phillips Brooks is quoted no less than nine times, together with J. H. Jowett and A. W. Tozer and others.

It will be evident from what has been said that there is much of value in this book. Unfortunately many of the issues dealt with need a fuller treatment than is possible in the space of these 190 pages, and this limits its usefulness. For instance, while the authors have been keen to approach their answers from a biblical standpoint, when it comes to the question Divorce and Remarriage are controversial issues in many churches. How can I make the right decisions? Matthew 12:31 is quoted to affirm that God forgives all manner of sin, there is no reference to Jesus' teaching in chapter 19:9 of the same gospel concerning remarriage after divorce.

DAVID WHEATON
Chesham

NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

I. Howard Marshall

Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2004 765pp £24.99hb ISBN: 1-84474-047-1

David Starkey would have done well to read this book! In a broadcast on Radio 4 entitled 'Who killed Christianity?' he trotted out the old chestnut that Paul was the first villain, rewriting and distorting the simple message of Jesus about the kingdom of heaven into a complex theology. In this monumental volume the Honorary Research Professor of New Testament at the University of Aberdeen sets out to demonstrate the fundamental unity of the books of the New Testament and their theology—and consequently the fallacy of arguments such as those used by Starkey and others.

Marshall's methodology is to give the reader what is virtually a theological commentary on the New Testament. He groups its contents into four parts: Jesus, the Synoptic Gospels and Acts; the Pauline Letters; the Johannine literature; and Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude. In each group he examines the individual books or letters, producing a potted commentary, and then drawing out the theological themes he finds in each. Each part then has a summarising chapter which assesses the common theological strands, and identifies the themes held in common with the previous part(s). A concluding section then discusses the diversity and unity to be found in the New Testament, pointing out that 'we must recognize that there may be considerable differences in religious ethos that are compatible with a basic identity in experience' (p. 730).

In the beginning the author points out that this corpus of earliest Christian literature must be the fruit of a development in thinking that falls into two clear stages. First there is the record of what Jesus did and taught in the four gospels, and then as his followers take the message throughout the Mediterranean world, it has to be explained and applied to the needs of the first audiences. This cannot be just an extension of what Jesus had taught but must rather be a proclamation of Jesus and His continuing significance (p. 22). Thus there must be different emphases, but these do not preclude an underlying unity of thought and theology.

It is interesting that the publishers of Guthrie's *New Testament Introduction* which defends the traditional authorship of the Pastoral Epistles by Paul and of 2 Peter by the apostle allow this author leeway to describe the Pastoral letters as being 'anonymous', or containing 'Pauline materials that have been adapted within a Pauline circle after his death' (p. 398). Of 2 Peter he says that it 'seems wisest to admit that we do not know who wrote this letter, but to recognize that it claims to stand in the tradition associated with Peter' (p. 671). Interestingly, when it comes to the authorship of Revelation and the problems suggested there over the apparently different ways of thinking from John's gospel, Marshall quotes with approval the illustration from W. F. Howard's *Christianity According to St. John*. There the author cites two hymns which reflect the Christian mysticism of the gospel and the 'undiluted Jewish apocalyptic' of Revelation, yet both are by Charles Wesley (p. 571).

On some of the other issues the book is, as one would expect, refreshingly conservative. Marshall can find no support in the theology of the New Testament for the universalist position (pp. 338-9 and 722), and in his approach to the theology of justification and salvation in Galatians and Romans he gives a timely defence of the idea of substitution in the doctrine of the atonement (pp. 224-6, 314-5 and see also ch. 25). Surprisingly, in dealing with the theology of 1 Peter 3:18ff he focuses on the significance of what Jesus was doing after His death rather than what that death accomplished.

A book of this size inevitably raises various points which the reviewer would wish to discuss with the author. After referring to Luke's account of the temptation (p. 132) is it correct to say that 'the devil has used up his weapons for the time being' in the light of Luke's own comment in 4:13 and 22:28? Is

the major part of Jesus's prayer in John 17 about the disciples (p. 508)? Surely from verse 20 onwards he is thinking of the subsequent generations of believers up to, and including, those of us who read these words and our successors. On page 723 Marshall suggests that John is the gospel writer who draws attention to the 'arrangements for [the disciples'] keep from various women who evidently had material resources' but there is evidence for this also in Luke (8:1-3 and 10:38-42).

The book is complete with three indices of Authors, Subjects and Scriptures quoted, and each chapter concludes with a bibliography of articles as well as books relevant to the subject-matter. Your reviewer ended up with several pages of quotable quotes, far too many to reproduce here, but this one from p. 484 gives a good illustration of the author's lightness of touch and approach to his subject. Speaking of the four Evangelists he says, '...they are all singing from the same hymnbook, although they may be singing different parts.' He concludes with the reminder that 'when we have reached the end of this book, we have not brought our study to a final conclusion but rather accepted an invitation that will lead us on further to a continuing engagement with the God who continues to speak to us in Scripture' (p. 731).

DAVID WHEATON
Chesham

HOW ON EARTH DID JESUS BECOME A GOD?

Historical questions about earliest devotion to Jesus

Larry W. Hurtado

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005 246pp \$20.00/£11.99pb

ISBN: 0-8028-2861-2

In 2004 Dr. Hurtado was invited to the Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheva in order to give the Deichmann lectures, which were established by a German philanthropist to encourage the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the early centuries of the church. The Israeli university proved to be remarkably open to that suggestion and established itself as a centre for Jewish-Christian dialogue, with special emphasis on Christian origins. This book is the published text of those lectures, together with four other pieces on related themes and two speeches, one by Herr Deichmann and the other by Dr. Roland Deiches of Ben

Gurion University, which set the whole project in its wider context. The circumstances in which the lectures were given must be understood by the reader, who will then be able to make the appropriate allowances. Almost all of the entire audience was Jewish and Israeli, and this fact is reflected in the way in which some of the material is presented. In particular, readers must get used to identifying the Hebrew names of familiar Christian figures, though the book generally follows established English usage in this respect, and to the ‘common era’ dating, which usually suggests that the author is not a committed Christian, but which is presumably used here in deference to the particular audience.

Dr. Hurtado’s theme is that the worship of Jesus as divine can be traced back to the earliest years of the Christian church, and that it was this, more than anything else, which marked it out from other strands of contemporary Judaism and made it unacceptable to those whose primary concern was the preservation of Jewish identity. Dr. Hurtado engages with mainstream scholarship, occasionally veering to left of centre (though not as far as the Jesus Seminar) and demonstrates that, even on their presuppositions, the worship of Jesus from earliest times cannot be denied. In making this claim he takes issue with many of his fellow scholars, and it is only to be expected that some will disagree with his conclusions, but Christian believers can take heart and be encouraged by his approach, which strengthens the case that we would wish to make.

Perhaps the most interesting chapters are those devoted to the study of the so-called ‘Christological hymn’ in Philippians 2:5-11. Hurtado takes us through this line by line, and shows how, well before Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, there was a developed liturgical tradition which offered worship to Jesus based on an adaptation of Isaiah 45:23, a verse which is clearly dedicated to exalting the strictest monotheism. Along the way, we are treated to a fascinating study of the nature of first-century Judaism in which he points out that although there was some willingness among Jews to give exceptional honour to angelic figures and other personal agents of God, this reverence never went to the point of outright worship. He also shows that the worship of Christ in the church cannot have been a Gentile contribution, since it was well-established before there was any significant non-Jewish form of Christianity.

Readers looking for solid evidence on which to base their claims for the divinity of Jesus will find this book extremely useful. Once its original purpose

is understood, they will realize that Dr. Hurtado has made a courageous presentation of the material which may even be used to good evangelistic purpose, even though that was not his original intention.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN

The pre-existence of Christ and the Christian Faith

Douglas McCready

Leicester: Apollos, 2005 349pp £16.99pb ISBN: 1-84474-104-4

The pre-existence of Christ is seldom talked about these days, but as Douglas McCready points out in this full-length study, it is central to our understanding of his person and work. If Jesus of Nazareth was not the eternal Son of God who came to earth to be born as a man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the New Testament is wrong and the Christian faith is without serious substance. That the apostles taught this doctrine was universally agreed until modern times, when post-Enlightenment scepticism got to work. Even today, it is relatively common to find scholars who are prepared to assert that Paul believed it, and hardly anyone would question its presence in the fourth gospel.

This has not prevented modern theologians from casting considerable doubt on traditional christology, either by asserting that the clearest statements of Christ's pre-existence are to be found in the latest parts of the New Testament, which suggests that the doctrine evolved over time and did not represent the teaching of Jesus himself. Where a late dating is not possible (as with Philippians, for example) recourse is had to other devices, including the assertion that the language of the texts is basically 'functional' in approach and does not grapple with the underlying ontological issues. Dr. McCready tackles each of these objections in turn and demonstrates why they are hard to sustain in the face of the known evidence. He himself holds to the traditional high christology of Chalcedon, which he defends with the help of a wide range of biblical scholars.

Much of the book is set in the late 1970s, when *The Myth of God Incarnate* made a temporary splash on the British theological scene. The names of that

time figure prominently in this work—Maurice Wiles, Geoffrey Lampe, J. A. T. Robinson. Although this gives much of the discussion a somewhat dated feel, it must be remembered that some of the people involved, like C. F. D. Moule, are still alive and that Dr. McCready is familiar with more recent work to which he frequently refers. In particular, he acknowledges the extensive writings of Larry Hurtado and Tom Wright, and like them, gives full credence to the hymnic substratum of Philippians 2:5-11, which is a very early reference to the divinity of Christ. Nevertheless, the debates of thirty years ago are the ones which set the tone for his argument, which may trigger a certain nostalgia in some readers and puzzlement in others, for whom those days must now seem almost prehistoric.

The opening chapter is a discussion of theological method which is very important to Dr. McCready, though it is hard not to think that it could have been cut down considerably without much loss of substance. Like many American writers, Dr. McCready has a habit of quoting a wide range of sources rather in the manner of an undergraduate essay. This shows us that he has read (or at least sampled) a great deal of material, though there is no way of telling how much of it is of any real significance. Dr. McCready knows the work of most current theologians, but cannot really be said to be in conversation with them. They are sources of usable quotes more than anything else, which can be frustrating for readers with a theological understanding. Later in the book however, when he gets to grips with people like J. D. G. Dunn and the late J. A. T. Robinson, he studies (and criticises) their views in some depth, which is much more satisfactory. In-depth study of a few representative writers is usually more fruitful than casual references to a wide range of different (and disparate) voices, and this book would have been even better if that principle had been adhered to throughout.

In terms of content and layout, the first half of the book deals with the New Testament directly and the second half covers the contemporary and subsequent theological tradition. The constant theme is that Judaism had an integrity which did not permit Hellenistic accretions of the kind which might have led some Jews to worship a man as God, nor is there any plausible Greek antecedent to the Christology of the early Church. Those who doubt its presence in the New Testament are obliged to reinterpret the text in ways which distort its plain meaning and ignore crucial evidence. Dr. McCready

demonstrates convincingly that those who do this are motivated by their own philosophical presuppositions, which not infrequently lead them into forms of adoptionism that cause more problems than they solve. If the early Church fathers found it hard to explain how the eternal Son of God could become the historical Jesus of Nazareth, modern scholars are confronted with the problem of how a Galilean carpenter turned rabbi could ever have been identified with God—and that by people who had known him in the flesh!

Dr. McCready had provided us with a lengthy, thorough, and above all faithful study of the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ and shown why it cannot be abandoned or compromised. It is a book which will encourage Christians at every level and be of great help to students and others who need or want to get a grip on the ways in which this key belief has been both questioned and defended in the past generation.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

EXPLORING AND PROCLAIMING THE APOSTLES' CREED

Roger E. Van Harn, ed.

London and NY: Continuum, 2004 297pp £14.99pb ISBN: 0-8192-8116-6

Geoffrey Wainwright closes his foreword to this book with the assurance that not only will he use it as a text in his theology classes, but the book is so good that it could conceivably replace whatever he might have to say and therefore make his lectures redundant! Praise like that makes us expect an extraordinarily good piece of work, and although we can hardly fail to be disappointed to some extent after such a build-up, it remains true that this collection of essays and sermons is very much better than the usual run of such things.

The contributors represent a wide range of church and confessional backgrounds, with Roman Catholics and Presbyterians particularly prominent. The essays generally maintain a good standard of scholarly integrity, though some tend to be closer to the sermons that perhaps they were originally meant to be. This is not such a surprise however, since the book's aim is to reconcile the academic with the pastoral, which has led the editor to attach a sermon to each article of the creed. We are meant to understand by this that the doctrine

is not merely believable, but also preachable—Karl Barth’s ultimate test of good theology.

The explanations for the different parts of the creed are generally illuminating, pointing out to us aspects of the text which have generally been obscured over the years. For example, we are reminded of the interesting history of the word ‘Almighty’ in the first article, which is only partly connected to the word ‘Father’ which precedes it. The commentary on the descent into hell is very interesting, giving as it does a detailed exposition of what John Calvin—one of the doctrine’s staunchest defenders—thought about it. We discover that he came to much the same conclusion as Thomas Aquinas—though by a very different exegetical route. We also find that Melancthon and other reformers took quite a different tack, and came up with an explanation of the phrase which bears little relation to that of either Calvin or Aquinas.

Another interesting chapter is the one on the ‘communion of saints’ which points out that if the phrase is of Greek origin—something which is generally asserted, but which may not be correct—then it refers in the first instance to participation in the sacraments, not to the fellowship of believers. If that is indeed the source of the words, then we must rejoice that the tradition has corrected the emphasis of the original and given them a much more biblical flavour than they once had.

By far the most ambitious chapter is the one devoted to the Holy Spirit. The Apostles’ Creed is not very expansive on this theme, and so the chapter deals essentially with the teaching of the Nicene Creed, taking in much of the New Testament and a wide sweep of current charismatic thinking along the way. It is amazing what you can do with only five words to start with—or four if you are reading the Latin.

One of the curious features of the book is that the creed is given in the original Latin without any explanation as to why. Perhaps it is meant to stress the historicity and catholicity of the original text, but now that so few people really know Latin any more, it must be asked whether this feature serves any real purpose. Within the body of the text itself, there are occasional concessions to political correctness—several contributors seem to have trouble with the inescapable masculinity of biblical language about God, for instance—but on

the whole, extremes of this kind have been avoided. The sheer orthodoxy of so much of what the contributors have to say is both refreshing and surprising, since some of the contributors (at least) are hardly known for that!

The sermons, by contrast, tend to be somewhat disappointing. Perhaps this is inevitable, since sermons are not meant to be read, but heard, and it is possible to imagine that they would have been much better in their original setting. But having said that, it is also true that few of them are genuinely exegetical, and if a sermon is not expounding Holy Scripture, it is not really doing its job properly. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of food for thought in this volume, and people looking for something to do in Lent or in a teaching course in their church, would be well advised to take a look at this book for ideas. The Apostles' Creed has been brought back to life in its pages, and the presentation offered here is one which will stimulate and inspire any number of pastors and lay people looking for solid meat for their sermon diet.

GERALD BRAY
Cambridge

INTERPRETING THE PSALMS

Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth (eds.)

Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2005 £16.99pb 332pp ISBN: 1-84474-077-3

The editors note in their introduction that 'Psalms study is in the midst of a sea change. A generation ago the dominant tendency was to study Psalms individually, in relation to their literary form and their cultic function. These approaches, pioneered by Gunkel and Mowinckel respectively, remain part of the scholarly agenda, but now jostle for attention alongside many others' (p. 18). Whereas many recent New Testament studies have progressed beyond issues of form criticism etc., some readers may be unaware of the wealth and richness of more recent evangelical scholarship in the Psalms. For this reason, I suspect that the book may be of particular assistance to those who studied the Psalms (or chose not to!) at college some decades ago.

The fifteen chapters of the book are subdivided into four sections—'Psalms Interpretation in Context', 'The Psalms and Key Themes', 'The Psalms and Interpretation Issues' and 'The Psalms and Interpretative Traditions'. I

personally found the central two sections the most stimulating—especially the chapter on ‘The Psalms and Praise’, and the discussion about their place and function as Scripture. Gordon Wenham’s helpful chapter, ‘The Ethics of the Psalms’, claims to chart ‘virgin scholarly territory’ (p. 178), whilst chapter 10—‘Body Idioms and the Psalms’—left me a little confused. Inevitably the chapters cover a wide range of issues, and some readers may remain unconvinced of the value of including chapters on, for example, ‘The Targum of Psalms’, and ‘Qumran and the Psalms’. But overall this is a valuable (re)introduction to this part of God’s Word which perhaps is often used devotionally but neglected in study.

The advantage of self-contained chapters by the various contributors is that it is a book that can be profitably dipped in and out of. Those familiar with the writing of Gerald Wilson may be frustrated by the brief recapitulation of his work on the shaping of the Psalter as a whole, but for others it will be a useful way into this whole field. Two appendices—one an index of form-critical categorisations of the Psalms and the other an index of selective Psalms commentaries (both compiled by Johnston), together with a thorough bibliography, round off the collection. A charming minor detail is the mention of the favourite Psalm of each of the authors—and the reason for it being so—within their biographical details.

This book will be grist for the mill in background preparation for preaching the Psalms. I suspect, however, that most of the topics and content would be lost on all but the best-read or most theologically-minded members of a typical evangelical congregation.

NEIL WATKINSON
Maidenhead

REDISCOVERING GOD’S LOVE

Frank Allred

London: Grace Publications Trust, 2005 256pp £8.95pb
ISBN: 0 946462 71 2

Frank Allred writes with decades of ministerial experience, to redeem the doctrine of God’s love. Now retired from parish ministry (but still clearly

active in ministry), he observes the decline in a biblical understanding of the love of God and writes to appeal to evangelicals to live up to the Bible's teaching. Allred writes as one imagines he would preach, in an engaging style with illustrations that expound the text or passage in view.

The premise for this volume is that 'the current emphasis on the love of God to the exclusion of his holiness and justice is robbing the gospel of its meaning' (p. 111). It seems that some minister under the delusion that an impenitent person can embrace the gospel and learn of sin and repentance later on, when we have gained their confidence. This is of course ridiculous (p. 17). Again, it appears that 'as Evangelicals we...allow ourselves to be influenced by those who think doctrinal clarity is not important' (p. 27).

Allred writes therefore to defend a biblical doctrine of God's love. Seventeen chapters in Part One correct imbalances by teaching on doctrines touched by the love of God, such as grace, election, justification, sin, repentance to name but a few. Against not a few I wrote 'defence of classic evangelical position' for that is what the reader is given, in an accessible and empathetic manner. Each chapter is topical, although starting from a single text or passage, and would work well as a talk or sermon. Part Two consists of an exposition in five chapters of the Practice of Christian love. An appendix addresses 'what is an Evangelical'.

The author writes to address Evangelicals and comes across therefore as 'preaching to the choir'. This may not be as great a disadvantage as first strikes the eye. If we substitute 'younger Christians active in ministry' for 'choir' (who may also be younger Christians active in ministry, of course), then the value of this book emerges: Christians who are willing consciously to grow up as evangelicals will find a sympathetic and warm exposition of our classic and foundational doctrines. While there is only a little engagement with current trends and this book is not sparring with current thinkers, it does consolidate ordinary, soul-saving, evangelical Christianity. And heart-warming it is too.

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